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Navigating the Social Landscape: An Exploration of Social Networking Site Usage among Emerging Adults

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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NAVIGATING THE SOCIAL LANDSCAPE:
AN EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE USAGE AMONG
EMERGING ADULTS

(Thesis Format: Monograph)

by

Kristen Colbeck

Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

This study explores how emerging adults (Arnett, 2000) in their first- and second-year of undergraduate study make use of social networking sites (SNSs) for their day-to-day sociality. This study compares emerging adults' use of Facebook, which is the most popular and widely used SNS among this particular demographic, to increasingly popular SNSs Twitter and Instagram. This project seeks to discover how the use of different SNSs supplements, changes, or replaces the use of Facebook, considering social capital exists on each platform, and if and how each sites' uses and gratifications differ. This study employs face-to-face semi-structured interviews to pursue the proposed research questions, using a grounded theory approach informed by social capital and uses and gratifications theory.

Keywords

social capital, social networking sites, social media, Internet studies, emerging adults, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, uses and gratifications

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Dedication

I'd like to dedicate this thesis to three VIPs in my life. This is for my father, Colin, for showing me the importance of hard work, the reward in careful planning, and the value of quiet contemplation. It's also for my beautiful sister (and very best friend), Brittany, who consistently proves to me that her love and friendship is unconditional, even through the many existential crises I have experienced since starting this project. Finally, this is for my dachshund, Cinnamon, who always reminds me when it is time to take a break. There really is no love greater than a girl and her dog, I promise you this.

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1 Introduction

Since their inception, social networking sites (SNSs) have been of interest not only to Internet users but also to scholars. In recent years, as these sites have become increasingly popular amongst the Internet audience, so too have they become a strong focus for studies considering aspects such as privacy, impression management, and social networks and community (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Understanding the importance of SNSs is a particularly pertinent field of inquiry, as their ubiquity has rapidly transcended the popularity of most traditional communicative forms available at this time. Even amongst other avenues of communication online – for example email or instant messenger – SNSs have taken a priority position as the communicative mode du jour.

SNSs may seem like a relatively new Internet phenomenon unique to the likes of Facebook or Twitter, but they in fact have been in existence since the mid-1990s in various forms, and there are hundreds of SNSs serving various purposes (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Previously popular SNSs have either been bought out or gone out of business, and each successive generation of these “big time” SNSs appears to build upon the ideas, successes, and failures of those that came before; such failed SNSs include SixDegrees.com, Friendster, and MySpace. Hence this study approaches the current king of SNSs, Facebook, with the failure of these other once-popular sites in mind, and inquires as to the portability, adaptability, and relative “staying power” that Facebook really has. This is especially pertinent given the frequent cropping-up of new and different SNSs, and as such seeks to examine shifting patterns of usage amongst a highly important and influential section of the Facebook users – emerging adults (Arnett, 2000).

SNSs are a unique space for interaction with both strangers and friends, a place for visible articulation of friendships and social networks, and a resource for both image management and self-affirmation, where one can “type oneself into existence” (Sunden, 2003, p. 3). SNSs are not social media, and it is important to make this distinction. While social media refers to social content that is uploaded and circulated, SNSs refer to the actual platforms that this content is circulated on (Burke, 2013). Definitively, a SNS can be

understood as any “web-based service that allow[s] individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211). Under these guidelines the first “real” SNS was SixDegrees.com, founded in 1997, and so named for the idea that every individual is related to each other by just six degrees of separation (Plymale, 2012). Though other sites at the time integrated aspects of private messaging, profiles, comments sections, and public friend listings, SixDegrees.com was unique in that it offered these features all on one single platform. All such features form the backbone of a “true” SNS, along with now popular common features of video or photo sharing capabilities, blogging tools, and instant messaging or other applications (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Despite the innovative opportunities for communication that SixDegrees.com offered its users, the website was defunct by 2001, having not attracted the user base necessary to have long-term sustainability, nor the ability to translate usage into profit (Ray, 2014).

Coming into popularity not long after the demise of SixDegrees.com, fellow former SNS and Facebook predecessor Friendster rose to prominence in 2002. Friendster contained many of the features that are now standard on Facebook and other current SNSs, and was designed with growing one’s friend circle in mind, as it was intended for networking with “friends of friends” (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Though Friendster seemed full of promise, one may now note its marked absence from the SNS repertoire. Friendster saw its decline in popularity begin in 2004, when MySpace eclipsed it as the new, popular SNS. In addition to this, Friendster had difficulties in managing its growth technically via its infrastructure, where site traffic was too great for the equipment on hand. These issues paired with limitations placed upon user activities by site administrators pushed users to gradually move their SNS interests and needs elsewhere – primarily to MySpace (boyd and Ellison, 2007). By 2006, Friendster was essentially dead in North America, though it still has a following in Southeast Asia to this day (McMillan, 2013).

MySpace, which rose to popularity in 2004, quickly became known for providing a unique SNS experience that users had not yet seen – it was “a more freewheeling version of Friendster” (Gillette, 2011). MySpace became a site of “living labour”, wherein profiles – comprised of blogging elements, chat elements, friend listings, and so on – became a living archive space that demanded owner and fellow user attention as it could be continually changed and updated, in both aesthetics and information (Cote and Pybus, 2007). It was also encouraged for use in this way, and users were able to “hack” the MySpace code to customize their profile pages to suit their individual tastes (boyd and Ellison, 2007).

MySpace was appealing in that it was a free medium of self-expression, and being a relatively unmediated and public space made it highly attractive to certain groups, particularly teenagers (Cote and Pybus, 2007). As it did not yet exist under adult authority, it was an appealing space to simply “hang out” with friends (boyd and Marwick, 2011). Recognizing this fortuitous niche adoption, MySpace relaxed the age minimum to create a profile, which ultimately became its downfall; a string of bad press regarding inappropriate communication between adult and underage users hurt the site’s reputation significantly (boyd and Ellison, 2007). This publicity nightmare, paired with MySpace’s various strategic failings, corporate mismanagement, and a particularly dispassionate corporate by-out, ultimately led to MySpace being relegated to the ranks of a “has been” SNS wherein users that still clung to its initial appeal “just look[ed] sad” (Gillette, 2011). Unfortunately for MySpace, as it was descending into its permanent downswing, Facebook was rapidly gaining success and popularity in the SNS market. MySpace dropped off around 2007, as users began to make the migration to the newer, ever-flashier SNS Facebook, perhaps recognizing that MySpace would not be making a comeback any time soon.

Founded in 2004 as “the facebook” by then-Harvard undergraduate student, Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook’s original purpose was to connect Harvard students on campus (Phillips, 2007). Once successful at its home base, the site extended to other Boston-based universities, before extending again to other Ivy-league institutions, and eventually all U.S.-based universities (Phillips, 2007). By 2006, the site was available to anyone with a valid

email address, encouraging widespread usage. Adoption of the site after it became available to the general public was slow; while in 2007 MySpace users were still more numerous than Facebook users – 85% of U.S. teens as compared to just 7% of U.S. teens – by 2009 the two sites were almost on par for usage amongst Generation Y (15-29 year old) (eMarketer, 2009). By the end of 2009, the numbers had shifted in Facebook’s favour, where 112 million U.S. Internet users were on Facebook, and 57 million remained on MySpace (Prescott, 2010). MySpace saw its final blow in 2010, and though neck-to-neck competitively for a few years, Facebook was unofficially crowned as the winner of the SNS battle, having overtaken MySpace’s 70 million users worldwide with over 500 million of its own. The general attitude towards SNSs in that year – as is arguably still the case – is easily summed up: “at this moment in time, it’s safe to say social networking *is* Facebook” (Kelleher, 2010).

Quite some time has passed since Facebook asserted its SNS dominance, and while annual research from the Pew Research Center consistently reports that Facebook remains the top SNS worldwide, it is important to point out that its prestigious position is facing some increasingly tough competition. Though Facebook has been heralded as “one of the most important social trends of the past decade” (Caers et al., 2013, p. 983), many have noted that even with Facebook being as popular as it is, alternate SNSs like Twitter and Instagram are slowly closing in on its popularity (Brenner and Smith, 2012; Duggan and Smith, 2013). While Instagram has been making waves within only the last two years, Twitter has been used widely since its introduction in 2006, predominately among older adults, and has been seen as the dominant Facebook competitor in recent years (Kessler, 2011). As such, while there is a copious amount of work surrounding Facebook – and to a lesser degree, Twitter – very little work currently commits much focus to Instagram.

1.1 Purpose of Study

Recently there have been competing reports with regard to the current status of Facebook and its future - whether it has “jumped the shark” or if it is still as ubiquitous and important as ever. As has been noted here, academic work focused on Facebook does not appear to suggest that the site is in serious jeopardy or that it is failing as significantly as media would

have the public believe. Regardless, online news sources and technolog-focused blogs frequently state that Facebook “has lost millions of users per month in its biggest markets” (Garside, 2013), that it is “dead to teens” (Cellan-Jones, 2014), and that “Facebook is just going the way of MySpace – it's old” (Rogers, 2013).

Assumptions that Facebook has had its last gasp may be premature, as there is yet to be a clear, whole picture on what uses alternate SNSs have – and if they exist in tandem with Facebook’s uses. While there is significant discussion about users and their rationale and methods of usage on Facebook, there is a clear gap in considering the alternatives to Facebook and those who may not be utilizing Facebook as their main or sole SNS. The purpose of this study is to investigate this gap in knowledge using qualitative means, further exploring and expanding previous findings from quantitative studies about the longevity of Facebook. These numbers show, from various sources, that while Facebook may be the largest and most popular SNS, but its competitors are slowly gaining momentum – albeit in relation to Facebook – creating an opportunity to investigate why these numbers are changing and how this impacts networked communication. For example, Facebook certainly has the most dedicated users (Duggan et al., 2015), but photo-sharing site Instagram now sees 3% of users utilizing the site as their main SNS profile (Madden, 2013). Furthermore, 94% of Instagram users are also Facebook users (Duggan et al., 2015). Similar numbers exist for Twitter, wherein only 7% use Twitter as their main account (Madden, 2013), and 91% are also Facebook users (Duggan and Smith, 2013).

While people may begin to utilize multiple sites to enhance their SNS experience – and teens especially interested in “diversifying” their SNS portfolio – only 2% use either Instagram or Twitter as their only SNS account (Duggan and Smith, 2013). This is compared to Facebook, which sees 79% of users utilizing it solely for their SNS needs (Duggan et al., 2015). Teens also make use of Facebook solely, with 81% of them reporting Facebook as their only SNS of the 94% who use Facebook at all (Madden et al., 2013). This is a stark contrast to the mere 8% of users who claimed Facebook was the only SNS that they currently

had a profile with in 2008, when MySpace was the most popular SNS among young adults (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008).

1.2 Research Problem

This research investigates the gap in knowledge about the adoption and utilization of alternate SNSs and their usage in relation to Facebook. Especially with mixed messages of a decline in Facebook's popularity amongst younger audiences, it is of interest to explore where these users are focusing their attention and if their bridging, bonding, and maintained social capital differ across social networking platforms. As yet, there is a lack of research comparing how Facebook functions or is used against alternate SNSs, or how it is used in conjunction with alternate SNSs. Quan-Haase and Young (2010) find that users do not typically utilize just one single form of communication, instead opting to integrate and employ multiple tools. They further suggest that one form of social media does not necessarily replace another, as each has its own unique utility. In the case of Facebook and alternate SNSs – which are usually a more specialized fragmentation of services that Facebook offers (i.e. photo sharing or microblogging), it follows that individuals may choose to supplement their Facebook usage with one of these other sites.

This study also seeks to debunk the latent tones of technological determinism that have been applied to Facebook usage in other research. Studies such as Hargittai (2007) and Lorenzo-Romero et al. (2011) suggest that Facebook is a necessity for online social interaction and overall social well-being – those who do not use it are sufficiently “othered” in the process of giving Facebook too much credence. While Facebook has become a staple for university students to interact with one another, it is not the only means of communication or of maintaining social ties, and as such this research will demonstrate the utility of alternate SNSs in pursuit of sociality and social capital in its various forms. Facebook is not the only option, and while it is significant for sociality and communication, it need not dominate the conversation surrounding SNSs and social capital any longer.

Notions of technological determinism aside, having a social profile has become increasingly pertinent among the university undergraduate population, and it has been suggested that non-users are at a distinct social disadvantage if they do not participate (Raynes-Goldie, 2010). As has been noted, Facebook indeed currently dominates other SNSs in terms of popularity, and its significance cannot be sidestepped. Even with alternate SNSs working their way into the common discourse and amassing a solid user base, Facebook still may be capable of facilitating valuable and meaningful engagement on a grand scale, where other sites do not yet have the user base to do so; thus Facebook can be seen as influencing usage of SNSs in general. If this is the case, questions circulate surrounding why it still holds such relevance in light of other SNSs, and how students without a Facebook account get by without it. This study seeks to answer that question, and to perhaps make predictions about what the future of Facebook may actually look like.

1.3 Research Questions

With the popularity of SNSs being the key focus of emerging adults' Internet use – and Facebook being the core site that they use – previous research has made great strides in investigating how and why young or emerging adults use Facebook, what they get out of it, and what the outcomes of their usage are. However, as Facebook has expanded and changed, it is possible that so too have the factors influencing attitudes and usages. As such, efforts must be made to understand the changes in patterns and flows of users and usage, especially when there are looming notions that Facebook may not “be cool” anymore (Russell, 2013). There is room for significant investigation into how alternate SNSs compare to Facebook by examining the uses and benefits that they can provide, because as emerging adults appear to be making use of them more and more, these alternate websites may become more relevant for discussions surrounding technology adoption and maintaining social ties across various platforms. Especially when Facebook's popularity decline is seemingly so gradual, and perhaps not nearly as lethal as some may suggest, there may be a divide forming between those who “progress” to the next big SNS (as users of MySpace did with Facebook) and those who remain loyal and dedicated to their Facebook profile as either their main or sole

SNS account. Considering Facebook and alternate SNSs in comparison will assist in understanding divisions or integrations of these sites among emerging adult users.

RQ1: How does the selected population use SNSs? Do their uses and gratifications vary across differing platforms?

This study investigates how emerging adults use the various SNSs available to them, to what extent they use them, and their attitudes towards them. Focused primarily on aspects of social capital, as they are defined in chapter two, this study examines how social capital plays out across these most popular SNSs. It has long been established that the use of SNSs amongst emerging adults may actually be of significance for making and maintaining social connections and to ease the transition into adult life (Lampe et al., 2006; Gray et al., 2012). The majority of existing studies on social capital and SNSs focus on older iterations of SNSs (typically MySpace or Friendster) or on Facebook, which currently dominates SNS discussions.

This study will add to the existing literature by expanding inquiries of social capital by considering the uses and gratifications of two dominate alternate SNSs, Twitter and Instagram, in comparison to Facebook Investigating uses and gratifications surrounding social capital may reveal differing usage patterns for emerging adults across various SNSs. Furthermore, examining Twitter and Instagram is of particular interest as these sites are also the sites that are experiencing the most growth currently. While Twitter may have taken some time to become attractive to younger users, Instagram has seen almost instant success and popularity amongst emerging adult users. As such, these sites are at the threat credibility forefront when considering Facebook's possibly diminishing status as the solely used SNS amongst once-devoted younger users, and are a keen research and talking point for this project.

RQ2: Does use of alternate SNSs (i.e. Instagram, Twitter) supplement, replace, or change the use of Facebook?

The emerging adult population selected for this study is not committed solely to Facebook and, as has been suggested, may have begun to move away from the site as other potentially more useful SNSs have been introduced. As such there is an opportunity for discussion surrounding how and why emerging adults use alternate SNSs and how this ultimately affects their usage of Facebook. Whereas it has not previously been considered, this research seeks to provide insight into how emerging adults make use of alternate SNSs – in the interest of three types of social capital and the gratifications obtained from them – in a way that may differ from the way they do so with Facebook.

While it may be the largest and most popular SNS, Facebook's competitors continue to garner users at an impressive rate. However, these alternate SNSs have more specialized application than that of Facebook, and may even be seen as fragmenting outwards from the generalized functions intrinsic to a traditional SNS platform. Facebook may still have the most dedicated users, but frequency of usage is on par for Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook (Duggan and Smith, 2013). It may be only a matter of time before these alternate SNSs eclipse Facebook's popularity, given emerging adults' noticeable interest in "diversifying" their SNS portfolio. Consideration will be made for how emerging adults use alternate SNSs in the age of Facebook, and if this use is supplementing or replacing use of certain aspects of the site, or the site altogether.

1.4 Research Approach

The abovementioned research questions are investigated in this study using a qualitative approach. Much of the current research is quantitative and user demographic focused, and so this research will contribute to this field by seeking to understand emerging adults' individual motivations for their use of different SNSs.

Interviews offer unique empirical advantages over other formats, and so were selected for data collection. In addition to being a useful tool for substantiating theory where there

may not be any previously, interview research is useful for exploring hidden rationales behind social processes while simultaneously opening up new avenues of inquiry (Bhattacharjee, 2010). Furthermore, interviews for the selected population allow for an understanding of the more nuanced rationale behind patterns of usage. It is anticipated that there will be stark distinctions between each individual, and the “sense-making” process of inductive interviewing will allow for patterns to emerge that can perhaps be expanded to a more general population in future quantitative research. While quantitative research, such as surveys, can capture the beliefs and opinions of participants, it cannot capture their individual reasoning for these behaviours (Lampe et al., 2006), which is at the very heart of this study. A participant’s report of his or her patterns of use and why these patterns of use are employed – as well as his or her opinion of various SNSs – are of interest here, and interviews are the most useful for this specific project.

An interview guide was designed to collect emerging adults’ personal experiences with and opinions of SNSs. In order to participate in the study, potential participants had to be either first or second year undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 24, as this is the age range that is identified for this study as an emerging adult, though this number usually includes individuals aged 18 to 25 (Arnett, 2000). Additionally, study participants needed to have some familiarity with SNSs as either current users or previous users of at least one major SNS.

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were employed in the process of this research, with a uses and gratifications theory (UGT) interview guide adapted from Whiting and Williams (2013). Whiting and Williams (2013) succinctly identify seven uses and gratifications of social media in general, integrating previous UGT research regarding new media, which enables these gratifications to be effectively applied across the differing platforms examined in the current study. Additionally, part of the interview guide focused on how different platforms provide users with social capital. This is adapted from Ellison et al. (2007), whose study examines social capital on Facebook, though their findings have been expanded for this study so that they may be applied to other SNSs as well.

To further expand on this, in the instance of this study, it is worth noting that this work is only partially informed by aspects of both uses and gratifications theory (UGT) and social capital; it does not directly or purely apply these theoretical approaches. The nature of this study is first and foremost exploratory; these two theoretical approaches are being used as a starting point for comparative exploration into the possible “hows” and “whys” of differing use across SNS platforms, as this study does not claim to apply these theories in full. Because social capital and UGT may be integrated to work well together, and have strong applicability across all three platforms being discussed with this research, these two theoretical approaches guide the exploration of SNS use.

The rationale for selecting social capital stems from both its previous history within the relevant body of literature that this study seeks to contribute to, as well as its implications for emerging adults, which are the demographic group of focus within this project. A great portion of literature concerning Facebook and emerging adults focuses on the social capital this group has bound up in the site; bonding, bridging, and maintained social capital have all previously and significantly been discussed within the relevant literature, as outlined in chapter two of this study. The importance of analyzing social capital and how SNSs facilitate the mobilization of these resources for emerging adults is of great importance when considering how and why emerging adults might select or make use of one SNS over another.

