

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE FACEBOOK SOCIAL NETWORK:
THE DESIRE TO INFLUENCE, ASSOCIATE, AND CONSTRUCT
A REPRESENTATIVE AND IDEAL IDENTITY**

Jessica Lee Pugh*

[May 2010]

* Jessica Pugh is a graduate of the College of Business Administration Honors Program at California State University, Long Beach, CA 90840. This manuscript serves to fulfill her Honors Thesis requirement. Address correspondence to Jessica Pugh: jpugh333@yahoo.com.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Mary Wolfenbarger Celsi for introducing me to qualitative research and guiding me through the steps in learning and understanding the importance of research in our lives. Dr. Celsi was extremely monumental in the completion of this thesis. I appreciate all support, creative idea brainstorming, and positivity that were brought to the student-advisor relationship. I have learned a tremendous amount from Dr. Celsi, and will continue to strive for my goals as she has pushed me to do. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Sam Min for his guidance, support as well as the knowledge he has brought as the instructor of the College of Business Honors Program senior seminar. I am extremely proud I had the privilege to learn under his instruction and work with the utmost diligence to meet his expectations of undergraduate qualitative research. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Pamela Homer for her continued support, research ideas, time and effort in helping me complete my thesis. This has been a great learning experience that I would not be able to accomplish without the CSULB faculty.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for assisting me throughout this process. Whether it was through their motivation and encouragement, or introducing me to potential informants their support did not go unnoticed. Special thanks to Stephanie Isenman, Jennifer Pugh, Matt Duenner, Andre Lujan, and Tony Ibarra.

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ABSTRACT

What better place to be your absolute funniest, most attractive, interesting and appealing self than a Facebook profile? Social networking websites (SNWs) have opened the doors of communication, allowing people from around the world to engage in identity creations and relationship development. As the leading SNW, Facebook boasts over 400 million active users, engaging in the Website on a daily basis to facilitate an ongoing dialogue of their identity and generating influence amongst their networks. Facebook users employ a number of features including notes (blog), games, chat, joining fan pages, starting groups, posting statuses, and writing on other's walls. Through these experiences, users develop their self-concept and affiliative identities to create their image, and to produce their own spotlight through a micro-celebrity experience on Facebook. This study extends prior research of computer-mediated environments (personal Websites) to develop theory of how people contemporarily define themselves in their social online space. The Facebook user celebrity experience is brought about through connected networks/fan base, a highly regarded image, and associations that are developed throughout this analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Evolution of Facebook

Dramatically changing the landscape of identity construction, Internet technology has mobilized people around the world to re-conceptualize their image. “We are moving from rooted identities based on place, and toward hybrid and flexible forms of identity” (Easthope, 2009). Where identity was once ascribed by family name and reputation, users now exert the utmost influence in shaping their virtual image to reflect both actual and ideal identities.

Interpersonal interactions mold the construction and perceptions of one’s offline and online identity. However, Whang and Chang (2010) believe, “the development of online relationships differs from offline relationships because of the features of the internet. As an example, physical attractiveness plays a crucial role in the development of offline relationships but not in that of cyber-relationships” (pg. 291). Social networking Websites (SNWs) provides a medium for users to express themselves beyond physical features and labels, to share experiences, discuss interests, and influence one another in a selective network. In addition, social networking Websites are not constrained by the same geographic boundaries as real life networks; allowing users to make and develop relationships with individuals of similar interests around the world. Lastly, SNWs provide an optimal format for users to keep a “personal narrative going” in which they “integrate events which happen in the external world, and sort them into an ‘ongoing’ story about the self” (Marsh, 2005).

While impression management is not a new theme in social sciences research, the implications of constructing an omnipresent digital identity is one specific to the development of social networking Websites (SNWs). The first research on this topic alluded to identity in computer-mediated environments (CMEs). CMEs were the first to establish the trend of presenting an online identity to the public. “CMEs are virtual digital places that occupy neither

space nor time” (Schau and Gilly, 2003). In CMEs, computer-savvy individuals create personal Websites which communicate their identity beyond 3D encounters. In recent years, SNWs have popularized the construction and presentation of personal identity online. Social networks provide a platform for communication and the extension of consumer influence. SNWs are “one of the fastest growing arenas of the World Wide Web” and Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn are currently among the most visited Websites in the United States of America (Trusov, Bucklin, Pauwels, 2009).

This study extends prior theory developed on the topics of identity creation through personal web pages on CMEs. The widespread availability of the Internet, at school, work, airports, and mobile devices makes Facebook accessible almost everywhere and provides a more connected, interactive experience than CMEs. The Facebook user experience includes joining groups, becoming a fan, updating a personal status, and games (e.g. Farmville and Sorority Life). These features are accompanied by the basic social networking elements of posting information, communicating with other users, uploading pictures, writing notes (blogs), and sending event invitations, all of which contribute to a more interactive Facebook experience. Recent statistics (2010) provided by Facebook reveal 50 percent of their active users log-in everyday, and 35 million use the status feature to update their profiles daily (Hepburn, 2010).

The fundamental differences between CMEs and SNWs create a new platform for identity construction online. Facebook and personal Websites differ in three key areas, interactivity, standardization, and usability. Regarding interactivity, personal Website users tend to log-in and update their information less frequently. In the context of Facebook, 60 million status updates are posted each day (Hepburn, 2010). In addition, communication with Website viewers is also limited in personal Websites (CMEs). In contrast, half of Facebook’s active users log-in daily, instantaneously responding to “pokes,” friend requests, status updates, and

comments. The uniform format of all Facebook profiles challenges users to be more expressive and strategic to distinguish their identity. Personal Websites are unique by comparison; each personal Website is a reflection of the user's time, knowledge, and effort to enhance their site through graphics and various links. The last difference is ease of use. The technology acceptance model "posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use determine an individual's intention to use a system (Wade and Schneberger, 2006). The substantial learning curve associated with personal Websites makes them less common, as their use is restricted to more motivated or knowledgeable users. On the other hand, Young (2009) explains "that the interaction is not merely between individual and tool (computer that is) but rather a form of socialization that is underpinned by one's conscious decision to create an online identity that is accessible to others." Therefore when a person has the social motivation to join a networking site they work to overcome learning curves to participate in a fulfilling social experience. The lower learning curve of Facebook allows users of all ages and skills to actively socialize and participate with a minimal time investment to use the site.

Comparing contemporary SNWs and personal Websites, we see how Facebook has evolved and became a strong household presence with the development and availability of the Internet. In 1999, four million Americans posted personal Websites, and by 2001 this number slowly climbed to 11 million pages (Schau and Gilly, 2003). More recently, social networkers have been quicker to join Facebook, as the site increased their United States user base from 42 to 103 million in 2009 alone (Corbett, 2010). Thus Facebook is the ideal social networking site to use for a qualitative study that explores how most Americans construct their online identities.

