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**ENGAGED OR JUST “FRIENDS”: USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR  
MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT OR IDENTITY MANAGEMENT  
THROUGH GROUP AFFILIATIONS**

by  
Emel F. Crawford

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Public Relations & Advertising  
College of Communication  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts  
at  
Rowan University  
May 1, 2012

Thesis Chair: Suzanne FitzGerald, Ph.D.

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## **Dedication**

*I dedicate this manuscript to my sons, Evan and Noah. Your love remains my greatest inspiration.*

## **Acknowledgements**

It is with much gratitude that I express my appreciation to Dr. Suzanne FitzGerald for her steadfast guidance and mentorship throughout graduate school and my career.

It is with many heartfelt thanks that I acknowledge my husband, Chris, for his support; my mother, Francisca, for her encouragement; and my classmate, Melissa

Novak, for her friendship.

## **Abstract**

Emel F. Crawford

ENGAGED OR JUST “FRIENDS”: USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR MEMBERSHIP  
ENGAGEMENT OR IDENTITY MANAGEMENT THROUGH GROUP

AFFILIATIONS

2011/12

Suzanne FitzGerald, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Public Relations

The purpose of this study investigation was to ascertain the engagement levels of emerging-aged adults that affiliate and hold membership in groups both on and offline. In-person and online participation levels were examined, and motives for online activity on groups’ social media pages were investigated to understand how profile identity formation played a role in emerging-aged adults’ associations. Information acquired through this study assists in further examining Facebook and Twitter’s influence on social capital production within groups. Group members demonstrated a preference for email and in-person communication over social networking sites, higher levels of offline engagement versus online, and an authenticity to join groups without the need to enhance their online self-image. The findings show that social media bears little weight on how group members organize to accomplish goals, seek information or form collective action in real-world terms.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
List of Figures	vi
List of Tables	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Problem Statement	7
1.2 Delimitations	8
1.3 Hypotheses	9
1.4 Procedure	11
1.5 Summary	13
1.6 Definition of Terms	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review	19
2.1 The History of American Social Capital	19
2.2 Group Networks	20
2.3 Significance of Associational Membership on Social Capital	21
2.4 The Bonds and Ties Created by Social Capital	22
2.5 Dimensions of Social Capital: Trust Engagement and Contentment	23
2.6 Sources of Social Capital Decline	24
2.7 Television's Effect on Social Capital	24
2.8 Newspapers' Effect on Social Capital	26
2.9 The Internet's Effect on Social Capital	27
2.10 Early Social Networking Sites	30
2.11 Facebook	30
2.12 Twitter	31

## Table of Contents Continued

2.13 Operations and Functions of Social Networking Sites	33
2.14 Groups on Social Networking Sites	34
2.15 The Relationship Between SNSs and Social Capital	36
2.16 Weak Ties and Bridging Social Capital on SNSs	37
2.17 Strong Ties and Bonding Social Capital on SNSs	38
2.18 SNS Users' Personal and Social Identity Formation	39
2.19 Identity Formation on Social Networking Sites	40
2.20 Identity Formation and Group Impression Management	42
2.21 In-Person (Offline) Civic Engagement	43
2.22 Collective Action and Its Effects on Identity	45
2.23 The Effects of SNSs On Civic Engagement	48
2.24 Summary	52
Chapter 3: Methodology	54
3.1 Research Questions	54
3.2 Research Design	54
3.3 Source of Data	55
3.4 Method of Acquiring Data	56
3.5 Method of Analyzing Data	59
3.6 Conclusion	60
Chapter 4: Results	61
4.1 Significance of Study	61
4.2 General Findings – Quantitative Data Results – Survey Findings	62



## Table of Contents Continued

4.3 General Findings – Qualitative Data Results – Interview Findings	71
4.4 Hypothesis One – Quantitative Data Results – Survey Findings	74
4.5 Hypothesis One – Qualitative Data Results – Interview Findings	85
4.6 Hypothesis One Conclusion	91
4.7 Hypothesis Two – Quantitative Data Results – Survey Findings	91
4.8 Hypothesis Two – Qualitative Data Results – Interview Findings	98
4.9 Hypothesis Two Conclusion	101
4.10 Summary	101
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Future Research	102
5.1 Hypothesis Conclusions	102
5.2 General Findings Conclusions	109
5.3 Future Research	111
List of References	114
Appendix A Survey Instrument	118
Appendix B Interview Instrument	121

## **List of Figures**

Figure	Page
Figure 1 Group Membership Among Respondents	66
Figure 2 Length of Membership in Group	67
Figure 3 Ethnic Background of Survey Respondents	68
Figure 4 Preference of Communication Method	70
Figure 5 Members' General Facebook and Twitter Usage Hours Per Week	75
Figure 6 Members Who Belong to the Facebook Group of Organization	76
Figure 7 Members Who Follow Their Group on Twitter	77
Figure 8 Members' Use of Group's Facebook Page & Group Twitter	78
Figure 9 Hours a Week Members Participate in Their Organization In-Person (Offline)	80
Figure 10 Enjoyment of Offline Group Activities	81
Figure 11 Facebook Group Users' Hours of In-Person Participation	83
Figure 12 Average Time Spent Per Week Offline and Online by Group	84
Figure 13 Members' Level of Agreement That Requests Made on Social Media to Participate Offline are Excessive	93
Figure 14 Members' Level of Agreement on Importance of Online Profile to Show Membership in Group	95
Figure 15 Members' Level of Agreement That People Join Their Group on Social Media to Enhance Their Online Profiles	97

## **List of Tables**

Table	Page
Table 1 Groups' Allocated 2011-2012 SGA Budgets	64
Table 2 Groups' Total Percentage of Budget Allocation Out of Aggregate SGA Budget	65
Table 3 Importance of Frequent Communication for Each Member	69
Table 4 Where Group Members Receive Their News	79
Table 5 High Frequency Facebook Users and Number of Hours Per Week That They Visit Their Group's Page	82
Table 6 Online Membership Enrollment vs. Offline Membership Engagement	92
Table 7 Importance of Group Membership to Circle of Friends Online and Offline	94

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Nearly a half century ago, the call to participate in civic reformation in the United States within the academic community was considered a duty amongst many organized groups. As the country underwent broad legislative and social changes throughout the 1960s, college students were invigorated with a sense of purpose and motivation to enact change in their environments.

Social activism and civic engagement in its most high-risk forms brought together thousands of emerging-aged participants during the Civil Rights era that endured arrests, beatings and bombings, while many even faced death (McAdam, 1989). At the time, the potential for future social good outweighed the present risks to life and prosperity for the participant.

Scholars have long studied the identity and personal changes necessary for involvement in civic engagement. High-risk activities may demand a fierce loyalty to the group, radically transforming the life of an individual in order to participate in and subscribe to a group's mission (McAdam, 1989). On the other hand, some high-risk activities are tolerant of the participant's other life attachments, and do not necessitate a radical break with the past, or the construction of an entirely new self in order to belong (McAdam, 1989). As individuals participate in and associate with groups, identity shifts

begin to transform their lives in different and dynamic ways, the effects of which can be evidenced over a lifetime (McAdam, 1989).

Membership in groups within our society creates a social connectedness that is an essential factor for participation (Putnam, 1995). Membership allows people to participate in causes and search for community via identification with those who join the same groups. Life contentment and personal satisfaction are motives for and benefits of participation in groups (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).

As human beings in a civil society, we naturally seek associations in groups, as it is our main source of social capital. Social capital describes the direct and indirect benefits one receives from their social relationships and networks with others. These benefits manifest in one's emotional wellbeing, livelihood, and physical comfort (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007). Social capital encompasses the "the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits amongst people," (Putnam, 1995).

Much discussion in our public discourse over the last 35 years focuses on the decline of group membership and subsequent decline in social capital. Specifically, scholars have evidenced how communication media have contributed to a rapid deterioration of social capital and civic engagement, which encompasses civic participation, social participation and membership in groups (Moy, Manosevitch, Stamm, & Dunsmore, 2005).

From 1975 to 1995, entertainment television viewing was correlated with a marked downturn in membership within political organizations, churches, unions, the PTA, women's clubs, the Boy Scouts, the Red Cross, civic groups and even bowling leagues (Putnam, 1995). "The more time people spent watching television, the less likely they were to be participants in civic activities and be content in life," (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).

Within the last decade, Internet usage was examined in connection with having an influence on social capital. The use of the Internet for information exchange remains a key contributor to social capital, fostering recruitment in civic activities and trust toward other people (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). However, social recreation on the Internet appears to have a diminishing effect on social capital production (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). Particularly, Generation X users have higher levels of predicated dissatisfaction with life if they participate in chat rooms or online gaming sites (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).

Today, the phenomenon of social networking sites (SNSs) are held accountable for the diminishment of offline social capital, much like the medium of television and the Internet in the past (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007). Out of the hundreds of SNSs that exist on the Internet with hundreds of millions of users, Facebook and Twitter are perhaps the most well known and their ease of utility as a low-cost communication tool garner unparalleled popularity.

In 2010, 46 percent of all American Internet users interacted with some form of social networking (Bateman, Pike, & Butler, 2011) with Facebook accounting for over 800 million users worldwide by 2011 (Facebook, 2011). Facebook allows an individual to construct a semi-public profile on the site, list users as their “Friends” of whom they share some connection, and view and traverse their list of connections with that of their “Friends” lists of connections. Some researchers liken this practice to placing your personal, hard-copied address book online, and allowing everyone inside of it to interact with everyone else (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

A 2007 Pew Research report reveals that 91 percent of emerging-aged adults use SNSs to connect with an established network of relationships (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). SNSs are embraced by this specific demographic because they render an entirely new way to interact and communicate on the Internet. SNSs allow users to easily join groups and causes that bring them into contact with diverse sets of people. Eighty percent of Facebook users alone join Facebook Groups, suggesting the creation of social capital from its application (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010). Additionally, some research suggests that Facebook makes users feel connected to a community, fostering trust, which thereby creates opportunities for collective action (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009).

Reciprocally, organizations and groups seek to cultivate relationships with their members or stakeholders via SNSs to distribute information and advocate for participation in causes. Facebook allows for interaction between group leaders and

members byway of the message boards, discussion walls, photographs, videos and external links, which enhances interactivity.

However, scholars argue about whether such interactivity contributes to the generation of social capital, and whether strong or weak ties are created in offline relationships (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007). To date, researchers have examined how the intensity, or duration of time spent on Facebook, by group members positively associates with civic engagement offline (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). Yet, no research has probed the specific motivations behind an individual who joins a group on SNSs, and the subsequent patterns of offline participation proffered by the individual to meet the targeted group goals. It is only from this further examination that offline group engagement and social capital production via SNSs membership can best be understood.

As prior research indicates, motivations behind social engagement in high-risk group activities, as witnessed during the 1960s, demanded a strict commitment to the group and the goal at hand, and sometimes even a complete transformation of identity from the participant. Today, membership within groups through social networking channels is a low-risk, low-cost form of participation.

In some cases, it may be as easy as signing up to be a “Friend” of a Facebook Group, and donating money online toward the cause—versus door-to-door canvassing to raise funds or sponsorship. Therefore, the research question arises as to whether an individual may be more motivated by the ease of online identity construction and the



benefits received by association of their online identity to a SNS Group, rather than the actual acts of participation that the group purports?

To this end, SNS profiles affect identity in entirely new ways. Today's generation of teenagers' online personalities differs greatly than their off-line one, and this disparity is intentional (Alexander, 2007). Facebook creates a "democratic community where one can easily have friends from varying pecking social orders, even when one only has a handful in real life," (Alexander, 2007). Thus, identity formation is an individual cognitive process as well as a social process, carried out among and in negotiation with others (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Online social networks perpetuate the notion that you are what you type (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

Whereas the social activists of the 1960s received social capital from the identity shifts caused by participating in their group cause, today's emerging adults may receive social capital benefits from the positive feedback they receive on their SNS profiles as members of a network—without evidence of any real participatory action on their part. In fact, SNSs users may be motivated by appearance to make as many Facebook or Twitter associations online, because even superficial connections will still bolster a user's online image (Stevens Aubrey, Chattopadhyay, & Rill, 2008). "Youths are overly preoccupied with how they appear in the eyes of others. On SNSs, interpersonal feedback is often publicly available, making public evaluations particularly relevant to self-esteem issues," (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006).

Given the role of offline social capital in relation to online social capital, as well as online identity formation within the context of group membership, this author posits an original research study to evaluate Facebook and Twitter's effects on group civic engagement amongst emerging adults.

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

Over the last 35 years, communication media are cited with eroding the ways in which Americans engage and participate with one another. As a result, there is a marked decline in membership within civic and community organizations and consequently, social capital. The Internet facilitates interaction among networks of people with email and demonstrates a usefulness for recruitment, information gathering and consumer transactions. However, recreational use online evidences a negative effect on social capital. Internet users engage in face-to-face interaction with their core network of friends and family only 72 days out of the year, versus an average adult's 210 days per year (Dolliver, 2009).

Today, online social networking poses the clearest threat to a decline in social capital. Of the communication media studied to date by scholars, social networking attains the most dramatic effects on personal interaction off-line, with users connecting to their core networks only 39 days per year (Dolliver, 2009). In fact, SNS users are 30 percent less likely to know their very own neighbors (Dolliver, 2009). A dramatic disparity exists between the perpetual rise in popularity of social networking, and the declines interpreted in civic engagement and social capital.

The identity traits necessary to engage an individual in collective action may not be evidenced by means of social networking. By their very nature, SNSs are more favorable to low-cost, associational membership in groups rather than high-cost, real-time activism. Therefore, the question arises as to whether the online social capital generated by the members of SNSs' group members generates offline social capital? Consequently, do they have the ability to generate collective action around a specific group goal, cause or purpose? Further, are social network users' group associations a means for online impression management rather than offline engagement?

## **1.2 Delimitations**

- The author will not survey nor interview those group members or leaders of Rowan University organizations who do not communicate on social network sites.
- The author will not select individuals to participate in the surveys and personal interviews based upon whether they are high or low frequency social networking users.
- The author will not survey students affiliated with other universities or colleges in the United States.
- The author will not choose to survey and interview university groups that communicate on SNSs other than Facebook and Twitter.
- The 21 Greek fraternities at Rowan University (excluding the seven Greek honor societies) will not be included in the research.

### **1.3 Hypotheses**

**H1—Group members’ online social networking site activity will take the place of or decrease group members’ offline social capital and engagement within the same organization.**

After completing a posthoc analysis by running a regression analysis, Valenzuela et al. (2009) inferred that the intensity of Facebook Group use among college students (i.e. duration and frequency of exposure to the medium) has a positive casual relationship between online and offline civic participation.

In this analysis, the researchers identified whether or not participants of their survey study identified themselves as members of an off-campus Facebook Group, an on-campus Facebook Group, or a student Facebook Group. However, the researchers did not identify nor draw a relationship to whether or not such group membership coincided in the offline/real world as well, and as such, measure the level of participation generated offline from online communication and engagement.

It is the aim of this author to build on Valenzuela’s et al. (2009) study by further examining the extent to which members of online SNS Groups participate in the same offline Groups. Further, Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) evidenced that while emerging adults’ offline and online worlds may be connected, they are not mirror images of each other. The researchers call for future work that examines how such variables as users’ SNS use and offline relationship strength might “moderate the extent of overlap between

their online and offline lives,” (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). In conclusion, it is the intent of this author to close the gap that exists between online SNS engagement and resulting offline engagement among individuals that belong to the same online and offline groups.

**H2—It is expected that Group pages on SNSs are not used for the purposes of achieving offline civic engagement by members, but rather for online identity management.**

Haferkamp and Kramer (2009) found that people on StudiVZ, the German equivalent of Facebook, do not use online group memberships to communicate with other online members. The researchers found that people are motivated to join StudiVZ Groups primarily for self-description, self-presentation and to fulfill a need to belong.

However, Haferkamp and Kramer (2009) do not account for groups that exist with members both online and offline, and if those members utilize the group’s SNSs to further engage in offline participation. Moreover, Haferkamp and Kramer (2009) measure communication by a content analysis of the number and frequency of online postings and comments as an indicator of communication. This author will consider groups that have both online and offline members, and survey those group members to measure if online SNS communication results in offline engagement or impression management through group affiliation.

## 1.4 Procedure

To determine the efficacy of group membership on Facebook and Twitter by individuals to the generation of offline engagement and offline social capital, the author will conduct a multi-question, quantitative survey of Rowan University students who are members of campus organizations. The survey will ascertain information related to Facebook and Twitter in the following areas:

- The members' overall usage hours on social network sites.
- The members' usage hours on the organization's page.
- The exchange of group related news and information on an organization's page.
- The members' volunteering, participation and activism habits/patterns/frequencies in organizations of which they are listed as a "Friend."
- The perception an individual has of himself/herself when listed as a "Friend" on an organization's page.
- The formation of online identity profiles.
- The motivations of members to enlist in organizations.
- The contentment, self esteem and life satisfaction members derive from their online associations.

To gauge the productiveness of SNSs in meeting the goals or causes set forth by organizations, this author will conduct personal interviews with three Rowan University registered, student organizations' leaders. This author will take a grounded theory

approach of data analysis, allowing for themes to arise from the data. This author will subsequently employ axial and selective coding of the data concepts to further quantitative research. In the personal interview, this author aims to ascertain the following:

- The extent to which the leaders assess the actual numbers of individuals who participate in their groups in relation to the numbers of members listed as “Friends” on their social networking pages.
- The frequency and patterns of participation the leaders observe.
- The strategies, if any, the leaders employ to motivate participation when communicating to members on social networking sites.
- The advantages or disadvantages the leaders feel their social networking pages bring to rallying around a cause or effort.
- The usefulness or uselessness the leaders feel their social networking pages provide.
- The strength or weaknesses the leaders feel the relationships are online versus offline.
- The types of social capital the leaders observe are generated, if any, by their social networking presence.

The comparison of the two data sets—the surveys and personal interviews—will provide this author with knowledge from the individuals who join the groups and the leaders who run the groups, to make the determination as to the benefits SNSs yield on offline engagement and social capital production.

To understand the most recent body of scholarly research on the subject of social networking sites and participation, this author will undertake a literature review of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, trade publications and other content on participation, volunteering, activism, Facebook, Twitter, social networking, social capital, identity construction, self-esteem and life satisfaction, associational membership and the author's narrow topic.

### **1.5 Summary**

Social network sites have been credited with expanding individuals' possibilities to communicate and interact online with the people in their networks. However, research thus far is limited to the evaluation of the types of relations that benefit from online association, and to what effect these relations have on identity formation, especially in emerging adults.

This author aims to further the interconnectedness of these concepts, while also ascertaining whether membership by profile formation alone leads to engagement within group activity. To do so, this author will conduct both qualitative and quantitative, formative research on registered university campus organizations that communicate and form group memberships on SNSs.

This author intends to gain an understanding of how members of these groups identify themselves on SNSs, and the frequency of which they participate, if at all, in the causes of groups of which they are listed as members. It is essential to gauge the



contribution that social networking makes on membership recruitment in groups and determine if it is a valuable form of communication for motivating offline participation in the community amongst emerging adults.