For example, in the instance of Facebook, it has been noted that this platform in particular encourages weak tie relationships to be forged and maintained; as such, bridging social capital forms easily (Ellison, 2007; Brandtzaeg, 2012). While the weak ties of bridging social capital do not necessarily provide emerging adults – in this study, specifically first- and second-year university undergraduate students – with the emotional support that they may need as they transition away from their parents’ home and into the “real” world, these connections do allow for new perspectives and useful information to influence their development. With Facebook providing a better platform for bridging social capital instead

of bonding social capital, it is important to investigate if another of the two platforms examined in this study – Instagram and Twitter – provide a better space for bonding or maintained social capital, which may influence emerging adults use of these sites over Facebook, or may encourage an integration of multiple sites to satisfy their social needs.

In addition to satisfying social needs, this study recognizes that users do not make use of SNSs for their social utility alone, and that other uses and benefits of these sites might influence usage of one platform over another. This needs to be taken into account alongside the implications of social capital, and as such, UGT is a useful theoretical approach to consider in the pursuit of this research. UGT can provide an understanding of what motivates users to prefer or use one SNS tool over another for gratifications other than social capital, though agreeing with Joinson (2008), the benefits of social capital are certainly a gratification among many of SNS use.

Many current studies of SNS by way of UGT focus on Facebook, though this focus on Facebook is common amongst SNS studies of all theoretical approaches. However, this focus on Facebook offers UGT insights that have transferability to consideration of how and why other SNSs are adopted and used. The findings of previous studies inform the UGT side of this current study, as they succinctly identify many uses and gratifications that may have applicability on both Twitter and Instagram. Some of the key uses and gratifications of Facebook, which are also considered here in exploration and discussion of alternate SNS use, include its utility as a source of relaxing entertainment, self-expression, boredom relief, and as a resource for general information seeking (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2011; Whiting and Williams, 2013). Facebook use also has numerous social benefits, as stated, and making and maintaining social connections, learning about social events, and social searching are all key uses and gratifications of the site (Lampe et al., 2006; Bumgarner, 2007; Foregger, 2008; Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Quan-Haase and Young, 2010).

Finally, it is worth noting that this research is guided by grounded theory. Grounded theory is appropriate for this work as it does not aim for any one particular truth, but rather inquires as to what is going on in a particular scene. This is ideal as there can be no one

particular truth in the subjective interactions with Facebook and alternate SNSs that exist for its users, and furthermore, because the social scene on these sites are constantly changing and innovating. Although grounded theory is defined as building theory from data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), it may still be informed by theory because as Corbin and Strauss (2008) note, knowledge does not just appear as if by magic. Knowledge is the product of action and interaction, and new knowledge cannot be merely pulled out of the data without existing knowledge to build upon. Informing grounded theory with additional knowledge can be useful, so long as it does not inhibit the creativity and openness that grounded theory lays claim to (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Such previous knowledge can be useful for practice, and some social knowledge goes a long way for the evolution of thought and society (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

1.5 Significance of Study

Lineberry (2012) notes that, supported by user-generated content, SNSs are changing the structure of communication in a profound way. Van Dijck (2013) also asserts that simple networked communication has been pushed aside in favour of “platformed” sociality in our growing culture of connectivity. Such changes warrant immediate and urgent inquiry into motivations and usages of SNSs. Given that Facebook appears to have an uncertain future ahead of it, there is a keen opportunity to investigate its uses for and importance to emerging adults, as they are Facebook’s most influential and active users.

Current literature is sparse on comparisons across SNSs, and for Instagram in particular. This research will consider the transition to other SNSs or the parallel use of alternate SNSs with Facebook. Finally, this research aims to clear the path for more research to be conducted on up-and-coming SNSs, as it is clear that their influence and importance will only continue to grow, and as such require the same careful and concise inquiry that Facebook has been the focus of now for a number of years.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Social Networking Sites and their Users

Social networking sites (SNSs) are an important social outlet for adolescents and emerging adults, and as such, scholarly work has long been concerned with SNSs' impact and significance within these specific users' lives. Much of this research is concerned primarily with Facebook, as it is the most popular among these young groups – however, more work is emerging regarding the alternate SNSs that this study also focuses on.

This first section of the following literature review focuses on SNSs and their users – though mainly on Facebook – and provides insight into its popularity, usage, and users. The intention of this introduction to SNSs is to set the stage for the latter half of this literature review and the primary focus of this research: emerging adulthood and its relationships to technology, the uses and gratifications of SNS use, and bonding, bridging, and maintained social capital that comes from use.

2.1.1 Facebook

With 1.3 billion active users, 680 million mobile users, and with a collective 640 million minutes spent on the site each month (Statistic Brain, 2014), it is hard to argue against Facebook's online prevalence and status as the leading SNS. Facebook is the most visited SNS, and second most visited website around the globe (Alexa.com, 2014), due in no small part to its heavy adoption and usage by teens and young adults. As it developed as a college site, it tends to attract a younger audience, particularly post-secondary students (Pempek et al., 2009). Given that teens are the heaviest users of technology in general, and lead the way for the adoption of technologies in the U.S. (Magee et al., 2014), it is no surprise that these are the groups most likely to be online, with 95% of teens and 95% of adults 18-29 using the Internet (Pew Research Center, 2014). Their prevalence on the Internet translates well as a predictor of Facebook usage – 84% of young adults aged 18-29 and 77% of teens aged 12-17

use the site (Pew Research Center, 2014). As noted in a 2007 study, 94% of college-aged participants were Facebook users, and amongst studies with similar sample sizes, that high number appears to be consistent (Ellison et al., 2007; Gray et al., 2013). However, Internet use alone does not account for Facebook use. According to Hargittai (2007), college-aged SNS users are more likely to be of Caucasian, Asian, or Asian American descent, have parents who hold a university degree, and females are more likely than males to use any SNS – Facebook included.

Facebook's popularity is measured not only by how many people use the site or who they are, but also what their engagement level is. In general, youth in the U.S. spend around 6.5 hours on media per day (Pempek et al., 2009), and social media engagement is a significant part of that time dispersal. A typical teen user is on Facebook for around 30 minutes per day (Pempek et al., 2009), while a typical college-aged user spends anywhere from 10 minutes to over 4 hours on the site (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). With regard to the frequency of usage, 42% of teens report visiting the site several times per day, while 25% report visiting the site at least once per day (Madden et al., 2013). As far as how usage is distributed, it comes as no surprise that older teens (Madden et al., 2013) and younger adults (i.e. those just having completed high school and/or entering post-secondary education) are the most frequent users of the site (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008; Pempek et al., 2009). This may be explained simply for the fact that these age groups are in a state of transition more so than other groups, wherein connections may be lost with friends via graduation, moving away for college and similar life events (Quan-Haase, 2007).

Even those who are not on Facebook have had some experience with it. Hargittai (2007) found that of a sample of over 1,000 students, only one student had never heard of any of the six SNSs listed in her study – of which Facebook was included and most popular. According to one study, 52% of non-users live with someone who has a Facebook account (66% of which are non-user parents with user children), and 24% of these non-users look at posts or photos on their live-in Facebook user's account (Smith, 2014). Another study reports that 56% of young adults without a Facebook account visit the site anyways to browse

available content (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). However in recent years this latter number may have changed, not due to a lack of interest on the part of non-users, but on the tightening up of privacy settings by users, thus making content harder to browse without an account.

Supporting the notion that Facebook is most relevant to and utilized by teens and younger adults is a study by Rainie et al. (2013), which suggests that older adults have significantly less interest in Facebook. While two-thirds of American adults use Facebook, 61% of them had voluntarily taken time away from the site for three or more weeks (Rainie et al., 2013). Furthermore, 20% reported having used the site at one time, but no longer doing so; reasons include lack of interest, lack of time to spend on it, and a lack of perceived social value (Rainie et al., 2013). Reduced time spent on the site is also noted amongst young adult (18-29) users, with 42% claiming their usage had decreased over the last year (Rainie et al., 2013). Supporting this study is one similar by Lampe et al. (2013), who also find that older adults tend to have negative associations with Facebook use. Worries of privacy breach, context collapse, and general lack of interest are the most common reasons why older individuals refrain from Facebook use, also finding interaction on the site to be superficial and gossip generating (Lampe et al., 2013). This is in stark contrast to how teens and younger adults use and value the site, which is primarily heralded for providing avenues for meaningful social interaction.

2.1.2 Facebook's Alternates – Instagram and Twitter

Twitter, though not nearly the SNS powerhouse that Facebook represents, has a significant user base and is often noted as Facebook's main competitor in the SNS market (Albanesius, 2012). Despite being referred to as a SNS and embodying particular characteristics that qualify a site as a SNS (i.e. a brief profile, friending, direct messaging), Twitter is actually better identified as a microblogging site. Microblog sites, which have existed in relative prominence since approximately 2007, allow for users to share very brief messages among a network of either friends or strangers (Java et al., 2007). The purpose of these messages may

vary, but the content often pertains to information sharing or personal anecdotes. Though this form of online social networking is most often associated with Twitter, there are many other microblogging sites in existence. Lesser-known sites such as Jaiku, Flipter, or Pownce offer microblogging services, but Twitter's greatest current competitor is Tumblr, a microblogging or short-form blogging service founded in 2006 (Duke University, 2013).

Also founded in 2006 – and by far the most popular microblogging platform – Twitter currently has 271 million active users generating more than 500 million tweets every day (Twitter, 2014). As mentioned, the primary use of Twitter is the sharing of short, 140-character text posts, discussing a range of subject matters (Masullo Chen, 2010). Like other SNSs, initial assumptions of Twitter were largely that its usage was self-indulgent and its users were brazenly self-important, sharing banal information such as what one has had to eat most recently (Ariens, 2009). As Twitter's popularity has grown, so too has the body of scholarly work concerned with its form and function. As Williams et al. (2013) note, work regarding Twitter has been steady since around 2010, when academics began to seriously consider the site, and examining Twitter alongside particular interests, topics, or concerns comprises the bulk of academic inquiry into the site. Barnes and Bohringer (2011) discuss the importance of microblogging services like Twitter in communicating information and updates regarding events such as natural disasters, such as the Japanese earthquake of 2010, or political dissidence, such as the Arab Spring uprising of 2011. Additionally, they note that Twitter has gained the attention of specialized interests groups such as journalists and healthcare providers, and a great number of papers examine Twitter's utility for these groups.

Outside of these special interests, currently available work on Twitter appears to have specific focus not necessarily on the uses of the site itself or general user groups within, but is primarily concerned with linguistics or semantics, analyzing message or “tweet” content and authorship of tweets (Cheong and Lee, 2010). Furthermore, Twitter rarely stands alone in discussion, instead existing alongside discussions of other SNSs or in contribution of “wider studies” (Williams et al., 2013). A few salient studies discuss Twitter in terms of its contribution to communication, noting its utility in disseminating messages to a wide

audience (Dork et al., 2010; Java et al., 2007; Masullo Chen, 2010), and as Java et al. (2007) note, Twitter is a useful social tool as it enables users to engage in daily chatter and conversations, to share news, and to seek and share information. According to Masullo Chen (2010), these behaviours are actively sought through use of the site, and gratify users' need for informal camaraderie. Twitter, as such a fast-paced and asymmetrical medium of communication, allows for easy access to a wide audience and mobilize them to action (Dork et al., 2010). Perhaps the most notable instance of this is the 2011 revolution in Egypt, of which Twitter is credited as having both sped up the organizational process and disseminated the revolution's message to an international audience (Gustin, 2011). However, that same asymmetry also works in favour of users who do not wish to be found. Like on Tumblr, Twitter's security comes in the form of either obscurity or anonymity for its users; profiles are sparse on the site, and users do not have to friend or follow individuals who choose to friend or follow them (Gruzd et al., 2011). One may surmise that this would make Twitter especially appealing for adolescents, who are transfixed with carving out their own personal spaces away from the supervision of parents or guardians. It is not surprising that Boyd (2014) finds that teens prefer spaces such as Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram over Facebook simply for the fact that their "parents don't know about it", as said parents continually "invade" the once private and teen-centric space of Facebook.

So while it has been previously said that Twitter "is for old people" (Crum, 2009), it appears as though the site is actually becoming increasingly popular amongst emerging adults, aged 18-24. Attention from younger users was initially sparse, but began to rapidly increase around 2008. For example, between 2008 and 2009, users aged 18-24 increased by 19% (Fox et al., 2009). This growth was not unique to this specific period, either; between 2012 and 2014, usage among emerging adults aged 18-24 grew by another 11% (Pew Research Center, 2014), with 22% of 18-24 year-olds logging into Twitter from their phone (Brenner and Smith, 2013). Of all Twitter users, 78% are mobile users (Twitter, 2014). Despite the opportunities for discussion of Twitter, such as its similarities to Facebook and its growing popularity amongst younger audiences, there is surprisingly scant specific discussion of teens or emerging adults and Twitter. Though it has a slightly shorter history

than Facebook – Twitter being one year younger than Facebook – Twitter’s popularity has been steady and its public image consistently positive. As Masullo Chen (2010) notes, other SNSs tend to “flourish and then flounder”, but Twitter appears to be here to stay (p. 756), making it ideal for academic exploration and discussion as it adapts to user needs, or users adapt to it. With a lack of current discussion, it is somewhat difficult to describe Twitter’s usage by and impact upon emerging adults in the same way as has been discussed in relation to Facebook; however, this weak point provides an opportunity to probe this area of inquiry and provide much-needed insight into this stark gap in knowledge.

It may be somewhat limiting to compare Twitter to Facebook, as these sites are immensely different in both form and function. As DeMers (2013) contends, comparing the two sites is akin to comparing “Pepsi and Coke” (n.p.), having very different consumer bases and ultimately, very different usage outcomes. While DeMers (2013) asserts that Facebook is a chore, he claims that Twitter is a hobby that is proactive in comparison to Facebook’s “reactive” disposition. While Facebook is primarily a scrapbook-like archive of self, Twitter is a fast-paced source of both news and gossip, and with this the attraction for a younger crowd may begin to come clear.

Speaking of the younger crowd, Instagram is a major hotspot for them to both see and be seen on, and has been extremely popular since it became available to them. However, Instagram is another brazenly stark example of a significant knowledge gap, as it has thus far evaded significant academic inquiry, despite its growing popularity, though it may be assumed that such works are forthcoming, and perhaps not available at the time of this writing. Regardless, there are some key studies that have begun to pick apart both its significance and implications, which are of interest here.

As mentioned, Instagram has been quite popular since its inception in October 2010. By December 2010, Instagram had one million active users, which quickly grew to five million by June 2011 (Siegler, 2011). This number doubled just four months later, with Instagram announcing that they had reached ten million active users. As of 2014, Instagram

has more than 150 million active users, most of whom are young women (Karimkhani et al., 2013).

Though initially offered as a mobile photo-sharing application (app) for iPhone users via Apple's App Store, Instagram has grown to be a photo- and video-sharing social networking service available for use from any mobile device, with an official Instagram website also accompanying the app. Through both the mobile and online versions of the app, users may browse photographs, communicate with each other via the comments section on each individual photo, and discover others and share their own photos with others using the now-infamous "hashtag" metadata tagging function. However, the preferred method of use for Instagram is via the mobile app, as it is intended to work with mobile cameras to capture and share users "in the moment"; users cannot post photographs from their computers without some workaround method (Salomon, 2013). Though other photo-sharing sites existed prior to Instagram's creation – such as Flickr, Photobucket or Picasa – Instagram's main difference is that it relies heavily on the ubiquity of smartphones and mobile photography, with the experience of photo capturing weighing as heavily as the experience of photo sharing. As Salomon (2013) notes, Instagram is both dedicated and indebted to the mobile experience, as its growth was both enabled and enhanced by the rapid adoption of smartphones with built-in, highly functional cameras.

Academic literature specifically concerning Instagram is currently in short supply, as previously mentioned. The few works dedicated to it, however, have an interesting array of subject areas, ranging from the implementation of Instagram in the interest of dermatological diagnosis (Karimkhani et al., 2013) to the politics of censorship and the female body (Olszanowski, 2014). Most pertinent to this discussion are works regarding the popular photographic trend of the "selfie" – a photo of oneself taken at arm's length and shared via the #selfie tag. This phenomenon's popularity is particularly attributed to Instagram, with its integration into everyday vernacular culminating in its recognition as "word of the year" by the Oxford Dictionary in late 2013 (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013). These increasingly ubiquitous "selfie" photographs are a good indication of how users primarily make use of

Instagram – predominately a communication of self to close friends – and further reifies that Instagram has great utility as both an app and SNS.

As stated previously, Instagram users tend to be younger, and in general tend to be young women. In the U.S., 20% of all women online and 37% of people aged 18-29 online use Instagram (Duggan and Smith, 2013). Instagram users make use of the app almost as often in a day as users of Facebook make use of that site – 57% of all Instagram users report using the app or visiting the site on a daily basis; for Facebook users, this is only slightly higher at 63% (Duggan and Smith, 2013). Turning again to Twitter, 46% of users on that SNS report logging in at least daily (Duggan and Smith, 2013).

2.1.3 SNSs in the University Scene

Though it is apparent that Facebook is still the most popular, it would seem as though Instagram and Twitter are closely allied in the battle towards SNS domination. Users have a typically make use of more than one website – at least 42% of online U.S. adults surveyed. As was previously noted, there are few individuals who solely use Instagram or Twitter without also being on Facebook or some other SNS, but the cross-usage of Instagram and Twitter is remarkable. Among Instagram users, 53% are also Twitter users, and vice versa.

As was previously suggested, younger users have a tendency to diversify their SNS portfolio as new sites crop up, as this allows them to evade the context collapse that has begun to occur as more older adults (i.e. parents) become interested in making use of Facebook. As noted by Madden et al. (2013), teens are so perturbed by adult presence on Facebook because participation in “networked publics” such as Facebook has been carved out by youth culture to provide an adult-free zone; thus unrestricted socialization and privacy coinciding with their burgeoning need for independent personal agency can run free. Furthermore, with participation in these key “networked publics”, such as Facebook being a cornerstone of teen culture, there is a certain expectation for participation. As noted in boyd and Marwick (2011), interview participants stress a need to be on Facebook, and that

participation is not only expected, but somewhat required. Those who do not participate on Facebook, according to one respondent, need to have a “good reason” to explain their lack of participation (boyd and Marwick, 2011). The authors posit that the reason for this is that as physical spaces for socializing have become constrained by adults or have disappeared altogether, sociality has become increasingly contingent on digital spaces. As such, being in the presence of friends is moving towards online spaces, and demands participation to recognize formal relationships between friends (boyd and Marwick, 2011). As more and more friends adopt sites such as Instagram and Twitter, a ripple effect occurs that thus demonstrates to others that they can either join in or be left out.

Non-participation on these up-and-coming sites is certainly an option, but has been suggested as potentially being limiting or detrimental to those individuals who choose to abstain (Raynes-Goldie, 2010; Lampe et al., 2006; Hargittai, 2007). Though Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) find that 63% of non-user college students felt their lack of participation had no effect on their social life (and subsequently, 73% of users felt that their SNS use had no effect on pre-existing relationships with friends), this number may have changed in recent years as the ubiquity of Facebook – and other SNSs – has steadily increased since the original date of the study. Other studies have found that Facebook has a profound impact on the transition into college, as well as the navigation of the social scene within their institution. The same is likely also true for these newer SNSs. With students arriving on the contemporary university scene as already skilled users of the Internet (Quan-Haase, 2007), and Internet savviness being a strong indicator of SNS use, students can make good use of Facebook and the like for easing the transition from high school to university.