The ease of use of today's leading SNWs has resulted in millions of people using these sites to connect with others. As in other social situations, users construct and present their identity through the profile. Peluchette and Karl (2010) explain that "Facebook provides a profile

template which prompts for different kinds of personal information (e.g., favorite quotations, political affiliation, favorite music and education), [and] users have considerable freedom to provide such information or not and to post any other information or pictures of their choice.” As in personal Websites, Facebook participants use their creativity to define themselves through “digital collages using symbols and signs to represent and express their self concepts” (Schau and Gilly, 2003). The object of this study is to understand the process of how individuals define themselves, and what attributes of their identity they find most important to share with their network. Drawing upon the established theories of self-concept and social distance corollary, this research examines the routes users employ to identify themselves. Uncovering user self-perceptions and applying aspects of social comparison is an especially appropriate topic in the context of social networking. It is in this forum that users can obtain immediate feedback on their personal views, consumption, and thus their identity. Understanding how users construct identity in Facebook has implication for products, services, and advertising that is related to Facebook and other social networks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Construction of Online Identity

Marketing scholars Schau and Gilly (2003) write that, “we may indeed be what we have self-presented, but we are also a great deal more” (p. 387). The research of this study explores the reasons why Facebook users are prone to emphasize particular aspects of their identity and “remove tags” from areas inconsistent with their constructed being.

Engaging in online identity construction allows users to define themselves by more than just their actual identity schemas, labels we place on ourselves (e.g. student, mother or husband). Instead, Facebook provides users the opportunity to share interests, ideas (blog), appealing images, and their identity amongst a public network. Users manage forums such as Facebook to

produce their desired image by communicating through symbolic, digital stimuli. In what Schau and Gilly (2003) refer to as “authenticating acts or self-referential behaviors, users feel free to reveal their true self, and frequently multiple selves” online (386). In this manner, users select the best representations of themselves to strengthen the link between their actual and their ideal (desired) identity. Creating an online representation of oneself with linguistic content, imagery and brand associations, users consider their self-concept, “our mental conception of whom we are” (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2007, p.54). With their self-concept schema; users are prone to activate the ideal identity schema. This schema describes “how the identity we seek would be realized in its ideal form” (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2007, p.55). For users, these cognitive processes underlying self-concept schemas lay the foundation for the way Facebook users construct their identities.

The social actions required for self-presentation are material-oriented and depend largely on individuals displaying signs, symbols, brands and practices to communicate a desired impression (Schau and Gilly, 2003). The deployment of the ideal identity schema causes users to select which consumption behaviors or labels best describe who they are, or desire to be. The social identity theory proposed by Hoyer and MacInnis offers that individuals “evaluate brands in terms of their consistency with our individual identities” (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2007). By this context, we extend Hoyer and MacInnis’ theory to include the behavior and status associations linked to the brands, which consumers appeal to. In other words, while users may not make direct brand associations, their behaviors operate in a manner consistent with brands, labels and behaviors presented on their profiles. This behavior further substantiates a user’s identity and may facilitate social acceptance in their (desired) network.

The value of being able to continuously update one’s profile is highly impacted by the theory of social comparison, in which social networkers use one another as a means to assess

their own identities. Zhang and Daughtery (2009) claim that the social networking experience is “a platform for users to compare against each other, and confirm or even enhance their self-identity.” Users are prone to use others as a yardstick to determine their social position, construct self-concepts, and acquire self-esteem, all the while making sense of themselves and their surroundings. The accessibility of networkers’ photos, comment histories and videos provide a substantial amount of material to make judgments about others’ identities. By processing the available signs and symbols, users themselves can become more critical of the image they project.

Situated Cognition

Young (2007) defines situated cognition as a process of enculturation by which “people adopt behaviors and belief systems of their social groups and eventually start acting in accordance with the norms.” Employing the situated cognition theory to analyze how users construct and operate their profiles, we can assess the influence their network has on the creation of their identity and their subsequent behaviors. Facebook is driven by people relating to one another socially through group-oriented behaviors. By this means, users employ the “like” button to reinforce agreement, join groups to show comradery, and become fans to provide support. Users joining social networking sites, such as Facebook, first conform to social phenomena by joining a heavily used site, and further conform to societal and group pressures as they operate profiles and target specific audiences with communications.

The theory of situated cognition is prevalent in studies of both identity and group conformance. Whether offline or online, to become a member of a social network one must adhere to its pre-constructed social norms. “Identity is characterized by the tension between of how a person defines themselves as an individual and how they connect to others and social groups, in affiliative relationships” (Schau and Gilly, 2003). To alleviate this tension, users

employ a degree of conformity to generate understanding and become recognized by their intended audience or social group. Goffman (1959) asserts that the presentation of self is contextual, based on a specific setting and facing a definable and anticipated audience, through such; users operate profiles within the norms of Website and audience.

The second concept of affiliated identity has been used to explain personal Website design. Associations built through networks are “important in situating the self within the social world and communicating identity to the intended audience” (Schau and Gilly, 2003). In this manner, “objects provide a medium of linguistic communication, through which people articulate their relationship to materiality and communicate their places within the social world” (Schau and Gilly, 2003). By these means, consumers are driven to express themselves by their consumption-oriented behavior to relate to others in their network. Drawing on the previously discussed notion of ideal identity schema, people assess their compatibility and set the stage for social comparison by the objects they use to represent themselves in an online context.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Study

Several methods of research design were explored before the selection of qualitative analysis by means of in-depth interviews was selected. While prior research employs the use of empirical designs through surveys and observational study, the limitations of these methods were not suitable for this study. Surveys are a respected method to gather representative data from a large sample on factual questions. However, when addressing more personal areas such as identity creation and self-concept, much of this behavior is subconscious and requires in-depth exploration. To better assess the true motivations of Facebook user behavior qualitative research proves most suitable.

Kozinets explains that, “qualitative methods are particularly useful for revealing the rich symbolic world that underlies needs, desires, meanings and choice” (Kozinets, 2002). Thus the topic of this study finds itself in qualitative research. Interviews involve direct contact with consumers, and when conducted in comfortable settings are likely to be more personal as well as productive (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2007). Qualitative research is not limited to rigidly pre-defined variables. Thus, qualitative research contributes inquiry research by enabling exploration of new areas of research and building new theories.

Informant Selection

A theoretical sample of members was chosen for their ability to contribute research feedback and to provide comparison between different user groups (see Table 3). To obtain the richest information regarding personal usage, heavy Facebook users were selected to participate. The criteria for heavy usage in this study were user log-in 4-6 times a week, and having maintained a Facebook profile for at least two months. To ensure the quality of information provided, informants outside of my personal Facebook network were chosen to participate in this study. The research sample reflects heavy users roughly proportionate to various age and gender categories of current Facebook user data (see Table 2). The sample of this research was always subject to change during the process as theory was filled in and additional information needed to be identified. The Los Angeles area, where this research was conducted, is the second largest Facebook user demographic, home to 2,166,840 users (Corbett, 2010). Additional demographic data regarding Facebook users that are representative in this study, male and females ranging between the ages of 13 to 50 years old, is provided in Tables 1 and 2. Table 3 presents profiles of the informants in this study.

