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**An exploration of the joining process of newcomers in
offline and online leisure pursuit groups**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Information School
The University of Sheffield

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APRIL 2017

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Andrew Cox, whose outstanding support and excellent guidance made it possible this project. He did not merely motivate but inspired me during my MSc and PhD period at the University of Sheffield.

I would also want to express my appreciation to all the interviewees for their sincere and pleasant participation. Without their involvement I wouldn't be able to complete this research.

Finally my thanks are extended to my colleagues and the staff of the Information School for their invaluable help, friendship and encouragement during my PhD period.

Undoubtedly, my parents' contribution to my academic research has been immeasurable. Their guidance, emotional and financial support are the foundations of my work. Most importantly, they constitute great examples of achievement, they are worthy of admiration.

Abstract

This research explores the joining process of newcomers in offline and online leisure pursuit groups. The notion of joining and becoming a member is a complex and under-explored area. People devote a significant amount of time and money to leisure and in modern life it is highly valued and desired. Yet it is acknowledged that leisure, as a distinctive aspect of society and social life, is often overlooked by researchers. More specifically, joining leisure groups can satisfy people's need to belong and offer the conditions to pursue their interests through social interaction, but understanding of this process is relatively under-developed.

The research adopted a qualitative, predominantly inductive approach. For the first stage, an auto-ethnographic study was conducted on two offline and two online groups based in Yorkshire. For the final stage 18 face to face interviews were conducted with members of the same photographic groups. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis.

The first stage revealed that groups and newcomers themselves use different, formal and informal approaches to becoming members. Members were found to have varied capital and skills. Information disseminated by groups about themselves was often inaccurate in regards to the entry requirements. The findings indicated that photographers tend to follow an equipment upgrade path that is linked with the joining process. Competitions in different forms were found to be a common and an integral part of photographic groups. They were viewed as a way to gain prestige and credibility. Casual competitions enabled novices to participate and feel part of the group. Compared to offline groups, joining online was found to be initially easy but it was harder to achieve a strong sense of belonging in the group. Overall Communities of Practice theory was found to provide a useful perspective for exploring joining.

The final stage discovered that joining is linked to learning. Becoming a full participant in photographic communities implies the ability to become involved in

core activities and to gain competency. Furthermore joining was found to be linked to the shaping of the identity. Learning and the ambition to learn shapes the identity. Through imagination, photographic members create images of the world and see connections through time which enable to accept or reject future identities. They can pursue future identities by learning. Differing forms of capital are converted in the different types of groups (offline, online, hybrid). Key moments of identification mark the transition between the joining and the establishment phase in the Photographic Membership Career Model. Members in online groups commonly have narrow identification, a form of identification where members have or feel limited accountability towards the practice.

Regarding the practical implications of the study, members should understand that they have to continuously adapt to or change the group domain in order to maintain their identification with the group. Newcomers need to be given a realistic idea of the hidden entry requirements and can select to join a type of group (offline, online, hybrid) that is more suitable to their set of capital. Newcomer-oriented groups should place more emphasis on orientation and be more tolerant, whereas more established groups can allocate fewer resources on orientation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance

The need to belong is a strong human characteristic and it can be achieved through affiliation and acceptance from others (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Gardner et al, 2000). Membership as a feeling of belonging and being a part of something, is fulfilled by investing in a group and therefore gaining belongingness (Aronson and Mills, 1959; McMillan and Chavis, 1986). "Simply belonging to a group can be seen to have positive consequences, even if there is no face to face interaction" (Tajfel, 1970). Thus, while the processes behind becoming a member in social and cultural environments can be tacit or even subconscious, they are worth exploring and investigating.

Leisure is an important part of people's lives and is often overlooked by researchers because of the common conception that leisure is optional and of secondary importance. Stebbins (2007) acknowledges that because the study of leisure can be seen as trivial "many sociologists fail to view leisure as a distinctive aspect of society and social life." (p. xii). Yet people devote a significant amount of time and money on leisure and in today's modern life it is highly valued and desired. More specifically, social leisure activities and to an extent leisure groups, are intriguing because besides their significance to people in general (Caltabiano, 1995), they are learning communities providing a productive learning setting (Arai et al, 1997).

Leisure groups offer places for individuals to experience the joining process in a tighter social unit than a whole society, and becoming integrated into their own culture. This makes them worthy of closer examination. Moreover since they often offer social activities combined with leisure, they are a crucial aspect of wellbeing in modern life (Caltabiano, 1995). Having this in mind, this study research into the insights of the joining process that contribute to the enhancement of a newcomer's journey to membership. The purpose of the study is to have a better understanding

of the factors affecting membership, not only during the initial joining stages but also in maintaining membership in leisure groups. In addition Macionis et al (2011) mention that through social experiences humans gain knowledge and create culture, and joining a group or community can provide the fundamental grounds for much needed social experiences and interactions. At the same time leisure groups can provide knowledge and fundamental skills that can lead to an occupational career (Stebbins, 2007). In Stebbins (2014) notion of the leisure career, participants typically find a career in acquiring and expressing knowledge and skills. The model of serious leisure career views leisure as a lifelong activity that begins with the development of an interest in an activity and ends when the interest deteriorates. Thus the current theory of serious leisure lacks richness and depth describing the joining process in leisure pursuit groups. Even though Stebbins has written much about the value of leisure, studies of joining are still under-developed.

A good example of groups relating to both leisure and occupation are photographic groups. Photography is an activity that involves a leisure and/or commercial aspect. During recent years, photography has entered people's everyday lives, not only changing the way that people "keep track of who they are and how they have lived" (Chalfen, 1987:4) but also constituting a method of social and visual communication (Dijck, 2008; Knoblauch et al, 2008). The distinction between amateur and professional photography is often blurred (Slater, 1991; Harrison, 2004). These unclear boundaries are partly due to the varied forms of photography and the rapid and wide adoption of photography in modern life. This constitutes an intriguing context in favor of examining photography as a research topic.

In contrast to joining leisure groups the scholarship of organisational joining is more developed but still has some notable gaps. Organisations develop and implement strategies to attract and induct new employees thus ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate skills and knowledge to be competent in their job (Myers, 2007). Compared to leisure groups, organisational groups attempt to achieve a "successful" joining in a more formal, structured and strategic way (Gallivan, 2001). Organisational assimilation theories view this process as a means

of gaining work competency taking an organisational perspective and not an individual-person perspective (Saks and Blake, 2006). That is natural, as the common primary aim of organisations is revenue, so they seek employee efficiency. Conversely, an individualist perspective of leisure group joining is needed, since individuals seek leisure and not necessarily monetary rewards. This is not to say that an organisational perspective in leisure groups should not be considered. In the same way as organisations, leisure groups ideally want to attract and recruit a targeted set of people. In addition, leisure can lead to other positive, occupational related effects (Passmore, 2003) and as noted previously, leisure groups can drive an individual to an occupational career (Stebbins, 2007). Thus while the well developed organisational assimilation theories are not often applied to leisure groups, the same principles may apply.

Photography is one of the most popular hobbies in the UK (Daily Mail Online, 2014). Photography, as an activity, entails accumulation of information, knowledge and skills which can be “harvested” from communities, clubs and leisure groups in general. Cox et al (2008) and Davies (2006) support the idea that photography through Flickr, an online photographic community, is a social learning experience. Therefore it is interesting to investigate how joining offline and online photographic groups is linked to learning.

With the advancement and adoption of technology new kinds of (online) groups are formed. The rise of social media have penetrated into everyday life and redefined communication (Dijck, 2013). The technological advancements that brought digital photography and its properties along with the ease of access provided by the internet, has enabled photographic groups to flourish in online social networks like Flickr, Facebook, Instagram and other internet forums and message boards (Shanks and Svabo, 2014). The emergence of such virtual communities introduced new forms of community that potentially differ from conventional-traditional offline communities. According to Dijck and Poell (2013) social relationships, interactions and information activities differ in such groups. While online community has

become a massive topic for research, joining as such has been relatively neglected.

It can be concluded that joining offline and online groups is an intriguing and vital process, worthy of examination and research. The notion of joining and becoming a member is a complex and under-explored area. The current research takes an interpretive approach to the exploration of the nature of the joining experience hence it considers and captures the subjective meanings in the context of offline and online groups. Thus joining is examined from varied perspectives, the individual and the organisational (group), and in offline and online settings.

1.2 Research aim and research questions

The purpose of this research is to explore the notion of joining and becoming a member in offline and online leisure pursuit groups specifically in photographic societies. This purpose is to be achieved by answering a number of research questions as shown below:

- How is joining linked to learning in offline and online leisure pursuit groups?
- How is joining linked to the shaping of the identity in the practice of offline and online leisure pursuit groups?
- How are organisational socialisation tactics used to attract and assimilate people in offline and online leisure pursuit groups?
- What differing forms of cultural, social and financial capital are converted and created in joining offline and online leisure pursuit groups?

1.3 The process of defining the Research Questions

From the process of conducting this thesis there emerged three sets of research questions at different stages.

1.3.1 First set of Research Questions

The first stage where significant new insights were gained was after the ethnographic data collection. According to Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) research questions tend to be formulated after the collection of the initial data in ethnographic work. Thus, based on the field notes and the experiences of the researcher during the ethnographic study the first set of research questions were formed. At that stage, the research questions were more open and general in order to maintain flexibility and objectivity during the analysis of the data.

The first set of research questions were:

- How is the process of joining experienced and defined by newcomers?
- What are the joining strategies used by newcomers?
- What are the characteristics that shape how hospitable an organisation is for the induction of newcomers?
- What are the induction strategies used by leisure pursuit groups for newcomers?
- Explore the differences between offline and online leisure pursuit groups

1.3.2 Second set of Research Questions

From the collected, ethnographic data patterns of specific events, experiences and feelings that were relevant with this research questions were identified. The aforementioned patterns are presented in Chapter 4 and aligned with the existing theories. Agee (2009) mentioned that

“the process of focusing questions is an iterative, reflective process that leads, not just to data, but to specific data that can add knowledge to a larger field of study.” (p.442).

Therefore since new insights were gained, the research questions were redefined in order to focus the research and also provide a framework to design the interview question for the final data collection in the final phase as presented in Chapter 7.

The second set of research questions were:

- What constitutes members' competency in the practice of offline and online leisure pursuit groups?
- What differing forms of cultural, social and financial capital are converted and created in joining offline and online leisure pursuit groups?
- How is joining linked to different forms of learning?
- How are organisational socialisation tactics used to attract and assimilate people in offline and online leisure pursuit groups?

1.3.3 Third set of Research Questions

The final set of research questions was formed after the analysis of the second, final data collection. The thematic analysis model of Braun and Clark (2006) that was implemented, identified the important themes that make meaningful contributions in addressing the main research question. Based on the aforementioned themes the research questions were redefined for the last time.

The third and final set of research questions are stated in Section 1.2

1.4 Outline of the report

The general approach that this research follows was the development of an understanding around the methods and theories developed in previous literature in the field. By collecting data and analysing the findings, conclusions were then formulated for further study. The structure of this report is presented below, along with a brief description of each chapter:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
The overall concept of this research is presented, including its significance and justification. In addition, the aim and objectives are stated, followed by the appropriate research questions to satisfy them.

- Chapter 2: Literature review
An exploratory and critical review of the existing literature related to the concept of joining is presented. The theoretical concepts of Communities of Practice, Organisational Assimilation, Virtual Communities and Serious Leisure are explored. Moreover relevant (theoretical and non-theoretical concepts) of photography are discussed.
- Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology
This chapter presents an examination and evaluation of potential methodological designs and, with justification, concludes with an appropriate model to carry out the research.
- Chapter 4: First Phase Findings
Analysis of ethnographic data from studies of offline and online photographic group are presented.
- Chapter 5: First Stage Discussion
In this chapter the ethnographic data is discussed in relation to the literature review and more specifically how the findings align with existing theories.
- Chapter 6: First Stage Conclusions
This chapter reflects on the initial phase and provides a summary of the findings. In addition it provides a discussion on how the initial research questions were answered.

- Chapter 7: Final stage Findings
The data collected from eighteen (18) semi-structured, open-ended interviews with members of photographic groups are presented.
- Chapter 8: Final stage Discussion
This chapter discusses the findings of the whole research aligning them with previous theory and builds on existing or creates new theoretical frameworks.
- Chapter 9: Conclusions
The final section presents a summary of this research and explains how the research questions were answered. In addition it provides an explanation of how this research contributed to knowledge.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to present an understanding regarding the methods and theories developed in previous literature that relate to the process of joining and so the research aim and objectives. Firstly the theory of Communities of Practice is presented, a learning theory that examines participation in groups based on shared interests (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This theory contributes to understanding how newcomers experience joining by learning, gaining knowledge and skills. In addition, the identification trajectory is an important idea to consider since it could play an important role in becoming a member and identifying with the practice or a group. In this theory the different types of participation are important for the process of identity formation.

Secondly, the literature of Organisational Assimilation theorises the strategies used by organisations for attracting and inducting new employees (Jablin and Putnam, 2001). According to the theory the aim of assimilation is to ensure newcomers acquire the required skills and knowledge to conduct their jobs efficiently. While such theories focus on the organisation and not on the individual, and might not always apply to leisure groups, the principles of assimilation may inform this research. Photographic groups may use organisational assimilation strategies formally or informally to induct newcomers.

With the advancement and adoption of technology, online groups and online social media emerged (Dijck and Poell, 2013). The third section, Virtual Communities, explores these new forms of communities and compares them to traditional, offline communities. It would seem reasonable to imagine that the joining process differs between offline and online groups, thus this section contributes to understanding photographic groups in their different forms. Moreover online communities follow recruitment strategies and selection processes; significant factors that affect the joining process (Floyd, 2004). The fourth section explores Stebbins (2006a)

concept of leisure; he views leisure as a prolonged lifelong activity that shapes a career path. The career framework might be a useful perspective to investigate joining in photographic groups. The career steps could potentially indicate a significant change in group and activity identification. Lastly, the section about Photography offers an overall understanding of the practice and how it is integrated into everyday life and has evolved into a method of social and visual communication, especially in online communities.

2.2 Communities of practice

Communities of practice as a learning theory is potentially relevant to the scope of this research because it refers to groups of people sharing an interest. The theory reflects on the way that based on shared interests and through group participation and experiences people gain knowledge and skills. This potentially applies to photographic groups where members, through practice, learn from shared information and experiences. Moreover, the structural characteristics of communities of practice can be potentially examined in photographic groups. Thus considering that the fundamental grounds align with the theory, it offers an appropriate and valid examination of its notions and frameworks.

Key to communities of practice theory is peripheral participation, a model of learning in which members start participating in simple tasks and gradually move to complex activities and to an extent expertise. This evolution of knowledge and competence affects membership, and a member's movement from core to periphery. Newcomers in photographic groups might be expected to follow such a path. Thus the peripheral participation model could provide insights about when photographic members join a group and gradually learn and develop their membership. The theory of communities of practice also offers insights the important notion of identity. Examining joining in relation to identity has the potential to explain many aspects of it. Identity in relation to the practice is a continuous negotiation process of ways of being a member in a group (Lave and

Wenger, 1991). The formation of identity is therefore a useful concept for examining how newcomers become full members.

2.2.1 Introduction

As defined by Lave and Wenger (1991) communities of practice are “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world..., an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge” (p.98). They are learning communities where people share information and experiences based on a shared interest. Lave and Wenger (1991) explore learning as a set of social activities in a community where newcomers participate; through this participation learning occurs. Newcomers acquire knowledge through social activities as their seniority is developed in a group (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

This kind of participation is known as legitimate peripheral participation and is described by Lave and Wenger (1991) as the process where

“Learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and... the mastery of knowledge and skills requires newcomers to move towards full participation in the socio-cultural practices of the community” (p.29).

In that sense, the framework of learning is conceptualised from a social perspective, deviating from the conventional view of learning as a cognitive process accomplished through formal education and training.

2.2.2 Peripheral participation

In Communities of practice Lave and Wenger (1991) view learning as a social activity where newcomers gain experience through peripheral participation. More specifically Lave and Wenger’s (1991) suggest that learning initially takes place in the periphery through observation or simple, low risk tasks and as individuals become more acquainted with these activities, they come to participate in the core through more complex activities central to the functioning of the community. Members learn from the experts of the group as well as their peers. Overall,

knowledge and skill are acquired by newcomers through progression towards full participation, as shown in Figure 2.1.

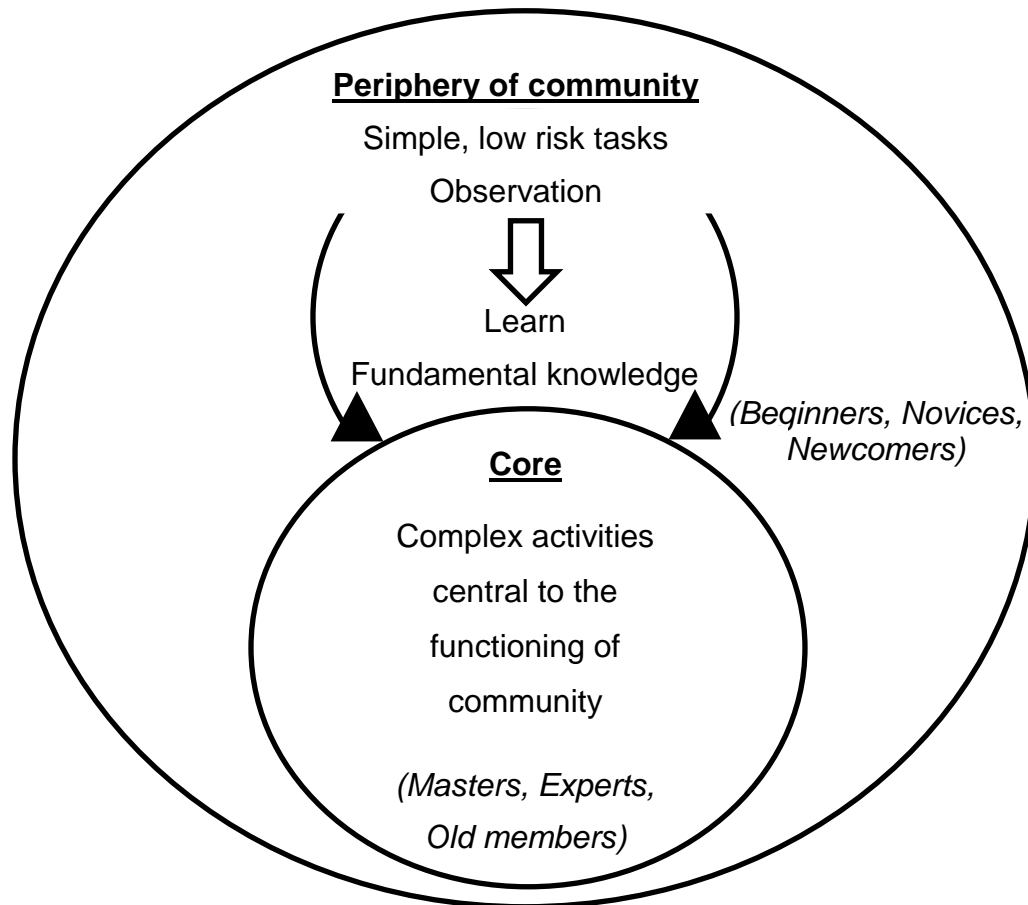


Figure 2.1: Legitimate peripheral participation model based on Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of learning

Learning through a social practice involves different relations between the individual and the community (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Members not only define but are also defined by these relations. Fuller et al (2005) state that participation and in turn learning is enabled only through the process of becoming a member. Learning is thus seen as an evolving form of membership, an on-going shaping of

identity that is affected by the relations among individuals and their participation in communities of practice. In this vein Lave and Wenger (1991) describe communities of practice as a “set of relations among persons, activity and the world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (p.98).

Through legitimate peripheral participation a continuous self-evaluation takes place. In order to proceed towards full participation, a newcomer must strengthen his identification with the practice. This requires a flourishing commitment, effort and furthermore taking and accepting responsibilities in the community.

Participation involves continuous self-evaluation and this is a complex process. As newcomers join a community there is a conflict between continuity and displacement. There is a tension where newcomers need to “engage in the existing practice, which has developed over time... but also have a stake in its development as they begin to establish their own identity” (Lave and Wenger, 1991:115). It is a conflict between newcomers changing in order to fit and adjust themselves to the community and leaving their mark, by reshaping the community itself. At the same time, old-timers continue to change to the practice which is renegotiated with the introduction of new members. This development of identity is fundamental to the trajectory of newcomers in communities of practice.

A significant aspect of becoming a full member is language, which is a way of transmitting knowledge. This includes formal and informal learning. It is essential that newcomers learn how to talk (or be silent) and act like a full member in order to blend in a community. In an example case of biomedical training (Lave and Wenger, 1991) it is noted that practitioners validate or recognise other members by the terminology used during their verbal communication. Terminology can be learned both formally and/or informally. Lave and Wenger (1991) mentioned that language is part of the practice and provides access to learning. Learning the language, and adjusting to the norms of the community, is not just a method of participation; it is fundamental in legitimate peripheral participation. Nevertheless language is just one of the cultural artifacts that people learn about.

Fuller et al (2005) identified a theoretical gap in Lave and Wenger's (1991) legitimate peripheral participation framework, noting the focus is on the newcomers and that experienced members are neglected. More specifically the learning process of experienced members should differ from the newcomers', and this is not addressed. The newcomer journey to full membership requires an on-going activity with members of the community, including old-timers, involving access to information, opportunities to participate (intangible) and resources (tangible/intangible).

Lave and Wenger (1991) address the use of technologies entangled in the engagement of practice. Through the use of technologies in communities of practice, members acquire competence which is part of the learning process and at the same time using tools is a method of identifying with the history of practice.

2.2.2.1 Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is a model of learning that is generally viewed as a relationship between an apprentice and their master/supervisor. Lave and Wenger (1991) identified an uncertainty on what apprenticeship was and how it was defined hence they examined the notion of learning through apprenticeship as a matter of legitimate peripheral participation. Upon studying different cases of apprenticeship Lave and Wenger (1991) revealed that learning in apprenticeship is a dynamic social process with, apart from didactic activities by the supervisor(s), a diversity of learning sources. Tutors being experts are part of the learning process and also gain knowledge and skills, just as apprentices learn from each other. Coffield (2000) emphasising the importance of informal learning, stated that formal learning is just the tip of the iceberg. Therefore according to Wenger (2006) apprenticeship is

“a more complex set of social relationships through which learning takes place mostly with journeymen and more advanced apprentices. The term community of practice was coined to refer to the community that acts as a living curriculum for the apprentice.” (p. 3).

Overall learning in apprenticeship can be viewed as an engagement in social practices in a community of practice (Boylan, 2005).

Examples illustrating this concept are the Floding and Swier (2012) and Hasrati (2005) where through apprenticeship, they trained students to become competent in their practice. The master has the ability to transmit legitimacy to the newcomer. This is done through introductory rituals, carefully selecting (or limiting) which experiences are suitable for a newcomer and overall, controlling their growth. Floding and Swier (2012) also state that the legitimate peripheral participation of a newcomer has the advantage that the newcomer can identify what is needed to be learned in order to perform and be competent, and the old timer can figure what is essential to “teach”.

It can be learned from this that this is a staged process since the student is intended to become a tutor and could potentially proceed to become a veteran tutor, then a supervisor of new students; a centripetal movement of learning from periphery to the center occurs, as shown in Figure 2.2 below.

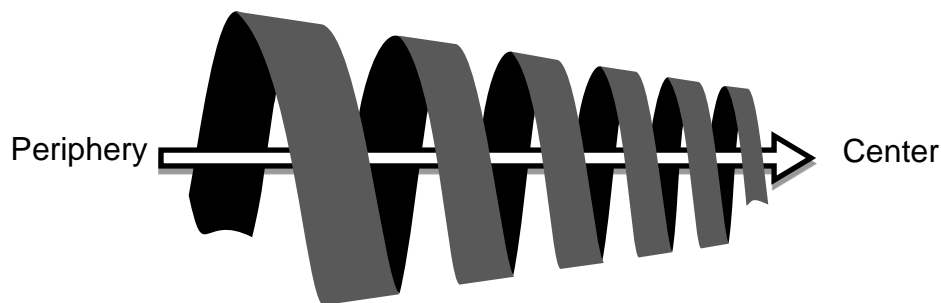


Figure 2.2: Centripetal movement of learning (adapted from Floding and Swier, 2012)

In the example of Floding and Swier (2012) the association of tutors set the fundamental norms and values of this community of practice and the veteran supervisor is part of the authority that transmits them. The student is not just a receiver but as a part of this community, shares knowledge or makes an impact on the norms and values. In this example, it is mentioned that a student can give his

supervisor a new perspective of beliefs that old members have not considered previously. Regarding this, Wenger (1998) described five learning trajectories:

- Peripheral: Learners, implicitly or explicitly, remain on the periphery and never engage in full participation.
- Inbound: Learners head towards full participation; similar to Figure 2.2.
- Insider: A full participant that is active and still learns.
- Boundary: A member participates in multiple related communities by handling interaction between them.
- Outbound: An individual in the process of leaving the community.

In spite of specifying multiple types of trajectories, Lave and Wenger's ideas are focused on the insider trajectory and are criticized for leaving other trajectories, such as the outbound, unexplored (Depalma, 2009).

2.2.3 Meaning and Identity

Wenger's (1998) book presents a learning theory that uses the concept of communities of practice to describe learning and knowing as a social participation process. The four components of this learning process are meaning, practice, community and identity.

Meaning, viewed as an experience of everyday life is essential in learning. By using the word "experience" Wenger (1998) implies that it is a process, an engagement in practice that continuously (re)defines meaning. Thus meaning is a process involving an on-going negotiation that comes through our engagement with the world. This engagement is described by Wenger (1998) as a duality, participation and reification where both require and enable each other. Hildreth and Kimble (2002) view this duality from a perspective of managing and developing knowledge. They claim that earlier knowledge management approaches considered knowledge to reside in machines and documents, whereas in Wenger's (1998) model knowledge resides in people. Wenger's (1998) participation and reification occur in an environment where people develop knowledge through

interaction with others; in this way knowledge is created, nurtured and sustained (Hildreth and Kimble, 2002).

Secondly, Wenger (1998) elaborates the notion of identity, the “ability and inability to shape the meaning that defines our communities and our forms of belonging” (p. 145). In an equivalent way, since meaning exists in its negotiation, identity is formed through events of participation and reification. Engaging in a community produces some experiences for the practitioner which (re)define our identity. Narratives, categories and self-images constantly shape our identity. More specifically Wenger (1998) defines identity in terms of negotiated experience, as “a layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other” (p.151). Identity reflects a complex relationship between the social and the personal thus a person’s identity is relational to the social (Wenger, 1998). A participant constructs meaning through their involvement within the community and alongside comes the process of reification. It is a complex process that creates a “tension” between participation and reification and the result of this is the creation of meaning.

According to Wenger (1998), another factor that forms identity is competence within the community and its practice. What constitutes competence is actively negotiated in the community. Wenger (1998) refers to competence not only as the level of one’s competency, but in addition how one’s level of competence is perceived by other members. By engaging with other people, one not only gradually becomes more competent but also transmits knowledge, enabling others to gain competence too. Besides the transmission of knowledge, people can identify with a role or the nature of the practice, regardless of the level of competency. As humans, even if someone is not sufficiently competent, some assumptions are made on how to practice or how a practitioner behaves. Through personal history, experiences that emerge within or outside of the community create expectations. The imaginary role that is generated is based on some expectations and can lead to identification.

Identity, meaning, and learning can be described as an on-going process and not a static context. Identity can be more accurately expressed as a trajectory, not in the sense of having a fixed path but as a perpetual course that changes over time.

2.2.4 Levels of participation

Wenger et al (2002) defined three main groups of members based on their type of participation, core, active and peripheral. Moreover they claim that to cultivate or in other words, promote interaction and “bring out the community’s own internal direction, character and energy” (p. 51), the community must provide a fertile group for all three levels of participation; members move between these three levels.

The first level of participation is the “core group” and it refers to people actively participating (e.g. discussing, debating, bringing new knowledge, etc.) in the community. Wenger et al (2002) describe it as usually a small percentage of the community and core members tending to take leadership roles. The second level, “active members”, share similar characteristics with the core group but lack intensity of participation and meeting attendance compared to the core. The third level includes “peripheral members” that have a low level of participation and rather keep a distance to observe and watch core and active members. Even though they are peripheral, this kind of participation is essential and they still learn.

Borzillo et al (2011) designed a framework addressing a linear sequence or the career of the process of integration, where peripheral members evolve to become core members. Their framework has five stages:

- The awareness phase.
In this phase peripheral members identify a sub-topic or an area within the community of practice that they are interested in and learn more by approaching and asking other members, or through formal information.

- The allocation phase.
Peripheral members make their first steps as active members by contributing to the community providing their own knowledge. This

contribution is acknowledged by core members who begin to view and consider them as active members.

- The accountability phase.

Here, active members begin to show signs of leadership by leading small group activities and events. Besides this, they also demonstrate their value of expertise and their involvement in the group is increased.

- The architectural phase.

In this stage, active members become core members. They have the ability to contribute significantly to the community, including adding and developing new sub-topics. Again, they must be recognised by current core members in order to move to this phase.

- The advertising stage.

The last stage is called “advertising stage” because core members promote their newly introduced sub-topics, so that they initiate participation in order to grow knowledge in the area. They are also recipients of other core members’ support in this promotion. Similar to every stage, they are also considered as fully legitimated core members by the core group.

The framework that Borzillo et al (2011) developed provides further insights into how members become core participants, but it has a limitation, in that it defines this as a sequential, linear framework based on Wenger et al (2002) levels of participation, omitting the potential that members move between levels of participation. For example, a core member might move to the periphery if a sub-topic is not interesting for them; an active member might move back to being a peripheral member and a peripheral member move to the core if he or she is enthusiastically interested (Wenger et al, 2002). As Wenger et al (2002) state

“The boundaries of communities are fluid, even those outside the community can become quite involved for a time, as the focus of the community shifts to their areas of interests and expertise” (p. 57).

It is worth noting that Wenger et al (2002) mentioned that successful-alive communities of practice should allow a certain degree of maneuverability between levels of participation, by designing activities appropriate for all members; participation should be encouraged rather than forced. Borzillo et al (2011) discovered that communities of practice that directly or indirectly forced participation had faster integration times compared to voluntarily communities of practice, though it is important to clarify that faster integration times do not mean more successful communities of practice.

2.2.5 Identification and Dis-identification (Participation and Non-participation)

The formation of our identity entails what members familiarize with but also what they do not. The process of non-participation is equally essential and influential as participation; non-participation is the reverse of identifying, identifying with dis-identification. These events of participation and non-participation form the identity.

“This process can cause identification as well as dis-identification with the community. In this sense, identification involves modulation: one can identify more or less with a community, the need to belong to it, and therefore the need to be accountable to its regime of competence.”
(Wenger, 2006:3).

For example, photographers not competent enough to participate in a specific competition would potentially be alienated from that event, forming their identity and participation trajectory. Overall identity formation is a dual process of identifying (familiarising/unfamiliarising) through experiences and negotiability, and the (in)ability to shape meanings.

Identification involves a sense of belonging and as Wenger (1998) explains, the sense of belonging derives from the processes of engagement, imagination and alignment. Through the negotiation of meaning and through imagination, expectations are extracted, based on involvement with the community and the

world; and by aligning actions to practices, broader structures are formed (Wenger, 1998).

2.2.5.1 Modes of Identifying - Belonging

To describe the process of the identity formation and learning Wenger (1998) used three distinct modes of belonging: engagement, imagination and alignment (Figure 2.3). As already mentioned in Section 2.2.5 a person that identifies with a community has a need to belong thus while Wenger (1998) initially coined the framework as Modes of Belonging, later on he stated that Modes of Identifying is a more accurate term (Wenger, 2006). Since the underlying meaning is the same and in literature commonly is referred as Modes of Belong, this term is also being used throughout this research.

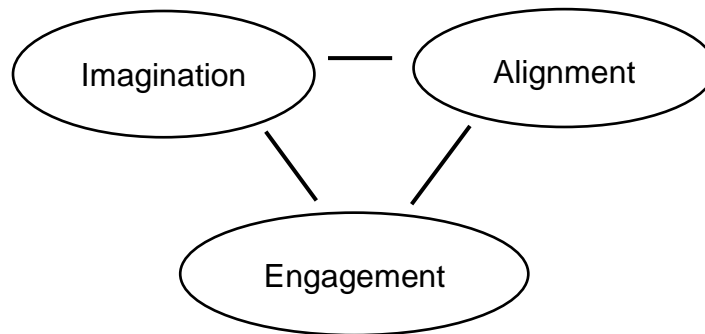


Figure 2.3: Modes of Belonging (adapted from Wenger, 1998).

The three modes of belonging were defined as:

- Engagement: Active involvement in mutual process of negotiation of meaning.

"This is the most immediate relation to a practice-engaging in activities, doing things, working alone or together, talking, using and producing artifacts. Engagement gives us direct experience of regimes of competence, whether this experience is one of competence or

incompetence and whether we develop an identity of participation or non-participation” (Wenger, 2006:4).

- Imagination: Creating images of the world and seeing connections through time and space by extrapolating from our own experience.

“As we engage with the world we are also constructing an image of the world that helps us understand how we belong or not...These images are essential to our interpretation of our participation in the social world. Imagination can create relations of identification that are as significant as those derived from engagement” (Wenger, 2006:5).

- Alignment: Coordinating our energy and activities in order to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises.

“Our engagement in practice is rarely effective without some degree of alignment with the context-making sure that activities are coordinated, that laws are followed, or that intentions are communicated.” (Wenger, 2006:5).

The three distinct modes of belonging are related and affect each other. For example, Wenger (1998) explains that rituals in communities of practice, with the help of imagination, form a kind of engagement that connects people with practices, identities and even locations across time and space. It is a method for people to develop a sense of what others do and align with standardised activities. Furthermore it is important to note that the three modes of belonging extend across the boundaries of communities and practices.

2.2.5.1.1 The Landscape of Practice

Wenger (2015) recognised that for an individual, meaning and practice can be created through multiple communities, in a landscape of practice. He mentions that practices of professional occupations and even most non-professional endeavors have their own history and domain and their composition is dynamic because not

only communities develop, evolve, decline but may also complement or compete each other. A practitioner might create connections between different practices in a way that competence in one is relevant to the other. In other words a practitioner might apply competence of one practice to another. In that sense the three modes of belonging as mentioned in Section 2.2.5.1 are interrelated the landscape of practices or between different communities of practice.

Having in mind the aforementioned, the identity trajectory is formed through the journey in the landscape. “This journey within and across practices shapes who we are” (Wenger, 2015:19). It is important to note that by participating in multiple communities or practices the individual creates connections between them but sometimes there are clashes between them. Therefore the practitioner creates their personal boundaries between the different roles in each community and practice.

For example a professional footballer within a gourmet cooking society can have a clash between their different roles. They could feel torn between their role as a professional football player to practically and ethically follow a strict diet and the practice in the gourmet cooking society where the diet and cooking might focus more on aesthetics and taste rather than nutritional balance. In this example footballers might create boundaries and while making few sacrifices on their professional style diet, they can have more interest in more nutritionally balanced recipes. In the same sense they might make connections between the two practices in a way that competence in one is relevant to the other. For example they might use the knowledge they gained through pursuing their football player on how to cook healthier and apply it in gourmet cooking.

The different roles and practices require balancing work from the individual in order to create boundaries. Wenger (2015) considers this balancing work, to “create personalised reflections of the landscape, its practices and its boundaries” (p. 20) part of the identity. The trajectory of acquiring knowledge or learning through the landscape and the balancing work between the different roles shapes the individual identity. The different roles in the different practices and communities are unique

identities that the individual shapes according to the group's practice or social world (community) that exist during the moments of their involvement with the group. The unique identities are shaped based on the boundaries the individual created and define individual's identity. Thus the journey or the trajectory through the social landscape dynamically constructs and shapes the identity.

Overall individuals create their own form of meaning or competence for each community of practice by creating connections between different practices and in doing so they are also creating boundaries of their identities, again within each community. Knowledgeability is the term describing this process of "translating practices and their boundaries into a meaningful moment of service" (Wenger, 2015:23). Therefore knowledgeability is the relationships the individual creates among the different communities and practices.

2.2.5.2 Participation as Dis-Identification

Hodges (1998) describes the journey an individual goes through when joining a community; a process that includes complex ambivalent moments that eventually lead to identification and dis-identification. This process, explained by Hodges (1998), and linked to Wenger's (1998) notion of participation and reification, has two parallels between practice and identity, as depicted in the Table 2.1 below, adapted from Wenger (1998). These conflicting moments are described by Hodges (1998) as non-participation, where one accommodates with the practice/activity but dis-identifies with some normative forms of the practice. It can be viewed as an inner struggle between multiple identifications and dis-identifications due to being a member among members of a group.

Hodges (1998) identified with the traditional teacher of young children (activity) but her antipathy (dis-identification) with certain normative practices (participation) diverted her from the group. To put it simply, what other member(s) consider as normal within the participation of a group can alienate others. In this example, Hodges (1998) brought up political and historical aspects of the activity that she felt

were wrong, in a very personal and emotional way, leading to her disidentifying with the practice she was attempting to join.

Practice as...	Identity as...
Negotiation of meaning in terms of participation and reification	Negotiated experience of self in terms of participation and reification
Community (familiarity within the group)	Membership (as in competency to participate)
Shared history of learning that bridges past and future	Learning trajectory (past and imagined future shape identity)
Boundary and landscape (belonging to many communities of practice)	Nexus of multi-membership (trajectories of multi-membership clash or support each other)
Constellation (ideas and notions outside a community of practice)	Belonging defined globally but experienced locally (their effect inside communities of practice)

Table 2.1: Parallels of practice and identity (Adapted from Wenger, 1998)

2.2.5.3 Narrow Identification

In Wenger's (2014) later work he coined the idea that there are individuals who identify with the practice or a group but without the need to gain competence in the practice. This is a form of identification experienced in non-participation and individuals do not have or feel any accountability towards the practice. In other words they do not feel accountable to become competent and their identity is not invested in practice. One example could be a member of a chess club where he identified with the group and the game of chess but he does not feel any accountability towards learning to actively play or learning the fundamentals of the game such as predicting short or long term actions. This could be due to his choice, (e.g. enjoying watching the game rather than playing it) or by necessity (e.g. Not having free time to devote in gaining competence and expertise).

The aforementioned form of identification, which for this research is defined and will be referred as called "Narrow Identification", is in contrast with Lave and Wenger's (1991) earlier work on Legitimate Peripheral in Section 2.2.2. Members in peripheral participation learn through observation or simple, low risk tasks and as they become more acquainted, participate in the core through complex activities central to the functioning of the community. Depalma (2009) suggests that Lave and Wenger's ideas are focused on centripetal movement, as described in Section 2.2.2.1, where members are headed towards full participation. Full participation by itself implies competency in the legitimate and normative practice within a group whereas narrow identification entails identification without gaining competency.

A key difference between narrow form of identification and Hodge's (1998) form of non-participation is that in non-participation individuals dis-identify with some normative forms of the practice (even if they still accommodate with the practice) whereas in narrow identification they do not disidentify with normative forms of the practice but rather they lack accountability towards competence and to an extent participation in normative forms of the practice. In narrow identification they identify with normative forms of the practice, but in an arguably limited form where they do not feel or have the opportunity to gain competency.

It is important to note that while narrow identification does not hold any competency accountability, the individual can still gain knowledge and practice insights. Furthermore through knowledgeable individuals create their own form of meaning or competence for each community of practice by creating connections between different practices. Thus it is possible for an individual that “identified narrowly” with a group, to have some form of competency.

2.2.6 Communities of Practice Structure

For Wenger et al (2002) knowledge is perceived in communities of practice sometimes as tacit, explicit and dynamic. Their social structure is a management tool (Wenger et al, 2002). In order to explore knowledge in communities of practice, Wenger (1998) and Wenger et al (2002) defined a structural model of communities of practice consisting of three elements; the domain, the community and practice.

2.2.7 Structural characteristics

Domain represents the common ground (e.g. an interest) and provides a sense of common identity. This is what drives members to contribute and participate, and informs their actions within a community of practice. Commitment to a domain is a condition for membership (Wenger, 2007).

Community refers to the relationships among individuals that will enable them to socially interact within the domain. Through these interactions members share information and knowledge. Learning, apart from being an intellectual process, also depends on the sense of belonging and community, which is a strong factor in forming belongingness.

Lastly, practice, as the word implies, is the means that members use in participating and contributing from what they are inspired within the domain. It refers to the resources within the community of practice, in this case knowledge, which is developed, shared and maintained.

2.2.8 Development Stages

It is vital to understand how communities of practice form and are preserved through time, in order to be able to explore the individual's joining processes. As defined by Wenger et al (2002), initially a community begins as a loose network and people that begin to discover common ground. In order to move forward the organisation (seeded development) or the community (spontaneous community) must help members to build relationships. Wenger (2009) states that the success of this "potential" stage depends on the "initiative of people who have a connection to the domain, recognize the potential for the community, and are in a position to build on it" (p. 2). It is worth noting that, as an important measure to aid the development of the community at this early stage, Wenger et al (2002) suggest interviewing potential members. The interviewing process offers an emergence of knowledge that will essentially redefine the domain and gives the potential member a taste of the community, a sample of its value. Additionally, through interview discussions, there is the opportunity to bring members together by linking them with other members sharing similar issues or knowledge.

The next stage is "coalescing" where the community is in its infancy. While the value of the community in the eyes of its members is still low because they still have not been solving problems, they realise their potential as a community. This is a fragile stage, since the initial spike of interest may suddenly fall, and what is essential is to keep the momentum of participation, in addition to building stronger bonds among the community. The success of this stage commonly results in the development of shared knowledge along with systematic meetings and interactions.

"Maturing" is the next stage after the community is formed, where membership grows. The community develops a "self-conscious identity" (Wenger (2009), where the domain becomes more focused, some standards regarding the activity are set and greater commitment to the group is required. In the Stewardship stage the identity of the community is established and the domain is expanded, while activities become more complex. In respect of this project, it is intriguing as well as

important that, according to Wenger (2009) the community starts seeking attention from other groups as a means of gaining recognition. In the case of communities of practice in organisations, they want to influence the organisation with the authority developed within the community.

The last stage of a community of practice is “Legacy”, where it comes to an end. At this stage, the domain is no longer relevant or useful to its members. One potential reason explaining this is the development of different focused interests that developed within the group accruing the birth of other discrete communities. In this case the original community did not merely end but transformed or transitioned into other communities.

2.2.8.1 The threat of newcomers

Especially during the maturing stage, the growth of membership widens the boundaries of the community and, as such, it is vital to address key matters when newcomers join. A community’s core purpose should not be distracted by the waves of newcomers. During the initial stages of a new member joining a group, there is a tension with already established members. Older members usually do not have the same need to create new relationships and have already learned the foundations of the group; they seek more expert interactions. Thus growth not only disrupts core members but also “threatens the intimacy and sense of identity that make the community attractive” (Wenger et al, 2002:98); it is a tension between focus and growth. Despite Wenger’s acknowledgement of this threat, Fuller et al (2005) claim that Wenger tended to present communities of practice as “rather stable, cohesive and even welcoming entities” (p. 53), while Geer et al (1996) support the view that organisational communities of practice tend to promote the introduction of new values and goals without much negotiation.

2.2.9 Communities of Practice Critique

Cox (2005) stated that the ambiguities of the terms community and practice allow the theory to be diversely used and repurposed for different studies. On the other hand he mentioned that this creates confusions between the different “conceptualisations of community, learning, power and change, diversity and informality” (p.1). Thus it is important to have a universal understanding of the relevant theories and concepts of communities and practice that are often criticised from other academics.

Cox (2005) argues that community of practice is not precisely defined as Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of community that is seen as an “intuitive notion” (p.42). Lave and Wenger (1991) describe community as a

“set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice... that implies participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means for their lives and for their communities” (98).

According to Cox (2005), Lave and Wenger’s (1991) viewed community is “a group of people involved in a coherent craft or practice... or not a neatly group at all” (p.19).

Wenger (1998) refined the idea of the community of practice as “a community of people with a mutual engagement in a joint enterprise and with a shared repertoire of resources at their disposal” (Johnson 2007:7). Mutual engagement refers to the mutual interactions between members that negotiate meaning. Practice resides on the relations of mutual engagement. Joint enterprise refers to the shared understanding and purpose that was created through mutual engagement. Shared repertoire refers to the development and maintenance of the common resources that are used to pursue the joint expertise.

Contu and Willmott (2003), Cox (2005) and Roberts (2006) criticised Lave and Wenger’s (1991) and Wenger’s (1998) notion of community that “tends to assume,

or imply, coherence and consensus in its practices” (Contu and Willmott, 2003:287). It overlooks the dynamic and fractured formation process that is a result of the individuals’ clashes of identification and disidentification and unstable alignments (Contu and Willmott, 2003).

Brown and Duguid (1991) and Corradi et al (2010) suggested that communities of practice should be reversed to practices of the community. The rationale of this shift was that practice, situated and repeated actions, create a context and based on that context people within the community form and sustain social relations. Learning takes place in the context of practice and as such they suggest that situated learning theory should focus on the practice rather than community. Thus Brown and Duguid (1991) definition of community is “an informal group of workers doing the same or similar jobs” (Cox, 2005:19).

2.2.9.1 Online Communities of Practice

There is not an agreed definition of online communities of practice but in general they are similar to communities of practice with communication relying, without excluding face to face, on the internet or on information and communication technology (Correia et al, 2010).

Prior to reviewing the notion on online community of practice, it is important to note that there is some controversy whether or not online communities resemble offline. Herring (2004) claimed that online communities are metaphorical extensions of the offline while Dijk (1997) supported that online communities cannot provide a strong sense of membership and belonging. A more detailed review on this debate is presented in Section 2.4.1.

Macpherson et al (2010) stated that there are work based learning communities that have transparent and changing boundaries and membership and leadership is subject to continual review. Even though Wenger’s (1991) situated learning refers more cohesive social activity systems, the notion of situated learning in virtual organisations is relevant because the

“attention is directed to learning as a process that depends on knowledge creation and sharing that is embedded and embodied in social activity, or practices” (Macpherson et al, 2010:4).

Wenger’s (1998) earlier work pointed out that the technological developments of telecommunication and networking pushes the limits of the scope of engagement but “at the cost of giving up participation in the complexity of situations and their local meanings” (p.131). However Wenger (2002) and Wenger (2005) mentioned that communities are not limited by formal structures and connections are created among people across geographic boundaries.

On the other hand many researchers argue that online communities of practice fail to exhibit legitimate peripheral participation (Zarb, 2006). Kimble et al (2001) stated that physical meetings of members was a fundamental factor in the success of an online communities of practice. This raises the concern if online communities of practice can exist solely in an online domain. Zarb (2006) claimed that online communities of practice can exist solely online because the “underlying characteristics of a community remain the interaction created by participation, and the strength of the learning relationships within it” (p.11).

Brown and Duguid (2000) and Wasko and Teigland (2004) used the term networks of practise instead of online communities of practice to distinguish their social structure differences. According to Brown and Duguid (2000) in networks of practice individuals engaged in a shared practice but may never meet face-to-face. They communicate through the internet or third parties and their network is typically consisted of weak ties. (Brown and Duguid, 2000; Wasko and Teigland, 2004). They selected the term network instead of community to

“to distinguish between collectives characterized by sparsely connected weak, indirect ties and collectives where members are connected through frequent face-to-face interactions and direct personal ties” (Wasko and Teigland, 2004:27).

However Murillo's (2008) findings did not support the position of Brown and Duguid (2000) that "communities of practice are always co-located structures and only networks of practice can be Internet-based" (p.1). He claimed that online groups that exhibit the five dimensions defined by Wenger (1998) are online communities of practice. The five dimensions are mutual engagement, joint enterprise, shared repertoire, community and learning. Wenger (1998) views learning as identifying with the community of practice. Roberts (2006) stated that "While certain features may be common to all communities of practice, others may be sensitive to their scale and geographical spread" (p.632). For the purpose of this study it is considered that communities of practice can exist solely online if they exhibit a domain, a community and a practice; characteristics of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) as described in Section 2.2.7. Nevertheless it is acknowledged that some features might be different in the online domain (Roberts, 2006).

2.3 Organisational Assimilation

2.3.1 Introduction

Organisational assimilation is a perspective from the literature of organisational studies, and concerned with how people join and are socialised into an organisation. Organisational assimilation is primarily adjusting individuals to the organisations' culture, norms and values rather than the individual changing the organisation. Compared to communities of practice members not only adjust to the group but also change the group. Moreover in the theory of organisational assimilation the joining process has end goals and the reaching of these goals mark a successful orientation process. In essence organisational assimilation views the orientation process from their perspective, to adapt an individual to organisational goals, not from an individual perspective (Saks and Blake 2006). Nevertheless an organisational perspective in leisure groups is useful since leisure groups ideally want to attract and recruit a targeted set of people in the same way as organisations. The same organisational assimilation principles apply to leisure groups.

Jablin et al (1987) and Jablin and Putnam (2001) view organisational assimilation as a developmental life-span process initiated from childhood up through an individual's selection of employment and development of a career. The process is divided into three phases: anticipatory socialisation, organisational encounter and metamorphosis.

2.3.2 Anticipatory socialization - *Preceding joining an organisation*

Anticipatory socialisation is the stage prior to entering an organisation, where, through the whole period of growing up, an individual intentionally or unintentionally forms a set of expectations about occupations and organisations. The expected values and standards of occupations/organisations are developed through family, education, media, etc and directly from organisations that output information to the

public (brochures, job listings, interviews, opening days, advertisements, etc.) (Jablin and Putnam, 2001; Wanous, 1992). During early college life, Bees (1978) claimed that students are the recipients of many social influences and, at that point, they start to picture themselves in occupational roles. He also specified that, by the time they finish their undergraduate courses, they have gone deeper into anticipatory socialisation and many will have experienced different parts of their skills and potentials; thus they adjust their pictured occupational role.

Levine (2006) suggests that the main sources of information during this stage are parents, school and part-time jobs. More specifically, parents provide advice on career and jobs potentially affecting their children's pictured vocational role. Parents and friends provide more information in the negative aspects of work roles and put emphasis on earning money and good living. One intriguing discovery of Levine (2006) is that part time jobs offer the least information about work and careers.

Taylor and Kent (2010) stress the importance of social media in anticipatory socialisation. Steward (2008) and Taylor and Kent (2010) noted that social media, like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, are powerful methods for companies to reach potential employees but they were puzzled about the inadequate adaption of these methods. Social media has tremendous power due to their instant ubiquity and widespread public adoption. Owyang and Toll (2007) claim that social media's "effect on brand and corporate reputation can be instantaneous and far-reaching" (p.1), while Diga and Kelleher (2009) reported that social media users inside organisations had greater "perception of their own structural, expert and prestige power" (p.440).

2.3.2.1 Organisational anticipatory socialization – Information derived from organisations

Organisational anticipatory socialization involves direct and indirect methods of organisations disseminating their preferred vocational role expectations. Direct methods include recruitment brochures, websites, annual reports and indirect

methods, such as pre-employment interviews, onsite visits, and interpersonal relationships/interactions with current employees (Nelson, 1990; Nelson et al, 2012; Flanagin and Waldeck, 2004). Saks and Blake (2006) state that searching for a job is a vital part of the job choice process, and one of the most important aspects of job seeking are job information sources (e.g. from employers' websites). Seeking job information not only results in discovering job opportunities but could also influence job seekers perception of fitting with the values, beliefs, norms of an organisation (Saks and Blake 2006).

The amount and more importantly the quality of information that organisations give out is crucial, yet they face a conflict in offering this. According to Cable et al (2000) high quality accurate information presents the right role expectations and job objectives and moreover increases employees' satisfaction and orientation success rates. On the other hand, presenting unfavorable organisational cultural attributes can discourage potential employees. Organisations want to "lure" applicants, in order to have a wider selection of prospective candidates so may not be motivated to give full information about careers.

One can understand the importance of the quality of this information and as Rynes (1989) and Fombrun and Shanley (1990) suggested, an applicant's job choice decision is heavily based on organisational image and attractiveness. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) claim that realistic job previews reduce turnover due to more accurate job expectations. Realistic job previews provide individuals with more accurate work expectations, thus they are not easily disappointed and as a result better employees fit into the organisation (Lawler and Finegold, 1999). Yet Gatewood et al (1993) and Cable et al (2000) note the tendency of organisations to artificially "brand" their firm to provide positive rather than accurate information. Even though there are long term benefits in providing accurate information (Meglino et al, 1999), the immediacy of hiring new employees to fill positions is a stronger motivator (Cable et al, 2000).

Overall organisations want to attract qualified and skilled employees and a strategy to achieve this is to emphasise their operations, working environment, personnel

and valued customers, economic and other fringe benefits, like welfare, medical provision, provident funds and retiree benefits and yearly profit bonuses. With such strategic plans and actions they promote their organisation as a desirable and “great place to work” (Minchington, 2011), called “employer branding” (Wilden et al, 2010); a relatively recent and emerging discipline that has seen major growth over recent years (Edwards, 2010).

2.3.3 Organisational encounter - Initial encounter with the organisation

Job applications are a bridging process between anticipatory socialization and the initial encounter with the organisation. While it often occurs during anticipatory socialization, as part of Universities industrial training programmes or when looking for part-time jobs, it is a common practice that students go through when they graduate (Scholarios et al, 2003). Upon officially entering an organisation, the organisational encounter phase is initiated. At this stage, the newcomer obtains information regarding job requirements, role expectations and the organisation itself, in order to become integrated to the culture of the organisation (Jablin et al, 1987). These procedures are guided by organisations through orientation processes and training, with the intent to socialise newcomers in order to embed them in the organisation needs. Socialisation refers to the process in which the organisation endeavours to adjust newcomers with the purpose of embedding them into organisation requirements; whereas individualisation refers to the tendency of newcomers to attempt to change the organisation; to adjust the roles, based on their own needs (Jablin et al, 1987); two interrelated processes.

2.3.3.1 Socialisation

Organizational socialization is defined as “a learning and adjustment process that enables an individual to assume an organizational role that fits both organizational and individual needs” (Chao, 2012:579). According to Lawler and Finegold (1999) and Moyson et al (2015) when new recruits or existing employees are assigned

new roles, organisations make an effort to induct individuals to the norms and values of the organisation while the individuals have to adapt to their new roles.

2.3.3.2 Onboarding – Socialisation tactics

The purpose of socialisation tactics is to affect and guide new employees in such a manner that will make them more valuable to the organisation (Tuttle, 2002). Van Maanen and Schein (1979) propose a model, as shown in Table 2.2 below, which describes six dimensions of strategies to induct newcomers.

Institutionalized		Individualized
Collective	↔	Individual
Formal	↔	Informal
Sequential	↔	Random
Fixed	↔	Variable
Serial	↔	Disjunctive
Investiture	↔	Divestiture

Table 2.2: Six dimensions of organisational socialisation tactics (Adapted from Jones, 1986)

The first dimension describes a collective approach where newcomers go through a common set of experiences designed to produce standardised responses to situations, as opposed to the individual approach, where each newcomer receives individual training in isolation from others.

The second dimension mentions that, in formal socialisation, newcomers are segregated from other organisational members and put through experiences tailored to them, whereas in informal contexts, newcomers are indistinguishable

from existing members and receive on-the-job training to accomplish their tasks and learn their roles.

The third dimension includes sequential and random socialisation. Sequential socialisation means newcomers are given a clear sequence of experiences or states they will go through in order to gain competency in their expected role. Conversely, random socialisation entails that the sequence of stages is not communicated in advance and the expected role is ambiguous.

The fourth dimension involves the chronological frame representing when the newcomer will be competent and ready to fulfill the vocational role. In a fixed tactic, newcomers are given a fixed time frame in which they will move through stages until the end of the socialization process, while in a variable approach, the timing of the roles transitions is unsettled.

In the fifth dimension Van Maanen and Schein (1979) state that, with a serial tactic, newcomers observe and get training from experienced role models, giving them a clear view of the experiences they will encounter in the organisation. With a disjunctive tactic newcomers do not have a senior to observe them and must develop their own definition of the role.

Lastly, in an investiture approach, newcomers receive positive feedback confirming their prior identity as the organisation attempts to build on the newcomer's identity and knowledge. Contrariwise, a divestiture tactic focuses on rebuilding a new identity while rejecting certain identity aspects of the newcomers. In essence, newcomers would receive negative feedback expressing organisational disapproval of their prior identity.

Jones (1986) categorised Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) dimensions into institutionalized and individualized approaches, as illustrated in Table 2.2. He suggests that collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture tactics represent institutionalized socialization, where it "provides newcomers with information that reduces the uncertainty inherent in early work experiences and reflects a more structured and formalized socialization process" (Saks et al,

2007:416). On the other hand he suggested that individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture tactics are individualised socialisation and encourage newcomers to use their judgment, and to interpret and develop their own norms, values and role expectations. Newcomers must take the initiative in seeking information and establishing work relationships; “individualized socialisation may occur more by default than by design” (Ashforth, et al, 1997:211).

