2013

Multitude of needs met by an online mom community

Shannon Alexis Snell
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, shannon.snell@gmail.com

MULTITUDE OF NEEDS MET BY AN ONLINE MOM COMMUNITY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Mass Communication

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by
Shannon Snell
B.S., Suffolk University, 2010
August 2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

Online communities for expectant mothers have existed for many years, but newer social media sites are allowing these groups to exist in different formats. This study features an online community of 94 women that originated from TheBump.com's forums who then formed their own community, a Facebook group for February 2012 moms. The women exist in many different social media spheres including the group, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and a separate Buy/Sell/Trade Facebook group. This study used a survey questionnaire to determine whether these different social media sites and platforms met different needs for this specific group of women. The study also hoped to determine whether needs being met or not met resulted in an evolution to different platforms. The third aspect of this study was to determine whether a context collapse existed with the creation and integration of this new Facebook group. The results suggest that the women used the February moms group rather than other social networking sites to fulfill most of their needs, and the women integrated their online friends from the group with their offline friends in social media contexts.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Online mom groups have existed in many different formats since the beginning of Internet communities. From their early stages, these groups operated as closed groups with limited access through email listservs or simple forums. Over the years, they have transformed into multidimensional groups offering support, guidance, entertainment and an emotional outlet for new and expecting mothers. Similar to broader online experiences, the biggest change these groups have seen is the evolution from single platform groups to groups that span multiple platforms across the Internet and social worlds. These newer groups utilize interactive social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to connect to each other and in turn, interweave this online life to their offline life with little to no delineation between private and public spaces.

This study attempts to understand the transformation of a particular online mom community and if different needs are met from platform to platform. The group started as a forum hosted by the pregnancy and parenting site TheBump.com and evolved into a private Facebook group. The Facebook group's members began integrating their social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and forming subgroups such as a Buy/Sell/Trade group to meet the needs not met by the other platforms. Previous studies of online motherhood communities evaluated the communities on one platform or a change from one motherhood-focused platform to another with similar structure and design. These types of isolated communities are not reflective of today's integration of public and private lives on multiple social media platforms in multiple social spheres. This study will attempt to understand why members of a particular online mom group have expanded their networks and membership across different platforms. A survey questionnaire will be distributed to a sample consisting of

1

members from a particular online mom group to determine how different social media platforms meet the different needs of the users.

Participation in online communities, such as mom groups, signifies users that are highly involved and interactive with the media (Leung, 2007). This high involvement fits in with the idea put forth by uses and gratifications theory that users will select media, and therefore different platforms, that best meet their needs (Rubin, 1994). The members of online communities will then gravitate towards different platforms if their needs are not being met on a previous platform. Thus, uses and gratifications was utilized as a theoretical framework for this research.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review contains two major topics: a) research on online communities and the platforms for these communities, and b) a review of the theoretical framework for this study.

Online Communities

Virtual communities exist on the Internet as a way for people with common interests (Dennis, Pootheri, & Natarajan, 1998) or a shared geographic bond (Kilsheimer, 1997) to communicate electronically (Ridings & Geffen, 2006). The first online communities began not long after the formation of the Internet with Usenet newsgroups in 1979 and the Well in 1986 (Ridings & Geffen, 2004). There are currently 13 online communities that have over 100 million active users with Facebook topping the list with over 1 billion users and rising (secdatabase.com).

In order to qualify as an online community, there must be sustained, recurring participation by its members, not just a site that attracts online discourse (Jones, 1997). Ridings et al. (2002) defines a virtual community as "groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way over the Internet through a common location or mechanism" (p. 273). Since there is no current definition of an online community member regarding frequency or participation, anyone who posts or reads in a community is labeled as a member (Ridings & Geffen, 2004). Internet communities are unique in that all content is member generated in a collaborative manner (Ridings & Geffen, 2004), leading the way for the modern social media sites of today whose content is exclusively member generated.