[Insert Tables 1, 2, and 3 about here.]

Interview Protocol

Interviews concerning the identity and consumer influence behaviors over Facebook were conducted in person. All of the interviews took place over a two month time frame. I recorded and later transcribed the interviews for further analysis. While the length of the interview was specific to user interpretations, they all ranged between 45 to 90 minutes. To elicit greater discussion on the reasoning behind identity construction through Facebook, interviewees personally navigated their profiles, during and after interviews.

Allowing informants to navigate their user profile is a technique related to autodiving. Autodiving requires informants to bring personal photos or videos to an interview, and then explain the pictures/videos. Creating a more interactive interview (by navigating user profiles) eases the informant's ability to recall their experiences and engages them more deeply in the conversation with the research.

Informant Questions

While all informants were asked a standardized set of questions, informant interactions resulted in probing and further questioning. Interviews began with questions of online identity construction and then moved to their network and lastly influence. Informants were asked 10-12 questions on each subject in a discussion-like manner. Through such, informants provided detailed narratives of Facebook experiences, compiled and analyzed to develop the themes. Questions ranged from surface level information, such as how many people are in one's network, to more intuitive questions, such as, ways that users feel that they personally impact their networks. A sample of the questions appears in Table 4.

[Insert Table 4 about here.]

Data Analysis

The interviews provided an understanding of how and why informants choose digital material to display on their Facebook profiles. The methodology in this study is based on Corbin and Strauss' (1990) redefined steps of grounded theory. Grounded theory is a well-developed research method explicated in 1967 to provide a theoretical explanation of social phenomena collected in qualitative research. By way of this method, "each concept earns its way into the theory by repeatedly being present in interviews – or by being significantly absent" (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Analysis of the data provided through informant interviews was done in a constant comparative method. As described by Corbin and Strauss (1990) "analysis is necessary from the start because it is used to direct the next interview and observations." Through the examination of the first bits of information, data and cues were incorporated into subsequent interviews. Each informant's interview was audio recorded then transcribed to cross reference for key themes of identity creation and consumer influence.

FINDINGS

What better place to be your absolute funniest, most attractive, interesting and appealing self than a Facebook profile? The data collected for this study can be described by one central theme relevant to all informants; the idea that each user partakes in a celebrity-like experience when using Facebook. While users do not obtain instant fame from being a part of an online social network, and that is not the intention for the initiation of profiles, aspects of a celebrity-like culture keep users engaged and continuously visiting. The indication of celebrity life on Facebook is substantiated by several sub-themes linking celebrity life to Facebook culture.

The culture of celebrity is marked by power, influence, and consumer interest and judgment, thus making a celebrity, "a voice above others, a voice that is channeled into the

media as being legitimately significant” (Marshall, 1997). The powers celebrities possess distinguish them from “everyday individuals” as personas of great expertise and influence. Scholar David Marshall believes celebrities “move on the public stage while the rest of us watch; express themselves quite individually and idiosyncratically while the rest of the population are constructed as demographic aggregates; represent success and achievement within the social world,” although they need no “requisite association with work” (Marshall, 1997). American culture places celebrities on a pedestal, making their popularity and influence appear almost completely unattainable to the everyday person. However, through social media, everyday people can become celebrities, at least in their network.

The Everyday Person as a Celebrity

In 1960 Andy Warhol predicted “in the future everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes” (Warhol, 1979). Fortunately for Facebook users, that time has come. Ryan Healy, COO of a contemporary social networking site, coined the term “micro-celebrity” to denote social networking Website (SNW) users who are well known amongst their network (Healy, 2007). A Facebook user’s well-connected and participative network enables them to have the spotlight, similar to the attention a celebrity would command from the public. A user’s experience of micro-celebrity life takes place when friends, family and associates are permitted access to a user’s thoughts, whereabouts and affiliations; thus giving up the normality of private life in exchange for a celebrity-like experience. The primary similarity between being a celebrity and being a micro-celebrity is denoted by the spotlight, which grants users visibility, prestige and thus influence. On the other hand, the primary difference is degree of popularity and span of control.

Celebrity vs. Micro-Celebrity

The scope of influence is a key differentiator between actual celebrities and Facebook users. Celebrities generally command much larger audiences than the average Facebook user (See Table 5). Along with this audience comes the factor of appeal, in which celebrities must charm more than just an immediate network. McNamara (2009) considers this the “backstage-ness of celebrity production,” in which “the private self is no longer the ultimate truth” to their networks (McNamara, 2009). On the other hand, Facebook users have the option of being more authentic than celebrities, as they primarily communicate with individuals they know or have met. In addition, micro-celebrities command attention in a more participative manner that reaffirms their status as a micro-celebrity. When others comment on a post you know someone is reading the user’s work. Unlike actual celebrities who do not have the time to communicate with all of their fans, a micro-celebrity forms more intimate relationships with those in their network. In fact, these connections are what make micro-celebrities influential amongst their networks. The status of a micro-celebrity is much more attainable, making them easier to relate to and communicate with.

[Insert Table 5 abouthere.]

The second aspect in which users differ from celebrities is the dimension of control. Actual celebrities have a limited jurisdiction of the “degree to which their images are produced, distributed and policed” (McNamara, 2009). Comparatively, Facebook users have the opportunity to manage their profiles by uploading personal pictures, and removing tags from photos, notes or comments they wish to disassociate with their identity. Aside from the magnitude of potential influence and control, celebrities and Facebook users share very similar experiences.

Celebrity and Micro-celebrity Similarities

According to Turner's analysis of the spread of celebrity culture, "the opportunity of becoming a celebrity has spread beyond the various elites and into the expectations of the population in general" (Turner, 2006) (See Figure1). In other words, the reality of becoming a celebrity is more attainable now than ever before. A micro-celebrity is a creature of its own construction, and shares several celebrity-like experiences. Firstly, a micro-celebrity is held accountable for "managing their name brand," thus building a credible and consistent image (Healy, 2007). A micro-celebrity is solely responsible for their image, and they highly regard it. Having negative or positive "press" alters the way others view a user, similar to a celebrity situation. This dimension is especially important, because it denotes both how users view themselves, and how they want to be perceived.

[Insert Figure 1 about here.]

Through the mediation of photos, several Facebook users find themselves obtaining negative press in the spotlight of their networks. Felicia, among several users contributed to the idea of a highly regarded image through her experience.

"New Years Eve [my friends and I] were at a murder mystery party, so we were all in costume. There was also a prize for like the best costume, [which was] more funny costume stuff, part of which was a package of bubble gum cigarettes. Since all of us have had a few cocktails, all of us in all of the pictures have bubble gum cigarettes hanging out of our mouths...but in a snap shot you can't tell it's a bubble gum cigarette. I'm not a smoker, I don't like smoking, I don't like being associated with it, so I don't like that those pictures are [on Facebook] because there's no context. It's not like "ha-ha...at a costume party with a bubble gum cigarette." My friend that put them up just put them all up without like captions or a description of what it was. So taken out of context I just feel like that could look bad, but that's me...I'm sure in other people's standards...its totally fine."