## **1.6 Definition of Terms**

1. Alternation: Some high-risk activities necessitate alternation of the volunteer, which does not require a radical break with the past or the construction of an entirely new self, but whose effects can be felt on the identity formation of the individual for a lifetime. Alternation highlights the necessary identity shifts of individuals as they participate in and associate with groups (McAdam, 1989).
2. Conversion: High-risk social activities demand conversion from the individual volunteer, or a fierce loyalty to the group as a member, and an even more extreme opposition to mainstream society. Conversion highlights the necessary identity shifts of individuals as they participate in and associate with groups (McAdam, 1989).
3. Contentment: One of the fundamental dimensions of social capital. Contentment refers commonly to one's state of happiness and satisfaction with life. See life satisfaction, below.
4. Civic Engagement: A social science terminology encompassing the concepts of civic participation, social participation, and membership in formal groups (Moy, Manosevitch, Stamm, & Dunsmore, 2005).

5. Emerging-aged Adults: Individuals grappling with aspects of their identities and seeking to establish intimacy via relations with others, particularly friendships. Arnett (2004) defines the term as: “The unique transitional period in human development that occurs between late adolescence and young adulthood in cultural contexts where marriage and parenthood are delayed until the late twenties or beyond,” (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008).
6. Facebook: A web-based social networking application whose uniqueness comes by way of its default setting, in which only users who are part of the same network can view each other’s online identity profiles. Users of Facebook can articulate and make visible their social networks (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). Facebook began in 2004 in the United States on the campus of Harvard University.
7. Groups/Organizations: For the purposes of this study, groups and organizations are interchangeable terminology used to describe campus clubs that are registered with the university. Group also refers to the working definition of the formal establishment of a number of individuals who work together for a common goal or share a common belief. When “Group/s” appears capitalized in this study, it is used as a proper noun for Facebook Groups.
8. Identity: The struggle for individuals to be themselves and find their true selves, as products of their unique personal biographies. Identity varies according to whom an individual is with, the social situations they are in,

and the motivations they feel toward recent events. Thus, identity not an entirely free choice to choose how one is defined (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

9. Identity/Impression Management: Goffman (1959) describes it as the means by which individuals modify their behavior to influence the impression others have of them, referring to identity formation as a process in that one's identity is something he or she does, not simply something he or she is (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).
10. Life satisfaction: Is connected to democratic stability and participation in collective actions efforts, and is a form of contentment that provides a motive for and benefit of civic volunteerism (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).
11. Participation/Civic Participation: Activities that address community concerns through non-governmental or non-electoral means, like volunteering or working on a community project (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010).
12. Profiles/Profile pages: One's online identity, where the individual types himself into being. A social network site will ask individuals a series of demographic and geographic questions to assist in the creation of the profile. Photos can be added as markers, as well as private email and a display of public messages and comments.
13. Member/Friend/Follower: For the purposes of this study, a member is an individual recognized by way of contact information or registration to be a

part of a campus group or Facebook Group. A Friend or Follower is an interchangeable proper noun terminology used to describe a member while engaged in online activity on Facebook and Twitter, respectively.

14. Membership: A source of social capital derived by the reinforced and created ties among people, which can then be used to facilitate other types of action like volunteering or community work. It serves as an indicator of a citizen's civic engagement (Fleming, Thorson, & Peng, 2005).
15. Self-esteem: For the purposes of this study, self-esteem refers to the positive feedback youth receive on their online profiles, and the tones (whether positive or negative) of that feedback.
16. Social activism: A range of behaviors associated with the acts of participation and engagement in one's community or politics. Social activism takes two forms—either high-risk or low-risk involvement, which can lead to personal transformation of the person.
17. Social Capital: The features of social organization such as the networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1995). Social capital refers to the resources available in one's networks that usually include useful information, personal relationships or the ability to form collective action, as in volunteering or community work (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007).
18. Social Network Sites (SNSs): A web-based service that allows individuals to (1) construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of users with whom they share a connection, (3) view

and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

19. Trust: The expectations people have of each other, of the organizations and institutions in which they live, and of the natural and moral social orders that set the fundamental understandings for their lives (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010).
20. Twitter: A web-based social networking application whose uniqueness comes by way of the “real-time” generation of short, 140 characters or less disbursements of messages from an individual, to his list of “followers.” These followers sign-up online to receive messages on a computer or mobile device. Twitter began in 2006 in the United States and is considered a leader in the concept of micro-blogging.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 The History of American Social Capital

Alexis de Tocqueville, 19<sup>th</sup> century French scribe and historian, is often credited with first observing and describing distinct American virtues in his 1835 work titled *Democracy in America*. “Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition,” Tocqueville writes, “are forever forming associations,” (Putnam, 1995). Tocqueville’s analysis became the basis for future social science research that addressed the ways in which Americans use associations to motivate and engage one another in civic and political discourse, as well as in movements (Stengel & Blackman, 1996).

By 1995, nearly 160 years after *Democracy in America* was published, Harvard professor and social scientist, Robert Putman, described what he believed to be a steady and diminishing decline in Americans’ ability to form and retain associations in the twentieth century. In his 1995 study, *Bowling Alone*, Putnam points to longitudinal empirical evidence that suggests the importance of strongly tied social bonds within groups to achieve civically engaged communities.

Putnam argues that social connectedness and civic engagement, which produce good schools, flourishing economic development, low crime rates, and effective government, all rest on the concept of social capital (Putnam, 1995). The idea of social capital, popularized by Coleman in 1988, describes the resources available to individuals

as members of associations, groups or community networks (Stevens Aubrey, Chattopadhyay, & Rill, 2008). However, it is Putnam's definition that is most widely recognized: "Social capital refers to the features of social organizations such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit," enabling participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives, (Putnam, 1995).

## **2.2 Group Networks**

The concept of social capital is most easily understood in the context of one's social networks. Social capital enables ties and contacts to be formed among people within a group to increase the productivity of the overall group (Fleming, Thorson, & Peng, 2005). Social capital allows an individual to draw on resources from other members of the network. These resources usually include useful information, personal relationships or the ability to form collective action, as in volunteering or community work (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007).

Therefore, it is through an individual's exchanges within a group network that social capital is created. Associating as a member of a group, otherwise understood as associational membership, becomes the prime source of social capital (Fleming, Thorson, & Peng, 2005).

### **2.3 Significance of Associational Membership on Social Capital**

Putnam found that the sources of social capital in America were on a rapid and steady decline by 1995. By examining research evidence from 1970 to 1995, Putnam determined that American organizations such as bowling leagues, church groups, parent-teacher associations, labor unions, fraternal organizations and many more groups experienced a marked reduction in individual membership participation, social interaction, attendance and engagement (Putnam, 1995).

For example, while the number of solo bowlers rose in America by 10 percent between the years of 1980 through 1993, organized bowling leagues dropped by 40 percent (Putnam, 1995). The significance of such a decline marks not only the demise of such organizations across the country, but of social capital production as well.

Nonetheless, while traditional forms of organizing were plummeting, Putnam observed an expansion in tertiary associations (e.g. the American Association for Retired Persons or the Sierra Club), nonprofit organizations and support groups. The latter encompass a range of associations from book clubs to self-help groups, and meet regularly to provide support for those who participate in it (Putnam, 1995). Although, Putnam contends that support groups only provide individuals the opportunity to focus purely on themselves while in the presence of others, instead of fostering a sense of community.



Similarly, tertiary associations only require “a tie to common symbols, common leaders, and perhaps common ideals, but not to each other,” (Putnam, 1995). When it comes to tertiary associations, attendance at meetings, volunteering or even an awareness of the existence of other members is not mandatory in order to belong (Putnam, 1995).

Paxton (1999) argued that some Americans do nothing more than write an annual check as a form of associational membership and a means by which to participate (Fleming, Thorson, & Peng, 2005). Likewise, Skocpol (1999) found that Americans have changed their ways of associating from a locally and nationally focused active membership to advocacy groups requiring no tangible membership (Fleming, Thorson, & Peng, 2005).

## **2.4 The Bonds and Ties Created by Social Capital**

Putnam contends that in order for social capital to not only thrive, but also flourish, strong bonds and relationship ties must be created among members that cannot be found in any of the aforementioned associations. “The bond between any two members of the Sierra Club is less like the bond between any two members of a gardening club, and more like the bond between two Red Sox fans or two devoted Honda owners,” (Putnam, 1995).

Putnam posits that such a distinction in social capital between strong and weak bonds can be further categorized respectively as bonding or bridging social capital. Bonding social capital is typically inward looking and maintains existing strongly tied

identities and homogenous groups. On the other hand, bridging social capital is outward looking, creating crossover networks that transcend social gaps and weakly ties associations (Skoric M. , 2003). Examples of bonding social capital groups are men-only-country clubs, while bridging social capital may encompass members of the same fan-based sports league.

## **2.5 Dimensions of Social Capital: Trust, Engagement and Contentment**

The strong bond phenomenon gives significance to the underpinnings of trust and engagement, which are crucial dimensions of social capital. Sullivan and Transue (1999) found that “when people are tightly bound to an association, their trust for their fellow members usually grows, and the aggregate social capital increases,” resulting in more participation and engagement in activities (Zhang & Chia, 2006). Specifically, Moy et al. (2005) found that civic engagement encompasses the concepts of civic participation, social participation (Zhang & Chia, 2006) and membership in formal groups.

Trust is a key component in understanding the nature of ties in a relationship, and reciprocity between individuals, or individuals and social or political institutions (Zhang & Chia, 2006). Orbells and Dawes (1991) and Levi (1996) found that individuals with high levels of trust expect others to follow a similar belief and rule system, are more likely to belong to community groups, more likely to volunteer, and more likely to work together to solve groups problems than those with low levels of trust (Zhang & Chia, 2006).

Moreover, Bargh & McKenna (2004) evidenced that strong network ties with friends and neighbors, which are found in bonding social capital, are related to higher incidences of psychological wellbeing, self-esteem and life contentment (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007). On the other hand, Ganovetter (1982) observed that weak network ties provide loose connections between individuals in groups, allowing for information exchange and new perspectives, but not emotional support (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007).

## **2.6 Sources of Social Capital Decline**

Putnam indicates three causes for the erosion of social capital in America measured over three decades: The movement of women into the labor force; the mobility of the American population; and the leisure activity of entertainment television viewing (Putnam, 1995). It is in the next section that this author will closely examine the latter of causes, the effects of mass media on social capital.

## **2.7 Television's Effect on Social Capital**

Putnam's 1995 study, *Bowling Alone*, called for future research by social scientists to examine the correlation that exists between American's use of leisure time and technological advancements and trends (Putnam, 1995). Specifically, Putnam identified television's effect on privatizing and individualizing recreational time, thus disrupting opportunities for social capital production found in associational membership within groups (Putnam, 1995).

“Television viewing,” Putnam indicts, “has made our communities wider and shallower...with technology driving a wedge between our individual interests and our collective interests,” (Putnam, 1995). Fleming, Thorson and Peng’s (2005) study supports Putnam’s assertions, finding entertainment television to be a serious drain on the availability of an individual’s time, making people less likely to take part in activities whether in a group or individually.

In fact, Sidney’s (1998) epidemiological research study connected the amount of time spent viewing television with lower levels of physical and mental health, supporting claims that such media usage is related to changes in life contentment, social trust and participation in one’s networks (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). Additionally, Putnam found that the media had a negative effect on establishing trust, causing viewers to distrust others, and depressing civic and political participation even further (Zhang & Chia, 2006).

On the other hand, Norris (2000) found that individuals who view public affairs television programming are found to have higher associations with political participation (Skoric, 2003). Shah et al. (2001) found that local and national hard news programs facilitated people’s civic engagement as well as life satisfaction. Additionally, televised social dramas depicting conflicts or controversies in relation to real life were reported to be positively associated with civic participation (Zhang & Chia, 2006).

## **2.8 Newspapers' Effect on Social Capital**

McLeod (2000) reported that reading public affairs in newspapers retains positive effects “that are stronger than the negative effects of television consumption on audience’s political learning and participation,” (Zhang & Chia, 2006). Newspapers present the strongest case study for the positive effects measured in political participation. Zhang and Chia (2006) found that political participation was predicted by newspaper reading.

In fact, Jeffres et al. (2003) found that newspaper readership was positively correlated to social networks, attachments to community, civically inclined cultures and activities (Fleming, Thorson, & Peng, 2005). To this end, Fleming’s et al. (2005) data revealed that local newspapers are an association-building mechanism, influential in uniting minority populations of large urban areas and Caucasians in small cities to a common goal for local community development.

Shah et al. (2001) studied three generations of Americans’ newspaper usage to gauge the differences in age groups with the medium’s effectiveness toward social capital. The researchers found that the Civic Generation (born before 1946), in comparison to Baby Boomers and Generation X, retained the highest levels of social capital and civic participation as a result of newspaper readership. The Civic Generation evidenced all three criteria associated with social capital—trust, engagement and life contentment—as readers of hard news in newspapers (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).

Conversely, Shah et al. (2001) found that Generation X readers, those born after 1964, experienced engagement, but not trust or contentment, as a result of newspaper readership. In fact, Generation X users evidenced the highest amount of social capital in the three criteria measured from Internet usage for information exchange. It is in the next section that this author will examine the effects of Internet usage on social capital.

## **2.9 The Internet's Effect on Social Capital**

In 1995, Putnam asked the question: "What will be the impact of electronic networks on social capital?" (Putnam, 1995) and hypothesized that an electronic forum could not compare in social capital production like that found in bowling leagues (Putnam, 1995). Many social scientists accepted the challenge to answer to Putnam's query.

In *Bowling Together*, Stengel and Blackman (1996) contend that social capital and activism in America are not so much disappearing, but evolving into a new way of interacting for a new era, one intrinsically focused on Internet usage. In terms of the welfare of the public, the Internet serves as form of togetherness, or the idea of being alone together (Stengel & Blackman, 1996). In this sense, while people may not attend organized club meetings anymore, they can still discuss club issues via the Web from the comfort of one's home or office.

Rheingold (1993) predicted that virtual Web communities would become valuable alternatives to traditional, physically located communities (Skoric M. , 2003). As of

March 2011, there are nearly 7 billion people in the world's population, and 2 billion of them are Internet Users. North Americans alone account for an Internet penetration rate of 73.8 percent, compared to the world average of 30.2 percent (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2011). Katz et al. (2001) found that more than 10 percent of those Internet users belong to at least one online community group as well as offline group (Skoric M. , 2003). Therefore, Skoric (2003) argues that Internet use is complementing, not replacing, real world communities.

However, Putnam (2000) warned of the social capital consequences of Internet usage for community building, citing the technical aspects of entry and exit to online communities as non-conductors of trustworthiness, reciprocity and commitment, creating weak ties, if any (Skoric M. , 2003). Moreover, Zhang and Chia (2006) found no significant impact from Internet use on civic or political participation amongst individuals in their study.

The insufficient impact of Internet use on social capital is attributed primarily to its ability to sustain recreationally focused activities. Shah (2002) found that online gaming, chat rooms and multiuser dungeons alienated users from strong interpersonal ties offline, eroding engagement in community groups (Zhang & Chia, 2006). Nie and Erbring (2000) found that the erosion of offline engagement, such as attendance of events, caused people to lose touch with their social environment (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).

Similar to the effects found in entertainment television, Kraut (1998) evidenced the recreational use of the Internet to have detrimental effects on social involvement and psychological wellbeing (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). Based on Kraut's longitudinal field study, heightened use of the Internet causes declines in users' interactions with family and friends, while increasing feelings of depression, loneliness and life satisfaction (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).

On the other hand, Internet use is found to have a positive effect on information exchange and acquisition, providing users with opportunities to recruit members for group activities within political participation (Zhang & Chia, 2006). In fact, Gore (1991) and Pavlik (1996) argue that the Internet is the most powerful tool for public discourse and grass roots organization in the last 50 years (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).

Norris and Jones (1998) found that those who use the Internet for email and investigative purposes retain higher levels of political knowledge and are more politically engaged (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). In Shah's et al. (2001) study, six out of nine tests supported a universally positive impact on all three criterion of social capital across three generations of Americans when the Internet is used for information exchange.

On the contrary, Kraut (1998) posits that online users who use email in order to socialize with geographically dispersed others are substituting weak ties for strong ones, or poorer quality social relationships versus higher quality ones (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert,



2001). Consequently, such evidence reinforces Putnam's (2000) assertions that weak ties are likely to be found in online relationships (Skoric M. , 2003).

## **2.10 Early Social Networking Sites**

In 1997, the first social networking site (SNS), named SixDegrees after social psychologist Stanley Milgram's 1967 small-world experiment, launched with the aim to show how every human could be connected through six degrees of separation (Harmanci, 2005). SixDegrees was the first SNS that combined the features of profile creation with lists of friends (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

From 1997 to 2001, a number of SNSs were created replicating similar features to SixDegrees, such as BlackPlanet, MiGente and LiveJournal (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). By 2002, the idea for connecting online users via a virtual community expanded with Friendster, a dating focused SNS, which had 19 million users within two years (Harmanci, 2005). In 2003, MySpace launched and was quickly adopted by musicians as a platform for reaching their fans, as well as teen youths and the post-college urban crowd (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In total, from 1997 to 2006, approximately 46 SNSs were launched on the Internet (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

## **2.11 Facebook**

In 2004, Harvard University student, Mark Zuckerberg, launched the social networking site called Facebook. It was created to give Harvard students an online replacement of traditional printed face books, which have photos and short bios of

incoming students. By the summer of 2005, most American universities and colleges had a Facebook network (Lupsa, 2006). In September 2006, with an estimated 12 million users, Facebook opened registration to all Internet users (Lupsa, 2006).

Today, Facebook has over 800 million active users, defined as those who have returned to the site within the last 30 days (Facebook, 2011). Lampe's 2008 survey data suggests that an upwards of 90 percent of undergraduate college students use Facebook (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011).

A May 2011 survey conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 65 percent of American adults use SNSs, with only email and search engines accounting for higher daily online usage. Additionally, the survey found SNSs to be most popular with women between the ages of 18-29, with no significant differences recorded based on race, ethnicity, income, education or geographic region.

## **2.12 Twitter**

On July 15, 2006 the SNS of Twitter was launched, becoming the leader in the concept of micro-blogging. Micro-blogging is a Web-based and mobile application, allowing a more instant and flexible form of communication compared to traditional blogging (Cheng, Sun, Hu, & Zeng, 2011). Sites like Twitter restrict the length of posted messages from users to 140 text characters, called tweets, to a network of their signed-up followers (Twitter, 2011). Additionally, images and links to videos or websites can be posted, or tweeted.

The Twitter network sets tweets as public domain so that users can follow and read each other's posts without permission. Java et al. (2007) studied the intentions for individuals to use Twitter and concluded it was primarily for chatting and information sharing (Cheng, Sun, Hu, & Zeng, 2011). However, Jansen et al. (2009) found that Twitter is used as a platform for online word-of-mouth branding, concluding that Twitter plays an important role in marketing strategies and campaigns (Cheng, Sun, Hu, & Zeng, 2011).

Since its launch, Twitter has played a key role in mass crises and emergency events. Brownstein et al. (2009) found that micro-blogging has emerged as a tool for rapid dissemination of information, statuses updates and live news reports (Cheng, Sun, Hu, & Zeng, 2011). Tweets during the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks, 2009 H1N1 flu outbreak, 2010 Icelandic volcano eruption and 2011 Egyptian revolution evidenced this trend. Hughes and Palen (2009) observed Twitter usage patterns during such emergency events and concluded that tweets were more likely to happen during emergencies than in regular situations (Cheng, Sun, Hu, & Zeng, 2011).