Speaking specifically of Facebook, use of this SNS may actually assist in easing this transition, and assuage the impact of “friendsickness” – missing friends back home or those who have moved away to college (Cummings et al., 2006; Gray et al., 2013). Use of the site also fosters relationship building with new friends and acquaintances met at their new institutions. Social searching via Facebook helps build relationships offline, by allowing students to get to know each other in an asynchronous, casual medium, and is truly a standard

usage for the site (Lampe et al., 2006). According to Lampe et al. (2006), social searching coincides with social surveillance, and is facilitated via Facebook, allowing for individuals to not only get to know other students, but to integrate into the new groups of which they belong or think they may want to belong to. This is, without a doubt, a crucial benefit for new university students. Social surveillance allows students to track the actions/beliefs/interests of their new groups (i.e. their school, faculty, residence, etc.), and provides students with social cues for the regulation of group norms. Students learn how to participate as public citizens independent of their parents, and grow as individuals, via a space they create for themselves. As such, time spent on SNSs could be seen as akin to a social norms “practice time”. This coincides with the purpose of college as a whole; aside from its concrete career and educational rewards, post-secondary education serves the important function of socialization and social learning during a key period in an individual’s life – emerging adulthood.

2.2 Emerging Adulthood and the Role of Technology

The largest demographic of SNS users are individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 years old (Pew Internet, 2014), which coincides with the years of crucial change and development in a young person’s life. This period for which important social development occurs is neither late adolescence nor early adulthood (ages 18-25), but actually occurs between them. Better termed, this period has been described by Arnett (2000) as “emerging adulthood”, and is characterized by having the ability to “explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews” (p. 469). Emerging adulthood is a time in which little responsibility is had, which allows young people to explore the multitude of life directions and decisions available to them, as there is no demand for any major commitment to life choices. As Arnett (2000) argues, this period of life is the highest point for many, in which the exploration of possibilities will be greater than at any other point in life. This period is key for identity formation, as identity is rarely achieved by the end of a young person’s high school career (late adolescence), and is not fully conceived of by individuals in their early twenties (Arnett, 2000). As a result, the sense of one’s “being an adult” comes to fruition through the

experiences and growth one undergoes in the late teens and early twenties. For some, the emerging adult years are comprised of the pursuit of post-secondary education, and it is this group that is the focus of the current study.

2.2.1 The Emerging Adult Goes to College

For some, a significant moment in emerging adulthood is when they depart their parents' residence to attend college, and begin living in semi-autonomous situations, such as student residences, with roommates, or in fraternities/sororities. Like the online spaces carved out by teens in Boyd and Marwick's (2011) work, the absence of parental oversight in these new living situations enables emerging adults to find their own path and to begin to do their major identity work (Arnett, 2000). Attendance of post-secondary education has steadily risen over the last 70 years, and while only 14% sought out university educations in 1940, over 60% were doing so by the mid-1990s (Arnett, 2000). The numbers are increasing for Canadian students as well – the 2005-2006 academic year saw Canadian university enrollment reach its historical all-time high, with 24% of Canadians aged 18-24 participating in university education (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2014). Furthermore, enrollment into university by adults 18-21 went up by 7% between 1990-1991 and 2005-2006 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2014). However, it should be noted that although enrollment is increasing, completion does not necessarily reflect the same high numbers. According to Arnett's 2000 study, only 32% of adults 25-29 had completed 4 or more years of college, and the majority of individuals who drop out of university will do so in the first year (Gray et al., 2013), hence making the success of this liminal experience of adjustment to university all the more pressing.

Adjustment to and experiencing university is a major component of emerging adulthood, and these years are fraught with instability, frequent residential and demographic changes, and a marked absence of responsibility or role commitments. It is also a time for self-discovery, marked by exploration of unusual work or educational opportunities,

experimenting with romantic and sexual partners, and learning about and “trying on” different world views. Exposure to new ideas, information, and perspectives is crucial for emerging adults (Ellison, 2007). All such experiences find themselves easily available to emerging adults in the university scene, and such exposure and experimentation during this period is important, so that by the late twenties and early thirties, a clear number of individuals can confidently be said to have successfully reached adulthood (Arnett, 2000). The progression of this identity construction does not exist in isolated individuality, of course, and peer culture and peer feedback are an important part of building the self. As such, studies have picked up on the important role of SNSs in the daily lives of emerging adults, where they may be in constant contact, either directly or indirectly, with their friends and peers (Cummings et al., 2006; Pempek et al., 2009; Gray et al., 2013).

2.2.2 The Emerging Adult Makes Some Friends

Media use, in general, provides an important backdrop for social, emotional, and cognitive development in youth, and as such, accounts for a fairly large portion of their leisure time (Pempek et al., 2009). How emerging adults utilize Facebook is especially of interest, particularly in the university environment. According to Pempek et al. (2009), emerging adults may use SNSs to assist in identity formation, with self-disclosure methods on sites like Facebook allowing them to solicit social inputs from peers. Self-disclosure serves a dual purpose for them, in that not only does it assist identity development, “where external feedback from peers may help the individual clarify his or her own sense of self” but also assists in the strengthening of intimate bonds, wherein “the relationship with the disclosure partner is strengthened” (Pempek et al., 2009, p. 228). Gray et al. (2013) support this assertion, contending that SNSs supplement long-standing traditional means of meeting and interacting with peers (i.e. shared residences, student organizations, classes), as is also noted by Lampe et al. (2006). Not only can activity on SNSs be used for academic enhancement (i.e. conduct discussions of class material, organize study sessions), but they may also be used to solidify casual friendships into meaningful connections.

The Internet, in general, is useful for fostering new relationships, reciprocity and trust (Quan-Haase and Wellman, 2004). Stemming from this, it is not a far stretch to see that SNSs tend to assist significantly in the facilitation of interaction. As boyd and Marwick (2011) note, social media is frequently utilized by teens to get to know acquaintances and friends better, and the space itself is marked by social photos and selfies, in-jokes, cultural references and casual language that all indicate aspects of others' identities. Furthermore, the perceived benefits that can be achieved from informational exposure – such as learning more about people from one's offline community – offset concerns about privacy (Lampe et al., 2006; boyd and Marwick, 2011). Students perceive their audience to be primarily comprised of their high school friends, current university classmates, and acquaintances from social events, as having established an offline connection constitutes viewership for one's profile (Lampe et al., 2006). Creating a large, diverse network allows for many opportunities to get to know others, and relies heavily on initial face-to-face meeting, as few connections are made exclusively online (Lampe et al., 2006; Hargittai, 2007; Subrahmanyam et al., 2008; Pempek et al., 2009; Madden et al., 2013).

Increasing awareness of those in one's offline community is a primary motivation for Facebook use amongst college students, as is accurately representing oneself to their perceived community (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). As such, Internet use – and more importantly, Facebook use – cannot necessarily be assumed to be used for the projection of an idealized version of self; the online and offline self are co-constructed, and are reciprocally important to identity formation for emerging adults. Reliability between how a student is offline and how they present themselves online establishes trustworthiness; identifying others who will not bring about harm (i.e. are trustworthy) encourages the fostering of Facebook friendships (Valenzuela et al., 2009).

At its most basic level, Facebook usage by college students can be understood as a useful supplement in the construction of identity during the formative years of emerging adulthood. Users can learn more about their world, explore different ideologies, effectively self-disclose, and generate and maintain various types of relationships (Arnett, 2000).

Making connections on Facebook in college is about more than just being popular and having something to do on a Saturday night, and although the narrative surrounding emerging adulthood may appear to be that of free-spirited experimentation and socialization, this period is crucial for the formation and maintenance of social capital in adult life. Having social capital – that is, the resources one needs to succeed throughout life – is both indicated by and facilitated through the Internet, and especially through the use of Facebook and possibly other, alternate SNSs as well.

2.3 Theorizing Social Networking Sites

How and why SNSs are used, how some may be favoured over others, and what the overall benefits are may be best understood via two theoretical streams. The first of these to be discussed is social capital, which has been a particularly useful method for investigating SNS usage in previous studies. By considering what the social value of the use of SNSs are, these studies examine the benefits that are offered and suggest why and how individuals make use of SNS in their day-to-day lives. Additionally, uses and gratifications theory (UGT) is also a useful research method for investigating SNSs, as this method can ask what people like about SNSs, what they can do with them, and what they get out of them. Social capital may be seen as both a motivation for and gratification of usage (Joinson, 2008; Lineberry 2012), and so these two streams work well together to provide a “big picture” understanding of the implications of a variety of SNSs for emerging adults.

2.3.1 Defining Social Capital

Social capital re-entered academic discussion in the 1990s, with its popularity increasing during the last decade or so. Social capital as a theoretical underpinning has been heralded as “one of the most salient concepts in social sciences” (Lin, 1999, p. 28). Important as it may be, though, the exact definition of this concept is somewhat blurry. Lin (1999) puts forth the interpretation that social capital “is captured from embedded resources in social networks” (p. 28), noting that this is a widely accepted term amongst major social capital scholars –

namely Coleman, Marsden, and Burt. This is an individual investment in a social network, however there is another half of social capital theorists comprised mainly of Bourdieu, Putnam and Coleman again, whom acknowledge social capital as “solidarity and reproduction of [a] group” (p. 29) – the group investment in mutual recognition and acknowledgment (Lin, 1999). Despite a slight division in intricacies of the theory, the basic understanding is that social capital is “investment in social relations with expected returns” (Lin, 1999, p. 30). Though this succinct snippet of social capital provides a general idea of this concept overall, Lin (1999) makes an addendum to this, stating that in addition to having these resources, people also access or mobilize them with purposive actions. This understanding of social capital is what guides this research. Furthermore, while there is no universally-accepted correct version or deployment of social capital (Brandtzaeg, 2012), three key concepts that are central to its theory and shall be used throughout this study: bridging social capital, bonding social capital, and maintained (Ellison et al., 2009) social capital.

Bridging social capital is associated with interactions with weaker social ties, like that of acquaintances or casual friends – such weak ties are literally “bridging” for the connections between diverse perspectives and information (Jung et al., 2013). Bonding social capital, on the other hand, describes the stronger ties that are formed between similar kinds of people, and is associated with meaningful support (Jung et al., 2013). Bonding social capital coincides with the development of a local support network, and emotional closeness (Gray et al., 2013). The third aspect of social capital is the maintenance of social capital, which as described by Ellison et al. (2007), is forged via the Internet. Maintained social capital is an additional dimension, which “speaks to the ability to maintain valuable connections as one progresses through life changes” (Ellison, 2007, p. 1146).

Focusing on its aspects of social contact and engagement, social capital is a useful idea for discussing both the Internet and SNSs. Back in 1999, Lin asserted that the implications of social capital on cyberspace and cyber-network growth would be simply “incredible” (p. 45). In a time when social capital was accused of being in an all-time

decline, as argued by Putnam (2000), it appeared as though the growth in Internet use was simply another nail in the coffin. However, Lin (1999) asserts that, at that time, social capital faced a revolutionary rise *thanks* to cyber-networks. There is certainly a grain of truth to this, considering the Internet's immense capability in bringing people together – especially when SNSs are involved.

Travelling forward just five years into the future, Quan-Haase and Wellman (2004) posit three arguments for how the Internet affects social capital, confirming by proxy Lin's 1999 assertion. According to Quan-Haase and Wellman (2004), the Internet affects social capital by transforming it, diminishing it, and supplementing it. As transformative, the Internet provides cheap, easy, and widespread communication amongst common communities. It fosters spatially-dispersed and sparse, diverse niche networks, forever ushering social contact and civic engagement away from local and group-based solidarities. As diminishing – by far the most negative view – the Internet lures people away from their kin and into the global repertoire, reducing local community and politics. Finally, as supplementary, social capital blends into people's lives via the Internet, facilitating communication amongst existing relationships in addition to traditional methods (i.e. face-to-face interaction, telephone). It assists individuals in exploring their interests and hobbies amongst a larger network of people, instead of being restricted to one location with perhaps fewer individuals with shared interests.

Ultimately Quan-Haase and Wellman (2004) find that the Internet is supplementary more than anything else, and contend that it joins the ranks of the abovementioned traditional methods as an effective mode of communication. Other studies also support this finding, and view the Internet as a positive technology for communication (see Bakardjieva, 2005). Though it has been now established that the Internet has significant benefits for communication and interaction, SNSs have faced similar questioning as to what their social value is and what effect they have on social capital (Hargittai and Hsieh, 2010).

2.3.2 Social Capital on Facebook

As far as questions of social value are concerned, it has previously been established in this literature review what effect SNSs have for the formation of identity in emerging adults. When it comes to social capital and Facebook, which is now noted as the gold standard for examinations of SNSs in general, the findings are almost always positive. Bridging social capital is often the focus of research relating to Facebook and social capital, as the site's design and use lowers the barriers of participation and encourages weak ties to form. By allowing a user's extended network to be visible to others (i.e. friends of friends), it is increasingly easier to connect to weak ties; Facebook allows for easier bridging social capital to occur both technically and socially and use of the site encourages loose bonds to form (Ellison, 2007; Brandtzaeg, 2012). While the weak ties of bridging social capital do not necessarily provide students with emotional support, they allow for new perspectives and useful information crucial to their development as emerging adults, as well as potentially provide them with resources and opportunities they may later need, such as job openings (Valenzuela et al., 2009). Steinfield et al. (2008) find that as students spend more time on Facebook their Facebook "friend" count also increases, thus leading to increased bridging social capital. So while it may seem that large amounts of friends are somewhat meaningless or superficial (as stated by the adult users in Lampe et al., 2013), it is actually indicative of effective bridging social capital.

Using Facebook correlates well with bridging social capital as it provides ease of access to social information for a multitude of acquaintances, and as such, is seen as beneficial for students to participate in (Ellison et al., 2007). This might explain why so many students sign up for Facebook after starting college, as it is an important part of their socialization (Pempek et al., 2009). In addition to this, Ellison et al. (2007) note that newer students use Facebook to get to know new people more so than junior or senior students, making Facebook use crucial at the start of an emerging adult's university career. As such, Ellison (2007) stresses the importance of universities not banning or resisting students' use of

SNSs; SNS use is associated with higher bridging social capital and more acquaintances, which may also predict more interaction offline (Brandtzaeg, 2012).

The implications SNSs have on social capital presents a plausible argument towards SNS usage for university students in any year, regardless of their living situation. Hargittai (2007) finds that students who still live at home with their parents are significantly less likely to use Facebook than students who live independently or with roommates. Autonomy encourages Facebook participation, and beyond just the use of Facebook, Hargittai (2007) notes that living at home in general may not provide students with the same opportunity to get to know their peers as those who live on-campus *and* make use of SNSs. Not being an active member of Facebook, and not making great strides to become a part of the campus community, may limit the extent to which students interact with a diverse group of individuals, thus inhibiting bridging social capital formation.

Not only is Facebook beneficial to students who are forming the loose ties of social capital, its use is valuable for bonding social capital as well. While impact on social capital depends on the specific uses and gratifications of Facebook – different types of usage produce different types of social capital (Williams, 2006) – there is strong evidence to suggest that Facebook is important for both bonding and maintaining social capital, in addition to the more obvious bridging social capital. Bonding social capital coincides with the development of a local support network that is stronger than the informal social resources and information that bridging social capital provides. Bonding social capital is associated with emotional closeness, and its facilitation through SNSs reduces loneliness and creates perceptions of increased social and emotional support. Such support is important as an emerging adult, because as Arnett (2000) notes, not all experiences during the emerging adult years are positive. Use of Facebook has the potential to strengthen bonds because it is both asynchronous and free of geographic constraints (Brandtzaeg, 2012), allowing for students to easily communicate with close friends or family back home, but its use does not necessarily predict an increase in the number of strong social ties (Donath and boyd, 2004).

Perhaps most salient to university students is Facebook's utility as a means of maintaining social capital. As Ellison et al. (2007) note, social capital needs to be maintained, and for a young person, the bulk of their social capital has been generated through their relationships in high school. High school relationships are an established, rich social network that would mean significant loss of social capital if it were to be abandoned or lost – as such, maintaining these relationships is a significant factor motivating Facebook use (Ellison et al., 2007). So while Facebook may seem to serve the basic purpose of alleviating “friendsickness”, its latent work is that of maintaining social capital – both bonding and bridging – with each having their own gratifying benefits for the person who holds them.

2.3.3 Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

Setting ideas of social capital aside, it is worthwhile to also note the applicability of UGT to SNS research, as astutely noted by Lineberry (2012). As Hogan and Quan-Haase (2010) point out, just because new media have emerged does not necessarily demand new communication theories – UGT can be honed, scoped, and elaborated to suit the needs of SNS research. Relevant to this study, Quan-Haase and Young (2010) note that it is important and useful to consider SNSs via UGT, as an understanding of what motivates users to prefer or use one SNS tool over another – in their case, instant messaging (IM) and Facebook – can be parsed using this approach. Furthermore, they suggest that concurrent use of communication tools, such as IM and Facebook, tends to signify distinct needs that are thus gratified via the use of these disparate tools (p. 352). UGT helps to identify these needs.

Gratifying benefits are inherent not just in SNS usage, but in media usage in general. UGT, as popularized by Katz et al. (1974), considers what people do with the media that they consume. Under the assumptions of UGT, individuals are goal-oriented in their motivations towards media, “select[ing] media and content that fulfills their needs” (Lineberry, 2012, p. 11). This extends Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, which posits that people actively seek out gratifications for a hierarchical list of needs, continually moving up the hierarchy as each

“level” is fulfilled. This hierarchy and UGT complement each other well, as media and mass communication fit in not as merely “doing something” to their audiences, such as influencing behaviour or purchasing decisions, but their consumption is rather considered within the hierarchy of needs to be satisfied.

UGT may be enlisted to analyze a wide range of media, with applicability for both traditional media such as radio or television (Herzog, 1944; Rubin, 1983), or for more contemporary trends in Internet and SNS usage (Stafford et al., 2004; Quan-Haase and Young, 2010; Whiting and Williams, 2013). Regardless of the medium being studied, Katz et al. (1974) identify five basic assumptions of UGT: 1) audiences are active and goal-oriented, 2) need gratifications and mediums are linked by each individual audience member, 3) media compete with each other for need gratification, 4) audiences have agency and self-awareness in their media usage, and finally, 5) value judgments of specific media may be assessed only by the audience. In addition to these assumptions, Katz et al. (1973) identify five “need types” that are gratified by media, and consist of cognitive, affective, personal and social integrative needs, as well as tension release.

Cognitive needs serve an information seeking and knowledge acquisition function (i.e. social searching), while social integrative needs have an element of “enhancing” the individual’s connections with friends, family members, and so on (West and Turner, 2010). Following the assumptions of these need types, it becomes apparent the connection between UGT and social capital, as it is clear that social capital (whether bonding, bridging, or maintained) is itself a gratification of SNS usage – and a use or motivation for it as well. Joinson (2008) notes that there are immense social gratifications of online social networks that are worth consideration, as they provide both social and emotional support, as well as information resources and ties to other people. As Joinson (2008) notes, in discussions of SNSs and UGT, there are two primary groups that motivate use: content gratifications and process gratifications. The latter of these two refers to the actual experience of using the medium in question, and content gratifications are derived from repeat usage. Stafford et al. (2004) suggest that as an additional, third gratification, the “social environment” provided by

the Internet is also key motivator for usage. Agreeing with this, Joinson (2008) notes that activity on Facebook is largely socially motivated, even when concerning content gratification. For example, college students who use Facebook primarily as a social connection derive social capital benefits from their use, even if it appears as though their time spent on the site is dedicated only to consuming social content. Content consumed is primarily status updates and wall posts of Facebook “friends”, as well as browsing the photographs that they have posted. Based on discussion from Lampe et al. (2006), this sort of behaviour on Facebook is may be described as social searching, and though is a gratification tied to content, directly impacts social capital.