The motivations for joining online groups are varied, but many join communities that offer a social and emotional support as well as a sense of belonging and companionship

(Wellman & Gulia, 1999). The connections sought out in Internet communities are often friendship oriented with the goal of "companionship, socializing, and networking" (Ridings & Geffen, 2004). Oftentimes, the ability to exchange "beliefs and opinions" is more of a motivation to participate in online communities rather than the exchange of information (Herring, 1996). Even in technical groups, the desire to socialize is the motivating factor for members to join an online community instead of the expected information gathering (Wasko & Farraj, 2000). But it is this combination of social support and information exchange that makes the Internet and online social networking applications a social setting (Mickelson, 1997).

Tonteri et al. (2011) operationalizes virtual communities with the following five dimensions; "feeling of membership and one's rights and obligations in the community, the feeling of influence in the community and of being influenced by the community, the feeling among the individuals members of having distinct identity in the community, the feeling of having a common social identity and identifying with the community and feelings of a strong emotional connection" (p. 2216). Tonteri et al. (2011) differentiates from previous models of virtual communities by putting an emphasis on mutual support as a "community level phenomenon that takes the form of participation" (p. 2216).

Personal online identities are created through shared information (Schaffer et al., 2008; Armstrong et al., 2012), which makes it important to study how online communities develop and operate. Communities operating with a small number of highly motivated users with shared identities and who are highly motivated participate over a "sustained period of time" (Armstrong et al., 2012). This is in comparison to communities with large memberships of different identities who are less likely to participate for such long periods of time.

A study of larger online communities found some structural patterns in online social networks (Kumar, Novack, & Tomkins, 2010). Individuals tend to choose one of three interaction patterns based on their engagement in a community. There are *singletons,* those who join groups but do not participate; *giant component*, people connected to a large number of people in the network; and *middle region*, those isolated members that interact with one another but not the group as a whole. Those in the *middle region* join online communities to move their offline lives into an online identity. Those in the *giant component* are the stars of the network and turn their attention to the evolution and maintenance of the network (Kumar et al., 2010). Kumar et al. (2010) alternatively describe the three types of users as *passive, inviters*, and *linkers,* with *linkers* as the most active and participatory members who continually link with others in the community.

According to Baym (1997), online groups qualify as "complex, interwoven, and personalized communities" (p. 119) even without a shared location. These communities use online groups to fulfill companionship needs resulting in vibrant discussions and group dynamics. Online communities with the most success encourage and enable their users to be creative in expressing themselves (Gallant, Boone, & Heap, 2007).

Online forums exist in communities as a way to connect members and strengthen the weak ties and make communications between members more frequent and effective (Weimann, 2010). Nyland et al. (2007) found that social networking sites where users seek out information are more likely to result in interactivity with others rather than users seeking entertainment-based material. Since online social networks rely on two way communication, active participation is necessary for almost all users (Park et al., 2009).

When studying members of online communities, it is beneficial to analyze personality models, rather than demographic traits to predict Internet use (Goldberg, 1990). Previous research found that there was no link between extraversion and intensity of Facebook use (Ross et al., 2009), but those that are narcissistic and shy are much more likely in to engage in Facebook frequently (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008, Orr et al., 2009). However, extraverted users are more attracted to utilize the communication features of social networking sites such as Facebook's wall posts and chat (Ryan & Xenos, 2011). It is important to note that different users use Facebook in different ways, and not all have the goal to improve a user's social capital (Ryan & Xenos, 2011).

Online Platform Development and Transformation

As the Internet has shifted from the world of Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, there are has been a shift in how users interact with the medium and with each other. Social networking as a part of Web 2.0 "fosters interaction, collaboration, and contribution" (Gunawardena et al., 2009). Gunawardena et al. (2009) define the structure of social networking using the definition of community of practice as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al., 2002). In a community of practice, each member of the group brings his or her own discourse to the community and after all the members learn from one another and reflect on their shared goal, they reorganize the community to better meet their needs (Gunawardena et al., 2009).

An online platform is any online system that can be programmed, with different platforms programmed differently to suit the needs of the developers and users (programmableweb.com). There is little information on the evolution of online communities

from platform to platform or the changes in motivation of their users. One way that online communities transform is the splintering of its members into subgroups or categories. In Massively Multiplayer Role Playing Games, there is evidence of neotribalism in its players. Tribalism refers to a group of people bound together by family, location or duty (Marshall, 1998) while neotribalism refers to smaller groups that have broken off into subgroups with similar personal characteristics (Brignall & Van Valey, 2008).