Stevenson (2006) identified a trend of shifting to individualistic approaches from collective approaches and overall collectivisation. According to Lawler (1974) and Lawler and Finegold (1999) an individualisation approach, taking into account the differentiability of individuals, can make work more rewarding to employees and increase the organisations’ efficiency. Moreover creativity and innovation are often positively related to individualistic values (Goncalo and Staw, 2006). Lawler and Finegold (1999) identified areas (e.g. personalised work contracts, selection, career development) in which organisations can focus in order to create a breeding ground for individualization.

Personalised work contracts are now a common part of modern organisations, based on the idea that employees are “able to negotiate contractual packages which reflected their individual needs and preferences, as well as the needs of the employer” (Welch and Leighton, 1996:48). Ideally, work contracts promote individualization, favoring both the individual and the employer, but Welch and Leighton (1996) argue that this is usually a myth and what happens in reality is that work contracts are just a reflection of the employers’ power and preferences.

Organisations can control the selection of employees, not only from their own perspective, but from the individual’s too. As mentioned above (Section 2.3.2.1), organisations can attract specific types of employees by disseminating their preferred vocational roles. Realistic or positive information derived from organisations aims to control the individuals’ decisions and selections.

Career development is also part of an individualisation approach. The prospect of having a view in a more personalized career development offers a way to adjust the roles and needs of the organisation, based on the individual’s needs. It is

important not only to provide the means for multiple career pathways but also to project a career identity that the person can identify with. Holland (1997) viewed the notion of vocational identity as a person's vocational goals and self-perceptions that starts from early childhood and continues through the development stages until the person discovers his tendencies in interests, skills and values (Section 2.3.2).

The differentiation and personality flavor in Holland's (1997) notion of vocational identity basically lies in the self-perceptions of the individual, something that he does not expand on. The process of employees "imagining" themselves in specific future career roles involves identifying with career role identities. Individuals' self-perceptions and career roles are subjects for social science, relating to identifying and meaning an individual gives to him/herself and to the world around them. Meijers (1998) states that the perceived career role:

"must not be equated with the sum of the experiences an individual undergoes during the course of his (working) life... but instead as a structure or network of meanings in which the individual consciously links his own motivation, interests and competencies with acceptable career roles" (p.200).

In other words, Meijers (1998) describes the identity career as a dynamic process where, through the exploration of the environment, one relates to a future-career role by selecting specific values and norms.

Overall, there is a tension between socialisation and individualisation and common practices will lie somewhere in the middle; Codrina (2008) describes it as the right balance in order to promote individual initiative that fall within the "spirit of cooperation and group ownership of innovation" (p. 520).

2.3.3.3 Information Seeking

During the assimilation process newcomers need information not only for the obvious reason of gaining job competency (actual and perceived) but to reduce uncertainty and “develop new self-images in keeping with their new roles and organisations” (Miller and Jablin, 1991. P.92). Poor information regarding the job role usually leads to high level of uncertainty (Louis, 1980).

Given the importance of information acquisition, the factors affecting information seeking among newcomers during their assimilation should be considered. Miller and Jablin (1991) provided a theoretical model identifying uncertainty, social costs, information sources, and information content and individual differences as factors affecting information seeking.

All newcomers have to deal with uncertainty upon entering a new organisation, as new environment. They still lack knowledge about the organisation’s norms and values, the roles’ requirements and expectations and potentially full competence for the job. Miller and Jablin (1991) and Louis (1980) suggested that higher levels of uncertainty result in information seeking behaviour. Moreover Berger and Calabrese (1975) pointed out that the lessening of uncertainty directly relates to a decrease in information seeking, and Louis (1980) mentioned that poor information leads to uncertainty.

Social cost refers to the cost of gaining information via social interaction and is based on the social exchange theory, where human relationships are formed involving a cost/reward comparison among alternatives (Emerson, 1976). The information seekers (newcomers) have to deal with the cost of requesting information from others. According to Miller and Jablin (1991) newcomers are anxious about asking for information from co-workers because they feel that they are distracting them or they do not want to be exposed by asking something that they should already know.

The next factor to consider is information sources, including official media related information from the management, other employees that are related to their

vocational role (supervisor, co-workers, etc.); other organisational members (e.g. secretaries, employees from different departments); extra-organisational sources (e.g. clients); and the task itself. Burke and Bolf (1986) found that the most valuable source of information, as recognised by newcomers and mid-career individuals, comes from the other people they interact with. Likewise, Morrison (1993) found that newcomers' peers and especially their supervisor(s) were also important sources of information.

The next described factor is information content, which means the nature of the job and how to successfully perform tasks relating to the occupational role, thus satisfying the newcomer's competence fulfillment needs. Appraisal information regards feedback on how successful and competently the newcomer is progressing, whereas relational information is about relationships with others (e.g. others' personalities and feelings about them).

Lastly, the individual's characteristics affect information seeking. Self-esteem, ambiguity tolerance and self-efficacy play an important role in the hunt for information. Worth noting is that socialisation tactics may change the nature of seeking behaviour (Kowtha, 2009).

2.3.3.4 Information-seeking tactics

In the limited research that exists on organisational information-seeking tactics, Miller and Jablin (1991) examined how newcomers obtain the information they need. The most straightforward method is through questions and inquiries. Overt questions have the advantage of providing specific information; reducing ambiguities and uncertainties and aiding in developing human relationships that can be exploited in the future for further, easier enquiries for information (Miller and Jablin, 1991). The downside of using this method is that it entails social costs, as described above in Section 2.3.3.3. Compared to overt questions, indirect questions reduce social costs but with the risk of compromising the outcome (information). Miller and Jablin (1991) state that indirect questions usually happen when the content of the inquiry is awkward or the receiver is of a higher status than

the inquirer. However, indirect questions are often not fully answered because the recipient of the question might not fully comprehend it or may simply dislike this type of question.

When a newcomer has a feeling of discomfort or the primary source of information is not available, he/she tries to find alternative sources from third parties. This method is prone to give incorrect information and, if overused, can make role clarity more indistinct. Newcomers seem to prefer it, due to its convenience as a way to confirm impressions and informally socialise with others. Another tactic is newcomers creating a situation where information targets must respond, usually entailing an action whose consequences will provide information (e.g. trial and error). This can also include deviating from work and relational values but it is risky, since it may have high costs and negatively affect the newcomers' ability to fit in.

Furthermore disguising information seeking attempts in natural conversation eases newcomers' high uncertainty. It is logical that this is not an efficient method due to the likelihood of inaccurate responses. On the other hand, it avoids high social costs and builds on human relationships through casual conversations. In addition, observation provides a way to obtain information. It is a vital method because it has minimal costs, provides information about behaviours, fills in the gaps of knowledge that are not explicit, can be used alongside other methods and can provide judgments for personal attitudes and performance.

“A chief distinction between a surveillance tactic and an observation tactic is that surveillance is based primarily on retrospective sense making and is indiscriminate in the cues to which individuals pay attention” (Miller and Jablin, 1991:111).

Morrison (1993) suggests that observation and surveillance, together referred to as monitoring, are used to a greater extent than inquiries. This is not always true, since the type of information required plays a role as to which tactic is preferred. Technical information is usually obtained through monitoring, whereas normative information, role expectations, and social and performance feedback tends to occur through inquiry.

2.3.4 Metamorphosis – Organisational Adjustment

The last phase, metamorphosis, is the final stage of organizational assimilation, and refers to the transition where newcomers are considered and consider themselves full members of the organisation (Jablin et al, 1987; Jablin and Putnam, 2001; Myers and Oetzel, 2003). At this stage, newcomers negotiate their role and behaviour so that they align with the organisation's standards or, rarely, modify the existing ones (Jablin et al, 1987). Myers and Oetzel (2003) argue that it is problematic to determine when a newcomer transits to becoming a full member, citing Ostroff and Kozlowski's (1992) claim that individuals diverge in acquisition skills, adjustment to norms and values and overall adaption to the "new setting".

All in all, successful organisational assimilation involves both organisation effort to socialise newcomers and efforts of newcomers to fit into organisational roles and requirements (Myers and Oetzel 2003).

2.4 Virtual Communities

2.4.1 Introduction

To understand virtual communities one must first understand the fundamentals of the term 'community', an elusive and sometimes vague term that cannot be easily and universally defined sociologically and can "refer to different things, depending upon who is using it and upon the context in which it is used" (Jones, 2006:1).

Gusfield (1975) identified two aspects of the term: the physical and geographical notion of a social group; and the relational aspect, concerned with the "quality of character of human relationships, without reference to location" (p. xvi), shared values, interests, and usually common cultural and historical heritage (McMillan and Chavis, 1986).

In order to understand the concepts of community and society Tonnies, as cited in Waters and Waters (2010), distinguished two non-mutually exclusive categories of community (and society), *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. *Gemeinschaft*, commonly referred to as community, has territorial and geographical properties, with kinship, personal and enduring relationships that share common values and beliefs, like family. *Gesellschaft* (society) on the other hand refers to an individualistic form of social organisation community where people act in their own self-interests, with relationships formed to serve functions based on the interests and activities of its members. The level of common values and beliefs is lower compared to *Gemeinschaft*.

These two types of sociality are not only non-mutually exclusive but also are not exclusive; meaning that any actual group or society is a mixture of both (Gusfield, 1975). Fernback and Thompson (1995) describe community as a changing notion and mention Sennett's (2003) claims of a 19th century shift from public relationships that were more tied to social status and context of cultural homogeneity to new individualistic impersonal, contractual and rational relationships (*Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*). It can be stated that there has been a shift to *Gesellschaft*, through globalisation.

In an early attempt to describe virtual communities Rheingold (1993) said:

“Social aggregations that emerge from the [internet] Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (p. 5).

Of course this early definition was heavily based on the traditional meaning of community prominent in the academic context of that era. More often than not, virtual communities are referred to as a form of (mediated) communication rather than a type of traditional community (Joons and Young-Gul, 2004). Often they are relabeled as Computer Mediated Space or Computer Mediated Communication (Jones, 2006; Fernback and Thompson, 1995; Baym and Jones, 1995; Etzioni and Etzioni, 1999). Fernback and Thompson (1995) identify virtual communities as on-line communities as places where “social relationships forged in cyberspace through repeated contact within a specified boundary or place” (p. 1). Note that even though the creation of relationships occurs in cyberspace, the authors do not actually define what they mean by “place” leaving one to wonder if the boundaries of this community may also extend to offline communities.

Memmi (2006) mentions that the literature points out that these virtual communities commonly share *Gemeinschaft* characteristics with strong personal relations between members (without the territorial limitations). He also believes that nostalgia for real personal relationships caused by the prevalence of electronic communication systems can lead to the creation or maintenance of social groups with strong interactions and real-life communication; though this is claimed to be rare, due to the lack of suitable conditions. It can be argued that Memmi’s (2006) view is not completely true, since virtual communities often include weak-ties or even lurkers, which favour more the *Gesellschaft* type of social relations. The explosion and adoption of availability of technologies (e.g. Web 2.0) at least during the last decade, has seen a rise in communities of interest; communities driven by a common interest, with the intent to share information (Henri and Pudelko, 2003).

Herring (2004) notes that 'virtual community' is a metaphorical geographical extension of the traditional meaning of community and points out Wellman's (2001) notion of community as providing "sociability, support, and identity". Herring's (2004) conceptualization of virtual community has six fundamental themes:

- “ - Active, self-sustaining participation; a core of regular participants
- Shared history, purpose, culture, norms and values
- Solidarity, support, reciprocity
- Criticism, conflict, means of conflict resolution
- Self-awareness of group as an entity distinct from other groups
- Emergence of roles, hierarchy, governance, and rituals” (p.14)

Cox (2008a) mentioned that Herring's (2004) approach focuses on online group characteristics, which in turn are characteristics of community. In other words, how computer-mediated communication can enable groups to foster a community. He also mentions Baym's (2000) approach, where, in addition to considering the online properties of a community, she emphasised the practices (similar to communities of interest) that shape the community, including offline aspects, like face-to-face meetings. Cox (2008a) raise the indirect question of how online activities are represented and symbolised in the real world, promoting two wider considerations; whether virtual communities are electronic versions of real communities; and how virtual communities affect offline communities.

Weinreich (1997) claims that the idea of virtual communities is incorrect, which is not surprising, since what he considers a community leans more heavily on *Gemeinschaft* (physical) rather than *Gesellschaft*, a perception where kinship networks and common geographic territory, along with a shared system of values are essential (Matusitz, 2007). Weinreich (1997) claims that personal relationships or friendships can exist through "net" communities, but even if they interact offline (a requirement for community, he believes) their frequency is not sufficient, as opposed to living in a traditional community. Rheingold's (1995) view is similar to Weinreich (1997), since he claims that a virtual community is real only if it resembles a physically situated community. Essentially, this view is based on a

duality, with a physical community having an additional computer-mediated communication; relationships must carry on in the physical world. In contrast to his position, he also predicts that, with new communication means, new social phenomena will arise that will change the understanding of community and that virtual communities, without actual contact, will eventually have to be considered as real.

Dijk (1997) supports the claim that virtual communities cannot replace physical or “organic” communities because they are primarily “built from the social, cultural and personal material” (p. 59) of organic communities. Additionally, the author claims that virtual communities cannot provide a strong sense of membership and belonging, due to weak virtual cultures and identities; what they are, is an addition to organic communities that possibly strengthen them. Most importantly though, is that virtual communities are not imagined or pseudo-communities but a new type of community. This is logical, since despite the absence of physical communication, these communities offer greater opportunities for information and private and public communication (Dijk, 1997). The argument of real versus virtual is rhetorical, since virtual communities have different properties than traditional communities; and so virtual communities are a form of communities with variations in structure, organisation and rules.

2.4.2 Means of Recruitment types

The heart and soul of any community, virtual or not, are its members. Every community relies on some formal or informal recruitment procedure so as to maintain, retain or increase its growth (in terms of population), otherwise the community will inevitably decrease in size over time until it “dies”.

2.4.2.1 Rites of Passage

Rites of passage are ritual events in offline communities that are used to “transmit cultural beliefs and values to the individuals participating in those rites” (Floyd, 2004:1). While the notion of rites of passage exists in offline communities the same

principles could apply to online communities. Floyd (2004) mentioned that in cases of major life events or milestones, like birth and social puberty, initiation into religious societies and funerals, Rites of Passage often involve the presence of the whole community and besides transmitting norms, they give emphasis to the individual's importance to the group. In special occasions, initiation rituals or ceremonies are needed to transfer "a particular feeling and frame of mind" (Van Gennep, 1977:1) like layman entering a priesthood or a priest; "the profane and sacred worlds that a man cannot pass from one to another without going through an intermediate stage" (Van Gennep, 1977:1). These rituals are initiation processes that aid people in transitioning from one stage to another and in addition they offer a perceptible way to transfer and establish their social identity to the community. In that sense, Rites of Passage not only aid in transitioning individuals but also evolve the community in a smooth way.

2.4.2.2 Means of Recruitment

Cothrel and Williams (1999) considered that, for an online community to be successful, it needs to engage and involve members. Since this thesis is concerned with joining, how people are recruited to virtual communities is of relevance.

2.4.2.2.1 Interpersonal Recruitment

Interpersonal recruiting refers to the impact that people have on others and more specifically how they can influence a person to join a specific community. Kraut and Resnick (2012) claim that inviting friends to join can be more effective than impersonal advertising when certain conditions apply. This is true if the entry of new members will make the community more valuable to existing members. When selling a product to customers, interpersonal relationships play a strong role in selling that product (Crosby et al, 1990). People are influenced by surrounding persons. Potentially this could also apply to leisure groups. Arndt (1967) says that word of mouth has a significant influence on purchasing a product, thus: "exposure

to favourable word of mouth was found to increase the probability of purchase; exposure to unfavourable comments decreased the probability” (p. 295).

In fact, many virtual communities and social networking sites use this approach to bring new members in. For example, Facebook and LinkedIn encourage users to invite people they know that have not yet joined. A similar tactic is followed by several online multiplayer games (e.g. World of Warcraft) which provide gift passes to send to friends so they can join the game (and their community) for free for a limited period (normally they require a paid subscription). Other virtual communities recruit members by “invitation only”, like the music sharing community trancetraffic.com, meaning that the only way to gain access to the community is to receive an invitation from an existing member, and even this involves an initiation period where the new member is monitored by the system or by older members and it is then decided if the newcomer fits the community; otherwise the newcomer is expelled.

2.4.2.2.2 Impersonal Recruitment

Conventional or impersonal advertising still exists in virtual communities and can be effective too. When advertisements share the same beliefs as the targeted audience, Kraut and Resnick (2012) state that conventional advertising is more efficient with new communities, where people may have limited or no information. They provide the information that people would like to know but are not aware of it. Dodd et al (2005) found that people that used impersonal information sources had high objective knowledge in decision-making. Thus, even though advertising potentially feeds people with subjective knowledge, it still serves as a source of objective knowledge too; and as marketing, it is an effective recruiting method in virtual communities.

2.4.3 Selection processes

The purpose of recruitment is to invite and select people that will fit in the community in order to achieve its purpose. In general, many virtual communities do

not use formal recruiting procedures and this process often happens imperceptibly. The selection process is essentially a measure to satisfy the recruitment standards and ensure that the community's purpose can be pursued. The literature of formal recruiting methods in Virtual Communities aligns with the context of organisational assimilation, as presented in Section 2.3, where candidates are recruited to fill a job position.

What is important to note is that, as in organisations, virtual communities have formal and informal methods of disseminating information, values and beliefs, in order to attract the right people. Organisations use brochures, websites, and annual reports as direct methods and, pre-employment interviews, onsite visits, interpersonal interactions with current employees as indirect methods (Nelson, 1990; Nelson et al, 2012; Flanagin and Waldeck, 2004). Virtual communities often follow similar tactics using their websites, conventional advertisements or banner ads, interpersonal relationships, free to try memberships etc. (Hagel, 1999; Eve online website, 2013; Chess.net, 2013). Overall, Kraut and Resnick (2012) state:

“Ensuring that the new recruits match the style and values of an online community will lead them to stay longer and be more satisfied with their membership, and it will lead to more benefits for the group as a whole and for existing members” (p. 197).

In contrast to organisations, virtual communities usually do not have the same economic burden of accepting new members and, in some cases, which has led to far more relaxed, even non-existent joining requirements. The anonymous nature of the “virtual” aspect of virtual communities also makes requirements much more difficult to set. Of course there are virtual communities which are not easy, or even possible, to join and often these communities have a physical element too. For example Mensa, the high IQ Society website (2013), requires one to take a supervised test and have an IQ score that falls in the top 2% of the population. On the other hand, many leisure pursuit groups often have little or no entry requirements. Sheffield's photographic community group on Flickr (2013) requires

nothing but a single “click” to join and Follett’s (2013) motorbike community requires only registration.

These inborn properties of virtual communities may make entering easier but complicate the process of becoming a member of a community. The lack of identity authentication or the sparse identity cues (Kollock and Smith, 1998) can result in “illusory contact that creates a sense of intimacy without the emotional investment that leads to close friendships” (Stoll, 1995:25). On the other hand, anonymity can result in a state of immersion. Joons and Young-Gul (2004) and Kollock and Smith (1998) presented cases where online interactions were as sociable and intimate as offline ones. Joons and Young-Gul (2004) defined membership in virtual communities as “people experience feelings of belonging to their virtual community” (p. 77) and said that membership was low in the early stages in online communities, something that Kollock and Smith (1998) and Wellman and Gulia (1997) also considered. Henri and Pudelko (2003) note Weinreich’s (1997) concerns that the common physical space and the history shared by its members in physical communities prevent virtual communities from being communities.

To compensate for the drawbacks of anonymity and the lack of physical contact, some virtual communities organise off-line activities. Kollock and Smith (1998) and Wellman and Gulia (1997) shared Joons and Young-Gul (2004) view that “strong ties among members of virtual communities cannot be sustained without physical cues” (p.86). Another example of dealing with the ease of entering is where communities set an entry fee. Even if the fee is small, it increases the effort and difficulty in entering; thus members who do not consider themselves fit for the group will not join.

2.4.3.1 Self-Selection, Information prior to joining and Entry barriers

Self-Selection is the process where a candidate can be attracted or not attracted to a community, based on the information he/she has acquired prior to joining (or not joining). As mentioned in Organisational Assimilation (Section 2.3), this information

can provide realistic expectations but also often tends to offer a positive view, omitting drawbacks or difficulties; these issues are also present in virtual communities. Kraut and Resnick (2012) noted that FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) available in many virtual communities more often do not offer realistic previews of the “life inside”. In online gaming communities, Jakobsson and Taylor (2003) claim the manual of EverQuest (a Massive Online Multiplayer Game) generates false expectations about the game, emphasising that offline connections with members proved much more valuable in the online game. Offline connections aided realistic expectations and additionally offered greater enjoyment. It also undoubtedly enhanced trust between members that had offline ties, compared to the trust levels between members without these.

On the other hand, many online communities offer see-only access to their content that provides a realistic history of the interactions within the group, so that potential members can get the feel of the community. An example of this type is the Flickr Sheffield Photo group, where the public can view its photographs and past discussions prior to joining.

A similar but different variation of the “lurking” method that some virtual communities use is to completely or partially hide community aspects to newcomers. Parts of past (and future) interactions, conversations and activities are only unlocked to members after a certain period of time after joining or after interacting enough within the group to achieve access to these premium beneficial parts of the community, an official or unofficial status promotion that members gain after some effort on their behalf. This could also be viewed as a sign that a member is no longer a newcomer and marks his acceptance to take part and be included with the old-timers and eventually be considered an old member too. These methods also promote legitimate peripheral participation because people initially get familiar with the tasks, language and basic rules and with the passage of time they move to the center of the community (if they decide to join/stay).

An example of such an online community is the Overclockers UK Forum, where a new member is denied access to activities like trading goods and the “trust system”

(where a member can leave good or bad feedback to one another). This newcomer's prohibited part of the community is, as described in their FAQ, for active and contributing forum members and requires more than one hundred and eighty (180) days of membership and one thousand (1000) meaningful (not spam) messages in the forum. Thus a barrier is put in place, in order to eliminate members that are not fit to become privileged and possibly also old-timer members. Likewise, setting an entry fee is effective to an extent, but it can eliminate people that fit a specific community member role model, either because they do not have the time or money to join, or they are put off by these barriers, believing that they do not have to prove themselves and that they can find alternative communities to meet their needs and expectations. Another loophole in this process is that the nature of online communities (e.g. anonymity and lack of face-to-face interaction) provides the opportunity for people to mimic the appropriate behavior of a suitable member, whereas in reality the person would have behaved differently. In the Overclockers UK Forum, a newcomer can overcome the one thousand (1000) messages barrier by pretending to be interested and taking part in conversations in order to gain access to the hidden and beneficial parts of the community; or they could steal or borrow another person's credentials and impersonate another identity.

In cases where leisure is taken seriously, entry barriers and initiation rituals can be "brutal". Examples of such virtual communities are video game related groups, like Counter-Strike or World of Warcraft. Apart from the fun aspect of such games there is major competition among members that can lead to a professional level (known as professional gaming or eSports). These kinds of groups often form small groups of people or teams in order to compete and the recruiting process usually requires past game experience, huge time devotion and of course competency in the form of the game and communication skills. The limited studies on eSports do not tackle in essence the issue on how virtual communities relate to offline communities and the joining process, though Taylor (2012) and Wagner (2006) identify that eSports has a natural connection with traditional sports in terms of the activity itself.

In the case of Wikipedia, an online collaborative project, volunteers/member can join effectively without barriers in order to encourage contribution/participation in sustaining the internet encyclopedia. According to West et al (2011), this no-barrier tactic is prone to abuse and vandalism. In Wikipedia there are mainly two kind of members (excluding administrative members), anonymous and registered. Both can change and add content, with the distinction that registered members can do this more frequently. The barrier to become registered is relatively low and easy to overcome and this constitutes unfit members of the community, which can damage the content. Even though a solution to this problem would be to raise the entry barriers, West et al (2011) believe that this would not solve the problem, since unfit people would still find a way in. What they suggest is to reduce the benefits of a registered user in order to counter unfit registered members. One could argue, though, that this solution (raising entry barriers) may improve the fitness level of registered members but would negatively affect legitimate participation and contribution, which is the essential, core activity in Wikipedia.

Overall, Kraut and Resnick (2012) believe that entry barriers and initiation rituals normally cause commitment and contribution, citing Drenner et al (2008) experiment that showed that high barriers reduced the number of newcomers but significantly increased current and future contribution, to illustrate this. Additionally, they found out that initial interaction within a community helped to retain newcomers and this expands on entry barriers, considering that they often require interaction. Lampe and Johnston (2005) develop this idea, claiming that in the Slashdot virtual community even negative feedback promotes contributions; in fact users that received negative feedback in their first interaction made a second one faster than the ones that received positive feedback.

Zhang (2010) states that high entry barriers increase members' quality and loyalty because "one timer" is reduced, the fittest will be selected and current members appreciate their position more. However Zhang (2010) makes the distinction that high entry barriers are not always positive. Depending on the maturity stage and condition of the community an appropriate barrier should be set. During the initial

stages of the community, where new members are needed to join in order to grow, the barriers should be lower. At some point, when the community has grown enough, the barriers should be raised. The elevation of barriers will work on reputable communities since newcomers will put more effort in overcoming the barriers and consequently quality and fitness of members recruited will be reinforced. On the other hand, communities with a lower reputation should follow a low barrier strategy to avoid raising newcomers' expectations (due to the effort required in joining) and then disappointing them, potentially leading to these people leaving the group.

2.4.4 Tactics for members' retention and socialisation

Retaining members in a community directly relates to the process of socialisation, where newcomers learn the necessary norms and behaviours of the community and become competent to participate within it, in order to meet their needs and expectations. The aforementioned methods of committing and promoting contribution in virtual communities are essentially methods of retaining members. There is no formalised framework on inducting newcomers to virtual communities, Kraut and Resnick (2012) used Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) model that mentioned six types of strategies to induct newcomers (Table 2.2).

Virtual communities commonly tend not to use institutionalised organisational socialisation tactics (Kraut and Resnick, 2012) on the basis that institutionalised tactics are formally structured and often incorporate supervision and training from experienced and older members. As can easily be understood, they require much more effort and money for the community to adopt them and are much better fitted to professional environments. Having said this, there may be cases where they are used in different environments such as serious leisure communities and e-sports. E-sport communities in particular involve a professional aspect and often apply such tactics. For example, in the Counter-strike scene it is not unusual to find groups that recruit a backup or second team with the intent to train them all together so they might reach the first team when they are fit enough, similar to

football teams like FC Barcelona and FC Barcelona B. Additionally, more experienced online gamers (members) and communities seem to distinguish skilled players (experienced) from newbies (newcomers) and commonly isolate them. In Counter-Strike, DOTA2 and many other competitive online games they use a variation of the Elo rating system proposed by Batchelder and Bershad (1979). This system is commonly used in chess in order for similarly skilled players to be matched and compete with each other (Cs Go Ranking System Information, 2013; Dota 2 wiki, 2013).

The online Hacking Community also provides a set of tutorials and workshops that newcomers can sequentially follow in order to pass through the different stages of becoming a hacker. Another institutionalized aspect that it is frequently present in Virtual Communities are the “Frequently asked Questions” which Kraut and Resnick (2012) call a variant of collective socialisation.

Kraut and Resnick (2012) note the lack of institutionalized approaches in the Ducheneaut (2005) study, a study that concentrates on a software development community where, such approaches could prove helpful, given its nature. Individualized tactics are more common in VC. In the example of Wikipedia, users provide their contribution in a trial and error procedure and similarly, in online photographic groups, there is the phenomenon of users posting their photographs awaiting individualised feedback from more experienced members. Moreover, Wright et al (2002) state the following for Counter-Strike:

“Players learn rules of social comportment that reproduce codes of behavior and established standards of conduct, while also safely experimenting with the violation of these codes” (p. 1).

2.4.5 Newcomers, from periphery to core

An important factor to consider for this project is not just how people become newcomers in virtual communities but if and how they transit from periphery to core, and vice versa. To study this transition, Jaehoon (2012) borrowed Haski-Leventhal and Bargal’s (2008) model of socialisation in voluntary organisations,

which identifies three stages in order to be considered a dedicated member, namely pre-entry, accommodation and affiliation stages. In the first stage, individuals collect information regarding the organisation. In the next stage, they identify with the organisational role and related tasks. Additionally they attempt to socialise and interact with existing members. Lastly, in the “affiliation” stage they are attached to the organisation and become a core member. Overall Jaehoon (2012) identified four prerequisites in order to move from the pre-entry stage to affiliation: information quality, trust, sense of belonging and brand loyalty. It is important to note that he studied an Online Brand Community, a community with an interest in a specific brand or product.

To begin with, Jaehoon (2012) found that information quality plays a positive role during the pre-entry and accommodation stage. This is because pre/newcomers main motive for joining such a community is to exchange information on their interests. If information exchange is compromised in such a community it would cease to exist. Additionally, as a result of its high quality information trust increases too and the intention to further use the community as a source of information grows. Trust is essential because, due to the nature of virtual communities, uncertainty of information validity and user authenticity needs to be reduced. A sense of belonging plays a vital role in the accommodation stage, since people’s intentions are to develop relationships and socialise, and without it interpersonal relationships and emotional attachment are not easily formed and retained.

Panciera et al (2010) studied newcomers’ activities in a system similar to Wikipedia called Geowiki. The authors claim that the first experience with the system is through lurking, which is similar to Wenger’s (1998) theory of communities of practice and learning users, who seem to observe in order to grasp the fundamentals of how a system works while at the same time potentially participating in basic tasks. Upon registration they continue and deepen their participation. They identify some patterns in the activity over time. Panciera et al (2010) categorised users with high activity as elite and with low activity as non-elite. Initially users that registered with the system showed a burst of activity, but

elites maintained a relatively high activity after the initial burst, whereas non-elite participants dropped to low levels of activity (normal activity was related to the level of the burst). This period from the burst to the normal levels of activity, called tailing off, is suggested to differ from system to system. What can be extracted from the above is that initial participation shapes the type of membership and is an indication whether or not it will lead to core or remain in periphery.

2.4.6 Threat from newcomers

Newcomers lack the competency and the apprehension of norms and values of a community and often become harmful to the community. Adler and Alfaro (2007) found that newcomers in Wikipedia are the largest source of short-lived contributions, meaning that their contributions are either spam, useless or simply not correct enough and require revision.

As well as newcomers' tendency to bring a fresh blood and innovate within a group they bring the danger of changing the culture in a way that it is disliked by old-timers. Additionally, newcomers require resources from the community, like supervision from older member and these can obstruct the functionality of the group. Toral et al (2009) say that the presence of too many free riders and/or peripheral members can hinder the evolution of the community.

2.5 Serious Leisure

Serious Leisure is a theoretical perspective of leisure activities and how people experience them, Stebbins (2006b). Stebbins views leisure as a prolonged lifelong activity that shapes a career path, a possibly useful perspective for examining joining.

2.5.1 Introduction

In one of the first attempts to conceptualise leisure, the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle described it as a state of being free from the obligation and necessity of labour (Sapora, 1975). The common meaning of leisure is free time, freedom from any occupations, that one gets pleasure or satisfaction from Oxford English Dictionary Online (2013). This notion is what Stebbins (2000) calls “casual leisure”. More formally he calls it “immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it” (Stebbins, 1997:18) and that it is “considerably less substantial and offers no career” (Stebbins, 2006a:38).

To enrich and expand this broad concept, Stebbins (1992) needed to describe the systematic pursuit of leisure that resulted in the acquisition of skills, knowledge and experience, hence his term ‘serious leisure’, which he describes as follows:

“the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that is highly substantial, interesting and fulfilling and where, in the typical case, participants find a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience” (Stebbins, 1992:92).

Although Stebbins’s constructed a cost-payoff rationale theory based on personal and social rewards, he diverged from previous economic philosophies, such as Kaplan’s (1960) and (1975). Kaplan (1960) viewed leisure as an antithesis to work as an economic function, involving minimum social-role obligations. The practitioner has a psychological perception of freedom and feels closely related to

the values of the culture. Through a range of commitment and intensity they have opportunities for personal growth and recreation that are often determined by some constraining factors (e.g. time, money, facilities). Overall Stebbins' (1982) conceptualization drifts away from Kaplan (1960) and Kaplan's (1975) relative adoption of Aristotle's view that leisure is the first principle of all actions: to work. In addition Stebbins does not treat free time just as time off obligations or inactivity but emphasises its deliberate and systematic pursuit of an activity.

In his conceptualization, Stebbins (2006a) categorized three types of serious leisure: amateurs, hobbyist and volunteers. A vital distinction between amateurs and hobbyists is that the amateur have a professional counterpart. Amateurs are part of the professional-amateur-public system where professionals and/or the public set the standards and needs of the activity. In the same way, amateurs contribute, too, in the enhancement of the activity; for example by providing unique knowledge to professionals. However, both, amateurs and professionals serve the public while receiving rewards from it, similar to a singer receiving the applause of the crowd. Hobbyists, on the other hand, the second type of serious leisure, are mainly defined by the absence of professional counter parts and as a result they are not part of a professional amateur public system. Additionally, they lack a strongly defined public. Stebbins (2006a) decided to consider "professional" in economic terms, meaning someone getting paid for pursuing the activity. Although he admitted that he considered adopting the "sociological" meaning of profession, he saw that monetary rewards would result in more time and greater opportunities for serious leisure, so he decided to adopt an economic meaning.

The third sub-category volunteers pursue leisure without any economic benefits or salary, while the difference compared to amateurs is that hobbyists volunteer as unpaid work rather than leisure, meaning that the personal rewards of a hobbyist are much lower. The last type is the occupational devotee, where the person is so passionate and positively attached to the activity that the distinction between work and leisure are conflated.

2.5.2 Photography in Serious Leisure

Photography is a broad activity and cannot be categorized. Firstly, Cook (2007) stated that Stebbins amateur and professional roles are not “a clear categorical position, but instead involves a cluster of related traits” (p. 1). Secondly, photography is a broad and, most importantly, a dynamic concept. The activity of photography has changed with the advancement of technology. Dijck (2008) noted this change and furthermore claimed that (personal) photography changed not only due to the progression and development of digital technologies but also as a result of the social and cultural transformation of which photography is a part.

Photography ranges from casual leisure, such as gazing at the national geographic magazine, to professional photography. It can be argued that, since photography has a professional role, one cannot be a photographer hobbyist. That is false, since photography has infinite types of professionalism and it can be debated whether Stebbins use of the economic meaning of profession was wise. For example, one could enjoy taking mobile phone pictures of one’s dinner table and it is possible that there is a professional counterpart, the food-photographer. However, while photography is a mainstream activity, food-photography is marginal (Amateur vs Hobbyist).

At first glance, leisure pursuit groups seem to promote serious leisure because membership is implied, which, on the surface, might rule out the immediateness property of casual leisure. In reality though, membership (as defined by photographic groups) is merely an entry requirement that usually requires monetary payment. Membership, in the sense of deeply engaging with the group activities and being strongly interested in photography, is not necessarily required. For this reason, there are lurkers and peripheral members (especially newcomers) who are part of the group and participate in a casual way.

2.5.3 Distinguishing Qualities of Serious Leisure

Stebbins (2006a) suggested that there were six characteristics that separate serious from casual leisure. The first, the “need to persevere”, refers to occasional

persistence in leisure activities as a way to overcome impediments, and often involves embarrassment, anxiety, danger, fatigue, etc. An example is mentioned in Gibson et al (2002), where football fans support a team during a losing season but the persistence brings positive feelings in the long term. The second quality is the prospect of a career, progressive stages and turning points, where participants evolve, as described in Section 2.5.4. The third quality is the personal “effort” to gain knowledge and competency devoted in pursuing a career (Khoo, 2008). The fourth quality, “durable benefits”, which are the positive outcomes of serious leisure. Stebbins (2006a) identified the following eight benefits:

“Self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, regeneration or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction and belongingness, and lasting physical products of the activity” (p. 11).

The fifth characteristic is a “unique ethos” and refers to the spirit of the community, where participants share and recognize the same ideals, values and beliefs. Lastly, the sixth quality is an extension of “unique ethos”, where participants strongly identify with an “attractive personal and social identity”, an identity relating to their chosen pursuits. Conversely, casual leisure barely has the impediments described in the first characteristic and is “mundane and commonplace for most people to find a distinctive identity there” (Stebbins, 2006a:13).

2.5.4 Career Path

A leisure career is viewed by Stebbins (2004) as a process across the life-course process with “temporal continuity of the activities associated with it” (p. 18), thus progression up the career ladder might not be realized or happen instantly. In photography, as this hobby involves individual long term engagement, while a member develops a career path within a photographic group they are part of a wider serious leisure career, as illustrated in Figure 5.2 below. In fact, Stebbins (2004) states that career continuity can occur within, between or outside of organisations or even in multiple organisations (multi-membership),

simultaneously. Overall, a serious leisure career could be seen as a development path with five career stages, he suggests by Stebbins (2006a):

- **Beginning**
The beginning refers to the time where an interest in a specific (leisure) activity develops.
- **Development**
Once the interest is developed, its systematic pursuit begins, along with the establishment of elemental skills and knowledge.
- **Establishment**
The stage that follows, establishment, is reached when all elemental skills and knowledge are established.
- **Maintenance**
The maintenance stage is the peak of a participant's career. They get the maximum satisfaction from their pursuit and most of the uncertainties of getting established disappear.
- **Decline**
The final stage is not always reached. Decline happens when the interest to the activity begins to deteriorate to the extent of diminishing satisfaction. Decline could also happen due to skills decay in relation to the activity. Usually after a decline the participant will seek a new interest.

The boundaries of each stage are unclear and Stebbins (2006a) mentioned that they are "imprecise... and the participant passes largely imperceptibly from one to the next" (p.20). Dilley and Scraton (2010) verified this indistinctness, attributing it

to the tension and negotiation of identifying between different personal identities. In particular, they examined mothers who pursued climbing as a hobby, and the clash of identities involved. The social norm of the caring mother made it difficult for some to negotiate their climbing identity. Besides time constraints, the role of a mother dictates commitment and, along with traditional gendered expectations, these constitute barriers to identifying as climbers. Dilley and Scraton (2010) say that even though they

“pursued their climbing systematically, demonstrated perseverance, acquired specialist skills and knowledge, identified individual benefits they had gained such as belonging and feelings of accomplishment and associated with their activity” (p. 136),

This example indicates that these respondents had difficulties in identifying with their roles, despite having characteristics defined by Stebbins (2006a) as serious leisure. Dilley and Scraton (2010) claim that serious leisure is beyond the activity itself. These impediments of self-identification contribute to the indistinctness of the boundaries of each career stage.

Stebbins (1982, 2006a) views serious leisure as a “profitable” activity where the rewards outweigh the costs. This could be problematic, since the costs and benefits cannot be easily and accurately quantified, measured or perceived. Jones (2000) criticized this approach, since it “fails to explain the continued participation in such activities where the costs to the individual seem to exceed the rewards” (p. 1).

Jones (2000) suggested that other factors play a role in maintaining participation in a seemingly unprofitable activity. Belonging to a group can boost self-esteem if a person perceives it as favorable group, even if there is no face-to-face interaction, as mentioned by Tajfel (1970), cited in Jones (2000, p. 290). Unrealistic optimism can fuel participation where people expect higher rewards; thus they continue to pursue the activity despite costs outweighing benefits. Moreover Stebbins’ (1982) claim that people get the maximum satisfaction during the maintenance stage is debatable. It can be argued that the excitement of learning and the establishment

of social relationships can offer more satisfaction to some people compared to the actual practice of the activity related to the hobby, especially in leisure groups, where there are many social factors to consider.

2.5.5 Information management during activity

The management and maintenance of information in leisure groups could be viewed as a sign of serious leisure and perseverance, since it is an investment and commitment to the activity. Each stage of the career trajectory involves information acquisition and management, something that Stebbins did not investigate in detail. Hartel (2010) conducted an ethnographic study on gourmet cooking as a serious leisure activity and studied information activity during the hobby pursuit; viewing hobbyists as “active producers and managers of information resources” (Hartel 2006).

More specifically, Hartel (2010) captured the time framework of information activities (during gourmet cooking) relating to the career trajectory. Each of the five career stages represents a state of knowledge and Hartel (2010) parallels them with a learning path. The career of a hobbyist involves collection and management of information through the activity that contributes to the incremental accumulation of knowledge. As knowledge accumulates the person passes by the career stages. At the stage of “maintenance” Hartel (2010) noticed that knowledge has accrued enough, so that some hobbyists become teachers. Allegedly this transfer of knowledge also depends of how people view others in the maintenance stage. Hartel (2010) states that, at the maintenance stage, they are “known as great cooks” and others seek advice from them. Thus, in this case, to reach the maintenance stage is not only a matter of obtaining ample knowledge and skills but also to be recognised in the group.

From Hartel (2006) it can be analysed how the growth of knowledge occurs. Episodes, which are characterised as the central activity of the hobby (in this case gourmet cooking), comprise a set of events which seem to follow a shorter periodic serious leisure career pattern. The culinary activity begins with provisioning, the

desire and interest to cook, followed by planning. In the planning stage the cook gathers information in order to be able to execute the core activity: to cook. Next, with the use of equipment and essential ingredients, the core activity is performed, and ends with the either self-evaluation or feedback from others, so information is added to the knowledge “pool”. Episodes are repeating fragments that add to the career trajectory; the end of an episode marks the start of the next one, since the hobbyist still has an interest in pursuing the activity. Episodes are small steps in the process of climbing the serious leisure career ladder.

2.5.6 Equipment

An understudied area of serious leisure is the relationship of material equipment in correlation with the career trajectory. Leisure activities very frequently involve relevant, required or optional equipment that acts as an economic commitment to the group or activity. Bryan (1977) in his specialization theory suggested that people go from general interest and low involvement in an activity, to specialised interest and high involvement, with equipment as one of the factors that indicate the level of specialization.

Cox et al (2008) noticed a pattern in the trajectory of involvement of photographers, producing a ladder of involvement where casual hobbyists began their amateur journey of photography with the least specialised equipment (e.g. cameras) and gradually moved on to the acquisition of more professional equipment, marking them as serious amateurs, and eventually professionals, if they continued to progress. It is not abnormal, as with Stebbins (2006a) career model, that one begins with the interest in an activity and that, in the development stage, fundamental skills and knowledge are established, so that they will potentially equip themselves, or upgrade their existing equipment. Nevertheless, in terms of Bryan’s (1977) notion of specialization, Tsaur and Liang (2008) indicated past experience and centrality to lifestyle to be more important than the level of equipment. Centrality to lifestyle is referred to as the “activity’s importance in a recreator’s life” (Valentine, 2003:1). Moreover, Tsaur and Liang (2008) justified this

claim by proposing that newcomers sometimes buy equipment as a form of fashion or to compensate for their lack of skill and knowledge, or simply because more experienced participants do not need some equipment (due to superior skills and knowledge). The last point partially aligns with Stebbins career model, where newcomers will most probably “gear up” during establishment, whereas people in decline (or even in maintenance) will be potentially saturated in materialistic equipment.

Cronan and Kerins (2005) defined “serial leisure” as “the constant pursuit of serious leisure within shifting activities” (p. 3), where participants tend to shift to similar activities, rapidly achieving specialization. In that sense, an equipment upgrade is not necessarily a requirement in order to advance in a serious leisure career, in cases where knowledge (and equipment) can apply to the newly shifted activity. Nevertheless, equipment does relate to a serious leisure career and, as Cox et al (2008) suggest, people still move on to more specialised equipment as they climb up the ladder of involvement.

2.6 Photography

2.6.1 Introduction

The term photography originates from the Greek words “phos” (light) and “graphe” (drawing) and describes the process of capturing a picture or essentially the drawing of light; “it is the copying of the real, visual world” (Levinson, 1997: 38). Besides the technical meaning of photography, there is a social and cultural aspect to the process. Bissell (2000) mentioned that the creation of an image constructs meaning that is subjective. It often represents the creator’s point of view, not merely the visual standpoint but also the socio-cultural elements associated with it. For example Harrison (2004) mention that photography derives from an individual’s subjective choices as to what is worthy of being photographed, showed, stored and admired. These functions can be variously interpreted but, as Gerbner, G. (1972) explains, symbolic functions are the result of communication and to understand them, the cultural environment must be analysed. Briefly, this means that meaning is interrelated with culture. Dijck (2008) says that photography “functions as a tool for identity formation and as means for communication” (p. 58), especially with the evolution of photographic manipulation.

“During recent years photographs are now very widely produced, consumed and circulated on computers, mobile phones and via the internet especially through social networking sites” (Larson, 2013: xvii).

Social networking sites and their rise invite members to contribute photos, comments and information (Larson, 2013). Dijck (2013) mentioned that social media profoundly changed online sociality. Photo sharing has grown in such extent that photos are nowadays a vital part of the online social experience (Maeve, 2013). Maeve (2013) claims that the emergence of smartphones increased photo sharing.

Even though the boundaries of photography are unclear (Molyneaux, 2011; Murray, 2008; Schwartz, 1986), they can be vaguely divided into four types: amateur, commercial, art and science. These types often overlap, which contributes to the difficulty of categorising them. For example, a professional photographer may produce artistic images, or an amateur may sell photographs to online photographic galleries. Amateur photography is practised without the direct intention of profit, whereas commercial photography is practised as a means to gain monetary rewards. It could be argued, though, that amateur photographers and everyday photographers may have different sets of skills. Slater (1991) and Harrison (2004) state that there is a difference between “skilled” amateurs producing their own photographs and the person buying a throwaway, inexpensive camera on a holiday to capture some moments. In addition Ball (2014) says that the distinction between amateur and professional is blurred.

In the next category, art photography, individuals express their personal vision, perception and emotions (McDarragh, 1999; Schwartz, 1986). In the nineteenth century there was a debate as to whether photography was art or an accurate reflection of reality, “free of the selective discrimination of the human eye and hand”, Wells (1997:20). The last category of photography, scientific, involves pictures that are captured with the purpose of recording phenomena and scenes as a method of storing data. In this case Wells (1997) stated the authority of the photographer to “document” or record. A photograph is technically and aesthetically unique and related to the content that is being pictured, and most importantly the person behind the camera. Wells (1997) believed that a photograph does not directly replicate the circumstances and Harper (2002) suggests that is a subjective form of representation.

The aforementioned categories’ boundaries are unclear and this is partly due to the advancement of technology, which has not only enhanced photography but, most importantly, lowered the economic boundaries in such a way that nowadays photography is widespread and common, as with today’s mobile phone devices, which are equipped with cameras. The much influential “Kodak moment”

phenomenon, refers to the capture of celebratory moments and people storing key moments in their lives, especially in relation to their families. With technological advancements, Kodak transformed “photography from a highly specialized activity to one that became an integral part of everyday life” (Munir and Philips, 2005:1) by introducing the “point and press” logic. Fundamentally, though the underlying and essential importance of the “Kodak moment” phenomenon was the introduction of photographic equipment in people’s everyday lives and the influence on the ways “that people keep track of who they are and how they have lived” (Chalfen, 1987:4). Photography (activity) and its products (pictures) serve as a meaningful method of social communication.

2.6.2 Digital Photography

Digital Photography undeniably widened the use and availability of photography but in addition opened new horizons and possibilities in the processes of reviewing, downloading, organizing, sorting, filing and manipulating images (Grinter, 2005; Kirk et al 2006; Rubinstein and Sluis 2008). With regards to information studies, Cox (2013) indicates that social practices such as photography involve creating, seeking and managing information. Moreover the birth, rise and maintenance of online social networks such as facebook.com and flickr.com, is commonly based on digital photography. Cox (2008b) discusses how Web 2.0 influenced the development and enhanced functionality of flickr.com. Rubinstein and Sluis (2008) state that the internet and Web 2.0 have made cameras broadly available and so transformed photography from an individual to a communal activity. It is worth noting that Rubinstein and Sluis (2008) indicate the need for more photographic scholarship, since, with its recent evolution, photography has been integrated into many processes, such as informatics and human-computer interaction, cultural anthropology and information management.

Photography and social networks are related in the sense that photographs serve not only as a means of memory or commemoration but also as a form of communication (Slater, 1995). “The ability to send, exchange images of the

immediate, can be important to maintaining forms of solidarity and group identity at a distance” (Harrison, 2004:36), and is important in identity formation (Slater, 1995). In other words, in photographic groups and online social networks, photographs constitute a direct or indirect way for people to communicate with other members and to an extent, form their identity and membership within the group and their social network: “People talk about photographs, with photographs and to photographs” (Edwards, 2001:21).

Slater (1995) states that taking family photographs is more important than looking at them because these captured moments are valuable and should be stored. Furthermore, they are a means of transferring memories and experiences and building a relationship with the viewer (Langford, 2001). In this sense it can be argued that taking or displaying photographs in photographic groups and online social networks is an important factor in members’ formation of identity. In addition Chalfen (1987) claimed that, where photographs exhibit “proper and expected behavior of participation in socially approved activities according to culturally approved value schemes” (p.139), cultural membership is demonstrated and a sense of belonging is developed.

The digital lifestyle has reformed photography in the sense that it revolutionized not only the tools for practicing photography but also created new types of photography involving social aspects that were previously absent (Rubinstein and Sluis, 2008). Moreover, the digital trend shifted the focus of photography from the family to the self, meaning that photographs are more than forms of memory: they are forms of identity formation (Dijck, 2008; Harrison, 2002). An indication of this shift is exhibited in comparing parents and youngsters, where youngsters are less interested in producing pictures that serve as collection for future reference, and instead tend to share their experiences through photographs (Dijck, 2008; Kindberg et al, 2005). Furthermore, photography does not merely serve as a formation tool but can also tweak and reshape public and private identities. Dijck (2008) stated that it is even possible to control memories extracted from a picture by manipulating them. Of course, the negative result of this is that manipulated

photography cannot be considered a faithful representation of memory (Dijck, 2008).

2.6.3 Equipment

Photographic practice entails employing different sorts of equipment. Slater (1999) mentions that this includes cameras, lenses, tripods and cine gear. It is intriguing that according to Slater (1999) cameras are a relatively small monetary investment compared to photographic accessories. The reason for this, apart from the literal usefulness of the accessories, could be the photographers' pleasure that an individual receives during the pursuit of his hobby. It is not argued that accessories do not have a significant usefulness in practice but their acquisition might partly be due to the considerable enjoyment of attaining new or more advanced products relating to their interest. In addition Cox et al (2008) suggest that the photographic practice itself and the social ties that develop in photographic clubs accrue personal enjoyment and satisfaction.

In order to demystify the equipment upgrade tendency of photographers one should consider Schwartz's (1987) statement that photographers are considered skillful based on "their technical mastery of the medium" (p.280), and Slater's (1999) claim that photographers climb up this fetishized consumer ladder as a result of their status and profile advancement. More specifically, Slater (1999) stated that people begin as snapshooters and progressively, purchase by purchase, move on to become hobbyists and then semi-professionals. Furthermore, Cox et al (2008) correlate equipment upgrade and Slater's (1999) consumer ladder with a lifelong hobby career.

2.6.4 Quality Standards and Competitions

Photographic practice has inevitably developed different codes and quality standards in order to have a measurement of a picture's value. Schwartz (1986; 1987) mentioned several "rules" developed through time in order to convince the world of a photograph's artistic and aesthetic value. Furthermore, photographic

standards and rules are used as an indication of an individual's expertise and skillset. In photographic competitions, a common activity in photographic clubs, the rules typically signify the level of expertise that the participants should have. In the case study of Schwartz (1987), depending on the level of photographers, members took part in different competitions and received different feedback. Often amateur photographers comply with more relaxed photographic rules and usually receive more detailed feedback in order to advance as "a result of the learning experience offered" (Schwartz 1987:272). Experienced and skilled photographers usually enter more challenging competitions, with stricter rules and less feedback.

2.6.5 Conclusion

Schwartz (1986) stated that

"Photography is a unique medium because of its wide-spread accessibility and popularity... so many camera owners have some expertise making and viewing pictures... photography has a broad potential audience" (p.190).

Considering that Schwartz claim was written almost thirty (30) years ago, it can only be said that was precise and accurate, and even valid in that period, while in recent years photography has been integrated into people's everyday lives. Moreover it serves as a method of social and visual communication (Dijck, 2008; Knoblauch et al, 2008) and entails collection of information, knowledge and skills. The newly emerged form of photography, digital, is well fitted into Web 2.0 and online groups, constituting an intriguing social experience that involves learning (Cox et al, 2008; Davies, 2006). Photography is an excellent example of a leisure activity for research, due to its history, future potential, social character, digital nature, varied levels of activity and information-related aspects. The aspects of photography discussed in this chapter indicate that it is suited for examining newcomers' joining processes in online and offline settings.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes how the research questions were addressed. It explains the choices that have been taken in order to plan and carry out the research; offers a review of the methods chosen for gathering data and the cases that will be studied; and explains how the data will be analysed (Silverman, 2005). It provides the reasoning behind the choices made in order to fulfill the research's aim reflecting the need to adopt an appropriate method that fits the research questions.

3.2 Qualitative and Quantitative research methods

The fundamental question of whether to use qualitative or quantitative research methods inevitably surfaces when considering an appropriate research strategy. Dabbs (in Berg, 2007:2) and Bryman (2012) claim the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research can be ambiguous. The primary distinction is that quantitative research employs measurement, whereas qualitative research does not. Bryman (2012) stated that qualitative research emphasises words rather than measurements and usually follows an inductive approach, considering how "individuals interpret their social world... and embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individual's creation" (p. 20). In contrast, quantitative research emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data thus using a positivism and deductive approach which "embodies a view of social reality as an external, objective reality" (p. 19).

Quite often positivists are associated with quantitative approaches as they seek logical or mathematical proof, while interpretivists tend to be linked with qualitative methods as a way to understand the social world and the meanings in people's actions, decisions, beliefs and values (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). However, in reality the divide between the two research methods is complex and in many cases the

two approaches overlap with each other. For example, in quantitative research, a common practice is the use of surveys with questions where meaning and interpretation is involved. While it could be argued that questions are formed in such a way that issues of misinterpretation are avoided or minimised, Bryman (2012) claims that this is an assumption. In order to demonstrate that meaning was appropriately interpreted some respondent validation methods must be applied; a qualitative characteristic. In addition, Marsh (1982) said that in many surveys researchers request the reason behind actions and this entails the discovery of meaning. Moreover, quantitative research regularly involves empirical research in social settings through direct or indirect observation, even though evidence is quantified.

Malterud (2001) claims that qualitative research is more suitable for understanding complex social processes, offering the opportunity to study the phenomenon from the studied individuals' perspectives; and Joubish et al (2011) mention that it is more suited to the study of beliefs, meanings, attributes and symbols as phenomena. Moreover, Miles and Huberman (1984) connect qualitative research with ethnographic and participant observer research, where the researcher interacts with people in a social group.

From the above, and considering what was presented in Chapter 2: Literature Review, it can be suggested that a qualitative method fits the study's scope. On one hand, quantitative research provides information about relations, enables comparisons and predictions (Miles and Huberman, 1984) and allows for a statistical comparison between groups (Sukamolson, 2005). However, photographic clubs are social entities with norms and values; they have an interpretive nature. Thus the social characteristics of the study field and the interpretive and explorative nature of joining indicate a qualitative research method with an inductive approach, thus this research will follow a qualitative approach.

3.2.1 Inductive and Deductive approach

In deductive approaches the researcher first studies the theory and what is already known in the domain and creates some hypothesis that are to be tested. Then data is collected and the hypotheses are tested based on the theory. In inductive approaches the research begins with observations and the collection of data and then based on the patterns of the data new theory is generated. Soiferman (2010) states that

“arguments based on experience or observation are best expressed inductively, while arguments based on laws, rules, or other widely accepted principles are best expressed deductively” (p.3).

This research is based on experience or observation thus an inductive approach is more suited than a deductive one. However in reality it can be argued that there is no pure inductive or deductive approach since some inductive reasoning is entailed in deductive and the opposite.

Firstly an inductive approach entails that the researcher has no knowledge of pre-existing theories so that the study is objective and the analysis of data is unbiased in the sense that is data driven instead of theory driven. However, the selection and proposal of the subject of the research implies that researcher considered it important. What is important to be examined is dependent on judgment. Moreover the researchers' interests and past academic experience affect what is important to them. Thus an inductive approach, arguably, entails some deductive elements. Secondly a deductive approach establishes measurements to the concepts so that they can be tested with the theory. These measurements, arguably, entail judgment and subjectivity. Therefore the distinction between inductive and deductive approach can be ambiguous. To be able to accurately state the approach that this research followed it is important to describe the main stages of the thesis.

During the different stages of this research a mixture of inductive and deductive approach was used. During the early stages of this research the researcher

reviewed the existing literature in order to identify gaps in the literature and form an interesting research question. Then in order to commence the ethnographic study, the researcher needed be competent and in a position to capture social meanings under naturally occurring settings thus a study on photographic groups was conducted. In that sense, the aforementioned processes followed a predominantly, deductive approach.