Lineberry (2012) similarly suggests that social capital aligns well with UGT, especially when dealing with SNSs, and suggests that instead of the social or psychological origins of needs that Katz et al. (1974) identify, the concept of social capital can replace this as the source of motivation to use SNSs. With a focus on reconnecting with contacts and maintaining existing contacts, as well as maintaining weaker ties and seeing what old contacts are up to, the use of SNSs has a clear motivation that is tied to notions of social capital (Joinson, 2008). While social capital and UGT may appear to have loose or incongruent connections, Joinson (2008) points out the importance of adopting a UGT approach when conducting research on SNSs, as this approach allows a more in-depth probing of the exact nature of “keeping in touch” or whatever else may appear to be happening on these sites, investigating these aspects as both a use *and* a gratification. Social capital bridging, building, and maintaining may all be distinct gratifications, but are covertly closely tied to being a primary usage as well.

2.3.4 UGT and Facebook

Using UGT when approaching Facebook has delivered some useful information regarding motivations for adoption and gratifications of usage. Smock et al. (2011) outline three key features that motivate individuals towards Facebook: being a source of relaxing

entertainment, a place to express oneself and share information, and as a source of social connection and interaction. These findings overlap quite a bit with other such findings from studies that consider Facebook via UGT. Sociality is the most common motivator, with making and maintaining social connections and staying in the know about social events being of key concern (Foregger, 2008; Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Quan-Haase and Young, 2010), while social searching is also of importance (Lampe et al., 2006; Bumgarner, 2007; Joinson, 2008). Work from Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) and Whiting and Williams (2013) support the finding that Facebook is not only an interesting way to distract or entertain oneself, but also that Facebook can be used for general information seeking. This is a primary gratification of Twitter (Coursaris et al., 2013) – not surprising given its high usage by journalists, entertainment news sources, and other such groups.

Quan-Haase and Young (2010) find that making use of a variety of SNSs signifies distinct needs that are gratified specifically through those disparate sites. Following this rationale, the necessity becomes clearer to investigate the usage of SNSs other than Facebook, especially as alternate SNSs like Instagram and Twitter attract more users. Concurrent usage of multiple social media platforms implies that something different is to be gained from the use of each individual site. As Quan-Haase and Young (2010) note, new social media types do not replace others, but are rather added to the overall set of communication tools that are utilized by an individual, in addition to their offline means – each social media has its own “unique utility” (p. 350) that sets it apart. However, adopting technologies and social media are dependent on the social trends of the moment as well, and social and technological trends affect the daily usage of sites like Facebook. Take for example the ubiquity of mobile photography, and its contribution to the popularity of Instagram. What is contentious in these assertions, though, is their validity in the face of continual informational fragmentation and refinement. If an emerging adult has Twitter for text-based social sharing, and Instagram for image-based social sharing – and these spaces are free of parents – what gratifications does Facebook have for them anymore? As Quan-Haase and Young (2010) find, the answer may simply be peer pressure: “everyone I know is on Facebook” (p. 357).

With the SNSs being the primary focus of emerging adults' Internet use – and Facebook being the core site that they use – previous research has made great strides in investigating how and why young people use Facebook, what they get out of it, and what the outcomes of their usage are. However, as Facebook has grown and changed, it is possible that so too have the factors influencing usage and outcomes. Understanding how emerging adults continue to use Facebook – if they continue to really significantly engage with it at all – in relation to these other sites is crucial, with considerations to be made about both the uses and gratifications of each of these sites as well as what their implications are for social capital.

2.4 Conclusions

Upon reviewing the relevant literature, it becomes clear that not only are SNSs extremely useful for emerging adults' sociality, but that such usage has deeper implications than just “hanging out” online. Far beyond just having a place to socialize, SNSs present a whole spectrum of use values and gratifications. UGT research on Facebook indicates that it presents opportunities for entertainment, socialization, and information gathering, and though other SNSs may be similar, the weighting of each of these gratifications may vary from site to site. This may supplement or supplant Facebook's dominance, and so more research must be conducted in regards to this possibility. Further to this, expanding current literature on alternate SNSs and social capital needs to be made a priority, as the majority of the literature focuses on Facebook without considering how increasingly popular alternate SNSs factor into networked sociality.

As has been noted, Facebook is a significant social outlet for emerging adults who are entering into university – from easing the transition to assimilating into the new campus community to strengthening weak ties into lifelong friendships, Facebook's inherently social nature makes it significant for Internet-based social capital research. Additionally, with Facebook being a standard example of a “true” SNS, current research pertaining to SNS-based social capital – though based on Facebook – may easily be extrapolated to investigate alternate SNSs. The question of “what does this mean for social capital?” has already been

asked, answered, and exhausted, and the time has come to explore how social capital is different across these sites, especially when there is such variation in the types of SNSs that exist and are used alongside or instead of Facebook. As alternate SNSs gain momentum, the focus needs to shift towards what those sites mean for emerging adults and social capital, as well as inquire as to what motivates a shift away from Facebook in the first place.

3 Research Methods

The purpose of this chapter is to outline and explain what research methods were used in this study. Starting with the research questions and the thematic clusters that informed the study, this chapter also details the research design that pursues these research questions, the strategies used to recruit participants for semi-structured interviewing, sample and demographics of the study's participants, and finally, how data were coded and analyzed.

3.1 Research Questions and Thematic Clusters

As noted in chapter one (section 1.3), this study is guided by two core research questions. This study asks 1) how the selected population uses SNSs and if their uses and gratifications vary across differing platforms, and 2) how the use of alternate SNSs supplements, changes, or replaces the use of Facebook. These questions are used, both guided and informed by existing literature outlined in chapter two, to formulate and discuss the following thematic clusters. Though this study utilizes a grounded theory approach as described by Corbin and Strauss (2008), existing literature cannot be overlooked in the pursuit of this current research and certainly informs the approach of this study. As such, this research takes on a theory-informed grounded theory approach. Using a theory-informed grounded theory approach allows for previous research regarding similar questions or areas of focus to be taken into consideration when further probing similar or tangential interests, and can “provide insight, direction, and a useful list of initial concepts” to assist researchers within a given field (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 40).

The following section outlines thematic clusters identified from previous research, which informs this project and helps to not only structure the semi-structured interviewing guide utilized in the data collection portion of this study, but also informs the overall understanding of SNS usage by undergraduate students to this point. Finally, these thematic clusters were taken into consideration alongside suggested guidelines from Charmaz (2006) when coding the data collected during the interview process, though done so with the

understanding that openness to new ideas and learning from the data first and foremost was the top priority in this process.

3.1.1 Facebook Use Compared to Alternate SNS Use

Thematic Cluster 1: Emerging adults utilize multiple platforms based on their differing social needs/gratifications.

Thematic Cluster 2: Emerging adults use Facebook in the interest of maintaining, bridging, and bonding social capital. Scant research exists on how they use other SNSs for these purposes.

While the use of Facebook among emerging adults has been studied significantly, in both their implications for social capital and their uses and gratification, scant research has been conducted examining how this use compares to other SNSs. While some studies, such as Quan-Haase and Young (2010) consider Facebook use compared to IM use, and Lineberry (2012) compares the usages of different types of SNSs (i.e. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter), there is no such study that considers how the use of alternate SNSs may affect the overall use of Facebook. This seems especially pertinent because, as outlined in chapter one, there is constant buzz that Facebook is a sinking ship, and will soon go the way of its SNS predecessors (i.e. MySpace or Friendster). Some reports suggest that the increases on other SNSs are the result of dissatisfied teens slowly migrating away from Facebook. Madden et al. (2013) show that teens find problems among friends (i.e. “drama”), inane friend updates, and increased adult presence to be factors motivating them to decrease their Facebook usage or to migrate elsewhere for social networking. Teens also report feeling too much pressure to participate, negative social interactions, and feeling overwhelmed by friends who post too much as making their Facebook experience less enjoyable (Madden et al., 2013). However, as previously noted, taking interest in other sites does not indicate that teens are abandoning Facebook en masse.

The assertion in this study is that a perceived mass exodus from Facebook is not necessarily accurate, and though emerging adults are becoming more interested in the alternatives that are available to them, they have a fundamental attachment to Facebook because of its ubiquity that makes it very difficult to abandon altogether. Most teen and young adult users have significant social investments in the site, and it has become an important fixture in youth culture. The social circle amassed on Facebook is on average quite large, with 150-200 friends being the norm for college students (Ellison et al., 2007). In addition to having significant friend connections, Facebook also acts as an important means of communication for students to interact with friends both on and off campus (Lampe et al., 2006; Pempek et al., 2009). There is significant overlap between online and offline friends, but few friends made exclusively on the site but not known in real life, indicating that the use of the site is primarily for maintaining pre-existing friend connections. Igarashi et al. (2005), supporting this notion, note that undergraduate students utilize technology (in their study, mobile phone texting) to simply supplement face-to-face interaction.

However, just because Facebook is too big to get rid of does not mean that emerging adult users are not adopting alternate SNSs to satisfy diverse needs. Facebook has specific need gratifications that may be changing as other sites crop up that appear to satisfy these needs in a better or more efficient way. One such need may be that of photo-sharing and commenting, which is likely more appealing on Instagram than it is on Facebook, with the added benefit that Instagram is affiliated with Facebook (its parent company), so that shared photos can be accessed across platforms. This divvying up of needs across sites is noted by Madden (2013), wherein one teen girl in her study states: "I am basically dividing things up. Instagram is mostly for pictures. Twitter is mostly for just saying what you are thinking. Facebook is both of them combined so you have to give a little bit of each" (n.p.). It is assumed emerging adults will enlist the same strategy.

While Facebook's guiding principle is that of autobiographical, transparent sharing (Van Dijck, 2013), it is doubtful that emerging adults reveal everything personal about themselves, given the site's propensity as a sort of online public sphere. This lends itself to

“creepers” (i.e. casual social searchers), parents and very casual acquaintances being able to access information with ease, if an individual has not adjusted their privacy settings. As such, Facebook may be finding new use as a surface-level platform for interaction, where the majority of bridging social capital circulates, while alternate SNSs are useful in the interest of bonding social capital with other emerging adults.

Thematic Cluster 3: Emerging adults supplement their Facebook use with other social network sites, instead of abandoning it altogether.

This study asks if emerging adults will supplement, change, or replace their Facebook usage with alternate SNSs. As previously mentioned, Facebook’s saturation in youth culture makes it difficult to abandon altogether, and there is an expectation among peers that emerging adults will be on the site. However, as Quan-Haase and Young (2010) note, new social media platforms do not replace others, and instead become integrated in an overall “toolbox” of communication. Emerging adults’ use of the site may significantly decline, and they may take periodic breaks from it as noted by Madden (2013), but they still retain the site as a useful communication tool.

Thematic Cluster 4: Emerging adults feel ambivalent towards Facebook because of context collapse, but continue to be active on it for reasons of peer pressure or fear of missing out (FOMO).

Thematic Cluster 5: Emerging adults primarily adopt alternate SNSs because of peer pressure/influence or FOMO.

As both Madden et al. (2013) and boyd and Marwick (2011) point out among teen users of Facebook, the presence of parents on the site is of great annoyance to them. While both MySpace and Facebook were initially parent-free zones ideal for unrestricted

socialization and privacy away from prying parental eyes, the ever-increasing usage of Facebook by parents has presented a major roadblock for teen users. Demonstrable of this are the number of parent-aged adults who seem to be flocking to Facebook. Of online adults, 79% of those aged 30-49 and 60% of those aged 50-64 report using Facebook (Duggan and Smith, 2013); these numbers have been consistently increasing for a number of years now, as well.

Having previously had a digital space carved out specifically for them, where identity development and exploration could be carried out without a parent's influence or control, these spaces, seemingly overtaken by parents, push teens to find other places. It is assumed that this is similar for the not much older emerging adults as well, however not for dislike of parents, but for the need to explore independently what it means to be an adult away from home. As Arnett (2000) notes, the emerging adult years are a time in which young people learn to be public citizens without their parents' guidance, and is a time for new experiences – many of which may not fall under the approval of parents. Thus being able to explore the new landscape of adulthood without the intervention of a parent or guardian is crucial to emerging adults' self-formation. However, these emerging adult years are still mostly juvenile, and emerging adults still need the benefits of bonding social capital from their parents and the older adults in their lives. Thus Facebook is still relevant for them to have as it easily puts them into contact with these resources should they need them.

Furthermore, and as has been repeated here several times, emerging adults will also remain on Facebook not only because they have significant social capital tied up in it, making it difficult to abandon altogether, but they also do not want to miss out on the social benefits that it provides. For example, sites like Twitter and Instagram do not have a specific event-planning function, thus making it difficult to both plan and learn of social engagements outside of Facebook. One of the main gratifications of Facebook is its proclivity for providing social information in the interest of bridging social capital, and thus an emerging adult may choose to stay on the site so as to not miss a party, birthday, campus event, or other such social occasion. This is in addition to the detailed profiles that are required of

Facebook, which make it useful for collecting information on both close friends and acquaintances. As noted by Lampe et al. (2013), Facebook is a source of gossip-generation that may not be so easily collected on alternate SNSs, which often provide little text-based profile information. Though Twitter is used primarily for personal updates, and as such gossip could be received there, it may also be more difficult to access this information about casual acquaintances or old, out of contact friends. Twitter handles (@username), and likewise Instagram usernames, are not necessarily associated with an individual's real name, making it harder to track an individual down at random.

Finally, as Quan-Haase and Young (2010) identify, adoption of digital technologies follows social trends, with the increases and decreases in daily use of one media depending on the popularity of other media. Considering now that 79% of (U.S.) emerging adults are smartphone carriers, and the most frequent use of smartphones is for apps (Catalyst, 2014), it appears to make sense that social media platforms geared towards mobile use would increase in popularity. Given that Instagram was initially created as an application or “app” to be paired with mobile camera technology built into smartphones, and that Twitter's interface is optimized for mobile use (even its 140-character limit on tweets is predicated on the same character restriction for SMS on mobile phones), it should come as minimal surprise that these SNSs are increasing in popularity.

3.2 Research Design

Approaching emerging adults' motivations behind their SNS usage, which is the subject of both the abovementioned research questions, necessitated a qualitative method. A qualitative approach was ideal to capture emerging adults' motivations because, as suggested by Lampe et al. (2006), quantitative means may capture the beliefs and opinions without necessarily capturing individuals' motivations behind these behaviours. By speaking to individuals one on one, there was an opportunity to discuss in greater depth and detail the experiences and attitudes that each emerging adult participant had in regards to the SNSs that they use. A great wealth of research already exists that is primarily quantitative (or occasionally mixed-methods) – the emphasis, however, is largely based on what the numbers reveal. Though

quantitative data collection methods allow for greater measurement sophistication and of the findings' reliability, this is not the intention of this research; tastes in SNSs change rapidly and are reliant on the attitudes or opinions of their users rather than on quantifiable information.

While much is owed to quantitative studies, as they are immensely useful to this current study and other scholars within the field, there is little differentiation or variation in findings between studies relating to social capital and SNSs, or uses and gratifications and SNSs. Each study produces little new evidence or information, relying heavily on the same patterns of use without considering how new SNSs may influence or challenge these aging conclusions about SNS use for emerging adults. As such, a qualitative method was deemed best to probe this subject matter in a new and interesting way, revealing findings that may enhance this particular field of study, instead of just adding to the pile.

3.2.1 Interviews

In order to address the previously mentioned research questions, one-on-one semi-structured interviews took place with study participants using an interview guide based on previous quantitative studies regarding both social capital and SNSs, and UGT and SNSs (Ellison et al., 2007; Whiting and Williams, 2013).

Interviews were selected for data collection because, as noted by Bhattacharjee (2012), interviewing offers unique empirical advantages over other formats. In addition to being a useful tool for substantiating theory where there may not be any previously, interview research is useful for exploring hidden rationales behind social processes while simultaneously opening up new avenues of inquiry (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 105). Interviews for the selected population allowed for an understanding of the more nuanced motivations behind patterns of usage; the "sense-making" process of inductive interviewing allowed for patterns to emerge that can perhaps be applied to a more general population in future research. As previously mentioned, though quantitative research, such as surveys, can

capture the beliefs and opinions of participants, it cannot capture their individual reasoning for these behaviours (Lampe et al., 2006). A participant's report of his or her patterns of use and why these patterns of use are employed – as well as his or her opinion of various SNSs – were of interest here, and interviews were seen as the most useful method of data collection for this specific project.

The nature of the interviews was semi-structured; this selection was made for the flexibility and opportunities for deeper discussions that semi-structured interviewing provides, which also fit well with the goals of the study. Though open-ended, this type of interviewing still follows a general script and list of topics to discuss, allowing for the researcher to maintain control over the interview. As participants were only asked to partake in a single interview, it was important to use a method that would ensure that all topics would be succinctly covered while still maintaining a relaxed, freewheeling disposition, as it was felt that emerging adults would best respond to a casual atmosphere. Semi-structured interviewing offers this disposition, while also allowing for efficient use of time and plenty of interviewer control (Bernard, 2006); however, this method is also not so rigid as to disallow interesting tangents to be explored or to allow participants to elaborate on ideas that may not have been set forth by the interview guide, but are still of use to the study (Bernard, 2006). It was assumed that emerging adults would have a lot to say about their time on SNSs, and a method was needed that would encourage dialogue among shyer participants and reel in very talkative ones, and at the same time would also allow for participants to chat openly about various experiences, attitudes, and ideas that could not be anticipated about each individual's subjective interactions with SNSs.

3.3 Data Collection

The data for this study were collected via semi-structured interviews with participants recruited from The University of Western Ontario. As with all studies where there is direct interaction with human subjects, ethics approval was sought and obtained for this study (see Appendix A for Ethics Approval). Prior to their interview, participants were provided with proof of ethics approval, a letter of information outlining the purpose of the study and their

role within it, including the required eligibility for participation, their compensation, and their confidentiality. Finally, participants were presented with and asked to sign a consent form to acknowledge their informed consent and willingness to participate in the study.

3.3.1 Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited via two methods. The first of these two methods was via informational posters placed around The University of Western Ontario's main campus. These attractive posters were placed in areas heavily frequented by undergraduate students, and included details on the study, compensation, and eligibility (see Appendix B for Recruitment Poster). The second recruitment method was a convenience sample that directly recruited first- and second-year undergraduate students in their classes. With course instructors' and tutorial leaders' express permission in advance, recruitment was carried out in required first- and second-year courses within the Faculty of Information and Media Studies. However, because the courses solicited are open to students from other faculties, selecting these courses for recruitment did not necessarily mean that all participants would also be students from this faculty.

Research sign-up sheets (see Appendix C for Recruitment Sign-Up Form) were distributed in-class to each individual student with information about the study provided for them there, and the details of the study were also announced in class. Sign-up sheets requested students' names and university email addresses should they want to participate. All sheets handed out were collected in an effort to anonymize those who had elected to potentially participate. Emails were sent to those indicating their interest in participating to establish a date and time for an interview, along with a letter of information regarding the study. The rationale behind this method, instead of simply providing students with the recruiter's email address, was to identify those who were already interested and recruit them directly. Emailing potential participants, instead of having them initiate their interest, was seen as a more effective method of subject recruitment than other potential options. Given

the success of this method for Skues et al. (2012), this method was similarly utilized for this study.

3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviewing Technique

Eleven individuals participated in semi-structured interviews based on their attitudes and experiences with SNSs, with questions pertaining to social capital, UGT, and overall experiences with various sites asked of participants (see Appendix D for Interview Guide). This was, as previously mentioned, greatly informed by previous research conducted in this area.

