

iSchool Conference 2008 Wildcard Submission

Title: Okay, Facebook me: Exploring behavior, motivations and uses in Social Network Sites

Format: In the information sciences, there is significant interest in the study of social network websites. Sites such as Myspace and Facebook have drawn hundreds of millions of users, shaping and contextualizing new forms of social information transfer. Furthermore, the impact of social networking sites on the college campuses we inhabit is substantial; students use social network sites to connect, engage with fellow students, and to form new learning opportunities.

In this wildcard session, four (with a potential fifth) researchers exploring social network sites will come together to debate and examine the future of social network scholarship. The panelists bring a significant breadth of experience, varying research questions, and a broad scope of methodological approaches. Rather than simply presenting research and fielding questions, the panelists will engage in a debate exploring some critical and exploratory aspects of social network sites. What do social network site behaviors represent? How are we constructing new publics in social network sites? What is the future of social networking? With this high interactivity format, this session will provide significant insight into social network sites.

Scheduled to participate in the session are danah boyd, Ph.D. student at UC-Berkeley's School of Information, Cliff Lampe, Assistant Professor in the department of Telecommunications, Information Studies and Media at Michigan State University, Alice Marwick, PhD student at New York University in the Department of Media, Culture, and Communication, and Fred Stutzman, Ph.D. student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Information and Library Science.

Biographies:

danah boyd is a Ph.D. student in the School of Information at the University of California, Berkeley and a fellow at the Annenberg Center for Communications at the University of Southern California. Her research focuses on how people negotiate a presentation of self to unknown audiences in mediated contexts; her dissertation is looking at how youth engage with networked publics like MySpace, Facebook, LiveJournal, Xanga and YouTube. She is interested in how the architectural differences between unmediated and mediated publics affect sociality, identity and culture. danah has an A.B. in computer science from Brown and a M.S. in sociable media from MIT Media Lab.

Cliff Lampe is an Assistant Professor in the department of Telecommunications, Information Studies and Media at Michigan State University. His research interests include the use of rating systems in online conversations, how online interactions are translated into offline activity, and online user misbehavior. Besides working with Slashdot, Cliff has studied online communities such as Everything2, Newstrust, and Facebook. Cliff received his doctorate from the University of Michigan's School of Information. In his research, Cliff explores how college aged people using Facebook have experienced benefits from their use of the site, maintaining relationships that they might otherwise have abandoned. These relationships, often tenuous and ephemeral, provide social capital benefits that can be enacted in the future. Consequently, relationships maintained through Facebook stretch the definitions of "friends" to a wide range of nuanced relationships. Also, as users older than the initial academic participants join the site, what experiences are they having? Are they seeing the same social capital benefits as their college-aged counterparts, or having other experiences altogether?

Alice Marwick is a PhD student at New York University in the Department of Media, Culture, and Communication. She studies social media from a critical perspective, including the political economy of new media, online identity, and feminist media theory. Her primary analytical lens is to view internet applications as commercial structures: how does a site's business model affect the types of user actions that are encouraged or discouraged? Social networking sites typically circumscribe user actions, such as page customization, based on what is economically beneficial for the parent company. Values often associated with social networking sites, such as social interaction, privacy, participation, and creativity, must therefore be understood within a commercial context. Recent work interrogates claims of YouTube as an inherently democratic space through an examination of community norms and Google's corporate practices. Alice's dissertation will examine the creation and maintenance of status hierarchies within social media through ethnographic work on the so-called "Web 2.0" community of the San Francisco Bay Area. She has worked in the technology industry since 1995 as a researcher, writer, and project manager.

Fred Stutzman is a Ph.D. student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Information and Library Science. His research interests include social computing, online social networks and digital identity. Since 2005, he has explored user behavior in online social network sites, primarily Facebook.com. He has conducted a number of studies exploring topics such as adoption, privacy and the network structure in online social network sites. Currently, he is exploring data from a 16-week study of college freshman adoption of Facebook. In this session, Fred plans to share information about user motivations and behaviors in online social network sites, as well as describing research methods and challenges of studying online social networks. In addition to his graduate work, Stutzman is the co-founder of ClaimID.com, the identity-management website.