The data collection and analysis of the ethnographic study was done with an inductive approach since the findings were emergent themes from the data (Chapter 4). Some theoretical terminologies were used for the purpose of accurately expressing meanings of the field but nevertheless the analysis was data driven. In Chapter 5 the findings were aligned with existing theory. Thus the first stage, ethnographic, data collection and analysis followed a predominantly, inductive approach.

In the next stage where interviews were designed and conducted, data analysis was data driven. Data was analysed similarly to the first stage and again some theoretical terminologies were used for the purpose of accurately expressing meanings. The findings (Chapter 7), were emergent themes from the data. The next stage involved a revision and update of the literature before discussing (Chapter 8) the findings of the whole research. Therefore, based on the aforementioned, this research followed a mixed approach that was predominantly inductive.

3.3 Reflective research

In the literature, through the lens of different perspectives and theories, how the joining process could be conceptualised was considered. Undeniably, each theory conceptualises membership within its own set of rules and the end result or direction of a project differs, from theory to theory. For example, many organisational theories and strategies of assimilation assume successful orientation as a state of efficient productivity, turnover and impact on the

organisation (Daniel and Crawford, 2011), but these almost certainly do not reflect joining from a different perspective (e.g. Communities of Practice).

Moreover, there is no theory in particular that explores the joining process in leisure pursuit groups. Bolton (2010) states that reflective practice could enable not only finding new knowledge but also unconscious knowledge that the researcher did not realize they knew before. Hence, reflective research is a method that aids in defining a more precise and valid set of assumptions from the researcher's point of view.

Joining is inherently an on ongoing process and the "measurements, observations and statements... are results of interpretation" (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000:5). Thus it is essential to have great awareness of the theoretical assumptions, language and pre-understanding in order to interpret as close to reality as possible, the first characteristic of reflective research according to Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000). The second characteristic, reflection, refers to inward focus of the research, which involves considering the researcher, the community, society as a whole, the intellectual and cultural traditions and the problematic nature of cognitive linguistics and semantics in the research context. Reflection can be defined as "the interpretation of interpretation and the launching of critical self-exploration of one's own interpretations of empirical material" (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000:5).

Reflective research can yield unexpected outcomes which are part of the informal knowledge that the researcher acquires from working with people in practice (Knott and Scragg, 2010; Parker and Bradley, 2010). For this research, results should not be considered as unexpected from a theoretical point of view, since this is an explorative study, not heavily based on a single theory. In that sense, unexpected results are essentially welcomed because they will augment the value of the research. Overall, this approach indicates a proficient understanding of the field to be studied and a systematic reflection, in terms of interacting with the empirical material; in this case the community and the individuals. From the nature of reflective empirical research and having in mind that the joining process is a

complex process involving interpretation and meaning, this approach not only fits our objectives but adds value to our understandings.

3.4 The rationale for adopting an ethnographic approach

This section introduces the different qualitative methods that were considered during the methodological design and the rationale and justification for selecting an ethnographic approach.

3.4.1 Grounded Theory

“Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed.” (Strauss and Corbin, 1994:273). Theory is constructed through a recursive process of data collection and analysis. In contrast to this focus on developing a new theory, the primary aim of this research was not to develop a new theory but to apply and further develop existing theories that are found to be relevant.

Grounded theory utilises theoretical sampling, a process in which the researcher jointly collects and analyses data in order to decide what data is going to be collected next (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Through this process the theory is developed as it emerges.

Coding is a vital process in grounded theory and entails

“reviewing transcripts and/or field notes and giving labels (names) to component parts that seem to be of potential theoretical significance” (Bryman, 2012:568).

There are three levels of coding: open, axial and selective coding. In open coding the researcher examines, compares, conceptualises and categorises the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). At this level the incidents described in text are described in order to be grouped into categories. In axial coding the researcher makes connections between the aforementioned categories. Selective coding refers to the process of selecting the core category and systematically relating it to

other categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Additionally it involves validating those relationships, filling in, refining and developing those categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The core category is the central focus that all the other categories relate to.

The coding process ends when theoretical saturation is reached. Theoretical saturation is the phase where the concepts and categories are well developed in the sense that reviewing them will not further develop their properties (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Another important aspect of grounded theory is the constant comparison which refers to maintaining a close connection between data and conceptualisation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The researcher constantly compares the concepts “being coded under a certain category so that a theoretical elaboration of that category can begin to emerge” (Bryman, 2012:568).

According to Aldiabat and Navenec (2011) grounded theory studies participants' behavior “regardless of their cultural background, from a social interaction perspective” (p.3). The culture of leisure groups is central to the joining process because joining involves not only social interaction with other members but also integration into their culture. “Grounded theory assumes that social events and processes have an objective reality in the sense that they take place irrespective of the researcher and that they can be observed and documented by the researcher.” (Willig, 2013:80).

The aforementioned assumption is critical and comes in contrast with the exploration of the joining process. Joining is a tacit process and might not be successfully captured by the research merely through the lens of participants. Due to the nature and complexity of joining a group it is more suitable to explore this process from the perspective of the researcher as a participant and the other participants as well. This provides the researcher a deeper understanding of the process to be in a position to interpret meanings within the culture of the studied groups.

Considering all the aforementioned, grounded theory was not the most suitable method to be followed by this study.

Nevertheless this study contained some elements of grounded theory. More specifically the interview data analysis entailed a similar coding process where transcripts were coded into concepts, categorised and connections were created among them. The concepts, categories and their relationships were systematically being refined and developed using constant comparison. On the other hand, the focus of this study directed by the thematic analysis model which produced a list of important themes and not a core category as with grounded theory.

3.4.2 Survey – Questionnaires

“Survey data is usually obtained by means of a questionnaire, a series of predetermined questions that can be either self-administered, administered by mail, or asked by interviewers.” (Pickard, 2013). While questionnaires have the advantage of being cheaper, quicker to administer and in general more convenient for the interviewer and the interviewees (Bryman, 2012), they have some important disadvantages for this research. There is no opportunity to probe interviewees to elaborate on their answers. Since joining is a tacit process the participants might not be able to answer some questions and could potentially provide simple answers that will fail to capture the complexity and depth of joining. In addition questionnaires cannot capture additional data. Since this is an explorative study the responses of the participants might trigger further questions. Moreover surveys and questionnaires are commonly associated with quantitative and deductive researches that are relying on existing studies and then building hypotheses that can be tested. There are no existing theories of joining that can be operationalised in this way for the scope of this study. For the above reasons questionnaires were not considered for this study.

3.4.3 Social Network analysis

Social Network analysis is “strategy for investigating social structures” (Rousseau, 2012:3). Social network analysis is focused primarily on the relations between the actors within a network and it produces relational data (Rousseau, 2012). Hertz et al (2015) state that social network analysis analytical methods “mainly involve formal, quantitative methods for collecting and analysing relational data” (p.1) and use graphical representations to reveal and display the patterns of those relations (Freeman, 2004). In formal social network analysis “relational data are predominantly collected using quantitative methods” (Edwards, 2010:9).

From the above definition it can be said that the quantitative nature of social network analysis is not ideal for the nature of this study since it will not be able to capture the fundamental norms and values of photographic groups. Furthermore it will have difficulties in uncovering the tacit aspects of the joining process, especially from the perspective of the newcomer. Social network analysis focuses on the relations among actors or members of a network rather than the cultural properties of the individual.

However social network analysis could answer questions that are relevant to joining offline and online leisure pursuit groups. Such approach would enable this study to examine over time how individuals or newcomers create relations with each other. Additionally it could be used to study how a group/network evolve before and after newcomers join. The important limitation of the aforementioned approach is that the meaning attached to these processes would not be revealed. Overall social network analysis as method that produces predominantly quantitative data is not ideal for this study that has a qualitative nature

3.4.4 Case Study

Case study is a broad term and is defined by Yin (1994) as

“an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p.13).

According to Yin (1994) multiple sources of evidence are used and benefits from existing theoretical propositions.

For this study, the initial literature review that was conducted has shown that the process of joining leisure pursuit groups was underexplored by existing researches and the theory did not provide a deep understanding of the process. Thus from this aspect using existing research as sources to conduct this research would be problematic.

Moreover Cohen and Court (2003) explain that the multiple sources of data used in case study include

“not only participant observation and interviews as in ethnography, but extensive document analysis and, not infrequently, the use of quantitative as well as qualitative data” (p.1).

The use of multiple sources of data collected under different contexts, such as past researches and document analysis has the risk of compromising the validity of the findings. Furthermore as it was discussed above in Section 3.2 this study is not suited for a quantitative approach because of the interpretive and explorative nature of joining. Photographic groups are social entities with norms and values, participant observation and interviews are well suited to capture their interpretive nature.

From the perspective that this study gathered empirical data from multiple photographic groups, some elements of case study were used in this research. However Cohen and Court (2003) mention that ethnography’s aim is to “uncover the tacit knowledge of culture participants” (p.1) whereas case study’s aim is “to delineate the nature of phenomena through detailed investigation of individual cases and their contexts” (p.1). The researcher considered ethnography to be a suitable method thus case study as a theoretical approach was not adopted.

3.5 Ethnography

Bryman (2012) presented ethnography as the researcher's immersion in a group for an extended period, making observations and engaging in conversations among other members. It is a written representation of culture produced through cultural interpretations and research experience (Van Maanen, 1988). In an early explanation of ethnography Heath et al (1982) stated that its goal is to describe:

“Ways of living of a social group... in which there is in-group recognition of the individuals living and working together as a social unit... becoming a participant in the social group the ethnographer attempts to record and describe the overt, manifest and explicit behaviors and values and tangible items of culture” (p.12).

Heath et al (1982) further explained that what enables the ethnographer to recognize patterns of behavior that may be covert and implicit is the presence of the ethnographer within the culture's natural setting, which permits him/her to learn the language, norms and values. Thus, instead of using a predetermined system to establish the conceptual framework of a society's members, ethnographers use their own comprehension, established through participant observation.

While the focus of ethnography is on individuals' behavior in groups, Watson (1988) suggested that most studies do not consider their individual characteristics and rather focus on the group as a whole because cultural behavior is a shared behavior. Ethnography could also refer to the data collection method combined with participant observation. Referring to the techniques of ethnographic data collection, Heath et al (1982) mention:

“Mapping; charting kinship and other patterns of interaction; interviewing; collecting life histories; studying written documents relevant to the history of the group; and recording folklore of all types: narratives, songs, myths, riddles, rhymes, and proverbs” (p.34).

In the example of Taylor (1993), data was gathered through observation and interviews.

It is apparent that ethnography and a reflective approach share similar and compatible characteristics and are not an uncommon combination (Nesbitt, 2004; Lillis, 2008; Riemann, 2006). Joining and becoming a member of a leisure group is arguably a cultural phenomenon and, as an academically underexplored area, ethnography provides an appropriate framework in the sense that the researcher observes within a society from their point of view, aiding in uncovering these knowledge gaps. Interpretation and meaning, when analysed properly, gain credibility and value if they come from the source (in this case, the researcher). Moreover ethnography seemed a natural way to explore leisure pursuit groups, to reflect and experience the feel of such communities.

The joining process from the newcomer's perspective entails tacit knowledge that is related not only with the culture of the individual but also the culture of the group. Photographic groups' culture and norms and values constitute an integral part of the newcomers' joining process. Under these contexts ethnography was selected as the most suitable approach.

3.5.1 Ethnography - Research Design

Hine (2009) states that, in ethnography, the researcher must connect and adapt their research questions to what they find in the field and Boellstorff et al (2012) stated that "arriving at a research question is the foundation of a successful ethnographic research" (p.56).

Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) noted, ethnographic research is typically concerned "with producing descriptions and explanations of particular phenomena, or with developing theories rather than with testing existing hypotheses" (p. 21). They explain that this is due to insufficient knowledge of a phenomenon or process, which is often associated with a lack of previous literature. Additionally, they mentioned that research questions tend to be formulated during the research, especially after the collection of the initial data. Important aspects of the research are identified, in order that they are studied in more detail and the research questions become more precise at this stage. An extreme example, depicting the

emergent nature of the research questions is the Shakespeare (1997) case, where the researcher moved from studying how a group was established and changed over time to conflicting stories of its members and finally to the confused talk of dementia patients (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007).

3.5.2 Group selection and scope of the field-site

Taylor (2009) described the field-site as an assemblage of the “range of actors (system, technologies, player, body, community, company, legal structures, etc.), concepts, practices, and relations” (p. 3) that make the setting, either physical, virtual or a combination of both. Thus the selection of a group or activity to study should offer the researcher the grounds to investigate the research questions. Even though Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) state that the ethnographer cannot predict whether or not the setting(s) to be studied will answer his research questions (or the newly formed questions) it is important to consider “the feasibility of carrying out research there, and how access might best be accomplished should they be selected” (p. 29).

The selected groups should not be treated as isolated from the wider social world. The experience inside a group can only be a part of the whole, considering that photography as a lifetime hobby is a widespread, mobile activity with varied levels of participation. In addition, the different forms of photography such as digital, essentially affect the activity. In online groups photography should be practised in a similar but not identical way as with local offline groups. For example, learning is not isolated at school but takes place in out-of-school settings, such as gardens (Rahm, 2012). Falzon, M. (2009) stated that “the essence of multi-sited research is to follow people, connections, associations, and relationships across space” (p. 1). Thus the field-site, as geographically defined, could be problematic. Multi-sited ethnography takes into account these considerations by studying social phenomena that cannot be explained by focusing on a single site (Marcus, 1995), and moreover Boellstorff et al (2012) stated that

“Multi-sited ethnography may be more useful for capturing a holistic picture of the life of a community or activity, and the scope of the fieldsite may itself be emergent” (p. 60).

A characteristic of ethnography is the natural settings it studies. It follows a naturalistic approach, since the participant-observer places himself in a field without invoking set experiments and avoiding formal interviews:

“The primary aim should be to describe what happens, how the people involved see and talk about their own actions and those of others, the contexts in which the action takes place, and what follows from it” (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007:7).

The value of this research and ethnography overall are the variations of these social groups and their cultural similarities and differences. The selection of three similar contexts (photography) but different setting sites (offline, online, combination of both) were preselected for research.

Photography is a crucial ingredient of the different settings, since the activity itself entails both an offline and online aspect. Thus, considering photography as a leisure activity, it is a huge advantage for this research to examine the same activity in respective offline and online social groups. In its traditional form, photography is an offline activity but the digital revolution in photography has expanded it into the fields of online social media and networks. Ballagas and Aachen (2004) identified new forms and trends in photography due to digitalisation and in addition, Counts and Fellheimer (2004), Van House et al (2004), Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar (2010) and Weilenmann et al (2013) have stated that online photo-sharing is a method of communication for connecting and staying connected in social groups. This benefit of practising photography in multi-settings is ideal in limiting the fragmentation between the studied social groups, and aids the exploration of their culture in a more precise way, adding more validity to any comparisons, differences and similarities, and ultimately to the findings. As ethnographic research aims to capture and describe culture based on information

collected from the fieldwork (Fetterman, 2009; Harris and Johnson, 1999), the shared photographic culture of multiple groups provides insights into how people join these groups.

3.5.3 Approaching the field

While gaining access to the field might seem to require a physical presence, it extends beyond this. Ethical issues arise concerning accessing public and private domains and the appropriateness of participation. Ethical issues are discussed below, thus the focus is on “placing” the setting. Boellstorff et al (2012) considers that a good piece of ethnographic research incorporates “difference and similarity, showing commonalities where they occur yet also documenting the cultural formulations that demarcate cultures” (p. 64); people are similar in many ways and they deploy culture which differ “through varied historical trajectories and contexts” (p.64). Culture is cultivated through history and is shaped through its context and the objectification of meaning (Simmel, 1971). Studying multiple societies across different settings with similar contexts and culture expands and deepens the research on how culture is formed; not only in finding differences but also in linking similarities.

3.5.4 Auto-ethnography

Marechal (2010) defines auto-ethnography as “a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic fieldwork and writing” (p. 1) and Ellis and Bochner (2000) add that it connects the personal to the cultural utilizing “the autobiographic materials of the researcher as the primary data” (Heewon, 2007:1). Auto-ethnographies vary in focus in three areas: on the process (how they are written); on the culture (interpretation); and on the self (the self-narrative) (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 740; Heewon, 2007: 3). These three elements, regardless of their level of emphasis, are all essential in auto-ethnography.

Auto-ethnography follows the traditional ethnographic research process, collecting data of self-participation, observation and interviews, with the added element of autobiographical narratives. In order to compose the autobiographical narratives researchers gather data, such as drawings, field notes, photographs, and notes on cross-cultural experiences; and in general they develop techniques that suit them in triggering their past experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In that sense, they evaluate, analyse and interpret the gathered data to compose narratives with a specific writing style.

Chang (2008) explains the benefits of auto-ethnography thus:

“It offers a research method friendly to researchers and readers; it enhances cultural understanding of self and others; and it has a potential to transform self and others toward the cross-cultural coalition building” (p. 3).

Through the personal narratives of auto-ethnography rich data is provided and the readers gain access into the ethnographer’s private world (Mendez, 2013; Pavlenko, 2002). Duncan (2004) noted the auto-ethnography approach is useful for explicating tacit knowledge and Kempster et al (2008) stated that it was helpful to illuminate tacit processes of situated learning and understanding the researcher sense of becoming. As indicated by the above the auto-ethnographic rich description of tacit and complex phenomena fits this study’s research questions on joining and becoming a member.

Considering these and the aforementioned, auto-ethnography is appropriate for this research, especially since it deepens cultural understanding. In addition, the researcher of this study fits into the role of a newcomer joining a leisure group and is likely to pass through the same experiences as other potential photographic groups newcomers.

3.5.5 Genre and Style of Ethnography

Van Maanen (2011) presented three types of representation in ethnography. Realist tales are stated to be most frequent and suited for a society, community and most importantly for small groups of people with a common interest. The author attempts to realistically cover the culture of the group in documentary style and in some instances provides some theoretical explanations behind observed phenomena or practices. The authors themselves are absent from the descriptions and only document other members. The fact that the researchers provide their own interpretation and assumptions make his subjectivity debatable. Thus, a high theoretical and practical competency regarding ethnography and the studied field/culture is required for crediting and legitimating observations and interpretations.

Confessional tales do not necessarily contradict the realist tale style and the main difference is that they focus both on the culture of the group and the researcher as part of it, adopt their own personal style. In instances where there is a gap of theoretical knowledge, or in cases of under-explored social settings, the research cannot be totally realistic, not having the required “back up” knowledge to validate the observations. To overcome this, the ethnographer considers themselves to be an object of the research, reflecting on themselves and providing their own point of view. Van Maanen (2011) mentioned that a way to orient oneself is to be “a student of the group” (p.75), to learn from living in the culture as a newcomer. Due to the personal reflections style, confessional aspects are not entirely scientifically rigorous but are an attempt to demystify these loose and open-ended settings.

The third Van Maanen (2011) type of ethnographic tales, the impressionist, is of a narrative form and attempts to describe a special moment. This kind of work is figurative, indicating that they are open to interpretation by the reader (Weick, 1989). Impressionist tales regard rare events and do not cover the routine of the studied social groups. There is no author’s interpretation or reasoning behind the group practices and the readers are left to draw their own.

Through the discussion of Van Maanen (2011) types of ethnographic genres and style it can be concluded that the confessional style is the most suitable for this research. Realist tales require a high theoretical background and extensive past academic work in the field, an element lacking in the academic literature and the understanding of the joining process in leisure pursuit groups. Confessional tales address this matter by approaching the field in a more explorative nature and setting the author up as a member of the studied group, in addition to considering their point of view.

The main weakness of impressionist tales are their focus on rare and special events, making it difficult to capture the on-going process of joining by emphasizing what the author considers special moments, diverting attention from regular practices. Since this study is exploratory and predominantly inductive special moments should not be identified during an early stage of the research. Without the researcher understanding the meanings and the culture of photographic groups he would not have the necessary knowledge to identify special moments and would probably focus the study to the wrong direction. Confessional tales complement the auto-ethnographic method discussed in Section 3.5.4 and their explorative nature is more suited for study.

3.5.5.1 Thick Description

Geertz's (1977) thick description is a widely accepted and used method of doing ethnography in qualitative research (Ponterotto, 2006). Thompson (2001) states that thick description is a "method to discover and reveal the depth of meaning that human actors inscribe in their language and actions" (p. 66). It provides an explanation of human behavior by giving the context of an act; stating the intentions and meanings that justify the action; tracing the evolution and development of the act; and presenting the action as a text that can then be interpreted (Denzin, 1989: 33). Through this process the reader creates a sense of verisimilitude that helps him understand the researcher's interpretation. Denzin (1989) describes verisimilitude as "truthlike statements that produce readers the

feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described” (p. 83). Joining is a process experienced by newcomers and naturally has an interpretive nature. Therefore the ethnographer should provide readers with a deep explanation of the behaviors and actions during the joining process so that they are able to interpret the findings.

Thick description, auto-ethnography and confessional tales complement each other. Therefore the style of ethnography adopted by this study is autobiographical narratives focused on the culture of the group and the researcher as part of it that provide explanation of human behavior by giving the context of an act.

3.5.6 Foreshadowed Problems

Ethnographic research is most often symbolised by its deriving of theories and explanations regarding the observation made. In Malinowski’s (2010) ethnographic work he notes the danger of being biased towards preconceived ideas regardless of the author’s theoretical knowledge. Such attitudes can cause the researcher to view evidence and facts in such a way as to form theories to suit his or her ideas. Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) noted that ethnographic work rarely uses a well-developed theory to verify or reject preconceived hypothesis but rather develops theories using explanations deriving from the observations of different phenomena. Thus the lack of literature on the relevant phenomenon is a useful starting point for ethnography. Initial fieldwork should identify the important aspects to be further examined and then research questions should take definite shape.

3.5.7 Participant Observation

3.5.7.1 Overt versus Covert Observation

Unless required, in most cases ethnographers use an overt role while doing research, mainly because of the practical and ethical implications that are inherent in covert ethnography (Lugosi, 2006). However in some cases covert research can relieve the ethnographer from the burden of negotiating access (in public spaces –

open access) from organisations and can add credibility to the data, since participants' behavior would be more natural. Depending on the individual and the context of the research human behavior can be affected when under study or observed.

In overt ethnography, many of the ethical implications are avoided and in cases of closed setting spaces, the researcher can conduct research ethically. However, Beauchamp et al (1982) said "that knowledge of concealment in fieldwork would raise self-doubt and suspiciousness among informants and make them reluctant to participate in future research" (Lugosi, 2006: 543). Overt observation is the only option in observing photographic groups since they could be considered as closed spaces.

3.5.7.2 Type of participation

The type or role an ethnographer takes in a group affects the kind of information and knowledge that will be generated from the group (Geertz, 1977). According to Morris et al (1999), anthropologist Pike (1967) described the inside perspective (emic) of ethnographers as the attempt to describe a particular culture in their own terms and the outside perspective (etic) as the attempt to describe and compare the differences across cultures in terms of a general external standard.

In "non-participation" researchers merely observe from a distance without being seen by the participants. They do not directly contact or get involved with the participants and essentially are not a part of the group. Gobo (2008) states that this kind of participation arguably does not capture the point of view of the actors. On the other hand, "passive participation" is similar to "non-participation", with the difference that the researcher is physically present in the group, but without participating. Bryman (2004) mentioned that this kind of participation may indicate members' lack of commitment to the group, leading to credibility loss.

"Moderate participation" is the most common type used by ethnographers. Dewalt and Dewalt (2010) and Gobo (2008) describe it as an intermediate position of a complete insider and a complete outsider. This balance between active and

passive participation offers the researcher the right involvement level to capture the culture of the group but also gives him the benefit of retracting his participation to a passive one, in order to remain objective.

This type of “active participation” indicates that the ethnographer is fully emerged into the group and engaged in almost all the activities. However, ethnographers run the risk of “going native”, meaning that their complete immersion to the culture will result in loss of objectivity and they may forget that they are conducting research (O'Reilly, 2013). In comparison with “active participation”, the “complete participation” principle is that the researcher becomes fully emerged into the group before the research is initiated. It is worth noting that this type has the highest risk of losing objectivity and credibility can be debatable.

The chosen type for this research is moderate participation because it has the lowest risk level while retaining the advantage of objectivity. Moreover, it is the most common type in ethnographic studies and also fit the context and nature of the studied groups.

3.5.7.3 Participant Observation in Online Groups

“In virtual ethnography the travel to a field site is itself virtual, consisting of experiential rather than physical displacement” (Hine, 2000:45). Boellstorff et al (2012) mentioned that when observing in virtual worlds every ethnographer has a view from somewhere; the subject position. Thus even if there is no direct physical position in online groups the experiential position affects the type of participation. Newcomers/old members and novices/professional photographers have different positions and probably participate in a different manner. The subject position inevitably introduces bias in the already interpretive nature of ethnography. These concerns of the subject position can be mediated when the ethnographer remains “in close and continuing relations with the natural social order” (Boellstorff et al 2012:66). Moreover considering the title of this thesis, to provide credibility and

validity to this research the ethnographer joined and participated as a novice newcomer; a similar subject position with the offline groups Section 3.6.1.

From this it can be said that the subject position fundamentally affects the type of participation. In a virtual, ethnographic study the experiential position could be accomplished by adopting the different types of participation (non-participation, moderate participation and active participation). In Section 3.5.7.2, it was mentioned that for the offline groups, the chosen type for this research was moderate participation. In general the same principles apply but it is important to re-consider them under the virtual context. In the offline groups, non-participation was not suitable because a passive participant could be seen by the other members and non-participation indicates lack of commitment to the group, leading to loss of credibility, Bryman (2004). In online groups non-participants are invisible to other members thus this drawback is partly mitigated. However the ethnographer should be able to understand the shared practices, meanings and social contexts (Boellstorff et al, 2012) and by moderately or actively participating, competence and validity is increased in the aforementioned areas. In the same manner moderate is more suitable than active participation because it retains the advantage of objectivity as discussed in Section 3.5.7.2. In addition by choosing moderate participation for the online groups consistency is maintained since moderate participation was also chosen for the study of the offline groups.

3.6 Ethics

The initial and fundamental step in conducting ethical research is the comprehension of the term “ethics”. Especially in ethnography, it is important that specific cases are prospectively considered, as well as everyday decisions reflecting others (Cassell and Jacobs, 1987). Thus ethics should be a constant concern of every researcher through all project phases.

In ethnography, while it is possible to foresee and avert some ethical issues, there are dilemmas that develop unpredictably but nonetheless naturally (Goodwin et al,

2003). Markham et al (2012) mention that it is not always a straightforward process to make ethical decisions because often there are:

“More than one set of norms, values, principles and usual practices can be seen to legitimately apply to the issue(s) involved. It becomes difficult to make judgments as to which set(s) apply, especially when one set conflicts with another in some way” (p. 5).

Despite the fact that there is no universal standard for ethnographic researchers to follow, there are numerous associations that provide codes of ethical practice. The Association of Internet Researchers (Markham et al, 2012; Ess et al, 2002), the British Sociological Association (2002) and the American Anthropological Association (2012) are some of the sources that provide guidance to ethnographers.

Below is an overview of The British Sociological Association (2002)¹ code of practice, classified in nine categories:

1. Professional Integrity.

The researcher themselves should be aware of and act consistently in accordance with social standards or moral values of society, National Association of Social Workers (2008). He/she must be competent in conducting research and minimizing safety risks. Publishing and promoting his/her results and data should be endeavored in order to be potentially used in future research.

2. Relations with and Responsibilities towards Research Participants.

The nature of sociological research often entails the establishment of personal relationships. Through these, the researcher may be faced with personal information and it is his/her duty to decide what information will be used and how is going to be disseminated.

¹ <https://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>

3. Relationships with research participants.

Sociologists are responsible for the protection of the participant's rights and interests as well as for the research not adversely affecting their social and physical well-being. This section also refers to ensuring free informed consent to the participants and highlights circumstances that require extra caution, such as research involving children (Morrow and Richards, 1996).

4. Covert Research.

Covert methods violate the principles of informed consent, thus the researcher should consider any possible legal issues regarding the right of privacy in non-public spaces. Even though covert research could incur privacy risks it could be justified when the research outcome is affected (Spiker, 2011). For example, participants may behave unnaturally when they know they are being studied.

5. Anonymity, Privacy and Confidentiality.

Participant's anonymity and privacy should be respected and personal information should be treated as confidential. Anonymity should be preserved by masking participant identities with pseudonyms and eliminating any connection between data and identifiable individuals. An additional measure that should be taken is to follow the Data Protection Act (1998) when storing data.

6. Relations with & Responsibilities towards Sponsors and/or Funders.

The relationship between the researcher and his/her sponsors should be of mutual respect. The researcher should commit to his obligation toward them and advance knowledge, but at the same time funders and sponsor should respect the researcher's obligations towards the community.

7. Clarifying obligations, roles and rights.

It is advised that researchers clarify their roles and obligations at the foundation stage of the research and if possible, sign a contract with the funders/sponsors.

8. Pre-empting outcomes and negotiations about research.

It is essential that the research conducted is not favorable towards any outcome and the researcher should also be cautious if a sponsor requires specific research methods that conflict with the aforementioned.

9. Obligations to sponsors and/or Funders During the Research Process.

As a researcher, one has the obligation to make an effort to be with in the agreed schedule. In addition he/she should notify his/her sponsors in case the research deviates and changes in nature.

To meet the ethical criteria of the British Sociological Association (2002) code of practice, research on ethnographic data collection and photographic groups was done in order to be in accordance with the groups' social standards or moral values. The data collected did not involve any personal information and in order to avoid any potential risks of privacy, the groups' name and location were anonymised. Instead of their real name they are referred as South City Photographic Society, University of South Photographic Society, South Yorkshire City Flickr Group and Yorkshire City - Old and New Facebook Group. No names are mentioned in this report and individuals or places are not identifiable.

This research was carried out in accordance with the ethics standards of the University of Sheffield's Information School. Prior to data collection, the required application form, participant information sheet and consent form were submitted and approved by the Information School Ethics Review Management. The University of Sheffield Ethics Policy (n.d.) states that "information consent should always be sought from anyone who may be recognizable in auto-ethnography" (p.

32). Despite the nature of this research, appropriate measures were taken, so that no one was recognizable, the researcher announced his true identity and informed participants about his study in the first meetings. In addition, printed copies of the information sheet were available for every member of the group.

3.7 First Stage Data Collection

3.7.1 Offline Groups

Data was collected from the two offline groups, South City Photographic Society and University of South Photographic Society, taking a reflective auto-ethnographic approach. Conducting moderate participation and utilizing Geertz's (1977) thick description, confessional style field notes were produced after group meetings, based on the researcher's observations. In order to keep participation in a natural form, field notes during meetings were written when there were no social interactions (usually during slideshows) or participation involved, in a quick, silent and non-obstructive way on the researcher's mobile phone. The password enabled and encrypted mobile phone was chosen as a temporary method of storing data instead of paper, because it fitted the environment without drawing any unnecessary attention; moreover its use during meetings was a common practice among members, as it is a device that fits the cultural properties of photographic groups. As an additional measure to experience the setting in its natural form, meeting's notes were kept to a minimum and enriched in personal time after the group meetings.

Attendance at both groups happened simultaneously and regularly since their schedule allowed it. The group meetings were held weekly; South City Photographic Group on Thursdays and University of South Photographic Society on Tuesdays, both in the evening. Data collection took place from September 2013 to April 2014, and in total twenty (20) meetings, ten (10) for each group, were attended.

3.7.1.1 Photographic meetings

Photographic meetings are the epitome of the offline group's major activity and interaction. Within these localized and time-restricted boundaries, a vital part of the community and culture is formed. In addition, they are a significant component of the information available prior to joining and are commonly referred to on the group's website and in informative leaflets. The group meetings constitute a strong motive for newcomers to join the groups, since attendance is a significant element in the participation. Regular meetings being an early strong and clear indication of what a newcomer is going to experience are arguably one of the main reasons to join, otherwise potential members might possibly not desire to join a group in which they do not like its main activity.

Moreover, meetings provide face-to-face interaction and constitute the ground where many social relationships form and interactions take place. Another very important factor for studying group meetings is that they are a common practice in photographic groups. Schwartz (1987) also considered photographic meetings as a significant aspect of photography and examined these events in order to "illustrate the interrelationships among pictorial, linguistic and behavioral codes, and social group membership" (p. 252).

Since the two offline groups share similar context and settings, translation of cultural idioms is more easily achieved. These settings constitute an almost ideal opportunity to study their commonalities and differences.

3.7.2 Online Groups

The two online groups that data was collected were from the South Yorkshire City Flickr Group and South Yorkshire City – Old and New Facebook Group. The same approach with offline groups was used; reflective auto-ethnographic. Moderately participating and utilizing Geertz's (1977) thick description, confessional style field notes were produced after each session in the online groups. The researcher joined both groups simultaneously and collected data based on his observations

and experiences, daily for a period of two (2) months. After each session, field notes were written based on the observations and self-experiences. On the first session in each group the researcher announced his presence by creating a new public post stating his purpose as a researcher and listed the information sheet.

3.7.2.1 Online Sessions of Participation

Online sessions took place simultaneously for both online groups. Data was collected from June 2014 to July 2014. In total ninety (120) sessions, sixty (60) for each group, took place. Field notes were recorded during and after each session. Each session lasted from twenty (20) minutes to one hour. There was not a fixed length for each session because this study wanted to retain a normative participation on online groups. The unstructured nature of participation in online groups indicated that this type of participation was suitable as it was under the natural settings of groups. Compared to the two offline groups (Section 3.7.1) where participation was more structured and took place during weekly meetings, in online groups participation was asynchronous. Participation in the two studied online groups (Section 3.7.2) did not have a fixed length and depended on the level of involvement of the individual.

During participant observation in online groups Boellstorff et al (2006) mentioned that a good ethnographer “play and research in parallel, as the same engaged activity” (p.69). Therefore a session involved the researcher engaging in the groups’ everyday activities that included viewing, commenting and supporting pictures (“like” or “favorite” button) and reading and taking part in public conversations. While the researcher was engaging in everyday activities he was also observing and taking field notes based on his experiences. Taking part in daily activities involved a level of playfulness for the researcher that provided satisfaction. The researcher was aware of this and did not end a session when he was no longer interested but rather until no further observations could be made. Thus a session ended when the researcher observed all past activity since his last visit. In order to remain in “close and continuing relations with the natural social

order” (Boellstorff et al, 2012:66) the researcher participated systematically in a daily manner.

The targeted length for each session was a minimum of twenty (20) minutes but under the unstructured, natural settings of the online experience, the researcher often extended the sessions to more than one hour. In some cases involvement and participation in different practices of the groups, such as following a conversation, required a continuing relation and participation with the group. Forced interruption or withdrawal would have caused an unnatural experience. However a balance in the involvement and participation (Section 3.5.7.3) was still sustained so the researcher did not completely immersed into culture of the group and run the risk of losing objectivity.

Overall participation involved the researcher joining as a newcomer and mainly observing the group activity in terms of viewing conversations and photographs. Taking part in conversions with other members was also involved. The overall approach was to retain participation under natural and normal conditions without forcing participation apart from the minimum session time of twenty (20) minutes.

3.8 First Stage Data Analysis

To analyse the data, field notes were used in order to generate findings. Similar to an auto-ethnography, the field notes were used to investigate contexts that could or could not be related to the process of joining; to connect the personal with the culture (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). The findings gave insights into what and how to explore, refine and focus the research questions and provided guidance on the future direction of this thesis. Through the field notes, a typical meeting of each offline group and an introduction for the online groups were presented in Chapter 4.

During photographic meetings and online sessions, short descriptive field notes were taken describing observed phenomena, experiences and personal feelings that could be related to the process of joining. After the data collection, data was reviewed and analysed in order to discover emergent themes. Emergent themes

(Section 4.2 and Section 4.5) are structured findings produced by a review of the field notes through an inductive approach. The patterns of specific events, experiences and feelings that were identified were part of the groups' normative behavior and culture that could potentially be part of other photographic groups and in addition were relevant with this research questions. In Chapter 5: Discussion the emergent themes were aligned with existing theories as explored in Chapter: 2 Literature Review. The aim of this data analysis is to provide insights and direct the final stage of this research. More specifically the objectives of this method are:

- To examine and select theoretical frameworks that provide a useful perspective for exploring joining.
- To identify potential key moments that shaped membership and had a significant impact on the joining process.
- To evaluate existing theories by identifying gaps and problematic concepts.
- To focus the research aim and revise the research questions.

3.9 Final Stage Data Collection

Based on the findings of the initial phase, the ethnographic study, the significant aspects of joining were identified and the research questions were revised. Based on the revised research questions and the first stage findings an interview data collection was designed. They were semi-structured, open-ended and written using simple terms in order to be comprehensible to the participants. A total of eighteen (18), face to face interviews were conducted. On average, the interviews were one (1) hour long but duration ranged from forty (40) minutes to two (2) hours. The designed interview consisted of sixteen (16) main questions and (14) secondary questions. The main questions addressed the important aspects of joining. The secondary questions were complementary sub-questions of the main questions in order to keep the conversation flowing (see Appendix 1).

The first interview question "Why do you like photography?" served as an introduction to the interview and prepared a smooth transition before proceeding

deeper into the discussion. The purpose of the second question “How did you get into it?” was to find out how individuals began their career in photography and about their initial experiences in photography as a lifelong activity.

The third question “Are you a member of any other offline or online photographic groups?” was to simply find out if an interviewee was a member in more than one of the studied groups. Participants could have been a member in more than one of the four offline and online groups covered in this research. For that reason questions four (4) to fourteen (14) were repeated for each group that they were a member of.

The fourth question “How did you join this group?” was related to socialization tactics and tried to find out how participants initially approached the groups, what tactics they used and how the groups attracted members. The fifth question “Why is it interesting to be a member in this group?” was for gaining insights on the participant’s motives and patterns in participation. Question number six “What did you know about this group before you joined?” aimed in discovering what kind of information was gathered prior to joining and how it affected the joining process.

The seventh “What were the important moments during your time in the group?” and eighth “At what point do you believe you became a member, if at all?” questions attempted to uncover the key moments of participation that could have potentially aided in making the transition in becoming a member. The ninth question “How did you try to become a member? What did you do?” referred to the individual tactics or strategies that participants used in order to induct themselves into the group. Moreover it covered the different types of capital that were valuable to joining and what constituted members’ competency. The tenth question “What did the group do that helped you feel part of it?” was similar to the previous question with the difference that it looked socialization strategies from the organization (group) perspective. This question was also gathering information about what constituted members’ competency.

Question eleven “In the future, how do you see yourself in the group?” attempted to find out about participants’ future ambitions and goals. In essence this question was not only addressing how the membership trajectory will be shaped in the future but also provided information about the current stage of a member’s membership (e.g. member might be withdrawing from the group). The next question, twelve, “What do you think the experience of new members is like?” was for gaining information about how joining was experienced from the newcomers’ perspective. In addition it revealed information about the early moments of joining.

The thirteenth question “How did you meet new people in the group?” was part of the socialization strategies used by newcomers and more specifically how newcomers socially oriented themselves into the group. Question number fourteen “What did you learn since you joined this group?” attempted to discover the different forms of learning that were taking place in the groups. Furthermore it initiated a discussion about learning as part of the members’ participation and how it was linked to joining.

Question fifteen “How is it different being a member in real-life compared to online groups?” was about discussing and revealing the differences between joining offline and online groups. It was expected that some participants would have been members of both offline and online groups at the same time and they would have been able to provide useful comparisons between the two settings. The last question, number sixteen, “What are your ambitions in photography?” addressed photography as a lifelong activity and attempted to find out about the participant’s involvement outside the boundaries of the discussed photographic groups.

3.9.1 Sampling and Selection of Participants

Sampling an appropriate number and type of participants is vital in qualitative research and is linked to the characteristics of the research. The selection of offline and online photographic groups focused on the geographical boundaries of Yorkshire. In addition the groups’ main theme and interest was relating to Yorkshire. A discussion on the selection of the field is presented in Section 3.5.2.

The aim of the sampling was to explore the joining process from multiple perspectives such as from newcomers, old members and members of the committee. This approach added quality to the collected data since it selected participants who could contribute most towards uncovering the complex aspects of joining in relation to the research questions.

In probability sampling participants are randomly selected in statistical terms. This type of sampling is mostly suitable for quantitative studies (Luborsky and Rubinstein, 1995). Marshall (1996) stated that

“a random sample provides the best opportunity to generalize the results to the population but is not the most effective way of developing an understanding of complex issues relating to human behavior” (p.523).

Therefore the interpretive nature of the study indicated that probability sampling was not suited for this research. Instead purposeful sampling, a method widely used in qualitative research, identifies and selects information-rich participants (Palinkas et al 2013; Patton, 2002). In purposeful sampling participants are selected based on their knowledge and experiences on the phenomenon of interest (Creswell and Clark, 2011). Therefore this study adopted purposeful sampling and participants were selected based on specific criteria. The criteria for selecting participants, the approach method are specified below.

The number of participants is discussed in Section 3.9.1. In the offline groups, participants were informed about the interviews by announcements in the group meetings and through mass mailing after the researcher has made arrangements with the corresponding group’s president or committee. For the online groups the researcher made an announcement in a public post after getting approval from the administrators. Members that responded were recruited if they met the criteria.

The criteria and limitations for selecting participants (interviewees) are listed below.

- While the importance of newcomers in the joining process is apparent, the explorative nature of this research indicates that the selection of participants should include old members too. Old members should be examined

because they were newcomers at some point in the past and because they have experienced the joining process. In addition they are members within a community and as such they play a vital role and affect the process of newcomers. The ratio of newcomers and old member represented the nature of each group as shown in Table 3.1. In the University of South Photographic Society the majority of members are newcomers, more newcomers participated.

- Leadership roles such as members of the committee and administrators are linked to the joining process in the sense that they shape the newcomers' selection criteria and also have more authority in defining or adjusting a group's main interest (Section 4.3.5). A group's main interest or theme is a strong reason for newcomers in selecting a specific group. In addition leadership roles affect the socialization strategies that the groups use to induct newcomers. Lastly leadership roles are commonly occupied by old members (Section 4.3.6) and could potentially constitute a role example to newcomers. For newcomers, old members in general are an example of what future membership might entail.
- The two offline groups participate with an annual schedule and as such the majority of newcomers join at the start of the program which is from September to November (Section 4.5.2). Thus collecting data from the offline groups is limited to that period of time.

Participants Information Table				
	South City Photographic Society	University of South Photographic Society	South Yorkshire City Flickr Group	South Yorkshire City – Old and New Facebook Group
Number of Participants	5	7	7	6
Newcomers / Old Members participation				
Newcomers	2	4	4	3
Old Members	3	3	3	3
Committee members or administrators / other members				
Committee members or Administrators	3	3	2	1
Other Members	2	4	5	5
Male / Female participation				
Male	4	3	5	3
Female	1	4	2	3

Table 3.1: Participants Information

As discussed in Section 3.6, participants' anonymity was preserved by masking their identity using coded pseudonyms. In Table 3.2 below all the details of the participants are exhibited. The pseudonyms of the participants are also shown in the first column of the table and consist of three parts, the prefix or group/s name, gender and lastly the number of participant. The first part or prefix of the coded

pseudonym represents the group or groups that the participant was a member of. The corresponding codes for each group were:

- “CitySoc”: South Photographic Society
- “UniSoc”: University of South Photographic Society
- “Flickr”: South Yorkshire City Flickr Group
- “Faceb”: South Yorkshire City – Old and New Facebook Group

An example exhibiting the aforementioned is “Faceb-M-16”. In the case where a participant was a member in two groups the pseudonym included both codes of the groups, for example “UniSoc-Flickr-M-2” (participant was a member of “UniSoc” and “Flickr” group). The second part of the pseudonym represents the gender of the participant where “M” stands for male and “F” for female. The last part simply refers to the number of the interviewee (1, 2, 3, etc). All the interviewees’ pseudonyms are shown in Table 3.2 below.

Participants Details						
A/ A	Pseudonym	Gender	Group Name			
			City Group	University Group	Flickr Group	Faceb Group
			South Photographic Society	University of South Photographic Society	South Yorkshire City Flickr Group	South Yorkshire City Old and New Facebook Group
1	UniSoc-Faceb-F-1	Female		X		X
2	UniSoc-Flickr-M-2	Male		X	X	
3	UniSoc-M-3	Male		X		
4	UniSoc-Flickr-F-4	Female		X	X	
5	UniSoc-Flickr-M-5	Male		X	X	
6	Flickr-M-6	Male			X	
7	Flickr-M-7	Male			X	
8	CitySoc-M-8	Male	X			
9	CitySoc-F-9	Female	X			
10	Faceb-M-10	Male				X
11	Flickr-CitySoc-M-11	Male	X		X	
12	UniSoc-Faceb-F-12	Female		X		X
13	CitySoc-M-13	Male	X			
14	CitySoc-M-14	Male	X			
15	Faceb-M-15	Male				X
16	Faceb-M-16	Male				X
17	UniSoc-F-17	Female		X		
18	Faceb-Flickr-F-18	Female			X	X
Total Participants/Group			5	7	7	6

Table 3.2: List of the Anonymised Pseudonyms for Participants' Information

3.9.2 Theoretical Saturation

Baker and Edwards (2012) mentioned that theoretical saturation is a simultaneous combination of sampling, data collection, and data analysis and not a linear process of stages. This research’s interviews were conducted, coded and analysed concurrently. This approach was followed to ensure theoretical saturation was reached and no further data collection was required. A strong indication for theoretical saturation was that through the analysis, newly collected data did not generate/emerge new codes or emergent themes and the responses from the new interviews were similar to the previous. According to Bryman in Baker and Edwards (2012) theoretical saturation is a “process in which the researcher continues to sample relevant cases until no new theoretical insights are being gleaned from the data” (p.18).

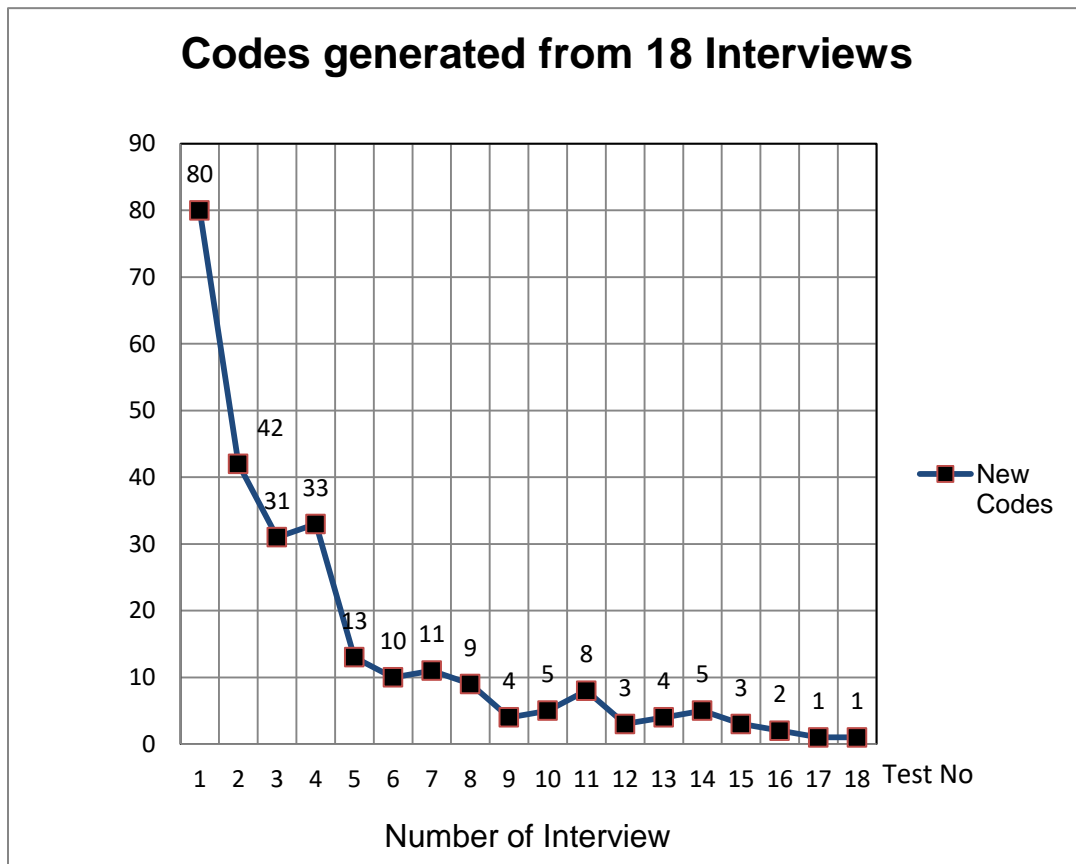


Figure 3.1: New Codes Generated From Each Interview

Figure 3.1 portrays the generated codes extracted from the interviews data analysis. From the graph it is clearly seen that the majority of the new codes were generated from the data analysis of the first eight (1-8) interviews (The first interview generated 80 new codes, the second one 42 etc). The last four (15-18) interviews generated only seven new codes (3+2+1+1).

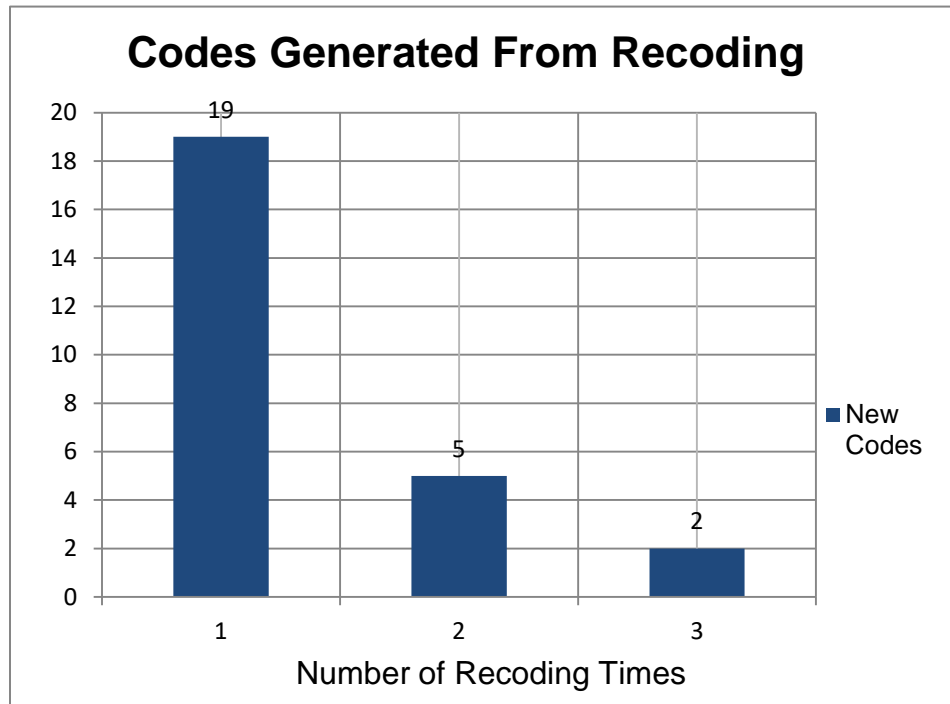


Figure 3.2: New Codes Generated From Each Complete Recoding

Re-coding was continuously taking place during the coding and analysis of each interview. When the last interview was coded the three (3) complete re-codings, of the whole data, were done. Figure 3.2 above shows that the first recoding resulted in 19 new codes, the second five (5) new codes and the third only two (2) new codes. The recoding was performed using the Nvivo software as explained below in Section 3.10.1.2. Based on the number of new codes generated it can be concluded that theoretical saturation was reached.

3.10 Final Stage Data Analysis

The final stage data analysis provides an explanation and a description for the analysis of the qualitative data. The data was collected through interviews as mentioned in Section 3.9. The thematic analysis model of Braun and Clark (2006) was used for the analysis of the collected data.

3.10.1 Thematic analysis

Qualitative data commonly depends on the researcher's interpretation. A vital aspect of this study is to explore how the joining process is experienced by newcomers. Thus for this study the data collected and analysed depend both on the researcher's and participants' interpretations. Thematic analysis is a common and widely used approach in qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2012) that is considered by Alhojailan (2012) to be the most appropriate for "any study that seeks to discover using interpretations" (p.10). Thematic analysis is "an approach for extraction of meanings and concepts from data and includes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns or themes" (Javadi and Zarea (2016:1). Based on the above a Thematic analysis approach is the chosen method for the analysis of the data. Since there is a lack of studies of joining online communities and a gap in theory addressing that notion, the analysis is data driven. Thus the Thematic analysis for this research followed an inductive approach.

The model of Braun and Clark (2006) is implemented for this data analysis and consists of six phases as described in the following sections.

3.10.1.1 First phase: Familiarising yourself with your data

To familiarize themselves with the data the researchers used the following four methods. Firstly, prior to the interviews data collection, an ethnographic study was conducted in the first stage of this research. Thus some understanding regarding the joining process in the context of offline and online groups was gained from the first stage of the thesis. Secondly all the interviews were conducted by the researcher in an interactive, face to face method. By merely conducting the

interviews some analytic interests and ideas began to be formed. Thirdly while transcribing the interviews, notes of potential patterns and emergent themes were taken and some initial codes were generated. Lastly since data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously, data familiarization was gradually increasing.

3.10.1.2 Second Phase: Generating initial codes

After the first phase, the researcher started using the Nvivo software. Nvivo is a qualitative data analysis software package (Bryman, 2012). At that stage two interviews were already conducted so the initial codes were imported into the software. The researcher re-listened to the two initial, recorded interviews and more initial codes were generated. The first two interviews were then transcribed and coded in Nvivo generating a total of 122 codes (Figure 3.1). These codes revealed some initial patterns so the codes labeled to create categories. Even though this process was data driven, in order to accurately describe the meanings evident in the data, some theoretical terminologies were used. The main categories formed were: Becoming a member, learning, information prior joining, socialization tactics and capital. Other categories such as travelling, digital photography, nostalgia, important life events, unexpected moments, experimentation were created as well even if at that time their relevancy to the research questions was uncertain. Then through a parallel process of conducting, transcribing, coding and analysing the remaining interviews were added in Nvivo software. Throughout this process, the codes re-defined and became more specific. Some of the newly generated codes were more accurate compared to the pre-descending that were more general. For this reason, the researcher went back and recoded from the beginning in order to keep consistency and also generate new codes based on the new ideas that emerged. By the end of the second phase, most of the codes were labeled with corresponding categories as seen on the example in Figure 3.3 below.

Information prior joining - Get information through official sources - Internet society website
Enjoyment - Activities
Learning - Enjoyment, satisfaction from learning considering it as an achievement goal
Becoming a member - Feeling of belonging through shared interest
Learning - Informal, Teach other members, share skills
Learning - Meet other members by learning together exchange knowledge
Becoming a member - Having specialised photographic equip helps in belonging
Community - Weak domain, not well defined, at initial-development community stages
Joining - Ambiguous moments, Uncertainty
Becoming a member - Old members accepting newcomers
Becoming a member - Looking forward to participating
Equipment - Equipment helps socialising as a talking point
Socialisation tactics - Meet new people by talking about equipment
Socialisation tactics - Learn, gain skills in order to easily socialise
Socialisation tactics - socialise by Sharing photos
socialisation tactics - meet people in social events
becoming a member - Attending social events to become familiar with other members
Socialisation tactics - Being photographed in events
Capital - Equipment helps in becoming a member
Socialisation tactics - Group - Teach members, satisfy their knowledge-information needs
family photography
Digital Photography - More experimentaion because of lower costs
Competitions - Photohunt specifically for competitions
photographs stored on a private archive on Computer
Photographic Standards - Technology changed them
Learning - Skills related to photography e.g. Photoshop

Figure 3.3: Example of list of codes with reoccurring patterns

3.10.1.3 Third Phase: Searching for themes

According to Braun and Clark (2006) this phase

“re-focuses the analysis at the broader level of themes, rather than codes, involves sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes” (p.19).

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To achieve this, the categories that were formed in the second phase of the thematic analysis were put on paper and the relationships among them were drawn as seen in Figure 3.4. The relationships among the categories represent the emergent themes from the data. Based on Braun and Clark (2006) this phase should form a list of main themes. The main themes that emerged were:

1. Newcomers' initial, ambivalent moments are defining their future membership.
2. Common-shared interest is essential for becoming a member.
3. Becoming a member through learning.
4. The different forms of Capital are converted into joining competency.
5. Newcomers use socialization tactics to become member.