Initial significant study correspondence with participants occurred via email, wherein interview scheduling occurred. Participants were given the option to be interviewed on-campus in a private interviewing room, or via telephone or Skype. Participants were given three different interviewing options to satisfy participants' potential safety/comfort concerns about meeting a (possibly) unknown individual face-to-face, and to satisfy any time, location or mobility constraints that would prevent a participant from being able to meet on campus.

Each interview took between 30 and 55 minutes to complete, depending on how much each participant wanted to say about their use of SNSs, and all interviews were ultimately conducted in a private interviewing room on The University of Western Ontario's campus to ensure confidentiality. Prior to the start of each interview, participants were asked to read the study's Letter of Information (see Appendix E for Letter of Information) to ensure that they were fully cognizant of the details of the study and agreed to be audio-recorded. Participants received a copy of this letter for their own records and future reference. If satisfied with the information provided and still willing to partake, participants were asked to read and sign a Consent Form to acknowledge their informed consent to participate in the study (see Appendix F for Consent Form).

Upon signing of the consent form and prior to the commencement of the interview, participants were provided with a \$5 Western Hospitality Services (the major food services provider for The University of Western Ontario) gift card in recognition and appreciation of their time commitment. After each interview, audio files were transcribed directly from the recording device, after which the audio files were deleted. Paper copies of participants' signed consent forms as well as printed and coded copies of interview transcriptions were kept in a locked cabinet for security reasons, while digital copies of interview transcriptions were kept as password-protected documents on the researcher's personal, password-protected computer.

3.4 Sampling Details

As stated above, eleven individuals were recruited to participate in this research. It is recognized that this is not a representative sample, nor was it intended to be. Non-probability sampling was chosen for this research, as it is not intended to be representative of a total population nor is it to provide hard "truths" of usage. The nature of this study is exploratory, and non-probability sampling allows for the exploration of specific populations to take place (Berg, 2007). Such specificities are not as easily ameliorated via probability sampling techniques (Berg, 2007).

More specifically, convenience sampling was used for multiple reasons. Convenience sampling is typical in university environments, given the large amount of individuals who may potentially be able to participate in a study. Berg (2007) notes that college and university professors commonly enlist their students as research subjects, simply for the fact that they are accessible. Similarly, as this study concerns emerging adults, carrying out data collection on campus allowed for convenient access to the target subject group for this study. Additionally, this method of sampling is fairly economical in both time and cost. Given that these constraints weigh heavily on the writing of a Master's thesis, all such matters were taken into consideration when selecting the appropriate sampling method. Convenience sampling was deemed to be the easiest and most efficient means, thus reflected in the recruitment methods as well.

Convenience sampling is not without its biases, though, and these biases were taken into consideration. Berg (2007) notes that, especially when using sampling from student populations, these individuals are simply not knowledgeable enough about certain phenomena or ideas to adequately offer any useful information to a researcher. Berg (2007) further warns that convenience sampling must be used very carefully, and must be “evaluated for appropriateness of fit for a given study” (p. 32). Taking these aspects into consideration, the subject matter of this study and subsequent selected population through which SNSs are being understood are well suited to this sampling method. While it may be true that an undergraduate student may not be able to provide greater insights into certain experiences, this population may be seen as the leading experts when it comes to providing information on SNSs, making them a highly appropriate fit. As Magee et al. (2014) find, teens and young adults use the Internet and technologies more than any other demographic group, are the leaders in SNS usage and generally dictate technology adoption through their selective usage of it. For Facebook usage alone, it is noteworthy that 84% of young adults aged 18-29 and 77% of teens aged 12-17 use the site (Duggan and Smith, 2013), and as mention elsewhere in this study, were the first to significantly utilize the site. This much is true for the other leading SNSs, as well, with the exception being LinkedIn (Duggan and Smith, 2013). However, given that LinkedIn is career- and professional networking-focused, it tends to be more attractive to older adults than emerging ones, who have yet to formulate solid career plans.

For this study, participants were students ranging in age from 18 to 20, three were in their first year of their undergraduate degree, and eight were in their second. In this sample, 10 identified themselves as female while one identified himself as male. All but one participant was a current member of Facebook, all but one participant was a current member of Twitter, and all participants were currently members of Instagram. Table 3-1 summarizes this information for each participant briefly, including the pseudonym provided to them, as participants’ actual names were omitted for privacy and confidentiality.

Table 3-1 Interview Participants Summary

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Year in University	Twitter/Facebook/Instagram	Usage
1 Chloe	19	Female	Second	Yes/Yes/Yes	High
2 Nathalie	20	Female	Second	Yes/Yes/Yes	High
3 Trista	19	Female	Second	Yes/Yes/Yes	Low
4 Jane	19	Female	Second	Yes/No/Yes	Low
5 Althea	19	Female	Second	No/Yes/Yes	High
6 Miranda	20	Female	Second	Yes/Yes/Yes	Mid
7 Amber	18	Female	First	Yes/Yes/Yes	High
8 Emily	18	Female	First	Yes/Yes/Yes	Mid
9 Bianca	19	Female	Second	Yes/Yes/Yes	High
10 Ramona	18	Female	First	Yes/Yes/Yes	Mid
11 Adam	20	Male	Second	Yes/Yes/Yes	High

3.5 Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Qualitative data was collected to answer the research questions and explore the hypotheses posed by this study, as outlined above in this chapter, via semi-structured interviews. Along with basic demographic questions, such as year of study and age, participants were asked questions regarding their communication methods, their use of SNSs, questions relating to social capital which were tied to questions relating to social interaction and experiences on SNSs, and perceived uses and gratifications of SNSs.

3.5.1 Social Capital and SNSs

Interview participants were asked guiding questions regarding their social capital offline, developed from previous research by Ellison et al. (2007). Participants were asked these questions to gauge the changes in their social lives that they may have experienced upon arrival to university. Participants were also asked guiding questions regarding their social capital on SNSs, developed from previous research from Ellison et al. (2007) regarding Facebook. Participants were asked these questions to gauge their level of social capital (bridging, bonding, maintaining) on various SNSs (see section one and section three of Appendix D – Interview Guide)

3.5.2 Uses and Gratifications of SNSs

Interview participants were asked guiding questions regarding their perceptions of the potential uses and gratifications of various SNSs, as they compare to Facebook. These questions were developed using previous research by Whiting and Williams (2013). Participants were asked these questions to explore the possible gratifications of alternate SNSs to compare alongside responses to questions regarding social capital. (see section four of Appendix D – Interview Guide)

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

Interviews were audio recorded with a digital audio recording device, and transcribed after each subsequent interview. Each previous interview was reviewed prior to the commencement of the next in order to explore new possible talking points, but interviews were not coded until all interviewing had been completed. Interviewing ceased once saturation in answers had been reached, multiple participants had given similar answers, and no new data was being collected. As this study explored the research questions using theory-informed grounded theory, appropriate codes were identified using a “bottom up” approach, in that thematic categories were developed naturally from within the data sets over the course

of the interviewing and coding process. Upon identification of overarching themes, it became easier to pull apart interviews, placing quotes in their appropriate categories in order to make sense of the data. As described by Schutt (2004), a grounded theory approach such as this allows for thematic categories to be refined and linked over the course of data collection, thus enabling theory to emerge from findings over time. Though full, line-by-line coding was not completed until after interviewing ceased, casual thematic codes were noted throughout the interview process and informed each subsequent interview.

Coding occurred as a two-part process, as outlined by Charmaz (2006). The first pass-through of the data examined participants' statements line-by-line, identifying loose coding categories and points of interest in each interview. The second coding pass-through considered coding across all interviews, with connections being made between each set of data, and more focused and selective coding taking place. This pass-through picked out the most frequent and substantive themes within each interview, grouping these together among the vast amount of data for analysis. As these frequent and substantive themes became apparent, significant memo writing on these ideas occurred. As described by Charmaz (2006), memo writing is a crucial step in the analytic process, keeping a researcher involved with their data and allowing for greater abstraction of ideas to take place. The hand-written memos that resulted were immensely helpful in piecing together the identified codes into coherent and cohesive analytic discussions, and were heavily drawn from for the following chapter.

3.7 Conclusion

As outlined above, a semi-structured interview instrument was used for data collection, and was used to discover how emerging adults make use of SNSs, especially in comparison to the use of Facebook. Described within this chapter are the thematic clusters that are notable from previous studies and inform this study, the overall research design including the semi-structured interviewing tool that was used, and how the data were ultimately analyzed, including the two-step coding process and subsequent memo writing that occurred in an

effort to pull the data apart. From here, the proceeding chapter describes and discusses the findings.

4 Study Results

This chapter details the findings from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with 11 first- and second-year undergraduate students about their use and attitudes towards various SNSs. The first section of this chapter provides details about the participants themselves, including their on-campus experiences, their social connections on-campus and back home, and their general SNS use information (i.e. which sites, how frequently, how many connections they have). Participants were asked these questions about their social lives offline because it was deemed necessary to get this general sense of their social experiences at university before any deeper discussion could occur about what their online social experiences are like as emerging adults. This first section also precedes the thematic categories that emerged through the analysis of the data, providing some background information to better inform those findings.

4.1 University Sociality and Experiences

The participants of the study represented a broad range of university experiences, and this diversity in experience clearly crossed over to their use and attitudes towards SNSs as well. The general finding from participants was that they are pleased with their experiences in university so far, with no participants reporting negative attitudes or experiences to date. The overall sense of community for participants varied slightly, largely due to their living situation. For the two participants who stated that they have not ever lived in residence, their overall sense of campus community was weaker in comparison to the other participants, while the remaining first year student expressed difficulty in getting to know her non-residence peers.

“I feel I would develop more friendships if I lived on campus but because I live off campus I feel like I have a harder time.” –Ramona

“I’m going to say very connected, I do see them a lot. I am in residence with a lot of my friends. I’ve been able to hang out with people, but those who don’t live in residence, it’s been a harder time.” –Amber

Participants that explicitly stated that they currently do or did at one point live in residence indicated stronger feelings of community, more weak tie friend connections, and overall had more friends of both the strong tie and weak tie distinctions. This ties in well with findings from Hargittai (2007), who notes that students who live off-campus tend to have a harder time adjusting to university life; not making an effort to integrate into campus if not living on the campus has the potential to limit bridging social capital formation, as students do not get to interact with a large and diverse group of other students. As such, the participants in this study who do or did live on campus for their first year spoke of having better connections and feeling more comfortable at university.

“I would say, because I lived on campus first year, I know a lot of faces and I know a lot of people.” –Althea

“I think both, because most of the closest friends that I have here are people that I lived with in first year in residence. When you live with people you know, you get to talk and know each other pretty well, better than you would know anyone else. I’d go to them to confide in stuff.” –Adam

“First year residence really helped me too, and because I lived on [my faculty’s floor in residence], I got to know everyone on the same floor as me and it really helped me because they’re all the people in my lectures.” –Bianca

University was so far a positive experience for all 11 participants, and they also all agreed that there are a lot of interesting events or opportunities to be involved with on campus, though only six of the 11 participants explicitly stated any involvement with clubs or organizations, or reported having been to an event recently. The number of new people met or acquaintances made at university so far for the participants had a diverse range, from as many as 500 to as few as 30. The average number of new connections made among this group of emerging adults was 170, though the number of new friends made was significantly lower than the number of connections made, with an average of 36 new friends. Participants all made a distinction between these general friendships and closer, more intimate friendships, of which they had fewer. The average number of close friends – that is, friends who the participant felt they could confide in about personal problems or seek advice from –

was just four. One participant felt that she has no close friends whatsoever at university, and that she would rather refer to friends from back home for advice. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this was also one of the first year participants, who at the time of her interview had only been attending classes for approximately four months, and was also not living in residence.

In general, participants made a distinction between who they are now as university students, and who they are back home, frequently aligning more with this “new identity” as a university student. Because they are in the same environment and experiencing the same lifestyles as their peers, participants felt strongly about their new communities. One participant summarized this succinctly, saying:

“I do have a lot of my close friends that I talk to almost every day, well maybe not every day but at least once a week. But even then, there are people who know me better here in the way that I am now, and they could help me better as I am now. The people from back home have an outdated model, or an outdated version of who I am. I feel a lot more comfortable talking to the people I’ve met at [school].” –Miranda

This seems intrinsically tied to the year of study for which a participant is in. All of the three first-year participants expressed a certain level of ambivalence towards the campus community and felt more closely aligned with their lives back home than with their lives and social connections at school. Two second-year participants provided some insight on this:

“I’d say second year, you develop more meaningful relationships because maybe you’re more comfortable with who you are and you’re more established at university. You know who you want to be friends with.” –Nathalie

“I would say I belong in [the] community in second year. In first year it was more kind of finding your place, and learning where you fit in but once I got more involved in second year then I sort of started to see my network form.” –Chloe

These two participants expressed stronger feelings of community, inclusion, and belonging now that they had one year of experience as a university student, and this confidence and comfort in the university setting was apparent among the other six second-year participants as well.

4.1.1 Facebook – General Findings

Facebook was by far the most popular site among study participants, and is where they have the most social connections. This aligns well with the most recent findings from the Pew Institute's *Social Media Update 2014* (Duggan et al., 2015). In that study, Duggan et al. (2015) find that while Facebook's growth has slowed, it is still the most popular among Internet users, with 71% of Internet users making use of the site. This represents no change between 2013 and 2014, although they do note that of Internet users aged 65 and above, 56% now use Facebook, up from 45% in 2013.

For participants in this study, there was again a diverse range in Facebook "friend" connections, with the most being 1200, and the fewest being 300. Participants all acknowledged that the number of friends that they had on Facebook was not representative of their actual number of friends, and that this number was actually much lower. For example, the participant who stated she has 1200 "friend" connections, Althea, acknowledged that only about 100 of these people are her actual friend. Similarly, Ramona stated that she has 300 "friend" connections, but that only about 20 are her actual friend.

On average, study participants also claimed to spend a majority of their Internet time on Facebook, though this also had a diverse range. While one participant claimed to spend well over five hours each day on the site, most participants provided a more conservative estimate of about one hour each day. With the exception of Jane, who does not currently use Facebook, each participant acknowledged that they use Facebook at least once per day.

Asking participants how they spent their time on Facebook was a natural segue from their discussions of the amount of time they spent. Participants all made reference to using Facebook during this time to maintain or build friendships – something that was lacking on the other two sites.

“Facebook is a huge communication deal and when you first meet someone, that’s the main stream for how you connect with them. A lot of the time it is party invites or I get a lot of information off of it or sharing what I’m doing about myself on it, and sharing photos and it’s a great way to connect to family that’s far away. It’s great for that.” –Chloe

“It’s just so easy to like something or to type a comment, or even add photos. They’ve made it so easy to do everything. I mean, just that it has a separate messaging app, they’ve kind of figured out how to get people to interact with each other. It’s easy.” –Nathalie

“There’s so much you can do on Facebook. I can post links, make posts, comment on things, directly message a friend or post on their wall – I just feel there’s more to do on Facebook. It’s easier to get in touch with people.” –Amber

Similarly, all but one participant described Facebook as being the best tool for communication with others, though whether they thought this communication was meaningful was not always clear. Finally, with the exception of two participants, it was generally agreed that Facebook is the best source for informal social searching or “creeping” on other people.

4.1.2 Twitter – General Findings

The level of use of Twitter varied among participants in the study, though 10 out of the 11 participants claimed to currently use the site. On Twitter, users have “followers” rather than “friends”, which is not necessarily a reciprocal relationship. The greatest number of followers for any participant on Twitter was approximately 300, with the fewest followers being 60. However, as with Facebook, the number of followers that a participant has does not represent the number of followers who are their actual friend. For example, while Bianca had the most followers at what she estimates to be 300, she only considered 10 of these people to be her actual friend, and acknowledged that most of her followers are strangers. Similarly, Jane had the fewest followers at what she estimated to be 60, but only considered five of these people

to be her actual friend, again acknowledging that the remaining followers are not people necessarily known to her.

The number of followers who are actual friends could be dependent on how the participant utilizes Twitter. For example, Adam, who had 300 Twitter followers and considered 200 of them to be his actual friend, made use of Twitter more extensively for social interaction than any other participant. Miranda had a similar situation, in which she had 90 followers and considered at least 50 of them to be her actual friends, and like Adam, used Twitter extensively for social interaction with her friends. The remainder of participants reported low or casual usage of Twitter. For example, participants did not report using Twitter daily, instead claiming to use it every few days or less. The six participants that did claim to use it every day did not spend much time on the site, averaging one hour or less per day. For example, whereas Bianca claimed to occasionally spend up to five hours a day on Facebook, she claimed to spend one hour or less on Twitter each day. A similar situation existed with Amber, who claimed to spend up to four hours on Facebook a day, but only checked Twitter weekly. Unlike Facebook, which requires more active engagement, Twitter can be utilized at a user's leisure and to satisfy their own social needs first.

“[I’ll check Twitter] twice a week, mostly if I want to see what’s up. Or if I know there’s something going on big in the world, I’ll check Twitter about it [...] I like to see what’s trending, you know? Through the hashtags; I like that.” –Amber

“I don’t really go on [Twitter] that much, but if something happens, I’ll want to go on Twitter and tweet about it.” –Bianca

Both of these participants touched on aspects of information seeking, which is what the majority of participants attributed as being Twitter's best function. Seeking general information about the world is a dominant use/gratification of the site, and was the only category that participants gave Twitter much credence in. These findings align with Java et al. (2007), wherein they find that Twitter is a useful tool for informal social connection and camaraderie, as well as information sharing and seeking, including world news and events. Two participants said that Twitter was the best site for wasting time, casual communication

and that it was the most convenient for them to use, but this was largely overshadowed in each category by Facebook, and to a certain extent, Instagram.

4.1.3 Instagram – General Findings

Participants were both positive and enthusiastic about Instagram, and frequently proclaimed to “love” the site/app without being able to articulate why they felt this way. All participants in the study used Instagram, with the greatest number of Instagram followers being 1300, and the fewest being 70. Among the participants with followers, the same trend continued that was noted with the other SNSs, in that there was a stark difference between the amount of followers a participant had and the number of followers that were their actual friends. Adam, who had the most followers on Instagram out of all the participants, with 1300, explained his popularity:

“I have 1300 followers, but that’s only because I got to a lot of auto shows in the U.S. with my family, and I post a lot of pictures of that. People go on there specifically to look for that kind of thing, using the hashtags. There’s probably only about 200 people that I actually know on there. The rest I have no clue who they are, they just follow me for the car photos.” –Adam

Participants generally devoted a great deal of time to their Instagram account, though it became quickly obvious that looking at others’ photos within the app and actually posting their own photographs to the app constituted entirely different conceptualizations of “use”. So while all participants acknowledged using Instagram at least once per day, with many participants reporting usage in excess of an hour each day, participants also noted that they infrequently post photographs themselves.

“I check [Instagram] daily, multiple times daily. But I don’t post nearly as often as I check it.” –Jane

“I love Instagram. I am very conscious when I do things on Instagram. I don’t post too often, because I don’t want to be annoying, but I am constantly scrolling through Instagram. If I’m not doing anything, I’m on Instagram.” –Amber

“I’m just always on Instagram, [but] I don’t take that many [photos]; considerably less than some people I know. If I’m doing something cool, if I’m at a concert, I’ll take 20 or 30 photos, but if it’s a regular day, I probably won’t take any.” –Nathalie

Returning to the significant affection that participants claimed to have for Instagram, this was further investigated. Of the 11 participants, six claimed that Instagram is the most convenient for them to use, citing its streamlined design intended for use on their iPhones. Furthermore, as all participants claimed to spend more time on their smartphones than their actual laptop or desktop computers when they use SNSs, it makes sense that Instagram is seen as the most convenient. Many participants made passing comments about the inconvenience of using Facebook on mobile, as the mobile site has not been completely optimized for viewing on a smartphone screen.