Today, Twitter has 200 million registered users, 100 million active users, and 50 million users who log in every day (Buck, 2011). On an average day, Twitter opens at least 460,000 new accounts (Smith, 2011) with 1 billion tweets posting every five days (Buck, 2011).

According to the 2011 Pew Internet and American Life Project, 19 percent of Twitter users are between the ages of 25-34, followed closely by 18-24 year olds at 18 percent. Both age brackets doubled in growth from the 2010 Pew report (Pew Internet & American Life Project). The Pew Research Project reports that African-Americans make up the largest group of Twitter users at 25 percent, followed by Latinos at 19 percent. Additionally, 81 percent of users follow fewer than 100 people as registered Twitter followers.

### **2.13 Operations and Functions of Social Networking Sites**

The success of SNSs rests in the bundles of technological tools that incorporate websites, which are reconfigured into a new context in order for users to form and maintain networks of social connections (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), SNSs are web-based services that allow users the ability to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those created by other users within the system.

The notable distinction that sets SNSs apart from other computer-mediated communication is not only the access SNSs provide users to meet total strangers, but also the means by which users can “articulate and make visible their social networks,” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Therefore, SNSs allow users to form a network of connections in three ways: (1) To make online connections that would otherwise not be made because the offline connection is vague or weak, (2) communicate with individuals who are already a

part of their extended social network, and (3) to look/search for new people to meet (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), the cornerstone of SNSs' functions is found within profile creation. After joining a SNS, a user is asked questions in relation to basic demographics (age, location, interests) to generate an "About Me Section." On Facebook, users have the option to add applications to enhance their profile. Core applications include photos, events, videos, Groups and pages (Facebook, 2011).

After joining and creating a profile, Facebook users are prompted to identify others within the system with whom they have a relationship—referred to commonly as Friends, contacts, Followers or Fans. On SNSs, the list of Friends is visible to anyone who is permitted to view the profile. Additionally, Facebook provides a platform for users to communicate with one another through Chat, personal messages, Wall posts, Pokes, or Status Updates (Facebook, 2011). Tim O'Reilly, Internet pioneer and publisher, describes this form of online communication as exemplifying user-generated content (Harmanci, 2005).

#### **2.14 Groups on Social Networking Sites**

One of the unique features of Facebook is its function that allows Groups to form an online profile and communicate with their members. According to Facebook.com, as of 2011 the average user is connected to 80 community pages, Groups and events. Royal (2008) found in one survey that nearly 80 percent of Facebook users had joined a

Facebook Group (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010). In fact, there are more than 900 million objects that people interact with on Facebook, including pages, groups, events and community pages (Facebook, 2011).

Facebook enables individuals with shared interests to form groups, or seek likeminded people to join groups, fan pages or networks through a searchable profile field (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). On college campuses across America, students have harnessed the power of Facebook to launch campaigns behind movements and run for campus office, when traditional forms of letter writing, flyers and notices have been unsuccessful (Lupsa, 2006). “Campus organizations use Facebook, not fliers, to advertise membership and events,” (Lupsa, 2006).

However, Michael Bugeja, author of the *The Interpersonal Divide: The Search for Community in a Technological Age* (2005), believes that “Facebook is a fine vehicle to organize a celebration or a protest, to inform users about schedules and events, and it can facilitate friendships. But, those are the exceptions, not the rule,” (Lupsa, 2006).

On the other hand, the 2008 American presidential election evidenced that Facebook Groups do have power in the political arena. Woolley et al. (2010) found that during the primary season until Election Day 2008, Facebook users created more than 1,000 Facebook Group pages that focused on candidates Barack Obama and John McCain, with Obama retaining higher levels of membership and activity.

In particular, Barack Obama's use of SNSs played a critical role in his campaign efforts with "My BO," which allowed supporters to join a Group to self-organize (Morrissey, 2008). Obama signed up 2.4 million supporters on Facebook (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010). Obama's SNS collected the cell phone numbers of millions of supporters, which then allowed him to send targeted notices of personal appearances by geographic regions and organize networks of volunteers (Morrissey, 2008). Additionally, on Twitter, Obama had 146,000 followers of his daily updates and tweets (Morrissey, 2008).

Robertson et al. (2010) found that Facebook Groups allowed Obama supporters ongoing two-way interactions with the campaign, enabled users to form online political networks amongst themselves, facilitated campaign contributions and offered personalized environments that created participation and ownership. This author intends to further examine the ability of Facebook Groups to motivate participation outside of the national political arena, as more research on such organizations and groups is needed in this field of study.

### **2.15 The Relationship Between SNSs and Social Capital**

Burt (2005) describes social capital as fixed within the structures of social networks, as well as in the location of people within those structures (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). Today, one of the biggest influences on reshaping social networks and lowering the costs of communicating comes from SNSs, which may have consequences on social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011).

Scholarship thus far on SNSs provides empirical research on “the demographic characteristics of SNS users and the personal information they reveal on these sites,” (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). This research establishes that a relationship does exist between Facebook use and the social capital levels among undergraduate students, who are the primary users of SNS (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011).

In addition, Burke et al. (2011) found that overall Facebook usage was associated with social capital, especially when users engage in active contributions to the SNS versus passive consumption of others’ information (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). However, no social capital research to date has understood “whether there are particular uses of Facebook that are more likely to result in positive social capital outcomes,” (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011).

Perhaps in one of the most comprehensive studies on the effects of SNSs on social capital, Ellison et al. (2007) examined SNSs effects on the creation of bridging and bonding social capital, in addition to the effects on trust, engagement and contentment. For the purposes of their study, Ellison et al. quantified contentment as the degree of self-esteem and life satisfaction users experience. It is in the next two sections that this author will explore these concepts.

## **2.16 Weak Ties and Bridging Social Capital on SNSs**

Ellison et al. (2007) found that based on intensity of usage (i.e. duration and time spent on SNSs), Facebook helped users to accumulate and maintain bridging social



capital as it is a low-maintenance way to keep tabs on distant acquaintances. Moreover, Ellison et al. (2011) found that SNSs serve to accelerate the conversion of vague offline relationships into weak online relationships, which results in bridging social capital.

Additionally, the creation of online bridging social capital was found to positively serve individuals with low life satisfaction and self-esteem, breaching social barriers that would normally preclude them from offline interactions with others (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007). Moreover, Galston (1999) understands that in virtual communities, where entry costs are low, people make connections they may not otherwise make in the real world (Stevens Aubrey, Chattopadhyay, & Rill, 2008).

To this effect, Aubrey et al. (2008) suggest that the online bridging social capital created by SNSs does serve a role as an online network-building or community-building alternative to traditional offline networks or communities. However, it is important to distinguish that while such online social capital benefits do exist, it does not translate into offline social capital benefits, such as the creation of new offline friendships (Stevens Aubrey, Chattopadhyay, & Rill, 2008).

### **2.17 Strong Ties and Bonding Social Capital on SNSs**

Ellison et al. (2007) evidenced that Facebook is less useful for creating bonding social capital, as it is not found to create the kind of close relationships necessitated in bonding social capital. Moreover, Ellison et al. (2011) conclude that Facebook Friends

who are not considered actual friends offline are unlikely to provide social capital benefits.

In fact, Wellman (2007) found that the greatest social value comes from a few close friends who would remain close irrespective of SNS usage (Konetes & McKeague, 2011). Ellison et al. (2007) found that Facebook has a strong association with solidifying those relationships that already exist offline. Correspondingly, research indicates that a SNS user's higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction predict the creation of bonding social capital (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007).

### **2.18 Social Networking Site Users' Personal and Social Identity Formation**

Twentieth-century philosopher, George Herbert Mead, (1925) argues that self-identity appears through social behavior, or that one's social identity affects the formation of personal identity (Ellis, 2010). Mead asserts that the self is established through communication, conceiving of self-identity only in relation to other people, or more simply put: We take the perspective of others to communicate ourselves to our networks (Ellis, 2010).

Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) likens the aspects of identity formation to that of people being actors, creating or presenting themselves by playing different roles on different stages to different audiences (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Furthermore, Goffman contends that such behavior is a form of identity or impression management, or the means by which people modify their behavior to influence the impression others have

of them (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Similarly, Buckingham (2007) argues that identity formation is a process, in that one's identity is something he or she does, not simply something he or she is (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

## **2.19 Identity Formation on Social Networking Sites**

The influential relationship that exists within individuals' personal and social identities is particularly evident when examined by way of SNSs, like Facebook (Ellis, 2010). SNSs are the perfect venue for both self-presentation and social interaction, as the sites are designed for conveying information about one's self to others while being social online (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008).

Ellis (2010) maintains that "Facebook is a particularly interesting case study in relation to personal identity on the Internet because...people use their real names and attempt to represent who they really are," on their profiles (Ellis, 2010). According to Williams and Merten (2008), SNSs allow for the creation of online profiles, giving adolescents an opportunity to develop an image of how they see themselves and want others to view them (Greenhow and Robelia, 2009).

In his landmark 2007 ethnographic study, Kevin Alexander infiltrates the offline and online virtual worlds of Wellesley High School in Boston to understand just how Facebook affects personal identity in adolescents.

Nowadays, nearly every teenager—through Facebook or some other social networking site—has an online profile in which the imagination can run amok, for all the world to

see...at virtual Wellesley High, as at virtual high schools across the country, social life as you and I remember it has been thrown out and reconceived, ushering in an era where kids have an alternative venue for engineering their images (Alexander, 2007, p.2).

Moldofsky (2009) contends that on Facebook, individuals struggle to maintain control of a fluid online identity. Users present their own names and willingly disclose personal information, selecting their social identities from a series of group memberships and networks available (Ellis, 2010). One's group memberships are part of his or her social identity, which in turn is part of his or her personal identity. Group memberships are the social categories to which a person believes that he or she belongs, such as sex, race, religion, nationality, social class, political affiliation, education etc. (Ellis, 2010).

Ellis (2010) argues that several of these categories are integrated into a Facebook profile, and in order to be a part of these groups an individual must possess certain characteristics, as well as be defined with these characteristics through social interaction. Therefore, Ellis (2010) poses the following question: How and as whom, does one want to be perceived in both the online and offline world?

The answer to this question is one that many scholars have sought to understand. Alexander (2007) found that in high school, social life is built around cliques. Membership within these groups is assigned on the basis of perception and association with fixed labels. However, once groups move online to SNSs, the dynamics change (Alexander, 2007). "Kids are empowered to categorize themselves...everyone can

posture with self-created images, winning respect or derision on their ability to market themselves,” (Alexander, 2007).

The ability to market one’s self image is inherent of the exploration that teenagers experience. Greenhow and Robelia (2009) found that teenagers are working to define who they are and who they want to be at all times, on and offline. Teens have a “quest for discovery, identity exploration, and self-presentation,” (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009) on SNSs. In this process, many teens will self-disclose as much information as possible on their SNSs’ profile. Sheldon (2009) found that the more an individual discloses on SNSs, the more social connections they will be able to create and the greater the benefits they will attain in using the site (Bateman, Pike, & Butler, 2011).

## **2.20 Identity Formation and Group Impression Management**

Bateman et al. (2009) found that while users are self-disclosing personal information regarding their identities on SNSs, they do not necessarily want everyone to have access to such information. This notion is attributed to what Elkin and Bowen (1979) describe as adolescents’ engagement in imaginative audience behavior, or becoming overly preoccupied with how they appear in the eyes of others, and overestimating the extent to which others are watching and evaluating (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006).

To this end, Haferkamp and Kraemer (2009) found that on StudiVZ, the German equivalent of Facebook, impression management plays a crucial role for those users

whose motives for joining a SNS for the first time are for self-disclosure and self-presentation. Those users will display more carefully selected StudiVZ Group affiliations on their profiles than other users in order to influence readers' impressions (Haferkamp & Kraemer, 2009).

In fact, Haferkamp and Kraemer (2009) evidenced that StudiVZ Group affiliations on SNSs are not primarily used for communication with like-minded people, but rather they've become one of the essential features of the profile owners' self-presentation. "Group memberships are important...in order to show other people one's philosophy of life or personality characteristics," (Haferkamp & Kraemer, 2009).

Further, Haferkamp and Kraemer reveal that membership in specific StudiVZ Groups can show, or appear to show, that an individual is able to integrate within a large-social network with many acquaintances and friends, which was also evidenced by Leary (1995). Haferkamp and Kramer's (2009) study brings into light the need for further research on group formations on SNSs to examine if the scope, size and function of online networks produce the kind of social capital capable of influencing offline behaviors. It is in the next section that this author will examine the role that SNSs have in engaging users' participation both offline and online.

### **2.21 In-Person (Offline) Civic Engagement**

As discussed earlier as comprising one of the essential dimensions of social capital, the concept of civic engagement is understood as encompassing civic

participation, social participation and membership in formal groups (Moy, Manosevitch, Stamm, & Dunsmore, 2005). In the United States, both civic and political participation have played an important role in building communities and social capital (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010). Civic participation is often referred to as the activities that address community concerns through non-governmental or non-electoral means (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010) like volunteering at one's local animal shelter or building a playground as part of a designated community works project.

As described earlier, trust serves an essential component within the framework of associations whose members participate, whether civically or politically. When members of a group are tightly bound to an association, their trust for their fellow members usually grows; thereby the aggregate social capital increases (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010). While Putnam (1995) argued that fewer Americans are participating in groups, resulting in less trust, engagement, and contentment (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007), other scholars have found that civic participation has evolved in new ways.

Today, some scholars argue that civic engagement and volunteerism is so important that it's no longer voluntary, especially on the campuses of many American universities (Stengel & Blackman, 1996). Many universities offer courses in which volunteering is part of the curriculum, or is now part of the college alumni groups' focus for annual get-togethers (Stengel & Blackman, 1996). With an emphasis placed on

volunteering, many formal groups are bound to participate civically or politically in some manner in the United States.

It has been established earlier in this discussion that many conservative scholars argue that today's organizations are simply cursory protest groups. However, sociologist, Theda Skocpol, contends that such groups are actually deeply rooted in America's past when many associations were formed in reaction to perceived injustice (Stengel & Blackman, 1996). Examples of groups that rose out of social injustices are the Parent Teacher Association and The American Legion. Robert Wuthnow, a Princeton University sociologist, suggests that civic participation has evolved today to be more diverse and loosely structured, allowing members the opportunity to move in and out of issues and organizations as it suits their lifestyles (Stengel & Blackman, 1996).

## **2.22 Collective Action and its Effects on Identity**

Collective action by a group requires its participants "to commit themselves to undertaking a particular effort together, and to do so in a way that makes the decision of the group binding on the individual members," (Shirkey, 2008). Collective action creates shared responsibility as it ties the identity of the individual to the identity of the group (Shirkey, 2008).

Collective action is undertaken in the name of the members of a group in order to enact change, and may often be in opposition to other groups who are committed to different outcomes (Shirkey, 2008). Therefore, for collective action to occur, groups



must share a vision that is strong enough to bind the group together despite disagreements within the network (Shirkey, 2008).

Traditional scholarly work in the field of collective action examines the factors that contribute to individual activism and movement participation (McAdam, 1989). Collective action may require either conversion or alternation in the identity of the participant. Conversion necessitates a radical transformation of a person's life, including one's self-conception, network of associations and larger worldview (McAdam, 1989) in order to participate in and subscribe to a group's goals or movements.

Conversion usually has long-term effects on participants as they continue through life, forming the basis for all other choices and decisions as it reflects on their new sense of self-identity (McAdam, 1989). Social scientists Snow and Phillips (1980) point to cults and insular religious groups as the most common examples of groups that require conversion from participants (McAdam, 1989).

On the other hand, alternation is a form of personal change that is not as drastic as conversion, described by Travisaro (1981) as not entailing a radical break with the past or the construction of an entirely new identity (McAdam, 1989). The effects of alternation may persist throughout the participant's life span (McAdam, 1989). Alternation takes place in a group dynamic where members are more inclusive and tolerant of the other attachments its members may have in life (McAdam, 1989).

Both alternation and conversion highlight the identity shifts required for participants who are involved in high-risk forms of activism, such as revolutions or reform movements (McAdam, 1989). For example, the high-risk activism that formed the 1964 civil rights Mississippi Freedom Summer Project was found to trigger a process of alternation in the lives of many of its participants, who were emerging adults. Nearly 50 percent of members developed strong, bonding social ties and networks of personal relationships that sustained their activism, shaping all aspects of their lives for over 20 years (McAdam, 1989).

On the contrary, it is evidenced that low-risk, low-cost, fleeting forms of activism, such as donating money to a group cause, writing letters, or signing petitions do not require conversion or alternation from the participants (McAdam, 1989). As such, participation in groups' causes in this manner does not necessitate ongoing interaction with other members (McAdam, 1989), thereby decreasing the likelihood of strong ties and bonding social capital. As Malcolm Gladwell (2010) concludes, weak ties seldom lead to high-risk activism.

Today, scholars argue that becoming civically engaged is far easier than ever before, requiring less and less of the participant and collective action from the group, thereby becoming less meaningful and consequential (Hoffman & Kornweitz, 2011). It is in the next section that this author will explore the effects SNSs have on civic engagement.

## 2.23 The Effects of SNSs on Civic Engagement

SNSs, more than any present form of media today, are attributed with enhancing participation among the world's citizens, providing new ways for inclusion and the ability to self organize (Hoffman & Kornweitz, 2011). SNSs provide ordinary citizens the tools to be their own publishers; offer politicians an online platform for the creation of transparency; and allow activists the access for gaining support and awareness for causes (Hoffman & Kornweitz, 2011).

Author, Clay Shirkey, demonstrates how the social-media movement has contributed to “the ease and speed with which a group can mobilize for the right kind of cause,” in his book *Here Comes Everybody* (2008). Shirkey contends that by harnessing the power of connections available within the diverse and interconnected network of Friends and acquaintances on Facebook, one can engage the masses in order to resolve even the slightest problem (2008).

Some critics argue that such conceptualization of SNS mobilization is actually a downgrade to real activism.

It is simply a form of organizing which favors the weak-tie connections that give us access to information over the strong-tie connections that help us persevere in the face of danger. It shifts our energies from organizations that promote strategic and disciplined activity toward those that promote resilience and adaptability. It makes it easier for activists to express themselves, and harder for that expression to have any impact, (Gladwell, 2010, p. 10).

Likewise, some scholars argue that this new form of engagement is actually less meaningful and consequential (Hoffman & Kornweitz, 2011). Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) found that only 25 percent of college students in their study participated in organized activities, despite 91 percent of the students logging online to visit SNSs in a day's time. In fact, Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) report that none of the students in their study created or visited groups on SNSs to talk about or participate in conversation regarding specific topics.

Today, if 71.6 percent of the developed world's population is online (Hoffman & Kornweitz, 2011), the question arises as to what are they engaged in? Hoffman and Kornweitz posit that SNSs have created virtual participation, where clicking on a "Thumbs Up" icon on Facebook substitutes for more time consuming offline activism—"where going public is confused with making a difference, and speaking up is confused with being heard," (Hoffman & Kornweitz, 2011).