Secondly, surrounding oneself with the right people can make or break a user's micro-celebrity. Adding contacts to one's page can serve as both an indication of status by means of popularity as well as resources. The celebrity experience is marked by the number of contacts or fans. Similarly, a micro-celebrity builds their network by being associated with the "right" individuals. Throughout the analysis we will uncover how users have employed their micro-celebrity to create experiences they would not have otherwise had access to.

Thirdly, Facebook users, like celebrities, have increasingly high visibility. Facebook has been localized to 43 languages, and profiles can be accessed from all over the world. When celebrities and Facebook users have a high degree of visibility they are subject to public/network opinion, and fans/Facebook "friends" become more interested in the intimate details of their lives. As our expectations of what is public information increase, "everything becomes fair game for our voyeuristic viewing pleasure" (McNamara, 2009).

Micro-Celebrity Experiences in Facebook

The connection between celeb-reality and the micro-celebrity on Facebook results when informants emphasize a particular aspect of their identity on their profile. Similar to celebrities who become famous for a distinct attribute or situation, Facebook users exemplify this behavior through the recognition they receive around their profile theme. By posting several pictures of their car, motorcycle, their pets and other animals, and MLS soccer game information, users develop a more credible micro-celebrity by strengthening the connection between their actual selves and ideal identity. Making a more concrete connection between their idealized online image and themselves, they are able to exert more influence within that realm. Through the construction of their image and credibility, users are able to function as opinion leaders within the niche of their network.

Common to both celebrities and micro-celebrities is a sense of openness and willingness to express their selves publicly. Both micro-and actual celebrities share the desire to spread their influence by the cultivation of fans/“friends.” Whether they are discrete about private lives or not, there remains an area of interest both celebrities and Facebook users are passionate about, and desire to share with others. This aspect becomes the foundation for their profiles. Across informants, Facebook users are drawn to the site to share with others.

Image

In the life of celebrity, fame results from an individual exerting a substantial amount of influence or expertise in a specific area. In this arena, a celebrity stands above the rest with their talent, knowledge, or experience. In a similar fashion, Facebook users create profiles building up one or more aspects of their identity. For example, the informants in the study had profiles pertaining to the following identities/themes: the “car guy,” devout worshiper, bike guy, club promoter, and soccer fanatic, among others. When Chase, a 22-year old university student and car fanatic, was asked which aspect of his personality was most developed on Facebook, he said that it was:

“Definitely car related. I’m into real cars, remote control cars, wakeboarding, and snowboarding. I mean anything to do with cars is on there, and a couple of the school activities I like to do are up there.”

Although Chase contends his profile is “90 percent indicative” of his actual personality, his fascination with cars makes up a significant portion of his online identity. When asked what he originally changed his profile picture to after breaking up with his girlfriend (who initially created his profile), he said, “after that...knowing me, it was probably me and my car, or me and a car.” Not only does Chase use Facebook as a forum to display his love for cars but also as an open forum for him to exchange ideas and exert influence amongst his network. Using his roles

as a remote control car technician and sales associate at Hobby People, Chase has been able to validate his identity and opinion leadership on Facebook.

Similarly, Anita, a 45-year old devout worshiper, spends much of her time on Facebook sharing the gospel with people in her network. According to Anita:

“It’s all about God. When I put myself up there (on Facebook), I let them know that I’m about the Lord. Some people have theirs up there about different things. We are different strokes and different folks. I represent God.”

While Anita elaborated throughout the interview about other roles that are part of her identity, her faith has set the foundation for her profile. The development of her profile provides others insight as to what topics are permissible for discussion, her expertise, and where her passion lies. While Anita does not have any photos illustrating a theme of praise and worship, a personal statement in place of an iconic photo states, “if you love the Lord, then you’ve got the right page,” right below her profile picture.

Across all informants, regardless of public or private personalities, they displayed a propensity to share a social aspect of their identity. In the least disclosed Facebook profile, Jesse, a 34-year old IT consultant, who uses a single motorcycle photo to represent himself, shares his identity in his profile.

“My Facebook profile has my name, birth date, and a picture, and I mean that’s about it. I have had the same picture of my motorcycle for the last two years. It’s not a presentation of me all together. It shows one small part just by having a picture up there of a motorcycle...I spent a long time fixing [motorcycles] for a living. So they are still a part of my life, I ride them whenever I can. I ride them to school a few times a week. So you can gather that from it, but that’s just a small part of what is me. But there are tons and tons of stuff missing. I guess one of the big things is we have a baby on the way and there is nothing about that on Facebook, nothing what so ever. My wife on the other hand, yes there is. She has got the pictures of this, and that, and the other, and I just didn’t want to.”

Users obtain network spotlight by taking an integral aspect of their identity and making it the foundation of their online image. In the spotlight, Facebook users are able to transition from an everyday person to a micro-celebrity. As in Jesse's case, the selected theme a user employs must contain the following qualities: (1) be a social aspect of their identity and (2) an area in which they display expertise. The social component of a theme refers to users' comfort sharing a desired topic in their online space. The second component of expertise pertains to a user's confidence, passion and knowledge about the topic that makes them an opinion leader in the context of their micro-celebrity. Once a Facebook user conceptualizes who they are or aspire to be offline, they can establish their credibility through both communication and photos online in the context of a social networking Website.

Photos

According to Rojek, "the increasing importance of the public face in everyday life is a consequence of the rise of public society" (Rojek, 2001). In other words, the emphasis placed on beauty by popular culture has set an ascending bar, unreachable by the everyday person. While most interactions on Facebook are informal, users remain conscientious about the visual images representing their online identities. Christine explains, "it's not in real life, so you want to look...better I guess." Facebook users have the opportunity to upload their flattering pictures, or even remove tags from their less glamorous photos to allude to a flawless image. While users differ significantly with respect to the pictures and videos they upload and the frequency; a significant meaning was apparent in photos.

Similar to celebrities, Facebook users are extremely mindful of the image they project on Facebook, and are careful in their selection of photos. Informants in the study displayed the following two behaviors: (1) placing a great emphasis on profile pictures, with a quest to differentiate themselves and (2) symbolically changing photos to coincide with internal and

external shifts in their lives. Aden, a 22-year old previous naval academy student, describes the selection of his initial profile picture.

“My first profile picture was me in civilian clothing, because everyone at the naval academy had to wear the same thing every day. So if you could bring out a little bit of whom you were in terms of the clothes you wear, or what you like to dress like, or how you like to look outside of the uniform, that said more than anything...any of the words I had on my profile.”

While Facebook provides a standard format for the creation of profiles, photos help users differentiate themselves, often by picturing their rare interests and tastes. Felicia, a 31-year old newlywed, highly values her unique identity on Facebook. In fact, Felicia chooses her profile picture through a set of “rules.”

“If it is a picture of me and other people it has to be something noteworthy. It can't just be all of us in a bar. The last group photo [I posted] was from a mud run, and we were all covered head to toe in mud. I thought it was kind of funny and cute!”