The addition of subgroup communities within gaming systems allows for a more successful platform and continued interactions from its members (Cao et al., 2008). Communities often need to create spaces for smaller groups of its larger population. A solution to this problem is to create "neighborhoods" within the larger community, as seen in Massively Multiplayer Role Playing Games such as World of Warcraft (Ren et al., 2007). These subgroups also have subgoals that can lead users away from the original intent of the community (Ren et al., 2007).

Groups that allow for more freedom of discussion tend to be more successful in forming friendships and encouraging the community to transform within its own platform along with its users, but this same characteristic also discourages new members from joining because of its lack of focus (Ren, Kraut & Kiessler, 2007). Bond-based communities are geared towards promoting friendship, while identity based communities are geared towards information seeking (Ren et al., 2007). If there is a mixture of both bond based and identity based in a singular community, the design elements have to be more complicated to satisfy its audience. An evolution of a community's platform may be necessary to accommodate its users' needs, such as increased privacy concerns, ease of access, or new technological capabilities. This may mean an

improvement of the structure or features of a current platform or the switch to an entirely new platform altogether.

Online communities also have the ability to merge with other platforms to become more successful or active. A group may decide as a whole to join a new platform because it better suits its needs or offers a new dynamic to the group. An example is an online cancer forum that hit its peak membership and activity when a Facebook group decided to join the forum to broaden their own community (Durant, McCray, & Safran, 2011).

Private versus Public Spaces and Context Collapse

Social media sites create the illusion of privacy, which creates issues in defining the boundaries between public and private lives (Barnes, 2006). Wyatt, Katz, & Kim (2006) argue that the home is a part of the public sphere because it is so connected to the virtual world. The ability to bring the public into the home blurs these lines forming the "electronic cottage" (Wyatt et al., 2006). The blurring of private and public spaces extends to how one manages their online presence.

The problem of "conflicting social spheres," in which content meant for one social sphere is available in a different social sphere, is a result of the increasing use of social networking sites (Binder, Howes, & Sutcliffe, 2009). The tension created by these conflicting social spheres is not between unknown parties but between individuals that share social spaces (Binder et al., 2009). Boundaries that exist in offline networks occur spatially, with work and personal friends kept in separate geographic spheres. These same boundaries do not extend to online networks, requiring users to "uphold structure" in these social networking sites in order to avoid "social clashes" between different spheres (Binder et al., 2009). Context collapse makes it harder for users to

preserve their image based on audience (Vitak, 2012) as their work and personal lives merge into one online network requiring one online identity.

The lack of boundaries is not necessarily a privacy concern, but is a concern over lack of control of content. The desire for control in online settings is similar to how people always have behaved in public spaces (Boyd & Marwick, 2011). Users value social networks that enable identity construction, through expressive communication patterns (Gallant et al., 2007). Users are not worried about others gaining access to personal information, but they are worried about broadcasting posts to their entire network (Binder et al., 2009). As a result, the social networks that are not segmented between heterogeneous groups have the most tension. Increasing tensions in social networks may also lead to limits on the social network's growth (Binder et al., 2009), even though Facebook is the largest social networking site where users often have a heterogeneous audience.

Traditional Facebook relationships operate in social ties moving from offline contexts to online contexts (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2007). Users are more likely to trust a site like Facebook rather than a social networking site that does not require a real name (Dwyer, Hiltz, & Passarini, 2007). A person's credibility in social networking sites increases with the disclosure of more information, making Facebook profiles the ideal way to legitimize an online identity (Mazer et al., 2009). Facebook users that have stricter privacy setting are more likely to share personal information (Stutzman et al., 2011), but users with large networks were less likely to share intimate information (Brandtzaeg, Luders, & Skjetnes, 2010). Vitak (2012) found that a more diverse audience led to more disclosures on Facebook, but those that were afraid of the social networking site's privacy settings were less likely to make disclosures.

Facebook users are members of 12 groups on average (Facebook, 2010; Houghton & Joinson, 2010) and have the ability to create lists controlling the content seen by members that are categorized in these lists. While Facebook allows its users to segment their audiences into groups, social networking sites such as Twitter and Instagram force users to present one identity to the entire audience (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). As a result, some users will separate their social networks by assigning each network to a different platform or even creating multiple accounts for the same platform (Boyd & Marwick, 2011).