Critics argue that the activism witnessed today on SNSs does not translate offline. Panagiotopoulos et al. (2011) found that very high Facebook support for e-petitions was not converted into signatures offline, and conversely, those that had high signatures offline received limited Facebook support. The authors concluded that popular issues, which can generate significant activity in the social networking sphere, would not translate into actual petition signatures. This evidence suggests the importance in understanding the lack of overlap generated in civic engagement on and offline.

Bridging the structural holes that divide groups is just as challenging online as offline, if not more so. Offline, [one] knows if a door has been slammed in your face; online it is impossible to determine the response that the invisible audience might have to your message, (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 243).

Another divide in SNSs' ability to engage is evidenced in the uprisings that have occurred since 2009 around the world. Since 2009, some journalists have named these uprisings, "Twitter and Facebook Revolutions," (Applebaum, 2009). From Moldova, to Egypt, Bahrain, Iran, Tunisia and Libya, media commentators in the Western world have credited SNSs with creating social change in the aforementioned countries. Yet, some scholars take issue with crediting a technology for mass rebellion. "In order to have a social protest, one must have something to protest about...all social protests begin with experience of injustice, rather than with access to technology itself," (Ganesh, 2011).

Communication technologies indeed play a part in what sociologists observe as a scale shift in contemporary activism, or the act of moving localized, small-scale resistance struggles to the larger public domain (Ganesh, 2011). SNSs make it easier for people to become aware of social problems and self organize to address them. In Egypt, word of mouth appeared to weigh heavily in ensuring that citizens attend the protests, just as much as the Facebook Groups' posts and Twitter tweets (Ganesh, 2011).

On the other hand, SNSs' capacity to generate civic participation has been slightly evidenced by researchers when studied in conjunction with political participation. Zhang et al. (2010) found that users' reliance on SNSs was positively related to individual civic

participation, but not to individual political participation for 24 percent of the respondents surveyed. In perhaps one of the only studies to date that examine civic participation within Facebook Groups, Valenzuela et al. (2009) found that intensity of Facebook usage (i.e. duration and frequency) was positively associated to civic participation.

Using the intensity of Facebook use scale developed by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2009), Valenzuela et al. (2009) based user engagement on number of Friends, amount of time spent on the network on a typical day, and level of agreement with several statements gauging users' emotional attachment to the site. The study concentrated on civic participation as that activity which takes place while logged onto the Facebook Group pages of which users had identified themselves as members.

However, Valenzuela et al. (2009) did not specifically examine if a relationship exists between those survey respondents who are members of an offline group that also communicates as a Facebook Group. Yet, in a posthoc analysis, Valenzuela et al. (2009) ran a regression analysis to infer a positive causal relationship between online and offline civic participation. In this analysis, the researchers identified whether or not participants of their study identified themselves as members of an off-campus Facebook Group, an on-campus Facebook Group, or a student Facebook Group. However, the researchers did not identify nor draw a relationship to whether or not such group membership coincided in the offline/real world as well. It is the aim of this author to build on Valenzuela's et al. (2009) study by further examining the extent to which members of online SNS groups participate in their offline groups. This author will discuss that aim in the next section.

## 2.24 Summary

From Tocqueville's 1835 conclusion that "Americans are forever forming associations," (Putnam, 1995) through today, the ways in which individuals seek out social capital by associational group membership has evolved in step with the evolution of media and technology. Just as newspapers, television and the Internet play an integral role in the formation of bridging and bonding social capital among people, today's SNSs continue to affect the networks in which individuals gain useful information, develop personal relationships or form collective action.

Social scholars debate whether the groups formed by way of SNSs are merely tertiary or advocacy associations, requiring only a tie to common symbols and ideals, but not to one another (Putnam, 1995). Consequently, the social capital derived by such association is frequently categorized as weak and incapable of substantive impact when taken offline into the real world. The collective action required by a group to affect change, mobilize members or fight social injustices requires a shared vision that is strong enough to bind all members within a network (Shirkey, 2008).

Such a requirement, in its traditional sense, has necessitated the transformation of the individual member's identity in some form—whether it is conversion or alternation. Today, critics argue that the low-risk, low-cost, fleeting forms of activism attributed to groups on SNSs seldom lead to identity shifts or strong social capital bonds (Gladwell, 2010).

The identity transformations witnessed on SNSs are geared more toward impression management (Haferkamp & Kramer, 2009), rather than for the purposes of communicating with one another about relevant topics or issues. Today's emerging adults utilize their affiliations with SNSs as a form of self-presentation, reimagining their social identities to create new and intriguing personal identities for the online, invisible audience (Alexander, 2007).

Ellison et al. (2011) posit that “no social capital research to date has understood whether there are particular uses of Facebook that are more likely to result in positive social capital outcomes.” Further, while Valenzuela's et al. (2009) evidenced through a post hoc analysis a relationship to civic participation in online groups to offline behavior, no distinct research has been conducted on the levels of engagement exhibited by emerging adults who are members of the same online and offline group while simultaneously communicating on SNSs.

It is the aim of this author to expand and contribute to the research in this narrow field by examining this particular subset of emerging adults, while also gauging the extent to which impression management plays a role in their affiliation with online groups. This author intends to close the gap that exists in previous research between the online and offline civic engagement of group members.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Questions**

Are the relationship ties created by social networks' associational memberships strong enough to generate civic participation? Consequently, do they have the ability to generate community action around a specific purpose? Further, do social networking users manage their identities by constructing profiles on these sites rather than from real-world actions alone?

#### **3.2 Research Design**

This study will determine the factors that allow university organizations to reach and maintain their annual goals, causes or efforts by way of social network site usage. Research has shown that media channels like entertainment television and the Internet have evidenced derisive effects on increasing or maintaining an individual's participation or engagement within group membership. As a result, there has been a significant decline in social capital in the United States alone over the last 35 years.

Today, online social networking poses the biggest threat to social capital production. Research has evidenced that social network users connect to their core networks dramatically less than even those Internet users, further perpetuating the disparity between the rise in popularity of social networking over the last five years and the declines in group participation and social capital. Additionally, this disconnect has

been shown through research to affect individual's feelings of isolation, self-worth and later, online identity profile formation. This author will argue that some individuals use their online identity's presence in place of real offline engagement.

The subjects of this study include Rowan University executive board leaders and members, all of who are actively registered and enrolled college students. The study will examine the experiences of both the leaders and the members regarding participation and engagement and gauge SNSs effectiveness in doing so.

The findings will identify the frequency of usage of Facebook and Twitter by members of Rowan University organizations in relation to the frequency of in-person (offline) participation within group causes. It will provide insight on how leaders can successfully communicate to their members via social networking sites or other communication channels to affect change and rally support in efforts that affect the university environment and surrounding community. As well, it will identify how members perceive their online personas to that of associations in the group and the effects this has in their lives offline.

### **3.3 Source of Data**

The author will select 10 Rowan University registered organizations from which to gather a sample set for the quantitative research. The sample will be a convenience, non-random sample. The sample will include students who are members of the organizations, as well as elected leaders of the organizations.

Likewise, the author will use a non-random convenience sample to choose three participants that represent executive board leaders of SGA groups in order to gather qualitative data.

### **3.4 Method of Acquiring Data**

The analysis will be conducted through *surveys* and *in-depth interviews* and performed by student members and elected representatives of the organizations. The set period for this study analysis will take place from February 26, 2012 through April 4, 2012.

The author will draft a 25-question survey to administer to a non-random sample of university organization members who communicate, form and maintain memberships via Facebook and/or Twitter. The students are the population. The list of organizations used for this survey will be generated from the Student Government Association of Rowan University's official group manifest. The members' present in-person during meetings serves as the sampling frame for the study.

For the purposes of the research questions, the sample selection method will be informal. Groups will be chosen based on the following criteria:

- 1) Officially chartered groups that hold approved budgets by the Student Government Association of Rowan University and appear on the SGA manifest.

- 2) Groups that appear on the Rowan University>Rowan Groups>Facebook page found on Facebook, which demonstrates that they have an online social media presence and online membership.
- 3) Groups with leaders that allow the author to deploy and moderate a 25-question survey in-person during their set weekly meetings. Group leaders will be contacted by telephone and email to arrange agreement and admittance into weekly meetings.

Consequently, there is no equal chance at being selected, therefore, the results cannot reliably reflect the larger universe, nor can probability be estimated. The author is conducting an informal survey because it is unlikely that the researcher will find a complete and accurate listing of every person in the population. If the author were to find this, it would be the theoretical population. However, this author can only survey the accessible population, or the group/subset of people available to survey. Also, conclusions based on surveys of college students are not generalizable to all college students in the country. However, it is the goal of this author to gain enough participants for statistically significant and predictive findings.

The survey will include informational, attitudinal and behavioral questions, which will help identify social networking usage, frequencies, motives, online and off-line participation and identity formation. This author will administer the surveys to no fewer than 200 group members within 10 SGA organizations. Questions will include five point Likert-scale questions (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) such as:

- 1) “I receive most of my news regarding this organization via its Facebook page.”
- 2) “It is important to my Facebook profile or Twitter account to show that I belong to this organization.”
- 3) “I enjoy participating offline in the activities of this organization.”

As well, questions to appear on the survey will be those of forced-choice and close-ended questions. Such questions will include: “How many hours do you use Facebook per week?” “How many hours do you participate in the group in-person?” and, “Are you a Friend of this group on Facebook?”

This author will also draft in-depth interview questions for executive board leaders who are elected to their positions on behalf of the Rowan University groups they represent. The questions for the interview will:

- 1) Identify the hours of social networking site usage by their members in relation to the hours of offline participation.
- 2) Identify the strengths and weaknesses leaders observe when using social networking sites as communication tools.
- 3) Describe the kinds of requests leaders make of their members on SNSs to participate off-line in the group’s activities.
- 4) Describe the perceptions of identity to associational membership the leaders observe.

The interviews will be conducted in-person with three executive board leaders of Rowan University campus organizations. Interviews will span one hour or more in recorded audio length. The author will contact interviewees by telephone, email and before or after member meetings to propose an appointment for an interview session.

### **3.5 Method of Analyzing Data**

This author will codify the surveys, then use the quantitative data to identify the frequency of participation among group members, perceptions of online identity formation, hours of social network usage and preferred method of communication amongst group members. This author will manually enter the data of all completed paper surveys into the online survey research service, Survey Monkey, to analyze and track findings. Additionally, Microsoft Excel 2008 will be used to report percentages, as well as generate charts, graphs and tables of results.

This author will also codify interview answers.

This author will maintain the same process as the surveys for the interviews by inductively analyzing the qualitative data. A *Grounded Theory Approach* will be used, allowing themes to arise from the data, which focus on eliciting themes, not searching for pre-conceived themes. Then, open coding will be employed to identify and group *like* concepts together, branding them with a coding system for further evaluation. The author will search for the relationships that exist between the concepts (axial coding), as well

distill that data to uncover key concepts that serve as links to one another (selective coding).

This codification and analysis will provide insight into how to successfully engage and motivate group members through communication tools to generate social capital, activism and participation.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Chapter 4 provides primary research results, which range from percentages of social media usage among members in various university groups within the sample, to attitudes towards the use of Facebook and Twitter by members. The chapter contains charts, tables and graphs to provide quick data references. Although it contains strictly data, the chapter provides insight into the make-up of university groups and the sentiments of its members and leaders toward the effectiveness of social media with online and offline participation. See Appendix A and B for complete survey and interview instruments.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

#### **4.1 Significance of Study**

This study will determine if the functions of social networking, when used as a communication tool, contribute to social capital production, increased activism and participation, as well as enhanced self-reflection of one's identity online. High-risk activism, as witnessed in the past in the United States, requires great effort in organization and communication, as well as a severe identity transformation of the individual in order to be successful.

As communication methods, channels and tools have evolved over time, research has shown that association within groups and participation in groups have correspondingly declined. When the Internet gained mass appeal in the 1990s, it revealed the capacity, reach and appeal to form groups and associations with little to no "real-world" effort. As such, low-risk activism, or the participation in groups with little change to self or demands of self, increased in the United States.

The popularity of social networking increases daily, with more than 800 million users globally possessing Facebook accounts. As such, it further perpetuates the dichotomy that exists between the individual, isolated at home with little group membership in the offline world, versus the explosive growth of online groups with millions of members.



Consequently, those who run and organize online social networking groups, such as universities and their organizations, need to understand how to effectively channel support and participation around the causes of which they champion. For Rowan University, nearly \$1 million is spent annually toward the existence and function of campus organizations.

Rowan University is a publically funded state institution in New Jersey. To date, Rowan's SGA comprises 110 officially chartered groups with a total budget of \$989,170 for the 2011-2012 academic year. The SGA states its vision as: "The Rowan SGA takes pride in creating a state of actively engaged students that willfully participate not only within their university, but also the surrounding community." In light of this vision, it is not only of social importance, but also of financial consequence, that research into how university groups elicit participation in today's digital world be sought.

This author's primary research seeks to identify issues and/or resolutions to understand the use of social networking sites in enhancing and meeting the expectations set forth for participation and activism within group membership.

#### **4.2 General Findings—Quantitative Data Results—Survey Findings**

In total, 238 respondents with 95 percent providing a self-reported age range of 18-23 years old completed the survey. The majority of respondents (89 percent) identify as being current undergraduate students of Rowan University, followed by nine percent

who point to having earned an associate's degree. Fifty percent of respondents self-report as male, while 49 percent identify as female, with one participant not answering.

The 238 respondents represent membership in 10 officially chartered Rowan University Student Government Association (SGA) groups. The following groups have met the requirements set forth by the SGA Constitution, Articles One through Five on organizations, as well as received two-thirds majority vote by the SGA Senate for official charter:

1. Bio Club
2. Circle K (Kiwans Club)
3. Habitat for Humanity
4. Institute for Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE)
5. Pre-Health Society
6. Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA)
7. Rowan Ad Club
8. Rowan Republicans
9. Rowan Television Network (RTN)
10. Student University Programmers—Live Events Unit (SUP)

Table 1 represents the study participant groups' allocated individual budgets in 2011-2012, totaling \$349,050.

*Table 1*

<b>Groups' Allocated 2011-2012 SGA Budgets</b>	
<b>Name of Group in Study</b>	<b>2011-2012 Group Budget</b>
1. Bio Club	\$1,350
2. Circle K (Kiwanis Club)	\$2,800
3. Habitat for Humanity	\$700
4. Institute for Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE)	\$1,800
5. Pre-Health Society	\$2,200
6. Public Relations Student Society of America	\$15,900
7. Rowan Ad Club	\$7,700
8. Rowan Republicans	\$800
9. Rowan Television Network	\$24,800
10. Student University Programmers	\$291,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$349,050</b>

According to Article One of SGA Organizations, chartered groups receiving funds from the SGA must adhere to guidelines, or funds become frozen. Monthly progress reports documenting accomplishments and attendance for the group must be submitted to the SGA. Two service projects that benefit Rowan University or the community must be completed each year, including documentation of at least 50 percent of total membership in attendance. Each group must send a senator to weekly SGA meetings. Each club's leaders must attend SGA workshops twice a year. Once a year groups must update their organization's constitution for SGA review and approval.

Table 2 shows the study participant groups' actual number and total percentage of budget allocation out of the overall budget of \$989,170 funded to all SGA chartered groups.

*Table 2*

<b>Groups' Total Percentage of Budget Allocation Out of Aggregate SGA Budget</b>			
	Percentage Out of SGA 2011-2012 Budget	Number of Groups in 2011-2012 SGA	Total Money Allocations for 2011-2012 Budget
Participant Groups in Study	35%	10	\$349,050
Groups Not in Study	65%	100	\$640, 120
<b>Totals</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>\$989,170</b>

As seen in Table 2, the 10 groups who participated in this study's survey account for 35 percent of the entire SGA budget for 110 total SGA groups. The groups in this study, while accounting for only nine percent of the total groups, spend 35 percent of the university's total budget dedicated for SGA groups.

Figure 1 represents a breakdown of individual survey respondents by groups in which they belong as members.

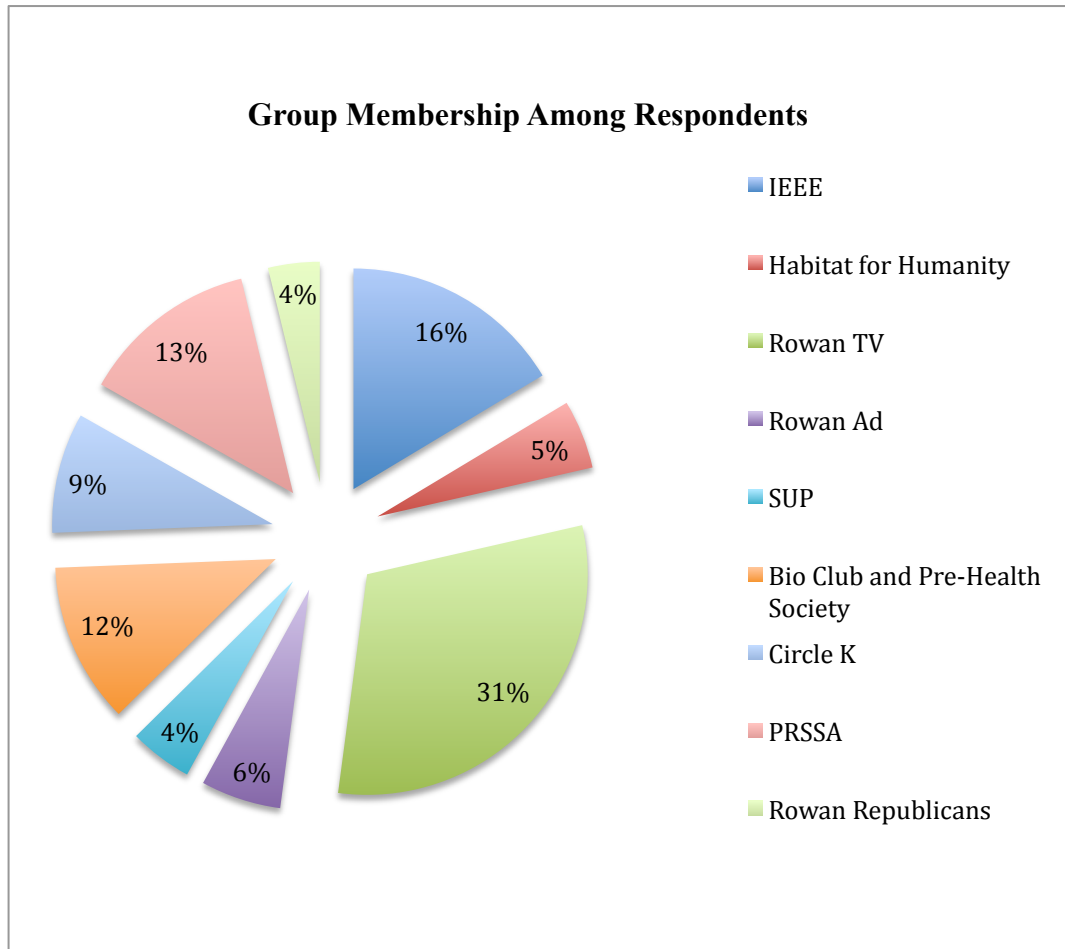


Figure 1

As noted in Figure 1, 31 percent of respondents belong to Rowan TV, followed by 16 percent as members in IEEE and 13 percent in PRSSA. The Bio Club and Pre-Health Society respondents were surveyed during a joint membership meeting, therefore they account for a combined total of 12 percent.