Although users are vested in presenting themselves positively on Facebook, they also seek individuality. While Felicia's case of selecting an extremely rare mud photo sets the boundary rather than the Facebook norm, users post profile pictures that are unique and special to them specifically. However, these images oftentimes change when new events happen or a shift takes place in users' lives. Judy, a 50-year old recently widowed schoolteacher, offers that her photos are designed to be both appealing and fit her mood or the actual season.

“If it's a birthday, I want a birthday picture, if it's Christmas, it's going be 'Christmassy.' Around Christmas I had my dog, because she's in the midst of the wrapping paper! When my husband was going through his ordeal, I had a picture of the two of us when we were in a friend's wedding, but it was just a really good picture of the two of us.”

While currency is not a standard requirement for all informants, it is an attribute that is consistent with micro-celebrity. In the life of celebrity, it is important to be up-to-date, and thus continuously relevant to the public. When the seasons Facebook users go through coincide with the changes in their profiles, they project a more contemporary and reflective image of their actual selves.

Profile pictures enable users to re-establish their identities by producing them in a highly visible online space. Selecting a profile picture confirms what people value and how they want to be perceived. Social science theorists Hazel Markus and Elissa Wurf, regard the “self-concept as one of the most significant regulators of behavior” (Markus and Wurf, 1987). As mentioned earlier, users highly value their image similar to celebrities. Fortunately, for Facebook users they are able to reshape their image through the manipulation of photos and text on their pages to convey a new sentiment, physical change, or life direction. Among users changing their profile picture to illustrate a “season” in one’s life is Stephon. The 27-year old previous club promoter reshaped his online image after leaving the club scene to pursue a business professional career.

“My Facebook probably represents me as someone who is outgoing, extrovert, social, someone who likes to party, be around people...having fun. I am kind of in a position now, where that is going to be changing. A lot of those pictures will start to disappear, as I know that employers are taking a look at those and making judgments on people. People will start to see more professional looking photos of me...wearing suits, ties, and stuff like that.”

A Facebook profile picture is not just a picture, but an image telling a story. In order for Stephon to convey that his theme and area of interest is shifting (nightlife to business professional), his visual image has been the first to change. Similar to the celebrity experience, image must speak without sound; conveying personality, value, and igniting interest.

The users in the study explored this opportunity to visually stimulate network visitors in a manner that was attractive, and symbolic of the identity characterized on their profiles.

Throughout the interviews, it became apparent users' meticulously chose to post appealing and current photos. As images begin to appeal to larger audiences, users and celebrities alike become more involved in the process of strategically shaping their identity.

A Culture of Sharing Daily Details

Facebook thrives on a sense of immediacy, as each user acts as his/her own PR director. Users update their network about the happenings of their life in order to further their 'ongoing dialogue' and thus identity. As the private lives of celebrities become more appealing to fans, Facebook users have begun mimicking celebrity behavior; sharing increasing amounts of personal experiences in a public forum.

"Candid images are the staple of many entertainment publications and programs that cater to a seemingly unending fascination with celebrities" (McNamara, 2009, p.10). Christine, a 13-year-old middle school student, reveals the manner in which she enhances her social identity on Facebook. "If [my friends and I] go out somewhere, and if we take pictures, then they always say 'oh, put that up on Facebook.'" SNWs have changed an ordinary trip to the mall with friends into a photo shoot. As users begin making everyday information noteworthy social experiences, their lives become more publicly available to their social networks than ever before.

Through sharing personal and casual information with the public, users and celebrities alike strengthen the links between their actual and ideal identity schemas by generating information in line with their intended image and presenting it on their profiles. Christine's example represents two factors that apply to identity construction and maintenance: (1) keeping an active and appealing social agenda and (2) updating profiles to represent information in a timely fashion.

For example, when Stephon got his hair cut, as he does every few months, he made sure his Facebook friends were aware of his recent consumer behavior.

“I got a shorter haircut; it’s kind of spiky now. So I wanted to notify all of my online friends that my physical image has changed.”

As does Christine and most informants, Stephon uses Facebook to publicize and chronicle events in his life. Facebook provides users with a forum to function as a micro-celebrity. Without a forum, it would be much more difficult to broadcast the recent developments of Stephon’s hair and target the people who might be interested in obtaining this information. Unlike alternate forums, Facebook requires no responses to posted photos or a status. Instead, users have the option of either ignoring the news or providing feedback. This feature allows users validate their micro-celebrity; being able to post and receiving unwarranted feedback from the people in one’s network. Felicia explains how posting informal details make her feel more connected to and supported by her network.

“The last thing I posted was this girl in my grad school class who was wearing high heels and a mini skirt in my graduate level research class. And I’m not kidding like four inch platform huge high heels, a tiny mini skirt playing video games on her laptop. ‘I’m like why are you in grad school? Please go away.’ So I posted that, and it got like a million comments.

It’s like self-reinforcement, like ok I’m not crazy, that girl is retarded. It makes you feel like you’re not alone...like that bothers other people too.”

The behavior of sharing informal details alludes to micro-celebrity power and connectedness to their networks. By establishing an online identity, users are able to connect with more people than ever before. Most importantly, while the public generally finds that the informal information that micro-celebrities post on their profiles is insignificant, it is of value amongst their networks.

Tabloid Experience

Similar to the magazine theme, the posting of unflattering photos evokes the celebrity tabloid experience. Facebook photos provide a platform for users to judge and be judged. While informants initially offered politically correct answers when asked whether they critique people after or while looking at their profiles, all of them did later admit they had used profiles as a basis for evaluating someone's character in a negative way. Felicia, once responsible for selecting applicants to be a part of an elite university Ambassadors group, described her process of using SNWs to screen candidates.

"I've seen pictures of people in just flat out lingerie, students at Rolling Hills University...like just in a bra and panties, like very obviously posing for the camera, and to me that is pretty poor taste considering its supposed to be a social networking site. My last two years, [as the Ambassador Coordinator] I looked up every finalist on Facebook and MySpace. And that has been a deciding factor. That bra and panties girl, she was a finalist. [She was not selected for the program.] Not just because of that picture. She was one of those people that were like a maybe no...and that switched her from like a maybe no, to a not so maybe...no."

While all the informants in the study contended that they practice discretion as to what is appropriate to be posted on Facebook, the majority of the informants had users in their network that posted material that seemed appropriate for a tabloid. Stephon explained a similar situation with a co-workers profile.

"One of my old co-workers, completely bubbly, down to earth, sweetheart...in person [you] would never think anything bad of her, until you see her online. And she is completely filthy and out of control with the way she acts, and speaks, and comments on things, and you would never expect that of her."

As people begin publishing their image they must be more careful now than ever before. Similar to the celebrity experience, in a tabloid, judgment is prone to occur. Once information is

published on Facebook or the Internet in general, it becomes public domain and no longer something solely obtained by the original owner. Not only can judgments be made about an individual, but also their network.