Online Mom Groups

Communities in the 1950's of suburban housewives featured reciprocal relationships between women involving knowledge, service, and goods (Strong-Boag, 1995; Vincent, 2003). There became a decrease in this reciprocity as a result of a greater shift towards women in economic roles and the commodification of domestic work (Side, 1999). This greater strain in having to exist in both an economic and domestic framework led many women to weigh the costs and benefits of friendships between other women (Vincent, 2003). Because of such strains, many modern women turn to online groups that offer more control over these relationships.

Drentea & Moren-Cross (2005) describe online mom groups as "virtual birth clubs (that) offer instant contact as those at the exact same stage of pregnancy as themselves (to within a month)." Previous incarnations of online groups also required a moderator and site administrator to lead the forums and group, which requires technical skill, money to host the site, and time to moderate (Ley, 2007). Motivations to join online motherhood and pregnancy groups include lessened time to meet with offline friends than in the past and the thought that advice sought from their own mothers may be seen as out of date because of rapidly changing cultural and medical practices (Taylor, Layne, & Wozniak, 2004). The creation of these mother's groups

moved online discourse from the medical discussion to the more female oriented sharing of their own experiences (Taylor, 1996; Collins, 2000). Groups that have majority-female membership are more likely to support one another (Miyata, 2002) and be emotionally oriented that groups dominated by men (Boneva & Kraut, 2002).

Online social and support groups have been found to have high levels of social capital, especially those that focus on a sense of community (Wellman & Haythornthwaite 2001). Social capital in online groups includes a high sense of trust, reciprocity, and interpersonal ties" (Cooks et al., 2002; Ley, 2007). Shared information builds user empowerment (Coulson, 2005) and self-confidence (Lemire et al., 2008). "Thick trust" (Radin, 2006) is evident in mothering groups in which members of the group "have developed a collective identity and worked to protect the group's boundaries" (Ley, 2007). This thick trust will then often extend to an offline presence of friendship between the women that contributes to more social capital on the online site (Ley, 2007). Groups with a high level of commitment to an online forum fit the mold of those who rely on the Internet for information and support: female, white, and economically advantaged (Fallows, 2005; Fox, 2005; Ley, 2007).

The need to create a space where there are high levels of privacy (Fallows, 2005) and support forces these women to consistently build and maintain this type of environment (Orgad, 2005). If an online forum is not providing these necessary aspects and women feel judged or unsafe, they will move to create a new online space that does fit their needs. In a group where the site moderator was viewed as controlling and unwelcoming, many members would still participate in the group because of the relationships already forged with the other women. It wasn't until there was an alternative site presented to them that they made the transition (Ley, 2007).

In this same group, the construction and guidelines of the site were important in fostering the atmosphere desired by the women (Ley, 2007). The few restrictions placed on topics in in the new forum in comparison to the old forum led to more dynamic discourses and the full range of emotions to be expressed by its members, not just negative ones. The lack of criticism from its members and moderators fostered respect and tolerance. Site administrators created different spaces for different types of discussion, keeping the more controversial topics open but separate from the main forum (Ley, 2007). The structure of the group was small in size and private, allowing for users to feel free discussing the wide variety of topics away from the public eye. The size was also cited as a reason that the women were able to form close ties with one another. These moms did not want outsiders joining their group or people from their offline lives to be able to join the group. The women, however did not hesitate to link to their personal pages and pictures from the online group. This type of sharing allowed the women to have a personal connection with one another (Ley, 2007).

The structure of private online forums also has its negative sides. There is a certain inevitability that members will eventually leave the group or stop participating. Because there was a finite amount of original members with high privacy settings, there was no way to attract new members to replace the old members. If there are new members to such a group, there is a high likelihood of insider/outsider feelings and the intimacy and trust will not be there (Ley, 2007). Drentea & Moren-Cross (2005) found that there was a high incidence of disagreement among new mothers in online forums, even if most of these discussions were supportive. A negative aspect of traditional online forums for mothers is that because there is such high anonymity with usernames, it cannot replace face to face interactions and traditional social

support. These traditional online forums were also time-consuming, with the mom required to participate from a personal computer (Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005).