*“Instagram, it’s only for mobile and the pictures are the perfect size for my screen. Facebook mobile sucks, everything takes forever to load and it’s a hassle.”
–Ramona*

In addition to favouring Instagram for its convenience, some participants also noted its usefulness for wasting time. Overall, however, Facebook was consistently reported by participants to be the most useful and gratifying SNS.

4.2 Thematic Research Findings

This section outlines the thematic categories identified through the coding and subsequent analysis of the data collected. This portion was constructed significantly from the memo writing that took place through the latter half of the coding process, as described in the previous chapter. Though not described in any particular order, some findings overlap and inform other categories, and are elaborated upon in kind.

4.2.1 Passive Contact

What became increasingly obvious in the coding process was that participants did not utilize any one particular SNS to facilitate active and meaningful interaction and communication with their “friends”/followers. If participants wanted to reach out to their important contacts and have a meaningful or personal conversation, they claimed they would rather do so via text message, but there was an overall preference for face-to-face communication with these important contacts, when possible. Overall, the SNSs listed in this study appeared to operate on a casual basis, supplementing offline connections in a casual, impersonal, and non-invasive manner, and this applies to both strong tie and weak tie connections. There is a sense of passivity in the interaction that occurs across all three platforms, where active engagement is not necessarily a requirement for participants to feel as though they are maintaining relationships. Participants can simply observe what friends or acquaintances are doing in their lives, and feel that they are still “keeping up” with them, even though they have not made a concerted effort to engage with them one-on-one and discuss what is going on in their lives. By passively observing these individuals’ lives through the posts, photos, and other content that they generate across SNSs, participants are sufficiently informed of any interesting or useful social information about friends or acquaintances.

“For Facebook, I like to be able to keep track of people’s lives, not in a creepy way. I like to see what people are up to without having to actually talk to them.” –Ramona

“I don’t really talk to [some people] anymore; I see them on Facebook and I see their life through Facebook, but I don’t really talk to them anymore.” –Bianca

“I don’t really use Facebook for making my face-to-face relationships any better. I mean, I might, but I just don’t see it that way.” –Miranda

Observing the content that other users generate about themselves (i.e. wall posts, photographs posted, status updates) without actively engaging with it (i.e. “liking”, commenting, sharing/reposting) was not considered a “creepy” way of keeping up with others, nor was it considered “creeping” on them. Thus the importance of sharing becomes

clear with this casual gathering of information. Participants did not appear to have any issues with this method of social maintenance, where they just casually keep up with others instead of actively engaging with them. However, some participants did express or acknowledge a lack of true meaning or genuine social caring in this passive acquisition of knowledge. There is a trade-off that was tacitly acknowledged by participants, wherein though they realized that how they are keeping up with others does not actually constitute genuine and personal interaction, they still do benefit from this in their social life. They are able to maintain their existing connections without having to expend too much time or energy to feel that they are sufficiently maintaining relationships.

“[Facebook is] how I stay connected to other people, not necessarily in the most genuine way, but I think that it’s an amazing way to build your network and stay connected with people.” –Chloe

“Maybe it’s selfish in a way, I need to know what’s happening in [others’] lives. I have this friend whose life is falling apart, and it’s kind of like reality television. I want to know what’s happening to him.” –Ramona

Furthermore, some participants pointed out that they needed to perform to their “imagined audience” (boyd and Marwick, 2010) on SNSs, and that being away from a platform for any given amount of time did not necessarily mean that they are disconnected from others or from themselves, but that their perceived audience would be disadvantaged or disappointed over time by a lack of information to passively consume about them. The desire to see others needs to be reciprocated with being seen; information must flow in both directions to successfully utilize Facebook, as the purpose of the site is autobiographical sharing (Van Dijck, 2013). As such, participants felt that they have a personal obligation to keep others casually informed of their lives, while simultaneously casually consuming this information from others.

“If I’m not posting people will say like ‘oh I feel like I haven’t seen you in forever’, and so I don’t feel like I would feel disconnected, but I feel like people might feel disconnected from me.” –Ramona

Paradoxically, most participants expressed a disinterest in making posts but did express a strong desire to see posts from others; this was most apparent for Instagram. Participants referred frequently to the ease of simply scrolling through information on all three platforms, and simply absorbing the content that they would come across.

“I guess I just like seeing what my friends are doing instantly but in picture form [on Instagram] instead of them just talking about it.” –Trista

“I feel like I’m with them when I see everything that they post, and I feel connected to back home. Maybe that’s why I spend so much time on Instagram.” –Althea

Finally, here seems to be a sort of detachment between the information that exists about a person, and the individuals that it pertains to, such that while these “friend” connections are not inherently meaningful, they function as both a source of entertainment for others, as well as operate as a method of imagined social maintenance.

4.2.2 “Fakeness” in Online Spaces

Participants touched on the “fakeness” or self-idealization that is inherent in the information that others post about themselves online, as well as what they post about themselves. The majority of participants – eight out of the 11 – briefly touched on the curated or idealized version of self that is projected in online spaces, and is most significantly facilitated via SNSs. Most participants discussed this perceived “fakeness” negatively, and in relation to Instagram:

“I don’t know why but I spend hours on Instagram every day. And you know that it’s all fake; everyone looks like they’re so happy, and nobody is really that happy...people like to show off their lifestyles and show what that they’re having fun. They aren’t having that much fun, that’s what they want people to think.” –Althea

“I feel like [Instagram] is just so people will see the good side of you, they don’t know much about you, but like, they see how you look.” –Bianca

“I guess one thing that’s been stirring around lately is just how people’s lives can be so different on social media than in real life. I talk to my friends about it and they’re always like, oh, I know someone like that. Everyone knows someone like that.”

–Nathalie

“How people choose to represent themselves won’t be accurate all the time, but it’s interesting to see in their mind what they want to portray.” –Chloe

However, what is also interesting is that although participants reported seeing “fakeness” or misleading photographs via Instagram, they also reported stronger feelings of closeness to their friends and social connections because of the images that they post. Ultimately, participants acknowledged the presence of image management (see Goffman, 1959) or “fakeness” online as a basic aspect of SNS usage. Like “creeping”, which has become both an acceptable activity and an expected activity, participants have also come to expect “fakeness” in the same way, and even take this into consideration when “creeping” on others.

This self-idealization appeared to have very little bearing on online interactions, and though annoying for some participants, did not inhibit them from interacting online. This finding does not support work from Subrahmanyam et al. (2008), who find that college students are chiefly concerned with accurate self-representation online. In their study, they find that the online and offline self are co-constructed, and ensuring that these representations align and reflect one another in each sphere is important for building trust among college students. Whereas in their study they find that reliability in online self-representation fosters valuable Facebook “friendships” into real friendships as well, this does not appear to be the case for participants in this study. They have a tacit understanding that online and offline selves may differ significantly, but having an understanding of this appears to make it of little concern.

Despite the positive feelings of closeness generated via photographs, there was also a sense of anxiety that stemmed from posting photos or simply using SNSs in general, in that the exact right image needs to be “given off”, and likewise, that this sharing needs to be affirmed with “likes” or comments.

“If I were to post something about my friend’s birthday and she doesn’t really go on Instagram that much, so she doesn’t “like” the photo on Instagram. What’s the point in me posting the photo if she’s not going to “like” it?” –Bianca

“I don’t really add people to Facebook anymore, I don’t ever send out a friend request. I feel like there’s a really weird meaning attached to adding someone to Facebook now. There’s a social anxiety that’s attached to that.” –Miranda

“One of my friends left [Facebook] because it gave her anxiety. She didn’t like that she’d post a picture and she wouldn’t get enough likes or something; it gave her anxiety.” –Amber

“I think that it can create an insecurity in people because you come so anxious about your posts and you take at least five minutes to check over your post and make sure that it’s correct and that it’s cool. So I feel it’s a little toxic; a toxic environment for some.” –Jane

Participants need an audience to feel they are contributing in a meaningful way, even if the meaning behind their communication is non-existent or imagined. The reaffirmation of self is very important as it means acceptability of identity in a phase where the need to negotiate identity is very real, pertinent, and based on the checking and rechecking of self against the larger community.

4.2.3 Facebook – Attitudes and Usages

All of the participants in the study touched on the ubiquity of Facebook for their generation, with the overall tone being that a person who is “of their generation” should be on Facebook, not because it is trendy or cool, but rather because it has become a social norm and a standard of communication. Though not explicitly stated by all, the language used to describe Facebook even assumed total ubiquitous usage – participants would not refer to themselves or specifically state “Facebook users”, but rather constantly used group terminology – “we”, “us” and “everyone” – when discussing Facebook. The sense that most participants had was that it is actually strange or unrealistic for an individual to not be a Facebook user; it does not

make sense to not have an account on the site, simply because of the assumption that everyone has it. The same thing is noted by boyd and Marwick (2011), where they find that not only is there an expectation to be on Facebook, there seems to also be a requirement or social obligation to be on the site as well.

As stated, only one participant (Jane) was currently not using Facebook, though at one point she had been. Despite her non-use of the site, Jane still has frequent interaction with the site and also acknowledged the ubiquity of the site, and explained that though she does not have an account, she is often directed to celebrity or businesses' pages on Facebook. She can also conduct social searching or "creep" individuals who have public profiles on the site. The following is a small sample of some of the comments that participants made about the ubiquity of Facebook:

"Everyone is on Facebook all the time." –Amber

"I'm not proud to use Facebook but just, I use it. It's just something that everyone in our society does, so we can all just do it. It's not something to be ashamed of either, it's just a profile about you." –Bianca

"Facebook is pretty prominent nowadays so everyone is using it. Especially Facebook, because when you say social networking that's what everyone thinks about." –Adam

"I don't know how someone would live without Facebook." –Chloe

"If you don't have Facebook, what do you have, you know?" –Miranda

There is an assumed necessity for Facebook usage, as well as the assumption that most people have an account on the site and have for some time. This leads to the idea that Facebook is a long-term platform; participants understood Facebook as being a place where they archive a substantial history of themselves, as such anticipating long-term use of the site as well. Furthermore, because individuals in this study have such a long history with the platform – usually from as early as 12 years of age – they have amassed a significant "archive of self" that they do not wish to lose, especially the friend connections that they

have established there. So while participants may not necessarily enjoy their use of Facebook, they did not dislike it either – it simply is a fixture in their life that is easier to have than to not have. However, as already touched upon in the discussion of communicative passivity, these friend connections are not necessarily actual friends, but rather people that participants want to “keep up with” or “keep tabs on”. The assumed ubiquity makes it easy for their social searching behaviours to be justified, especially on Facebook, because of its all-encompassing autobiographical sharing components; as such, most participants reported using Facebook for “creeping” on others.

Participants did not anticipate Facebook’s demise any time soon, with most participants attributing this to its unique multipurpose utility, as it encompasses the features of both Instagram and Twitter. For example, some participants discussed the usefulness of the group chat function, group pages, and events tools on Facebook for enhancing their social experiences, while the chat/messenger function, wall posting, and plethora of other modes of communication on the site make it ideal for asynchronous, casual communication.

“I love Facebook, for a bunch of reasons actually. I like to plan events and all that, so I’ll make a Facebook event about a party. It’s easy to access and you know who’s getting that information. I like to post pictures on it, I like to post albums and all that. Adults now especially are using Facebook; a lot of my family. It’s easy to connect with them and keep up with them. My aunt just went on vacation, and I only know about it because she posted it on Facebook.” –Adam

“Instagram and Twitter are limited in the ways that you can communicate with other people whereas Facebook has the same aspect of Twitter, the same aspect of Instagram, but you also have messenger. So it’s just all really all-encompassing.” –Trista

Participants reported that the other platforms discussed in this study did not offer these same useful communicative functions, though they did tend to see their use fragmenting onto these sites. For example, status posting is a mainstay of Facebook usage, but participants found that this is more appropriate to do now on Twitter, which as a platform is geared towards short, personal updates much like a Facebook status. The same fragmentation exists between Instagram and Facebook; some participants reported having once enjoyed posting their

photos to Facebook, but now do so more on Instagram because that is what it is explicitly meant for. This fragmentation or divvying up of uses across platforms is similarly noted by Madden (2013), where she finds that “Instagram is mostly for pictures. Twitter is mostly for just saying what you are thinking. Facebook is both of them combined so you have to give a little bit of each” (n.p.).

“I think Twitter has maybe taken the place of like a Facebook status; maybe I wouldn’t post a Facebook status anymore. I will tweet whatever is on my mind. And Instagram is obviously where I post pictures and stuff.” –Nathalie

“If you post something on Twitter, it’s what a status update used to be. Facebook status now, if you’re going to post something small and dumb and random? It’s not really that important.” –Miranda

“You can update your status on Facebook, but nobody really does that anymore. I guess maybe that’s why they resort to Twitter. I think it’s weird when someone posts a status to Facebook.” –Bianca

Ultimately, though, participants did not perceive a current better alternative to Facebook; no other SNS offers the same multi-layer functionality, meaning that its use is almost a requirement, or is at least perceived as such by participants. The attitude towards this varied, with some participants begrudgingly or reluctantly continuing to use the site out of perceived necessity. Participants were divided on this, with six of the 11 lacking this reluctance or distaste for Facebook; generally, they felt that using Facebook (and social media, in general) positively affects their lives or makes them feel somehow better or more fulfilled.

“I love social media. The older crowd, maybe they didn’t like it...I find social media is a great way to communicate, and especially because people are so busy. I like it. I use it; I’ll always use it. It’s going to change, but it’s always going to be there, and I’m always going to love it.” –Adam

“I like social media. I think it makes my life better.” –Emily

“About three times a day I’ll sit down and think ‘do I really need all of this crap’. And then I’ll realize that yep, I really do, and then I get a little jaded, a little upset and then I go eat some chips and then I feel better.” –Miranda

As stated, all participants touched on the ubiquity of Facebook, and similarly extended this perception to explain a shift in social norms or expectations. Many participants suggested that having Facebook is simply “how things are now”, with statements being made about how social norms have adjusted to reflect the needs/usages of Facebook use, or statements being made about the need for SNSs – Facebook, in particular – just being a natural progression of sociality and communication. This might also explain why participants did not seem particularly bothered by the “fakeness” or self-idealization of others that they frequently encounter on SNSs – and also potentially partake in themselves – as this falls under the same attitude that guides Facebook’s acceptance: *this is just how things are now*.

Similarly, participants were not fazed when asked about their social searching or “creeping” habits across platforms, many making comments about the acceptability of “creeping” now.

“Once you add [someone] to Facebook you can “creep” their profile, and see what they’re all about because you probably don’t know what they’re all about.” –Chloe

“Oh yeah, everyone creeps. They can say that they don’t but they’re lying.” –Althea

“[On Facebook], you’re finding out very personal information that you wouldn’t find out in just a normal conversation. [Things] that wouldn’t come up, so I think you find very personal details on someone’s Facebook, that they tacitly sign off on by putting on Facebook.” –Miranda

“I enjoy ‘creeping’. I think it’s interesting, and if you see a person and you think you know them – you think ‘oh, I get them’, but then you look them up and you see that they are [something else].” –Emily

Social searching is significantly stymied, though, when participants’ social contacts are not all on SNSs. Half of participants expressed disdain for these non-users of Facebook, and eight of the 11 participants reported knowing someone who was not currently on Facebook, which was significantly more inconvenient for them than if social contacts were not on Twitter or Instagram. Participants reported that it is not impossible to get in contact with non-users if absolutely necessary, but it is incredibly inconvenient for them. This inconvenience

largely related to event planning, where one or two individuals may miss out on an invitation because they are not on Facebook. It is more convenient to contact individuals who are on Facebook; this is also true of class or school group projects.

“I use Facebook for group projects and whatnot. You never give people your number; you just find them on Facebook. Honestly, I use it more for university now, I used to use it for entertainment, but not really anymore.” –Althea

“Here at university now, there’s a group for everything, everyone posts there about housing to rent and selling textbooks. There’s groups for classes and for study help.” –Adam

Participants heralded Facebook because it allows them to very easily connect to the people within their various social spheres. Not all their contacts are on the site, though, and this is at times annoying, especially when planning an event or working with other students on course projects. Email and texting is not as convenient or casual, which is paradoxical as the majority of participants reported using their phone the most when accessing SNSs; furthermore, all undergraduate students are supplied with a university email address and have access to a student directory to contact all their classmates, but still do not favour this method. Participants had a marked dislike for “going out of their way” to contact a person via text message or email; the preference in these situations was always Facebook.

“One of my classmates left Facebook. It was hard, because we were in a group project with him, and we had to text him about everything. I had to type something up, but he had the notes. I had to text him and then let everyone in our group chat [on Facebook] know what he said. It was very inconvenient.” –Bianca

“I have one friend in our group and she doesn’t have Facebook, and it’s bad if we don’t tell her what we’re doing, and we always have to be like ‘oh, did someone tell her’. It’s not as if we don’t want her there, because we do, but if the plans change or stuff like that it’s harder because we have to remember to text her or call her.” –Emily

“I had a friend that doesn’t have Facebook, and whenever we plan that we’re going to go out, we make a page or an event for what we are doing, and he never sees it. It’s hard because you can’t always reach him on his phone either.” –Althea

Raynes-Goldie (2010) finds similar attitudes towards Facebook non-use, where there is a marked inconvenience of getting in contact with non-users. In her study, Raynes-Goldie (2010) asserts that Facebook is slowly replacing email or telephone as the default method of communication, and as such, non-use has significant social costs associated with it.

4.2.4 Twitter – Attitudes and Usages

The usages and perceptions of Twitter varied substantially, with some participants using it as a social tool, some using it as an informational or entertainment tool, and some using it as a little bit of both. Twitter was a slow adoption whose full use potential did not necessarily materialize until users had been members of the site for some time; a few participants specifically spoke of a lack of knowledge about how to use and for what purpose Twitter exists; this confusion was initially a barrier from full utilization.

“When I was in grade 11, I guess Twitter became pretty big. And then I was like, oh, who really needs Twitter? You only need Twitter if you’re like a big celebrity or a public figure because who cares about what you say? At least that’s what I thought, and it took me a couple of years but eventually I was like, oh, it seems like a cool way to learn about what’s going on in the world and what my favourite celebrities are doing.” –Nathalie

“Twitter at first I didn’t know how to use it, and I was like ‘this is stupid, why would I use this’. But then I got the hang of it, and I found it more entertaining for me.” –Bianca

“I was 15 [when I got Twitter]. I only got it because I wanted to follow some authors and see their tour dates. I didn’t really understand how to use it at first.” –Ramona

The general perceptions of Twitter are clear – no participants used Twitter as a central means for communication with friends, though some did make use of it for casual or sporadic communication with friends. Put simply, the platform does not allow for such communication to occur, because that is not its intended purpose. Twitter stresses sharing ideas, and in particular, promotes itself as a useful tool for businesses and media companies

to disseminate information and build their brand. The prime target of the site is not individual story telling, as it is on Facebook, but instead seeks to promote visibility and dialogue. Though there is a direct tweeting function, participants did not typically make use of this function – if they want to have a conversation, they will do so either on Facebook or via text message, particularly because a greater portion of their friend connections are on Facebook than they are on Twitter. Participants perceived that Twitter is likely not that popular with their friends nor with the general university population, and that most people only post “stupid things” such as what they are eating, and that such posts are both annoying and unnecessary.