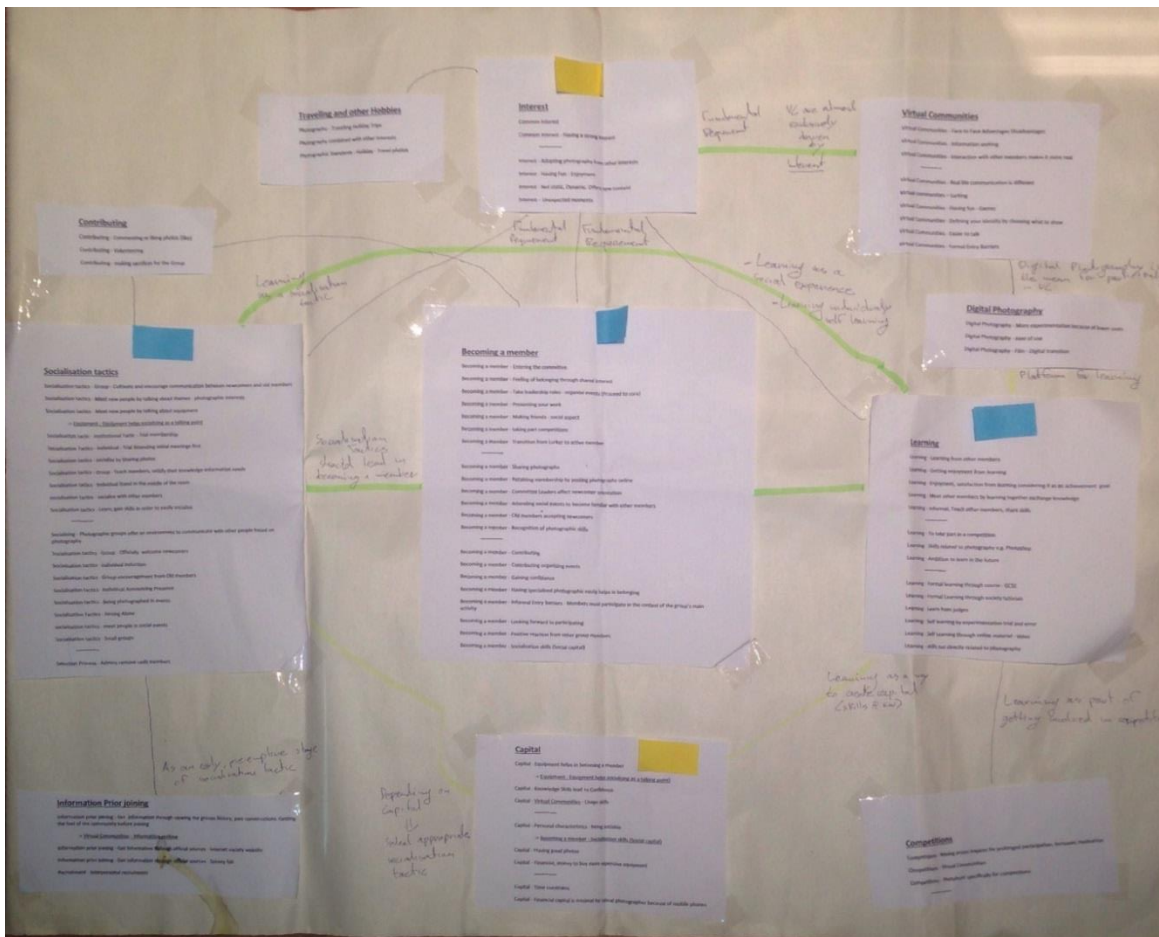


Figure 3.4: Categories formed from codes based on reoccurring patterns

3.10.1.4 Fourth Phase: Reviewing themes

At this phase the list of candidate themes formed in the third phase are refined. Braun and Clark (2006) stated that some themes might be joined together or collapsed into separate themes. To complete this process all data was recoded, the categories were revised and another visual representation of their relationships was created (Figure 3.5). The purpose of this stage is to

“consider the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set, but also whether the candidate thematic map accurately reflects the meanings evident in the data set as a whole” (p.21).

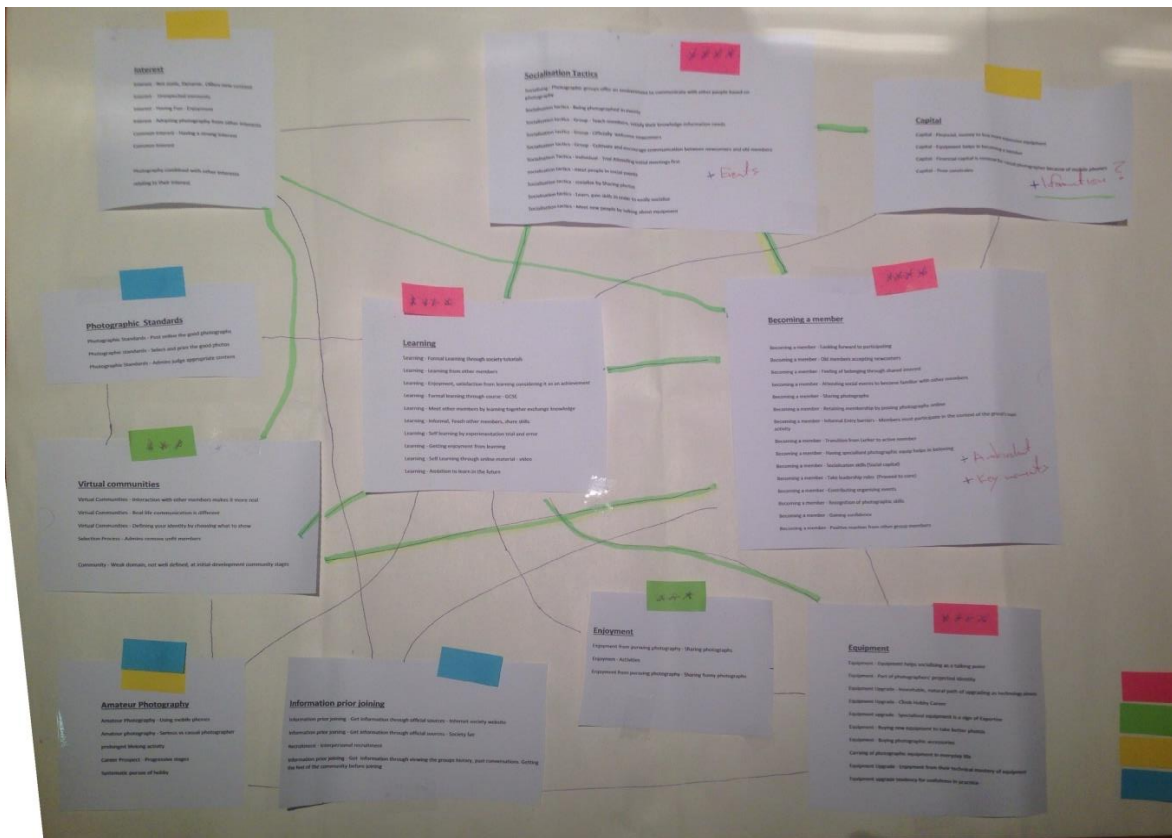


Figure 3.5: Categories formed from codes based on reoccurring patterns

Similar with the second phase, to accurately describe the meanings evident in the data some additional theoretical terms were used from the literature. The first theme remained the same. The second theme, “Common-shared interest is

essential for becoming a member” was collapsed into two. Based on the codes newcomers not only aligned their interests to the group but also changed the group interest (domain) to align to theirs. The third theme, “Becoming a member through learning”, was refined using the notion of identity (Section 2.2.3). The fourth theme did not change. The last theme “Newcomers use socialization tactics to become members” was refined in a way that is more specific and a more accurate representation of its meaning in the data set. The revised themes were the following:

1. Newcomers’ initial, ambivalent moments are defining their future membership.
2. Newcomers align to the group’s domain to identify with the group.
Newcomers change the group’s domain to identify with the group.
3. Members shape their identity through learning.
4. The different forms of Capital are converted into joining competency.
5. Socialization tactics newcomers used that aided the joining process.

3.10.1.5 Fifth Phase: Reviewing themes

According to Braun and Clark (2006) in this phase the themes are defined and refined by “identifying the essence of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures” (p.22).

The first theme is about the early moments of joining and how they are experienced by newcomers. The aspect of the data that it captures, are feelings, identification and disidentification moments, uncertainty, building new social relationships, adapting to new environments and offline versus online comparisons.

The second theme that was collapsed into two, describes the ways that newcomers adjust their identities and interests in order to identify with a group. In addition it describes the ways that newcomers change the group shared interest in a way that it aligns with their interests. The data captured includes the way that

newcomers adjusted or changed to group domain in order to identify with the group.

The third theme is about newcomers shaping their identity through learning. The aspect of the data that it captures, are the different forms of learning that took place during the joining process. This theme also includes data that showed that learning created a trajectory of future participation such as ambitions in photography or ambitions to learn.

The fourth theme describes the different forms of capital that aided the joining process. The data that are captured by this theme are the different forms of capital found in photographic groups and the ways they were used to aid the joining process.

The last theme is about the socialisation tactics that newcomers used during the joining process in order to become members. It includes data describing the different ways that newcomers used as tactics to help them in the joining process.

3.10.1.6 Sixth Phase: Producing the Report

The last phase entails writing the report of the findings. The written report of the analysis of findings should provide “a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell” (Braun and Clark, 2006:23). Participant quotes from the interviews were used to reflect the story behind the data. Overall the report should be written in a way that “convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis” (Braun and Clark, 2006:23). The revised themes that were discussed in Section 3.10.1.4 are analysed in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 incorporates and discusses the findings of the first and final stage together.

3.11 Research Quality

Research validity and reliability are concepts used by positivists to address the quality of research. According to Brink (1993), research reliability in qualitative research

“requires that a researcher using the same or comparable methods obtained the same or comparable results every time he uses the methods on the same or comparable subjects.” (p.35).

Research validity refers to the accuracy of the findings or if the findings accurately represent the phenomenon they attempt to measure (Drost, 2011). Overall a study is considered to be valid and reliable if the results can be reproduced using a similar methodology (Golafshani, 2003; Joppe, 2000).

Nevertheless, many writers have questioned the trustworthiness of the concepts of validity and reliability because they involve measurement and in qualitative research some subjectivity is inevitable. To address this issue many naturalistic researchers used “different terminology to distance themselves from the positivist paradigm” (Shenton, 2004:63). In pursuit of a trustworthy study in qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) provided an alternative to reliability and validity by proposing the following criteria:

Credibility seeks to ensure that the “study measures or tests what is actually intended” (Shenton, 2004:64). The results of the findings should be credible from the perspective of the participants (Trochim, 2014). To capture the participants’ perspective, an open ended interview data collection was conducted. In addition the technique of data triangulation was used. Data were collected from multiple sources (four photographic groups) and the research was composed of two data collections on the same subject providing credibility to the findings. Moreover, the researcher developed an understanding of the culture of photographic groups by reviewing existing literature and conducting an ethnographic study during the first stage of this research. Thus the researcher not only developed an understanding of the field but this also aided in reflexivity. The researcher was able to reflect on the implications of his “methods, values, biases, and decisions for the knowledge of the social world” (Bryman, 2012:393) and have an accurate awareness of his cultural, political, and social context.

In relation to such reflexivity, firstly, the researcher was a young, international student. This made the researcher a better fit to some groups than to others (e.g. The University of South Photographic Society). Nevertheless this was not a limiting factor for joining and participating in other groups consisting mostly of local, older age people because the culture of the groups was welcoming. Moreover the researcher acknowledged his position and behaved and participated in a way that was considered normal within the context of the studied group. Secondly the researcher had limited skills and knowledge in photography and no prior experience of joining photographic groups. This was a benefit for the credibility of the study since he was able to experience and interpret data from the perspective of a newcomer which is the focus of this research. Lastly, the researcher was digitally literate and had the ability to learn and adapt to new technologies. This enabled the researcher to overcome any technical obstacles of joining online groups. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that these technical obstacles were part of the joining process and that other members might have more difficulties overcoming them. In the study the researcher sought to take these personal characteristics into account in analysing the data, to ensure that they did not unduly influence the findings. Making the position of the researcher explicit to the reader helps them judge the credibility of the research.

Transferability refers to “the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts with other respondents” (Anney, 2014:277). Qualitative studies usually develop a theory that make sense of particular persons or situations (Maxwell, 1992). This theory may be useful in making sense similar persons or situations but it is not designed to “allow systematic generalisations to some wider population” (Maxwell, 1992:293). Nevertheless transferability in qualitative research is still important when inferences on similar persons or settings.

For this study, to ensure transferability, the researcher used Geertz’s (1977) thick description to give other researchers enough information to make a judgment about the applicability of the work to another context. Based on the

mentioned, it can be argued that the results of this study are transferable to other kinds of leisure groups besides photography such as cooking, dancing and gaming groups. In addition the theories developed by this study should be transferable to groups that are based in other geographical locations.

Dependability seeks to ensure that the findings of the study are “consistent and could be repeated” (Jason and Glenwick, 2016:36). To ensure dependability observations and ethnographic field notes were documented and voice-recorded files and transcriptions of the interviews were maintained. Dewalt and Dewalt (2010) state that audit trails are

“detailed description of the research design, data, codes, coding strategies, changes in codes and application of codes to text which would allow a third party to make an assessment” (p.206).

This study documented an audit trail by presenting in detail the methodological choices and their reasoning. During and after data collections, notes and records were kept and presented through the writing of this thesis. A detailed description of each step of the data analysis is presented showing how the codes were generated, how the main themes merged and what aspect of the data each theme captured.

Confirmability or objectivity refers to the degree to which the results of an inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). Shenton (2004) states that confirmability aids in ensuring

“as far as possible that the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (p.72).

The audit trail documented through out this study aids in establishing confirmability. Combined with the use of thick description it provides the reader reasoning behind the decisions that were made. Lastly, the researcher used peer debriefing (Cooper

et al, 1997) to discuss the researchers' interpretations of data and the analytical decisions with his supervisor.

3.12 Conclusion

The overall research design and methodology followed an exploratory and reflective approach. The nature of the research area, the research questions generated and in combination with the lack of literature addressing the issue directly, meant that the researcher adopted this methodology to develop a cultural understanding of the targeted leisure groups.

During the first stage of this research, a reflective, ethnographic methodology was applied and the collected data and findings shaped the direction of the final stage data collection and analysis. At the final stage, semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted and analysed through a thematic analysis model. Lastly the findings of the whole research were incorporated and discussed together.

Chapter 4: First Stage Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the emergent themes of the auto-ethnographic data collection. The emergent themes were patterns of specific events, experiences and feelings that were identified were part of the groups' normative behavior and culture that could potentially be part of other photographic groups and in addition were relevant with this research questions. At this stage these were the research questions:

- How is the process of joining experienced and defined by newcomers?
- What are the joining strategies used by newcomers?
- What are the characteristics that shape how hospitable an organisation is for the induction of newcomers?
- What are the induction strategies used by leisure pursuit groups for newcomers?
- Explore the differences between offline and online leisure pursuit groups.

4.2 Offline Groups

This section presents the findings from the two offline groups, South City Photographic Society and University of South Photographic Society.

4.2.1 Typical South Photographic Society Meeting (City Group)

As with every week, on Tuesday, the meeting starts at 7:30 pm at a church hall in Yorkshire. A few people arrive early and patiently wait outside the venue until the hall is available. They take the opportunity and engage in light conversation about the weather and the theme of the current meeting. When the church hall room is released by its previous occupants, South City photographic members enter the hall, the majority being British locals in their late fifties or sixties. The essentials of the meeting begin; the person responsible for the audio-visual presentation begins

Chapter 4: First Stage Findings

setting up the speakers, microphone and projector, the secretary finds her place at the welcome desk and the rest get the chairs out of storage and set them up for the upcoming members. As members join the group they register presence by signing the secretary's "presence book" and usually take a seat near their friends. Some members, carrying large envelope bags, proceed to place their printed photographs on the exhibition tables.

The meeting officially starts when the president is at the podium, welcomes everybody and introduces any newcomers by announcing their presence. Then the president proceeds with a range of announcements regarding upcoming events, results and registrations of photo-competitions and technological news of photographic equipment. Lastly, the meeting's guest is introduced and his or her accomplishments in photography are praised. As the guests take over, they provide a description of the theme to be presented, along with a background story on the time and place that the pictures were taken.

The lights are dimmed and the slideshow begins. Every photo depicted is a small part of the whole story that is narrated by the guest. Apart from the story, each picture has a technical aspect which is often part of the story too. For example weather conditions affect both the story and the way a photo is taken. It is usual that a member asks about the settings or the lens used for taking the picture; this kind of discussion is not always understandable for a novice in the field, since it includes advanced terminologies. The frequency of questions or comments from the members is relatively high, especially when they are excited by the theme.

Moments before reaching the halfway point of the presentation, two ladies leave and go to prepare tea and coffee for the break that follows. Group interaction spikes during the fifteen (15) minute break. Many of the members queue up to get drinks and pay a symbolic amount for it. In the queue people are particularly open for discussion and meeting with new members. Most of the people know each other; thus newcomers get more attention and members try to introduce them to other members. Apart from basic information exchanges, like names and occupations, when two people meet each other for the first time the two standard

questions that follow are what kind of photos they like and what photographic equipment they have. Meanwhile, members gather around the exhibition tables to peruse other members' printed photographs. Often the owners of the photographs are near and initiate discussion about their exhibits. People interested in a photo usually look behind the print where typically the owner's name is paired with a description or title. By the end of the break most of the members have gone through the exhibition tables and are now socializing with people they are already friends with.

In the final part of the meeting, the second part of the presentation is completed along with questions to the guest. The president signals the end of the meeting with a small goodbye speech expressing his impressions of the presentation and providing a summary of the next meeting.

4.2.2 Typical University of South Photographic Society meeting (University Group)

The meetings vary in nature and can be organised into three types: tutorials, photo-hunting trips and fun activities. Photo-hunting trips happen either locally or in a different city, and members meet at a prearranged location where they visit an area with the intention of taking pictures. Many members upload pictures from such events onto social networking sites such as Flickr and Facebook. For an overall representative description of a meeting a hybrid type of tutorial and fun activity is described.

The university group meetings commonly take place in specific lecture theatres weekly on Thursdays at 7:15 pm. Members are university students from all around the world, most in their early and mid-twenties. Students arrive in small groups and it is assumed they are friends or classmates. The beginning of the meeting is marked by one of the committee members who is also a student, and briefly explains the content of the meeting.

The meeting is divided into two parts. Initially a number of committee members present a slide show to the other students, about how a particular concept of

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photography works (e.g. Long exposure). Through this learning type of presentation, cameras or any relevant equipment are passed around amongst members in order for them to experiment with the different settings and put into practice what they are shown. Even though it is not necessary, about a quarter of the students bring their own photographic equipment. Committee members have responsibilities beyond the presentation of a slideshow, walking around the room to answer questions and generally make sure that everybody is having a pleasure time and does not feel isolated or neglected. This interactive process of practicing throughout the session yields some results and a sample is presented to the whole group along with comments from the committee. Most of the members are eager to participate in this process but they seem reluctant to present their work, thus the results shown are usually from the committee members.

Apart from some basic introductory concepts of photography often there is a fun aspect in the theme of the meeting. Ranging from cats to takeaway food to Bokeh photography (a technique for capturing partly out of focus pictures) the group emphasises having a good time while participating. The fun side of the meeting is usually more apparent in the second part of the meeting, when the foundations have already been explained to members. They are randomly grouped into small groups of five to six members where they are given a game to play. The ultimate goal of the game is to bring members together, since they are newcomer students of various languages, cultures and nationalities.

Each group is assigned a leader who is part of the committee and is given a photograph of a place on the university campus. The aim of the game is to recognise the place that the picture depicts and then by going there they will find another photo of the next place. This process was repeated until they reached the final destination, which was a nearby pub. It was similar to a treasure hunt game, where the first group to arrive won.

Members in the groups collaborate together to find spots and meanwhile have a great opportunity to meet other members. Eventually, when all groups have arrived at the pub, they merge into newly formed social circles. People introduce their new

friends to their “prior to the meeting” friends. Gradually people start forming back into their initial friendship groups until they depart. There were a few cases where the new connections formed seemed strong, so that they depart along with a newly formed social group of people and not with the initial group they originally arrived with.

4.3 Emergent themes

4.3.1 Introduction

Being part of, and participating in, photographic groups revealed some themes from personal observation. What seemed a significant aspect of joining was the initial experiences and impressions with the group that influenced the sense of belonging or being alienated. This refers not only to identification with the set of people inside the group but with the activity itself too, especially for newbies. For example, upon joining, the researcher had a worrying feeling of being left out because of being competent in photography or owning insufficiently specialised equipment. Even though entry requirements specifically state that none of the above was needed, the presence of similar newcomers excelling in these areas put some pressure on me, indicating that being competent (in terms of following implicit/explicit rules of photography) and owning better equipment, was the right path to becoming a member. In the university group this pressure was less, since there were many newbie in a similar situation. Especially for a newbie in photography and a newcomer to a group, the increased presence of experienced and long standing members projected a stronger photographer role and gave him the impression of being less able to deviate from this model.

The first encounter with a group is actually imaginary. Initially, upon gaining information about the group, automatically an image (consisting of a number of assumptions) starts to form. The group description, photographs and entry requirements of a group’s website or leaflet affect the individual’s self-evaluation of fitting in with the group and the activity, as they try to imagine themselves as part of the group:

“Upon reading the group description on the South City Society website I was relieved that photographic equipment was not mandatory. It was stated that simply an interest in photography would be enough. The requirement of owning specialised equipment would indirectly indicate some sort of competency in photography something that I, as a novice, lack. In addition, the invitation to attend initially as a visitor, without the need to register, put off the pressure of committing in the group. The welcoming description along with the detailed interesting programme gave me the impression that I was going to have a pleasant time” (Field notes).

Even though one could claim that an interest in photography is implied for a photographic group, the inclusion of it in the joining description made the imagined future self in the group more viable. It gives newbies a sense of criteria fulfillment and plants an expectation of enjoyment, since the requirements are concurrently the source of enjoyment they are seeking. Thus information gathered prior and during the early stages of joining loosely or strongly defines future members in the group.

4.3.2 Induction methods

The two offline groups differed in their way of welcoming and introducing newcomers. The South city group’s representatives briefly mentioned the small presence of new members but did not follow a formal procedure of transferring knowledge to newcomers in order to provide competency. Of course, as an already established group with many old members and few newcomers joining each year, the main focus of the group is not inducting newcomers.

“From the beginning of the first meeting there was a clear plan of what it would follow. It was apparent that the structure was established long time ago, repeated yearly; newcomers are expected to join in and harmonize with it” (Field notes).

Chapter 4: First Stage Findings

However, though the city group lacked formal welcoming procedures, it excelled in its friendliness and in the willingness of its members' to accept newcomers. Even though this helped with the induction into the group, the lack of formal procedures indicated that newcomers were not the focus of the group.

In contrast, the University group was more newcomer-oriented and included formal welcoming procedures. The group's activity cycle starts yearly in early October, coinciding with the mass introduction of fresh University Students meaning that the majority of members attracted are new students and the focus of the group was oriented towards them. The group welcomes its members at the beginning of the academic year and, through Fresher's Events' week, students get informed about it and formally join. Thus, most members are not just newcomers to the group but also newcomers to the university.

“The initial feeling of the first meeting was that we were small group of friends among other small group of friends, strangers to each other and waiting to be instructed on what to do or what was going to follow... knowing that I was among many newcomers, I felt I was in a similar situation and wasn't concerned about, as this was normal and expected that opportunities would arise for socialising” (Field notes).

Competency and equipment knowledge were frequently addressed formally during the meetings and a member was even assigned the role of helping to building relationships among members of the group. Apart from the structure of the meetings that promoted socialisation between new members, the social relationships person frequently initiated discussion with members and attempted to connect them by engaging them in conversations with other members and small groups, especially if a member seemed isolated. One could also directly refer to that person if they wanted to meet more people and make new friends. Older members existed in the group, but newcomers, being the focus, increased the sense of belonging to the group and released much of the pressure mentioned above.

4.3.3 Meetings Structure

The structure of the group meetings is an indication of how newcomer-oriented the groups are. The city group has a very clear structure for each meeting. A schedule is planned ahead for the whole year and each meeting is described in detail as to what it will contain. An important role in this is the committee, consisting mainly of long-standing members. The meetings usually involve a presentation showing the work of a photographer in a specific theme. The structure of the meeting, not being interactive enough, did not provide a novice, without the competency or confidence, to present his own photos, thus effectively excluding him from one of the group's main activities. There was no formal newcomer introduction, either in socialising or becoming competent.

“Even though I found the content of the photographs exciting and interesting there are technical aspects that I do not fully comprehend that potentially render me unable to understand their technical details, significance and correctness”. (Field notes).

Newcomers were essentially placed between older members and the group relied on the individuals' good will and initiative to socialise with them. In order for newcomers to acquire competence they had to wait for the opportunity to arise where they could get feedback about their photos. In addition the language and notions used during the meetings were not always understandable to the newcomer and this differentiated him/her from the rest. Not being able to communicate in the same language as the majority of members debilitated the image of their future selves as members of the group.

In the University group the structure was much more interactive and fluid. Upon joining, newcomers had a smooth transition to photography by taking part in interactive tutorials and workshops that covered the fundamental parts of photography. Moreover, several group activities do not require any special skills or competency in photography, thus enabling everyone to participate. Apart from the learning aspect of the meetings, members often decided spontaneously on what to

do with their time. On one hand, this gives a sense of freedom and power to newcomers where they can adjust the group activity to fit their own needs, though on the other hand, they can feel lost and not guided enough. However, the newcomer-oriented structure of the group could potentially alienate older or more experienced members, since they will not be interested in learning what they already know or have experience of. They may also not share the same excitement as newcomers, when they first join a group and they want to socialise.

4.3.4 Participation

Participating in two photographic groups may involve participation outside of it as well. A typical activity that both groups engaged in was visiting a pub. Engaging in such activities influences the construction of social ties with other members. Even though it seems an optional activity not directly related to the group, newcomers taking part become more familiar with the other group members. In the case of the city group, most social ties were already established long ago and due to the small entrance of newcomers, members seemed eager to form new social ties, regardless of the event. Social events like visiting the pub were not that influential in the city group, since the network structure of the group did not change significantly as it was already well established. In this manner, engaging in such activity in the university group was important in order to make social ties with other members. Since the group is reborn each academic year, many social ties are formed in the early period and evidently social events are of more importance.

“In the pub I met my friend’s friend who was in the other small group”, “I also spoke with some of the committee members”, “My friend had also made new friends who she introduced me to” (Field notes).

People not participating in such events are in a different stage than others that engaged in the activity. As the group evolves simultaneously there is the danger of becoming isolated if one misses important events. As social ties are formed it seems harder for newer ties to form. It is apparent in the meetings after such

events that people start forming their own sub-groups, interacting frequently with each other.

4.3.5 Contributing and Volunteering

Contributing and volunteering is another theme that emerged. Each of the group offered different types and opportunities for participation. The city group offered the opportunity to lay the chairs at the start of the meeting and stack them up at the end, as well as lining up for tea and paying a symbolic amount of money.

“The laying and stacking of chairs helped me as a newbie to contribute in the meeting preparation. Naturally, besides questions, I wouldn’t feel as confident in contributing in photographic discussions without having the competency to speak at the same level as the older members. This could change in the future but at least at the initial stages it is easier and rewarding at the same time when your effort was appreciated by the others” (Field notes).

People seemed to get to know each other in the queue. These opportunities were less managed and not forced by the group structure. Even though they did not contribute to the group’s main activity of photography, they showed a member’s pure intentions in helping the group. In addition people participating in such activities seem to relate to each other as they are essentially helping one another in maintaining the group. They show a form of unity and that the group is important for them, outside of pursuing their interests. The personal feeling of contribution is also notable since a newcomer might not be able to contribute differently (in photographic terms) and this constitutes a way of providing volunteer work to the group.

The university group had more of a forced participation during the meetings. Due to the structure of the meetings (learning style) and because a large proportion of newcomers had limited technical expertise, they all participated in a similar way.

“Instructions were given to all members on how to experiment/play with the lens shutter speed and cameras were provided to play with the settings.”

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“People had an expression of excitement when we were presented with samples of bokeh photography...We were given a tutorial on how to implement bokeh on our cameras and then, with simple every day supplies like scissors, small pieces of cardboard and tape, and after making our own bokeh we proceeded to take photos using our own custom bokeh shapes” (Field notes).

For example, during tutorials members were instructed in what to do in order to learn. An obvious way to contribute was for a photographer to present his/her work to the group. This seems a great way of contributing since it is one of the group core activities but at the same time not all people are comfortable in making what might appear to be such a big step that indirectly and directly exposes them to “strangers”. Smaller opportunities to voluntarily contribute to the group are much more accessible and ease newcomers in participating. For instance, as described in the typical university meeting, a game was organised where members were randomly grouped in small teams and, along with one preselected leader, members participated together. Teams interacted independently and the game essentially was not directly competitive. By essentially forcing members in small groups and giving them a simple but fun activity to do, this created good conditions for contributions and a great opportunity to meet each other. Moreover, the leader of the group (who was a member of the committee) guided the activity in such a way as to avoid stalling or reaching a dead end; the leader and some members received help from friends in other teams on advancing with the game even though this could have been considered to be cheating. The essence of this game was not to win but to get to know each other; newcomers were eager to provide their input and start conversations.

“I spoke with every member of my group. We mainly discussed our university courses, our country of origin and about our impressions about university life and the city of South” (Field notes).

Overall these small opportunities to volunteer or provide contributions seemed useful in getting comfortable with the group. Interacting with a smaller group of

people at a time also seems to promote participation more, in comparison with the whole group or individually.

4.3.6 Hobby Career

From the early stages of joining a group a newcomer grasps an idea as to how he/she will evolve through time by participating in it. In the city group there was a much stronger sense of one's future career within the group. The apparent distinction of newcomers and old timers provided a clear indication of the evolution of membership within the group. Certainly, the presence of members and regular guests that practiced photography as a profession aided in this. The different layers and levels of competition and the use of more sophisticated language within the group provided a ladder that the newcomer could climb. These delineated different stages and paths that a member could follow through time; something to be earned during their membership and participation within the group.

“The applause in the announcement of competition winners showed a recognition of skills and projected an example of a successful photographer. Competitions seem like a path to get recognized” (Field notes).

In the University group this career path is far less evident. Undoubtedly newcomers can sense their level of competency rising through time but their career stages are not clear from the beginning. The lack of old-time members and the limiting yearly academic cycle of the group prevented them from imagining their future inside the group. In addition, the absence of strict criticism and the fun themes depicted a more relaxed attitude towards photography. Even some committee members were newcomers or novices; thus there are weaker projected roles.

The leadership roles of the two groups differed significantly. The city group has a formal committee that changed of necessity each year. Many of the group members had passed through the committee in one role or another and, due to the structure of the meetings, leadership roles were not evident, apart from the current president. The status and image of a member as a photographer were more

evident. In the university group leadership roles were much more clear and evident. Excluding official titles, members could show initiative and lead small groups. Newcomers were in much more need of guidance and opportunities to lead were plentiful. This initial lack of status (both in leadership and photographer status) in the university group was another reason why “going to the pub” activities offered a fertile ground for forming new social ties.

4.3.7 Equipment

A factor affecting joining seems to have been the equipment that members used. Overall, newcomers started with a level of equipment (can be from practically no equipment to professional equipment) and, as they progressed, they upgraded to more specialised equipment. The route of acquiring equipment seems to go only upwards and a member rarely downgraded equipment without a specific reason. Additionally photographs that were presented in these meetings and were considered as good examples of photography were mostly captured using specialised equipment, passing on the message that this was the right way of pursuing the activity. This effect was stronger in the city group where more long-standing and experienced members existed (also supporting the observation that members gradually moved up the equipment path).

“Taking photos entails a complicated process. Photographers carry a number of small to giant lenses, tripods and often more than one camera. They seem that they gradually gained more knowledge in a way that they carried more specialized equipment to suit their needs and to produce a more refined photograph. Newbies use simpler array of equipment because they don’t know how and why use a more advanced one” (Field notes).

In the city group, even though old members used highly specialised equipment and had the competency to use such tools, they preferred more traditional and conventional methods. Despite knowing that modern tools and methods could produce similar results with less effort, many of the group’s members put great

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emphasis on producing a pure, untouched photograph without any post-processing manipulation. Indicative of this was the common method of presenting their work, often through a formal digital presentation but also through printed photographs, “in order to depict the true colors of a picture because monitors and projectors’ color reproduction is not consistent” (Field notes).

In the University group newcomers had a wider array of tools. Most did not hesitate in using modern methods and post-processing manipulation. On the contrary, they endeavored to experiment and tried different methods, without caring much about the end result. Additionally, the use of social media websites like Flickr.com was prevalent among university members. It served as a method of presenting and sharing their photographs and provided a supplementary means of socialisation with other group members. The use of such online tools was also a sign of expertise and there was an impression that the important members used Flickr.com, thus one should join too, in order to be more connected.

Equipment ran parallel to the hobby career. Novice newcomers usually joined the group with little or no photographic equipment and more experienced newcomers and older members had more specialised equipment. This equipment upgrade path seems to be analogous with membership evolution. Equipment needs increased with continuous involvement in the activity and also projected roles indicated which equipment to acquire.

“Most of the (University) members do not have a specialised camera but they have the latest and more expensive mobile smartphones. Members with cameras seem to be more experienced than the others” (Field notes).

4.3.8 Meeting Themes

Furthermore photographers and photographic groups tended to revolve around categories and themes. For this document, categories referred to the technical aspect of a photograph, such as landscapes, black and white, aerial etc and

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themes describing the content of a photograph like parties, nature, portrait, photo-bombs etc.

In the city group and generally among more experienced photographers there was more refinement in choosing a category. Through their experiences they had found out what they liked more or less and this had led them to choose a more narrow set of categories. They could still experiment but mostly they wanted to explore new themes or seek new content. The different themes helped in sustaining interest in photography and having something new to present and show to others. It can also act as an excuse to participate in other activities or visit new places (e.g. photo hunting trips in a city). They also tended to be more faithful to the implicit and explicit rules of photography, especially when they wanted to participate in photographic competitions.

“Themes are a thing to look forward to the meetings. Either to share your experience by showing your photographs or to see what others did... The theme of the meeting’s presentation is a journey to Eastern Turkey and Norway. I am intrigued by the theme and expecting to experience part of that journey through the photographer’s lens, even though I have never been there” (Field notes).

Newcomers of the University group tended to have a wider array of categories. Since most of them were newbies, they wanted to explore the area and were more eager to learn and experiment. For example, in one of the meetings, university students made their own “camera” using household materials like a matchbox (the pinhole camera). Usually they still hadn’t invested in specialised equipment and were more willing to try things that in the future might indicate what equipment would be best for them to acquire.

The themes between the two groups differed. Students, apart from being more fresh to photography were also younger, compared to the city group, and this was reflected in the content. They were also more affected by the internet culture, often depicting themes that emerged through that. Leaving aside the age factor, newcomers do not place a big emphasis on photographic rules. Besides potential

“illiteracy” in specific matters, they wanted to primarily entertain themselves and have fun; a large proportion viewed photography as more of a casual leisure activity rather than a serious activity, thus taking a photograph that was right or correct in the eyes of an expert was not something important yet. Their lack of confidence as a photographer was another factor that meant they do not want to follow rules or compete with others. In both groups, but more obviously in the city group, members tended to have episodes of photographic themes, such as an event like a concert or an interesting natural incident, like migrating birds. Episodes represent a process that a photographer goes through in pursuit of the activity. To sum up, they found a theme (sometimes by planning it), visualised how to capture it and took multiple photos. Then they reviewed the taken pictures, selected the best ones and then printed, posted or uploaded them.

4.3.9 Competitions

A common component of photographic groups is competitions. In the city group they put a lot of emphasis on photographic competitions, which served many purposes and largely drove and motivated the group members to participate. Competitions are a way of gaining prestige and credibility as a photographer. Many people presenting their work tended to mention prizes they had won for a specific photograph. They were similar to the titles that a footballer might win through his/her career. The prizes were also a driving force to explore new themes and an excuse to take photographs. A significant characteristic of some competitions was that they involved an interactive learning process, being formalised processes with the stress on authoritative assessment of achievement.

“Less experienced members could enter these competitions in order to get feedback from more experienced members on what they did wrong and how they could improve” (Field notes).

They are channels for getting credit for their work. Especially in competitions tailored to less experienced photographers or newbies, feedback is given to participants on improving their photographic skills. More experienced

photographers take part in stricter competitions that are often outside of the group, competing nationally or internationally. Naturally the strictness and the competition level relates to the rewards, especially in terms of the status and prestige that a winner gains among the group.

“Prizes are a simple way of the group to give something back to its members. Apart from the enjoyment of competing and taking photographs, they gain recognition and have something to be proud of” (Field notes).

4.3.10 Multi-membership

Many members of these groups belong to other groups. City group members were mostly part of other photographic or related groups. It was apparent that photography was their main hobby and they had expanded out of or been driven from other groups. Conversely, members of the university group belonged to multiple groups not related just to photography, possibly explaining their more fluid nature and lesser focus in professional photography.

“During our conversations and discussions, students mentioned that they belonged to other university societies as well, like salsa dancing and zumba aerobics. They claimed that apart from being interested in salsa, zumba, etc, joining these kinds of societies was a way to meet and have fun with new people” (Field notes).

4.3.11 Varied Capital and Skills

Belonging in multiple groups resulted in a variety of interests and both groups often combine leisure activities, for example diving and underwater photography. It seems that some activities or interests complement one another and, since photography is such a diverse and adaptable activity, many took part in a wide range of combinations of activities. As a result it appears to be an acquisition of skills through participating in photographic groups, of two kinds: skills that are gained in order to pursue the activity and skills gained through the pursuit of photography. Fundamentally, to pursue the activity members learned how to use

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their basic equipment and complicated software for image manipulation; how to share photos in social networking sites; how to print high quality images; how to project and present them; or even how to build a homemade camera.

“I found myself intrigued and extremely satisfied by learning the theoretical aspects of how a camera works. Not only I learned how to adjust the different camera’s settings to produce a photograph the way I wanted but I also knew why and how the end result (picture) was produced the way it was. Despite often being a process of trial and error, I felt a challenge of determining and calculating the affecting external factors (e.g. lighting, motion, weather) and making an imaginary plan on how to get the desired result and execute it” (Field notes).

Above and beyond skills that relate to photography they gained skills through their participation in photographic activities, such as, in climbing, because the group organised a hiking event; in cooking Chinese food, because there was a Chinese theme competition; in learning to be a moderator in a photographic forum, etc. Knowledge and skills acquisition that happen through photography serves as a personal investment and often leads to other leisure activities as well.

4.4 Online Groups

This section presents the findings from the two online groups, South Yorkshire City Flickr Group and South Yorkshire City - Old and New Facebook Group.

4.4.1 South Yorkshire City Flickr Group

Flickr.com, an online social networking site, provides a virtual place for people to pursue their interests in photography. Groups in flickr are commonly defined by a photographic theme and often the interaction between group’s members form a community. This study explored the flickr group of South Yorkshire City which as the name suggests, its theme is about Yorkshire. The group’s content (photographs and discussions) is available publicly, to non - members.

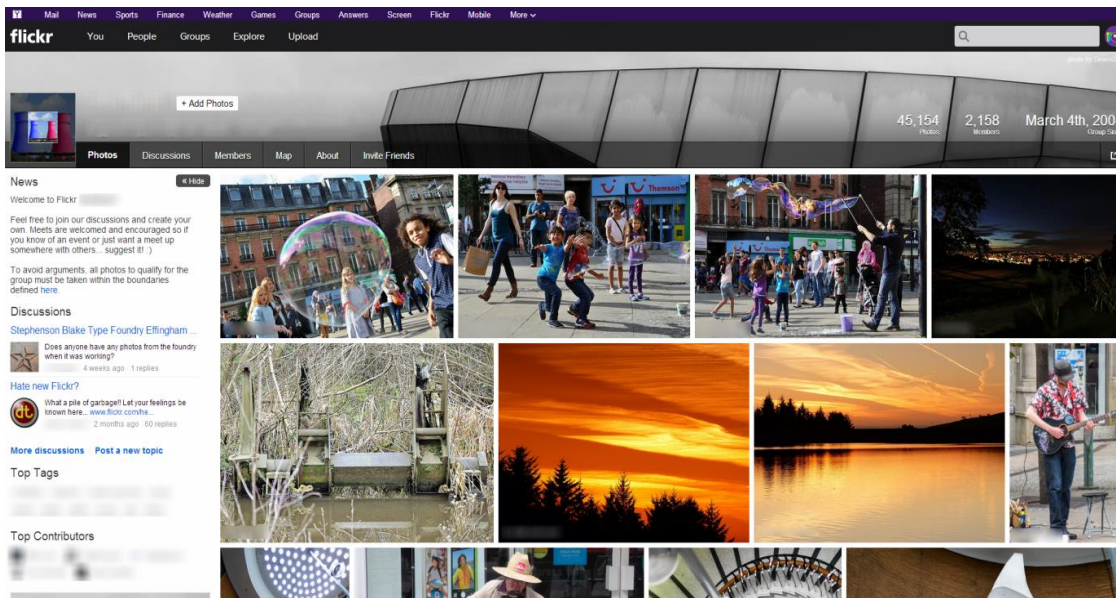


Figure 4.1: Flickr group: South Yorkshire City

In general, Flickr users access groups either by selecting through a list of groups they are already a member of or by searching in the appropriate field. The content of public and invite only groups is visible to the public whereas in private groups only accepted members have any kind of access. Invitation only groups require approval from their administrator(s) before accepting them as members and becoming able to participate whereas in open access groups membership is achieved instantly without any barriers. Flickr design and structure is more focused on the content (photographs) instead of discussions and in that sense it differs from conventional online forums. Flickr groups have a “discussions” area but by default the user is directed to the “Photos” section. In addition members’ statistics such as photographs uploaded, discussions participated and joined date or not visible unless the user visits his/her personal profile.

The “South Yorkshire City” group was created on March 2004 and as of 26 September 2014 it numbers 2158 members, 45154 photographs and 1475 discussions. It is a public group meaning that anyone can view or join the group without any entry requirements.

4.4.2 South Yorkshire City - Old and New Facebook Group

The “South Yorkshire City - Old and New” is a facebook group about photographs depicting the city through time. It was created on May 2008 and as of 26 September 2014 it numbers 15034 members and more than 20000 photographs. The theme is historical and architectural changes in the city and family albums. The group is public and all facebook users can access it and participate as if they were members. Approval from the group administrators is needed in order to officially become a member.

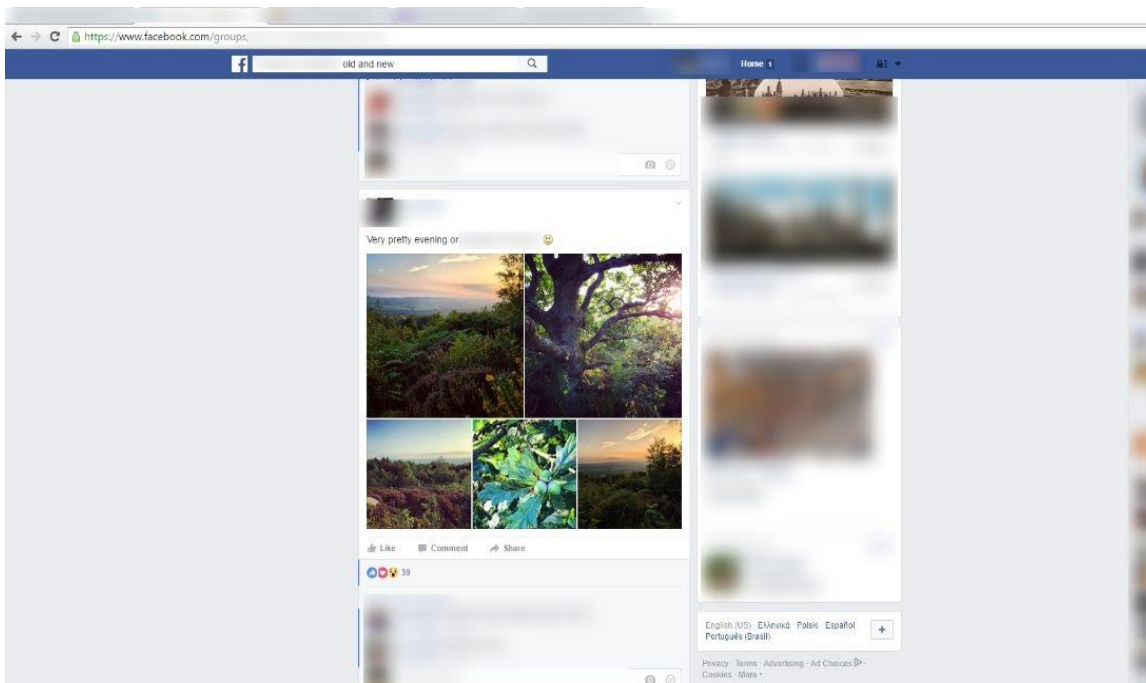


Figure 4.2: Facebook group: South Yorkshire City - Old and New

4.5 Emergent Themes

4.5.1 Initial Impressions

The first impression (Figure 4.1) that one gets from the Flickr group is that this group is for people who live in Yorkshire and that there are no requirements for joining this group since essentially this is an open access group. This impression comes from the photographs depicting present events in Yorkshire and it creates a

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sense of belonging if a newcomer is a current resident of the city since they share similar experiences. On the other hand, the general impression from browsing through the group's photos, known as the "pool", is that the majority of photographs seem to have a level of technical quality in terms of photographic skills and captured with dedicated cameras instead of mobile phones.

"As a current resident of Yorkshire I partly felt that it would be easy to fit into the group since the theme was simply Yorkshire. On the other hand, the photos that were being posted in the pool, for a novice like me, seemed to be professionally taken or edited. This was not necessarily bad because it meant that better photographers were part of the group and I could potentially learn from them and also I would get to see good photographs" (Field notes).

The lack of lower quality photographs in the pool give the impression that either novices or people with mobile phone cameras do not post many pictures or that administrators are removing them. In either case, the kind and level of photography projected from the pool does not lean towards that of an amateur photographer lacking in skills or equipment. In that sense it can be discouraging for amateurs to participate thus skills and equipment could be a barrier. However the higher level of expertise can also act as a goal for amateurs to achieve while offering the possibility to gain knowledge from other skilled members.

The initial impressions for the South Yorkshire City - Old and New Facebook group is that the group displays mostly photographs of the past that are a few decades old. There is a sense of importance in the photographs and in extent to the group because of their historical value. "South Yorkshire City - Old and New" is more than merely pictures of a place; each photograph carries information or a story about the city thus it could also be described as a historical learning experience. This also stands true for the majority of the pictures taken at present time.

"The photos on the group were interesting but the most interesting part was reading the discussions that followed them. I had recently moved to Yorkshire thus I did not know a lot about the city, especially how the city

was decades ago. People talking about the photos sharing their experiences made me imagine how the city was in the past and how important those experiences were for those people living here. Photos of the current city were interesting as well but mostly to find out about happenings in the city” (Field notes).

The group does not set any restrictions to membership and in addition it specifically mentions that members are from all over the world and all pictures of Yorkshire are welcomed, either from mobile phones or cameras. Even though groups can set no requirements for joining it is reassuring to specifically have it mentioned in the group description. Especially for older photographs and current pictures of memorabilia the emphasis is on the content rather than the quality of the photograph. The downside for newcomers without any historic value pictures is that they can contribute in this aspect although they could still provide photographs of the present.

4.5.2 Induction methods

The induction method that is used in the South Yorkshire City Flickr Group is newcomers taking the initiative to introduce themselves and commonly state their photographic interests and the kind of equipment they have. Nevertheless only a fraction of new members follow this strategy. In context out of the thousands of members only a handful of newcomers introduced themselves in the discussion this year. The strategy of starting a new discussion to self-introduce might not be ideal for all newcomers because they might not have the confidence to create a whole new discussion or they might not like this approach. When they do though, newcomers usually start a new conversation in the discussion section and frequently, along with their introduction, ask questions relating to the theme of the group such as information about an event or places that are worthy to be photographed as shown in figure 4.3. At the same time they exchange knowledge that could lead to participation (e.g. attending events together). In this kind of

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discussions responses are usually coming from old time, active members and are welcoming and helpful by addressing the newcomers' questions.

The screenshot displays two columns of Facebook discussion messages. The left column shows a user introducing themselves as new to the group, asking for photography locations, and receiving helpful responses from other members. The right column shows a user asking about film development services and receiving advice from another member.

Message 1 (Left Column):
New to [redacted] says:
Hi all,
I'm recently new to [redacted] have a Nikon DSLR and have a bit of a habit for urban exploration.
Can anyone suggest any places for some decent photography? Disused railways, old & derelict buildings, old world war air raid shelters...anything of historical interest in and around [redacted]
Any info would be appreciated.
Thanks
1:09PM, 22 March 2011 PDT

Message 2 (Left Column):
[redacted] says:
[redacted] is an old building that once imprisoned [redacted]
It's in the [redacted]
There's a few industrial museums: [redacted]
There are also groups for [redacted]
Might be worth browsing those and see if image locations are marked on the map.
Otherwise, a good excuse to explore, I've been here 10 yrs and keep stumbling on things new to me.
43 months ago

Message 3 (Left Column):
[redacted] says:
Yes, was going to suggest the [redacted] group.
Full list of [redacted] linked from the frontpage of this group (most are pretty inactive on the chat front though).
Also if you want to stay abreast of activity across a few of the groups then follow [redacted] in Twitter.
43 months ago

Message 4 (Right Column):
New [redacted] says:
Hi there... I'm new here in [redacted] I'm from [redacted]
I would like to know if any of you guys knows a place to develop films and where to buy them too. In reasonable prices, cos I went to Boots and it was 4.99, so expensive!
That's it basically :) thanks!
2:26AM, 8 February 2011 PDT

Message 5 (Right Column):
[redacted] says:
Hi [redacted] and welcome to [redacted]
There are a few people in the group still keen on using film (afraid I'm not one of them), but there is a [film meet-up in the offing](#) which you might want to head along to to meet other film enthusiasts.
44 months ago

Message 6 (Right Column):
[redacted] says:
Unfortunately I don't think there are many options locally?
Tesco on abbeydale road recently closed down their lab. They used to be 99p for 35mm dev only. I cried inside when I heard.
Asda at [redacted] may still have their machine, but I'm not sure on the price?
Jessops in town have 1 hour dev, but I believe they may be of a similar price... tho if I remember correctly, they do give free film?
Beyond that you've got [peak imaging](#), who, while more than likely offering a better service than anything else locally, don't have a drop in service, and are still expensive.
PS: welcome to [redacted].

Figure 4.3: Members' introduction message in discussions

This type of questions and requests seem to be a good method of getting to know online members since it provides an opportunity for older members to interact with newcomers and contribute to the group. At least in the discussion section, the vast majority of members do not actively make any kind of effort to induct themselves; they do not seem to participate or are simply lurking. By browsing the group's pool and discussions it seems that most users and members are inactive or lurking and only few post pictures in the group and even less participate in the discussions.

The induction methods used in the Facebook group are similar to the "South Yorkshire City" flickr group. People can be introduced by posting a picture or describing themselves in terms of their photographic interests and what kind of equipment they use. Newcomers also indirectly introduced themselves by asking questions about technical aspects or any other kind of questions regarding the

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theme of the group. Occasionally the group administrators welcome the newcomers as a whole by starting a new discussion but they are not mentioned individually. Some newcomers take this opportunity to join the discussion and basically let the community know of their presence. Many old members seem passionate about the theme of the group and possibly that is a reason why they are very friendly and welcoming to newcomers.

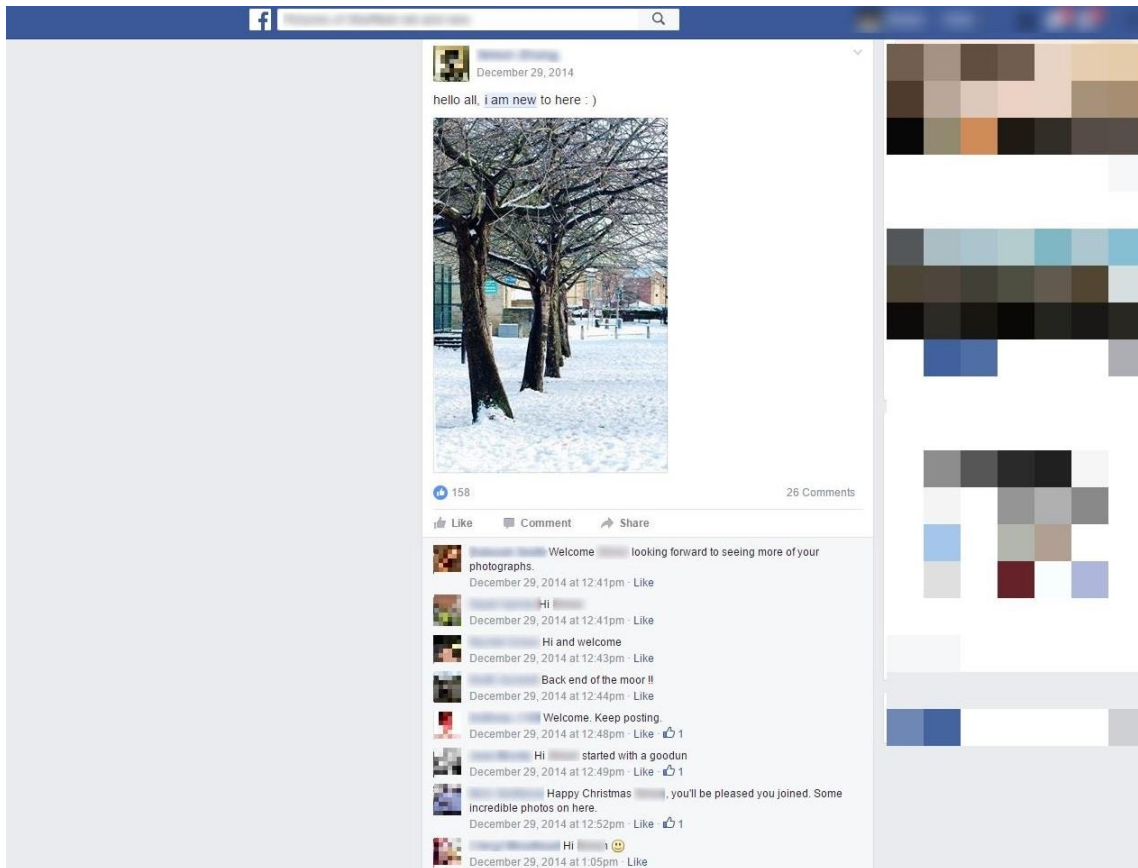


Figure 4.4: Newcomer's welcoming through a posted picture

4.5.3 Participation


In the Flickr group, the most common and easy type of participation is by posting photographs on the pool. This is done by tagging their personal photographs to the group. For example a user might upload a photograph to his personal profile and tag it multiple groups. Overall it takes minimal effort to post photographs in the group's pool thus the barrier to participation is low. Moreover, Flickr users can

comment on photos and mark them as favorites. However these activities require very little effort and can also come from members outside of the group.


“Looking at pictures in the pool it felt a slideshow, many nice photos but apart from the general theme of the city, they did not have a connection between them. The pictures could be part of any Yorkshire group. There were scarce comments below the pictures but I got the sense that they were mostly from other Flickr users, not members of the Yorkshire Flickr group. However, the discussions section felt more comfortable because there were other novices and newcomers like myself and most importantly I could see that members interacted with each other meaning that I could participate as well. They asked questions, took part in competitions talked about happening in the city and in general things that I expected to find in an online group” (Field notes).

The South Yorkshire Flickr group is not restricted and bounded similarly to forums. For example a group member might tag his/her picture to the South Yorkshire City Flickr Group but receive comments from his Flickr friends that do not belong to the group. Thus this kind of participation is hard to trace and not clearly evident to the eyes of the other group’s members as to which is an active member. Participation in the form of discussions (Figure 4.5) is more direct and apparent. Discussions involve events, questions about sights to photograph, bargains on purchasing new and used equipment, competitions, etc.

Tour de France - Groups to Post Shots In
0 replies

 These are the groups I've found that you can post your shots in of the Tour de France coming through [redacted] Tour de France in [redacted] Tour de France 2014 England [redacted] Tour De France 2014 UK Stages [redacted] by [redacted] 2 months ago

Canvas printing anyone interested ???
5 replies

 Personalised Photo Canvas Printing & Framing Service Choose From Full Colour or Black & White 12" Gallery Stretcher Bars 16" Gallery Stretcher Bars 20" Gallery Stretcher Bars 24" Gallery Stretcher Bars Polyester Canvas Roll Wrapped around custom made frames and are ready to hang. Printed on the latest Epson Stylus Pro printers by [redacted] 3 months ago

Events/Photo-Op's 2014
8 replies




 Hi all Quite a few people in this group like attending events as they also provide good photo op's. Please feel free to add events/photo op's (or corrections) to those below as the year develops. Local communities in particular organise many events over summer. The 'biggie' this year will be the Tour de France Grand Départ 2014 visiting [redacted] by [redacted] 3 months ago


Photo chain Game
68 replies

 Time to resurrect a game we've played here before the idea is that the next picture in the thread should have a factor that is shown in the previous picture that is specified by the poster. This could be a colour, object or idea. It should be a picture taken in [redacted] So I'll start with this and the next picture should show the arts tower. by [redacted] 4 months ago

Film!
4 replies

 [redacted] on [redacted] has 35mm 200 ISO in stock, right at the back near floor level. [redacted] by [redacted] 6 months ago

Canon Gear for Sale
1 reply

 Hi all, I'm selling some gear at the moment and thought people may be interested; Canon 7D with BG-E7 Grip - unboxed, but immaculate condition - £700 Canon 70-200L F4 - very good condition - unboxed, comes with front and rear caps & B+W uv/haze filter & canon lens hood - £380 Canon 50mm F1.4 - almost new condition (because its almost new!) unboxed, comes with... by [redacted] 8 months ago

British Heart Foundation's [redacted] "Chase The Pud" this Sunday
0 replies

Figure 4.5: Discussions in South Yorkshire City group

Other forms of participation are attending offline events and meetings. Even though this is an online group, people sometimes get to know other members in face to face meetings. Even if they are online friends or members of the same group, they seem to have a different notion of meeting online and meeting offline. Often members state that it was nice meeting somebody after an offline interaction despite already being friend online. Thus there are two notions of being friends or knowing members from the group; an offline and an online type. In general, participation and flow of the group is related to the events happening in the city. Mentioned in the description of the group is a website that provides information regarding events and happenings in the city. Fundamentally this is a guide for members and offers a structure of future participation. This tendency of

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participating through events is apparent through the groups' photographs pool where one can notice many photographs related to an event being posted during that time.