February 2012 Moms Group

The February Moms Group is a Facebook group of approximately 94 women who were all expecting a child in February of 2012. The group originated from TheBump.com's online forum system. The Bump is a popular pregnancy, parenting and baby information website. The website offers informational content through articles and advice columns for new and expectant mothers. A dynamic feature of the site is the online community, which offers emotional and informational support for women by other users.

The online community is subdivided with forums dedicated to topics such as adoption, infertility, specific trimesters as well as parenting. There are also boards dedicated to expectant mothers that all are expecting the same month and year. The site is set up so that users can interact with one another using pseudonyms as screen names. The users have the option to update their profiles with personal information and links to blogs and other websites but it is not a requirement of its users. The February 2012 board has a wide arrange of topics from parenting advice, emotional venting, photo sharing, and off topic conversation. The forum is open to anyone. There are no restrictions among its membership and movement from board to board for new childhood stages is encouraged by the format of the site. Most members start visiting the site in the very early stages of pregnancy to share and gather information.

On August 24th 2011, a group of moms decided to follow the example of previous birth month groups from TheBump.com and make a platform jump to Facebook forming the Facebook group February 2012 moms. The previous birth month groups cited a greater ease of access and interaction between its users as reasons to make the jump. Facebook groups allow members to

create their own interactive community while eliminating the concerns of previous online forums such as site administrators with technical knowledge and large amounts of time to dedicate to the group.

The Facebook groups also gave the group a sense of exclusivity because the group could be made private and all memberships had to be approved by an administrator. Facebook groups do not require the users to be friends with one another but a user must have a Facebook profile. A Facebook profile is required to legitimize an online and offline identity. A forum topic was created on TheBump's message board with a temporary link to the Facebook group. After a short window of time, users had to contact the group's administrators to gain access to the group. Moderators of the group would only accept users that could be matched to a username on the TheBump.com and those that had credible active Facebook profiles with personal pictures or information. After six months, inactive group members were purged from the group by the administrators to discourage the presence of lurkers. Six months also marked the period where no new members were allowed in the group in order to maintain a sense of privacy and intimacy among its current members. At its peak, the group had 111 active users. These users range in age from 21-38, from varying socioeconomic backgrounds.

The group has 3 administrators although the group largely self-moderates its discussions and behaviors. The Facebook group was created while its members were still pregnant and as a result, early discussion was largely informational seeking and sharing. This format continued up through the births of most of the children at which point, topics became more conversational and intimate. While most topics center on the experiences of motherhood, there is no limitations on discussions, resulting in diverse topics such as family, school, work, and financial issues. This

type of mutual support and the desire of its members to socialize fit with the characteristics of most online communities.

As a result of the new platform's privacy settings and ease of access, users began to share pictures more frequently, be more active in conversational topics, and "friend" one another on the social networking site. This integration of a social networking sites that was already in use in their personal lives with an exclusively online community resulted in a context collapse of their offline and online identities. As the Facebook group had increasing success and ease of access with its members, the group became more integrated on all social networking platforms. The tendency of social networking accounts to be linked with one another, especially Facebook, meant that more online identities between the women were being linked as well. Some of these social networking sites include Twitter and Instagram. As members became "friends" in their online identities, the online identities became friends in other platforms reserved for purposes other than pregnancy and child rearing information.

Over time, the Facebook group experienced an overflow of topics on its regular page with many users complaining that group had become too cluttered and hard to up with. As a result, members requested separate groups be formed for separate topics. This formation of subgroups to create space for its members follows the evolution of platforms as seen in Massively Multiplayer Role Playing Games. The first and largest sub group to form was the Buy/Sell/Trade group featuring listings and requests for homemade items such as children's clothing, accessories, décor, as well as used products of the same nature. This group is open to the public and has 307 members.

The Facebook group resulted in the members "friending" one another on the social networking site using their personal accounts. As the Facebook group had increasing success, the

group became integrated on all social networking platforms including Twitter and Instagram. The members also decided to create subgroups to decrease the clutter on the original page resulting in a Buy/Sell/Trade group on Facebook.

The memberships and friendships on all of these social networking platforms represent the members' online presence in conflicting social spheres in which online and offline identities coexist. The presence in different social networking platforms must mean each platform meets the different needs of its users.