“There are so many tweets that just have no meaning. Like, oh, just had a piece of cake. Oh, just woke up. People use it to get attention.” –Ramona

Participants inferred that Twitter should be used for meaningful discourse because it is perceived as a public space, and participants mainly utilize the site to follow news sources or to stay “in the know” about what is going on in the world, or about their favourite celebrities and public figures. The benefit of Twitter is its concision for many participants, as well as its timeliness – events and news happen in the moment and so it can be used to discover things very quickly, for on-campus news and events as well as “bigger world” news items. However, participants did not find Twitter to be a good source for meaningful social interaction, casual social interaction, or event planning among their peers. Furthermore, its utility for bridging social capital is limited because they cannot “keep up” with life events and obtain other casual information from this platform in the same way that they can on Facebook. Participants also saw limitations in its relevance for “creeping” on others, with certain barriers being in place, such as usernames not aligning with actual names, and private accounts locking people out altogether. Gruzdt et al. (2011) note this asymmetry in “friending” or following as well, as this relationship that is formed on Twitter does not have to be reciprocal as it does on Facebook. This can create significant barriers, especially with private profiles that participants are not able to view unless the owner of the profile accepts them as a follower.

*“For Twitter, it’s harder to find [a] person because they might have another name.”
–Althea*

“Facebook makes it easy to find people because your name is just whatever it actually is usually, but on Twitter it’s a bit harder to find someone because your name can be whatever you want it to be...there is no real way of finding [specific people] on Twitter. I mean, I’ve done it, but it’s not the easiest thing to do.” –Adam

When participants do have access to others through Twitter to “creep” them, they reported that Twitter is useful to see how someone thinks, what they are like intellectually, or how they are doing emotionally. The general consensus among participants was that Twitter is a place for sharing intelligent thoughts, newsworthy posts, funny/clever quips or observations, and important or entertaining anecdotes from one’s day.

“I would say that [Twitter] is kind of like looking into someone’s brain sometimes. Some people will post what they’re thinking; it’s more intimate way to look into their brain.” –Nathalie

“[With Twitter], you can see what’s going on in their heads.” –Althea

Though there is a plentitude of mundane posting that occurs on Twitter, the site offers an ephemeral advantage, in that posts will quickly slip to the bottom of the newsfeed, often without people seeing or needing to respond to it. This is unlike Facebook, which recycles popular posts and continually exposes users to information or posts that might be of interest to them with their proprietary EdgeRank algorithm. Twitter is linear – things disappear and if a post is not important or is not specifically looked for, then it does not necessarily get exposure. This is at times advantageous.

*“On Twitter, I’ll post at least three or four times a day, and I don’t really have anything to say, but I think I do. So I just post stuff, and it falls into the wind, what’s posted. On Twitter, it’s just whatever. It can disappear; nobody really has to see it.”
–Miranda*

“Twitter is just you, and people don’t even see it or respond to it.” –Jane

Participants infrequently used Twitter, as noted above in the general discussion of the site. However, infrequency of usage is not an issue for Twitter users, and there is little to no fear of missing out as a result of prolonged absence from the site. For example, on Facebook, extended non-usage may result in missing out on messages, pictures, important posts, announcements and so on, whereas on Twitter there is little “waiting” for a user to respond. Though Twitter has a direct messaging function, participants express either disinterest or disdain for this feature, and do not typically make use of it. Furthermore, Twitter is easily accessible and passively absorbable on participants’ phones, in the same manner as Instagram, and thus may be used very passively to waste time between classes or while waiting on a bus. This aligns well with previous research from Papacharissi and Rubin (2000), where time spent on the Internet is in part devoted simply to wasting or passing time, and from Whiting and Williams (2013), wherein they find that 76% of their participants used social media when they were bored or to waste time; for example, their participants reported using social media to occupy time between classes. This is similar to the findings in this current study, and this use of SNSs by participants was apparent in their discussions of all three of these platforms.

Most participants felt in the know by using Twitter, due in large part to the news sources that they follow on the site. However, as stated, social contact is very low, very casual, and asynchronous. Those who did use it for social contact found that its use is supplementary, having the same friend connections on other platforms as well.

4.2.5 Instagram – Attitudes and Usages

Participants express a great deal of appreciation for Instagram, with many participants claiming to “love” it. Participants were not able to articulate why they love Instagram, only that they do. Most participants were still quite new to this SNS, having only joined in the last two or three years, but generally spend a great deal of time on it. Participants described their use of Instagram as enjoyable, easy, and not involving much thought. Interestingly, all

participants made the same hand gestures when referring to the ease of “just scrolling” through the pictures on Instagram, moving their hand in a quick, fluid wave mimicking the sliding up of a screen.

*“That’s why I like Instagram; if I’m waiting for the bus I can scroll through it.”
–Nathalie*

“I think the general, us not liking to look at text anymore thing; we want something fast and we want to get through it. Photos are easy, you can just scroll through and look at them.” –Jane

*“Instagram, it’s so easy; you just have to scroll through the pictures. With Facebook, there’s so much going on. On Instagram, it’s just pictures. You just absorb it.”
–Althea*

Perhaps the enjoyment of Instagram stems from the fact that it is optimized for mobile devices. Again, all participants reported using their iPhone or smartphone as the main point for accessing SNSs, as they are often “on the go” as university students and do not have the same, short opportunities to use their laptops (i.e. waiting for a bus, travelling between classes). Interestingly, all of the participants in the study made the connection that signing up for Instagram (and Twitter) coincided with them purchasing or receiving an iPhone. Given that Instagram is optimized for use with iPhones, this finding is not surprising; what is interesting, though, is that participants did not make this connection until it was pointed out to them.

As discussed above, many participants picked up on the image management tactics that are an inherent aspect of SNS use, and found these tactics to be employed most frequently in the photos on Instagram. However, participants also expressed two very distinct benefits of Instagram use. First, all participants expressed a sense of visual or aesthetic pleasure from utilizing Instagram, referring to its artistic utility and facilitation of self-expression. Participants made use of Instagram when they want to create something or feel artistic; they associated Instagram with art, and that Instagram was a place for “nice pictures” above all else. They also noted that they derive visual pleasure from seeing what others are

doing, and connect this visibility to a stronger sense of closeness with their friends. This was especially true of friends who are farther away or friends that they do not have an opportunity for frequent face-to-face contact with.

“It’s a great way to stay in touch though for me with the people [back home]. I feel like I’m with them when I see everything that they post, and I feel connected to back home.” –Althea

“I feel like Instagram is so personal; people can look on there and see who your best friends are and what you’re about, what you really like doing, and what the highlights are of your life.” –Bianca

“Instagram is pretty personal; you see them in their house, you’re there with them in their pictures. One of my friends went through cancer, and going through her photos of that? That was pretty personal. I felt like I went through it with her.” –Emily

Though they found Instagram to be quite personal, participants did not find Instagram particularly well suited to synchronous, meaningful communication, and often referred to the public nature of the comments and likes on photos. Many made reference to a new feature on Instagram that allows for direct messaging, but few participants knew the full details of this feature, and did not show interest in using it.

“I know you can direct message now [on Instagram], but that’s stupid. Why would you do that?” –Bianca

“I know [Instagram] has direct messaging now, but I’ve never used it and probably wouldn’t. Especially for something personal.” –Adam

Finally, while almost all participants perceived Instagram to be the most popular, they also hesitated to put its popularity on par with Facebook. Furthermore, though Instagram is increasingly popular, no participants estimated that it will eventually overshadow Facebook.

4.2.6 Context Collapse and Control on SNSs

As Davis and Jurgenson (2014) succinctly define, context collapse “refers to how people, information, and norms from one context seep into the bounds of another” (p. 477). For emerging adults, navigating their new social roles and social spheres can be a challenge, and all participants touched upon aspects of context collapse, especially on Facebook. In most cases this did not relate specifically to parental influence or exposure on the site, which is an issue that boyd and Marwick (2011) find to be of concern for their teenaged interviewees. The concern for participants was rather about the access that potential employers might have to their information, including what they have posted to each of their SNS accounts. Participants frequently expressed worry or concern over how their SNS information might affect job hunting:

“I feel like people will have public Twitter public Instagram because there’s this worry like, what will employers think if they see what I’m doing? Their Facebook might be worse?” –Chloe

“There’s that whole ‘future employers will see this’ thing attached to everything that we do now, so that always holds me back. I’ve also changed my mentality that not everyone needs to be a part of all the fun things that I do, not everyone needs to know that I’m going out to a bar and having a really good time with my friends.” –Miranda

“I just like Twitter to vent on it for myself, so I did think about deleting it at one point, but I also worry about when I think about jobs. Sometimes I’m swearing on it, and I think about what if my boss saw this – or, you know, my potential boss. So that wouldn’t be a good look.” –Bianca

“At first a lot of people put a lot of their personal information on Facebook, but now that people are aware of it and people my age want cleaner reputations because when they apply for jobs, that can be a problem.” –Ramona

While some participants did express concern for their parents being on SNSs, this concern was marginal. Most participants noted an overall change to Facebook as a result of parents and extended family coming onto the site, and were not perturbed by this fact though they

did not claim to use Facebook to talk with their parents; this was largely due to their parents' non-use of the site or lack of skill/ability to use the site. For speaking to their parents, all participants reported that they would rather call or use Skype or Apple's FaceTime to be in contact with them. Some participants also text their parents, and frequently text their siblings, though only three participants spoke about using Facebook as a means of casual communication with their siblings.

In general, participants expressed a need for professionalism and to project intellect or intelligence through the SNS accounts that they maintain as publicly accessible and which may be accessed by peers or potential employers. This perhaps shows a marked change in attitudes towards how these sites are to be utilized between high school and university. Participants all made comments regarding their need and desire to be "adult" or to be professional, and this image is carefully curated on their public SNS profiles. This was most common for Facebook and Twitter identities, whereas Instagram – possibly because it is still novel and image-based – did not appear to be of concern in the work of professional identity construction. Furthermore, there was still a sense of privacy on Instagram for participants, as parents are not yet utilizing the site.

"I've heard one friend tell me that she'll post a bunch of whatever she doesn't want her family to see on Instagram because her parents don't have Instagram but they do have Facebook. So that also changes things a lot." –Chloe

"I don't even like Facebook anymore, all of your parents are there. Everyone is there. It's just too exposed. You don't get that private, you know, that privacy. For example on Instagram, my account is private. If someone wants to follow me, I can agree to let them." –Althea

Though this research is not about privacy nor did it set out to explore aspects of privacy on SNSs, this was a recurring issue that participants talked about – and not just in relation to context collapse and what their parents or future employers might see. Participants expressed a need for privacy, but paradoxically also lamented individuals who maintain private accounts, as this limits or inhibits participants' ability to perform social searching tactics or to "creep" them.

“On Instagram sometimes the accounts are private, and then that’s weird because you can’t see people unless you add them as a friend; the privacy settings make it harder [to ‘creep’].” –Althea

“Facebook is usually more open, people don’t understand their privacy settings. And Instagram could be pretty good [for ‘creeping’], but usually people have the lock thingy on.” –Trista

“Instagram is pretty good for ‘creeping’, but most people usually block their accounts so you can’t see anything. But Facebook has so much; you can look so far back. But if people unblocked their Instagram, you could find out a lot there, too.” –Bianca

Finally, users expressed a need and appreciation for control. This encompassed both being able to control who is following them and whom they follow, especially in reference to Twitter. Participants claimed to like the ability to filter out the “junk” that they do not want to see, which they encounter frequently on Facebook.

“On Facebook and stuff I see a lot of stuff that I don’t really want to see; it’s just junk. But on Twitter it’s all stuff that I want, and I follow a lot of celebrities and stuff.” –Emily

“With Twitter, everything is streaming right in front of you. You can pick and choose what’s relevant for you. On Facebook you can stop on a picture, take a look at it, and then realize that it has zero meaning for you. On Twitter you don’t find the junk.” –Miranda

By having the ability to control the content that they are exposed to, participants had better attitudes towards Twitter, which also provided a great contrast to how they feel about Facebook. Participants’ indifference to Facebook as a platform was also clearly communicated in how they spoke about the content they saw on Facebook, which again had very little meaning to them, though they passively consumed it regardless.

4.2.7 Text Messaging, Meaning, and Critical Distance/Awareness

Though participants in the study all made significant use of SNS for social need fulfillment, particularly in an informal manner, the most pervasive means of all types of contact was consistently stated to be text messaging. This mode of communication was listed as the most common way to stay in touch with close friends and family, and also with less close friends and occasionally acquaintances as well. Some participants made explicit that no SNS is ideal for meaningful communication, and where face-to-face interaction is not possible, texting can provide a similar or supplementary communicative experience. However, some participants also pointed out the casual nature of texting, and that in addition to using it for the maintenance of close relationships, it may also be utilized as a fun and asynchronous conversation tool with others. Texting did not necessarily get a privileged status as a communicative form, but while it has the same utility as Facebook, it was generally seen as better or more genuine than Facebook.

Communication over Facebook was generally viewed as inauthentic or insincere, and most participants invoked some form of critical awareness or critically distanced themselves from the site and its stigmatized usages or reputation. This is paradoxical, as 10 were active users of Facebook. Participants understood very well the negative associations with the SNSs that they use, and for Facebook in particular, they acknowledged that use of the site for communication is not necessarily the best or most meaningful way to contact others. However, Facebook's ease of use and ubiquity justified its usage for all types of communication. Participants still critically distanced themselves from how "others" use the site, downplayed how much they used or liked to it, or would self-deprecate and embrace the perceived frivolity of the site, claiming to be addicted to it. There was some need to justify the use of SNSs, in spite of the fact that participants perceived most people to use them.

"I kind of don't really want to be addicted to social media. I do feel like I missed out [if I don't use SNSs], but I also feel better about myself that I don't need to be on these sites." –Nathalie

“I feel like there’s a personification of social media that I’m not wanting to lend myself to. I don’t want it to have that power over me. I’m never like ‘oh my god, 50 likes, this is an accomplishment’. Let it be what it is.” –Miranda

“I would like to think that I’m using it less but that’s not really true. I’d like to think I have better things going on.” –Trista

“Instagram, it’s the number one. I spend hours there a day; it’s addictive. It’s cool because you can just see their styles and stuff. It’s such a waste of time, obviously.” –Althea

This observation aligns with new perceptions of third-person effect as described by Debatin et al. (2009). While traditionally third-person effect is typically associated with mass media effects, wherein the assumption of individuals is that mass media has a greater effect on others than on themselves, Debatin et al. (2009) update this definition to also include the use of Facebook. In their study, they marry third-person effect with UGT, describing a certain “economy of effect perception” – negative effects of Facebook are ascribed to others, while positive effects are ascribed to oneself (p. 89). The critical distancing or downplaying of usage that participants enacted in their discussions of SNSs – particularly Facebook – is thematically similar to this new conceptualization of third-person effect. While others are “in too deep” when it comes to SNSs, participants all had the attitude that their own use was not a big deal and that they were not reliant on the site or they were somehow doing better than other users because they knew that Facebook was insincere. Regardless, participants still frequently make use of the site for their social needs, and many spent time on SNSs far above the average time spent as discovered by other studies and outlined in the literature review of this study (see section 2.1.1)

4.3 Summary

This chapter provides insight into how and why participants are using SNS, and how these uses are interrelated across various platforms. Furthermore, it elaborates on some of the attitudes that are associated with these three dominant platforms, including the extent to which they may be used for social connection in various types of relationships.

The results of the study are somewhat ambivalent in regards to the exact attitudes towards use of SNS to facilitate meaningful contact with strong-tie connections. While participants in this study recognized insincerity in their communication via SNS platforms, this does not discourage or prevent them from utilizing them. However, the vast majority of participants indicated casual communication with weak tie relationships, with passive contact sufficient to maintain feelings of connectedness. Across the three platforms, participants only indicated strong utility for communication within Facebook, with many participants acknowledging that the other platforms in this study are not ideal for communication whatsoever, though casual, informal communication is possible on both Instagram and Twitter. Again, these SNS platforms are generally not ideal for communication anyways, as they are both geared towards either image-based or short message-based communication.

Not surprisingly, this study finds that Facebook is the most popular, most frequently, or most widely used SNS platform among participants, such that not only is there a perceived ubiquity of the site, but also a perceived necessity as well. Much discussion of SNSs revolves around the use of Facebook, as this appears to be the standard measure for SNS use; commentary regarding the other SNSs in this study was always in relation to Facebook as well. For example, many participants discussed their use of Instagram as having been a gradual progression from their posting of pictures on Facebook, though because they are owned by the same parent company participants often use Instagram and Facebook in tandem. The pressure to “need” to be on Facebook does not yet exist for Instagram or Twitter, though almost all participants made use of all three. Additionally, all participants acknowledged that the connections they have on Twitter and Instagram (i.e. their followers and the people they follow) usually stem from the Facebook “friends” that they have; if they have Facebook “friends” who are on either of these other two sites, they typically will connect with them on these sites as well. This was especially true of Facebook “friends” who are actual friends in real life.

Finally, the results of this study suggest that attitudes towards all three sites are reflective of a perceived progress of communication, wherein social norms/standards are also

adjusting to reflect the use of SNS – or Facebook, in particular. Almost all participants refer to the use of SNSs as being “just how it is” now, with social norms – such as “creeping” – being an acceptable activity to carry out online. This also normalizes many negative aspects of SNS use, such as informational deception and “fakeness”, or flippant/mundane commentary and insincere communication, such that though they are not considered acceptable, they are accepted nonetheless.

5 Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the key results as outlined in chapter four, providing further discussion of the implications of these findings, highlighting the contributions this study makes to the current body of work regarding SNSs and emerging adults, and relating these findings back to the research questions initially posed at the outset of this project. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this study, as well as the opportunities for further investigation that have arisen as a result of this research.

5.1 Findings Discussion

At the onset of this project, it became very quickly apparent that there is a considerable gap in knowledge surrounding alternate SNSs. Previous literature regarding Facebook is both abundant and exhaustive, while research on Twitter – and to an even lesser degree, Instagram – is both sparse, and situated in very specific fields of interest. There is little investigation on how alternate SNSs and Facebook are used both separately, and in tandem, to create a fuller social networking experience. The literature that does exist in regards to cross-platform or multi-platform social networking can be succinctly described as a sort of “social toolbox”; each site has its own unique value and use among the others, making it individually attractive among other sites. This “social toolbox” understanding of multi-platform SNS usage is what is ultimately deduced from this study, though there is much room for further future investigation. These findings will be discussed to shed some light on both the successes and room for growth that this study uncovered.

5.1.1 Research Question 1 – Discussion

The first of the research questions for this study asked not only how emerging adults use each of the three SNS included in this study, but also if utilization differed across platforms. This study focused primarily on the influence of social capital – bonding, bridging, and maintained – and expands current inquiries of social capital by considering the uses and

gratifications of the identified alternate SNSs in comparison to Facebook. It was assumed that investigating uses and gratifications surrounding social capital would reveal differing usage patterns for emerging adults across these SNSs. Through this study it has become clear that utilization does differ across these platforms, and that this is influenced in part by social capital.

The attitude of participants in this study was that Facebook is their SNS “home base”, and they make use of the site for all of their basic networking needs. The use of Instagram and Twitter fragments away from this, though, and into specialized, more “me-centric” use. Relating to social capital, while Facebook is great for participants for bonding, bridging and maintained social capital, these other two sites are used more in the interest of maintained social capital, and occasionally bridging social capital. These alternate SNSs’ platforms are not designed in the interest of bonding social capital, and so it is not surprising that participants did not find great use for these sites for this purpose.

For Facebook, the existing literature is clear on this, and the present study only further supports these previous findings. Emerging adults do primarily make use of Facebook for bridging social capital, particularly because of the ubiquity of the site. Very few participants claimed to know anyone who was not on the site, and of those who did, this lack of membership was often an obstacle in the casual social surveillance associated with bridging social capital online.