Regarding the pool, having in mind the aforementioned and the way flickr is designed, members of the South Yorkshire City group create their own network of people and participate within. There is no bounded group to join. The pool of the group is where one of the main activities (posting photos) takes place but it does not feel like a community because the interaction between members in the pool is minimal and rare. Members simply tag photos that fall into the Yorkshire theme without necessarily being involved with the group. Overall the pool section is a place of tagged photos of Yorkshire City with minimal interaction between members whereas the discussion section resembles the conventional type of online forums.

In the Facebook group, posting pictures with historical value is evidently one of the main types of participation. Nevertheless newcomers and old members get involved into discussions about the different events and happenings in the city. It is worth mentioning that members are encouraged to contribute and participate because photos of the present will be important in the future. This perspective of members is aiding newcomers and members without historical material to give meaning and purpose to their participation. Their contribution is valued thus their position inside the group is of some importance. In that sense, people without old photos of Yorkshire are enabled to participate although not in the same manner as people with members posting historical photos. Posting old, historical photos is a more important contribution to the group compared to pictures of the present since old photos are a limited resource whereas anyone could take photos of Yorkshire in the present. Thus in terms of contribution towards the group as a way to become a member, some members are in a better position than others.

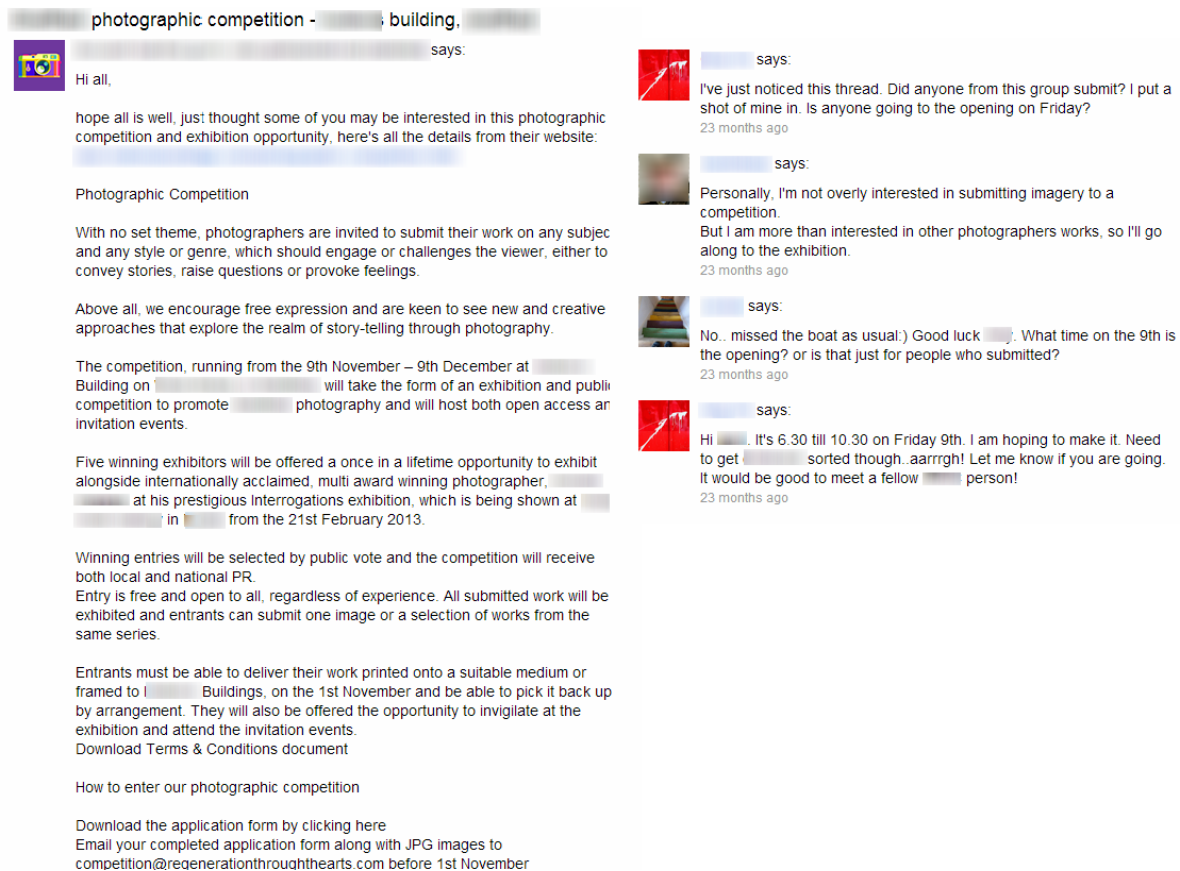


Figure 4.6: Members guessing the location depicted in the picture

The theme of the group creates a nostalgic character among its members, and especially people who are old enough, browse photos with the intent of finding a picture that triggers a memory. This process commonly fuels participation in terms of posting and commenting on photos and is a way for a member to exhibit knowledge outside of the context of photography. Moreover, it promotes systematic participation since members are curious to check if something new appears on the group that triggers a memory from the past. From that perspective, some members lacking past experiences might find it difficult to participate in such tasks. This creates an invisible barrier in participation which is difficult if not impossible to overcome.

4.5.4 Competitions

Another aspect of participation in the Flickr is competitions. Competitions, as a type of event, are usually announced on different places, like the South Yorkshire City website, and members start discussions expressing their opinions and exhibiting their photographs. Official competitions (Figure 4.7) are usually organised by external members or websites outside of the flickr group. In the discussions section a member announces the existence of a competition and others respond regarding the theme, rules, etc. In all cases, competitions have themes and often they also have rules that are necessary to follow in order to take part.



The screenshot shows a Flickr discussion thread. The main post is titled "photographic competition - [redacted], building, [redacted]" and is marked as "says:". The post content includes:

- A greeting: "Hi all,"
- A link to a website: "hope all is well, just thought some of you may be interested in this photographic competition and exhibition opportunity, here's all the details from their website: [redacted]"
- A section titled "Photographic Competition" with the following text:
 - "With no set theme, photographers are invited to submit their work on any subject and any style or genre, which should engage or challenge the viewer, either to convey stories, raise questions or provoke feelings."
 - "Above all, we encourage free expression and are keen to see new and creative approaches that explore the realm of story-telling through photography."
 - "The competition, running from the 9th November – 9th December at [redacted] Building on [redacted] will take the form of an exhibition and public competition to promote [redacted] photography and will host both open access and invitation events."
 - "Five winning exhibitors will be offered a once in a lifetime opportunity to exhibit alongside internationally acclaimed, multi award winning photographer, [redacted] at his prestigious Interrogations exhibition, which is being shown at [redacted] in [redacted] from the 21st February 2013."
 - "Winning entries will be selected by public vote and the competition will receive both local and national PR. Entry is free and open to all, regardless of experience. All submitted work will be exhibited and entrants can submit one image or a selection of works from the same series."
 - "Entrants must be able to deliver their work printed onto a suitable medium or framed to [redacted] Buildings, on the 1st November and be able to pick it back up by arrangement. They will also be offered the opportunity to invigilate at the exhibition and attend the invitation events."
 - "Download Terms & Conditions document"
- A link: "How to enter our photographic competition"
- Instructions: "Download the application form by clicking here. Email your completed application form along with JPG images to competition@regenerationthroughthearts.com before 1st November"

There are four replies in the thread:

- Reply 1: "I've just noticed this thread. Did anyone from this group submit? I put a shot of mine in. Is anyone going to the opening on Friday?" (23 months ago)
- Reply 2: "Personally, I'm not overly interested in submitting imagery to a competition. But I am more than interested in other photographers works, so I'll go along to the exhibition." (23 months ago)
- Reply 3: "No.. missed the boat as usual:) Good luck [redacted]. What time on the 9th is the opening? or is that just for people who submitted?" (23 months ago)
- Reply 4: "Hi [redacted]. It's 6.30 till 10.30 on Friday 9th. I am hoping to make it. Need to get [redacted] sorted though.. aarrgh! Let me know if you are going. It would be good to meet a fellow [redacted] person!" (23 months ago)

Figure 4.7: Competition announcement in discussions

“I was glad to see all these simple yet fun photo games that took place. They did not involve any skills or special equipment and basically you had

to post a picture according to the game rules. Usually the photos had a link between them based on the rules that created a story along the way this game was played. It was fun to participate but it was also fun to see what others have posted” (Field notes).

It is worth noting that members also take part in online games similar to competitions. In the discussion section they define a photographic theme and members must post a picture that is within the rules of the game as depicted in Figure 4.8. One example is a member that posted a picture of a house door with a number on it and asked that the next picture posted should depict a number too.

Competitions in terms of games did not follow strict rules and apart from the general game theme, they were very easy to take part, even for novices. The reason for this is to enable all members to participate and to have fun in a more relaxed way without having to worry about the quality of the photographs. Due to the low requirements of the games, such games offer novices the opportunity to participate and feel part of the group. Moreover, the chain games provide continuity and can potentially fuel future participation. In fact these games are one of the most active, in terms of responses, discussions in the group. As of September 2014, three out of five of the most popular discussions are chain games with a total of 453 replies. A person can post more than one reply in multiple discussions thus the number on participants is less than 453 but is still one of the most popular activities.

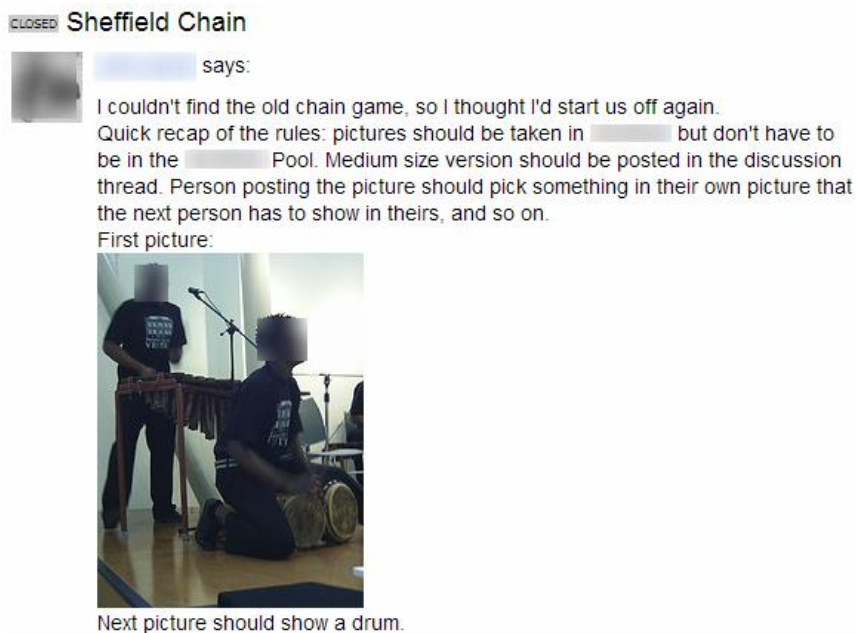


Figure 4.8: Competition in the form of a game

Contrary to the Flickr group, in the Facebook group even though members join and discuss photographic competitions they are not a vital aspect of the group. This is partly because the group's purpose and aim leans towards creating and maintaining an archive of history rather than photographic skills. In addition members that are interested in competitions of present pictures most likely belong to other offline or online groups as well, that are more closely related to competitions. There are informal competitions in the form of games where members post a picture and other people try to guess the location within the city.

4.5.5 Joining Experience

The name of the group (South Yorkshire City Flickr Group) instantly provides a sense of belonging if a member has any connections with Yorkshire city. In addition it is assumed that members share photography as an interest. Joining the South Yorkshire City Flickr group resulted in mixed feelings. On one hand it felt that people related to Yorkshire city with an interest in photography "inherently"

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belong to this group but on the other hand the technical expertise manifested in the photographs (skills required to participate) made it more difficult to imagine becoming a member. Novices are alienated by the professional style looking photographs on the group's pool. Not only is discouraging for them to participate since their photographs might not be as good but also this type of participation and interaction within the group might not be suitable to them. As the pool consists of thousands of pictures and very little interaction between group members, the community to join is found in the discussions section of the group.

“I was not sure if I wanted to ask anything or start a conversation with in the group but seeing other newcomers doing it was reassuring. The really good photographs in the pool made me nervous in terms of being a suitable member of the group. I could see that newcomers or people posting for the first time were treated well and not ignored” (Field notes).

The discussion section though felt welcoming. For novices, there are clearer and easier ways to participate. The presence of other newcomers apparent in the discussions, the link between offline events and the Flickr group, the occasional face to face meetings between group members and overall the interaction between old members and newcomers created an imaginary, future path of becoming a member. Moreover members answering other members' questions including technical knowledge meant that the community helps novices to learn. A result of such learning would enhance novices' participation and enable them to participate in tasks that are tailored to more advanced users.

For newcomers, by participating in the discussions is aiding in feeling like a member. That is because discussions offer simple tasks that are suitable for newcomers and novices but at the same time they interact with existing members. There are multiple ways to feel part of the group such as participating in games, asking questions relating to photography or simply chatting about Yorkshire. Another way of becoming a member is to attend offline meetings and meet members face to face. Gradually, newcomers could potentially get to know other members and learn the necessary skills and knowledge to feel part of the group.

“Pressing the button to join the group was easy. I was a bit unsure after that but I was confident that I will enjoy being a member of the group because I was living in Yorkshire and because the photographs were nice to look at. I could see from the discussion section that existing members and newcomers participated more or less the way I imagined they would but I didn’t find it unique. The topic was too general and everyone posted different photos or comments closely or loosely related to Yorkshire. They were interesting to me but the vagueness and lack of a more specific theme made me think I would probably not be deeply involved with the group in the future. What made me feel connected with the group also made me feel distanced” (Field notes).

The joining experience in this group is initially easy. Due to the assumed connection between the newcomer and the theme of the group, a quick sense of belonging is developed. The broad theme of the group meant that it would be easier for many people to join but also meant that participation would be less specialised. In regards to the theme, this hindered dedicated participation in a way. This might not always be the case but in the long term if a member develops some more specific interests will probably seek another group that is more specialised towards his or her detailed interests. In case the user has already developed more defined interests, before joining this group, then probably he or she will not participate intensely within this group. However the aforementioned is from the perspective merely of the group theme; a group member could still develop relationships within the community and intensify participation through strongly feeling a part of the community.

Joining “South Yorkshire City - Old and New” felt like a more difficult process compared to the Flickr group but at the same time offered a clearer path in the journey of becoming a member. That is because a set group of members were visible from the first moments of joining the group. There were some active members who seem to be posting regularly and also welcoming newcomers whenever they had the opportunity whereas on the Flickr group it was more difficult

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to distinguish active members. It felt more difficult because the theme was more specialised.

“While most of the people posting seem to be really good photographers, some people were also posting photos taken with the mobile phones. In addition members talked about various topics not directly related with photography and this made it easier to join in discussions. On the other hand I did not have any old pictures of the city so I could not contribute to the group in that manner even if I wanted to. This fact made me realise that I might never be as important to the group as someone who shared old photos. Anyone from the thousands of members could take a picture of Yorkshire now but few have old photos” (Field notes).

As a newcomer, posting photos in the group seems like a great way of interacting with other members whereas in the Flickr group there is minimal interaction with members in the photo section (pool). Another important aspect is that the lower expertise standards of photographs enabled newcomers and novices to participate by their posting photos. This minimized confidence issues of hesitation to participate in posting pictures or comments. For some people there are some limitations to membership though. Without valuable content to contribute it is hard to become important to the group and additionally there were not many steps to climb, the future prospective career was weak.

“From the beginning I felt that I belonged to the group. I could feel that there were many other members similar to me who joined the group because they were living in the city and were interested in photography. It was easy to join because I simply pressed the join button and since I could participate online not much effort was needed to participate such as attending weekly meetings. On the other hand thousands of members were similar to me and nor I was able to familiarise with them nor I was willing to do so. I could imagine that I would never become an important part of the community not only because I did not have old photos to share but mainly because it was a very large group” (Field notes).

The initial sense of belonging in the Facebook group is similar to the Flickr group and what is mentioned below in this section stands for both online groups. The connection between the newcomer and Yorkshire along with the low requirements of the group, create a quick sense of belonging. Moreover while the type of group might be suitable for the newcomer in terms of the theme and requirements, the large number of people within the group makes it difficult to strongly bond with it. Fitting in seems to be limited, to have a low ceiling in regards to building relationships with other members. It might be possible to meet some people online within this group but it would be difficult to become an important part of the community without a lot of effort. Since many members join frequently and probably feel the same similar early, weak bond with the group, most newcomers do not have a unique or special connection with the group. Furthermore while some members are much more active than the others, it is not certain if they are the important members of the community. The active administrators of the group are distinguishable from the large number of members but their work is to simply make sure the rules are applied. It does not necessarily mean that they are contributing to the group in any other way.

Moreover many members are not actively participating because they are either observing or they are inactive and this makes the community lose some of its importance for its members. Having the majority of members not making any effort to actively participate indicates to a newcomer that people find observing a more appropriate way to participate or worse that the community is not worth devoting effort. For these reasons, joining this group might initially be easy but it is unclear how to strongly fit into the group.

4.5.6 Barriers and Boundaries

After joining the Flickr group, it is clear that the majority of the photographs being posted were of higher standards creating a barrier for novices. As a result of the quality of photographs barrier a potential indirect requirement for equipment is created were members with inferior equipment might not be able to produce the

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same level of quality pictures as others. While the quality of a photograph is not necessarily dependant of the equipment it is still a disadvantage not having it.

The theme of the group was more general and in attempting to define what fit into the group created a tension between members. One on hand this vagueness of the topic allowed more members to join the group and enabled more people to participate. On the other hand it limited membership in the sense that it lacked a defined, detailed subject for members to intensify participation. While the type of photography was leaning towards expertise, participation was very fluid and casual. That is because users on flickr may tag their photos to the group's pool but do not participate within the group.

Participation in terms of exhibiting and posting photographs on the group's page, known as the pool, is monitored by administrators where they veto inappropriate activities. Members can still post photographs on the group's pool but those that are not deemed by the administrators to be related to the group are deleted. While the thematic boundaries of the group are established to an extent, they are continuously negotiated. It is important to note that in an attempt to resolve the issue of the vague definition of the group, the administrators are taking suggestions for other members on what should be part of the pool and what not. In other words, members have the opportunity to shape the group's theme.

The photographic rules of the Facebook group are photographs with historical or potential historical value. Nevertheless quality pictures from a technical point of view were credited but the focus weighted more on the content. Thus the thematic boundaries of the group and its emphasis on the content affected the newcomers in two ways. For newcomers without valuable content like historical photos and living experience in the city it constituted as a barrier while for newcomers having the aforementioned constitutes a benefit that could help them in becoming members easier. Moreover the connection with the real world (in terms of meeting offline) and offline group events seemed to be weak thus participation was mostly limited to online. This is not necessarily a downside but in the case where a

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newcomer lacks historical photos and memories to share, it is difficult to connect and feel invested with the group.

Chapter 5: First Stage Discussion

5.1 Alignment of findings with existing theories

5.1.1 Communities of Practice

It can be argued that photographic groups can be usefully analysed through the model of a community of practice. The structural characteristic of communities of practice can be observed in photographic groups. They clearly exhibit a “domain” that includes a shared interest in photography where members learn from each other. The “domain” also includes a sense of identity that members align at a variable level. “Community” is the next characteristic attributed to photographic groups. Photographers engage in often planned joint activities and discussions; and in conjunction with the relationships formed, they learn from each other. Lastly, photographic groups share a “practice”, which is photography, and around that a shared repertoire of resources develops, such as experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems (Wenger et al, 2002). Photographic groups are not merely a network of connections between people belonging to the same group; members share an interest in photography and they evolve by learning from shared information and experiences. The habitual practice of photography enables and drives the development and maintenance of knowledge. Certain notions of the communities of practice model apply to photographic groups and, as such, it is useful to see it through this lens.

5.1.1.1 Photographic Groups’ Common Identity

As previously mentioned, the domain of each group includes a common identity. Wenger et al (2002) said that people in communities of practice develop tools, manuals, standards, generic designs and other documents, as well as a tacit understanding that they share as knowledge. From the members’ perspective, the value of this process of learning is not merely for gaining competency but also for

belonging to a group of people with similar or understandable knowledge, practices and approaches. This creates a sense of a common identity.

In this sense, the common identity of the South City Photographic Society aspires to technical expertise, with stricter standards, a wider array of manuals and advanced tools, whereas the University of South Photographic Society's common identity is defined in terms of the roles of an amateur photographer with lower standards, less specialised equipment and the shared knowledge is less advanced. The common identity of South Yorkshire City Flickr group is not strongly projected aspires to technical expertise whereas South Yorkshire City - Old and New Facebook Group aspire both, expertise and amateur photography and is focusing more on the content of pictures and their archival value. The differentiation between the four groups is normal, since their domain, a structural characteristic of a community of practice, is unique.

Nevertheless, the projected common identity differs from the process of an individual identification. This process entails ambivalence and the individual's identity is unique in terms of being fundamentally temporal, always on going and not linear with time (Wenger, 1998). The group member's identity trajectory does not always move towards the core or the projected common identity. Yet Lave and Wenger's ideas are focused on centripetal movement, members heading towards full participation, to the core and leave other types of trajectories explored (Depalma, 2009). Overall all photographic groups developed a sense of common identity and members developed their unique perspectives of identities forming their own trajectory as described in Section 2.2.2.1 (peripheral, inbound, insider, boundary, outbound).

5.1.1.2 Legitimate Peripheral Participation

Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of legitimate peripheral participation provides an appropriate terminology and focus of attention for looking at how learning worked in the four societies. For newcomers in the South City Photographic Society, learning and participation essentially started from the periphery. Newcomers participate in low risk peripheral activities that aided in fitting in with the group but

in their majority are not productive with regards to photography. Thus, initially, newcomers lacking competence did not participate in the group's main activity but they mostly observe the core. At the same time they can take opportunities to peripherally participate in less important activities regarding photography but more importantly to the community as a whole. Examples exhibiting this are the events where newcomers presented a sample of their work to the group in order to receive constructive feedback from more experienced members. In addition newcomers followed other lower risk activities, such as laying and storing the chairs at group meetings or taking part in casual discussions during the tea break.

Legitimate peripheral participation was more apparent in the University of South Society. The structure of the meetings and the order of activities reveal this. Newcomers began by learning the basic concepts of photography and gradually getting involved more deeply and usually in more complex activities. It can be argued though that, since the society's focus was on newcomers, they participated in the core from the beginning contradicting the original model of legitimate peripheral participation, as captured by Lave and Wenger (1991). Newcomers do not follow a legitimate peripheral participation path because they are not located in the periphery. The trajectory is in the opposite direction to that described by Lave and Wenger (1991). During the first meeting (at the beginning of each academic year), the core of the group is on the periphery because the common identity is that of a newcomer. Through time and participation, members either stayed at the core by engaging in activities that involved getting acquainted with the activity and the community, or deviated to the periphery, either by taking photography too seriously or simply withdrawing from the group. Overall, it can be said that the group's structure followed a peripheral participation trajectory and, in contrast, members engaging in peripheral activities were from the core.

The hypothesis that University of South Photographic Society newcomers were in the core of the group and involved in peripheral but essential activities which were the goal of the community could indicate that there is a gap in Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of legitimate peripheral participation. Their model assumes that the community was pre-established, and that a strong domain exists in order to guide

newcomers and give meaning to their actions. Freshly formed groups, groups with a cyclical timeline (e.g. the annual lifecycle of the University of South Society) and generally groups with weaker domains, provided newcomers with the flexibility of deviating from the projected roles, beliefs and behavior and essentially to create a new core. In this sense they may not follow the traditional model of peripheral participation, as shown Figure 5.1 below.

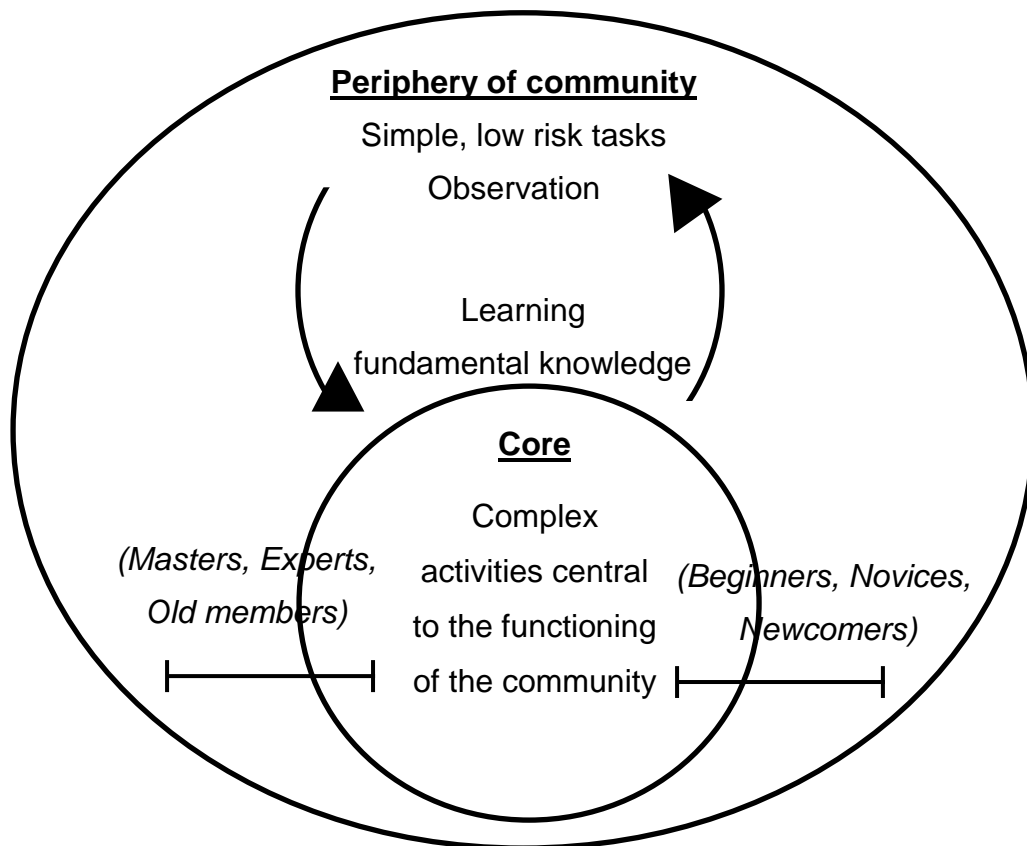


Figure 5.1: Legitimate peripheral participation in University of South Photographic Society

Figure 5.1 depicts the centripetal learning trajectory of members in the University of South Photographic Society. While there were few older members that renewed their annual membership cycle in the group, they still needed to get involved in peripheral activities in order to evolve to the core. They needed to establish social connections, despite having competency in photography. They still had new activities to explore, since the direction and schedule of the group was dynamic

and heavily influenced by newcomers. They even participated in the same basic learning activities (e.g. lectures and tutorials) regardless of whether they had experienced them during previous years. These activities may seem peripheral but in essence they are central to the functioning of the community, and can be considered as core. Since the focus is on newcomers, activities such as establishing social relationships and participating in low risk tasks become important and “central to the functioning of the group” as in Figure 5.1. In addition, core members need not only consider themselves as core but also be recognized by others as such. Maintaining their core position in the group required a continuous and considerable amount of effort, whereas in the South City Photographic Society, once a member enters the core it is easier to maintain that position. It can be argued though that it is harder to get into the core compared to the University of South Photographic Society.

In the example of the University of South Society, experienced members were considered experts but the group’s common identity is novices having fun with photography. Experts of the group served merely as knowledge transmitters enabling newcomers to participate. The explanation of this phenomenon requires deeper research and analysis to identify a formation through the process of shaping meaning. This is in addition to the theoretical gap referred to in the literature review. Fuller et al (2005) claimed that the learning process of competent members (not necessarily old members) differed from novices while Lave and Wenger (1991) focused only on novices.

For newcomers in the South Yorkshire City Flickr Group, learning and participation essentially started from the periphery. Newcomers participate in low risk peripheral activities such as asking questions in the discussions section or taking part in simple photographic games such as chain games. Through the interaction from participating in low risk tasks newcomers were meeting existing members and acquiring skills and knowledge to participate in more complex tasks such as entering competitions or giving feedback to other members. The pool section of the group did not follow the peripheral participation model since it was merely a place where tagged photos were placed. Any Flickr user, including non-members of the

group, could post photos on the pool and in addition any kind of interaction within the pool such as people commenting on a picture could be coming for any Flickr user. The three characteristics of a community of practice according to Wenger (2007) are the domain, community and practice. The pool's shared interest is not the same as the group's domain since Flickr users that are not interested in Yorkshire can still participate.

Wenger et al. (2002) states that the domain creates common ground and a sense of common identity and also that "without commitment to a domain, a community is just a group of friends. A shared domain creates a sense of accountability to a body a knowledge and therefore to the development of practice" (p.30). People posting or commenting in the pool do necessarily not share the same interest in the domain thus any kind of joint activities are not a result of their common interest pursuit. They may share interests like photography as a whole but arguably all users of Flickr have this in common. What is fundamental is that they do not share an interest or commitment to the domain of the specific group. Thus the pool, in Wenger's terms, is not a Community of practice and legitimate peripheral participation does not exist because there is no periphery and core.

The South Yorkshire City Old and New Facebook group aligned with the legitimate peripheral participation model. Newcomers started participating in low risk tasks such as observing and asking simple questions. Compared to the other groups, the practice in the group did not require demanding photographic skills to be learned since the quality of the pictures was not as important as the actual content. Thus legitimate peripheral participation emphasis was in the form of viewing old and new photographs of the city and taking part in conversations in order to become familiar with other members, share experiences and learn about the past and future of the city. Gradually, newcomers can proceed to the core where ideally will regularly post photos, take part in discussions or monitor/administer the group. While sharing photos to the group is a core activity, some newcomers also shared photos to group. This does not mean that they came to be old members or experts of the group since they have to participate or share photos regularly. In addition to

sharing photos, newcomers have to become familiar with other core members, take part in conversations and share experiences.

The evidence of the findings in combination with the literature suggests that communities of practice theory offered a productive lens to examine joining in photographic groups. As discussed above, there are shortcomings but the notion of learning through legitimate peripheral participation offers a productive framework for understanding them transparently and, most importantly, the tacit, more subtle and enigmatic factors related to joining.

5.1.2 Organisational Assimilation

For this research, organisational assimilation's main drawback is its focus on organisations. The corporate conceptualization of joining and becoming a full member has different assumptions and goals, especially when compared to leisure studies. While camera clubs resemble organisations in terms of structure (such as in authority, leadership roles, orientation programs, etc.) they have a different perspective on membership. An organisation's main aim is to "mold" people into job-related requirements and once their newcomers fulfill these criteria, induction is considered successful.

Organisational assimilation addresses social elements and individual leisure, as well as personal satisfaction, but only as a means for a smoother transition to becoming a full employee. To an extent, the same can be said for leisure groups but still these characteristics develop in a more natural way and environment compared to a more forced and controlled methods found in organisations. Overall, while the processes and techniques of assimilation in organisations may resemble what is used in leisure groups, the outcome is perceived differently; the evaluation and criteria of full membership are not in harmony with leisure groups. Nevertheless, considering the aforesaid, the concept of assimilation provides productive ways to view joining, especially notions and models of socialization tactics and information acquisition.

5.1.2.1 Organisational anticipatory socialization: Information derived from organisations

As with organisations, photographic groups select what information is released to the public. Their aim is to attract and simultaneously select prospective members. As Gatewood et al (1993) noted, organisations, and in this case photographic clubs, tend to present a favorable picture, not necessarily representing reality. On one hand, this is not bizarre for leisure groups, where their goal is entertainment, but, on the other hand, this practice raises expectations to an arguably unrealistic level. Combined with harder entry barriers (often hidden) than the formally mentioned, it could result in a sense of disappointment upon realization.

An example of the aforementioned is the South City Photographic Society formally stating that one does not need to be competent or in possession of any photographic equipment to join. While this at least in the initial stages of joining could be factual, it is not entirely accurate; one cannot easily move towards the core of the group without following the upward equipment path. Admittedly, it is problematic for leisure pursuit groups to project accurate information and realistic expectations because leisure is subjective to the individual; and, secondly, it is implied that leisure is directly related with pleasure and amusement. Favorable information certainly attracts more members but it is questionable whether it aids in retaining membership within the group. In addition to the other theories examined, information regarding organisations and leisure groups and by extension, projected and actual entry barriers, constitute a constructive combination in investigating the joining process.

5.1.2.2 Socialisation Tactics

Socialisation tactics are a vital component of becoming assimilated in organisations and in extend leisure groups. These tactics adopted by organisations also prevail in photographic groups as examined in the findings. The latter are relatively transparent but correspondingly there are socialisation tactics from the

individual perspective, often tacit and not well documented in the literature (Saks and Blake, 2006).

From the organisations' perspective, it is apparent that the socialisation strategies adopted by groups differ substantially. A variation of an individualised socialisation is applied by the South City Photographic Society where newcomers join individually and are on their own to create social ties and learn the gripes of the group. There is no clear orientation program, although there are strongly projected roles. On the opposite side, the University of South Society follows an institutionalised socialisation pattern. Newcomers join together in large groups and go through a set of common experiences which are tailored for them. Even though there is a loosely chronological frame (academic year) indicating roughly when the orientation will be completed, the weak projected roles and the relaxed nature of the group make this process ill defined.

Both online groups, South Yorkshire City Flickr group and Yorkshire City Old and New Facebook group clearly had individualised socialization methods. Newcomers joined individually and the majority of them remained as observers or lurkers. Some newcomers took the initiative to share photos and take part online discussions Overall socialization tactics were informal and depended on the individual.

This contrast of approaches used by the groups aids in making a comparison between them and suggests that established groups, whose focus was not to introduce new members, tend to follow an individualised approach. The reason is that it limits the exposure of the group to the "threat of newcomers", by spending less sources (such as older members' time and effort) and keeping members focused on core rather than peripheral activities with newcomers. Conversely, developing groups that are in need of newcomers approach newcomers in an institutionalised way, especially when newcomers are also novices. In order to promote participation, fundamental competency is desired and, in terms of the University of South Society, where there are few experienced and older members, newcomers must participate in a meaningful way in order for the group to thrive.

The “threat of newcomers” is not a major risk, since they are expected to drive forward the future focus of the group.

The same patterns apply to both offline and online groups but in online groups there are two additional factors to consider. Online groups do not have a fixed schedule or arranged times for participation and also newcomers do not necessarily join at set times but join at any given time. These two reasons make it harder for groups to adopt institutionalised approaches.

As can be deduced, socialisation tactics are indeed a notion that assists the understanding of the structure of inducting newcomers in photographic groups and, moreover, provide insights into the importance of the newcomers’ role within the groups.

5.1.2.3 Information-Seeking

Information seeking in organisations is a phenomenon that is exhibited in photographic groups too. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notions of learning and Stebbins’ (1992) career path constitute powerful tools to examine how information acquisition, enabling learning and, ultimately, directing a newcomer’s career occur. This is especially the case in online communities, where information is more direct and harvestable and to an extent, available for research, so information-seeking is less transparent compared to offline communities. Thus theories of information-seeking, including tactics, are useful for the scope of this research.

5.1.3 Virtual Communities

The theory of Virtual Communities is a relevant field for the scope of this research. In order to explore the differences between offline and online leisure pursuit groups it is useful to examine the findings from the appropriate theoretical angles. One important finding to examine is the relative initial easiness of developing a sense of belongingness in the two online groups that as a result hindered future career path and difficulty of intensifying participation.

Herring (2004) defined Virtual Communities in terms of six characteristics as mentioned in Section 2.4.1. One of the criteria that defines a virtual community is an active, self-sustaining participation; a core of regular participants. This refers to how frequent core members participate. In order to be able to identify core participants and measure the frequency of participation members have to recognize the core of the group. How is the core perceived by newcomers? Because of the size and the relatively vague theme of the two online groups the core is not clearly visible to a newcomer. Moreover especially in the case of the Flickr group, participation in terms of sharing photos is, quantitatively, massive so that it cannot be grasped by a member of the group. There are so many photos posted by multiple members in the two online groups that it is almost humanly impossible to be able to identify regular participants or even if there are any. Identifying regular and active members participating in the main activity and normative practice of the group is not visible to the eyes of newcomers. Hence, at least from the perspective of newcomers, they will not sense an active, self-sustaining participation.

From a communities of practice angle this could be explained as the groups not having a static or stable core group of people. As it was mentioned in Section 5.1.4 participation in online groups is asynchronous meaning that members can participate at any time and not necessarily, together, at the same time. This property of virtual communities creates time holes where depending on when a newcomer participates within the group he or she will face a different core and periphery. Normally this is not an issue since the history of the group is visible to online users but the vast number of photos posted makes it impossible to keep track of what happened in the group while someone was away.

Furthermore the large number of people within the group result in huge numbers of inactive members. The vast majority of members in the two online groups are inactive and whether they are observing, lurking or have withdrawn from the group is unknown. Since there is no distinction between a withdrawn member and someone participating in the periphery then the periphery cannot be perceived. The boundaries of the core and periphery of the groups do not exist or at least are hidden from the eyes of the newcomers. It is relatively easy to join these two online

groups, at least in terms of requirements and many new people join. This means that the periphery is always going to be dynamic and along with the asynchronous aspect of virtual communities, it will be harder for a newcomer to build relationships and familiarise with other members.

The easy initial identification and sense of belongingness with the two groups is attributed to the relaxed requirements and the general themes but it could also be attributed to the very big periphery of the two online groups. When newcomers join, they might participate in normative practices such as observing or performing simple tasks, interacting with other members such as liking other people's photos. Thus, they are legitimately participating peripherally but if the core is hidden from them or they cannot see a way that in the future might lead to the core then the legitimacy of their participation is questioned. That could be an explanation of why online members initially join easily but then is harder to intensify participation. Lastly, Herring's (2004) criteria of "self-awareness of group as an entity distinct from other groups" (p.14), is problematic in the two online groups. As discussed in Section 4.5.6 the Flickr group has a vague domain and that openness of the theme of the group has a negative impact on its distinctness as an entity.

5.1.3.1 Selection process

From the literature and through the findings it was revealed that a major part of the selection process transpired from online information prior to and after joining as members of these groups. Activities and participation of the two offline groups were concentrated in a real world context but nevertheless they involved an online counterpart, especially in the selection process. The two online groups were publicly open for anyone to view thus potential members gathered information from the group itself through its description and past discussions and photos. Overall information available selects, eliminates and shapes membership.

Initially, an interested and potential member acquires information mainly interpersonally (from other people) or online, by visiting the relevant web sites. In a direct and occasionally indirect form, communities inform people of the requirements for becoming a member. The fact that the two online groups offer the

ability to view the group's history before joining could potentially increase the accuracy of information. This process is crucial, since it selects members based on the criteria that not only aligns with the community's culture but also shapes it. For example, in leisure pursuit groups this could indicate the distinction of the focus of a community, between being in serious or amateur pursuits. In principle they may share the same interest (photography) but in essence the joining process may be completely heterogeneous.

Overall, the entry barriers could be a strong indicator of conceptualizing a sense of the community, but at the same time the findings have shown that entry barriers are often misleading and differ in reality. Thus virtual communities provide useful insights and, furthermore, examining the similarities and differences between offline and online communities has the potential to play a vital role for the remaining of this research.

5.1.3.2 Groups' common identity and member orientation

Formally, all four photographic groups have lower entry barriers. However, the selection process of the South City Photographic Group is in fact more complicated. Seemingly, joining involves no serious barriers; there are other factors to consider for membership retention. Firstly, the majority of members are roughly aged over sixty (60), residing in South city. In short, the majority of members were retired, people which had an impact on the culture of the community and did not deviate from the common. For example, older people have their own norms, values and behavior and tend to participate in activities (that are also combined with photography) oriented to them. The term 'common identity' refers to Wenger et al (2002) idea in which a community creates a sense of normative behavior where it inspires and guides members to participate giving meaning to their actions.

Having this in mind, the University of South group, consists of people members of the university in their early twenties, with a wide array of nationalities. Thus, there are fewer members deviating from the perceived common identity. Overall members of the University group do not need to adjust their identity to align with

the common identity. It can be said that newcomers that are closer to the group's common identity will need less adjustment thus it will be easier to fit in. Newcomers that deviate from the common identity have to either adjust their identity or change the group's common identity to fit in. In addition, it seems that, after overcoming the formal entry barriers, the group's tolerance and acceptance of deviating members affects the process of becoming a member.

In the South Yorkshire Flickr group, active members posting photos and taking part in discussions commonly project technical expertise. Due to the virtual aspect of the online group and its broad theme the common identity is vaguely defined. Nevertheless the notion of technical expertise is an aspect of the common identity that is strongly projected. Thus the common identity aspires to technical expertise and members that are residing (either students or locals) to Yorkshire.

The South Yorkshire City Old and New Facebook group projects two types of common identities. The first common identity that creates sense of normal behavior are people that have lived on Yorkshire for many years and have old photos of the city or memories and experiences to share. The second common identity are members without old content or experiences to share. They are a newer generation compared to the first common identity thus they participate and contribute in different ways. They still participate by sharing photos and share experiences of the present time. In both online groups members the barriers of being a city resident or have close relation with the city and the technical expertise (on the Flickr group) and content to share (on the Facebook group) are strongly projected. Thus members that deviate from the common identity are difficult to fit into the group.

5.1.4 Serious Leisure

Stebbins' (1992) serious leisure framework offers a meaningful method to examine the type of membership and activity in photographic groups, especially where a comparison could reveal their differences. As mentioned in Section 2.5.3, Stebbins' (1992) distinguishes casual from serious leisure with six characteristics.

In legitimate peripheral participation (Section 5.1.1.2) it was mentioned that each group have different membership perseverance. Perseverance is an important aspect of serious leisure and in the process of becoming a member. There are key activities for entering a social world because they mark critical stages in a membership trajectory. For example competitions are a common way for a photographer to present their work (Schwartz, 1986), and taking part in photographic competitions, even when novice oriented, indicating a crucial step towards serious leisure. Having the confidence to present their work, and a willingness to improve by receiving constructive feedback and competing is an indication of a serious leisure pursuit. To a lesser extent, or as a smaller step, this could also be said for exhibitions, either inside or outside of the group.

In terms of comparing the two offline groups, members in South City Photographic Group exhibit a clearer perseverance to photography as a leisure activity and as members of the group. Being older people, they usually had a longer history and commitment to photography. Photography is one of their primary hobbies, thus they are more willing to overcome impediments regarding their leisure pursuit. Overall, perseverance in this group happened at a slower, gradual pace. The prospect of a career was apparent in this group, especially since there were members considered to be experts and who were widely recognized. The varied level of competitions also indicates a ladder that one can climb and, as Schwartz (1986) mentioned, photographic competitions provide a model for amateur photographers to follow. Relating to the need to persevere, people put considerable amounts of personal effort and considering their age, they needed to devote extra effort and time to familiarising themselves with the technological aspects of photography.

Old members in the University of South Photographic Society passed through numerous obstacles to maintain their membership. The need to persevere is evident each year, when the cycle of the group restarts. They have reached maximum satisfaction from their pursuit with minimal uncertainties during their first cycle in the group thus retaining their membership, indicating rich devotion. On the other hand, a possible motivation to participate is that old members tend to have

leadership roles which result in personal rewards, such as self-enrichment, accomplishment, self-image, social interaction, and social belonging (Bendle and Patterson, 2008). From the novices' perspective, perseverance is not clearly evident, since they were in their initial career stage. Nevertheless, students tend to have a very active life which often includes several other hobbies, thus the effort and time they devote to the group and photography should not be directly compared to members of the South City Photographic group. They have a wider selection of hobbies to pursue, so the fact that they chose this specific leisure group is important and adds some value to their perseverance.

Key moments that reveal a serious approach by their members are the acquisition of photographic equipment, since owning specialised equipment is not a norm in this group, in contrast with the South City Photographic Group, where most photographers are well-equipped. Moreover, students have limited financial resources, so the fact that they choose to buy equipment to enhance their experience is another sign of devotion. Apart from the aforementioned key moments of entering a competition and exhibiting work, participation in activities outside of weekly meetings are important. The continuous and systematic participation in social activities marks members' personal satisfaction in the group and this urge expands their membership beyond the typical meetings.

The prospect of a career in the University group is more limited than South City's Photographic Group. While old members are considered experts, the notion of a professional photographer or a photographer with long, recognized, rich perseverance is not very apparent. Apart from the foreseeable group's "expiration date", newcomers perceive that the group is an entry level step towards photography and if they keep advancing the career ladder they will need to seek elsewhere to satisfy their needs.

In both online groups, South Yorkshire Flickr Group and South Yorkshire City Old and new Flickr group, there are thousands of members and naturally there are many observers or lurkers. It is difficult to discover if observers that do not participate within the group are pursuing photography as serious leisure or not and

if they have a career to examine how it evolves. Thus group membership perseverance requires regular activity. Observers or lurkers are not participating within the group, and even if they are pursuing photography as a lifelong activity, they are not active within the group to be able to examine how the activity might relate to the joining process. It is worth mentioning that Stebbins (2004) classified passive entertainment as casual leisure thus observing or lurking is not serious leisure.

In the context of the two online groups, serious leisure or casual leisure could only be exhibited by active members who posted photos and took part in discussions. Therefore membership perseverance indicated regular participation such as sharing photos and taking part in discussions. In the online groups studied and as described in Section 4.4.2 there is a large number of members and the majority of them are lurkers or observers. In the sense that participation in such groups is asynchronous and not limited by time and also that newcomers join daily it means that the core and periphery are dynamic and reflects on which members are active for a rather recent period of time. Therefore newcomers' perseverance is more recent and temporary but significant.

Perseverance in online groups does not necessarily require systematic participation due to the characteristics and due to the nature of Virtual Communities. Nevertheless it requires regular perseverance in terms of being active within a relatively recent period of time. How long and recent is that period of time depends on the dynamic of the core and periphery. If the core is dynamic and changes frequently then the period of recent regular activity is shortened but at the same time requires more intense effort. In contrast if the core is more static and changes infrequently then the period of recent regular activity is extended but at the same time requires less intense effort. Both of the online groups examined are considered by the author to have dynamic core and periphery rather than static because many newcomers join continuously that are active and participate in a normative manner. Therefore in the two online groups perseverance requires regular perseverance in terms of being active within a relatively recent period of time. However long term participation and commitment is also a sign of

perseverance as well since the history of group activity and participation can be viewed at any time in their respective virtual group spaces. In addition, as with offline groups, long term participation and perseverance can create ties with the other core members that might sustain after a period of inactivity or absence.

In the Flickr group, the higher level of photographic skills indicated that the members posting them were pursuing photography seriously. There was a prospect of a career both as a photographer and as a member of the group. The high quality pictures posted in the group indicated to novices that they could potential reach that level expertise. By participating in the community in the discussions section members could acquire skills and knowledge and they could also take part in online competitions.

In the Facebook group though even if there were many members posting photographs which required good skills and knowledge there were also many members posting amateur photos or old photos for archival and nostalgia purposes. Thus there were the notions of a serious leisure as in professional photography and also serious leisure as in collecting and archiving photos. For both types of photography there were casual and serious leisure counterparts. For example there were members posting professional quality photos of the City while there were members posting photos from their mobile phones. There were members who had their own collection of old photos and posted regularly while there were members occasionally posting old photos they happen to find. Overall the Facebook group involved serious and casual leisure. In terms of becoming a professional or expert photographer there was a prospect of a career in the same way as the Flickr group. In addition it offered a prospect of a career in terms of collecting or archiving photos. Not having the content to share or archive thought is hindering the career prospect and makes retaining membership more difficult.

To sum up, the pursuit of photography in the South City Photographic Group seems to be leaning towards serious leisure rather than casual, whereas in the University of South Photographic Society it is a combination of casual and serious, acting as an initial step that can potentially lead to serious leisure. In South

Yorkshire City Flickr group the pursuit of photography is leaning towards serious leisure and In South Yorkshire City Old and New Facebook Group it is a combination of casual and serious.

Key moments in the online groups are sharing and posting photos since this is one of the main activities and purposes of their groups. Sharing photos is an important moment because it is sign of devotion by participating in a normative practice and because the newcomers is exposing himself or herself to the group. As mentioned in Section 4.4.1 and Section 4.4.2 in the two online groups face to face contact is absent in their normal practice thus newcomers are getting to be known within the community only by participating. Sharing pictures is a way to announce their presence while contributing to the group at the same time. Equipment upgrade might also constitute a key moment in the sense that newcomers will potentially take better photos and this might boost their confidence to participate and have to share their photos with the group. Newcomers might feel that their photos are inferior or not worthy to be shared due to their lower level equipment in addition with high technical expertise group standards.

5.1.4.1 Career Path

Stebbins (1992) theoretical framework of serious leisure applies to photographic groups. Members follow a career path; initially they have an interest in photography and, upon joining photographic groups, they start to develop their skills and knowledge. Once they establish the fundamental skills and knowledge they can participate with little or no uncertainties, although, as mentioned in Section 2.5.4, is debatable, if members get the maximum satisfaction at this stage, as Stebbins (1992) claimed. Newcomers are more likely to reach the decline stage, since they still have not persevered long enough and their interest in photography might diminish quickly. For example South City's Photographic Group members had a proven and prolonged lifelong photography career without it necessarily meaning that they had advanced to the last stages, though the majority of its members seemed to be in the maintenance stage.

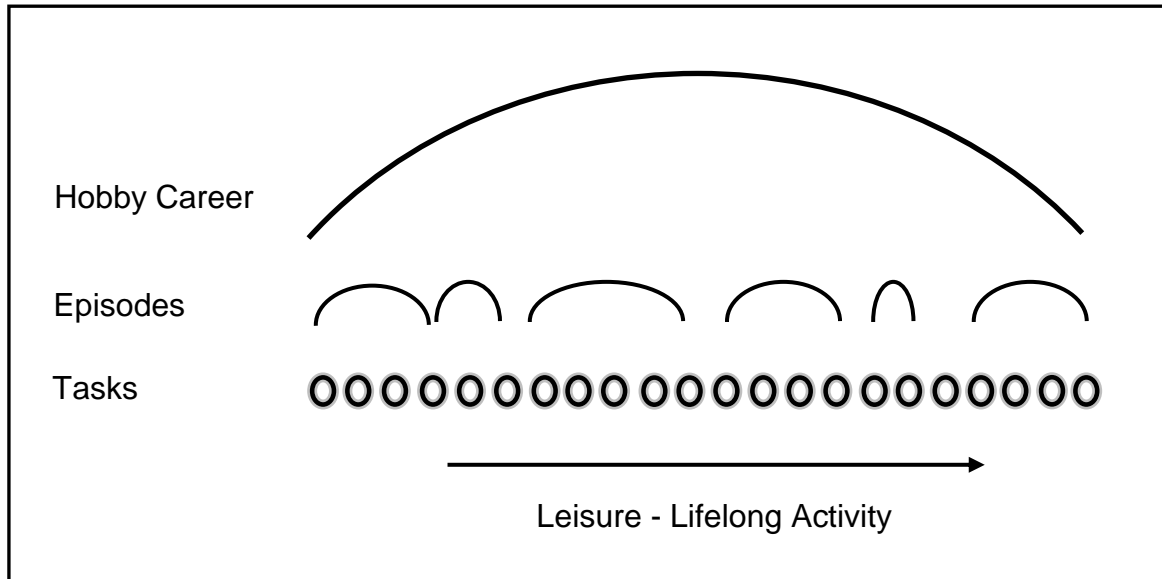


Figure 5.2: Career path composed of episodes and tasks (adapted from Hartel, 2010)

The key moments mentioned above in Section 5.1.4, which mark crucial stages of encounter in photographic groups could indicate a movement in Stebbins' (1992) career stages. Figure 5.2 depicts leisure activity episodes that are composed of smaller tasks. In a similar manner, members in photographic groups tacitly or consciously organise their work in projects, where they pursue a particular subject they are interested in capturing. The time that passes from the beginning of these projects until completion is composed of smaller sessions and tasks. This cyclical and repeated process is essentially embedded in their leisure career.

This gradual evolution of someone's photographic career is relevant to joining, in the sense that their membership is shaped in parallel with their career. The completion of photographic projects is a method of retaining and augmenting perseverance and concurrently developing their identity as a photographer and as a member of the group; especially when manifesting their work. They are a feasible example and a result of his involvement with the activity and the group from which he or she gained the competency and knowledge. Since this process is repeated, it shows commitment and a sense of belonging; a step towards serious leisure.

This view of repeated projects/subjects is a useful perspective of examining how they are shaping their leisure career and in extend joining; an expedient way to view photographic activities and moreover group meetings. The sense of evolution creates a trajectory, a historical self where one can evaluate oneself and also be evaluated by others in order to relinquish the newcomer tag. Along with other key moments, projects are achievements, either as personal rewards, the fruit of a member's labor or as manifestations illuminating a photographer's status.

5.1.4.2 Adoption of technology – Equipment Upgrade

Adoption of technology is a useful perspective through which to examine information and human behavior in leisure groups, and even though technology adoption in offline social networks is well documented, in online social networks it is still relatively underexplored (Peng and Mu, 2011).

The findings exhibited a materialistic equipment path that newcomers went through in their participation in leisure groups. In all groups, members followed an upward equipment path that could possibly relate to their career path. Through continuous participation, members' competency and knowledge increased and, at the same time, new requirements led to the acquisition of more powerful, innovative and advanced cameras. Moreover they followed this upgrade path in secondary equipment that either related to photography or to activities performed in combination with photography. For example, people purchased better printing equipment, learned how to use image manipulation software and acquired new hiking equipment.

The South City Photographic Society had more advanced and expensive photographic equipment but on the other hand the University of South Photographic Society had a wider variation of equipment. This could be attributed to the groups' nature, one being more serious than the other, and the average age difference. Older people, being economically independent and belonging to a more focused group, drove their equipment path accordingly. University members, having restricted funds and belonging to a more fluid and experimental type of group had a wider variety of equipment. As mentioned in Section 5.1.4, the groups

had different implied equipment requirements. In any of the two groups, the investment and acquisition of better equipment was a key moment in joining.

In South City Photographic Society owning the appropriate equipment was more essential, since this is a characteristic found not only in the core but also in the periphery. While equipment ownership shows a commitment to the group, the same upgrade path in the University of South Society had a stronger influence in joining, since this is a characteristic more apparent in the core, and not owning basic equipment is acceptable in the periphery. Thus this key moment, while having its own meaning in the two groups, is more appropriate to emphasizing the more distinct change in membership in the University group compared to the indirect but forced acquisition of equipment in the South City Photographic Society. University members having the choice not to upgrade signifies their decision and as a result their commitment to the group.

Apart from this, many students had versatile equipment, such as the latest and more advanced mobile phones that have surpassed older phones in terms of photographic capabilities and, at the same time, served as instant bridges to online social groups (e.g. flickr.com). This reinforces the view that the University members' equipment acquisition was a significant commitment.

The South Yorkshire City Flickr group aspired to technical expertise thus having the appropriate equipment was essential. Nevertheless in online groups equipment is not physically seen by other members therefore photographs posted are what is immediately visible by other members. The quality of photographs is indirectly linked with the equipment and in that sense having the appropriate equipment was essential. Compared to offline groups, equipment upgrade is not as a strong act of commitment to the group and in photography in general because it is not visible to the other members in the same way as if face to face meetings. It should be noted that in Flickr posted photographs contain data that reveal what type of camera was used to capture them but regardless the equipment itself is not immediately visible as someone holding a camera in a photographic meeting. Hence equipment

upgrade in online groups is still a sign of more serious pursuit and advancement in the career path but not in the same weight as in offline groups.