Associations

In the world of celebrity it's not just what you know, but who you know. The same idea applies to Facebook users, whether they choose to acknowledge it or not. Every contact a user adds as a "friend" then becomes a link in their profile, and therefore an association. In this respect, adding the right people can increase social prestige. On the other end of the scale, adding an obnoxious or offensive individual would lower one's prestige. In the latter case, users have the option to delete or "de-friend" contacts.

In the contexts of both fame and Facebook, having the proper network can improve a user's social standing and provide access to new opportunities. On the other hand, users, "believe that their social standing suffers when people with whom they are associated (offenders) act in socially inappropriate ways" (Fortune and Newby-Clark, 2008). In this case, and very much like celebrity life, being associated with negative Facebook users can be detrimental to one's character. Because users' networks are extremely visible, many users demonstrate discretion in the people they add to their profiles to reduce the risk of negative image.

Stephon, the 27-year-old former club promoter has proactively disassociated from nearly 900 contacts in the past three months. According to Stephon:

"The group of selected friends that I have narrowed it down to are who they are for a reason. Anyone who uses vulgar language, or who is impolite or unpleasant to others, will usually get the boot, and not get my attention anymore. People that have similar social interests as well as similar aspirations in life are the people that I tend to associate with more, and show more of a prevalence with through my communication."

Anita, 45-years old, who has constructed her micro-celebrity identity on the basis of her faith, is unwilling to let anything be posted on her page that would tarnish her constructed image. She shares a story in which she added someone to her network, but later had to delete her:

“We were talking about how the Lord is so good. And I said, ‘the Lord blesses you every day.’ And she said ‘I want some of that,’ and that’s what made me welcome her to my page. And then after I welcomed her, she had the little devil in her.”

Unfortunately for Anita, her new Facebook friend posted disturbing videos on her page of animals participating in inter-species intercourse. Later, Anita explained, “I had to get rid of her, because her mind wasn’t on the Lord. Her mind was on, thinking she could just post whatever pops into her head,” thus tarnishing Anita’s image, morals and foundation for her micro-celebrity. Anything posted to a user’s profile is somehow related to them. Either the profile owner posted it, or enabled someone in their network to post and create an underlying association that a particular behavior is acceptable.

Clearly, users are careful about the people with whom they choose to connect and share profiles. According to the “spotlight effect,” “individuals overestimate the extent to which their appearance, behavior, or even presence is noticed when they commit a social faux pas” (Fortune and Newby-Clark, 2008). Therefore micro-celebrities under the spotlight in their Facebook profiles are apt to hide or delete the “negative press” linked or posted on their Facebook page. However, on the other side of the spectrum, users believe that having the right associations on Facebook improves their prestige.

A connection with the right person on Facebook is similar to the celebrity experience in that users are invited to more events and offered a wider array of consumer goods because of their connection. Several informants in the study described the event feature as their means of staying informed about events, as well as reaching out to their contacts. Judy, the 50-year old

recently widowed schoolteacher, was thrown a birthday celebration, solely publicized through Facebook.

“My sister and some friends at work had a big party for me. Someone says to me, ‘who do you want at your party?’ ‘I don’t know, everybody.’ And then I just let go of it. I had nothing else to do with it, and they didn’t invite everyone to the party, only if you were on Facebook. Anyone could have come...but if you weren’t on Facebook, then you didn’t get invited.”

Similarly, Felicia contends that having a Facebook profile keeps her in the loop with regards to what’s going on in her social sphere.

“Now I am like an everyday checker, because I don’t want to miss something, and some people will send an invite to a party, but only send something out through Facebook. So now my two friends are like, ‘oh I didn’t hear about that’, and I’m like... ‘ha ha you’re not on Facebook.”

While the major benefit drawing users to Facebook stems from the desire to stay informed and share with others, additional benefits can be gained through the associations, and with friends that are displayed in user profiles. Celebrities are often called upon to endorse products or services for companies. As well, celebrities are frequently offered products before they are available to the public, and oftentimes for free. Facebook users engage in similar experiences through the connections of their network. Judy, the recently widowed school teacher, shares how she has been able to benefit from her Facebook relationships.

“I have made friends with one of my sister’s friend’s from...the Scottish world. He is a bag piper and he came and played the bagpipes and did it for free at my husband’s memorial reception. We connected through [Facebook] ...so I would say that for some it’s a waste of time, and certainly I waste time on [Facebook] ... but I have made amazing connections.”

Obtaining free products and services is not the only benefit to being a celebrity, but having access to information before it reaches the rest of the public is quite important too.

Several of the informants in the study have used their connections to benefit from other's services, products, and information. Jesse, the 34-year old IT consultant, shares an experience where he reconnected with a coworker regarding the motorcycle theme of his profile.

“Yesterday one of my co-workers sent a link over [Facebook] about new motorcycle gloves. It was kind of neat, I hadn't talked to the guy in a month and a half and he just randomly sends me a link over. I thought that was kind of cool. They were all metal and all fancy. So I sent him back, 'yeah those are kind of neat, they are kind of like terminator...how much?' If I would have kicked him out (from my Facebook network), when he left the company I wouldn't have gotten to see that.”

The people in one's network can be extremely valuable. And users never know when they may need to rely on another's micro-celebrity for homework advice, to borrow a laser leveler, or restoration ideas for a motorcycle, all of which were examples informants provided. Most importantly; however, is making sure users stay connected with those in their network so that they can later rely on those relationships. In Granovetter's explanation of the strength of weak ties, he asserts, “that individuals with few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and will be confined to the provincial news and views of close friends” (Granovetter, 1983). As seen through the data, Facebook provides an excellent medium for micro-celebrities to use their status to make connections, obtain information, and share resources.

Using Your Network as a Filter

For some users, adding friends to a profile is simply a “numbers game” to boost one's micro-celebrity. However, adding friends has some definite disadvantages. The more contacts a user adds to their profile, the more careful they must become with the way they present themselves on Facebook. Ryan Healy, COO of Brazen Careerist, a social networking Website for Generation Y, shares the way his followers have shaped his communication.

“As fun as having a large audience is, it certainly makes blogging more difficult. Posts take much longer to write, and I try hard not to make the same ‘sweeping generalizations’ that I was so often accused of making in the past” (Healy, 2009).

To become a rising star in their own network, users must appeal to several different identities, interests, and personalities. Not surprisingly, informants experience confusion in managing their identity when networks expand to include parents, church members, and workplace acquaintances. Deciding whether or not to add family to their social network was a great hesitation among several informants. In fact, four of the interviewed respondents stated that although their parents are members of their real life network, they would not add on them Facebook. More specifically, the younger male informants preferred not to have their mother involved in their online social networks.

“The only person I might not add if she had [a Facebook account] would be my mom. Just because...I don’t know, there are things that my girlfriend might post. They aren’t necessarily bad. But, just a mom being a mom, they’re protective...they tend to over-analyze things.”

Although only three of six males said they did not want to add their mother, this theme appeared across genders with informants of all age groups being uncomfortable sharing their online social space with parents. The oldest informant, 50-year old Judy Lee, explains that adding her parents on Facebook affects what she is willing to post on her page.