Figure 2 represents the length in years of membership within their designated groups as reported by all 238-survey respondents.

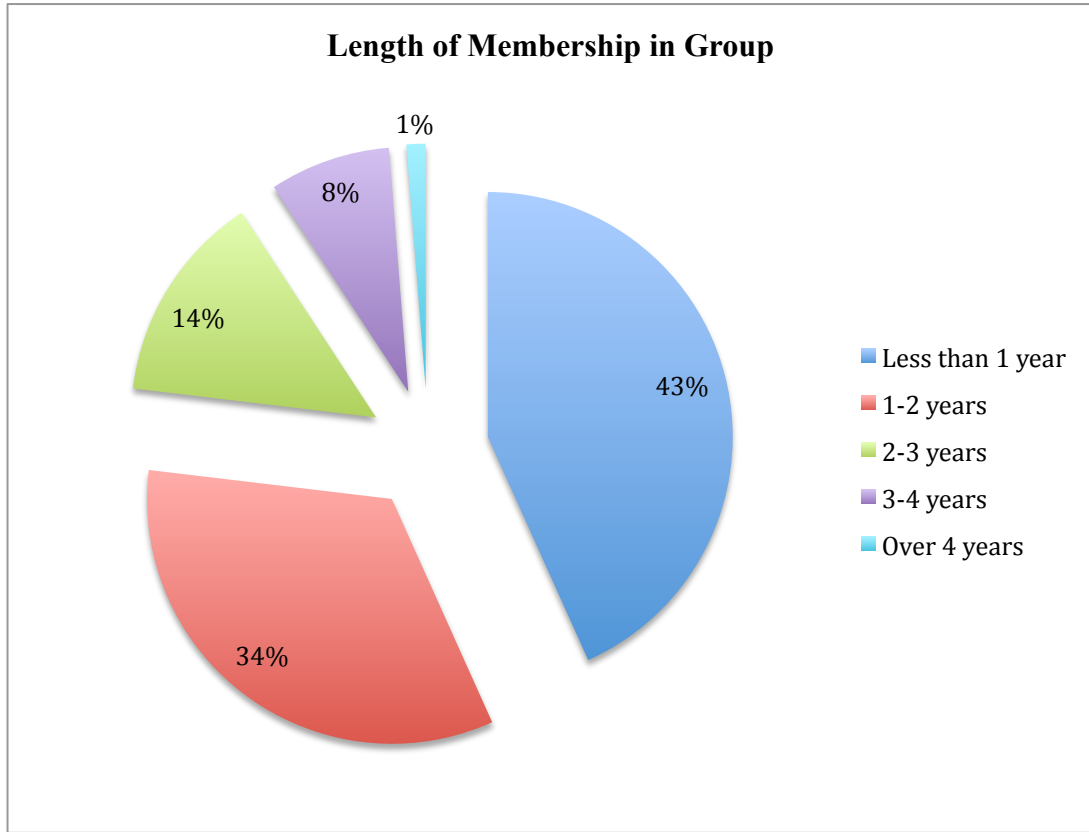


Figure 2

As noted in Figure 2, 43 percent of the total group members surveyed report being a member of his/her group for less than one calendar year, followed by 34 percent of individuals that belonged to his/her group for one to two years.

Figure 3 illustrates the ethnic background of the 238 survey respondents, as self-reported.

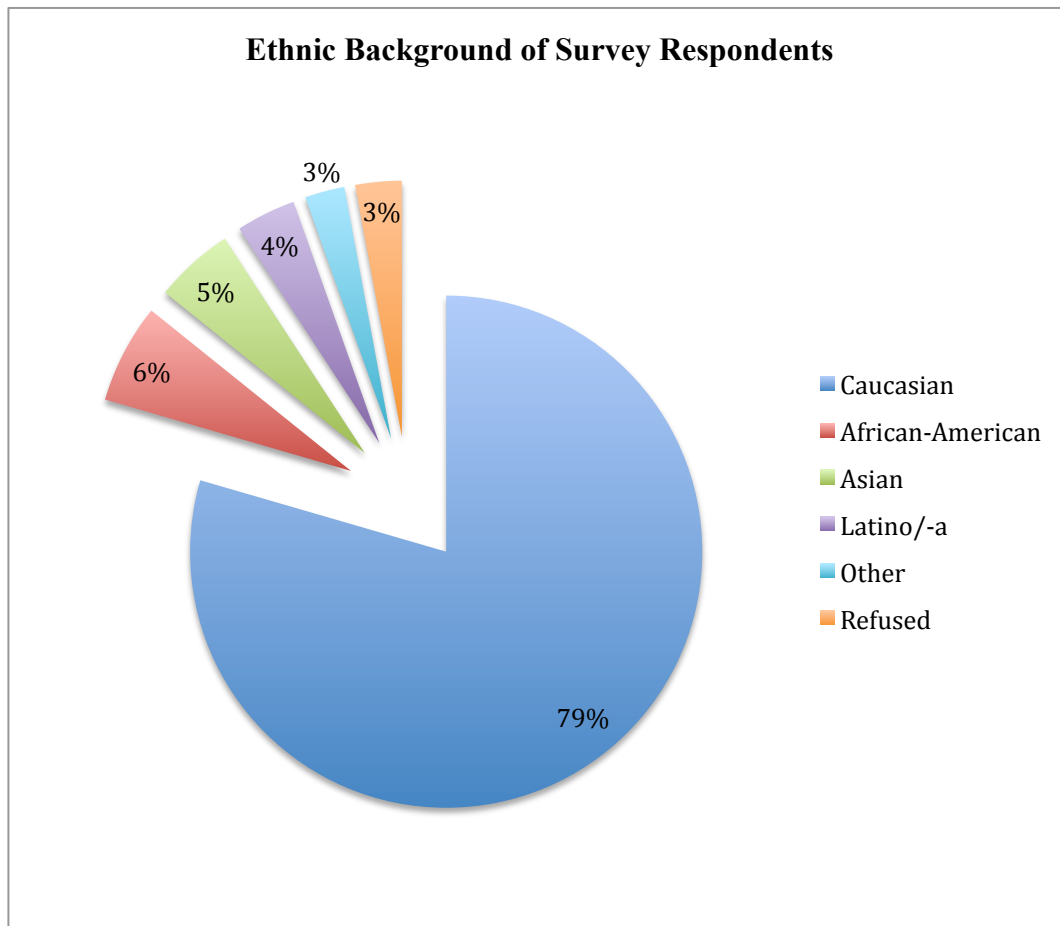


Figure 3

As shown in Figure 3, a majority (79 percent) of respondents identify as being Caucasian. These findings are consistent with the overall ethnic background of the greater Rowan University universe, reported by the Office of Admissions as having a student body of 78 percent Caucasian and 22 percent minority or other.

Table 3 shows the 238 respondents' level of agreement with the idea that it is important to receive frequent communication from the organizations in which they belong as members.

*Table 3*

<b>Importance of Frequent Communication for Each Member</b>				
<b>“It is important to me to receive frequent communication from this organization.”</b>				
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
34%	38%	21%	6%	1%

As noted in Table 3, 72 percent of respondents “strongly agree” or “agree” with the idea that it is important to receive frequent communication from their organization.



Figure 4 represents the respondents' preference of communication method from the group, if given a choice.

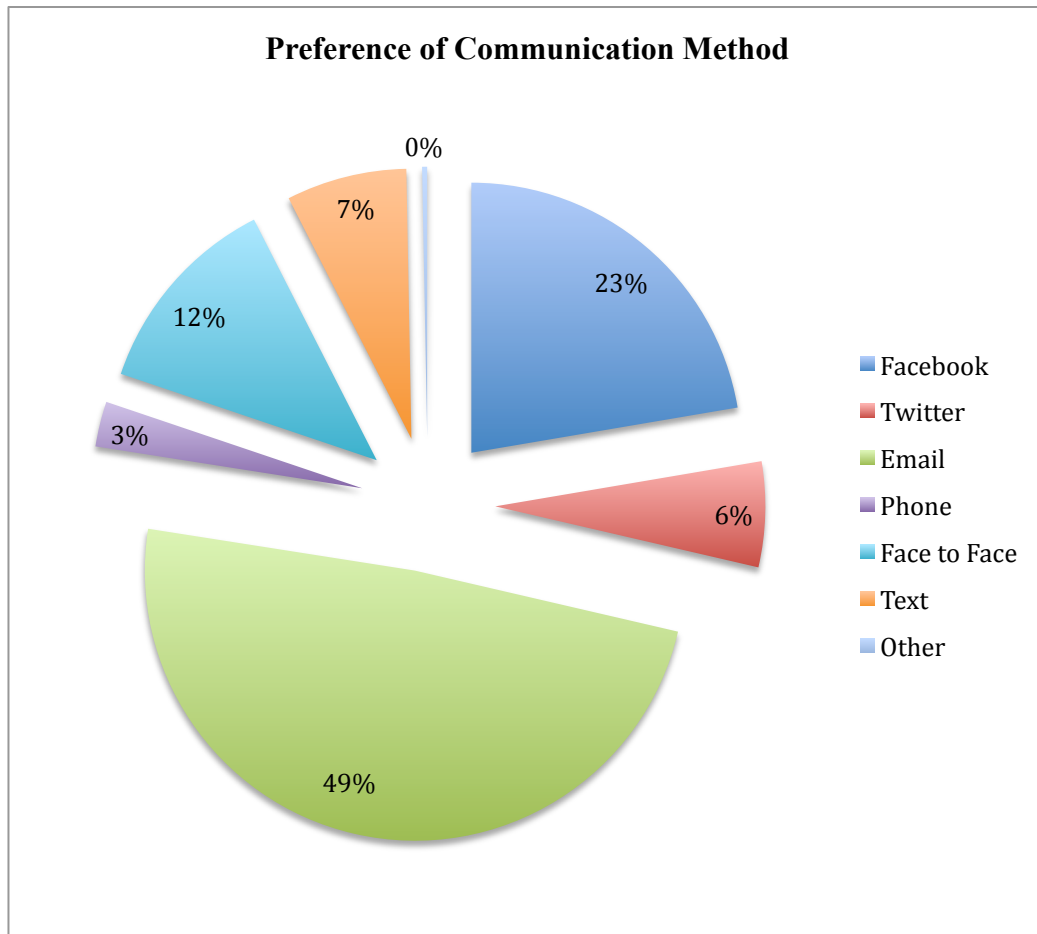


Figure 4

As shown in Figure 4, the majority of respondents (49 percent) choose to receive information from their groups by way of email, followed by Facebook with 23 percent. When combined, social media accounts for nearly 30 percent of the preference of respondents as a communication's tool.

### **4.3 General Findings—Qualitative Data Results—Interview Findings**

**Background and budget.** One hundred percent of the interviewees of this study were Caucasian females who hold senior academic status at Rowan University. The women range in age between 22 years old to 27 years old. Seventy-five percent of the interviewees are active members, belonging to the organization for three years, while 25 percent hold two-year membership. One hundred percent of the interviewees are on the Executive Board of the organization and are in current leadership roles for the group. One hundred percent of interviewees have been elected to their positions, which are unpaid and voluntary. Seventy-five percent of the interviewees are dues paying members of the group, ranging in dues from \$8 to \$50 per academic year, while 25 percent pay no dues.

The approved 2011-2012 SGA budgets of the interviewees' groups range from \$2,800 to \$24,800. The budgets of the interviewees account for 13 percent of the total budgets of the SGA groups in this study. The interviewees' groups' account for a combined 53 percent in membership of the total groups in the study.

**Frequency and preference of communication.** Overwhelmingly, all interviewees report that frequency of communication is essential to their group and 100 percent "strongly agree," that they like to receive frequent communication from the group. "While I personally prefer email or a phone call, the way that our members communicate is through Facebook. They'd rather respond to each other through Facebook than answer a phone call," stated the Circle K leader.

The PRSSA leader reiterated the idea that social media is a preference to communicate. “Social media is the biggest avenue for us, especially Twitter and Facebook. We even have sub-groups, or derivatives, of our main group on Facebook for committees. However, I personally get more responses from an email than on Facebook.” On the contrary, the Circle K leader reports, “I’ve emailed group members and they’ve responded to my email on Facebook, rather than hit reply to the email.”

The RTN leader added that social media in combination with email is a preference for her group. “The members gravitate toward using email or Facebook. They tend to get annoyed with email, even though it is the best way to get important information out to them. They say they receive too many emails from us.”

When asked to further explain the groups’ preferences for communication, the interviewees revealed the divide that exists between email and social media, which was 49 percent versus 29 percent, respectively, in the survey results. “Facebook is different than a lot of communication because it allows everyone to see the same message, not just one person, like text or email,” remarked the Circle K leader. “It’s good for our group. It’s electronic information—no one writes anything down in a meeting because they know they can get up-to-date information all off of Facebook.”

The RTN leader describes why the leaders in her group prefer email:

We have to use email to send out forms in order to sign up crews for shoots, like upcoming sport’s games that need coverage. Email is an easy way to get forms completed. We used to do this face-to- face, which was great; it

generated a lot of excitement in the moment, and got people to participate. Then we changed to only sending out forms via email. It lost a lot of momentum. We need to do both.

The RTN leader's comments regarding face-to-face communication as her preference for crew sign-ups is consistent with survey results from her group, which reveal that 31 percent of RTN members prefer face-to-face communication, with only email coming in higher at 70 percent. She explains, "T.V. is very hands on. We need face-to-face interaction to explain methods and procedures for equipment, which can't always be done with an informational post to Facebook or instructional YouTube video. It's easier and more enjoyable to learn in person."

However, the PRSSA leader reveals the inherent nature of email's preference for some, which allows for recipients to receive the message with no effort on their part. "Email allows for information to be pushed to you. Facebook requires some seeking, and if you are not looking for it and signing in, then you're not going to find it." She continues, bringing up important points regarding the Facebook feed. "Facebook feeds will push the information of your groups higher and higher, so you see it easier when you log on, if and only if, you are a frequent visitor of that particular page."

**Quality and effectiveness of group communication.** Each interviewee was asked to rate the quality and effectiveness of their groups' combined communication methods on a scale of one to 10 with one being poor and 10 being excellent. RTN's leader rated the quality and effectiveness of communication as seven for each category.

PRSSA's leader rated both categories as six. Circle K's leader rated the quality of communication methods an eight, while rating effectiveness of communication an outstanding 10. "Our members are very good about responding on Facebook and getting people the information they need or answering their questions," added the Circle K leader.

#### **4.4 Hypothesis One—Quantitative Data Results—Survey Findings**

H1—Group members' online social networking site activity will take the place of or decrease group members' offline social capital and engagement within the same organization.

Figure 5 represents the hours per week that the 238 survey respondents report for general usage of Facebook and Twitter. Percentages represent response counts from population surveyed.

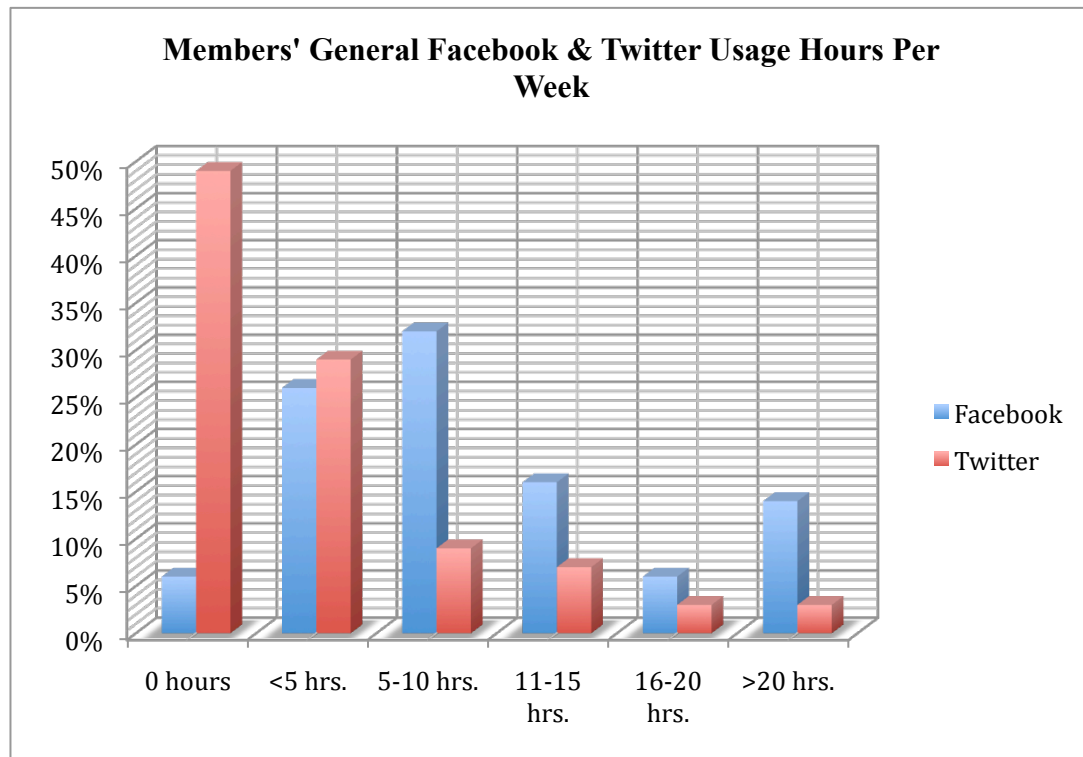


Figure 5

As Figure 5 indicates, non-Twitter usage among the respondents equals 49 percent, nearly half of all surveyed, compared to six percent of respondents who do not use Facebook. Those using Twitter and Facebook “fewer than five hours a week” account for 55 percent of the total combined. One-third of the respondents use Facebook between “five to ten hours per week.” As the results indicate, Twitter usage among the total number of members surveyed is insignificant.

Figure 6 represents the online membership of the 238 total respondents on the Facebook page of the organization to which they also belong as a member offline.

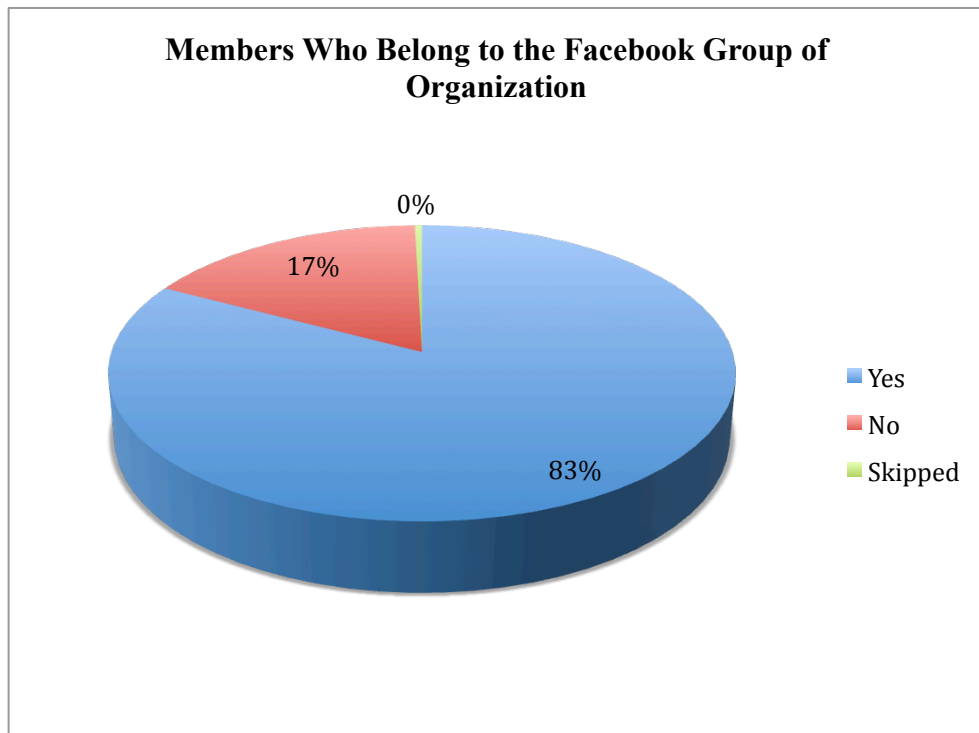


Figure 6

As Figure 6 reveals, the majority of survey respondents (83 percent) indicate that they are online members of the Facebook group of their organization. This represents an overwhelming overlap in both online and offline membership within the same organization.