In South Yorkshire City Old and New Facebook group equipment upgrade was a weaker indication of a more serious pursuit compared to the Flickr group. As mentioned in Section 4.3.3.2.7 the focus and the domain of the group gave more weight to the content rather than the technical aspects of a photograph. Equipment upgrade and in general having specialised equipment was still a sign of a more serious pursuit but not in the same extent as the other groups.

Chapter 6: First Stage Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This research initially explored the field by reviewing the literature, and studying and collecting data from the field via an ethnographic approach. After the analysis of the data, the usefulness of each theoretical perspective was evaluated in relation to the findings and finally the key theoretical models and their research related questions were produced.

The findings were based on the researcher's participation in photographic groups, and presented observations that could potentially be related to the process of joining, or intriguing aspects that could potentially provide unforeseen perspectives of joining. Novel insights were offered by not focusing only on what the researcher considered directly related to joining but also focusing on what could potentially be relevant. This provided credibility and validity to the findings, since it reduces subjectivity. In addition it aided the attempt to connect the personal with the cultural (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). The findings evaluation and alignment with the literature in Chapter 5 strived to explain them from theoretical perspectives and to identify gaps in literature and narrow the focus of the research.

The area chosen to be studied is sufficiently unexplored, thus the appropriate methodological approach was chosen. Prior to collecting data, an initial literature review was conducted in order to acquire the fundamental literature background, identify theoretical gaps, gain methodological competency and form the initial research questions. The exploratory character of this research demanded a continuous literature review, not only during data collection but throughout all phases of the study. The combination of analysing data while still conducting a literature review aided in constructing a more comprehensive and global view of the process of joining and at the same time reduced any predetermined and unjustified selection of theoretical frameworks that could invalidate the results.

During the preliminary literature review and upon experiencing photographic groups in the ethnographic data collection, relevant theories were identified. Data analysis provided the grounds for aligning and viewing the findings from the perspective of existing theories in order to proceed with the second and final stage of this research and complete the final thesis. The result of the data analysis and findings pointed to the value of communities of practice as the main perspective to examine joining, along with concepts of other theories, such as Serious Leisure, the career ladder and Organisational Assimilation socialisation tactics.

Research questions were partly addressed by the literature review but, more crucially, by the researcher, experiencing the process of joining in his ethnographic study. The process of joining experienced and defined by newcomers was viewed through the lens of the researcher in a qualitative approach of personally joining photographic groups. The methods newcomers use to assist their induction and in addition enhance their membership were identified as key moments in Chapter 5. In addition, patterns were identified in the upgrade of equipment relating to the career ladder. Also the organisation's characteristics that shaped its hospitality towards newcomers were discussed. This research examined the induction approaches of each group and discovered aspects of the actual membership requirements compared to the perceptible joining requirements available prior to joining a group.

6.2 Summary of Results

To gain more insights into the joining process, the findings were examined through different theoretical perspectives, providing the researcher with a direction to focus in the remaining part of the thesis. To summarise, the results and the related generation of the research questions for further study are presented below in Table 6.1

Theory	Model	Findings	Suggestions
Communities of practice	Common Identity	The group's common identity differ. South City Society leans towards the professional, while University of South towards the amateur photographer. South Yorkshire City Flickr Group leans towards professional while South Yorkshire City - Old and New Facebook Group towards both, professional and casual.	The group's common identity is an important factor in identifying and developing a sense of belonging with the group. It is important to note that the common identity is not clearly evident or may even be misleading in terms of the information available prior to joining.
	Legitimate Peripheral Participation	The model of legitimate peripheral participation is based on the assumption that a group was established long enough so that a core was developed. This	In newly formed groups, the core is weak and not well defined. Thus members develop and direct the focus of the group (which will define the core) rather than head to an established core.

		model does not align with newly formed groups.	
		In addition, Wenger's model does not explain the learning process of newcomer but competent members.	To be able to examine it is needed to explore the practice in each group and what kind of capital is significant in order to be considered as competent.
Organisational Assimilation	Information derived from organisations	Apart from its use in the selection process, information prior to joining shapes members' expectations and builds a sense of the community.	Information derived from photographic groups does not necessarily reflect reality and is often favourable.
	Socialisation tactics	In South City Society group, where the focus was on old time members, an individualised socialisation type is followed. In contrast, the University of South group followed institutionalised socialisation. Both Online groups used Individualised	Socialisation tactics are related to the focus and the tolerance of newcomers of each group. In this sense, some approaches (tactics) are more suitable than others, depending on the aforementioned. The induction of newcomers requires a group's effort and resources. Newcomer-oriented groups place more emphasis on orientation and

		approaches.	are more tolerable.
	Information Seeking	Information seeking is part of the learning process for newcomers.	Information acquisition enables learning and to an extent, a movement up the career ladder.
Virtual communities	Selection Process	Entry barriers, along with information available prior to joining, chooses or eliminates future members of the group.	<p>Apart from the entry barriers, the common identity of the group affects joining. Newcomers that are closer to the group's projected common identity are more likely to become full members. Newcomers that deviate from the common identity have to either adjust their identity or change the group's common identity to fit in.</p> <p>In addition group tolerance of newcomers plays an important role.</p>
Serious Leisure	Perseverance	Each group has a different form of perseverance. South City Society group has members with a lifelong commitment and perseverance to photography and a	Perseverance in South City Society's group involves long and steady devotion to photography. In the University group newcomers' perseverance is more recent and temporary but significant. In the two

		<p>substantial history in the group. In the University group, due to its short term yearly cycle and newcomers focus, perseverance is not clearly apparent.</p> <p>In the two online groups newcomers were joining frequently and some were active and participate in a normative way. This made the group core and periphery more dynamic.</p>	<p>online groups perseverance was more recent and temporary but significant. Perseverance was regular but systematic due to the nature of virtual communities.</p> <p>Also the demographic properties of each group are a factor shaping the meaning of perseverance.</p>
	<p>Career</p>	<p>Photographic club members align with a leisure career and different key moments during their photographic practice indicate a progression to this career.</p>	<p>Photographers tend to get involved with different subjects and episodes that contribute to their career. Thus, these subjects could be seen as projects that constitute key moments in the joining process. In addition, key moments include entering photographic competitions and other forms of exhibiting photographic activity content.</p>

	Adoption of technology	Literature and findings point out that photographers tend to follow an equipment upgrade path.	Equipment upgrades are key moments in the joining process as they are indications of perseverance and knowledge/skill progression, and, to an extent, advancement on the career ladder. The aforementioned is true for both types of groups but in online groups it seemingly has less impact on the joining process.
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Table 6.1: Joining, from different theoretical perspectives

6.3 Review of Research Questions for the Final Stage

The relevant issues and questions identified in Table 6.1 suggested the direction for the final stage of the research. Flick (2006) stated that “The result of formulating questions is it helps you to circumscribe a specific area of a more or less complex field which you regard as essential” (p.100). Moreover Agee (2009) mentioned that “the process of focusing questions is an iterative, reflective process that leads, not just to data, but to specific data that can add knowledge to a larger field of study.” (p.442). At this stage the important aspects of the research were identified and in order that they were studied in more detail, the research questions needed to be more precise. Thus the research questions were revised as shown below:

1. What constitutes members’ competency in the practice of offline and online leisure pursuit groups?
2. What differing forms of cultural, social and financial capital are converted and created in joining offline and online leisure pursuit groups?
3. How is joining linked to different forms of learning?

4. How are organisational socialisation tactics used to attract and assimilate people in offline and online leisure pursuit groups?

Chapter 7: Final Stage Findings

7.1 Introduction

In Section 3.10.1 the analysis of the conducted interviews emerged and identified the important themes that make meaningful contributions in addressing the main research question. In this chapter the findings and how the emergent themes support the data are discussed. The findings are presented in a way that it provides a “concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell” (Braun and Clark, 2006:23). The discussion of this chapter is based on the following themes that emerged from the analysis:

- Newcomers’ initial, ambivalent moments are defining their future membership.
- Newcomers align to the group’s domain to identify with the group.
- Newcomers change the group’s domain to identify with the group.
- Members shape their identity through learning.
- The different forms of Capital are converted into joining competency.
- Socialization tactics newcomers used that aided the joining process.

7.2 Joining from the newcomers’ Perspective

The process of joining, as experienced by newcomers, is usually a divergent, complex path with many risks and consists of moments of ambiguity and uncertainty. These moments are crucial in the newcomer’s progress towards becoming a member and they could be described as milestones in a never-ending transformational journey.

7.2.1 Ambivalent moments

Almost all of the participants indicated that their first interaction with the group was characterised by uncertainty and anxiety. This entails an initial adjustment period

where newcomers are in an explorative process of discovering their membership future within the group. At this phase they might withdraw or imagine their selves as members of the group in short or long term.

“I didn’t know anyone, I wasn’t sure what was the main purpose, obviously it was photography but of the society. So I couldn’t grasp the whole environment of the photography society on the first meeting so I felt a bit nervous and I wasn’t sure if I was at the right place. I don’t know. When everyone took their cameras out and we just had the things that we all have, we share... but that was on second meeting, I was a bit nervous on the first.” (UniSoc-Flickr-F-4).

Firstly they are unsure if the group is suitable for them, whether or not it will be interesting and enjoyable. The initial encounters on one hand are important because a newcomer might identify or dis-identify with some of these moments or practices but on the other hand these are early indications and might change over time so their first impressions might not be accurate and realistic. A newcomer and a group might share an interest in the topic of photography but the group has certain norms and values that the newcomer might not accept. Not only this but also photography is a broad subject, thus newcomers have to find out if their interests are aligned with the topic of the group and the specific interests of the existing members. Thus unless there are some moments of strong identification or dis-identification the uncertainty will exist until newcomers can have a clearer, more complete image of the group. Secondly newcomers have to deal with the social aspects especially upon joining an Offline group. One participant mentioned that she did not know anyone within the group revealing moments of uncertainty and anxiety in regards to the social aspect.

“I met more people that are photographic members so I think it was definitely easier for me to go to the meetings more if I see familiar faces at the society. The key is just to be familiar with people and that’s how you feel comfortable in a society so you can feel you belong to the society and the feeling of being a member.” (UniSoc-Flickr-F-4).

Upon joining a group, newcomers have to learn the necessary norms and values of the community and also have to accept and be accepted by other members. Especially in offline groups where physical presence is required, becoming familiar and feeling comfortable with the other members is a requirement in belonging to a group.

“I think all people want to join initially but if they give up, it is because they are too nervous on the first meeting because it is hard for people to adapt to new environments. If somebody wants to join a club, I usually go with him or her to make them feel less nervous, so we can easily get used to the society. Also you must try to have communication with other members.” (UniSoc-M-3).

The initial encounter with the group involves a social adjustment where newcomers orient themselves sufficiently in order to feel comfortable as part of the group and enable them to participate. As the above participant mentioned the social adjustment barrier is commonly a cause hindering the joining process and the cause of people withdrawing from groups. To assist newcomers overcome the initial social discomfort it is not unusual for existing members to personally oversee a newcomer and try to smooth the process (Section 2.3.3.2).

“Freshers is all a big blur. I came to the Uni and I was excited and I was making friends with everybody so I didn’t have a nervous stage or a state where “I don’t fit in this society”, I was straight in, “I like these people I am going to stay”. I can’t remember feeling any different, I just went for it.” (UniSoc-Faceb-F-1)

This participant quickly become familiar with other members and stated that she liked them. For this reason she seemed to have a smoother process in adjusting to the group characterised by less or no ambivalent moments. In such cases where the initial social adjustment process is accomplished rapidly and with little effort, it tends to feel as an intuitive process for the newcomer, fitting in with the group almost instantly. In this case the reason of this seamless, smooth identification with the other members seemed to be the close fitness with the group’s domain

(including other members) that required less adjustment to the norms and values of the group. She mentioned that she never felt that she did not fit into that society. In other words it seems that her interests aligned with the group domain and the interests of the other members. Despite that the effort needed by the individual to adjust to the group was little; it was a milestone in becoming a member. Moreover when the newcomer's interests, norms and values align with the group, less effort is needed to fit into the group. Apart from the aforementioned alignment, the social adjustment is partly dependent on other aspects as well such as the member's Social skills and Personal characteristics discussed in Section 7.7.2.1.

“I was there as an observer and accidentally and suddenly something comes up that means much to you and you have to make a comment... whether it is positive or negative. Somebody posts a photograph or comments something that triggers a memory or an emotion, and you just have to say something [...] it is like sitting with people and listening to a conversation and somebody says something that you have to respond to. That's when you become from an observer to someone who participates and says something.” (FaceB-M-15).

In online groups the initial encounter is less intimidating because at least at the beginning, there is no mandatory physical interaction and a newcomer can safely take part purely as an observer, without exposing himself/herself to other people. The early stages of joining an online group commonly involve observation until there is a moment of meaningful participation in the group. At the same time, directly or indirectly, this constitutes an announcement of their presence to the group by publicly interacting and being visible to the whole community. These moments of early meaningful participation are a result of gaining confidence or identification or dis-identification in such a way that they feel the need to participate instead of observing. The quote of the participant above clearly showed that there are moments of identification and dis-identification that change a member's position within a group. Dis/Identification moments similar to these can be seen as

a progress to their joining process and can enhance their attachment to the group or alienate them accordingly.

7.3 Domain Alignment

7.3.1 Newcomers Adjusting or Aligning to the Group's Domain

Another factor and concern that newcomers have is the uncertainty about whether the group will suit their interests and satisfy their needs, since photography, as an interest, is a very diverse activity that the domain of the group could be defined in infinite ways either leaning towards or deviating from the newcomer's interests. The data indicated that members quite commonly were aware of the group's general theme but they were naturally worried about the more distinct and defined aspects of the group's interest.

The defined domain of the group is extremely important in the process of a newcomer's identification with the group and how close that is with the newcomer's interests affects their level of identification. A weakly or loosely defined domain might be easy for one to weakly identify with but hinder strong member identification with the group's domain. Conversely a strongly defined group domain could be harder to adjust to, but the bond might feel stronger because more effort is invested. Furthermore during the alignment process some sort of participation is required thus some common history is created and shared between the member and the group.

“It is interesting to be a member of this group because for me it is mixing with like-minded people. If you look at the group, the various photographs that people are putting on, I would put on things that interest me and I like and hopefully other people like. The last couple of days that I have put the photos on, people have commented, liked them so I know that what I have taken is interesting to other people. I would say it is one of the best ways of, I wouldn't say meet people, being with people of similar interests.” (Faceb-M-16).

This interviewee felt similar to the other members in the sense that he was in a group of people with similar interests. The main interest and theme of the group is not only important for satisfying a member's entertainment and leaning needs but it also constitutes a common, shared aspect of uniting the community. A person that identifies with the group's domain simultaneously identifies with the existing members as well because naturally it is understood that all members identify with the domain of the group. Thus an imaginary link exists between members from the very first moment a person learns about the existence of a group. This is similar how fans of a football team share an imaginary connection (Jones, 2000). The impact of the common interest is analysed below in Section 7.3.3.

Another point shaping the alignment with the domain is if and how a newcomer is accepted by other members. The above participant's contributions to the group, the shared photographs, were positively perceived by the group indicating not only his alignment with the group's common interest but also his acceptance from the existing members. He exhibited member's competency by meaningfully participating in the group's main activity.

7.3.2 Newcomers Adjusting or Changing the Group's Domain

Newcomers and older members also have the ability to shape the group in a way that it aligns with their interests. Depending on the group's resistance to change, the group's domain can and is changed by its members. Thus another way of a newcomer aligning with the group's domain is to change it.

“If anybody has an idea of what they want to do, for example this year in Chester there's a castle somewhere, it's massive, huge, with turrets and everything, and someone said “we need go here” and we said “Yes, we do that”. If anybody has any more ideas we will try to fit everything in” (UniSoc-F-1).

The Yorkshire University society which has a weakly defined domain is more open to changes whereas the Yorkshire City Group with the long, rich history and well defined domain is more resilient to change. A group that is easily affected by

newcomers or open to changes in general runs the risk of diverging its domain and focus in a way that previously aligned members might no longer identify with the group's interest.

As with the case of the above participant, members have the opportunity to change the group's domain. The group's openness to suggestions indicated not only the hospitality to members' suggestions but changing or redefining the group's domain was a practice urged by the group. In Section 2.2.8.1 it was mentioned that there is a threat of newcomers where they might change the domain in a way that is less attractive to the old members. In this case the change caused by newcomers was not a threat. Newcomers were defining the domain because the group's domain was not defined. The group was seeking focus and direction for its domain from newcomers. Wenger et al (2002) state that there is a tension between focus and growth. The reason that the University group did not exhibit this tension is mentioned in Section 5.1.1.2 and is because purposely and by design the group did not have a defined domain. Due to the large proportion of members changing every year and its annual cycle the group's domain was redefined every year and it mimicked the early development stages of a community of practice.

7.3.3 The impact of Aligning to the domain with a Shared Interest in Offline and Online communities

In offline communities the opportunities for social interaction are commonly more frequent and multidimensional during physical meetings compared to online communities. While there are other forms of socialisation online, physical interaction is not an intimate option. When comparing offline and online groups many participants mentioned that they preferred face to face socialisation.

"I prefer real life groups because you deal with people face to face and I find that much more pleasurable because you get to know people and socialise more. Real life group get you out of the house instead of sitting in front of the computer and you also socialise and can make long lasting friends. On the other hand the online forums are instant and I believe it is

easier to keep everyone happy because it is a take or leave it attitude whereas in real life group you can keep everyone happy.” (CitySoc-M-13).

In the above example the participant prefers offline groups clearly for the physical socialisation and because he finds it easier to create strong friendships offline. He does however point out that online members are satisfied easier online and that online groups are either suited for a member or not. The latter can be perceived as the group’s domain either aligning with the person’s or not. From the participant’s quote that the online groups are “take it or leave it” it can be perceived that aligning to the domain of an online group is important. On the other hand changing the group domain to fit into the newcomers’ interests either is not possible or is not worth the effort.

Selecting an online group to join does not have the same limitations as offline groups. In offline groups people have to consider time and space when selecting a group. Thus if the group’s domain is not adequately interesting to the newcomers online then they will not have strong incentives to join or at least make sufficient effort to adjust to the group. Online, if a group’s domain is not aligned with the newcomers’ interests then they can easily select another group that aligns more closely to their interests. This makes newcomers’ domain alignment more important to online groups compared to offline.

“You don’t have to be sociable because you can just be an observer and I don’t think you have to have photographs, you have to have an interest in the group’s topic... it is a safe environment for the shy and confident people to be in a group” (Faceb-M-15).

The above participant specifically mentioned that having an interest in the domain is important. In other words this means that aligning to the domain with a shared interest is vital when joining online groups. From the quote it can also be said that the social aspects are less important in online groups since members or newcomers can simply observe. Nonnecke and Preece (1999) found that the online interaction mechanisms are a reason why people lurk and Nonnecke and

Preece (2001) mentioned that lurking is more prevalent online because it cannot be easily observed by other members. Overall it seems that in online groups, the social aspects are less important and the importance is shifted towards the domain.

In addition offline groups have the incentive of physical socialisation thus people preferring or seeking this might prefer joining an offline group, even if they do not strongly identify with the group's domain. On the other hand, interviewees from online groups gave much significance to the group's domain. The lack of physical interaction in online communities make them unfit towards people favouring the social aspect of a community, at least in the traditional form, but at the same time they attract interest driven members, people that do not value or seek the traditional form of physical interaction or are satisfied by the different means of socialisation online.

Moreover online, the initial adjustment mentioned in Section 7.2.1 is different because of the absence of physical interaction and the different ways of socialisation. In essence online social adjustment is shifted towards the common interest in the sense that interaction revolves around the domain.

“For meeting new people would help if somebody would post a photo or something and you start talking about it or connecting on it or if somebody asks a question and somebody answers talking to people that way. It's a case of, you have to be actively trying meeting people, you can't just sit there and like a photo or just hang around with a group of people like you would in real life let it be where you all start talking getting to know better and then close together.”(UniSoc-Flickr-M-2).

The initial adjustment in online groups is closely related to the domain. A common individual tactic that newcomers used to overcome the initial adjustment was sharing photographs online. Another tactic used by newcomers was to actively engage in conversations with in the group; conversations that fall within the domain in order to be seen as fit by existing members.

“You shouldn’t expect people to come and talk to you, you should go to talk to people as well. Because we are British people you can always talk about the weather.”(CitySoc-M-8).

In offline groups a newcomer can form relationships with other members based on interpersonal skills or with subjects irrelevant with the group’s domain. In the above example, the weather is used as a subject for initiating communication with other members mainly because the weather, even though is not directly related with the group’s domain, is part of the physical everyday life. Moreover offline groups have geographical boundaries thus the weather can affect meetings or even the photographic themes.

7.4 Types of Learning in Photographic Communities

In photographic communities becoming a member involves learning in the sense of gaining skills and knowledge to participate and in terms of fitting into the group and adjusting or changing the group as mentioned in Section 7.3 above. For some members, learning constitutes a driving force to participate in the context of photography and photographic groups. The data suggested that learning is a vital aspect in joining photographic groups and one participant mentioned that “having an interest to learn” (Faceb-M-16) is the most important thing to have to become a member. Thus it is important to examine the different forms of learning in photographic groups.

7.4.1 Learning the norms and values

A photographic group has a shared history, purpose, culture, norms and values that newcomers have to learn and embrace or negotiate norms and values. Thus learning provides meaning to practice.

“The only barrier is language for me but joining this community is an opportunity to practice my English as well.” (UniSoc-M-3)

The English language is the norm in the studied photographic groups and is part of their culture. The above interviewee not only made an effort in learning the

language but also considered it as an additional reason to join. Thus one of the reasons of joining is to learn.

7.4.2 Learning from existing members

Within photographic groups members learn from other members. In this context there are two types of learning among existing members. Newcomers acquired subject knowledge from existing members but also learned how to appropriately interact within the group. The quote below exhibits a clear example of learning from other members within the group.

“Yes definitely asking questions and people are always happy to share their knowledge, so if you don’t know something you ask and you keep on asking until you find somebody who knows the answer. You gain a lot of knowledge from the society.” (CitySoc-F-9).

The data also suggested that through learning newcomers also learn how to communicate within a group and create their social presence which aided in interacting with other members.

“I am learning all the time and being part of a group helps with the learning process because other people will know all the things that you don’t know and I know things that they don’t know.... it is a good way of interacting.” (Faceb-M-16).

Thus learning from other members is also a way of interacting and participating within a group. In that sense learning is a way to socialise and get involved in different group practices that as a result aid the joining process.

7.4.3 Learning from newcomers and novices

Another type of learning related to the above is when members learn from newcomers or inexperienced members. This is important because newcomers or inexperienced members commonly do not have adequate membership competency, nevertheless they still contribute to the community. While Fuller et al

(2005) claim that Lave and Wenger's (1991) framework of legitimate peripheral participation focuses on newcomers rather than experienced members, Lave and Wenger (1991) mentioned that apprentices (or learners) create their own learning relations with other learners. They mentioned that this kind of learning could possibly result in an efficient and rapid circulation of knowledge and is based on the engagement in practice. Thus newcomers learn from other newcomers in communities of practice.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991) peripheral participants can develop a view of what is there to be learned and this type of learning takes place during the engagement in practice. Newcomers create their own learning goals that they fulfil by engaging with other members, newcomers or old timers.

“I can learn stuff from new members as well, who knows? That's really important; we should never think that we know everything because even if he is a new member he may have some amazing ideas.”
(UniSoc-M-3).

A newcomer might be peripherally participating in the group but he can still provide knowledge to an experienced member. Having in mind Wenger's (1998) work, this type of learning is part of the shared repertoire because it refers to the development of procedures and techniques of practice (Wenger, 1998) that should be a core activity central to the functioning of the group. Although Wenger (1998) conceptualised that participation and reification occurs in an environment where people develop knowledge through interaction with others, this type of learning is not aligned with the legitimate peripheral participation model because members (masters, experts and old members) in the core of a group can also learn from members (beginners, novices, newcomers) at the periphery of the group.

7.4.4 Teaching, transfer skills and knowledge

Teaching is a type of learning in the sense that through it a member can revise and enrich their skills and knowledge. Revising is a form of maintaining knowledge and essentially constitutes membership perseverance, investment and commitment to

the group.

“I think it will be really enjoyable to teach new members because when I teach other people I basically do some revision for myself and maybe I can also enhance my skills” (UniSoc-M-3).

“I like answering other people’s photography questions and also being able to teach people in the darkroom. I like to teach people who are really enthusiastic in the darkroom [...] I did quite a lot of tutorial sessions in the weekly meetings. I love doing that because I know that some of the stuff that I specialise and know about isn’t stuff that the other committee members know about because they don’t do that much portraits. So luckily I am on the committee and I get to run meetings and I get to talk to people about portrait composition, talking to your model and I get to feed people with my knowledge.” (UniSoc-F-17).

In addition teaching is a form of participating in a community of practice it inherently involves sharing knowledge and experiences. It involves interaction and socialisation with other members in a meaningful way that offers enjoyment to the above participant.

It can also be said that teaching is a contribution to the community and an indication of competence. Thus through teaching, a member could be recognised as expert and fit for membership and moreover get enjoyment from it. For the above reasons teaching could be seen as a process of learning that aids in becoming a member.

7.4.5 Learning occurring from equipment

Buying or owning equipment promotes learning. The data suggested that firstly, buying equipment usually involves research and retrieving information related to the desired equipment. Secondly equipment’s technical capabilities and proper use constitute a guiding reference of what is needed to be learned and mastered. Thirdly, photographers are often driven by their equipment and view it as a

challenge until mastered and then proceed to another one or simultaneously master multiple.

“Buying the SLR I started learning more about photography and techniques and stuff and getting more interested in. Also being in a foreign country I found a lot of stuff to photograph and play around and see what works and what doesn’t. I would say that it was because of buying the SLR that my interest in photography took off because before that I was just snapping pictures of friends. When I got the SLR I started thinking more about and looking it more as a sort of art form and a way to be creative.” (Flickr-M-6).

By owning photographic equipment, such as an SLR camera, users are faced with different and advanced settings that they often do not have the knowledge on how to use them. Apart from the sense of achievement of mastering them (Cronan and Kerins, 2005), this initiates the need to learn how to use them for its usefulness in practice. Due to the varied photographic themes, different specialised equipment is available and considered suitable for different types of photography. This creates the need to photographers of buying new equipment in order to take better photos or videos matching their interests. Thus learning how to use a camera is an exploratory research of what is there to be learned and what it can be achieved. This partly explains the equipment upgrade tendency (Section 7.7.1.1).

“It developed like that until I got my first SLR camera, my first proper camera, which I paid for myself when I was about 17 years old. Then I could adjust the light and play with shadow, make dramatic pictures... it was a learning process. I was looking at artistic drawing and I was wondering how I could do that with the camera. Going to exhibitions and museums and seeing old photographs... that link with history and photography, fascinated me, and the passion developed. That’s where it started for me.” (Faceb-M-15).

Equipment is a tangible reference point of information; it creates the need to seek and learn. Before mastering it, its usage continuously and naturally promotes

learning. The quotes below indicated that some of the common learning techniques that photographers use to learn are by trial and error, through formal sources like books and tutorials, informal sources like interacting with other members in a photographic group, and through online content like videos and websites. Combined with the tendency to try new photographic themes it creates an interrelated process between acquiring new equipment and learning how to properly use it.

“Every camera and phone that I ever had I just played with them. Watched a few Youtube tutorials but most of it was just but having a go, experimenting.” (Faceb-M-10).

“I usually use Google and Youtube to find out what I want. I also paid and did some online tutorials which were an introduction to photography and it was about beginners. I found it a bit basic but I learned a lot from that.” (CitySoc-M-8).

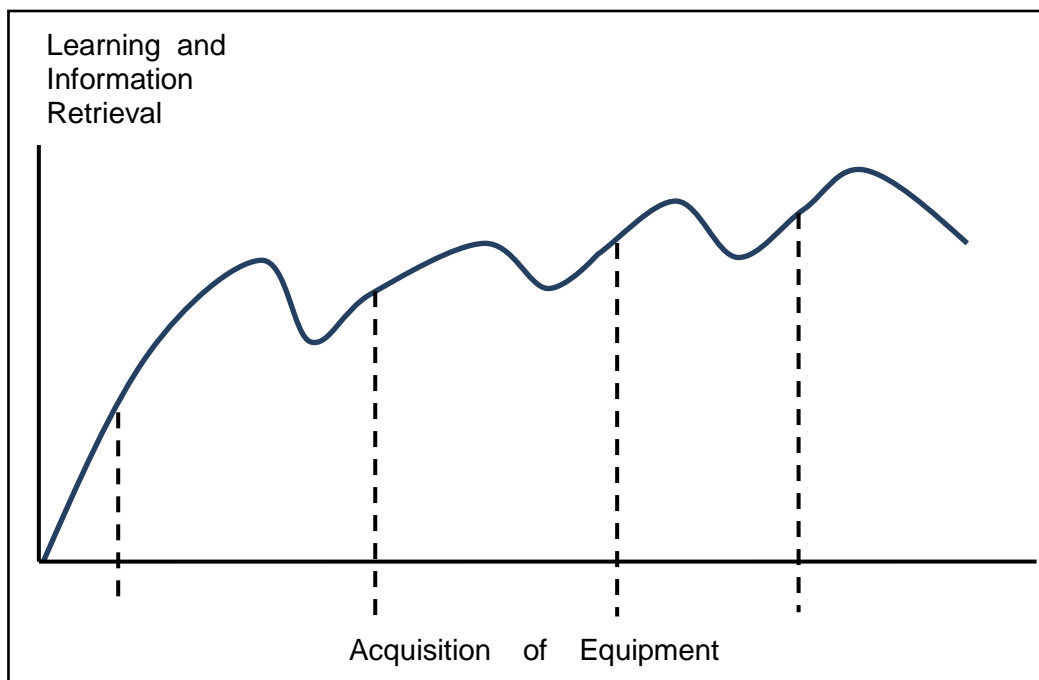


Figure 7.1: Learning and Information Seeking: An interrelated process.

“I might get another camera in the next year or two but I don’t know which one I am going to get yet because they keep upgrading them and I keep an eye on them and see what’s coming out.” (Faceb-M-10).

Figure 7.1 above shows the relation between learning and information retrieval, and the acquisition of new equipment. A common strategy of photographers’ is to research before buying new equipment. The research’s purpose is to discover what kind of new products are available in order to make a decision based on different criteria such as features, price and reviews. The participant above was continuously gathering information and keeping informed about equipment. It seems that the gathered information affects the interviewee judgement when is a good time to upgrade. If new equipment offered something valuable to the interviewee that justified buying he would probably upgrade. Due to the evolving nature of photographic equipment, its capabilities are continuously widened and new features are introduced making research before acquiring meaningful.

“When we were trying to get the children running we were getting blurred pictures so we needed to get a proper camera. So last spring we decided to do a little research to get some proper equipment.” (Faceb-M-10).

Moreover photographers tend to pick up new themes or specialise in their current interest even further and this creates a need to upgrade equipment. In Figure 7.1 this is represented by an incline curve right before the acquisition of equipment which means increased learning and information retrieval.

“When I bought the landscape lens it was the first time... I didn’t really have a landscape lens so when I took my first few photos I was amazed of how much of the picture it can capture in one single shot. It’s the fact that each lens has a very specific function which is something I did not previously have so I know now that I have a lens for this category, a lens for that category, a lens for such and such category. That is something that is very motivating to upgrade and a reason for excitement” (UniSoc-M-3).

After an equipment acquisition there is a similar pattern of increased learning and information retrieval because of the different types of learning relating to the usage of equipment and mastering of techniques of a specific theme. Equipment is inter-related with learning and is often required when picking up new photographic themes. In the sense that learning and mastering new equipment is a form of competence within the community and its practice, then it also shapes the identity. Thus the whole process of acquiring equipment indicates a progress on photographers' identity path; their identities are becoming more defined as they master equipment and explore their interests.

7.5 Shaping the Trajectory of Identity through Learning

7.5.1 Learning in Photographic Groups: A Collective Engagement

One of the strongest motives that drive newcomers to join photographic groups is learning; to gain skills and knowledge on their subject of interest. Quite commonly this also constitutes a common ambition among other members, hence forming a sense of belonging with the alignment of their common goals. It is a learning community.

“Obviously the best thing is that you can just make friends who can share your interests and by working together and figuring out how to take good photos it is kind of making a team to do it. That’s a fun bit of the society.” (UniSoc-Flickr-F-4).

“We had a meeting at night usually and we went outside to take a photo of night traffic, it was shutter speed and I couldn’t figure it out at first and then me and my friend are trying to do it together with my camera. Eventually we kind of figure it out by trying out lots of different settings together and asking the members they obviously know how to do it.” (UniSoc-Flickr-F-4).

Almost all of the interviewees recognised that they shared similar needs and interests, in this case to learn, with other members and this common purpose provoked communal participation. By learning collectively the above interviewees created a shared history of learning with other members. Members evolve collectively since knowledge is shared among members. Learning is an engagement that connects people with the practice. The process of learning in photographic groups involves group participation and members evolve collectively since knowledge is shared among members.

7.5.2 Shaping the Trajectory of Identity through Learning Episodes

The data suggested that there are events occurring within or outside the boundaries of a community where a newcomer or a member gains knowledge. In Section 7.4 it was found that members gain knowledge through group meetings, presentations, experimentation, online tutorials, websites and videos, and when they acquire new equipment. These are examples of learning episodes, events where members gain knowledge through the different types of learning (Section 7.4).

“My ambitions to photography are to take more photos and take better photos all the time. I don’t want to be a professional photographer by any chance but I would like to be able to keep getting better photos. I definitely noticed it over the last few years with some of the things that I’ve been doing. I want to be at the stage when somebody asks me to take almost any kind of photo I want to be able to say “yes ok, I can do that”. If somebody want a portrait, “ok let’s do this and this and this” and we take a nice portrait photo. Or if it is a landscape now what to do or what would make a good photo of that” (UniSoc-Flickr-M-2).

In the above quote the ambition to learn expressed by the participant created an imagined future identity. The interviewee is referring to the future by imagining. He has an ambition to learn and imagines a future stage of his identity. This future

stage is imagined by him as a state of having certain skills and knowledge. Since skills and knowledge are part of the identity and future identities, shaping the trajectory of identity involves learning.

The ambition to learn is essentially an imagined future identity. Fundamentally learning in this context is a crucial part of the joining process since it is an imagined transition between the current identity and the initial set of knowledge to the desired stage. The imagined stage is not necessarily the final stage a member would ever reach but rather a fluid stage or an imagined future identity that is continuously shaped by the emerging needs and expectations of a member. A simple example would be an individual who is going on a trip to the mountains and wants to learn how to take good landscape photos. Their intent is to learn about landscape photography and to gain knowledge about it at the same time constitutes a possible future identity. That possible future identity state (e.g. Beginner landscape photographer) could potentially be reached when they gain the necessary knowledge. It may take multiple learning episodes to gain the knowledge that the individual desires. What is important though is that knowledge is part of the identity hence learning episodes shape the identity.

“I haven’t got any pictures that are, technically, worthy. Even though I said that iphones can take really good pictures, I wouldn’t consider the ones I have taken with my compact camera before to be worthy because I can see some of the deficiencies. I still have a lot to learn in the postproduction aspect. There will be an open in time which gives me inspiration, it is a little bit like the look or the right time but also is developing those skills. For example if I find a pond with wild life in it, I will come home to get my equipment to do macro photography, if we go on holiday and I see some architecture then I would want to take that. So these moments of inspiration will always be there and with experience I will narrow down my interests. The more you know the more you learn.”
(CitySoc-MF-8).

This interviewee, a newcomer to a photographic group, specifically identifies some of his skills and knowledge gaps, set some learning ambitions and has a future image of himself in mind. By doing this, unavoidably parallels learning with practice which is the ultimate purpose of learning. He creates meaning with how he perceives practice by identifying the required skills and knowledge. Learning is interconnected with practice. It is important to mention that the fluidity of the imagined future identity is evident in this example since his expressed opinion is that learning itself will trigger more learning in the future. Photography, as a practice in offline and online groups, is a never ending, tacit or conscious learning process and only ends at the decline stage where members lose interest. In essence the dynamic identity shares similar characteristics.

Wenger (1998) describes identity as the “ability and inability to shape the meaning that defines our communities and our forms of belonging” (p.145) and meaning as the process where people develop knowledge through interaction with others. In that sense learning in photographic groups is an engagement that shapes the identity. Therefore learning episodes shape the identity.

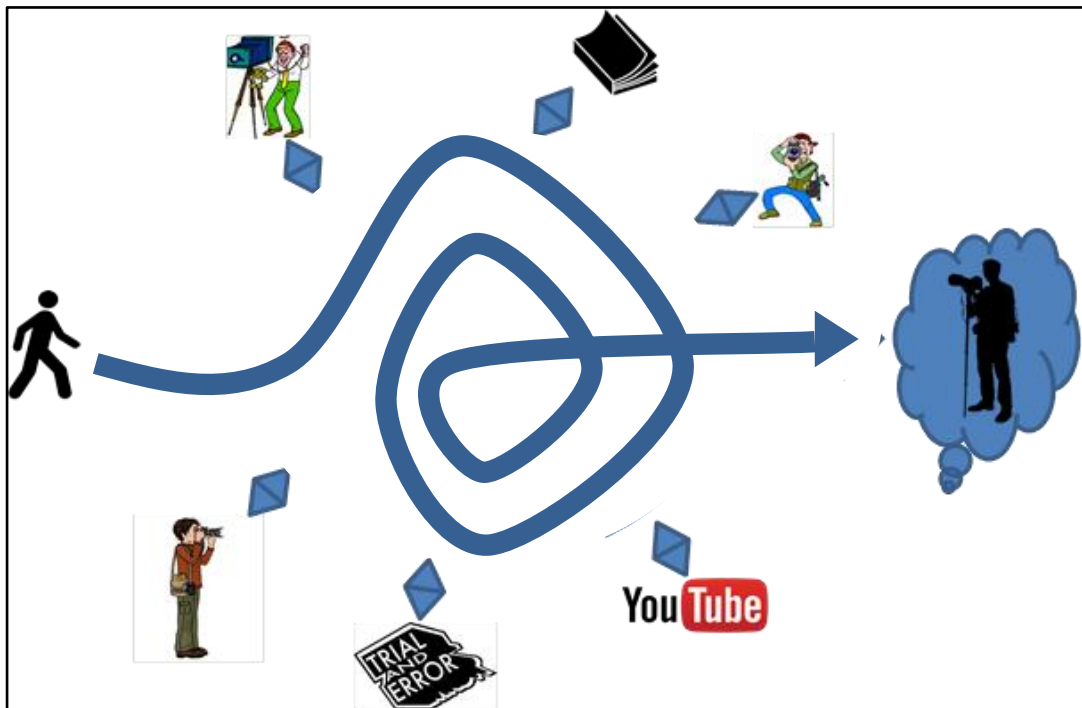


Figure 7.2: Newcomers' shaping of identity through learning episodes

Figure 7.2 represents a newcomer shaping their identity over multiple episodes (e.g. group meetings) by gaining skills and knowledge through multiple forms of learning. In each episode the knowledge that is acquired further defines the identity, which is depicted by the inward movement in Figure 7.2. The movement of shaping the identity is inward in the sense that the individual, through learning episodes, is getting closer to the imagined future identity. The newcomers' intention or ambition to learn, something that is found to be common in the examined photographic groups, constitutes an imagined future identity in the sense that the intention to learn is driven by the need to gain knowledge and to an extent the intent to shape their identity in a way that they imagined.

Findings in Section 7.7.1 indicated that participants recognised that they shared the need and ambition to learn and this common purpose provoked communal participation. In that sense, by learning, newcomers contribute to the group as well. Members' identity is relational to the world or the community they participate thus members and their identities are part of the group domain. An individual developing his identity is also affecting the group. The data indicated that in photographic groups typically old or experienced members can also learn from newcomers or amateurs. They can discover new paths of identities to pursue.

“... I can learn stuff from new members as well, who knows? That's really important; we should never think that we know everything because even if he is a new member he may have some amazing ideas” (UniSoc-M-3).

An old, experienced member with a far developed identity might discover new identity trajectories by interacting with a newcomer. Apart from the projected identity of a member (how one is seen by other members), photographic ideas of newcomers could trigger learning episodes. The above quote is an example suggesting that old members learn from newcomers or inexperienced members.

7.6 Types of Photographic Communities. Hybrid Communities and Egocentric Online Social Networks

The data gathered for this research indicated that photography is the shared interest of a wide array of types of communities. Besides the types of virtual communities that are addressed in the literature review (Section 2.4) it is interesting to see what kind of communities the studied Yorkshire photographic groups are and what are the different forms of learning experienced by newcomers.

7.6.1 Conventional Communities

The Yorkshire City group is an offline community in the sense that the main activity and vast majority of the interaction between members takes place offline and more specifically during the weekly meetings.

“The winter season was just starting and she invited me to the first meeting, anybody can go as a visitor but you have to pay which is fair enough because they have program with meetings. They meet every Tuesday night and it is not just a get together with club members; they have visiting photographers, real top ranking photographers who give lectures and share their work, and these people have to be paid so the subscription is fair high, is about £20 per year but it’s worth it” (CitySoc-M-14).

“Basically they listen to you for two hours waffling along about whatever you have chosen for your evening, going through a theme or technique. I tried to incorporate something about me, how my photography started, photographs that I have taken currently and how I processed them. This keeps the evening going along instead of just showing pictures. I also allowed them to ask questions, like “How did you do that HDR effect”? and then I showed them. Not everybody is a computer genius and I am

certainly not, I use my computer like my darkroom and that's how I progress with Photoshop" (CitySoc-M-13).

The above quotes encapsulate the main activity of the group and the nature of members' participation during the group meetings. Besides the presentations which constitute as entertainment to the viewers, members learning by directly making enquiries to the presenters in a similar fashion to how students ask questions to a teacher during class. The data suggested that members that did presentations had some sort of expertise or at least had a basic set of knowledge and skills. Through the first quote above it can be clearly determined that there is the expectation that the presenter's work is worthy to be seen since it comes from people who are considered experts and are paid to do a presentation. This also partly justifies membership fee or in broader terms it gives newcomers an incentive to overcome the initial entry barriers one of which is the membership fee.

It may not always be the case that presenters are experts but in most cases they are considered to be and this is the common expectation of members. The fact that they are invited to present their work or give a talk in a way is defining and indicating other members what expertise is. Apart from visiting photographers, members of the Yorkshire City group also do presentations and this is a way of firstly, contributing to the group and secondly being recognised by other members. Being recognised not only in the sense of physical existence but also skill and knowledge wise acknowledged; to be accepted and considered fit for the community. Thus through learning a newcomer can extend their participation to more advanced tasks, like doing presentations to other members and show some kind of expertise similar to the above example.

"It is the social side, you always learn lots, we have outside speakers, our own members give talks. Also it encourages you to go to external exhibitions and look at other clubs' photographs... because that's another way of seeing what is in fashion, they inspire you to see new methods and I go out and have a go at them. So as a member of the group you have got companionship, if you want to know something there

is always somebody who knows the answer. So the social sides are a big factor. And the learning side, even though you don't think you are learning, you are learning all the time [...] definitely asking questions and people are always happy to share their knowledge so if you don't know something you ask and you keep on asking until you find somebody who knows the answer. You gain a lot of knowledge from the society" (CitySoc-F-9).

Undeniably newcomers and old members also learn by interacting and socialising directly with other members. This is a characteristic found in all the photographic groups studied in this research and it essentially means that through learning not only one gains skills and knowledge to participate in more advanced tasks as mentioned above, but also is a way of socialising and meeting other people. By socialising and talking on the subject of photography members come in contact with the identities of other members. They are presented and introduced to different identities that potentially they might decide to pursue.

"It became obvious that I like natural history and I photographed fungi and it was quite a talking point because people didn't photograph fungi. When we had competitions my pictures were usually fungi. When people when out to take photos, sometimes they would come and say to me that they thought about me on some day because they saw some fungi" (CitySoc-F-9).

A member's photographic interests are part of their identity, something that they usually like to discuss with other people thus they are seen by other members as unique photographic identities and not only as individuals belonging to a group. Their interests are part of their projected identity. Merely by socialising, one can perceive a member's identity and identify or dis-identify with them accordingly which in turn will shape the identity trajectory. By interacting with each other, they can view the different paths they can follow. This is a form of learning, part of the discovering process of the Imagined Future Identity which in extend will indicate what is needed to be learnt in the future.

7.6.2 Hybrid communities

Even though the South Photographic Society Meeting has a forum, an online aspect of the offline group the researcher does not consider it as a hybrid group. One reason is that the main, central activities of the group are happening solely offline.

“The society has a website and has a forum although my impression is that not many people post comments, it seem to be down to about half of the regular people so I think this is underused. So people will presumably collect information but not necessarily post comments. Once a month there is also a competition on the forum on a specific topic, it might be humour or texture, and if you look at the number of people that viewed the picture is actually quite significant, 30-40 people who view the images so there is some interaction there between people but necessarily communicate on a one to one basis. The age of the people in the society I would say is weighted towards people I would say, over 55 and then it tails down to younger people. So the age of the people are not the kind that they would use Facebook or twitter, we talk to people.” (CitySoc-M-8).

“I joined it when I first started to keep track of what is going on. It is not a very active forum at the moment but it is interesting, people put photographs on and other people would make comments about them. Even though I don't make comments I am actually commenting in my head if you like... it is the technical side, I didn't want to learn how to do it and answer them or comment” (CitySoc-F-9).

A crucial point to take into consideration for membership participation in the online forum is that there is a technical barrier for the majority of the members. Due to different factors such as the age of members or lack of internet access, not all members have the ability to participate. Moreover the two participants above and the majority of the members are alienated from this form of

interaction and even if they visit the forum and find the subject interesting, they choose rather to merely lurk with no future intention of changing their online membership.

It could be argued that as a sign of dedication and membership perseverance they could learn how to use it and acquire internet access but considering the circumstances, the sustaining or sacrifices required would be greater than the resulted satisfaction or benefits thus not “cost efficient”. The data suggested that the online forum is used by very few members of the South Photographic Society Meeting and participating in online groups is a setting felt alienate to its majority of members. Thus the online forum of the group is considered to be a smaller group within the main group. Small groups within a group are discussed in Section 7.8.3.1.

7.6.3 Offline-Online Hybrid

Upon first inspection, the University group shares similar structural characteristics with the City group; both have an offline and online group. In reality though, the University of Yorkshire is a hybrid group and more specifically an offline-online hybrid. The main activities of an offline-online group are taking place offline, usually during meetings, but at the same time there is an online aspect of the group that is connected and is an extension of the offline activities.

“We nearly had one hour in the meeting talking about basic things like what the professional cameras are, and then we changed to another room. There were small things on the tables and after the introduction about basic things like the darkroom and how we can rent the professional cameras; the basic things about the society. Then the organisers told us that we can take as many pictures we want and post them on Facebook to share with others. This feels relaxing for me and also I can learn something to develop my skills” (UniSoc-F-12)

The primary focus of the University of Yorkshire group is the offline counterpart because this is where the main activities (e.g. weekly meetings) and participation takes place. In addition to the offline there is an online, Facebook group that is an extension of the offline group. The online is an extension of the offline group in the sense that online participation resembles offline participation and there is a meaningful tie between them. Some offline practices are directly transferred online such as the example mentioned in the quote above where members take pictures offline and share them online. In this case the tie between the offline and online practice is obvious as it is a continuation between the two.

“Yes we share photos and usually we prefer to take some photos together, five or six people together and put them on Facebook and we tag. Sometimes I take photos with my British friend and I put them as profile pictures in my Facebook” (UniSoc-F-12).

“I think is because it’s where they get their information. So they announce their meetings there, apart from being on the email as well, so you are on an emailing list, but everything comes up, like jobs are there and like “do you want to go out and take pictures in the snow?”, people post their photos up there. And I as president I’ve made a big thing after meetings to put your photos on the Facebook page for the people to see. It is not just publicity to show what our meetings are, but it is making them confident with their photos. I was never confident enough at the beginning to show people my pictures and say “I think this is a good one” but if people put them on the page people will say “Oh wow it’s amazing or shift it a bit to the left” so it helps people learn as well” (UniSoc-F-1).

On the other hand in some online practices there is no clear continuity from offline practices but still there is an imagined and meaningful connection between the two. In the above quote the strong tie between offline and online is clear. Members are

using the Facebook group in such a way that online participation makes sense to them and takes advantage of the virtual properties of the group.

For example most of the newcomers interviewed, before attending the first meeting, browse through past photos and discussions to get a feel of the offline community and shape some expectations. In addition, newcomers are encouraged to share their photographs online in order to become confident which will have an impact on becoming a member in the offline group since confidence and ability to present is part of membership competency. Learning online in a primarily offline group is also enhancing membership competency. Learning from other members is done in a similar fashion to the offline counterpart and is based on socialisation. Nonetheless online members have the advantage of socialising with members who would otherwise be unreachable in the offline context.

Apart from physical constraints, online groups change the requirements of social skills (Section 7.7.2.1) in the context of face to face communication. Thus members lacking in face to face social skills might find another way to overcome the initial social discomfort.

“In real life no one cares about you. You think you are a member but actually they do not know about you it is just general faces. In online you can feel you are a member if I comment I think I am a member. If I no longer comment or pay attention to the information then it is like a group I followed; I followed many societies on Facebook that I may not feel as a member. In real groups the case is the same but one difference is that you have more chance to talk with people face to face. Even if you have missed one or two meetings none care so I think the ties are not strong among members; but I think it is the case for me because I am a beginner and also an international student” (UniSoc-F-12).

This interviewee as she was an international student had some difficulties in socially adjusting to the offline group whereas online where the language barriers, personal characteristics and origin matter in a much lesser extent she felt like a member. The data discussed in Section 7.3.3 suggested that the social aspects

are less important in online groups and as such can enable members to participate that otherwise would be hindered. The above participant felt like an outsider in the offline group whereas in online groups she felt like a member when she participated. Therefore Offline-Hybrid groups offer the opportunity to members that lack some social skills or skills and knowledge to participate in the online aspect and when they have gained enough skills and confidence to proceed and participate in the offline group as well.

“I tried to post more on the Facebook group and also try commenting on other people’s photos so that you let them know that you are in the group. If you never post or never talk to other members online they will never know that you are there. If you are not talking or interacting it is not feasible to become a member. They mainly posted pictures in the group and when they are doing an event, like the Christmas dinner, they create an event on the Facebook group and they will ask people to join the event. I will keep posting pictures and keep commenting on other people even after I graduate” (UniSoc-M-3).

It has already been mentioned that in online groups the social aspects are less important than offline. This does not necessarily mean that the requirements of joining online groups are reduced but are rather shifted towards different aspects that are more valuable in joining online. Socialising and becoming a member online involves a different set of skills compared to offline. On the social side members still need to communicate and interact with other members.

On the one hand, interacting online is usually easier to initiate since many of the potentially limiting physical aspects and face to face intimidations are absent (e.g. physical appearance). On the other hand, this flatness of communication results in more emphasis on the projected identity of a member including his interests, skills and knowledge; components that are more transferable online.

“Occasionally like somebody would favour one of my photos which I liked a little bit but very little I guess but nothing else stands out because there is no organised interaction. It’s unlikely that other people regularly

look at my photos or talk to me as a specific person. For example “this is a nice photo, I favour it and then move on to the next one”. It feels a lot less like the group of Universities where people are always chatting about. Everything is much more of a case of a group of photos that people have taken and look through and maybe if you like a photo say so” (UniSoc-Flickr-M-2).

For example since sharing pictures and commenting online is important in becoming a member, a newcomer with good pictures will probably get more attention from the old members and he will also be in a better position to provide feedback to other members. Newcomers sharing good pictures would be easier to be considered as fit for the group compared to newcomers with average pictures. In that case, unless newcomers find another way of making their contribution to the group, their online relationships will be weak.

7.6.4 Egocentric Networks

The Flickr Yorkshire Group consists of two communities. The first part is the “Discussions section” which is a hybrid Online-Offline because members participate online but occasionally they meet in offline meetings and attend events. The second part, the pool, is an Egocentric network in the sense that users create their own network by selecting which members they want to digitally connect with. Thus the user is the sole defining factor of the group domain and interest.

“I only use flickr to look at other people photographs or to post my own really. For example in Facebook or in real life it is much more about talking or getting to know people. [...] If you are on Facebook you join the group and then you can post photos or post text to talk to people whereas flickr groups, at least how I use it, they add photos and you can look through all the group’s photos and do you like this one? Which is nice in a way because you see a lots of very, very nice photos which is what I use it most often. In terms of interacting with other people it is nowhere as near as sociable or easy as Facebook because you have to

comment specifically on somebody else's photo. Because there are so many photos on some of these groups there aren't that many people who comment regularly to form a kind of community" (UniSoc-Flickr-M-2).

Users have their own, unique group domain and since they are the only ones defining it there is no shared interest. Domain identification is assumed and apart from any technical barriers, there is no domain or social adjustment. Members decide who to include in their network by creating a one-way link (simply following them) they are also defining the domain of the group they created. The users that the creator of the network follows can affect the domain and in an indirect way, change it. Nevertheless the creator is in control of how the domain is shaped without having to negotiate with the other users of its network. This along with the minimal interaction with other members essentially bypasses the joining process.

Since members do not necessarily share an interest or similar characteristics they do not have a sense of unity and furthermore members do not have the same sense of belonging as with the other types of communities. Egocentric networks do not have a shared practice nor any group history or repertoire. In addition there is no negotiation of meaning or any alignment with the group domain.

From the above participant's quote it can be said that Facebook groups sustain a more intimate form of interaction between members. In the Flickr pool which resembles an egocentric network, members do not interact each other within the space of the group. The pool in South Yorkshire City Flickr Group is a place where users' photos are tagged if they fit into the theme. The photos in the pool are simply tagged and are not exclusive to the pool; any form of interaction relating to the photos (such as commenting) can be from users that do not belong to South Yorkshire City Flickr Group. Therefore the pool does not have any boundaries apart from the theme that the tagged photos fall within. In contrast, South Yorkshire City - Old and New Facebook Group has an existing domain that members align to or change. It has boundaries in terms of membership and where interaction comes from. Photos added to the group are exclusive to the group (Though copies of a

photo can be posted elsewhere) and interaction is apparent that it comes from other group members.

7.7 Capital Valuable to Joining

Members' competency is an active negotiation within a community. It is important to examine what kind of capital is important and how it is converted into joining competency, especially when photography, a very diverse practice, constitutes the domain or area of interest of a community. In general, capital can be found in financial, social and cultural forms.

Leisure pursuit communities and to an extent photographic communities' social character and digital nature often conceal capital to the observer thus it is important to examine capital not only from the eye of the researcher but also from the tacit understanding of community members.

7.7.1 Financial Capital

7.7.1.1 Equipment

A more tangible form of competency that was examined was equipment.

“I think it is better if you have a specialised camera because the society has sessions which are based on professional cameras, not just iphones so I think it is definitely better if you have a professional one. And also it is more complex, there is more to explore, you have something to develop, actually gain skills, not just press a button” (UniSoc-Flickr-F-4).

In the above case it is clearly expressed that having specialised equipment helps members in a number of ways. Indeed, when certain activities of a community are tailored towards specialised equipment the individual will feel excluded, on the margin if they do not have it. They could feel alienated not only from members that own specialised equipment but from the community as well. Not being able to meaningfully and fundamentally participate in an essential activity of the community is a form of exclusion and indication of membership unfitness. Thus

even if formal requirements of a group state that equipment is not a prerequisite, participation barriers might exist within the nature of the group's activities. In this particular case, not owning a specialised camera is a barrier to meaningfully participate in the specific meeting session.

The dynamic of owing specialised equipment expands on a very important aspect, the imagined future identity. In general, higher end compared to entry level equipment and mobile phone cameras offer much more capabilities and complex functions. This fact alone indicates that having the potential ability to develop the skills needed to use these function expands the imagined future identity. On the other hand, having limited functionality and options, equipment wise, hinders or limits the imagined future identity. The foreseeable career ladder is further with more advanced equipment.

Often photographers cannot reach their imagined future identity due to their current equipment thus they tend to upgrade. They would like to be able to do things that their current equipment is offering them or at least not to the extent they wish. A photographer imagining what he wants to do in the future essentially is part of his own future identity; he pictures himself as who he wants to become. It can be said that equipment is a set of multiple future identities.

One member stated

“I want to be at the stage when somebody asks me to take almost any kind of photo I want to be able to say “yes ok, I can do that”. If somebody want a portrait, “ok let's do this and this and this” and we take a nice portrait photo. Or if it is a landscape now what to do or what would make a good photo of that” (UniSoc-Flickr-M-2).

In this statement he essentially drawn a career path including a list of identities he imagines of potentially pursuing. The group of current and imagined multiple identities together consist of one identity. A member's identity consists not only of what he currently is, but also what he imagines or plans of becoming. A member's

identity is unique. For example two newcomers with the same equipment will have a different identity trajectory thus making them unique.

“One of my main attempts was when I showed my photos during those two lectures on some occasions people would come to me because I already had some good lenses by then but I think it wasn’t because of me, but because they wanted to try my lenses, so wasn’t actively doing anything to become part of the group and I don’t think other were doing this either. It was only last year when I improved so much and I could speak more freely to other people, that’s when I felt that I am really a member. I didn’t have to make any special efforts I feel it was coming naturally to me that I was becoming part of the group” (UniSoc-Flickr-M-5).