“I have my [current] pastor on [Facebook] and my former pastor on [Facebook]. My mom and dad are on there, even though they don’t post anything. So I keep them as a “filter” about what I want to say, to make sure that it’s not too offensive.”

Thus, Facebook users have become more thoughtful as to how they present themselves and how their identity is communicated online as they add particular “friends” to their network. As Chase mentioned, in the context of Facebook, identities are not only shaped by profile owners, but by the photos and comments posted on their network as well. While users can

regulate their identities and emphasize the values found most appealing to their network, they have little impact in the regulation of other's behaviors with which they share online space. So not only must users censor their thoughts, behaviors, and links on Facebook when they add new layers to their social network, they must also reinforce these standards amongst their existing affiliations. Thus, expanding one's network to include users not directly in one's social realm keeps users on their best behavior to portray favorable impressions on Facebook.

Although users attempt to deviate from adding people to their network who are subject to judge or be disappointed by what's presented on Facebook, it is inevitable for some, and valued by others. According to Stephon, the 27-year old previous club promoter, "once I started adding some of my family members, I had to add the rest...I knew they were going to see it either way." While Stephon was extremely reluctant to share his profile with his parents, other users such as George, the 18-year old college student, was more open to the idea of adding his family.

"I would probably add my mom, just because she's always complaining that I don't call her enough. So that would be a good place to keep in touch, and for her to know that I am alright."

Therefore there appears to be no standard, and users operate their profiles as individuals with varying regulations of acceptability. Regardless of who users decide to add, they must remain mindful of the content they post and the associations they make, as Facebook profiles becomes users' online existence.

Celebrity-Like Experiences

In what McNamara calls (2009) "managed publicity," informants shape their images through the acquisition of friends, photos, statuses and event invitations. These key elements were the puzzle pieces informant Stephon Thomas used to become a micro-celebrity and exert a considerable amount of influence in his network. At Stephon's peak, he had 1300 friends, which

he used as social capital to build his career as an event marketer and club promoter. In essence, Stephon claimed he had to “fake it to make it.”

“Using the right key words to stimulate and spark people’s attention combined with photos of myself in actual night life situations helped build credibility for the image I was trying to convey.”

Although Stephon did not have the prior experience level of others in his field, he was able to drive results through the use of his constructed image on Facebook. By taking photos with actual celebrities and being photographed in popular venues amongst enthused socialites he successfully illustrated his ideal persona. With this perceived image, users in his network believed that they too could buy into the lifestyles of the rich and famous who party like rock stars alongside their very own Facebook friend, Stephon Thomas.

To be identified as a celebrity one must have a fan base that shows an interest in the celebrity. Across all interviews, informants referred to being an active Facebook participant, commenting on other’s posts, or having a profile that encourages others to browse, comment, and employ the like button. Through ongoing communications with his extremely large network, Stephon found that he had developed fans and followers, similar to an actual celebrity experience. When asked if he had ever been “stalked” on Facebook, Stephon shared one of several experiences.

“I’ve been in situations where people will come up to me and talk to me as if they know me. And I have to catch them off guard, actually I feel caught off guard and I have to ask them, ‘I’m sorry how do I know you again?’ ‘Oh, we’re friends on Facebook....I follow you, I’m a big fan,’ ‘that’s interesting, I’m not sure why, but thanks, it’s good to meet you in person.”

While Stephon’s case is very similar to the initial definition of a celebrity and fame, his experience is more like the exception than the rule. Celebrities and micro-celebrities have

legitimately significant voices, which allow them to command the attention of their fan base and networks. The concept of making a social impact in one's network was a theme revealed among all users. Aden, a soccer fanatic believes he has made a considerable social impact in the world of soccer through his Facebook profile.

“If you look back, probably 7-10 of the last posts have something to do with soccer. I feel like I am having an impact in some sort of movement in the U.S., for some sort of soccer phenomenon that is. Because, now I'm having friends come over to watch, or coming out to play with us, that would of never played soccer a year ago. Maybe it's completely false. But I feel like I have some sort of impact on the world around me. Well all 750 (the size of his network) people in it, well on Facebook.”

Whether a user's network is large or small has no relation to the impact they can have on others. While previous studies have shown that market-mavens are of the most importance to marketers this concept is less applicable in the Facebook setting (Feick and Price, 1987).

“Influential's in such a world (micro-celebrities on Facebook), while clearly more influential than average, are rarely many more times more influential” (Watts and Dodds, 2007). Micro-celebrities on Facebook are able to exert influence no matter what size their network is. Acting as an opinion leader, their ideas and actions are of value and thus influential to others. Informants all acknowledged that they post with a particular audience in mind. For all informants in the study, the audience they target consists of the “very immediate tiny circle of friends.”

The degree of micro-celebrity one experiences on Facebook varies with user's activity online as well as their networks'. Even for the less recognized micro-celebrities, Facebook provides an exceptional forum to highlight and receive positive feedback on the user's talent. As I asked Judy what the purpose of her Facebook posts were, her face lit up as she shared a story of a friend complimenting her poetry.

“I like to make people laugh, and keeping it light, and I like just staying in touch. And people have told me, ‘you know Judy, I really don’t write anything in my posts, but I love reading your posts.’ Ah...is that good? I guess it is good?”

Whether it’s a comment on a user profile or beginning a soccer revolution, knowing that others care about the information we post allows users to feel part of a community. Scholars Wang and Chang assert that individuals go online to achieve emotional and social support, “members share their comments and suggestions online...and experience a sense of belonging and intimacy through their interactions online” (Wang and Chang, 2010). No longer are users alone in their devotion to a sport or hobby, but through Facebook networks are formed, and users directly influence one another.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Facebook is an excellent source for marketers to introduce new products. According to the analysis provided in this study, each user has the ability to function as a micro-celebrity, as they exert significant influence over other users and act as opinion leaders. According to Jenna Goudreau (2010), a Forbes journalist, women in particular use social networking Websites as tools to make connections. Thus in a more communicative manner than men, women discuss products, and are influenced by those acting as opinion leaders in their network base. Although the men in the study on average had larger network sizes, they used their network as means to build social capital; a target market for club promoting, improving one’s score in a Facebook game, a public “black book” of female acquaintances, and a potential market of soccer enthusiast, all of which were reported in the data. On the other hand, women used Facebook to “keep in touch with my cousin Julie because she lives far away” and be a lifeline during a tragic loss. While it is important to recognize that all users are influential in some manner on Facebook,

marketers should develop avenues for women to directly discuss their products or brands through a combination of fan pages, reward points, coupons or free merchandise.

As seen in the analysis, Facebook users enjoy having a valued opinion and being an active online member. As each user acts as an opinion leader, marketers should create avenues for Facebook users to have an integral role in product development, testing and the diffusion of new products to the public. Having information first, is one of the values of being an opinion leader. If technology companies such as Sony or Samsung were to partner with Facebook micro-celebrities they could find how consumers are using their products, as well as their needs, and make them more dedicated and loyal to a company's brand and products.