Figure 7 shows the percentage of survey respondents who report being followers of the online Twitter accounts of the groups they belong to.

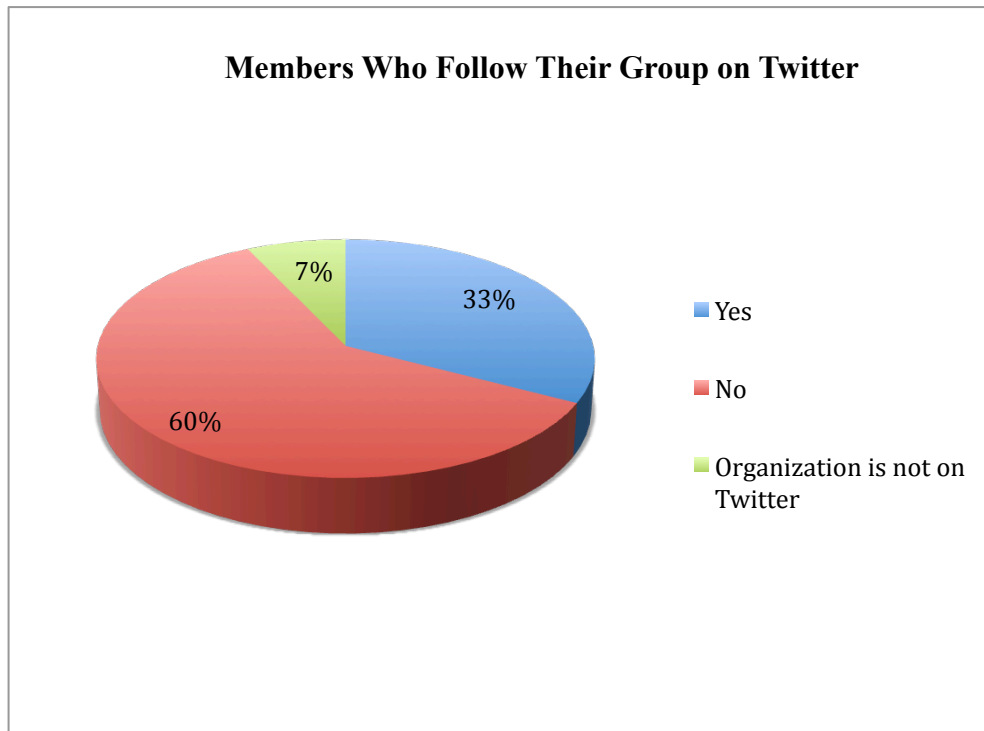


Figure 7

The majority (60 percent) of respondents do not follow the groups they belong to offline on Twitter (See Figure 7). Seven percent of members report that their organizations do not have a Twitter account, which comprises both those that are not aware of the Twitter account as well as those instances where none exists. As Figure 7 demonstrates, the groups' ability to retain Twitter followers comes in at 33 percent of the total respondents surveyed.



Figure 8 details the 238 total respondents' hourly visits per week on the Facebook page of the organization they belong to as members, as well as the Twitter account of the organization to which they belong. Percentages represent response counts from population surveyed.

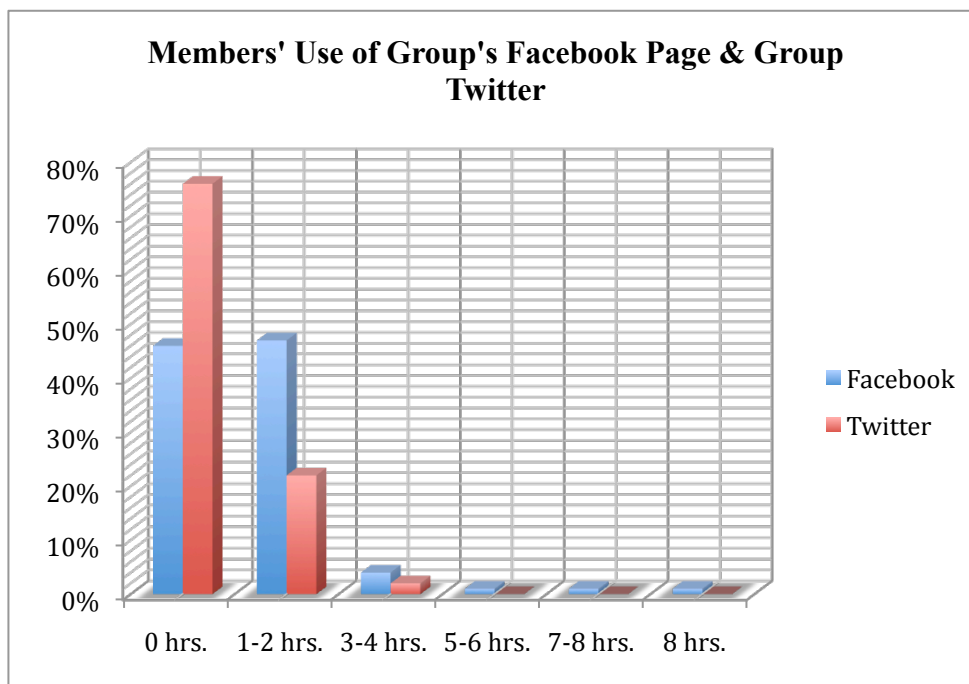


Figure 8

As Figure 8 indicates, the Facebook pages of groups in the survey receive no visits each week by the majority of members (46 percent). As well, the Twitter accounts of groups receive no followers per week by 76 percent of the members surveyed. The results show that at most, members spend “one to two hours per week” on the social media accounts of their groups by a combined total of 68 percent for both Facebook and Twitter.

Table 4 shows the level to which the 238 respondents agree with the idea that they receive most of their news regarding their organization via its Facebook page and Twitter account.

*Table 4*

<b>Where Group Members Receive Their News</b>				
<b>“I receive most of my news regarding this organization via its Facebook page.”</b>				
<b>“I receive most of my news regarding this organization via its Twitter account.”</b>				
<b>Strongly Agree: FACEBOOK</b>	<b>Agree: FACEBOOK</b>	<b>Neutral: FACEBOOK</b>	<b>Disagree: FACEBOOK</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree: FACEBOOK</b>
10%	14%	20%	25%	31%
<b>Strongly Agree: TWITTER</b>	<b>Agree: TWITTER</b>	<b>Neutral: TWITTER</b>	<b>Disagree: TWITTER</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree: TWITTER</b>
2%	4%	8%	19%	67%

As seen in Table 4, 24 percent of survey respondents “strongly agree” or “agree” that they receive most of their news regarding the organization via its Facebook page. Table 4 also reveals that six percent of survey respondents “strongly agree” or “agree” that they receive most of their news regarding the organization via its Twitter account. Clearly, group members spend little time on group social media sites obtaining news and information about their group.

Figure 9 represents the total number of the 238 survey respondents' hours of in-person participation per week within the organizations of which they are members.

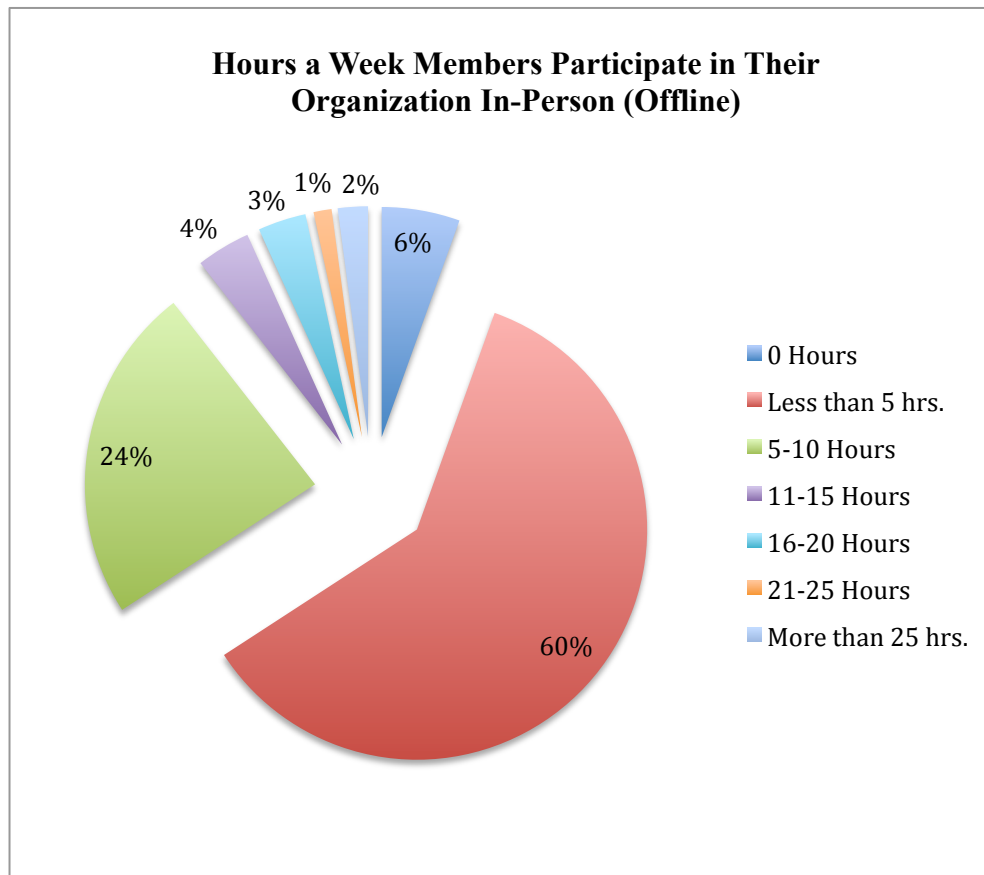


Figure 9

Sixty percent of group members surveyed participate in-person (offline) in their groups, “fewer than five hours per week” (See Figure 9). Twenty-four percent of survey respondents’ self-report participation in-person (offline) from “five to 10 hours per week.”

Figure 10 represents the 238 survey respondents' agreement with the idea that they enjoy participating offline in the activities of their organizations.

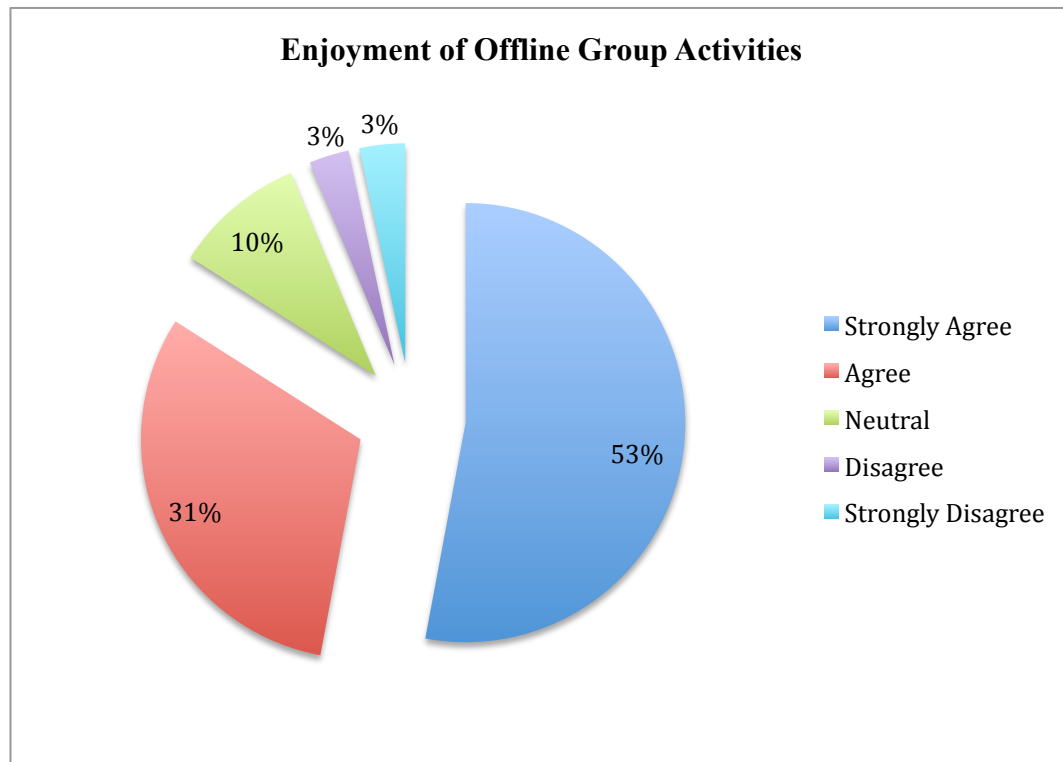


Figure 10

As Figure 10 demonstrates, 84 percent of respondents “strongly agree” or “agree” with the idea that they enjoy participating in-person (offline) in the activities of their organization. Notably, the members of the groups in this survey derive much satisfaction from participating in the groups that they belong to.

Table 5 is a breakdown of high frequency Facebook users (*those that use Facebook 5-10 hours or 11-15 hours per week for general usage*) and the number of hours per week that they visit the Facebook page of their group.

Table 5

<b>High Frequency Facebook Users and Number of Hours Per Week That They Visit Their Group's Page</b>		
<b>Hours per week the Facebook Group Page is Visited:</b>	<b>By Members Using Facebook 5-10 hours per week</b>	<b>By Members Using Facebook 11-15 hours per week</b>
<b>0</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>1-2 hours</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>3-4 hours</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>5-6 hours</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>7-8 hours</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>8 plus hours</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

As Table 5 indicates, frequent users of Facebook do not visit their group's Facebook page often. Forty-six percent of members using Facebook "five to 10 hours per week" never visit their group's Facebook page while online. Those respondents who use Facebook "11-15 hours per week" also spend limited time on their group's page, with only 53 percent of them visiting their group's page "one to two hours per week."

Figure 11 shows the survey respondents who visit the Facebook page of their group and the number of hours that they participate in-person (offline) in that group.

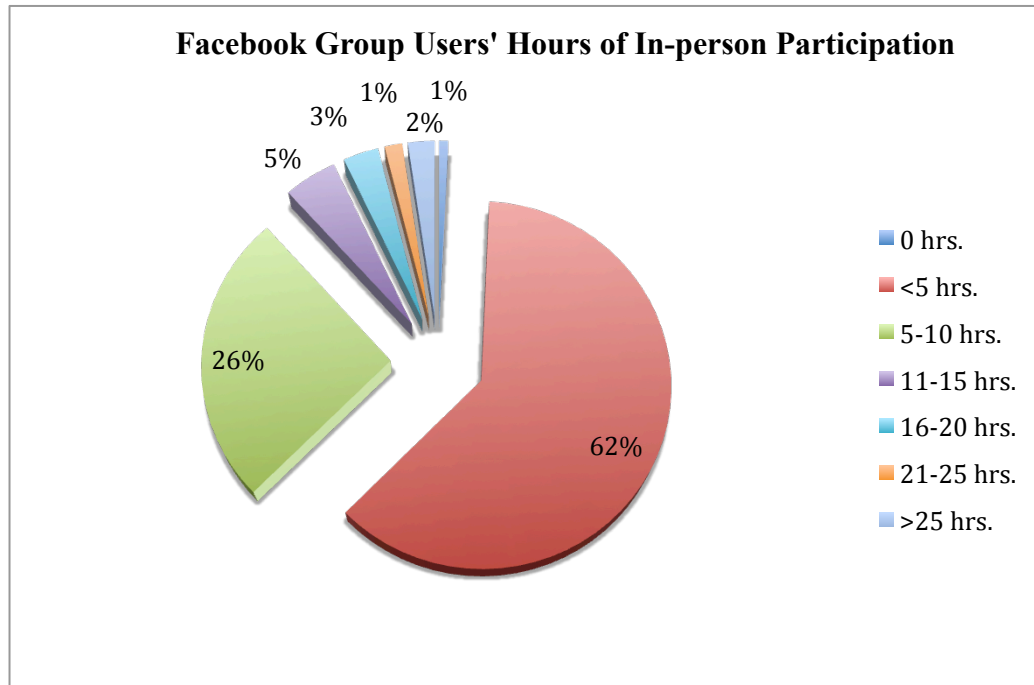


Figure 11

As Figure 11 shows, the majority of members (62 percent) who visit the Facebook page of their group also participate in-person (offline) in their group “five hours or less.” Twenty-six percent of members who visit the Facebook page of their group participate in the group in-person (offline) between “five to 10 hours per week.” As Figure 11 clearly demonstrates, members who participate online by visiting their group’s page will also participate offline in person.

Figure 12 compares average time spent per week by groups on their Facebook page and in-person. Time is reported in hours and minutes.

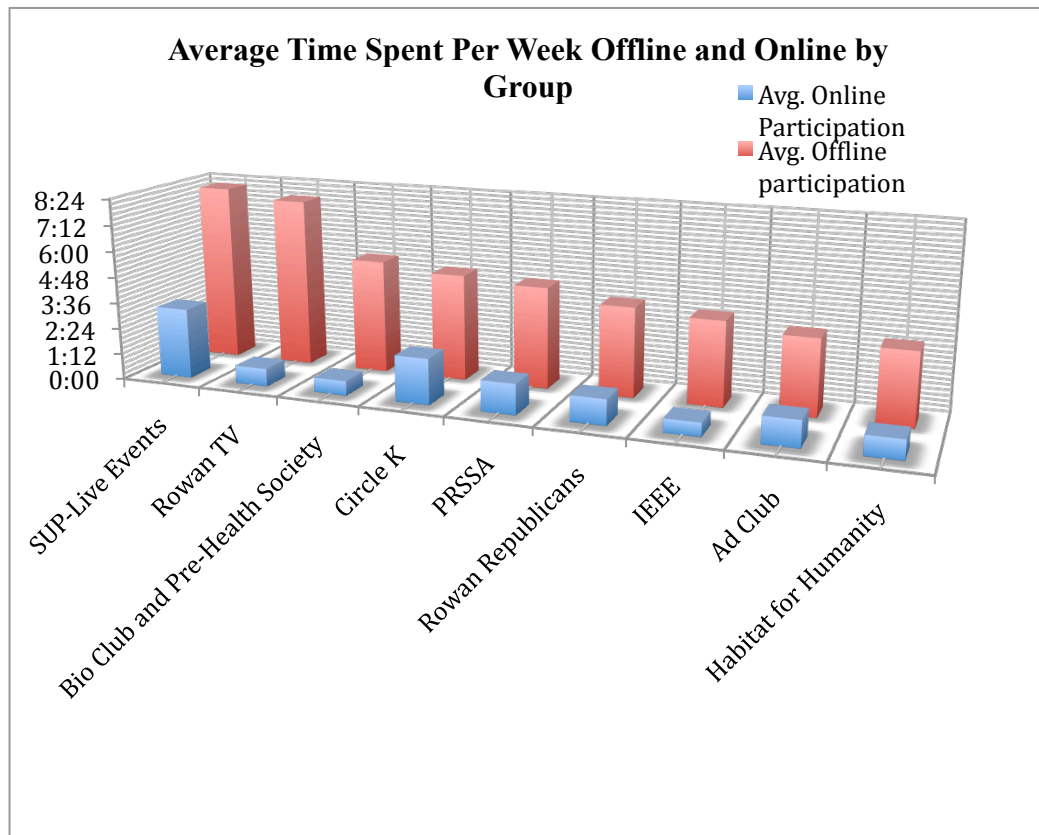


Figure 12

As Figure 12 reveals, the highest offline participants (SUP and RTN) spend an average of eight hours per week in-person with their respective group members. Both groups visit their Facebook page less than half of the time they spend participating offline (3 hrs. 14 minutes and 49 minutes, respectively). RTN members spend the second most time per week participating in-person in their group, but are the third lowest group in time spent online.