Theoretical Framework

In order to better understand the evolution of this particular online community and the needs of its users met by its different platforms, this study will employ social capital theory and uses and gratification theory to guide its design.

Social Capital in Online Communities

Social capital is "investment in social relations with expected returns," with the returns or profits at the group or individual level (Lin, 1999). In order for the group to have social capital, it is up to the members to maintain the group and interact with one another in order for there to be a continued investment. Online communities operate under "a strong norm of reciprocity" in which "individuals trust that their contribution efforts will reciprocated by other members," with individuals with direct ties more likely to contribute (Sun et al., 2009). Closed, dense networks offer strong sense of reciprocity and a closed network offers security for a group, especially one involving children, and preserves the resources of a group (Coleman, 1988; Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 1999). The sample used in this research is one example of a dense, closed network.

Social capital has three dimensions; resources within the structure of the community, access to those resources, and the use of the resources by its members (Lin, 1999). Two types of

social capital, bridging and bonding, exist on social networks. Bridging social capital is when users reach out to those with unlike characteristics outside of one's in-groups while bonding social capital maintains network ties to those already in your own groups (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). An online mom group would have bonding capital because all of the members share the identity of mothers to young children but would also have bridging capital if there is no shared geographic location and social background.

Uses and Gratification

In mass communication, uses and gratification theory states that the audience member choses certain media to fulfill their needs (Rubin, 1994). The audience involvement in uses and gratification emphasizes the importance of the user within the theory (Raake, & Bonds-Raake, 2008). The theory focuses on why different users chose different media and how they use media to fulfill their needs.

The assumption in the uses and gratification theory that the users are highly involved with the media (Leung, 2007) makes it appropriate to apply to social media use, where users have a great deal of control and influence over the media content. The high level of participation on social networking sites means that users have a high level of involvement in deciding which sites best meet their needs. As a result, the users will gravitate towards sites that fulfill these media related needs.

Certain social factors, such as tension, conflict, and impoverished real life opportunities, influence media related needs (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973). Wright (1960) proposed that media "served the functions of surveillance, correlation, entertainment, and cultural transmission." When uses and gratifications theory was first applied to computers it was reported that computers fulfilled interpersonal needs, traditional needs of media, and new media needs.

17

These new media needs included time shifting and meeting other individuals (Flaherty, Pearce, & Rubin, 1998). Online media serves as an "alternative to interpersonal and mediated communication, providing options or complements for aspects of an individual's environment that are not as fulfilling" (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011). Because Facebook is a "collection of communication tools, rather than a single, one-dimensional medium used only in uniform ways" (Smock et al., 2011, pp. 2323-4) one must look at a variety of needs that Facebook meets for its users.

While previous criticism of uses and gratification in different media focused on the lack of interaction within the theoretical approach (McQuail, 1979), the addition of the study of online social networks, the social network approach, enables it to look at the structure of the network to examine "orientations towards social network use online" (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011). The incorporation of the structure of the social network to determine how these needs are met best fits the platform evolution of social networking behavior that is so prevalent today. Using the structure of the network, Papacharissi & Mendelson (2011) found nine different types of Facebook use including passing time, entertainment, information sharing, escapism, trend seeking, companionship, professional advancement, socialization, and making new connections.

Bonds-Raacke and Raacke (2010) found that new media users on social networking sites primary use for the media was to gather and share personal information. The secondary use for social networking sites was a friendship dimension where users sustain new and old friendships. The third use of social media sites was to build new connections and the desire to feel connected to the outside world (Bonds-Raacke & Raacke, 2010). The primary use of social networking sites fits in with the dimensions of information seeking, exchanging beliefs and opinions; while the

secondary use fits in with the dimensions of companionship, emotional support; and the third use of social media sites includes the dimensions of socialization, entertainment, professional development, and relaxation. Using these eight dimensions to guide the research, the study proposed the following research questions

Research Questions

RQ1: Why do these highly participatory community members expand their membership to different platforms?

RQ2: What needs are met by each platform for these women?

RQ3: Do the women integrate their offline and online lives and identities on social media accounts?