Photos

Because photos are important to Facebook users, Facebook should team with a company that would enable users to order prints directly from their account. In January 2010, there was a reported three billion photos uploaded on the Website each month (Hepburn, 2010). This is a tremendous market for managers to target for their printing resources at a discounted rate. In addition, photo companies could partner with Facebook to begin enhancing images users post on the site.

Currently Facebook users can only crop uploaded photos; however, if they were able to zoom, change the color to sepia, black and white, or remove red eye, users would likely take these opportunities. Employing a commercial photo company to offer these features on Facebook could be extremely beneficial from a profit and brand recognition standpoint.

Implications for Future Research

One area of further exploration is the norms users employ on Facebook. While the majority of users agreed to have a standard to what they placed on Facebook the other side of the story remains largely unexplored outside the realm of college students. Across demographics

there are users who exploit themselves both visually and lyrically with the content that they post. Further research should explore the motivations for users to employ these sorts of behaviors. Analysis from this study would suggest that these users operate in a social network who finds their behavior acceptable, as we are influenced by our network. However, a detailed qualitative analysis would contribute to social science research by examining the motivations and rewards for being socially defiant in an online space, and those two factors differ from real life.

Secondly, further research should address the profile pages and interactions of actual celebrities on Facebook. Whether or not they open their pages to fans, have multiple pages, and what degree the information posted is actually candid rather than staged. A number of celebrities have pages, and a qualitative analysis of this research would actually be very beneficial to PR directors in order to know whether this space should be commercial or authentic, and who should be invited to a celebrity's "private" social sphere.

Lastly, an emerging theme from the data stemmed from users mixing close family members with their non-family social networks. While most informants agreed that their profiles projected positive images, users are still reluctant to add family members and others who may judge their character on Facebook. Future studies should investigate the foundation of user hesitation to add these people to their networks.

Limitations

The time restraint of this project was a limitation to the amount of data that could be collected and analyzed in this study. Eleven informants were used to draw the conclusions developed in this analysis. In order to draw more conclusions regarding individuals who use their Facebook in a tabloid manner, more time and research would be needed to find this niche user group and interview them.

In addition, the basis of discussion for interviews (influence, identity and network) is a subjective topic in which each user is open to their own interpretations. Therefore, when discussing influence and judgment, some of the users were prone to offer socially acceptable responses. While informants were told that their information would not be directly represented in the analysis, informants could have been untruthful or exaggerated in some of their responses. For example, when respondents were asked whether or not they are judgmental, based on the information they see of others and their fueled presumptions, many of them were hesitant to admit to this behavior originally. On the other hand, some people were blatantly open to judging others. This finding has provided that informants had the potential ability to provide inaccurate information in their interviews in fear of being judged themselves.

CONCLUSION

Through the social context of Facebook, users have the ability to display characteristics that may not be visible on their immediate surface. These characteristics come in the form of distinct knowledge of cars, humor, motorcycles, and fraternity philanthropy. As users emphasize a particular aspect of their identity to develop their Facebook micro-celebrity the process of online identity construction begins. From this point on, users are able to invite fans and friends alike to their network to share information, products, and experiences. As a result, the strong and weak network ties develop mutual relationships of self-esteem, a sense of belonging, and support on Facebook. In an online environment, Facebook users are driven to the site to employ their influence, ignite their curiosity, and seek adventure as they communicate and learn from their networks. In this interactive experience users have been able to share more than ever before, and will continue to improve online communications by making online identities more intertwined and reflective of real-life relationships.

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Table 1: Facebook Gender Statistics

Gender	Users	Percentage
US Males	43,932,140	42.6%
US Females	56,026,560	54.3%
Unknown	3,126,820	3.03%
Total	103,085,520	100.0%

Source: Corbett, 2010

Table 2: Facebook User-Age Statistics

Age	Users	Percentage
13-17	10.4%	10,680,140
18-24	25.3 %	26,075,960
25-34	24.8 %	25,580,100
35-54	29.0%	29,917,640
55+	9.5%	9,763,900
Unknown	1.0%	1,067,780

Source: Corbett, 2010

Table 3: Informant Profiles

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Network</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>
<i>Felicia Hayes</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>Long Beach Small Business Office</i>	<i>557</i>	<i>Married</i>
<i>Regina Smith</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>Hospice Social Work</i>	<i>337</i>	<i>Divorced</i>
<i>Judy Lee</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>190</i>	<i>Widowed</i>
<i>Stephon</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Unemployed</i>	<i>464</i>	<i>Single</i>
<i>Thomas</i>					
<i>Chase Greene</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>Single</i>
<i>Victor Frank</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>Unemployed</i>	<i>690</i>	<i>Single</i>
<i>Jesse Delgado</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>IT Consultant</i>	<i>1,072</i>	<i>Married</i>
<i>Anita Brown</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>Housewife/Disabled</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>Married</i>
<i>Aden McGeedy</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>750</i>	<i>Single</i>
<i>George Waters</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>320</i>	<i>Single</i>
<i>Christine Bert</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>237</i>	<i>Single</i>

Table 4: Sample Informant Questions

Sample of Standardized Questions
Do you post information, pictures, links, etc. with a certain audience in mind?
Do you use Facebook to obtain advice from people in your network?
What was your process in selecting your current profile picture?
How has your relationship with Facebook changed and evolved over time?
Have your views of a person change after seeing something they posted?
What do the people in your network say about you?
Does your profile appeal to the several aspects of your identity?
Have you ever used Facebook to perform a “background check” on another individual?
What do you think your profile page says about you?
How is the person on your Facebook different from your actual sense of self?
What has motivated you to continue using Facebook past your initial reasons?
Does it matter to you whether or not people frequent your page?
Whose Facebook pages do you frequent the most?
Do strong ties have greater influence on you (WOM)?
Tell me about when someone made a positive comment on your Facebook profile.

Table 5: Celebrity vs. Micro-Celebrity

	Celebrity	Micro-Celebrity
Shared Attributes	Have the spotlight, for a recognized behavior, attribute, or association	Have the spotlight, for a recognized behavior, attribute, or association
	Highly regard image	Highly regard image
	Act as an opinion leader to fans, friends, and family	Act as an opinion leader in your social network
	Influential amongst fans	Influential amongst Facebook network
	Affiliations shape image	Affiliations shape image
	Connections enable access to resources	Connections enable access to resources
	Internationally known	Can be an international icon
	Have a target audience	Have a target audience
	Fans interested in the intimate and less noteworthy experiences of life	Network interested in the intimate and less noteworthy experiences of life
	Differences	More visible than micro-celebrities
Must appeal to larger crowds		Close network = authentic identity
Less intimate relationship with fans		Ability to personally know network
Very public image, and has no control of who they reach		Has control over who accesses their information
Image is highly shaped by the media		Almost complete control over image
Judged by individuals in and out of network. More heavily criticized		Opportunity to be subject to judgment by those profile is shared with

Figure1: Culture Context – Culture of Celebrity