“I think my lenses acted like magnets pulling people towards me and they would say hi and we would start talking... some people have become friends eventually and some have remained acquaintances” (UniSoc-Flickr-M-5).

The second participant’s quote is interesting because it shows that equipment could also be a form of social capital. Equipment itself can act as a conversation starter thus elevating the opportunities of building relationships with other members that can lead to a sense of belonging within the community.

On one hand equipment is just an excuse, an easy conversation starter for someone but on the other hand and considering the aforementioned; equipment is a set of multiple future identities. Photographers are tacitly or explicitly interested in exploring their own future identities thus they want to learn more about other people’s equipment. A member with a set of equipment might be able to show them paths they can followed that they did not know or thought about.

“I think equipment has no effect, in the society anybody who has an interest in photography is welcomed, whether they are doing

photography with a phone or with a professional camera, it doesn't matter" (UniSoc-Flickr-M-5).

7.7.1.2 Financial

Since equipment is as relevant as cultural and social capital, financial capital is obviously linked since it is needed to purchase equipment. Nonetheless it is important to analyse how financial capital is converted in joining offline and online leisure pursuit groups.

"It started in 2006 when I got a job in Australia and I wanted to share what I was doing over there with my family so I decided on doing a flickr account and post my pictures in there. I did take some picture before that when I went safari in Kenya and I was very keen on taking pictures then. I saved up money and I gave my money to my parents when they went on holiday to America and they brought me a camera. They didn't bring me what I wanted, I wanted an SLR and they got me a semi automatic camera. I took a couple of pictures but my interested died off because I didn't have money to buy the camera that I wanted and also I was using film and it was expensive to develop photos. When digital photography took off I got back again and my interest really took off when I went to Australia" (Flickr-M-6)

"When I had a camera I liked taking photographs but because it were photographing on film it was expensive getting the film developed and I was never in the dark room I could never work in a dark room. But now because you can use the digital media for photography it's so much easier and so much more satisfying so I think that's why I got into the game recently" (Faceb-Flickr-F-18).

By joining newcomers have to negotiate meaning, to understand and identify with practice; in other words shape their identity. Thus by not owning the equipment one desires and fundamentally hindering who he wants to be and stalling his progression to the identity trajectory could lead to a loss of interest as with the case

of (Flickr-M-6). It is clearly stated that once his equipment needs were fulfilled his interest grew. Apparently financial capital is linked with purchasing equipment thus financial capital is indirectly related to the evolution or shape of the identity.

It is significant to mention though that in comparison with film photography, Digital photography and especially camera phones reduced the financial requirements of practising photography and that is one of the main reasons behind the widespread use and practice of photography during recent years.

“When I started with a camera phone, then I got to a digicam and then to the SLR that I have now. When I got my DSLR it came with a basic lens and two months later I bought an extra lens which was a zoom lens and I was very happy with that lens for a year and then my salary got better and I decided to buy a nice all-purpose lens. Then I could immediately see that the lenses that I had bought initially were general lenses and the lenses I was looking at were professional grade and much more expensive but then I finally bought that lens and as I took pictures I could see the difference. Then I was at a stage at my life where I could let aside some money and upgrade my gear... maybe at a later time I would have family and other commitments but now I don't so I should just do this. So the main motive behind upgrading is to be able in the end to take better pictures. I went to Venice two weeks ago at a festival and this was the first time that I would be taking photos of faces, usually I take photos of buildings, so I bought a lens which was specially designed for portrait work. So I have some things in mind and in the future when the opportunity allows me try to upgrade to that sort of lens” (UniSoc-Flickr-M-5).

Financial capital enables a photographers' equipment upgrade tendency and is linked to the progress in their identity trajectory that would otherwise run the risk of becoming stale. It may seem simple but funds enable the continuous pursuit of a hobby that allows an active participation and development of one's identity.

7.7.2 Social Capital

7.7.2.1 Personal characteristics

Social skills are a vital part of becoming a member in a group. Being able to build relationships with other members is a step towards building a sense of belonging.

“You have to be talkative and you have to be interactive, if you are shy then it would take you a very long time to integrate into the group unless you find other person who are as shy as you and they are automatically attracted to and you become friends but it doesn’t happen very easily you have to be interactive” (UniSoc-Flickr-M-5).

“It depends on the person I suppose like you said, it depends if you are outgoing or shy. I suppose if you are quite shy and quiet it could be quite overwhelming having lots of people, doing something they are interested and trying to get you to do it too. But then, hopefully it is not overwhelming for them or intimidating, they just feel they can do what they want and when they want” (UniSoc-Faceb-F-1).

“Being friendly and a nice person, accepting of other people, have a chat and not take things too seriously is the key to fit in. I have not being much active in the last year, I don’t post a lot of pictures mainly because I am taking pictures for other fields... over the years I have done so much photography based on Yorkshire city that I don’t do so much now” (Flickr-M-6).

“Especially if you are a member of a lot of groups and none of your friends are members. It is like walking into a room of people. It can be a bit intimidating” (Faceb-M-10).

Almost every interviewee expressed the opinion that personal characteristics such as having a sociable and talkative personality and being easily approachable will favour joining a group. Personal characteristics are more important during the early

stages of joining where a newcomer has to establish new relationships with the other members in order to be socially accepted within a group.

Newcomers during the first meetings or first encounters with the group have a sense of uncertainty for numerous reasons. On one hand they do not know if the other members will accept them as part of the group and on the other hand they are unsure if the group is suitable for them.

In offline groups, entering a room full of people can be intimidating and even if they identify with the domain of the community they run the risk of withdrawing before building the basic social relationships needed to participate in meaningful group activities. Therefore social skills mitigate the risk of early withdrawal before orienting into the group.

“My friend said “come along and see what we are like”. It was good that I knew somebody even though I didn’t know here very well, I just met her but at least I could go with somebody. Also the fact that she was a woman, and that it was a club without many women, it helped that I went with a woman” (CitySoc-F-9).

A form of social capital is the people that one knows. As with the last quote, being friends with existing members beforehand is a way of establishing relationships within a group before joining. Moreover they joined a photographic society in the early nineties, where photography was a male dominant, niche hobby and it was unusual for women to join photographic groups. This specific issue actually strengthened her bond with the other female photographers she knew since she identified with her difficulties as a female photographer. In the same sense newcomers feel similar and identify with the difficulties they share.

7.7.3 Cultural Capital

7.7.3.1 Knowledge and skills

In photographic communities learning is a key aspect and as a result knowledge and skills are a major form of capital.

“You’ve got to have confidence, self-confidence because I have a feeling that people like to look at the pictures, but they haven’t got the confidence to put their own [...] education has a lot to do with it because I have been on a few photography courses and I feel more confident because of that. You also need to have social skills” (Faceb-Flickr-F-18).

“I will say something that will not sound good but I feel that I am much better than most of them, I feel that my photos are far better than the photos produced by the most people but at the same time I feel much more connected because I am so confident of my pictures and I know that they will appreciate it and to be appreciated is very encouraging” (UniSoc-Flickr-M-5).

Firstly knowledge and skills enable a member to proceed to the center of the group and participate in core activities. The first from the two interviewees quote above mentioned that people who did not have necessary knowledge often did not post their own pictures, an activity which is central especially in online groups. Secondly knowledge and skills can enhance confidence and enable newcomer to participate in important tasks and practices of the group. Confidence is also part of social capital (Section 7.7.2) but the data showed that confidence is commonly a result of competence which itself requires knowledge and skills.

“I think this is true because people in the committee have to organise things and they have a lot of meetings and in these committee meetings I can meet committee people. Also new members are more willing to talk to people in the committee instead between members [...] because I have already adapted and got used to the society and I know how the society works and what is going to happen so I will have more experience to share with the new members. For example this year I don’t know many things so I need people to talk to me but next year I will have confidence and I could talk to others instead of others coming to me” (UniSoc-M-3).

Thirdly, knowledge and skills along with experience creates opportunities of socialisation with new members since newcomers commonly have learning needs that an experienced member can provide. By teaching other members in the group one also become a vital part of the community since he ensures membership maintenance and the continuation of the complex activities that are central to the functioning of the community. In that sense teaching other members is a form of contributing to the community which not only helps in feeling like a member but also being accepted and appreciated by other members as well.

7.7.3.2 Doing Well in Competitions

Competitions were part of all photographic groups that this study examined. They are part of the culture of photographic groups and it seemed that they are about agreeing a set of rules of what makes a good photo, and trying to put them into effect. Taking part in competitions is such a strong element in the Yorkshire City group that is not only part of the main activities within the weekly meetings but also extends to activities during members' personal time.

“There is a pressure in the club to take part in the competitions, I am saying the wrong thing, not pressure it is encouragement, so you tend to look. For example on the Saturday that just passed, my wife and I walked down the Yorkshire canal because I know that there a lot of broken buildings and I did go specifically for that type of photography” (CitySoc-M-14).

“We don't have lectures to tell you how to use your camera but if you go to the competition nights, the judges, if they are good we will look at pictures and say “that is good but you could do something different, you should have taken it form a different angle”, that sort of thing” (CitySoc-F-9).

Taking part in competitions, participants are forced to follow some rules that usually involve photographic standards or subject/theme restrictions. Clearly, in the attempt to meet these photographic standards participants often have to learn in

order to gain the necessary photographic skills and knowledge to participate in a competition.

“I shared knowledge about cameras with people that like taking pictures. We like to discuss about taking pictures and we learn from each other” (UniSoc-M-3).

“I usually use Google and YouTube to find out what I want. I also paid and did some online tutorials which were an introduction to photography and it was about beginners but I found that a bit basic and I learned a lot from that” (CitySoc-M-8).

“My dad taught me some skills of taking pictures and I like to watch videos on YouTube on how to take a good picture” (UniSoc-M-3).

Apart from learning through socialising with other members, books, online content such as websites and videos (CitySoc-F-9) mentioned a crucial aspect of is learning from the judges.

“I also find it a challenge to actually develop that eye. When we went to the society and saw the judges, one of the phrases they were using about a picture is that it was “well seen”, in other words somebody was out with his camera and something has caught their eye and with the correct camera settings and post processing they have created an outstanding award winning image” (CitySoc-M-8).

Normally competitions have some clear rules regarding the photographic standards but most importantly they also have some hidden, implicit standards that are in the discernment of the judges. (CitySoc-M-8) refers to this as developing that “eye” and it means to develop the skill and knowledge to firstly be able to understand and predict what the judges consider good photography and secondly to be able to capture and produce such photograph.

What differentiates this form of learning is the method of gaining competency for this ability. While the rules are in many cases clear, some are hard to make explicit. Thus members also learn this metaphoric language such as “well seen”

and in addition learn what the judges like, both of these require experience. Members without this knowledge cannot participate to a full extent within a group and could potentially participate in a more casual or amateur manner than others. As a result the judges in an indirect way define membership since they are indirectly measuring photographic competency and skills and knowledge is a form of Capital (Section 7.7).

“Winning two of the rounds of the intermediate. They were both urban photograph and I like to double in black and white as well and won the second round of the intermediate class with a photograph that I was out one Sunday afternoon with my wife and we decided to photograph Yorkshire city street art... I told to my wife that I am going to win with this and she said “don’t be silly” and I just knew it was going to win and it did. It was judged by an outside judge so very professionally organised and he thought it was the best thing since sliced bread. That was the most satisfying moment. I think I went and won the third round as well with another photo” (CitySoc-M-14).

“When I won the competition and when I got into the committee. That sort of thing establishes you as a member. Once you prove or have shown your enthusiasm and your intention is for the club because no person is bigger than the club” (CitySoc-M-13).

In answering the question of “What was the most important thing that helped you become a member?” the above interviewees designated the importance of doing well in competitions to be a key moment in their transition to full members. Competitions are a way of becoming acknowledged, being accepted and considered fit for the community. Emphasis should be given to (CitySoc-M-13) who mentioned that being a distinguished photographer alone is not enough without contribution to the group. Part of the reason why doing well in external competitions is considered an achievement, is because the group’s reputation is renowned assuming the participant is entering as a group member and not an independent individual without any perceptible ties to the group. This way the

competitor contributes to the group as a whole by positively increasing the group's reputation. Acclaimed photographers might have significant skills and knowledge capital but if their achievements did not contribute in any way to the group, they would still have to contribute in some way to the group in order to be recognised and accepted by the other members.

7.7.3.3 Geographical location

The theme and culture of a group is part of the domain. The findings indicated that the connections between the theme and culture of the group and the newcomer constitute capital. The location and theme of the examined photographic groups were more or less revolving around the City of Yorkshire. Thus people that had stronger ties (e.g. local residents) with the city had a pre-existing connection with a group. This created an initial sense of belonging since the connections that they shared with the group culture created an alignment with the domain.

“I deleted it because it was too general and too obscure, not focused... it was about all England or UK wide ... It is pretty straight forward to technically join but emotionally there is a distance ... to get an interest in something I have to have a passion, an emotional tether between you and the group. If that connection is very general or very broad and you are not satisfied ... Technically everything was fine but joining there was very flat, no passion. In the Yorkshire group it is easier to have an emotional link with other members because you share similar experiences, there is an emotional link. With this one, for example a member shared a memory in Bath, but for me, it was not interesting” (Faceb-M-15).

In this example, the general geographical (national) theme of the group being the reason the participant joined, he initially weakly identified with this group but in reality the broad domain of the group did not satisfy his interests' needs. The broad theme of the group might have created some initial connections with the newcomer

but they were weak. On the contrary in the South Yorkshire City - Old and New Facebook Group the above participant had stronger connections with the group and that is why he felt that had a stronger link. He also mentioned that he did not find it interesting when another member shared an experience in another city. This is probably because the participant lacked or did not have the same the cultural connections with Bath as with Yorkshire to identify with the described experience. Thus geographical location can be considered as capital since it can align a newcomer with the domain of the group.

7.7.4 Capital Converting into Joining Competency. The Experienced Newcomer

For this study, the term “experienced newcomer” is used to describe a person that has recently attempted to join a group (newcomer) but already carries some capital that can assist his or her transition in becoming a member. In other words the experienced newcomer carries some capital (Section 7.7) that will help his or her joining process. The kind of capital that is discussed in this section refers to capital that was created outside the group that the newcomer recently joined. In Section 2.2.5.1.1 (Landscape of Practice) was mentioned that a practitioner might create connections between different practices (and different communities or practice) in a way that competence in one is relevant to the other (Wenger, 2014). In other words a practitioner might apply competence of one practice to another.

These skills and knowledge were gained from prior experiences either in similar contexts such as joining other photographic groups or skills acquainted from other aspects of life such as professional, work experience and are considered capital as discussed in the Section 7.7 above. In contrast, novice newcomers are individuals who are new to the circumstances of joining photographic groups and have a limited set of skills and capital that will help them in their transition.

“Also what I did, because I am a teacher I am used to stand in the middle because if you stand in a weird place people will not come and talk to you so in that way you encourage people to come and talk to you.

So rather than sitting down in the corner you should stand in the middle of the room, to be noticed, so when people try to get pass you, you can talk” (CitySoc-M-8).

In the above example the participant applied some of his knowledge as a teacher during his early stages of joining the group. From his work experience he learned that standing in the middle of a room among many people and in general by physically positioning himself in the centre relative to the other members, the opportunities of interacting with other members increased and as a result aided the initial social adjustment to the group (Section 7.2.1). In essence, through his job, he acquired some social skills that were useful in becoming a member of that specific photographic group.

Even though his profession as a teacher was seemingly in a different context compared to photographic groups, the experience that he gained from practicing his profession transferred to the context of joining photographic groups. Thus even though he was a newcomer to the group he joined as an experienced newcomer since he had a conscious advantage compared to a newcomer standing in a less ideal position.

“After we left school, when we were working we were both technicians and it was part of our training to learn how to do some basic things in photography. After that we were doing photography for family and holidays and that went through all the way until we retired and then we thought that we should do some proper photography. That’s when the grandchildren came in. We were using a compact camera and when we were trying to get the children running we were getting blurred pictures so we needed to get a proper camera to do some proper photography” (CitySoc-M-8).

Newcomer experience is also gained from similar contexts. The interviewee acquired some photographic skills as part of his profession thus when he joined already he already had a fundamental set of photographic skills to participate in basic tasks within the community. Interestingly life events can also trigger the

acquisition of skills and knowledge directly or indirectly relating to joining photographic groups. Apart from the profession which could also be considered as a life event, the arrival of grandchildren to his life triggered his wish to photograph them and to an extent his need to learn taking appropriate pictures without blur. The introduction of grandchildren to his life indirectly increased his photographic skills and when he joined the photographic group this knowledge was transferred as well, thus in terms of photographic competency he was not an absolute beginner as discussed in Section 7.7.

7.8 Socialisation Strategies

7.8.1 Socialising with other members

Almost all interviewees mentioned that making an active endeavour to interact with other members is one of the basic strategies that newcomers should follow. By attempting to initiate communication with other members one starts to get a sense of the community. Apart from reducing the initial uncertainty that newcomers feel during the early stages, the foundations of potentially long lasting relationships between existing community members are starting to be built. The establishment of key relationships within the community is of chief importance.

“You shouldn’t expect people to come and talk to you; you should go to talk to people as well. Because we are British people you can always talk about the weather” (CitySoc-M-8).

“You can post “Hi everyone”, “nice to see your photos from the holidays”, “it would be nice to see your photos of your trip from last weekend”. If you are doing that then it is an effort to make everyone feel welcomed. It is important to have an exchange of comments. For me my main criteria is the picture itself, if it is a fantastic picture I will comment on it, I don’t care if I had previously spoken to that person or not” (UniSoc-Flickr-M-5).

Apart from the direct value of quickly establishing a network of newly formed friends that through them, practice and participation within the group will be

enabled, initiating interaction between other members indicates an effort and willingness to participate. From the newcomer perspective, this indicates an effort not only to aid towards his/hers orientation but also a commitment to fit in. In that sense, a newcomer's effort in orienting themselves is essentially a contribution to the group since the group will have to spend fewer resources, such as time and effort, for orientation purposes. The continuous effort from the newcomer is also a commitment to the group that could potentially and eventually lead him to be accepted as a member from the other, existing members.

"I think all people want to join initially but if they give up it is because they are too nervous on the first meeting because it is hard for people to adapt to new environments. If somebody wants to join a club I usually go with him or her to make them feel less nervous so we can easily get used to the society. Also you must try to have communication with other members" (UniSoc-M-3).

"The year before that I feel that I was a member officially but I was just attending a lecture and I was one of the people in the class but you may or may not feel very immersed into the lecture. It was only last year that I felt that I am a member now. [...] I think it was the change in the committee, the president in particular is really nice and she has on many occasions told me that my photos are stunning. We are having an exhibition next week where many people in the society are showing their work including myself and she messaged me, firstly on Facebook, and said that she would really love to see my pictures because she thinks they are stunning. When people say this you feel very encouraged. This wasn't something that the previous president did; he is also like a friend but there is a difference in their personalities. She is very encouraging with everyone in the society and it makes a difference to where the society is headed" (UniSoc-Flickr-M-5).

Quite often establishing relationships with the president of a community or people in the committee will have multiple benefits. During his first period in the society,

the above participant did not feel the sense of belonging to the community whereas in his second period he established a friendship with the newly elected president and this constituted a turning point in terms of feeling like a member. It is worth noting though that becoming friends with committee members does not necessarily grant the benefits of an assisted orientation. The personal characteristics of committee members might prevent this or it could be that formally assigned leadership roles do not reflect the actual importance of a member's position within the group.

7.8.2 Systematic participation

A few participants emphasised on the importance of participating systematically.

“I turned up to meetings, I made friends with people in the committee, I think if you are involved enough if you come to everything. Apparently they had in their mind that I was going to be a committee member next year. You see it and I have done it now. There are three people who always come to meetings and I am like “You are going to be in the committee, we’ve got you!” So you just come and get involved make sure you are a regular member” (UniSoc-Faceb-F-1).

“I know what you mean. For example this guy that joined a year before me, he goes and he comes back and he goes again, I don’t think he feels like a member because he is not actually involved in anything. So I think being a part of it makes you feel like a member” (CitySoc-M-8).

The first participant pointed to the importance of systematic participation. Systematic participation requires devotion and dedication and other members can notice and recognise this commitment and granted that it is sufficient, they will judge if the newcomer is fit for the group. This recognition of commitment from other members could be an intuitive judgement of a selection process.

The interviewee stated that during her first year in the group, before entering the committee she was basically chosen to be fit for the role while she has done the

same with newcomers. Moreover in the quote from (CitySoc-M-8) it can be extracted that sporadic participation handicaps becoming a member. The term systematic is in relation to the frequency of a group's main activities. In offline groups, meetings and events tend to be the main activities whereas in online groups, due to their uninterrupted and instant nature, the term systematic is blurred and besides important events, it is in relation to the group's flow of activity.

“On that trip there were quite a few of international students who I hadn't seen or at least I can't remember seeing them at the meetings, but they came along to the residential. Whereas last year it was mostly regulars in committee members or ex committee members or people you see every single meeting and this year I think is the same, its people who you know they are going to come, they are solid members who come every week. I think you get to a point in a year where people are unwilling to go to the society meeting because they haven't been for the last half of the year, they haven't make friends and they just turn up, like not know anyone. So maybe at the beginning of this year when we have another fresher's fair people are more willing to start. So they don't tend to come at the middle of the year” (UniSoc-Faceb-F-1).

In the case of the University of Yorkshire Society where there is an annual, cyclical timeline systematic participation is vital. The timeline begins with the mass joining of newcomers thus even if it has a more fluent schedule and structure of events, sporadic participation stagnates the orientation process. It is ones of the main reasons that people who do not systematically attend meetings and events in the University of Yorkshire Society do not tend to return.

They have a problem fitting in because systematic newcomers already share different experiences and are at a different orientation stage than sporadic members. Newcomers join as a group and after some time when they reach the point where they have established their fundamental relationships, they do not show the same willingness to make new friends, especially to members that are not emitting dedication to the group.

7.8.3 Joining in small groups

A common method used by photographic groups for inducting newcomers is to induct them collectively, in small or large groups. This type of induction approach is partly used by the Yorkshire University Society mainly because of the big influx of newcomers at the start of each academic year. However newcomers and older members quite often join in small groups or form small groups within the group after joining.

“On the first meeting, we were separated into groups of people that we haven’t met before which is good as I got to know a group of people that I’ve become friends with. The meetings aren’t like “sit down and some of us talk or is always quiet”. We are always quite involved in doing things, that’s always good because it is not just coming along then listening and then going, overall is talking to people and seeing other’s people photos” (UniSoc-Flickr-M-2).

When newcomers are purposely formed into small groups it helps their social adjustment because through a kind of forced participation, they make the necessary friendships or social relationships to mitigate the sense of uncertainty that newcomers’ feel.

In order to succeed this, newcomers are intentionally put in situations where the tasks and challenges they are faced with are easy to complete and at the same time involve interaction with other members. What is achieved by this is that the varied forms of “joining capital” requirements are minimised with the intention of enabling participation to as many newcomers as possible. Thus instead of knowledge and skills, group participation is focused on social interaction where, in theory, almost everyone should be able to participate.

“Initially I was disappointed because I saw that when they start there are a lot of people coming to the group’s meetings and by the time the year is over very few people left. Also people tend to have their own groups within the society ... they say that we should mix up but there really isn’t

any mixing up going on but I am happy to go there this year because the committee seems more friendly, especially the president, she is lovely” (UniSoc-Flickr-M-5).

7.8.3.1 Forming Small Groups within a group

Unavoidably some people are forming smaller groups within the main group either because they became close friends with some members whereas they are uncomfortable with other members or they joined with pre-existing friends (Section Interpersonal Recruitment). On one hand, interacting within a small group is helpful because, as it has been already mentioned, it aids in social adjustment, especially during the early stages but on the other hand it hinders the sense of belonging in a number of ways.

“People tend to have their own group within the society. They say that we should mix up but there isn’t any mixing up going on. I am still happy to go there because the committee seems more friendly, especially the president” (UniSoc-Flickr-M-5).

Firstly, when members form small groups they tend to exclude or reject other members to their inner circle thus they are essentially are creating a smaller community within the community that deviates to a small or large extent from the main group. In the longer term if their own small group domain deviates enough from the main group’s interest, they might even create their own photographic group or even disintegrate from the main group.

The group domain is dynamic thus the main group’s domain that they (people in strong small groups) initially identified might change. This itself does not cause any issues but since their small group has its’ own unique adaptations and variations of rules, the main group’s domain might change by other members that might not be accepted or are rejected by their small group. These small or large deviations from the main group might come in conflict with the future formation of the main group’s domain.

“Because people already had established groups and I was always seeking the company of my Korean friend and I was seeking his company because I didn’t feel very welcome by the others. Some of the committee members of that time are still in the committee now, so this group of people still exists but the fact that we have the new president who is so nice it changes things so drastically” (UniSoc-Flickr-M-5).

The participant quoted above mentioned that newcomers have difficulties orienting themselves into the group. With the presence of strong smaller groups within a group, newcomers will have difficulties in forming relationships and getting accepted by the group. In addition they no longer have one group to integrate in but possibly smaller groups as well adding up to more obstacles in their joining process. The same participant also mentioned that other members did not mix up, meaning that they have created strong small groups that are not hospitable to new members. This can hurt the joining process of newcomers because if they do not have any pre-existing friends to create small groups then it is difficult to enter the small groups of other members.

Secondly, it can be speculated that the existence of strong small group’ leads to the creation of additional small groups since newcomers could be forced to interact only with newcomers or pre-existing friends. This existence of many strong small groups could lead to a less coherent community which could result in reducing the extent of the sense of belonging. An incoherent community would have a weak domain and members would identify to a lesser extent.

Thirdly it can be theorised that people in small groups might initially adjust to the group faster and have an easier transition between newcomer and old member but in the long term this could hinder their integration to the group because they would invest less in the main group since they would have more than one group to maintain membership (main and small groups). Moreover as mentioned above their membership in small groups would obstruct the formation of newer relationships within the group thus as the group domain and membership evolve, they will stay relatively static within their small group. Their membership could

become stale relative to the main group because other people will continue forming new relationships whereas the excluding properties of small groups will obstruct not only newcomers but also older members to enter their small group.

Overall the formation of small groups can aid in the joining process of newcomers in the sense that it aids in their social adjustment. On the other hand it is speculated that small groups deviate more or less from the domain of the main group and these small or large deviations from the main group might come in conflict with the future formation of the main group's domain. In addition the presence of many strong small groups could lead to a less coherent community which could result in reducing the extent of the sense of belonging. While small groups might help newcomers to initially adjust to the group faster in the long term this could hinder their integration.

Chapter 8: Final Stage Discussion

8.1 Overview of Chapter

This chapter discusses the findings of the final stage of data collection (Section 7) and the first stage findings and results (Section 4 and Section 5). Thus this chapter reflects the work done in the whole thesis and not merely the findings of the second stage of data collection. Since the first stage data collection was ethnographic, the researcher was able to reflect back on their findings. Incorporating both findings resulted in a lot of theorisation. In addition the main theoretical perspective used to explore joining is communities of practice and as such this chapter adopted Wenger's (1998) style of writing which is focused on theory development.

8.1.1 Introduction

Learning is a vital aspect of joining photographic groups since through learning newcomers gain competency to be involved in core activities, perform new tasks and perceive the meanings and understandings within a group (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Research Question No 1 How is joining linked to learning in offline and online leisure pursuit groups?

8.1.2 The shaping of identity through episodes of learning

Becoming a full participant in photographic communities involves learning in order to gain competence. In the case of narrow identification (Section 2.2.5.3) the individual can still gain knowledge and practice insights. In that sense, learning implies becoming a different person, to shape the identity which reflects a relationship between the social and the personal (Wenger, 1998). Identity is characterised by Wenger (1998) as a "constant becoming". Therefore, learning is

an evolving form of membership, a long term living relationship between a person and their place and participation in communities.

“As an aspect of Social Practice, learning involves the whole person; it implies not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities – it implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person.” (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

The identities of photographic members are shaped by what they identify or disidentify with. Since the identity refers not only to the personal but also how it is perceived by others then shaping the identity is not only relational within a group but also in the landscape. As described in Section 2.2.5.1.1 individuals create unique identities that are meaningful in the moment of service and the journey through the social landscape (or multiple communities) dynamically shapes the identity. In simpler words, individuals create unique identities that are meaningful within a community but at the same time they shape their identity in the landscape which includes all communities. Thus the notion of imagined future identities entails unique identities within groups but also the identity in the landscape as a whole.

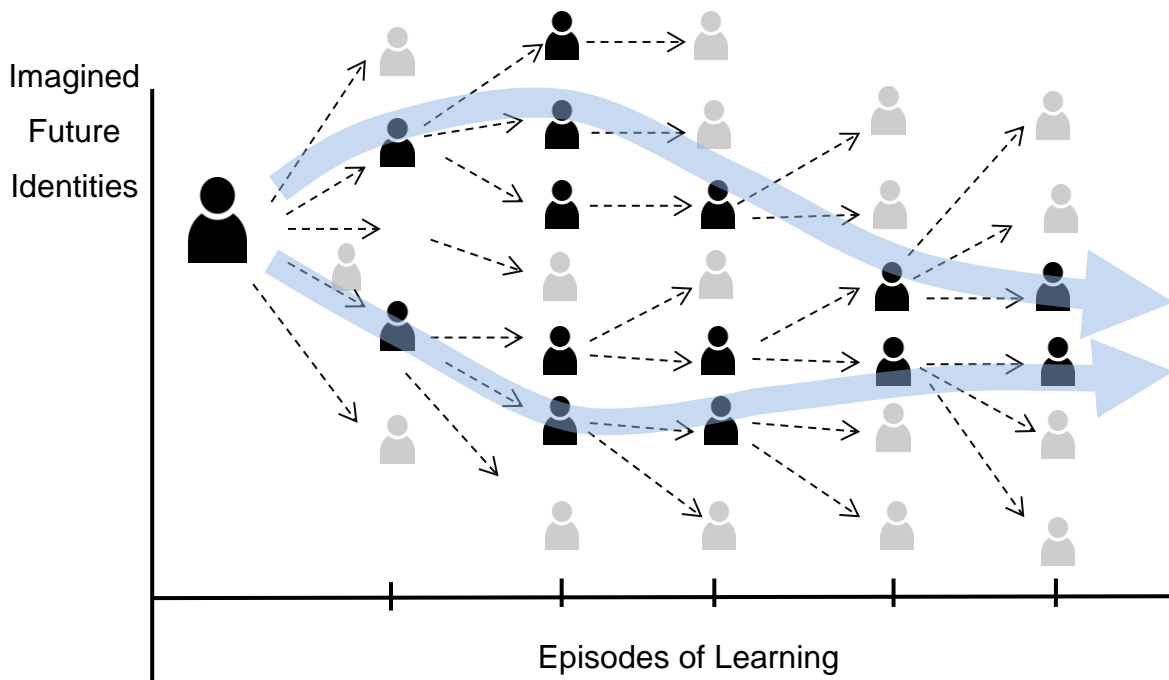


Figure 8.1: Shaping the Imagined Future Identity through episodes of Learning

Episodes of learning are moments where a member acquires knowledge by getting involved in photographic practices within or outside the boundaries of a photographic group. During each learning episode a person identifies with a set of imagined future identities that could potentially lead to additional imagined future identities. The dis-identified imagined future identities are rejected by the photographer thus in those cases there is no interest in learning and as such, the path of possible future identity stops.

At the start of a photographic member's career or when a newcomer joins a group (The initial stage, Section 8.1.4.1), their identity is more diverse since the photographer's identity is unshaped and they explore the many potential directions it can take. Over time, the ambition to learn becomes more focused depending on moments of identification and disidentification; their interests become more defined. Their ambition to learn entails more specific identities to be pursued in the future (e.g. Landscape photography). Thus the early stages of shaping the identity entail more exploration where individuals, in the process of discovering their interests, go through intense identification and disidentification. The result of this period would be a focus or a direction of their identity based on what they identified and disidentified with. Thus after the initial period, learning focuses more on pursuing identities rather than exploring (identifying/disidentifying). Nevertheless, exploring new identities occurs naturally in the context of photographic groups even after the initial period. During learning episodes, new information is acquired that initiates the process of identifying and disidentifying with imagined identities. Learning episodes enable photographers to firstly reject some previous imagined future identities and secondly to create more potential directions that their identity can take.

As shown above in Figure 8.1, the paths of imagined identities are narrowing down because the individual is identifying with some identities and is intending to pursue them. The imagined future identities are an evolved version of the previous identities the individual explored and paths are created as shown in Figure 8.1. These paths depict the evolution of the pursued identities that through each

learning episode are further defined. In other words the paths are a representation of the identity trajectory. From the individual perspective, an identity path is defined enough when the relevant skills and knowledge are learned and the individual does not feel the need to acquire new information. There is no ambition to learn and their identity path is becoming stagnant. Despite that, communities of practice by nature involve sharing of information and experiences (Wenger, 1991) and also learning is interconnected with photography as a practice and instances or opportunities of gaining knowledge are raised through getting involved in legitimate photographic practices even without having the ambition to learn. For example a photographer that considers himself to be an expert in portrait photography might acquire the latest equipment which offers new functions thus new knowledge to be gained (Section 7.7.1.1). Thus even if the individual does not have an ambition to learn, learning opportunities may arise that will progress his identity shaping/trajectory. It is worth mentioning that even if some identity paths are well defined the individual might start new identity paths resulting in a new set of imagined future identities. Overall a photographer's identity trajectory are all the identity paths together.

The ambition to learn is represented by the blue arrows as depicted in Figure 8.1 and shows that at the beginning of a photographic career, something is more diverse since photographers' identity is unshaped and they explore many potential directions it can take. As the current identity is being shaped, the ambition to learn focuses more since their interests are more defined and they tend to pursue certain identities. The learning episodes enable photographers to firstly reject some previous imagined future identities and secondly to create more potential directions that their identity can take. This is a never - ending process since, as is already mentioned above, learning is interrelated with photography thus learning episodes will occur and as a result new imagined future identities might surface; even when the set of all identity paths are well defined and there is no ambition to learn.

An example to exhibit the explorative nature of the identity formation would be a person that bought their first camera and in the first learning episode they

experimented with the device. During that episode they play with the camera's shutter speed and this action creates a desire to further learn how to use it. In the next learning episode, they learn some applications of fast and slow shutter speed and decide that they are more interested in taking sports photographs rather than landscape. Thus for the time being they have an ambition to learn about sports photography while putting aside landscape. In a future learning episode there is a possibility that landscape will resurface again and they might pursue it even if it was previously rejected but for now they are creating an identity path towards sports photography.

Not only learning but the ambition to learn shapes the identity because through imagination, individuals create images of the world and see connections through time which is a mode of belonging as discussed in Section 2.2.5.1. It can be said that in the landscape of practice, photographers begin with an unrefined identity and through learning they shape and refine their identity as depicted in Figure 8.1 above.

8.1.3 The patterns of Dis-identification during the initial phase

Above it was discussed how learning shapes the identity trajectory by how people identify with imagined future identities. In this section the patterns of identification and disidentification during the initial phase (Section 8.1.4.1) are examined. Newcomers during the early stages of joining a group are faced with moments of uncertainty and anxiety in regards to both the social aspect and the domain of the group. These ambivalent moments are part of the process of a newcomers' successful or unsuccessful orientation within a group and to an extent are shaping their identity as discussed in Section 8.1.2.

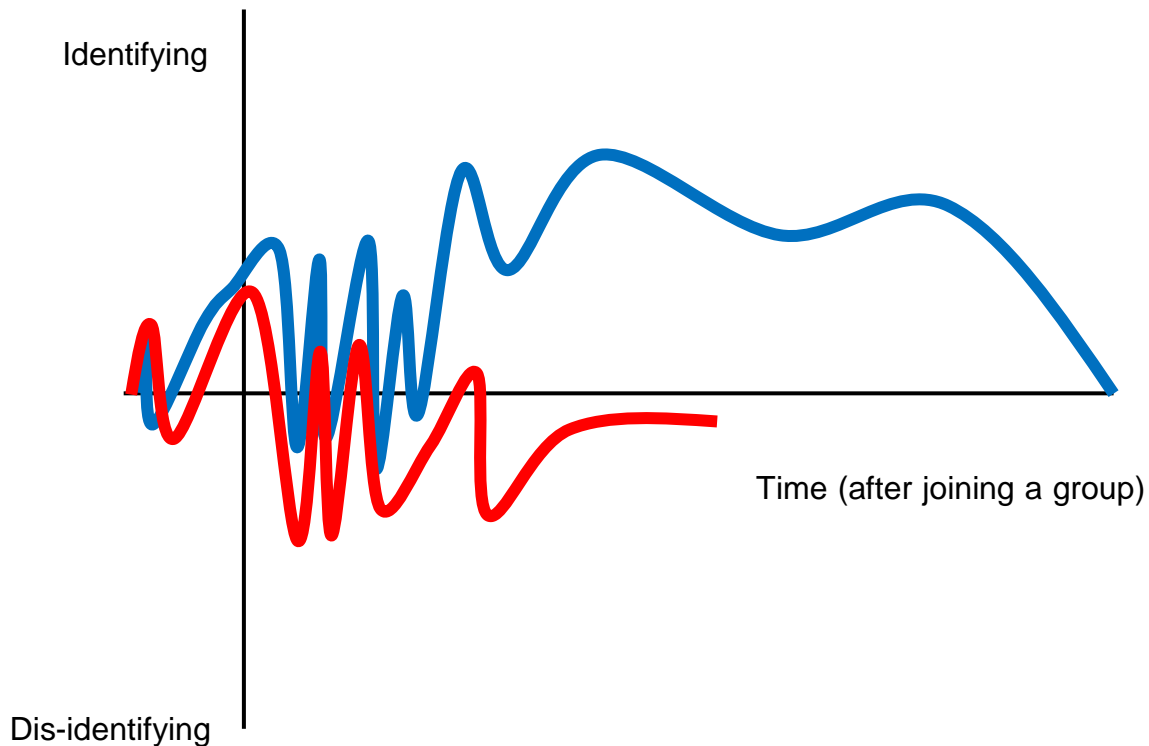


Figure 8.2: Patterns of Identification and Disidentification.

Figure 8.2 shows the patterns between two cases of identification and disidentification. The blue line represents an individual that successfully identifies with the group and the red a member that disidentifies with the group and withdraws. Initially, before joining a group, one identifies with photography as a

whole. The identification that happens prior to joining a group could be considered as joining capital because the individual can make a connection between the practice in the landscape and the practice as part of the domain of a group. Through imagination, their identification with photography as a whole and competency in other practices (including photography), will create connections with the group's practice and domain. The above process is described in Section 2.2.5.1 and in this case knowledgeability the process of "translating practices and their boundaries into a meaningful moment of service" (Wenger, 2015:23) could be considered to be joining capital. The connections that individuals form between the practice in the landscape and the practice in a group constitute competency and in that sense, connections are a form of capital.

Apart from the connections that individuals form, their identification with photography as a practice and with the domain of a group can also be considered as capital. Prior joining, identification with the practice and the domain provides newcomers a reason to persevere the disidentification moments and overcome initial obstacles. Thus newcomers always start their group membership with a weak or strong identification. This initial identification also involves identification with the group by making connections with the information they gathered before joining through imagination. Information gathered before joining aids in making connections between past (experiences) and the future and provide meaning to the actions in the community through imagination as discussed in Section 8.2 below and also in Section 2.2.5.1. In addition, photographers could learn some skills and knowledge from past experiences and before joining a group in general that are transferable and applicable within the group domain as mentioned in Section 7.7.4.

The early stages of joining a group are characterised as ambivalent and uncertain thus there is a pattern of a lot of identification and disidentification moments. This is the period where newcomers are in the process of orientation and trying to figure out if the group is appropriate for them and if they are appropriate for the group. The result of the intense identification and disidentification period is the successful or unsuccessful induction in the group that could lead to full membership (full

participant) or peripheral participation. Successful induction refers to the newcomers' perspective of no longer considering themselves as newcomers. An unsuccessful induction refers to the overall disidentification with the group which will eventually lead to their withdrawal. Figure 8.2 shows the pattern of the two described cases.

After the initial phase, members do not consider themselves newcomers and their ambivalent moments are reduced and uncertainty is not hindering their participation in the group. Nevertheless newcomers might withdraw before the initial phase is over because the disidentification moments were stronger than the identification moments. In some cases the disidentification moments are stronger than identification but the newcomer might still be involved with the group. The reason of this disidentified participation is analysed in detail below.

8.1.3.1 Unaligned Participation in Leisure Pursuit Groups.

In Figure 8.2 it can be observed that a member (red line) who had disidentified with the group as a whole still continues to be part of the group. This phase of disidentified participation is covered in Section 2.2.5.2 but in short is described by Hodges (1998) as

“lags in participation, when a person is engaged in "doing" and yet is withdrawing from an identification with the practice. In these instances, identification is in-relation to the practice, but invokes an "agonized compromise" within the community” (p.1).

This is a phase where the individual to an extent still participates in the practice of the group but disidentifies with the practice within the group. In Section 7.3.2 it was mentioned that newcomers have the opportunity to change the group and shape the practice (e.g. get a new form of photography accepted as legitimate). In that sense unaligned participation in a group could potentially lead to legitimate participation since previously disidentifying newcomers can create change in the group in such way that they will identify with the group. In this case the process of adjusting the group's domain and the group as a whole is part of the initial phase of

joining as described below in Section 8.1.4.1. Overall there are three reasons of this type of disidentified participation.

The first one is identified by Hodges (1998) and mentioned by Maclellan and Marie (2008), while the second and third are identified for the first time in this research:

- The first reason is because members have other motives to participate other than their identification with the group such as the need to belong or monetary returns that can generate a form of pseudo participation explicitly excluded by Lave and Wenger (1991), (Hodges, 1998; Maclellan and Marie, 2008).
- The second reason is the newcomer's expectancy of membership at the early stages of joining. During the initial phase even if disidentification moments are stronger, newcomers are anticipating these ambivalent moments and through perseverance they are hoping that after the initial social adjustment they will eventually identify with the group (Section 7.2.1). Furthermore and as newcomers have the opportunity to change the group in a way that they will eventually identify with.
- The third reason that can generate participation as disidentification within a community of practice is when members have a long history with the group and while they previously identified with the group, the group domain or member's identity changed so that they no longer identify with the group. Apart from the individual's history and past experiences with in a group, the group history by itself could still be a reason to participate even when one disidentified with the present domain and practice of the group. For example newcomers might join one of the oldest and most prestigious photographic groups of the country and even if they disidentify with the practice, they still participate because they want to be a member of that group.

8.1.4 The Serious leisure career as an evolving form of membership.

Since learning shapes a member's identity within the social world it should be examined if it can be aligned with a leisure career and more specifically Stebbins (2006a) model.

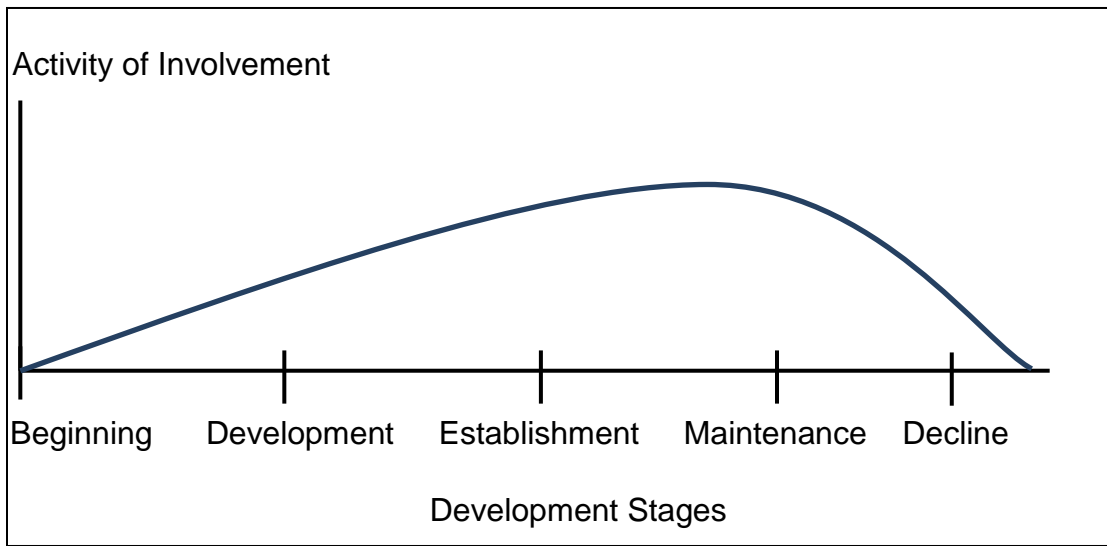


Figure 8.3: Leisure Career trajectory according to Stebbins (2006a)

Stebbins' (2006a) notion of career could be depicted as a trajectory that includes five sequential stages as shown in Figure 8.3. In this model a practitioner can only climb up the career ladder until the decline stage. On the contrary to this notion of linear stages, the findings of this research have shown that the leisure career is not linear. Through the interviewees responses it was discovered that the interest of photographers often declines and develops again after some time. In some cases this is attributed to life events such as finding a job, retirement, having grandchildren, etc.

“After we left school, when we were working we were both technicians and it was part of our training to learn how to do some basic things in photography. After that we were doing photography for family and holidays and that went through all the way until we retired and then we thought that we should do some proper photography. That's when the

grandchildren came in. We were using a compact camera and when we were trying to get the children running we were getting blurred pictures so we needed to get a proper camera to do some proper photography” (CitySoc-M-8).

While the concept of a leisure career makes sense, Stebbins’ (2006a) notion of career is rather simplistic in the case of leisure pursuits groups. Firstly because the career is not linear and secondly because a member participates in the Landscape of Practice and not in a single group. The membership career in photographic groups is not linear because sometimes stages can be skipped. Firstly, the notion of capital in photographic groups entails the transferability of knowledge and skills. Thus stages which involve acquisition of knowledge and skills can be skipped. Secondly, photographic groups have dynamic domain and practice, something that is not taken into consideration by Stebbins’ (2006a) model of career. Since photographic groups are dynamic some elemental skills and knowledge might need to be re-established. For example a group might evolved in a way that elemental skills and knowledge need to be re-established. Thus members in the maintenance stage need to go back to the development stage to re-establish core skills and knowledge. The idea of having a leisure career has still been adopted for this research but as a notion of an evolving form of membership and shaping the identity within the social world of leisure pursuit groups.

8.1.4.1 Photographic Membership Career Framework

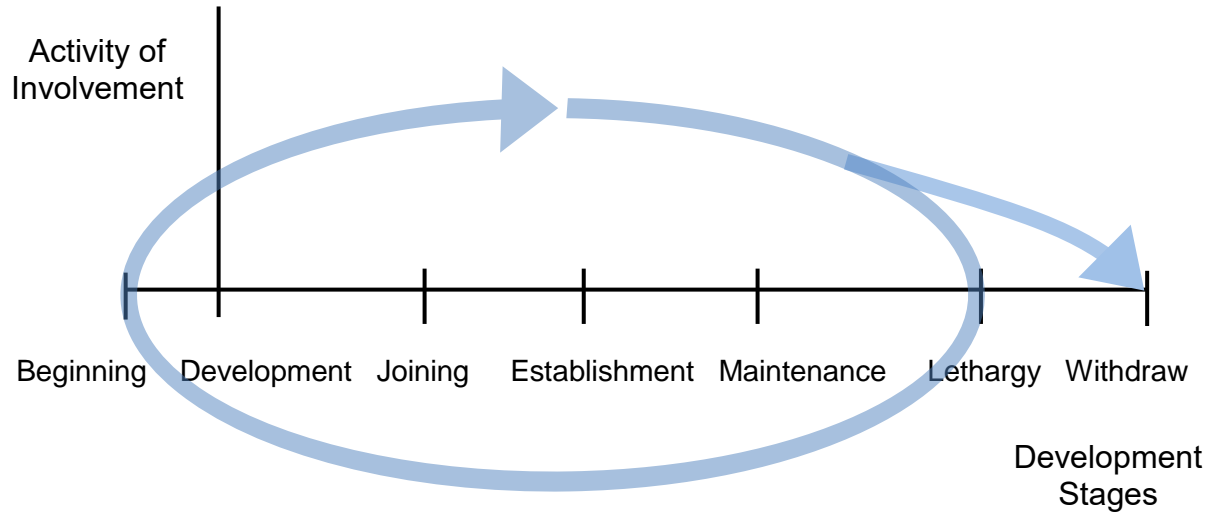


Figure 8.4: Photographic membership Career Formation

Based on all the aforementioned a framework for the formation of photographic membership career is conceptualised. The term career refers to the lifelong progress of an individual's membership status through joining multiple photographic groups. The seven stages are connected but some stages can be skipped or passed with little effort. More specifically the Joining and Establishment phase might be skipped in case an individual has enough membership competency (Section 7.3.3). For example, an expert in photography might have a quick transition or skip the Joining and Establishment phase when he joins a group consisted of pre-existing long-time friends.

The seven stages of photographic membership career formation are the following:

- **Beginning:** The beginning refers to the time prior joining a group where an individual identifies with photography as a practice. At this stage an individual might gain skills and knowledge relating to photographic groups via different forms of learning such as self-learning or through work. Furthermore the individual is creating an image of the practice in photographic groups based on the information gathered before joining, Section 8.2.1. This has parallels to Saks and Blake (2006) idea that seeking

job information influences the individual perception of fitting with the values, beliefs and norms of an organisation.

- **Development:** This stage refers to the development of an interest to join a photographic group. It involves identifying with the group through imagination by making the connections based on the gathered information.
- **Joining or Initial phase:** Joining is the stage where strong and intense identification and disidentification moments occur. It is characterised by ambiguity and uncertainty. At this stage newcomers are participating peripherally.
- **Establishment:** At this stage members no longer consider themselves newcomers. They are taking part in a mixture of peripheral and central activities in an attempt to gain all the necessary skills and knowledge to make the transition to full participants. Identification moments are stronger than disidentification. The markers or indications of transitioning to this phase are discussed in Section 8.1.5 (Key Moments of Identification: Making the Transition between newcomer and full member).
- **Maintenance:** Members are full participants and become involved in core activities of the group. Disidentification moments are much weaker and less frequent.
- **Lethargy:** Their involvement with the group is reduced either because their interest has declined or because other factors are hindering their participation such as life events, cost outweighs the benefit or group inactivity. In the same manner participation might restart due to a spark of interest caused by life events or the group resumes operating as normal.

- **Withdraw:** Withdraw refers to permanently withdrawing from photography as a practice. This is the final stage since temporarily withdrawing from photography as a practice is part of the lethargy stage.

Comparing the two models in Figure 8.3 and Figure 8.4 there are some differences. Figure 8.3 model describes the career as one lifelong activity (e.g. Photography) whereas Figure 8.4 adds the element of joining groups too. Both models entail that a career begins (first stage) with the development of an interest as the first stage but the difference is that in Figure 8.4 some stages are recurring due to joining multiple groups. Thus career is still a lifelong activity that is formed through recurring stages. This implies that Figure 8.3 is being modeled as a set of successive stages in contrast to Figure 8.4 where stages are recursive and through repetition career is being formed.

8.1.5 Key Moments of Identification: Making the Transition between newcomer and full member.

Key moments of identification refer to the times where newcomers experience the transition between a newcomer and a full member. They are milestones in the identifying and disidentifying process that shape membership. From the newcomer's perspective, key moments mark the end of the joining process and in the photographic membership career model, Figure 8.4, the end of the joining stage. The key moments identified through the findings of this research are listed below:

- Contributing
 - Volunteering in core tasks
 - Volunteering in simple tasks
 - Presenting own work
 - Sharing Photographs
 - Teaching or helping other members
- Interacting with existing members and receiving positive response
- Entering the Committee

- Feeling of belonging through shared interest
- Taking part and doing well in competitions
- Feeling familiar with other members

Contributing is one of the most common ways of becoming a member. Contributing is an indication of membership fitness to the group since the newcomer is aiding in the good functioning of the community. The newcomers exhibit membership competency in the sense that they are fit and able to participate in the core or simple tasks that are central to the functioning of the group.

- **Volunteering in core tasks**, central to the functioning of the group is a way of directly contributing to the group. It shows effort from the newcomer to take part in group activities that are potentially not as enjoyable as other activities. The investment of effort involves membership perseverance and is recognised by other members and the committee which usually offers such volunteering roles and opportunities (e.g. Preparing the prints for an exhibition). Moreover volunteering is an indication of membership fitness to the group since the newcomer is aiding in the good functioning of the community. The newcomers exhibit membership competency in the sense that they are fit and able to participate in the core tasks that are central to the functioning of the group.
- **Volunteering in simple tasks** that are not central to the functioning of the group is a way of indirectly contributing to the group. These tasks usually do not require any special skills or knowledge thus it is not an indication of membership competency in that sense. Nevertheless it is an indication of commitment to the good functioning of the group. Volunteering tasks such as preparing and offering tea during the break, or arranging the chairs in the venue are not photographic related activities but newcomers often take part because they might not be able to contribute to the group in legitimated

practices due to the lack of skills and knowledge. Thus newcomers may feel that they are members by simply participating in simple tasks.

- **Presenting own work** is a form of contribution and when presenting is a core task in a group the aforementioned in “Volunteering in core tasks” apply. Furthermore presenting their own work implies confidence in the form of considering their work valuable to the group and in the form of feeling comfortable in having an audience. The former form of confidence is an indication of membership competency and fitness to the group in the same manner as contribution and the latter is an indication of skills that might not necessarily be related to the core activities or the domain of the group. From the individual perspective this can be a form of achievement and even if it is not directly related with the domain of the group it is a result of their participation within the group thus an additional indication of competency.
- **Sharing Photographs** is similar to presenting own work but sharing them among other members during meetings in offline groups or posting them in online groups. The moment of sharing the first photograph is important because a lot of uncertainties, of the initial phase, regarding membership fitness to the group are resolved and that is the reason newcomers feel that they made the transition at that moment. Sharing photographs is a legitimated practice in photographic groups and participation in such tasks indicates membership fitness to the group.
- **Teaching or helping other members** is another way of contributing. In addition being able to teach is a sign of expertise not only indicating to the individual that he is competent enough for the group but it also constitutes recognition from other members too.

Interacting with existing members and receiving a positive response was a frequent key moment for online newcomers where they participated in a discussion or posted a photograph and received positive response from existing members. This action relates to membership competency since the newcomers' contribution is accepted by the group giving them a sense of fitness to the group.

Entering the Committee was a key moment for many newcomers. It is important to mention that members in the committee are commonly considered as part of the core of a group. Thus by entering this closed circle of people automatically members assume that they are in the core. From the newcomers' perspective, committee membership and leadership roles in general are the definition of full membership thus in their quest to become full members they view joining the committee as the goal. While in reality this might not always be the case, that committee members are the core of the group, becoming a committee member is a sign of membership competency since new committee members are elected by other members. Thus being selected by a group of members is recognition of competency and the acceptance of such position indicates the willingness to invest additional time and effort into the group. Moreover committee members are involved in different and additional tasks compared to other members that often hinder participation in more enjoyable practices. In that sense, committee members also exhibit perseverance.

Feeling of belonging through shared interest refers to domain and social alignment. When newcomers get the impression that other members have similar interests with them they make imaginary connections that build a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging might arise in other ways but the findings showed that the feeling of belonging through shared interest was linked with a key moment for many participants. Fundamentally members' interests should partly align with the domain of the group but depending on the strength of the alignment newcomers might feel that they belong. Moreover by identifying with the domain of the group, individuals also identify with the interests of the other members (since

the domain is a shared interest). This creates a connection between members that can increase the sense of belonging.

Taking part and doing well in competitions provides members a sense of achievement that is judged and endorsed by other group members. Competitions serve as formal acknowledgements of different levels of competency and expertise depending on the type of competition. They provide a competitive environment that many photographers seek and through them they can get a sense of achievement and satisfaction. When they take part in competitions they are not only participating as individuals but as group members representing their group. Thus doing well in competitions can easily lead to strong identification with the group not only as member but also as contestants. Furthermore doing well in external competitions offers competency and prestige to the group as a whole since participants are identified as group members. In that sense doing well in external competitions is a great contribution to the group.

Feeling familiar with other members involves, apart from the shared interest, social aspects of the group. It refers to a newcomer fitting into the group socially and the ability to socialise with other members. Feeling comfortable within a group of people is important because it enables participation and minimize uncertainties.