CHAPTER 3
METHOD

The sample for this study is the members of the February 2012 Moms Facebook group, to represent a target population of online mom groups. The sample represented a convenience sample because it was based on contacts known to the researcher. The researcher's sister was an original member of the group and has ties with these women on social media sites and platforms. The sister, while an active member, did not create the Facebook group or hold administrator privileges. However, the sample was also purposive because it focused on the group that moved across platforms to the Facebook group. The study was cross sectional with all data collected at one point in time.

A link to the online survey was distributed to the 94 members of the Facebook group February 2012 Moms on its group page. This survey was optional for the members of the group with no reward offered for its participants. The study used the Facebook group as the primary site for the community making the other platforms secondary to the group identity. This was a study of the behaviors and motivations of a particular closed online community and was not representative of the general population or the population of all online community members.

A survey questionnaire was distributed to members of this online motherhood community to gather information on the motivations of its members, how its members utilized the different forms of media to meet their needs and how the group offered a sense of virtual community. The questionnaire was divided into sections based each social networking platform. There was a section for Facebook, the Facebook February Moms group, Twitter, Instagram, and the Buy/Sell/Trade Facebook group. Each section contained questions regarding frequency of use, privacy settings, and if the members are connected to one another on that platform.

20

Each section also contained a set of uniform questions regarding which needs were being met by each platform using the Uses and Gratification theory to identify the needs of online users. These needs included information seeking, emotional support, companionship, exchanging beliefs and opinions, entertainment, relaxation, professional advancement, and socialization (sharing personal pictures and stories). These questions all used a five point Likert scale for participants to self-report how each platform best meets their needs. The users were asked if they agreed or disagreed whether they use each site or platform for these specifics uses and needs. There were also questions to determine if membership to a certain platform predated group involvement and which platform best suited the different needs of the group members. The survey was supplemented with an informal interview with the researcher's sister who explained the history and context of the group.

The goal of the questionnaire was to determine how this particular online community used each platform and whether certain platforms better suit certain needs of its members. This information served to help determine why groups make jumps or expand their membership to different platforms and if the members' online identities merged resulting in a context collapse between their public and private spheres.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Sixty five of the 94 members of the February mom group completed the questionnaire, resulting in a 69% response rate. All participants reported that they were currently members of the February mom group and all were originally members of TheBump.com's message board. Sixty percent of the women have previously been a part of an online group. All but one member had a Facebook account prior to the creation of the February mom group.

All of the women had Facebook accounts, 53% had Twitter accounts, 49% had Instagram accounts and 55% were members of the Buy/Sell/Trade Facebook group. Table 1 illustrates the findings regarding how the women interacted on the social media sites and platforms. Eleven percent of the women updated their Facebook status daily compared to 34% of Instagram users that posted pictures daily as well as 37% of the women who posted daily in the February mom group. None of the users posted on the Buy/Sell/Trade group or Tweeted daily. Seventy two percent of the women commented or liked another person's post on Facebook daily and 80% of the members commented on or liked another person's post on the February mom group daily. Fifty nine percent of Instagram users accessed Instagram daily while only 2% of Twitter members accessed Twitter daily. Three percent of the members of the Buy/Sell/Trade group commented or liked another person's post within the group's page.

All of the women have added other moms to their Facebook friends list. Eighty eight percent of the Instagram users followed other women from the February mom group, while only 25% of Twitter users either followed other February moms or had February moms follow them on Twitter. Sixty percent of the women said that over 51 of their Facebook friends came from the February mom group, even though 92% of the women say excluding the February moms, they only added people on Facebook that they know in real life. The February mom group is

comprised only of members of the mom community and the Buy/Sell/Trade group exists as an

offshoot of this group with other February moms as the founders. Thus, interaction with other

moms was not measured because it was assumed to be at 100%.