#### **4.5 Hypothesis One—Qualitative Data Results—Interview Findings**

**Frequency of Facebook usage.** One hundred percent of interviewees report using Facebook for personal use and as a method of communication for sending and receiving information about their groups. “All members of our organization are given full access to the Facebook page and Twitter account of our group,” agreed all of the interviewees. Further, 50 percent of the interviewees in this study report that their organizations have more than one Facebook page, either for the Executive Board (elected leaders) or for sub-groups.

When asked to gauge the members’ personal use of social media versus group usage, the Circle K leader responds, “The members of our group are more active on our group page because they are already on Facebook 24/7 for personal use.” She delves into this idea even further, “If I write something to them on the Facebook page of Circle K, they will write back in a minute. They’ll be on our page for at least an hour at a time.”

The RTN leader reports that the executive board encourages the members of the group to visit the Facebook page of the group often and, “To change their status profile to reflect what the group is doing at the time—like if we are having a telethon.” But, despite this prompting the RTN leader feels, “The Webchair of our Facebook page doesn’t update it often enough. On an average week, we’ll list the show of the week, our guests and events, but those updates are under five hours a week and could easily be more.”



The PRSSA leader describes the relationship between personal versus group page usage on Facebook among members as, “Being a barrier we have to break.” Her insights on group page usage are consistent with survey results that reveal that 16 percent of PRSSA members check the site one to two hours per week, with the rest not checking it at all. She states:

Everyone is on Facebook, I believe at least 15 to 20 hours a week for personal use. They even use it in class in front of professors. Yet, they aren’t checking the PRSSA page for information more than one to two hours a week, I think. We need to find out why that is. We know they belong to our page as friends, however.

Additionally, the PRSSA leader strongly believes, “We have constant activity on our Facebook page, at least two to three posts a day. I am on it at least 10 hours a week.” She further notes her insights on members’ activities: “I don’t think our members are not visiting the page because of a lack of information posted. Maybe the reason is because they want the association with the group only, not the updates.” She adds, “I don’t think our members feel, for whatever reason, compelled enough to ‘like’ something on our Facebook page or tweet back.”

On the contrary, the Circle K leader believes that by posting links to Flickr and the Circle K blog on the Facebook page of the group, “We easily get 200-500 Facebook hits a week, forcing people to go there for information.” The PRSSA leader reiterates the idea of driving people toward social networking sites. “We do try to push social media, especially during the Organ Donor Awareness campaign, by listing sign-ups through it as a channel. Social media helps with this kind of thing.”

**Frequency of Twitter usage.** While Twitter accounts for six percent of the communication preference among survey respondents in this study (See Figure 7), 100 percent of the interviewees believe it is under-utilized by their members, which explains Twitter's overall insignificant data findings in the survey results. "We have 34 followers on our Twitter account and only five are from Circle K at Rowan. Most are from Circle K International." She explains further, "Our group hardly knows or understands what Twitter is. I've really, really tried to promote Twitter and it didn't work. They just don't care."

To this point, the PRSSA leader agrees with survey data results that reveal that nearly 100 percent of the members of her group follow the Twitter account, but don't actually read the Tweets. "Our tweets don't meet my expectations as a leader. They are not interactive or social enough. They are requests to come to the weekly meeting, which takes less than an hour to do in entire week," the PRSSA leader remarked. She adds, "We have more Twitter followers than Facebook friends because some members will socialize with people outside of our group on Twitter, like other national chapters, but not each other."

However, Twitter is deemed essential for getting out information to members during live events. "We use Twitter for live tweeting during productions, like 'The Battle of the Chefs' show or to promote something big that is happening in the moment," remarked the RTN leader. Although 86 percent of RTN members' surveyed report never checking the Twitter account of their group, the leader states that, "We have nearly 200

Twitter followers. I personally like Twitter a lot for my role here. I look at Twitter more than Facebook, even though no one else does. It is more concise. It's a fast, cleaner and easier way to get information out."

**In-person (offline) membership participation in groups.** One hundred percent of the interviewees in this study agree that they have an overall active and participatory membership offline within their groups. "We have around 40 dues paying members," remarked the PRSSA leader. She reports that PRSSA had about 20 members fall off from the beginning of the year, "Mostly because of homework, internships and work. It's work to attend meetings and be a member, so people do drop out." She states that there is no point system or hours per week requirement for members. "If we instituted requirements, no one will ever come."

Further, the PRSSA leader reports that the organization has bi-weekly meetings for both the members and a sub-committee of PRaction, as well as executive board meetings once a week. PRSSA created a "Chapter Development Committee" to gauge who is participating and who isn't. "We look at a list and see who's on it, and we now know who to depend on or not when planning, implementing or creating outings. We know who we can rely on and who we can't," commented the leader.

When asked to give more detail regarding her commentary, the PRSSA leader states, "Our members could participate in-person more. Fifteen members will say they are coming to help at an event and then only half show up. It's very frustrating. Some

events are attended only by the planning committee and no other members.” She adds, “We even have some members that come to meetings every week and only stare at their phones the whole time and don’t do anything outside of the meetings.”

When discussing group participation, the RTN leader reveals, “RTN participation is what you make of it. We have some members who choose to do only one thing, and others who come to the weekly member meetings, the weekly executive board meetings and also working on multiple shows.” She continues, “I think an average member of RTN spends 10 hours a week participating in-person in the organization. We have to—we just have a lot going on, trying to produce television shows.”

Unlike PRSSA, the RTN leader reports that they have a point system in order to be considered an “active” versus “regular” member. The points are earned per semester of membership, with three points required of members and four points required for executive board members. Points can be earned from attending meetings and participating in shoots. “Ninety to 100 percent of our members earn the points. We had 30 more point-earning members this year than last year,” remarked the RTN leader. She is personally in charge of tracking and accounting for the points earned in the group.

The leader of Circle K reports that they have 32 dues paying members, with an average of 25 who show up for meetings. The members are not on a point system for participation. The organization meets weekly for two hours, with executive board members having bi-weekly meetings that also last two hours. She reports that leaders of

Circle K, “Must spend at least nine hours a week participating in the group.” She further states, “I believe we have 75 percent of our membership who actually do the service and events, and 25 percent who do participate in other smaller ways.”

**Online membership participation in groups.** As described earlier in this study’s results, the leader of Circle K reports that the members of the group prefer Facebook as a method for communication. The group retains 60-70 Facebook members, which includes the current active members as well as alumni. “Personally, my online presence is greater than my in-person presence,” stated the Circle K leader because her role necessitates the posting of information to social networking sites. However, she points out, “We are a service organization and are all about helping as many types of people as we can and getting our service hours. So, the people using social media are still working in-person.” The survey results concur with the Circle K leader’s assessment, as the group evidenced the fourth highest rate of participation and second highest rate of Facebook Group usage among all the groups in the study. See Figure 12.

The PRSSA leader reports that the group has at least 80 members on Facebook, with two percent belonging only to people outside the organization and 48 percent accounting for PRSSA alumni. “We have alumni on there that still want to identify with our group. They are active on our page and even post career tips and internship advice.” She adds, “We have reliable members that are always at the meetings and do the extra work, and those are the ones that are the most active on Facebook.”

As well, the RTN leader believes, “The group’s Facebook numbers for members are a little inflated. We have a lot of RTN alumni still on there. But, the people that are active online are at the weekly meetings, week after week.” However, survey results show that RTN has the second highest offline participation rate in hours spent per week by members, yet third lowest online activity, even though their Facebook page lists over 300 Facebook members. See Figure 12.

#### **4.6 Hypothesis One Conclusion**

H1—Group members’ online social networking site activity will take the place of or decrease group members’ offline social capital and engagement within the same organization. Hypothesis One is not supported by the research in this study.

#### **4.7 Hypothesis Two—Quantitative Data Results—Survey Findings**

H2--It is expected that Group pages on social networking sites are not used for the purposes of achieving offline engagement by members, but rather for online identity management.

Table 6 shows the level that the 238 respondents agree with the idea that they join organizations on Facebook or Twitter, regardless of whether they participate offline as a member.

*Table 6*

<b>Online Membership Enrollment vs. Offline Member Engagement</b>				
<b>“I join organizations on Facebook or Twitter, even if I do not participate offline as a member”</b>				
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
4.6%	10.9%	11.8%	28.2%	44.5%

As noted in Table 6, 15 percent of respondents “strongly agree” or “agree” with the idea that they join groups on social media sites even if they don’t participate in the group offline. Overwhelmingly, the majority of survey respondents (74 percent) “strongly disagree” or “disagree” with the idea that they join groups of which they do not also participate offline as members.

Figure 13 reveals the level that respondents agree with the idea that requests made on the Facebook page or Twitter account of their group to participate offline are excessive.

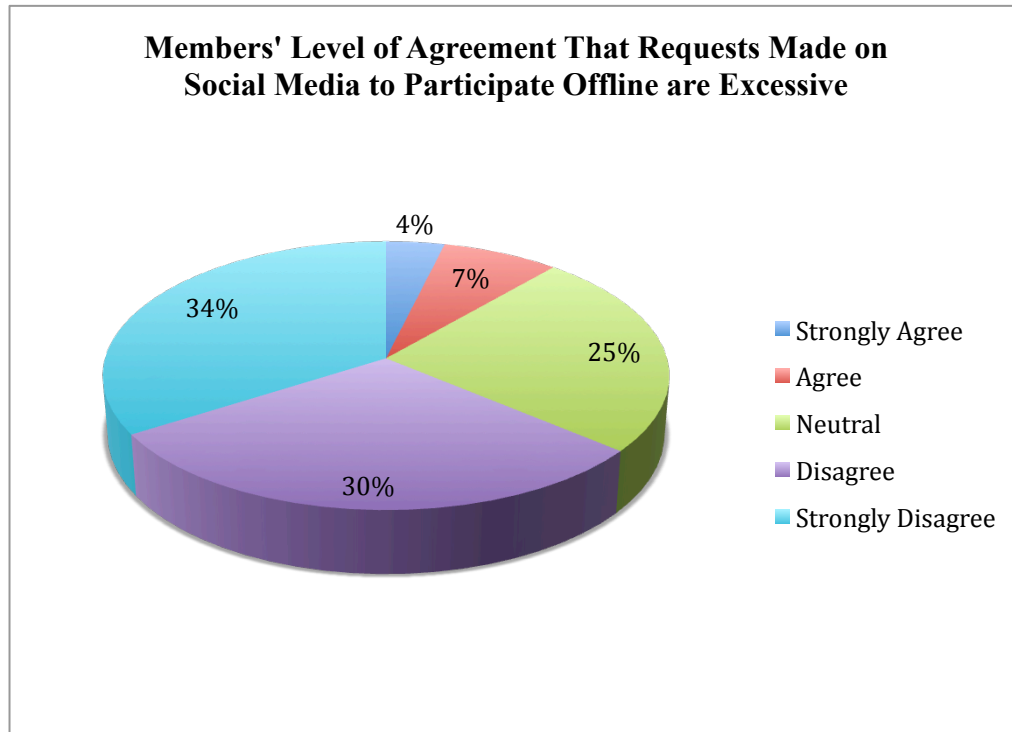


Figure 13

As Figure 13 demonstrates, the majority of survey respondents (64 percent) “strongly disagree” or “disagree” that their groups’ social media sites post an excessive number of requests to participate in-person (offline). Markedly, members of groups who frequent the social media sites of their groups do not feel harassed online to engage in offline activities.



Table 7 shows the level that members agree with the idea that it is important to their online and offline social circle of friends to be a member of their organization through Facebook or Twitter.

Table 7

<b>Importance of Group Membership to Social Circle of Friends Online and Offline</b>				
<b>“It is important to my ONLINE social circle of friends that I belong to this group on Facebook or Twitter.”</b>				
<b>“It is important to my OFFLINE social circle of friends that I belong to this group on Facebook or Twitter.”</b>				
<b>Strongly Agree: ONLINE</b>	<b>Agree: ONLINE</b>	<b>Neutral: ONLINE</b>	<b>Disagree: ONLINE</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree: ONLINE</b>
11%	14%	29%	19%	27%
<b>Strongly Agree: OFFLINE</b>	<b>Agree: OFFLINE</b>	<b>Neutral: OFFLINE</b>	<b>Disagree: OFFLINE</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree: OFFLINE</b>
8%	13%	26%	20%	33%

Nearly half of the members surveyed (46 percent) “strongly disagree” or “disagree” with the idea that it is important to their **online** social circle of friends that they belong to the Facebook page or Twitter account of their group (See Table 8). Table 7 also shows that more than half (53 percent) of respondents “strongly disagree” or “disagree” with the idea that it is important to their **offline** social circle of friends that they belong to the Facebook or Twitter account of their group. Evidently, group

members surveyed do not feel pressure from either their online or offline friends to belong to groups on Facebook or Twitter.

Figure 14 illustrates the surveyed members of SGA groups and their level of agreement on the importance of their online profiles to display membership in their group.

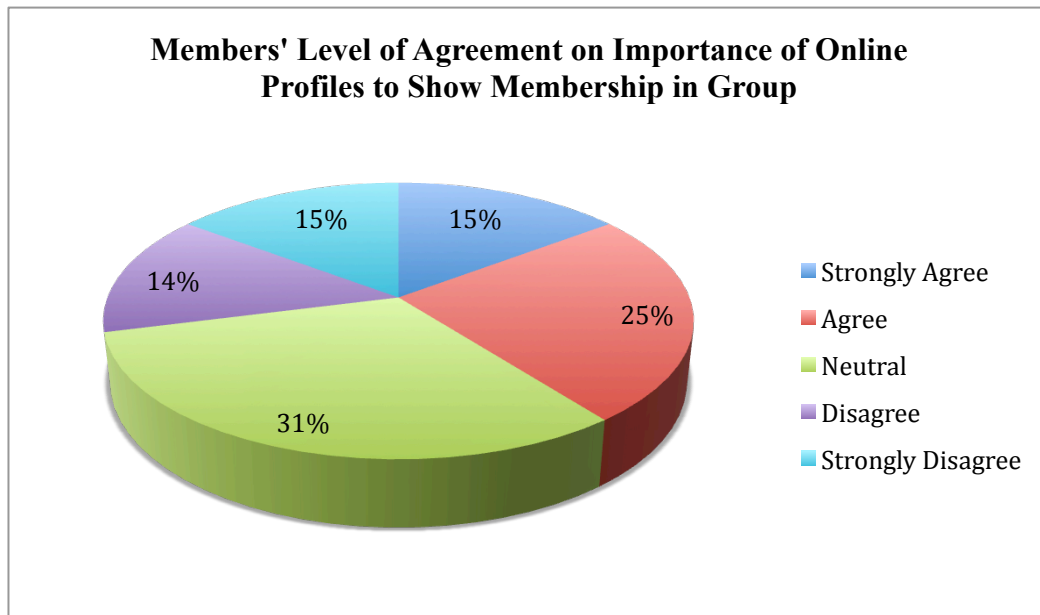


Figure 14

As Figure 14 profiles, the majority of members surveyed (40 percent) “strongly agree” or “agree” that it is important for their Facebook profile or Twitter account to display membership in their group. Only 29 percent of members surveyed “strongly

disagree” or “disagree” with the idea that it is important to them that their online profiles show association with their group, while 30 percent feel “neutral” on the subject. Interestingly, the majority of members of groups place personal significance on displaying their group memberships on their social media profiles.

Figure 15 represents the level of agreement of survey respondents to the idea that people join their groups to enhance their online profiles.

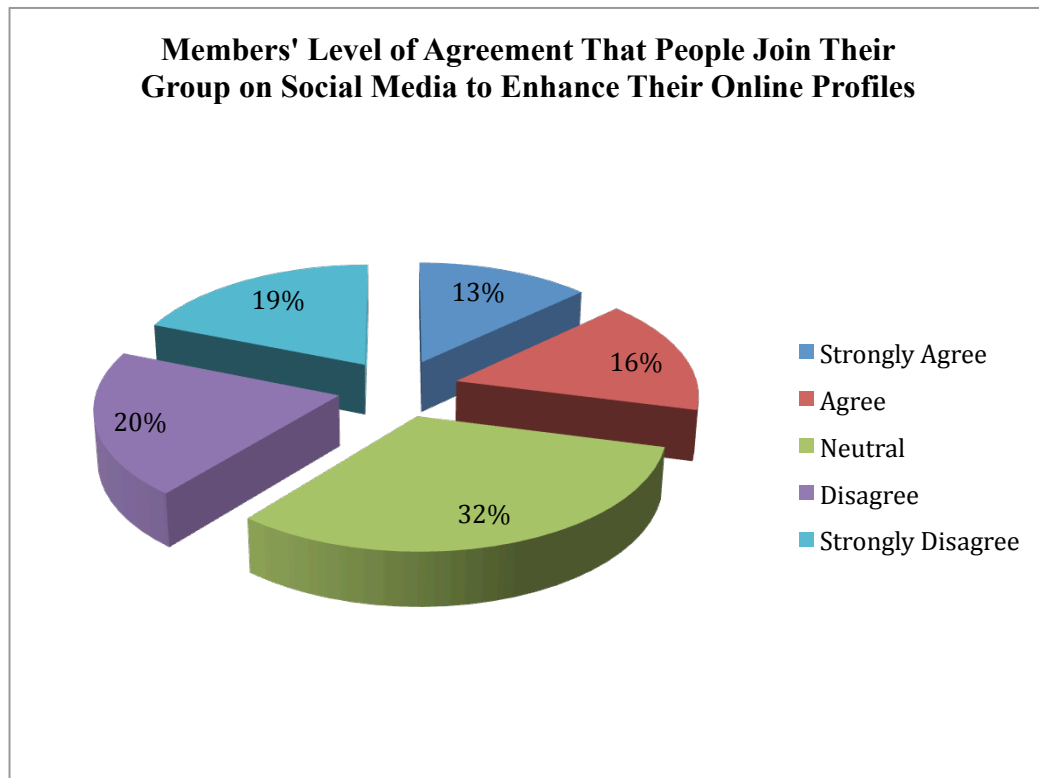


Figure 15

As Figure 15 reveals, the majority of survey respondents (39 percent) “strongly disagree” or “disagree” with the idea that most people join their group on Facebook or Twitter to enhance their online profile. Thirty-two percent of members surveyed feel “neutral” on the subject, while 29 percent “strongly agree” or “agree.”