8.1.5.1 Patterns of Key Moments of Identification

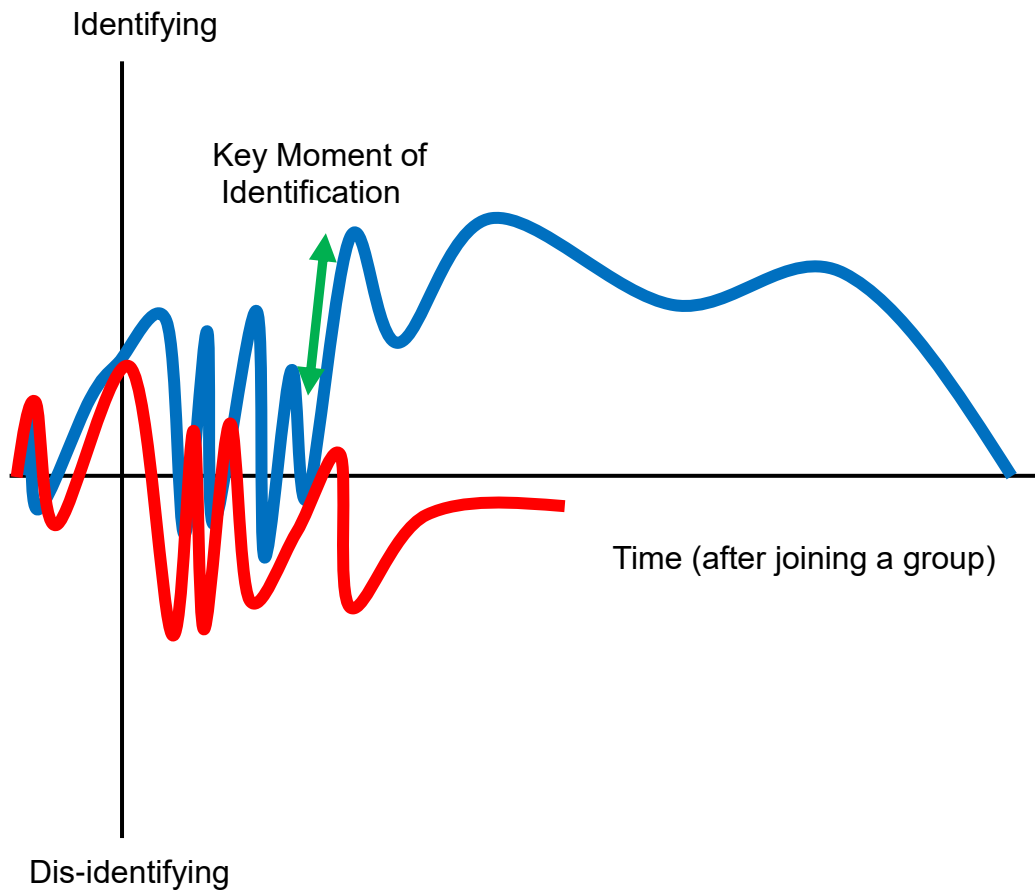


Figure 8.5: Patterns of Key Moments of Identification

Key moments of identification are strong moments of identification that mark the transition between being a newcomer and becoming a full member. At key moments newcomers resolve most of their uncertainties and due to their strong identification moment they feel that they belong to the group. In Figure 8.5 it is shown how a key moment reduced the intensity of identifying and disidentifying moments and while there are still disidentifications, identifications prevail and overall the process is much smoother than before. Their inner struggle of uncertainty is largely resolved and they are getting more enjoyment for their effort.

8.1.6 How does Shaping the identity in the Landscape Transforms into Joining Capital: Modes of Belonging

The findings in Section 7.3 presented how newcomers identify and disidentify with a group and in Section 2.2.5.1.1 how identifying in the Landscape of Practice is interconnected with competency. Considering Wenger's (1998) model of identity formation need to be revised since it only reflects on shaping the identity within a single group and not in the wider landscape.

Before discussing identity formation in the context of a Landscape of Practice it is crucial to examine Wenger's (1998) model. To describe the process of identity formation and learning Wenger (1998) proposed that are three distinct modes of belonging, engagement, imagination and alignment. The three modes were defined as:

- Engagement: Active involvement in a mutual process of negotiation of meaning.
- Imagination: Creating images of the world and seeing connections through time and space by extrapolating from our own experience.
- Alignment: Coordinating our energy and activities in order to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises" (Wenger, 1998:173-174).

As mentioned before, members' multiple identities might clash or reinforce each other thus there is an on-going inner struggle. Having this in mind then forming an identity in one group (through the three modes of belonging) shapes their identity in another group that together form the common identity or the nexus of multi-membership (Wenger, 1998). Thus the three modes of belonging should be a nexus, where each mode of belonging for one identity is part of another identity as well. For example a member in two Yorkshire photographic communities will form their identity uniquely in each group and at the same time progress in the identity formation in one group will shape their identity in the other group as well and to some extent a common identity.

Firstly, the active involvement in one group will shape the negotiation of meaning, such as the language, that could make sense in another group as well. Secondly, by experiencing being a member in one group members can imagine and create images of the world for another group. Thirdly aligning to one group can impact the alignment of another group. If two groups share a similar domain, then by aligning to the domain of one group it will aid in the alignment of the other. Overall there can be imagined or practical similarities that an individual can create connections between different groups and practices.

In Wenger's (1998) older definition, engagement is physically limited in time and space but in the case of landscape of practice (Wenger, 2015) these limits are reconsidered. Through the landscape of practice, the process of forming an identity is not limited by space since the identity trajectory advances while engaging to another group because of the creation of connections between groups and practices. In virtual communities individuals have the flexibility to engage in multiple groups at the same time. Thus the limitation of time and especially space are minimized or eliminated in the environment of virtual communities. Thus engagement, imagination and alignment is a much more complex process and it takes place simultaneously in multiple communities forming one common identity as shown in Figure 8.6 below.

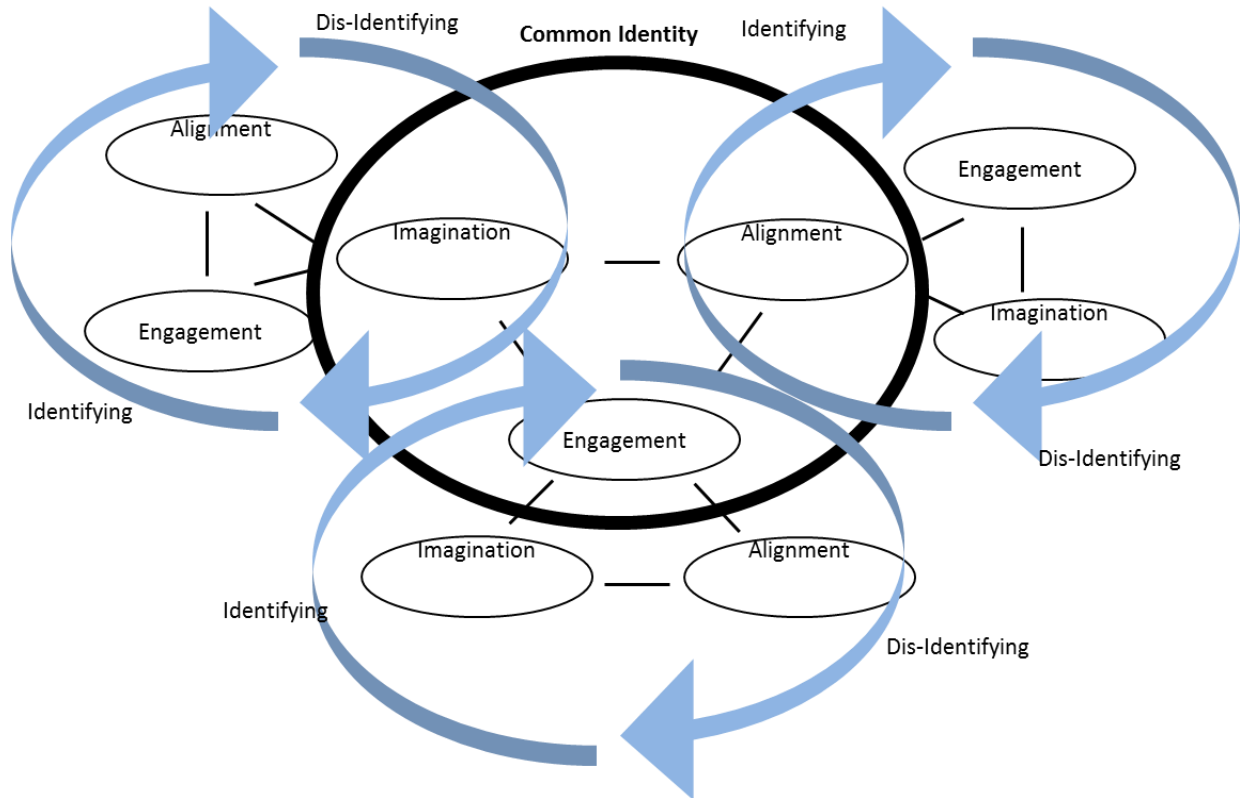


Figure 8.6: Modes of Belonging in the Landscape of Practice (adapted from Wenger, 1998).

Identifying and disidentifying in a community of practice in one group is a form of capital in the sense that it also evolves the identity formation in another community of practice and to an extent the identity in the landscape. Since engagement, imagination and alignment are processes of forming the identity, advancement in the identity trajectory constitutes joining capital for the next group. The blue arrows represent the three modes of belonging in one group. The modes of belonging of every group are connected to the three modes of belonging in the landscape. In other words, the shaping of the identity (through the three modes of belonging) within each group shapes the identity in the landscape. In that sense shaping the identity in one group has an impact in the shaping of the identity in another. Considering that joining is linked to the shaping of the identity (Section 8.1.7) then shaping the identity in one group creates joining capital in another group.

Lastly, by disidentifying with a group members not only shape their identity but also gain knowledge on how to successfully orient themselves within a group. Newcomers' identification and disidentification experiences could constitute a guide to lessen the disidentification moments in the initial phase. Thus joining capital tends to smooth the future ambivalent moments of identification and disidentification during the initial phase. Overall joining capital tends to shorten the early ambivalent moments period.

Research Question No 2. How is joining linked to the shaping of identity in the practice of offline and online leisure pursuit groups?

8.1.7 Shaping of identity as part of becoming a member: A never ending process. A Comparison between Offline and Online Groups.

Learning shapes the identity of individuals, as analysed in Section 8.1.2, and key moments of identification mark the transition between a newcomer and becoming a full member (from the newcomer perspective), as discussed in Section 8.1.5. In Section 2.2.5.1.1 it was mentioned that individuals shape their identity according to the group's practice or social world (community) and these unique identifies exist during the moments of their involvement with the group. The journey through the social landscape dynamically constructs and shapes the identity.

Therefore becoming a member is a process of shaping the identity. Furthermore in Section 8.1.2 it was explained that learning or the intent/ambition to learn creates paths of pursued and future pursued identities. The evolution of the formation of these identities, shown as paths in Figure 8.1, represent the identity trajectory. Therefore the notion of becoming a member entails a never-ending, on-going process of shaping, and evolving of identity.

Communities of practice are dynamic worlds in the sense that their domains are always evolving and their members have evolving identities. Thus, from the community perspective the joining process is never ending in the sense that the

identities of participants are always being reshaped. Due to the dynamic nature of communities of practice there is no set state of being a full member but rather there are temporary states or “snapshots of time” when individuals can identify with the group in such a way that they consider themselves as full members. When individuals cease to change, inevitably at some point their domain alignment and identification with other members will change as well.

Communities of practice by nature involve sharing of information and experiences thus for individuals to halt their identity formation within a group essentially entails not participating in legitimated practices. Therefore the on-going formation of the identity is not only required in the process of joining but also constitutes the result of legitimate participation within a group. At this point, it is crucially important to mention that the identity trajectory shapes not only when identifying with new imagined future identities but also disidentifying as discussed in Section 8.1.2. It is not merely about learning who individuals are but also learning what they are not (what feels alienating). As part of the fundamental sharing of information in communities of practice, instances or opportunities of new knowledge arise thus in that sense identity formation should never halt when individual are involved in legitimated practices within a group. Overall the notion of becoming a member entails a never-ending, on-going process of shaping, and evolving the identity and is connected with legitimate participation in communities of practice.

8.1.8 Shaping the identity in the Virtual World

During the ethnographic study conducted in the first phase of this research it was mentioned that joining online was, initially, easy (Section 4.5.5). The reason for this initial identification with the groups was that the general and open domain for the groups and the ethnographer’s geographical location aided in making relationships across practices and groups quickly without much “balancing work”. The different roles and practices require balancing work from the individual in order to create boundaries (Section 2.2.5.1.1). Wenger (2015) considers balancing work part of

the identity and it involves creating “personalized reflections of the landscape, its practices and its boundaries” (p. 20).

In terms of shaping the identity this meant that the researcher’s identity initially evolved quickly (Figure 8.1), but consisted of fewer potential paths or weaker identities to pursue. Normally, during the initial stages of joining a group, members’ identity is mostly unshaped and they explore many potential directions it can take (explorative nature). In virtual communities, the reason for the less explorative initial stage was that the domain of the groups was simple thus the explorative nature of the early stages of the identity formation (Section 8.1.2) offered fewer potential paths or weaker identities to pursue. Thus the nature of the early stages was less intense as a process and considering that these early stages are characterised by strong and intense moments of identification and disidentification (Section 8.1.3) there were less ambivalent moments and less uncertainty.

Additionally in the first phase it was found that legitimated practices in online groups and also the core and periphery were not clearly defined and invisible/non-perceivable to the newcomer. The reasons for this blurriness in the online groups is discussed in Section 5.1.3. In the studied offline groups the core and periphery were easily perceivable by a newcomer. Moreover the offline groups had structured and systematic participation in the form of weekly meetings whereas legitimated practices in online groups were less structured and certainly less perceivable. Since individuals shape their identity according to the group’s practice that exist during the moments of their involvement with the group (Section 2.2.5.1.1), it was easier to create relationships among practices in online groups.

The legitimated practices being blurred in online groups made it easier for the ethnographer to create his own form of competence at the early stages. On the other hand less perceivable and forced participation in legitimated practices affected learning and to an extent the depth or the level of definement-refinement of the identity. In offline groups some participation was forced (e.g. tutorials in the University group) and some while not directly forced, the nature of face to face meetings and the fear of becoming an outsider added pressure to participate.

Therefore the easy initial creation of relationships among practices in online groups meant that legitimate participation was much more accessible and easily achievable compared to offline. There is the issue that legitimate participation in online groups was not easily perceivable thus gaining competency in participating could, in reality, be much more difficult. Nonetheless the important effect of this was to create the impression that it was easily achievable.

Overall the notion of becoming a member entails a never-ending, on-going process of shaping, and evolving the identity and is connected with legitimate participation in communities of practice (Section 8.1.7). Considering this the impression of a more accessible and easily achievable participation in legitimated practices hindered the identification trajectory. From one perspective, being able to participate in legitimate and normative practices in a group meant that less learning of knowledge and skills were required. As mentioned in Sections 8.1.2 and 8.1.7 learning or the intent/ambition to learn creates paths of the pursued and future pursued identities. Joining in online groups is limited in the sense that because it is easy to do and involves no learning, then the possible impact on identity is much less.

8.1.9 Narrow Identification

The claim in the above Section that joining in online groups is limited in the sense that shaping the identity is hindered is the reason why the majority of online members narrow identify with the group. In the first phase discussion (Section 5.1.3) it was mentioned that the majority of members in the online groups are inactive and whether they are observing, lurking or have withdrawn from the group is unknown. With the insights provided by the findings in the second phase it can be claimed that the majority of members are narrowly identified with online groups. Below are the reasons of the trend of narrow identifying in virtual communities:

- Newcomers in online groups can easily, at least initially, create a sense of competence in online groups and that creates the impression legitimate participation was much more accessible and easily achievable compared to offline. This decreases the need of accountability to gain competence (Section 2.2.5.3)
- Participation in online groups is not forced so the need of accountability to gain competence is lessened.
- The blurred and dynamic core and periphery disrupt the Legitimate participation model (Section 2.2.2) since there is no clear way of proceeding to the core of the group by learning and gaining competence.
- The large number of members makes sense of belonging thinner since it is difficult or unfeasible to create social ties and interact with other members.
- The asynchronous nature of virtual communities Section 5.1.3 and the vast and rapid pace of activity (huge number of photos/discussions, etc) makes it difficult/unfeasible to keep track of the current and past history of the group and as a result hindered strong identification with the group.

8.1.10 Narrow Identification in Egocentric Networks

How the joining process is evaded in Egocentric Networks such as Flickr or Instagram (Dunbar, 2016) is described in Section 7.6.4. Joining as a process described in Section 7.3 in essence does not really occur and newcomers do not exist in the sense that they are not aligning/adapting or changing to a group. Since members are the sole creators of their own network there is no shared practice within that group. It can be argued the network they have created does not act or share a sufficient sense of unity to form a social group (Turner, 1982) but rather members of an egocentric network. Nevertheless, it is important examine joining and identifying in egocentric networks from a communities of practice lens.

While there is no domain or shared practice in communities of practice terms, the individual is creating his own domain and practice. If it can be assumed that who the creators of the networks chose to follow are based on the people and practices they identify with, then they are also shaping their identity in a similar way as described in Section 8.1.2.

Since there is an identity trajectory does it mean that there is a joining process? It must be taken into consideration that the connections the creator establish with other users are not necessarily mutual, meaning that the creator can create a connection with another user but the other user might not have a connection with the creator. Thus for that user, the creator is not part of his own network and the creator's identity is not present in the network. Wenger (1998) defines identity as a negotiated experience, "a layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other" (p.151). Identity reflects a complex relationship between the social and the personal. Since the identity of a member in egocentric networks is not necessarily perceivable then the "egocentric identity" has more emphasis on the personal rather than the social. While users in egocentric networks shape their identity, their network does not have a negotiated competence. According to Wenger (1998) competence is one factor forming the identity and is actively negotiated in the community. Thus some important principles of the communities of practice identity do not apply in the "egocentric identity". In egocentric networks, the joining process in terms of shaping the identity according to the group's practice or domain does not apply.

What it can be said is that since practice is defined solely by the creator and meaning is not negotiated then there is no need of accountability to gain competence in the practice. With that logic egocentric network users are narrowly identifying to the network they created. Even if narrow identification does not hold any accountability for competency the individual can still gain knowledge and practice insights. For egocentric network members this is true since they can still gain knowledge from other members. That is also a way that their identity is shaped, by identifying and potentially disidentifying with other members and

practices and by receiving information from the network. While it does not seem reasonable to follow members that they disidentified with their identities and other members' evolve, thus they might disidentify in the interim.

It is widely believed and cited that the majority (90%) of online members are not participating and are merely observing (Mierlo, 2014). What is trivial in this statement is the definition of participation as contributing. Firstly in egocentric networks the principle of 90% of the users being inactive is problematic since the number of members in a group are relevant only from the perspective of the creator. For example the creator of the network might tend to follow users that are posting photos and comments frequently, such as celebrities. Adding celebrities to their networks in egocentric networks is a common practice. Thus the principle of 90% could potentially not apply in this case. In addition social networking systems apply their own algorithms that promote content of some users at the expense of other users. Thus from the perspective of the user, the ratio of contributing members might not apply and also not reflect reality.

Most importantly however, following and observing users is a common practice in egocentric networks. In that sense observing and being inactive without contributing might be a legitimated practice in the domain that the user created and defined. Thus while individuals might not contribute they are not necessarily inactive since they are actively participating in the sphere or domain they have created. Instead it can be said that are narrowly identifying with their network where they identify and disidentify with other members and practices.

8.1.11 Identifying and Narrow Identifying in Small Groups within Groups

A common strategy that newcomers used during the initial phase of joining is to form small groups within a group. In Section 7.8.3 it was shown how and why newcomers follow this tactic but it is important to further examine this from the perspective of identification in regards to the group and its practice.

When newcomers join, at the initial phase, they identify and disidentify with the group domain (Section 8.1.3). In the case where newcomers are lacking competency in the practice of the group there are two possibilities. Either they feel the accountability to gain competence in the practice or they identify narrowly. When they feel the accountability they may proceed to gain competence following the legitimate peripheral participation model (Section 2.2.2). When they identify narrowly either because of the lack of accountability or by necessity then they have the option of forming sub-groups. What happens in terms of identification, is that newcomers are creating a new domain that while it is related to the main's group domain it is different from it in such a way that they might strongly identify within that small group. Especially in the case of narrowly identifying due to necessity (e.g. group expertise is of such high level that is very hard to gain competence in its practice), newcomers are legitimising a practice within that small group that will enable them to be able to gain competency.

Fundamentally they are overcoming a barrier in their participation that is restricting their identification with the main group. Thus while they are narrowly identifying with the main group, because of their inability to gain competence, at the same time they are identifying with the small sub-group. Through time as they gain competency in the sub-group practice and the domain evolves in the main group it is possible that, eventually, they will become able to gain competency in the main group. This applies to offline and online communities even if it is hard to trace the formation of subgroups in online groups. In online groups this is a viable strategy for newcomers to use and considering the virtual characteristics of the communities, it seems to be an effective strategy. The size of the community, its fast asynchronous nature and the undefined-blurred legitimated practice (Section 5.1.3) are negated when creating small sub-groups.

Research Question No 3. How are organisational socialisation tactics used to attract and assimilate people in offline and online leisure pursuit groups?

8.2 How does the Information gathered shape the joining process?

The information gathered by newcomers before joining a group is vital because it shapes their expectations and alignment with the group. In addition information gathered after joining enables learning and to an extent the acquisition of competency. The findings of the first and final stage showed that Yorkshire photographers tend to gather information through the following different sources:

Information Sources Prior Joining: Groups' websites, interpersonally, open access online forums and University Society Fair.

Information Sources After Joining: External Sources: Books, offline and online courses and tutorials, online videos, from friends, Internal Sources: From other members, tutorials, presentations, competitions.

8.2.1 Information Gathered Before Joining

Information gathered before joining is part of the selection process that groups use in order to attract certain members that they consider to be suitable. In addition individuals use this kind of information to choose the appropriate group for them. From the newcomer's perspective the information gathered is their connection between the imaginary and real. Essentially when deciding to join or attempt to join a group, individuals identify with the information derived. This kind of information creates images to individuals that through assumption and imagination, they view themselves as part of the group. Based on a combination of all the information they gather they are simulating the community and create imaginary experiences as members and they identify or disidentify accordingly. In that sense the joining process begins from the very first moment an individual is receiving and processing

information about the group and is part of the Development stage of a Photographic Members' Career, as discussed in Section 8.1.4.1.

8.2.1.1 Inaccurate information shaping the joining process

From the first stage findings, Section 5.1.2.1 (Organisational anticipatory socialization: Information derived from organisations) it was found that information derived from groups was inaccurate as regards to the entry barriers and to an extent the domain of the group. In terms of shaping membership in the joining process, inaccurate information creates a pseudo-dis/identification with the group. The realisation that information was not reflecting reality intensifies the ambivalent moments during the early stages of joining since what newcomers identified before is different and they might identify or disidentify with reality. Commonly groups use favourable information to describe their community, Section 6.2, thus in that case newcomers will probably, weakly or strongly, disidentify depending not only on the inaccuracy of information but also on the imagined membership they created before joining. As an example of this, the participant below claimed that he did not gather any information about the University of Yorkshire Society because he assumed it existed as photographic societies are common in universities.

“I knew that every university has a photography society so I search on Facebook “Yorkshire photographic society” and I just joined their Facebook page but I didn’t know anything, I didn’t know what kind of events they were going to organise I just knew that I should join this club” (UniSoc-M-3).

Regardless of the lack of information, he identified with the image of the group that he constructed based on his assumptions. Almost certainly his image of the community will not be completely accurate and he might have strong disidentification moments if his expectations were unrealistic. On one hand he could identify by reshaping the group and essentially changing the group’s domain to align with his expectations (Section 7.3.2) and on the other hand he identify by making an effort to align and fit into the group (Section 7.3.1). Both ways exhibit

membership perseverance and willingness in making effort to either reshape the group or align and fit into the group. Since he seemed determined to join, possibly because of the need to belong, he would probably need to invest more into the group. Investing is in terms of time and effort but also in willingness to withstand the initial identification and disidentification period. Thus this willingness is a sign of dedication and a form of membership competency which itself constitutes joining capital in the case of a newcomer.

8.2.2 Information Gathered After Joining

Information gathered after joining mainly serves as a cultivating process for learning and socialising. When members gather information from external sources (information outside of the community), it is almost exclusively to gain skills and knowledge. Thus learning outside of the group, if what is learned is relevant with the practice of the community, can help joining. Even though this is outside of the scope of this research it is worth mentioning that skills and knowledge are a form of competency thus information from external sources enable learning and to an extent increasing joining capital. Information from internal sources along with experiences serves as means for a functioning community of practice where members share them to develop themselves and the group.

Research Question No 4. What differing forms of cultural, social and financial capital are converted and created in joining offline and online leisure pursuit groups?

8.3 What kind of capital is of value to joining in the different types of communities?

The different forms of capital mentioned in Section 7.7 and their value to joining is linked to the properties of each type of community. Hybrid groups are a combination of the two aforementioned types of communities; in offline-online groups the offline properties are more important and in online-offline the online

properties prevail. Offline groups involve physical presence and equipment is visible and tangible and is more prevalent as part of a photographer's projected identity. In online communities, social capital is partly replaced or transformed into digital literacy as a mean of communication and establishing a virtual social presence. Equipment is less associated with a photographer's projected identity because online, photographs are more prevalent due to the nature of virtual communities. Knowledge and skills are more visible to the online participants compared to equipment.

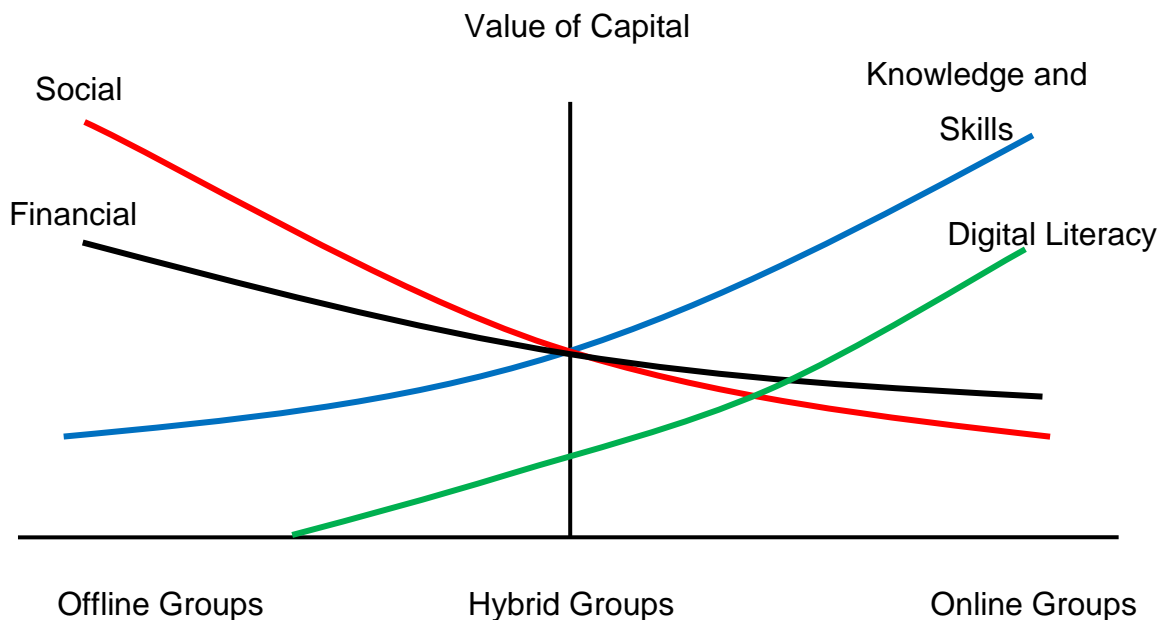


Figure 8.7: The Transformation of Capital in the Different Group Types.

In offline groups Social Capital is more important for newcomers since the initial social adjustment makes more demands than online groups mainly due to the face to face interaction. In contrast, in online groups newcomers can more conveniently participate by observing and making their presence known or participating in a more meaningful way when they feel more conformable. This reduces the importance of Social Capital in online groups and shifts the weight towards the domain of the group or the shared interest which is more closely related with the knowledge and skills capital. In offline-online hybrid groups, where the primary

group is still the offline, Social Capital is still a more important asset than Knowledge and Skills Capital but to a lesser extent. Knowledge and Skills competency are increasing in importance as the online aspect prevails.

As depicted in Figure 8.7 above, in the online-offline hybrid type of a community there is a transition of value or importance between digital literacy and the other types of competency. This transition of importance is not absolute and this applies to all the described types of competency. Figure 8.7 illustrates an estimation of when these transitions of importance occur but in reality they are dependent on the unique nature and the domain of each community. In addition other forms of competency might exist depending on the domain of a group. For example in a climbing society physical fitness and appearance might constitute valuable joining competency.

During the first stage data collection and analysis of this research in Section 5.1.1.1 (Photographic Groups' Common Identity) it was found that South City Photographic Society aspires to technical expertise, with stricter standards, whereas the University of South Photographic Society's common identity stresses the roles of an amateur photographer with lower standards, less specialised equipment and the shared knowledge is less advanced. While the South City Photographic Society is almost exclusively an offline group knowledge and skills are more valuable to joining compared to the University of South Photographic Society which is an offline-online group. Overall the value of this model is the conceptualisation of the relationship between the types of the communities and their properties, and the significance of the different forms of competency.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the whole research. It explains how the thesis fits together, how the aims and objectives were met and how the research questions were answered. It also presents the study's contribution to knowledge, its practical implications and a discussion of its limitations and ideas for future work.

9.2 Summary of Research

Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the joining process of newcomers in offline and online leisure pursuit groups. Chapter 1 introduced the notion of joining and becoming a member in the context of offline and online groups and concluded that this process is not only complex but also under-explored. The theoretical areas of Communities of Practice, Organisational Assimilation, Virtual Communities and Serious Leisure were found to be providing some insights on the joining process. Thus part of this research was to examine what theoretical concepts are useful for understanding the joining process.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

An exploratory and critical review of the existing literature related to the concept of joining was presented. The Chapter presented an understanding regarding the methods and theories developed in previous literature that related to the research aim and objectives. Firstly, the theory of communities of practice was presented, a learning theory that examines participation in groups based on shared interests. This theory contributes to understanding how newcomers experienced joining by learning, gaining knowledge and skills. In addition, the identification trajectory developed in the theory is a potentially useful notion since it describes an important

process in becoming a member and identifying with the practice or a group. The theory's identification of different types of participation offers insights into the negotiated process of identity formation.

Secondly, the study of Organisational Assimilation investigates strategies for attracting and inducting new employees. Its aim is to ensure newcomers acquire the required skills and knowledge to conduct their work efficiently. While organisational theories focus on the organisation and not on the individual, and might not always apply to leisure groups, the same assimilation principles may be useful for this research. Photographic groups may use organisational assimilation strategies formally or informally to induct newcomers.

With the advancement of technology, online groups and online social media have emerged. The third section of the literature review, Virtual Communities, explored these new forms of communities and compared them to traditional, offline communities. Seemingly the joining process differs between offline and online groups, thus this section contributed to understanding how photographic groups might differ in their different forms. Moreover online communities follow recruitment strategies and selection processes; significant factors that affect the joining process. The fourth section explored Stebbins' (2004) concept of leisure; he views leisure as a prolonged lifelong activity that has a career path. The career framework he develops could be a useful perspective to investigate joining in photographic groups. The career steps potentially indicate a significant change in group and activity identification. Lastly, the section about Photography offered an overall understanding of the practice and how it is integrated into everyday life and has evolved into a method of social and visual communication, especially in online communities. Photographic equipment and its upgrade path could reveal information about membership.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

The nature of this study was exploratory due to the complexity of the joining process and the absence of literature directly addressing notion of joining and becoming a member in offline and online leisure pursuit groups. Thus this study

was exploratory in the sense of developing a cultural understanding of the targeted photographic groups and also in the sense of developing new angles on the existing theories to study and identify significant aspects of joining. A qualitative research approach was chosen because of the social characteristics of the study field and the interpretive and explorative nature of joining. During the different stages of the research a combination of inductive and deductive approaches were followed but overall the research was predominantly inductive.

The first stage data collection was an auto-ethnographic study of two offline and two online groups. During the ethnographic study field notes were produced that were later reviewed and analysed in order to discover emergent themes. The emergent themes were patterns of specific events, experiences and feelings that were identified and were part of the groups' normative behavior and culture that could potentially be part of other photographic groups and in addition were relevant with this research questions.

For the second and final data collection eighteen (18) interviews were conducted. Based on the findings of the initial phase, the research questions were revised and a semi-structured, open-ended interview was designed. The thematic analysis model of Braun and Clark (2006) was used to analyse the data. The result of the analysis of the data was a set of main themes that were used to write a report of the findings. Lastly findings of the first and final stage were incorporated together and discussed in Chapter 8.

Chapter 4: First Stage Findings

The first stage of this research was an ethnographic study of two offline (South Photographic Society, University of South Photographic Society) and two online groups (South Yorkshire City Flickr Group, South Yorkshire City - Old and New Facebook Group). The emergent themes of the first stage findings revealed that groups and newcomers use different, formal and informal approaches to become members. Part of the strategies that newcomers used were to take up opportunities of participation or contribution that were less managed and not forced by the group structure e.g. laying out the chairs. These small opportunities to

volunteer or provide contributions seemed useful in getting comfortable with the group.

In the notion of a hobby career, compared to old members, newcomers were found to be more likely to reach the decline stage since they still have not persevered long enough and their interest in photography might diminish quickly. Equipment was potentially part of the hobby career in the sense that equipment upgrade and the competency to use it ran parallel to the hobby career. Competitions in the different forms were found to be a common and integral part of photographic groups. They are viewed as a way for members to gain prestige and credibility. In addition, casual competitions or photographic games offered novices the opportunity to participate and feel part of the group. Members were found to have varied capital and skills. Some knowledge and skills were gained from being members in other groups that combined photography with other leisure activities.

Compared to offline groups, joining online was found to be, initially, easy due to the assumed connection between the newcomer and the theme of the group. On the other hand there were some technical expertise barriers that made it more difficult for novices to imagine becoming a member. The large number of members in online groups and the many individuals joining frequently creates a weak bond with the group. Moreover many members were not actively participating and made the community lose some of its importance for its members. For these reasons, joining this group might initially be easy but the strength of the fit to the group remains variable.

Chapter 5 and 6: First Stage Discussion and Conclusions

Legitimate peripheral participation was found to be an insightful lens to examine joining. The findings suggested that in newly formed groups, the core is weak and not well defined. Thus members develop and direct the focus of the group (which will define the core) rather than move towards to an established core. Information prior to joining was used in the selection process and also shaped members' expectations and built a sense of the community.

Socialisation tactics were related to the focus and the tolerance of newcomers of each group. Some approaches (tactics) were more suitable than others. For established groups, whose focus was not to introduce new members, it was more appropriate to follow an individualised approach. The reasoning is that this limits the exposure of the group to the “threat of newcomers”, by spending less resources (such as older members’ time and effort) and keeping members focused on core rather than peripheral activities with newcomers. Conversely, for developing groups that were in need of newcomers it was more suitable to approach newcomers in an institutionalised way, especially when newcomers were also novices.

Information acquisition enables learning and to a certain extent, a movement up the career ladder. In addition in the studied online groups and especially South Yorkshire City Flickr Group participation in terms of sharing photos is quantitatively, massive, making perceiving who are regular and active members participating difficult or impossible. Combined with the asynchronous nature of virtual communities, this makes the core and periphery of the group and to an extent normal practice, invisible to newcomers. A result of the invisible core and periphery was that it made it difficult for newcomers to distinguish what kind of participation was legitimate.

Chapter 7: Final Stage Findings

Based on the conclusions of the first stage, eighteen (18) interviews were conducted as part of the second and final stage of this research. The analysis of the data using a thematic analysis model emerged a list of main themes:

- Newcomers’ initial, ambivalent moments define their future membership.
- Newcomers align to the group’s domain to identify with the group.
- Newcomers change the group’s domain to identify with the group.
- Members shape their identity through learning.
- The different forms of Capital are converted into joining competency.

- Socialization tactics newcomers used that aided the joining process.

The research questions developed and were adapted based on the analysis of the collected data and the emergent themes. The findings showed that newcomers' initial encounters with the group were characterised by uncertainty and anxiety. This initial period involved an adjustment where newcomers orient themselves sufficiently to feel comfortable as part of the group and enable them to participate. In order to accomplish this, newcomers can either align/adjust to the group domain or change the group domain.

The different types of learning that were exhibited in the four groups were presented. The way that the trajectory of identity is shaped through learning was also explained. Since knowledge is part of an individual's identity, then learning episodes shape their identity trajectory.

The studied groups were categorised into four types of communities. Conventional communities are offline communities that have their main activity and vast majority of their interaction between members taking place offline and more specifically during the weekly meetings. In Offline-Online Hybrid communities the main activities are taking place offline but at the same time there is an online aspect of the group that is connected and is an extension of the offline activities. Online-Offline Hybrid communities are the reverse of Offline-Online Hybrid. In Online Egocentric Networks users create their own network by creating a one-way link (simply following them) selecting which members they digitally connect with, thus they are the sole defining factor of the group domain and interest. This along with the minimal interaction with other members essentially evaded the joining process.

The different forms of capital that are valuable to the joining process were examined and the notion of an experienced newcomer was described as an individual that carries some capital created outside the group that the newcomer recently joined. One important strategy newcomers used when joining was to form their own small groups within the group because they became close friends with some members whereas they are uncomfortable with others or they joined with pre-existing friends.

Chapter 8: Final Stage Discussion

Based on the findings of the whole research (first and final stage) the research questions were answered:

Research Question No 1. How is joining linked to learning in offline and online leisure pursuit groups?

Becoming a full participant in photographic communities implies the ability to become involved in core activities, to perform new tasks, and perceive the meanings and understandings within the group; to gain competency (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In terms of narrow identification the individual can still gain knowledge and practice insights. In that sense, learning implies becoming a different person, to form an identity between the social and the individual. Learning is an evolving form of membership, a long term living relationship between a person and their place and participating in communities. Not only learning but the ambition to learn shapes the identity because the ambition to learn, through imagination, is creating images of the world and seeing connections through time.

Patterns of Dis-identification during the initial phase refer to the early stages of joining a group that are characterised as ambivalent and uncertain. Therefore there is a pattern of intense identification and disidentification moments. This is the period where newcomers are in the process of orientation and try to figure out if the group is appropriate for them and if they are appropriate for the group.

A photographic Membership Career Framework was conceptualised describing the lifelong progress of an individual's membership status through joining multiple photographic groups. It is consisted of seven stages, the beginning, development, joining or initial phase, establishment, maintenance, lethargy and withdrawal.

Key moments of identification refer to the instances where newcomers experienced the transition between a newcomer and a full member. The key moments identified were:

- Contributing
 - Volunteering in core tasks
 - Volunteering in simple tasks
 - Presenting own work
 - Sharing Photographs
 - Teaching or helping other members
- Interacting with existing members and receiving positive response
- Entering the Committee
- Feeling of belonging through shared interest
- Taking part and doing well in competitions
- Feeling familiar with other members

Research Question No 2. How is joining linked to the shaping of the identity in the practice of offline and online leisure pursuit groups?

Communities of practice are dynamic worlds in the sense that their domains are always evolving and their members have evolving identities. Due to the dynamic nature of communities of practice there is no set state of being a full member rather there are temporary states or “snapshots of time” when individuals can identify with the group in such a way that they consider themselves as full members. From the social world or the community perspective the joining process is never ending in the sense that the identities of participants are always being reshaped.

In the studied online groups, identity initially evolved quickly but consisted of fewer potential paths. The reason was that the domain of the groups was simple thus the explorative nature of the early stages of the identity formation offered fewer potential paths or weaker identities to pursue. The nature of the early stages was less intense as a process and considering that these early stages are characterised by strong and intense moments of identification and disidentification there were less ambivalent moments and thus less uncertainty. Online groups gave newcomers the impression that it was easier to participate in legitimate and normative practices in a group and to an extent that less learning of knowledge and

skills were required. Learning or the ambition to learn creates paths of the pursued and future pursuing identities. Based on this joining in online groups is limited in the sense that shaping the identity is hindered. With the insights provided by the findings in the final stage it can be claimed that the majority of members are narrowly identified with online groups.

Research Question No 3. How are organisational socialisation tactics used to attract and assimilate people in offline and online leisure pursuit groups?

From the first stage findings it was found that information disseminated by groups was inaccurate in regards to the entry barriers and to a certain extent the domain of the group. In terms of shaping membership in the joining process, inaccurate information creates a pseudo-dis/identification with the group. The realisation that information was not reflecting reality intensifies the ambivalent moments during the early stages of joining since what newcomers identified before is different and they might identify or disidentify with reality. The inaccuracy or lack of information is creating an image of the group based on assumptions. Almost certainly that image of the community that newcomers created based on the information will not be completely accurate and they might have strong disidentification moments if their expectations were unrealistic.

Research Question No 4. What differing forms of cultural, social and financial capital are converted and created in joining offline and online leisure pursuit groups?

The kind of competency that is of value to joining in the different types of communities was elaborated. Social and financial capital are more important in offline groups and knowledge and skills are more important in online groups. Hybrid groups are a combination of the two types of communities; in offline-online groups the offline properties prevail and in online-offline the online properties prevail.

9.3 Contribution to Knowledge

The study's exploration of the joining process contributed to the existing knowledge of information science and more specifically in the areas of communities of practice, virtual communities and leisure studies. Most importantly this research was the first that explored, in depth, the joining process in leisure pursuit groups. Leisure studies uses the notion of career as a lifelong activity that begins with the development of an interest in an activity and ends when the interest deteriorates. This perspective lacks richness and depth in describing the joining process in leisure pursuit groups. Moreover organisational assimilation studies focus on organisations while this study was the first that examined how socialisation tactics apply to leisure pursuit groups.

This study fits into the large body of work based on communities of practice theory. In communities of practice joining is usually seen as a process of gaining competency that could eventually lead to proceeding to the core of a group. The focus of the research is a relatively under explored area and it was demonstrated that communities of practice is a really useful perspective for exploring joining. Existing communities of practice theory primarily views joining as a process of gaining competency that could eventually lead to proceeding to the core of a group. This model of legitimate peripheral participation is based on the assumption that a group was established long enough so that a core was developed. This study discovered that in newly formed groups the core is weak and not well defined thus members develop and direct the focus of the group (which will define the core) rather than head to an established core.

The research took part in the debate (Fuller et al, 2005; Hughes, 2007; McCormick et al, 2010; Walsh, 2013) of how the learning process of competent members (not necessarily old members) differs from that of novices while Lave and Wenger (1991) model was focused largely on novices. As part of the first stage findings in Section 5.1.1.2 on legitimate peripheral participation it was uncovered how the learning process is shaped and the domain is formed in newly established groups. New insights were gained with the concept of unaligned participation. Hodges

(1998) and Maclellan and Marie (2008) argued that Wenger in his theoretical frameworks does not include a type of participation where an individual; participates in the practice of the group but disidentifies with the practice within the group. This research expanded further on this and discussed how unaligned participation in a group could potentially lead to legitimate participation.

Furthermore Wenger's (1998) model of the three modes of belonging (Section 2.2.5.1 - engagement imagination and alignment) was extended in the landscape of practice. Previously this model considered the three modes of belonging, which shapes the identity, in the context of a single group whereas this study shaping the identity in the landscape (e.g. in multiple groups at the same time). Even though Wenger addressed the notion where an individual belonging in multiple groups has multiple identities that require balancing work, Depalma (2009) mentioned that he did not fully develop this notion. In addition Cox (2005) stated that

“Lave and Wenger (1991) is essentially a picture of how newcomers are socialised into a rather static practice community, through legitimate peripheral participation. It does not consider the relationship between communities as a potential driver for change” (p.3).

This work contributed in extending the shaping of identity in multiple groups.

As part of the joining process in virtual communities, the research coined the term “narrow identification” which describes a certain type of identification. The notion of narrow identification describes members who identify with normative forms of the practice, but in a limited form where they do not feel or have the opportunity to gain competency. While “narrow identification” is based on Wenger's (2014) idea of accountability towards the practice, it is in contrast with Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on Legitimate Peripheral Participation. It also aligns part of the critique of Depalma (2009) that Lave and Wenger's ideas are focused on centripetal movement, as described in Section 2.2.2.1, where members are assumed to be always heading towards full participation. Thus narrow identification was a contribution that added to existing theory.

In capturing the joining process, Organisational Assimilation theories emphasise experiences in organisations rather than the individual and usually assume that an organisation, as a domain, already exists as an accomplished entity. During the socialisation process, organisations are focused on the employees acquisition of the appropriate skills and knowledge to be competent in their job (Myers, 2007). From this perspective, organisational assimilation is primarily adjusting individuals to the organisation's culture, norms and values rather than the individual changing the organisation. Moreover in the theory of Organisational Assimilation the joining process has end goals and the reaching of these goals mark a successful orientation process. In essence organisational assimilation views the orientation process from their perspective, to adapt an individual to organisational goals, not from an individual perspective (Saks and Blake, 2006). However this study revealed not only that individuals change the organisation (photographic groups) but also that they use their own strategies not documented in the literature. The findings of this research provided insights to the joining process and found that the notion of becoming a member is a never-ending, on-going process of shaping, and evolving the identity.

In the literature on Virtual Communities there is a lack of work on joining online communities. This research begins to fill that gap. This research offered a theorization of a new way in which newcomers could overcome a barrier in their participation that is restricting their identification with the main group. While they have narrow identification with the main group, because of their inability to gain competence, they could identify with a small sub-group. Over time as they gain competency in the sub-group practice and the domain of the main group evolves, it is possible that they will become able to gain competency in the main group.

In addition the research examined online groups and egocentric networks from the lens of communities of practice theory and found that following and observing users is a normal practice in egocentric networks. The aforementioned challenged the widely used principle of the majority (90%) of online members not participating and merely observing (Mierlo, 2014). Characteristics of the different types of

virtual communities were discussed and categorised accordingly. New knowledge on the structural properties of egocentric networks was added. Lastly, new ways of becoming a full participant in virtual communities were found that were previously undiscovered. For example how participants that have narrow identification can proceed to become full participants through forming or joining small groups with in a group.

9.4 Practical Implications

This research has practical implications for newcomers, existing members in offline and online photographic groups and groups as organisations.

9.4.1 Newcomers and Existing Members

The findings of the research offer an analysis of patterns of the initial, joining phase of ambivalent moments, a period of intense strong identification and disidentification. It was found that the process of joining is experienced as a series of moments of identification and disidentification. Since this is the case, those joining groups can be advised to exhibit perseverance during this phase. Perseverance might bring strong identification moments and in addition it was found to be a sign of dedication and a form of competency. An awareness of the study's findings should ensure that newcomers' expectations during this phase should now be more complete and accurate and can help them persevere and overcome initial obstacles. Furthermore realistic formal and most importantly informal and hidden entry requirements were uncovered. Based on the requirements, newcomers can evaluate more accurately if they are fit for a group and if they do not have the necessary capital or not willing to acquire it they should avoid joining. For example equipment was found to be a significant form of capital, especially in offline groups, even if the group's requirements mentioned that it is not required. If a group has a formal or informal requirement of equipment then newcomers should avoid joining if they do not have the necessary equipment or are not willing to acquire it.

This research also explored the differing forms of cultural, social and financial capital converted and created in joining offline and online leisure pursuit groups. This understanding can help newcomers evaluate the capital they currently have and to an extent identify the capital they need to acquire. Not only that but the findings on how capital transformed in the different group types provides newcomers more information in choosing a group that aligns with their set of capital. Individuals for whom their set of capital leans towards digital literacy, knowledge and skills but are lacking in financial and social capital, might find that online or online-offline groups are be more suitable for them. If their capital leans towards financial and social capital rather than digital literacy, knowledge and skills then offline or offline-online hybrid groups should be more suitable.

Moreover, the research provided an understanding of the different types of socialisation tactics that newcomers use to orient themselves during the joining process. Looking at this analysis, newcomers can have a better understanding of which approach is more suitable to them based on their set of capital. Newcomers that lack in skills and knowledge in a way that is prohibiting them to participate in a group they should attempt to joining or form small groups within the group. A new tactic that emerged can help newcomers that do not feel or have the opportunity (narrow identification) to gain competency, to potentially become full participants by forming or joining small groups with in a group.

It was argued that becoming a member entails a never-ending, on-going process of shaping, and evolving the identity and also that the identity is shaped through episodes of learning. In that sense learning was found to be linked with joining. Firstly, newcomers and existing members gained knowledge on persevering and maintaining membership in offline and online groups. Based on organisational assimilation the joining process has end goals and the reaching of these goals mark a successful orientation process. Whereas this study found that this process is never-ending. Since the domain and shared interest of a group is dynamic then members have to continuously adapt to or change the domain in a way that they identify with the group. Secondly since learning was found to be linked with joining

then newcomers and existing members should use learning as a strategy for shaping their identity as a way of maintaining their membership (and their identification). Members should explore the possible identities they can follow and choose to pursue the ones that they identified with.

Finally this study examined how information gathered before joining shaped the joining process. It was found that inaccurate information creates a pseudo-dis/identification with the group and that intensifies the ambivalent moments during the early stages of joining. Commonly photographic groups use favorable information to describe their community and as such the recommendation is that newcomers should be more cautious when gathering and interpreting information. In combination with the real entry requirements covered by this research, the newcomer should be in a better position to evaluate the validity of information they gather prior to joining. Furthermore the acknowledgement that photographic groups use favorable information to describe their community should result in more realistic expectations and as a result a smoother joining process during the moments of ambivalence.

9.4.2 Organisations

This section discusses the practical implications for the individuals that control or manage photographic groups. In other words this regards the groups' or the organisations' perspective.

Firstly the findings offer to groups an understanding of the socialisation tactics that are best used to induct newcomers. Socialisation tactics are related to the focus and the tolerance of newcomers of each group. Based on their needs, groups can adopt approaches that are more suitable to them. Newcomer-oriented photographic groups should place more emphasis on orientation and be more tolerant whereas more established groups should allocate less effort and resources on orientation. In addition it was suggested that newly formed groups and online groups in general use institutionalised approaches whereas established groups use individualised. The findings indicated that institutionalised approaches are

more suitable when newcomers join in numbers and individualised approaches are more suitable when they join one at a time.

Since this study has provided information about the socialisation tactics that newcomers use, groups have a more efficient process on how to cultivate and aid the orientation process. This can potentially reduce the resources that groups spend in attracting and orientating newcomers. In addition the groups should now have a better understanding of the information and knowledge needs of photographic members and as such they can provide a better ground for sharing information. Groups can direct members' participation in a way that satisfies their information needs and at the same time evolve the domain in their desired direction. For example if their members aspire towards technical expertise, they could organise more competitions whereas for a newcomer driven group they could organise more tutorials.

Secondly this study's findings offer insights into the approaches that groups use when they are at their early development stages or when they seek to define or focus their domain. In that case the groups should be more tolerant or promote the adjustment of the domain based on their members' interests. Instead groups that already have a focused domain could be resilient to change.

Lastly the findings on the accuracy of information gathered before joining indicated that inaccurate information could lead to more intense disidentification movements for newcomers. Having this in mind then groups should find the right balance between presenting favorable information and creating unrealistic expectations. To attract fewer but longer term members they should focus on presenting accurate information to create realistic expectations. To attract more but shorter term members they should focus more on favorable information

9.5 Limitations and Future work

The scope of the research, the joining process in offline and online leisure pursuit groups, was successfully explored. Given the limited resources of a single PhD project there was a geographical limitation on the groups studied thus a focus in

Yorkshire area was chosen. Even though the findings of the research should be applicable in different contexts as well, future work can expand to other geographical locations and compare the results. Furthermore research could be extended to other types of leisure groups other than photography such as cooking, dancing and gaming groups.

The research's methodological choices inevitably had some limitations. Since the ethnographic study was focused on four photographic groups within a geographical region it has limitations in term of generalisations. Ethnographic research is often criticised for lacking in generalisability (LeCompte, 1982). In the same sense the use of purposeful sampling for selecting interview participants is lacking in terms of generalisability compared to probability sampling where it provides the best opportunity to generalise the results to the population (Marshall, 1996).

Ethnographic studies are considered to be time-consuming (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004) and even though the findings from the interviews were very insightful and revealing, more participants or more groups could be studied if participant observation was not adopted. On the other hand the ethnographic study increased the research quality and more specifically its validity.

Moreover online and offline groups evolve over time and as such they could have evolved in a way that the findings might be slightly different if a future data collection takes place. The history of the groups studied was also part of the data collected but still there was the limitation of time in this study over only a few years. Future work could follow the evolution of a group for an extended period and draw out more findings on how they structurally change and how it can affect the joining process.

Based on the findings and the emergent themes of the first and final phases of the research, appropriate theoretical lenses were chosen to view the findings from. Due to the exploratory nature and qualitative approach of the research, future work can use the same kind of data that were collected and use different theoretical lenses to study and analyse them. It would be interesting to analyse and compare the findings of this research through a different theoretical lens.

To better understand the strategies that newcomers use at the early stages of joining and also examine the structural characteristics of a network over time, a Social Network Analysis could be used in offline or online groups. Such approach could examine how the relationships of an individual are shaped by learning during the joining process and examine the impact of key moment on their network. A Social Network Analysis could be used to verify existing findings. For example this study found that inaccurate information might cause newcomers to weakly or strongly disidentify with the group. Thus Social Network Analysis could potentially examine the impact of inaccurate information on the establishment and maintenance of weak and strong ties within a group.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

1. Why do you like photography?
2. How did you get into it?
3. Are you a member of any other offline or online photographic groups?

4. How did you join this group?

5. Why is it interesting to be a member in this group?

6. What did you know about this group before you joined?

7. What were the important moments during your time in the group?

8. At what point do you believe you became a member, if at all?

9. How did you try to become a member? What did you do?

10. What did the group do that helped you feel part of it?

11. In the future, how do you see yourself in the group?

12. What do you think the experience of new members is like?

13. How did you meet new people in the group?

14. What did you learn since you joined this group?

15. How is it different being a member in real-life compared to online groups?

16. What are your ambitions in photography?

Appendix 2: Information Sheet



Information Sheet

The University of Sheffield. Information School	An exploration of the joining process of newcomers in offline and online leisure pursuit groups
------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Researchers

Researcher name: Nicolas Kyllilis,

Email address: nkyllilis1@sheffield.ac.uk

Telephone: 00 44 (0) 114 222 2630

Supervisors name: Dr Andrew Cox

Email address: a.m.cox@sheffield.ac.uk

Telephone: 00 44 (0) 114 222 6347

Purpose of the research

This project is part of a three year PhD research. Its purpose is to explore the notion of joining and becoming a member in offline and online photographic groups. More specifically, we will try to find what makes such societies hospitable to newcomers during the joining period. Additionally we will examine the different strategies that are used in order to achieve membership. Lastly we will attempt to explore newcomers' experiences and feelings about becoming a member.

Who will be participating?

Members in offline and online photographic groups.

What will you be asked to do?

You will take part in an interview (approximately 40 minutes) at a convenient time and place (e.g. After group meetings).

What are the potential risks of participating?

The risks of participating are the same as those experienced in everyday life.

What data will we collect?

The information sought is regarding experiences, feelings and events throughout joining photographic groups and photography as an interest in general.

What will we do with the data?

We will be analysing the data for inclusion in my PhD Thesis or an academic publication in the future. Interviews will be recorded in digital form (voice recorder). The audio files will be transferred and stored in an anonymised form in a secure computer. Apart from me and the project's supervisor nobody else will have access to these data.

Will my participation be confidential?

We are anonymising the data and coding the computer files with a random number. No identifying information will be retained.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of this study will be included in my PhD Thesis which will be publicly available. Please contact the School in one year. In addition, the results of this research could be reported in journal papers.

I confirm that I have read and understand the description of the research project, and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

I understand that I may decline to answer any particular question or questions, or to do any of the activities. If I stop participating at all time, all of my data will be purged.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, that my name or identity will not be linked to any research materials, and that I will not be identified or identifiable in any report or reports that result from the research.

I give permission for the research team members to have access to my anonymised responses.

I give permission for the research team to re-use my data for future research as specified above.

I agree to take part in the research project as described above.

Participant Name (Please print)

Participant Signature

Researcher Name (Please print)

Researcher Signature

Date

Note: If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Jo Bates, Research Ethics Coordinator, Information School, The University of Sheffield (ischool_ethics@sheffield.ac.uk), or to the University Registrar and Secretary.

Appendix 3: Ethical review application documentation

Information School Research Ethics Panel

Letter of Approval

Date: 19th November 2012

TO: Nicolas Kyllilis

The Information School Research Ethics Panel has examined the following application:

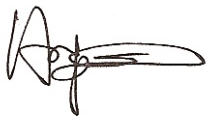
Title: An exploration of the joining process of newcomers in offline and online leisure pursuit groups

Submitted by: Nicolas Kyllilis

And found the proposed research involving human participants to be in accordance with the University of Sheffield's policies and procedures, which include the University's '*Financial Regulations*', '*Good Research Practice Standards*' and the '*Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue*' (Ethics Policy).

This letter is the official record of ethics approval by the School, and should accompany any formal requests for evidence of research ethics approval.

Effective Date



Dr Angela Lin

Research Ethics Coordinator