Participants felt that not only is everyone already on Facebook, but also that they *should* be on Facebook. Despite this, though, there is a bit of ambivalence towards Facebook and this appears to impact how participants make use of the site. No participant was excited or outwardly enthusiastic about using Facebook – it is as if the novelty of Facebook has completely worn off, with its use as a means of communication eliciting excitement equivalent to the use of a rotary telephone. As noted, some participants were even reluctant or resistant to use of Facebook, but make use of it anyways because they feel that, generationally, they have to. One particularly poignant example of this came from Bianca, who stated:

“Honestly, I hope [Facebook is] on its way out. I don’t think it will be though, because everyone uses it – that’s just our generation. You know? Everyone uses it, and I almost wish I wasn’t born in this generation; I just hope it dies out. It’s just too much; people don’t need to know all that. It’s just a popularity contest.” –Bianca

In addition to feeling like they have to be on the site and having significant social capital tied up in it, they also have a substantial archive of self that they felt ties them to the site. Given that all participants in this study have been Facebook members since at least age 12, much of their growing up has been archived there. Their emotional attachment to this information is very real, and this translates into continued use of the site, though most use Facebook very casually and primarily in the interest of bridging capital or very passive maintenance of already existing social capital.

This is a key point of difference between Facebook and the other two sites in this study. While Facebook has arguably become a fully integrated aspect of emerging adults’ communication, such that they were often indifferent towards it, the attitudes and utilizations of Twitter and Instagram are very different. Twitter’s use in the interest of any form of social capital is quite minimal, with the exception of two participants in this study. Those two that did make use of Twitter for communication with their friends did so in an entirely supplementary way – the main method of communication with these strong-tie connections was either text messaging or Facebook. Conversations on Twitter are not easily facilitated the way that they are on Facebook simply because of the structure of the platform; events cannot be easily planned on the site, social searching is not as easily carried out, and private one-on-one messages are not a main focus of the site. To compare Twitter to Facebook is unrealistic for these very reasons: the platforms are simply not the same, cannot be used in the same way, and are intended for entirely different purposes.

If anything, Twitter’s best use, as indicated by participants in this research, is to self-explore and self-express or to learn more about the broader world outside one’s own social circle. There is a sense of intellectualism or sophistication attached to Twitter – though not to be confused with excitement or enthusiasm, as is also absent from discussions of Facebook –

which participants associated with their new, burgeoning university identity. In this sense, having Twitter might be best described as a resource for cultural or intellectual capital for those who have a positive stance on its utilization – this is an idea that may be explored in future research. In terms of social capital, however, this study finds that there is very low utility for Twitter in regards to bridging or bonding social capital. Maintained social capital is apparent on Twitter, and this is also the case for the other two SNSs studied.

Attitudes and usages of Instagram were somewhat similar to Twitter, but participants all liked Instagram and spent more time with the app, but again, this had very little to do with bonding or bridging social capital. Participants did report feeling a sense of visual closeness when they saw the pictures of their friends, which helped immensely in bridging distance, but did not use this SNS to tap into the bonding capital associated with these individuals. The use of Instagram was reported to be quite similar to Twitter, though not in an expressly intellectual capacity. Participants reported a desire to use Instagram in a more personal way – they all liked its utility for artistic self-expression and the “nice” photos that they could share and see. They also much prefer to share photos on Instagram than on Facebook, just as they would prefer to share a status on Twitter.

What is novel and worth further future exploration in these findings is this sense of passivity in interaction. This does not align with either bonding or bridging social capital, but may have some bearing on maintained social capital. As Wellman (2012) notes, Facebook has increased the social “carrying capacity” of individuals, and though they may all be acquaintances until they are specifically called upon, all these contacts within a person’s social network provide them with important ties. In the instance of Facebook, where participants often had over 500 friends and many of them were never directly spoken to but rather passively observed, these social connections provided a sense of wellbeing and social connection even when no social “labour” was being performed. At times, these ties simply provided them with entertainment or something to talk or gossip about. In this sense, then, the connections made on each of these sites could all be considered to substantiate a form of bridging social capital, as these connections are all “called on” in one way or another to

satisfy various social needs of participants, whether this is social contact, boredom relief or otherwise.

Drawing on network theory, Debatin et al. (2009) discuss Facebook's utility in maintaining many superficial social relationships. The use of Facebook has become ritualistic, and provides its users with the sentiment of being social without having to actually be social, and is "an intimate yet distanced voyeuristic position without actual involvement" (p. 96). What this sort of interaction – or lack thereof – does for the development of the emerging adult is not yet clear, however it is clear that this passivity was pervasive among this small group of participants.

5.1.2 Research Question 2 – Discussion

The second and central research question put forth by this study asked if and how emerging adults supplement, change or replace the use of Facebook with alternate SNSs. As alluded to in the above section, it appears as though the use of Facebook is both changed and supplemented by the use of other SNSs. Specific SNS actions are fragmented across these three platforms – Instagram for sharing photos, Twitter for sharing thoughts and ideas, and Facebook for interaction. In this sense, Facebook's use has changed, because whereas participants may have previously relied on Facebook for all these activities – photo sharing, status updating, social searching, and so on – they now complete these tasks across all three platforms, no longer favouring just Facebook for these things.

At the same time though, the use of alternate SNSs also supplements the use of Facebook. For the participants who made use of all three sites, it was clear that they used each site for the same reasons: to waste time, to see what people were up to, and to find out more information about both social contacts and the world at-large. This is as suggested by Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011), Coursaris et al. (2013) and Whiting and Williams (2013), who find that SNSs are frequently utilized for information seeking and entertainment. Adding more SNSs into the mix only provides them with more opportunities to diversify how

they occupy their time online, but does not necessarily take away from their time spent on Facebook. For the participant who did not use Facebook and for the participant who did not use Twitter, they made up for this by using other SNSs in the same way as the participants who did use all three sites; the participant who did not use Facebook also still occasionally found herself on the site even though she does not have an account.

This fragmented use of SNSs supports the notion put forth by Quan-Haase and Young (2010), in that the use of new social media platforms does not mean that older SNSs already in use will be replaced; they rather become integrated into a person's communication "toolbox". It is clear from speaking with participants that while they may no longer feel a great sense of excitement about Facebook, they do feel a strong sense of attachment to the information archive that exists about them, as well as the pressure generationally to be on the site. The need to be on Facebook is as much their own construction as it is a reality – the vast majority of their peers are indeed on the site, and not being on the site presents many challenges.

As Debatin et al. (2009) suggest, "developing a persona and maintaining communication through technology [...] is so embedded in the typical college students' ecology that to not engage in this form of communication would be social death" (p. 101). This comment touches upon the assumed determinism for sociality that Facebook enacts, as outlined in brief at the outset of this project. Breaking down the assumption of technological determinism associated with Facebook and sociality was a secondary goal of this project, and appears in part to have been accomplished, based on the attitudes of the participants in the study. No participant felt that it was impossible to be in touch with someone who was not on Facebook, and that if they really wanted to, they could keep in touch with just about anyone. The key point of this, though, is that Facebook simply makes it easier and takes away from the feelings of annoyance or inconvenience associated with having to go out of one's way to keep in contact with individuals who do not use the site. Calling it social death may be a bit extreme, and does in fact give Facebook far more credit than it deserves, but it is fair to say

that social life is made much more full and accessible on both ends of a relationship if a person is on the site.

This same need to be involved has not yet materialized for Instagram or Twitter, but this also seems unlikely to manifest any time soon. While Facebook has been skillfully crafted to permeate many aspects of individuals' social spheres and activities, having also come up around the same time as smartphone and mobile devices also popularized, the other SNSs in this study are very specific. This specificity is appealing though, and proves to be a much-needed break from the standardized utility of Facebook. For this reason, it appears safe to confirm that these three SNSs can work in unison to provide attractive multi-platform experiences to their users as well as specific experiences that are unique to their platform that ensure their individual continued utilization and success. Furthermore, it is also safe to say that Facebook is not dying the slow death that many news outlets claim it to be experiencing. With so many relationships and personal details tied up in the site, as well as the ubiquity of use that Facebook has reached, individuals simply do not wish to walk away from this. Facebook, as such, is here to stay.

5.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The limitations of this study must be taken into consideration when reviewing the data as presented, as there were certain methodological specificities that limit the broader applicability of these findings. First, as non-probability convenience sampling was employed to collect interview participants, and furthermore to the fact that this sample was only comprised of 11 participants – only one of which was male – these findings may not be generalized to broader emerging adult SNSs usage. Such a small sample has limited interpretability, especially as the majority of these participants are affiliated with a faculty known to critically study social media at length at the undergraduate level. This may mean that these students have a more critical perspective of their engagement with SNSs, possibly explaining the third-person effect apparent in their discussions of Facebook use.

Further studies examining the social capital of emerging adults across SNS platforms may consider either mixed or quantitative methods, in an effort to capture more of the population and expand on the findings from this study. The initial attitudes are presented here; it may be useful to observe the themes of this study as a jumping off point in designing and carrying out future quantitative studies. It may also be useful to consider additional SNSs such as Pinterest or LinkedIn, especially as the latter deals specifically with one's professional identity, which ended up actually being of chief concern to participants in this study.

There are many opportunities for future research stemming from this project. It may be enlightening to examine emerging adults' cross- or multi-platform use in comparison to other demographic groups, such as older adults. Many participants discussed how their parents use Facebook, noting that they make use of the site to reach out to old friends, and that parents' use of the site is specifically for active, engaged contact with friends. It could be that as emerging adults become fully-fledged adults that their uses and attitudes towards Facebook, as well as other SNS, change significantly and shift more towards maintenance of bonding social capital once they have graduated or moved past their university life.

In addition to considering different demographic groups in future study, there is an opportunity to further explore the use of these alternate SNSs that have been briefly explored in this study. While there is a very clear picture of how and why individuals make use of Facebook, there is still a considerable gap in knowledge about how and why individuals make use of Instagram and Twitter. As suggested here, Twitter might be better understood not in the interest of social capital, but in the interest of cultural or intellectual capital. Emerging adults in this study strongly associated the use of Twitter with intellectualism and worldliness, ascribing it more serious or professional utility that is not apparent with Facebook. This unique attitude exists for Instagram as well, in that participants considered the app to be for artistic self-expression, and may again be better considered as a source for intellectual or cultural capital. More investigation into this suggestion needs to take place.

Finally, although this research is decidedly devoted to Facebook and makes comparisons of these alternate SNSs to Facebook, moving research on Instagram and Twitter forward perhaps needs to break their examination away from Facebook. This means to examine these SNSs not as they exist in relation to Facebook, but examining them as stand-alone SNSs. There is a wealth of opportunity to discuss these SNSs separate from Facebook, especially as it is clear that the attitudes and uses between Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are starkly different. Though DeMers (2013) suggests that comparing Twitter to Facebook (or in this case, Instagram to Facebook as well) is like comparing “Pepsi to Coke” (n.p.), the difference between all these sites cannot be reduced to such subtly – these sites are radically different for emerging adults, though all significant in their social toolbox.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval



**Western
Research**

**Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice**

Research Ethics

Principal Investigator: Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase

Department & Institution: Information and Media Studies\Faculty of Information & Media Studies,Western University

NMREB File Number: 105902

Study Title: Navigating the Social Landscape: An Exploration of Social Networking Site Usage among Emerging Adults

Sponsor:

NMREB Initial Approval Date: November 14, 2014

NMREB Expiry Date: November 14, 2015

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Recruitment Items	Information and Recruitment form to be distributed to potential participants in classes.	2014/09/10
Instruments	Instruments - Interview Guide. Version date: 11/12/2014	2014/11/12
Western University Protocol	original	2014/10/07
Western University Protocol		2014/11/12
Letter of Information & Consent		2014/11/12
Advertisement	recruitment poster	2014/11/12

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.



This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

Appendix C: Recruitment Sign-up Form

Project Title: Navigating the Social Landscape: An Exploration of Social Networking Site Usage among Emerging Adults

Principal Investigator: Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase; Kristen Colbeck (co-investigator)

Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to participate in a study that we, Kristen Colbeck and Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase are conducting. Briefly, the study involves an approximately one-hour interview regarding first- and second-year university students' use of social networking sites. Interview will be held on The University of Western Ontario campus, and participants will receive \$5 for Western Hospitality Services in appreciation of their time commitment.

If you would like more information on this study or would like to volunteer to participate in this research, please provide your information below.

Participant Information:

Name: _____

UWO Email Address: _____

Year of Study: _____

Thank you,

Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase
The University of Western Ontario

Kristen Colbeck
The University of Western Ontario

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Project Title: Navigating the Social Landscape: An Exploration of Social Networking Site Usage among Emerging Adults

Principal Investigator: Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase; Kristen Colbeck (co-investigator)

Interview Guide for Semi-Structured Interviewing

Part 1: SOCIALITY AT UNIVERSITY (SOCIAL CAPITAL OFFLINE)

(adapted from Ellison et al., 2007)

How connected do you feel to friends and classmates?

Possible probes:

What have been your social experiences at university so far? (i.e. developing friendships, attending social events on and off campus, sense of belonging/community)

Are you interested in what goes on at UWO, and is it a good place to be?

Is it easy for you to find things to do on campus, and do you participate in events?

How many new people would you say you've come across on campus? How many have you become friends with?

Have you met many friends at school that you can confide in about personal things, or is this something you mainly do with the people you already knew?

Part 2: COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

How do you keep in touch with the people in your life?

Possible probes:

How do you keep in touch with close friends? Family members? Friends from back home?

Do your communication methods differ for your varying social relationships?

Part 3: COMMUNICATION ONLINE INTENSITY/IMPORTANCE

Participants will be provided with a list of Social Networking Sites, and will be asked to check off which ones they have used or currently use.

Possible probes:

If the participant does not use a currently popular SNS, inquire as to why they may have decided not to use the site. Inquire as to why they chose to join the sites that they do use.

In general, how you do feel about Facebook/Twitter/Instagram?

How often do you use [Social Network Site]?

Are you proud to say you use [Social Network Site]?

Do you feel out of touch if you haven't used [Social Network Site] in a while?

Which site do you think is most popular among your friends/peers?

How you ever thought about leaving [Social Network Site]? Why?

Have your friends ever left, or have talked about leaving, a Social Network Site?

Which one? Why did they do/think about doing this?

What sorts of things do you do on each of these sites? Do you see their uses relating to each other in your online activities?

Part 4: SOCIAL CAPITAL ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

How do you make use of social networking sites to supplement your face-to-face sociality?

Possible probes:

Is it hard for you to keep in touch with friends who don't use [Social Network Site]? Is their lack of use ever annoying or inconvenient for you or others?

How many "friends" do you have on [Social Network Site]? How many of these people would you consider an actual friend? How many would you say are friends from before you started university?

On [Social Network Site] do you have friends that you can trust to chat about your problems with, or can turn to for advice regarding important decisions?

Do you feel like you're "in the know" about social activities and events by using [Social Network Site], and is this for events going on here at school? What about back home?

Is [Social Network Site] a good source to find out more about the people you've met in your classes or elsewhere on campus? In a casual way, or in a more personal way? Compared to when you were in high school OR first year (depending on participant's year in university), how has your use of [Social Network Site] changed? What about your use overall?

Could you use [Social Network Site] to see what friends or acquaintances from before university are doing now? Could you chat with them to find out what they've been up to?

Part 5: USES AND GRATIFICATIONS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

(adapted from Whiting and Williams, 2013)

When you signed up for Facebook or [other specified Social Network Site], what were you hoping to get out of it, and how do you mostly use it now?

Possible probes:

Compared to Facebook, how does [Social Network Site] function for:

Social interaction? Why?

Finding out general information? Why?

"Creeping" on others (i.e. getting to know what someone else is like)? Why?

Wasting time or distracting yourself? Why?

Communicating with others meaningfully? Casually? Why?

What site is most convenient for you to use? Why?

How often do you engage in any of these activities on [Social Network Site]?

Part 6: CONCLUSION

Do you have any final comments or questions for me?

Appendix E: Letter of Information

Project Title: Navigating the Social Landscape: An Exploration of Social Networking Site Usage among Emerging Adults

Principal Investigator: Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase; Kristen Colbeck (co-investigator)

Letter of Information

1. Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to participate in this research study about uses, benefits, and overall engagement with social networking sites (SNSs) (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) because you are within the demographic range of what is perceived to be the most active and influential users on this site, and therefore can likely provide the most timely and relevant perspectives on its overall value.

2. Purpose of the Letter

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in an interview for this research.

3. Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to gauge what level of engagement users have with SNSs, what purposes they serve in your social life, and how you use them to enhance your social relationships. It is also to provide a clearer understanding of the social implications of SNS use preferences.

4. Inclusion Criteria

Individuals who are between 18 and 24 years old *AND* are currently in either their first or second year of university *AND* have familiarity with Facebook, either as a

currently active user or otherwise. Participants must agree to be audio recorded during their interview.

5. Exclusion Criteria

Individuals who do not agree to be audio recorded.

Individuals who do not meet age requirements.

Individuals who meet age requirements but do not meet current education requirements.

Individuals who meet age requirements but do not meet social networking site requirements.

Individuals who meet both age and education requirements, but do not meet social networking site requirements.

Individuals who meet both age and social networking requirements, but do not meet education requirements.

Individuals who meet all requirements, but are a current student of the MA student researcher.

6. Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked open-ended questions from six categories, with probes based on your response, regarding your interaction with SNSs. It is anticipated that the entire task will take no more than one (1) hour of your time, and you will be asked to complete this interview only once. The task may be completed as suited to your preference: in-person, or via telephone or Skype.

7. Possible Risks and Harms

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study, and identities will be anonymized by providing participants with a pseudonym.

8. Possible Benefits

You may not directly benefit from participating in this study, but will be contributing to research exploring the benefits of SNS use for university students, which may be beneficial to future students (i.e. SNS use in classrooms, for university functions, etc.)

9. Compensation

In acknowledgement of your time commitment, upon completion of your interview you will receive a \$5 gift card for Western Hospitality Services – the major food services provider on The University of Western Ontario campus.

10. Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future academic status.

11. Confidentiality

The data collected as part of this research will remain confidential and accessible only to the abovementioned investigator and supervisor of this study. If the results are published, you will in no way be identifiable in the overall data set. All names will be anonymized, though your year of study and age will be included alongside your pseudonym. Participants are asked to refrain from disclosure of personally identifiable information, or information that may identify others, for added protection in the unlikely event that data security is compromised. Such accidental disclosure will not be transcribed from the audio recordings, and will not be used in the study. All audio recordings collected from interviews will be kept only until transcribed by the MA student researcher, and then will be destroyed, approximately one week or less upon completion of your interview. Information

collected overall from participants will be kept for a minimum of five (5) years on a secure server, at which point, these documents will be securely destroyed.

Only the MA student researcher and Principal Investigator will have access to these recordings at any time, though representatives from The University of Western Ontario's Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may access study information to ensure that proper laws and regulations are being adhered to in this research.

12. Contacts for Further Information

If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact the principal investigator: Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase.

Or, further information may be obtained by contacting the MA student researcher (co-investigator): Kristen Colbeck, MA student.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics.

13. Publication

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please contact the principal investigator with your name and contact information.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Appendix F: Consent Form

Project Title: Navigating the Social Landscape: An Exploration of Social Networking Site Usage among Emerging Adults

Study Investigator's Name: Kristen Colbeck; Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase (Principal Investigator)

Consent Form

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

You do not waive any legal rights by signing this consent form.

Participant's Name (please print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Kristen Colbeck

Post-Secondary Education
and Degrees:

Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta
2010-2013

Master of Arts
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario
2013-2015

Related Work
Experience:

Graduate Teaching Assistant
Faculty of Information and Media Studies
The University of Western Ontario
2013-2015