#### **4.8 Hypothesis Two—Qualitative Data Results—Interview Findings**

**Joining groups online without in-person (offline) participation.** RTN’s leader reports that she does not believe people join RTN’s group on social media without participating in-person in some way. “RTN allows for a range of broad opportunities, all with varying levels of commitment and engagement. We are very diverse—you can produce, write, shoot, edit.” She later adds, “I would be hard pressed to say that people join and just don’t do anything.” As discussed earlier, RTN’s point system revealed that nearly all of their membership fulfilled their necessary participation hours to gain “active” status for 2011-2012.

To this end, Circle K’s leader stressed the importance of Circle K’s mission over any method used to communicate. “We are a service organization and that is our main priority. If we are having a yard sale as a fundraiser to help a local charity, we’ll shout it out on Facebook. But, we still show up and work the yard sale.”

On the contrary, PRSSA’s leader believes that a small number of people join PRSSA online and do not participate offline. “We’ve had some people who graduated from our degree program, but weren’t active as students, then joined later online as alumni.”

However, PRSSA’s leader stresses that they welcome people from all disciplines to join online, even if they can’t be present in person. “We have received great internship

tips, scholarship opportunities and job information by opening up membership online to people with different resources.”

**Amount of requests to participate.** One hundred percent of the interviewees report that the demands made to members to participate in offline activities are not excessive. “Our group is casual about everything we ask. They always stress doing it for fun. They aren’t strict on service hours. They are really a group of people that love what they do and you can tell,” remarked the Circle K leader.

Additionally, the PRSSA leader emphasizes that the group does not have a set number of people that they try to recruit to fulfill all the demands of the group. As well, the RTN leader does not feel the demands to participate are excessive, but she believes the nature of television production necessitates a lot of participation, “On average about 10 hours per week per member.”

**Importance of belonging to group to one’s social circle of friends.** The survey results of this study evidenced that 53 percent of respondents disagree with the idea that it is important to their offline social circle of friends to be members of their groups on social media, while 46 percent disagree that is important to their online social circle of friends to be members of the group on social media. Consistently, the leaders of all the groups interviewed overwhelmingly report that it not important to either one of their social circles of friends to belong to their groups via social media. “There is absolutely no peer pressure from our friends to belong to Circle K’s Facebook page,” remarked its

leader. “Our members want to belong because we have state and national chapter members on Facebook as friends, and by belonging, we have access to socializing with them,” she added.

**Profile and identity management.** “I am proud to be a member of RTN, but it’s not that important to me that my Facebook profile says that I am,” remarked RTN’s leader when asked whether she placed importance upon the identity portrayed on her online profile. “I do think that most of our members want people on Facebook to see that they are RTN members because it’s a way of advertising the creative productions they’ve just made.” Survey results in this study revealed that RTN members are neutral by 45 percent on the subject, while 38 percent place importance on RTN group membership displaying as part of their online identity.

Interestingly, Circle K’s leader reveals the notion that belonging to the group on Facebook has benefited all of the members’ online identity. “It gives us a certain vibe,” she remarked. However, she makes it very clear that the members of her group were not motivated in the first place to join the group in order to then belong online. “They don’t care about that kind of thing. They joined because they are truly in it. They don’t care to publicize it.”

On the contrary, PRSSA’s leader believes that some members are affiliated with the group just to enhance their online identity. “I agree with that idea. It’s realistic. I think it’s true,” the leader remarked. She expands on this notion: “In fact, we have some

members now that never pay dues or participate. They are members online and offline just as a resume booster.”

#### **4.9 Hypothesis Two Conclusion**

H2--It is expected that Group pages on social networking sites are not used for the purposes of achieving offline engagement by members, but rather for online identity management. Hypothesis Two is not supported by the research in this study.

#### **4.10 Summary**

The conclusions drawn from this research, as they are at variance with the hypotheses, are discussed in Chapter 5 under the section, *conclusions*. As well, general study findings and recommendations for future research are discussed in Chapter 5 under the sections, *general findings and future research*.



## Chapter 5

### Conclusions and Future Research

#### 5.1 Hypotheses Conclusions

**H1—Group members’ online social networking site activity will take the place of or decrease group members’ offline social capital and engagement within the same organization.** *Hypothesis One is not supported by the research in this study.*

The data evidenced in this study clearly reveals that members who participate on the Facebook page of their group will also participate offline in that group, with no significant increase or decrease observed. Sixty-two percent of all members who visit the Facebook page of their group also participate offline in the group five hours or less a week. Moreover, 25 percent of online Facebook page users in the study will participate offline five to 10 hours per week in their groups. Qualitative interview data support this finding, with group leaders disclosing that an average member can easily spend an average of nine and one-half hours per week participating in the group in-person.

Notably, the study shows that organizations, whose members visit the group Facebook page infrequently to never, manage to retain high levels of participation offline. This is best understood by the combined groups of the Bio Club/Pre-Health Society, who spend an average of over five hours per week participating offline and less than one hour per week on their groups’ Facebook page. Bio Club/Pre-Health Society ranks as the third highest in overall hours spent per week engaged in offline activity by its members out of

all of the groups in this study. Interestingly, only IEEE ranked lower than the Bio Club/Pre-Health Society in hours spent on the group's Facebook page.

Such evidence exposes the misplaced emphasis placed on organizations today to implement and form social networking site pages to engage members, as members of organizations prefer to engage in-person rather than online. Overwhelmingly, the study's findings show that 84 percent of all group members enjoy participating offline in their organizations, while simultaneously holding membership in the group on Facebook (i.e. 83 percent of all respondents). Further, more than 50 percent of this study's respondents actively seek to participate in any or all of the offline activity requests that are posted on the group's Facebook page.

However, as in the case of this study, activity on these pages is very limited, accounting for less than two hours a week in usage for nearly 100 percent of the study participants. Moreover, Twitter usage is completely non-existent for 76 percent of the members. Interestingly, despite survey and interview data that point to nearly 50 percent of all study members using Facebook for personal use five to 15 hours per week, use of group pages remains correspondingly low. In 2011, the Pew Internet & American Life Project found Facebook to be most popular with women age 18-29, which accounts for half of the respondents in this study as well.

The findings in this study are consistent with prior research that evidenced that emerging adults' offline and online worlds may be connected, but are not mirror images

of each other (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). However, this study uncovers a radical shift from prior research that found that the intensity of Facebook usage was positively associated to offline civic participation (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010), and that Facebook solidified relationships that already exist offline (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007).

The findings presented in this study clearly demonstrates that Facebook and Twitter usage are insignificant channels of communication for student organizations made-up of emerging-aged adults, and bear little weight on the extent that members participate offline. Such findings diminish the current trend toward social media for organizations, which has been described by many scholars as offering, “an ease and speed with which a group can mobilize for the right kind of cause,” (Shirkey, 2008).

As shown in this study, the highest offline levels of participation reported by its members are found in the groups of RTN and SUP. Interestingly, a dichotomy exists between these two groups and how they utilize their Facebook page, which further underscores the variability of the relationship of online usage to offline participation.

In the case of RTN members, they are the third lowest visitors of and information seekers of their group’s Facebook page. However, they spend eight hours per week participating offline, which places RTN as the second highest-ranking group in offline participation. RTN clearly demonstrates that despite having more than 300 online

Facebook members and low Facebook Group usage, offline participation is still very strong and active.

Eighty-five percent of RTN's membership enjoys participating offline in the group, which mirrors the overall finding for enjoyment with all the groups in this study. Further, RTN members report in both quantitative and qualitative findings to seek face-to-face contact by over one-third of their membership, demonstrating social media's irrelevance in the functions of the group to achieve its collective goals.

Additionally, 70 percent of RTN members prefer email for correspondence, information and newsgathering, with only one-third of their members opting for social media. RTN members evidence that social networking has little to no effect on how their members organize to accomplish goals, seek information or form collective action in real-world participatory efforts.

On the other hand, SUP members spend an average of nearly eight hours a week participating in the group offline, as well as spend three hours a week online, accounting as the SGA group with the highest number of hours spent on Facebook, as well as highest number of hours spent in offline participation. As such, SUP members undoubtedly demonstrate that an organization can maintain both an online and offline presence without sacrificing group goals, accomplishments or activities in the real world.

The study reveals that even for some groups such as Circle K, with both quantitative and qualitative data revealing high Facebook Group page usage, the amount of time spent online is still half of what is spent in-person participating in real-world efforts. While Circle K members strongly reveal their preference of Facebook as a media channel for newsgathering, interaction, socializing and exchanges of information, the ratio remains 5:2 in offline participating hours versus online participating hours.

In conclusion, these findings show that a relationship cannot be drawn from the data presented in this study to show a marked decrease in offline participation by group members due to online activity, therefore Hypothesis One is not supported.

**H2—It is expected that Group pages on social networking sites are not used for the purposes of achieving offline engagement by members, but rather for online identity management.** *Hypothesis Two is not supported by the research in this study.*

Prior research in the field of impression/identity management overwhelmingly points to social networking sites as the perfect venue for both self-presentation and social interaction, as the sites are designed for conveying information about one's self to others while being social online (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008). This study evidenced that while 40 percent of members believe it is important for their online social media profiles to show membership in groups, it does not stem from a desire for self-presentation among their peers.

Qualitative interview findings reveal that members are motivated for the good of the group when it comes to profile management. Throughout the interview process, Circle K's leader emphasizes the importance of the group's mission as being a service organization with committed membership, dismissing the notion that individuals join for appearances' sake. RTN's leader sheds new light on the topic by revealing that many of their members may want their online profiles to reflect their membership status because it is a way to advertise the television productions they recently created, further pushing forward the group's goals and agenda.

Likewise, this study found that the majority of group members placed no significance on what their online or offline social circle of friends thought of their group membership on Facebook. As Ellis (2010) first indicated, one's group memberships are part of his or her social identity, which in turn is part of his or her personal identity. However, more than 50 percent of group members in this study do not feel a sense of importance or peer pressure to belong to online groups, and the remaining members feel neutral on the topic.

Notably, this study reveals a fundamentally different perspective on identity, as emerging adults that form and maintain memberships in tandem on and offline are not evidenced to be pre-occupied with a conflation of their personal and social identity. In fact, 39 percent of participants in this study do not believe that individuals are motivated to join their groups online in order to enhance their social media profile, while 32 percent remain neutral.

The data presented in this study is in opposition of Haferkamp and Kramer's (2009) findings that revealed individuals are motivated to join online "Facebook-like" groups primarily for self-description, self-presentation and to fulfill a need to belong. This researcher has observed from this study's findings that emerging-aged adults seek a truly authentic experience within their university group affiliations.

Overwhelmingly, 74 percent of SGA group members in this study are found to join organizations on Facebook and Twitter only if they also participate offline as a member of that same group. Additionally, 64 percent of members feel that the requests to participate offline are not excessive, further revealing that demands for engagement are reasonable and acceptable. Such data supports survey findings that account for rates of offline participation to be 84 percent for one to 10 hours per week.

SUP provides the clearest data set for understanding the results of this study in relation to Hypothesis Two. While retaining over 1,500 Facebook members, SUP also maintains the highest levels of offline and online participation of all groups in the study, eight hours and three hours respectively.

The findings related to SUP clearly demonstrate how its members can easily straddle both the online and offline worlds while still remaining engaged, achieving group goals and deriving satisfaction in doing so. It is clear that members of SUP, as well as all the members in this study, acquire substantial bonding social capital from the networks in which they are members. The findings from this study clearly show a

relationship exists between offline engagement and low levels of online impression/identity management. Therefore, Hypothesis Two is not supported by the research in this study.

## **5.2 General Findings Conclusions**

The ethnic background of the study population reflected the Rowan University universe as reported by the Office of Admissions. The study offered a near split in gender, serving as a good pool to gauge both male and female responses. No variations on gender or ethnic background were observed.

SUP is granted the largest operating budget by the SGA, \$291,000, and this study found it to also have the highest levels of offline and online participation by members. Additionally, SUP retains the highest number of Facebook friends than any other group. It can be understood from the findings presented in this study that funds dispensed to SUP are channeled in ways that motivate, engage and form collective action in order to reach group goals.

In comparison, groups with some of the smallest budgets, such as Bio Club and Pre-Health Society (with a combined budget of \$3,550) still maintain high levels of participation offline (over five hours per week), despite low levels of online participation (less than one hour per week). Overall, the groups in this study account for 35 percent of the 2011-2012 budget allocated by the SGA and represent a range of funds—from \$700



to \$291,000—demonstrating that member engagement and participation is not enhanced nor diminished by the amount of money available.

The financial implications of Rowan University’s SGA should be considered in conjunction with the declared mission. The SGA mission states: “The Rowan SGA takes pride in creating a state of actively engaged students that willfully participate not only within their university, but also the surrounding community.” The findings in this study fully support the SGA vision and mission statement as achievable.

While it is revealed that the majority of SGA group members prefer to communicate via email by nearly half of all survey respondents, interview findings reveal that nearly all leaders believe social media is a good channel for effective communication. This study demonstrates the misplaced emphasis that leaders or orchestrators of organizations place on social media and its ability to engage the populace.

Within emerging-aged adults that are members of organizations, this study shows that Twitter is significantly irrelevant as a form of communication for news, updates or member engagement. Further, Facebook remains a form of communication that is primarily and most frequently used for personal and social purposes, not for organized communication within group affiliations.

As Ellison et al. (2007) also evidenced, this study establishes that strong bonding social capital is not created on social networking sites, but in real-time, real-world, in-person activities. Moreover, low-cost, low-risk, fleeting forms of activism that do not demand collective action from the group are not evident in the findings of this study, further emphasizing the impact that meaningful and consequential offline engagement retains over any other form.

### **5.3 Future Research**

At the present time, limited research exists on social networking site activity and social capital, and how it relates to engagement, participation and identity management within group affiliations both on and offline. However, this study presents a comprehensive look at specific channels of communication that groups prefer, how they utilize those channels and for what purposes, and how social media enhances or detracts from meeting their participatory expectations. Further, this study traces the views that members have of their identity, and whether that identity is transformed by any means while being a part of a group that functions both online and offline.

With this information, the researcher can recommend ways to enhance future research into the narrow topic. Such research should focus on private institutions, as they may offer alternative insights by group members and those differences can be compared and contrasted. Additionally, because a convenience sampling was taken in this study, a representative sample of universities (both private and public) may produce an even more

comprehensive look at emerging-aged adults throughout the United States or in different geographical regions.

This study took into account 10 SGA groups at Rowan University, accounting for 35 percent of the overall SGA funds for the academic year. An all-inclusive surveying of the entire SGA would provide rich data and present a much more comprehensive analysis to reflect upon the university universe.

As well, a focus group instrumentation of group leaders would aim to gather the knowledge and consensus of what leaders expect from members in terms of participation, and the best channels to pursue their goals. Additionally, a content analysis of group members' messaging and posts on Facebook, as well as their frequency and duration of activity, would allow for further insights into comparing and contrasting online and offline participation.

Future research should expand the scope to include those groups that are tertiary associations, nonprofit organizations and support groups. Such groups require members to have ties to common symbols, leaders and idols, but not necessarily one another. A study to investigate the soundness of such a notion would serve as a good follow-up to this study's findings.

Additionally, service groups such as volunteer fire fighters, fraternal and police organizations, PTA, Boy and Girl Scouts of America and labor unions may be examined

to understand how members utilize social networking sites for news, information and socialization within their groups, and how it relates to their overall sense of identity as civil servants and volunteers.

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## Appendix B Interview Instrument

DEMOGRAPHIC: NOMINAL	DEMOGRAPHIC STRATA: POSITION	USAGE HRS. ON FACEBOOK
How old are you?	What is your title?	On average, how many times a week do you log onto your personal Facebook page?
What is your ethnic group?	How long have you been in this role?	On average, how many times a week do you log onto X-Club's Facebook page?
What is the highest year of schooling you have completed?	Who do you work for?	On average, how many hours per week do you spend on updating your personal Facebook page?
What is your gender?	Are you paid in this position?	On average, how many hours per week do you spend on updating X-Club's Facebook page?
Are you a Rowan University student?	Were you elected or self-appointed to this role?	
	Do you manage the communication mediums ( <i>mediums defined as: Facebook, Twitter, email, phone calls, face-2-face, newsletters</i> ) for X-Club?	

	USAGE HRS. ON TWITTER	X-CLUB'S INFORMATION POSTINGS
1	On average, how many Tweets do you send a day from your personal Twitter account?	Does X-Club advertise their upcoming activities ( <i>activities defined as: meetings, parties, get-togethers, volunteering efforts, elections, face-2-face interactions</i> ) on their Facebook page?
2	On average, how many Tweets do you send a day as a representative of X-Club?	Is X-Club's Facebook page your first choice of medium to receive the latest news about them?

3	On average, how many Tweets a day do you read from X-Club?	What medium is your preference when it comes to receiving the latest news about X-Club?
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<b>VOLUNTEERTING/PARTICIPATION</b>	<b>PERCEPTION OF FOLLOWERS</b>
Do you actively seek to participate in the activities of X-Club?	Is it X-Club policy to recruit as many followers as possible on their FB page?
Do you enjoy participating in the activities of X-Club?	Is it X-Club policy to recruit as many followers as possible on their Twitter page?
Do you seek the role of organizer of activities for X-Club?	Is it important to the leader of X-Club to have a lot of followers? Explain why or why not.
How many hours per week do you participate in face-2-face activities of X-Club?	Is it important to the leader of X-Club to have a lot of followers regardless of whether they participate or not in the X-Club activities? Explain why or why not.
How many hours per week do you volunteer in your off campus community as a representative of X-Club?	
Do you think the demands set for participation in X-Club activities are demanding?	
Do you observe any correlation between activity updates on the FB page of X-Club and participation hours contributed by members?	

<b>PROBING QUESTIONS: WILL ALLOW FOR STEMMING OFF/DEPTH</b>	<b>QUANTIFIABLE DATA ON INTERVAL SCALE</b>
<i>Remain Silent Technique:</i> Take a 10 second pause after asking the question: "Do you enjoy participating in X-Club?" to allow the respondent an opportunity to jump back in and expand on yes/no answer.	On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being poor and 10 being excellent, how would you rate the quality of communication methods used by X-Club?

<p><i>Elaboration Technique:</i> Ask the respondent to elaborate on why or why not they want a large group of followers listed on SNSs.</p>	<p>On a scale of 1 to 10 again, how would you rate effectiveness of posting X-Club news to their FB page to engage participation amongst their members?</p>
<p><i>Clarification Technique:</i> Ask the respondent to clarify the reasons they choose certain communication mediums over others.</p>	<p>On a scale of 1 to 10 again, how would you rate the effectiveness of posting X-Club news to their Twitter page to engage participation amongst their members?</p>
<p><i>Repetition Technique:</i> Ask the respondent "What do you mean by this?" after asking the question about the demands required by X-Club.</p>	