Media Table 1
Membership and Interaction of the Social Sites and Platforms

	Social Media Sites/Platforms				
	Facebook	Mom Group	Twitter	Instagram	B/S/T Group
Member	100%	100%	53.8%	49.2%	55.3%
Daily Posting	11%	37%	0%	34%	0%
Daily Interaction	72%	80%	2%	59%	3%
Interact with other moms	100%	N/A	25%	88%	N/A

As seen in Table 2, 38% percent of the women had 151-300 Facebook friends while

another 38% had 301-500 friends. Fifteen percent of the women reported 501-750 friends, 3%

had 751 friends or more and 6% had 50-150 Facebook friends. All of the women were Facebook

friends with friends and family while 75% were friends with coworkers and 51% were Facebook

friends with neighbors. Sixty-four out of the 65 women either agreed or strongly agreed that the

closed nature of the February mom group was important to them

Table 2

Number of Facebook Friends

# of Facebook Friends	Percentage of Women
50-150	6%
151-300	38%
301-500	38%
501-750	15%
751+	3%

All questions regarding the different uses of each site or platform were on a 5 point Likert scale with 1 as strongly disagree and 5 as strongly agree. The eight categories of uses of social media presented in the questionnaire were dominated by the response of the February mom group. Means and descriptive frequencies were calculated and presented in Table 3. In all but two categories, the women reported the February mom group as the highest means for each category or use. The categories in which the February mom group had the highest mean were information seeking (4.57), emotional support (4.69), companionship (4.26), exchanging beliefs and opinions (3.72), entertainment (4.51), and relaxation (4.17). Facebook had the highest means for professional advancement (2.32) and socialization (sharing personal pictures and stories, 4.66).

Table 3

Mean Responses of Uses of Social Media Site/Platforms(with Standard Deviations in parentheses)

| Type of Uses | Social Media Sites/Platforms | | | | |
	Facebook	Mom Group	Twitter	Instagram	B/S/T Group
Information	4.18 (.682)	**4.57**** (.684)	2.43 (1.290)	2.73 (1.257)	2.94 (1.351)
Emotional	3.88 (1.41)	**4.69**** (.635)	1.69 (.832)	1.94 (.827)	1.53 (.560)
Companionship	3.23 (1.183)	**4.26**** (.940)	1.71 (.825)	2.33 (1.190)	1.72 (.741)
Beliefs	3.17 (1.140)	**3.72*** (1.256)	1.97 (1.150)	1.85 (.939)	1.53 (.609)
Entertainment	4.40 (.524)	**4.51** (.526)	3.14 (1.417)	4.22 (.906)	2.53 (1.276)
Relaxation	4.02 (.838)	**4.17** (.858)	2.23 (1.114)	3.42 (1.370)	2.19 (1.167)
Professional	**2.32** (1.213)	1.97 (1.075)	2.09 (1.197)	2.09 (1.146)	1.97 (1.158)
Socialization	**4.66** (.567)	4.60 (.581)	2.06 (1.136)	4.33 (.854)	1.58 (.554)

Note: *p<.05, **p<.001

In order to determine if the highest mean of each category of use was statistically significant, one sample *t* tests were run against the mean of the next highest site/platform within the same category. If the highest mean for the category was statistically significant compared to the next mean, it signified that the women used that particular social media site or platform for that specific purpose more so than the other social media sites and platforms. Therefore, that social media site or platform would fulfill that particular need for this community more than the others.

The highest mean for the information-seeking category was the February mom group with a mean score of 4.57. A one-sample *t* test was conducted on the February mom group find-

and-share information score to determine whether its mean was significantly different from the next closest score, the Facebook mean score, 4.18, of the same measure. With alpha set at .05, the one sample t test was significantly different from 4.18, $t(64) = 4.588$, $p = < .001$. The effect size d of .569 was a medium effect. The results supported the conclusion that members use the February mom group to find and share information more than the other the other social networking sites and platforms.

The same test was conducted on the February mom group emotional support score to determine whether its mean was significantly different from the next closest score, the Facebook mean score of the same measure, 3.38. With alpha set at .05, the one sample t test was significantly different from 3.38, $t(64) = 16.649$, $p = < .001$. The effect size d of 2.066 was a large effect. The results supported the conclusion from Table 1 that members used the February mom group for emotional support more than the other the other social networking sites and platforms.

A one-sample t test compared the February mom group's belonging and companionship score to the next closest score, the Facebook mean score of the same measure, 3.23. With alpha set at .05, the one sample t test was significantly different from 3.23, $t(64) = 8.847$, $p = < .001$. The effect size d of 1.098 was a large effect. The results supported the conclusion that members used the February mom group for belonging and companionship more than the other social networking sites and platforms.

A one-sample t test was also run to find out if the mean for the February mom group's score was significantly higher than Facebook's mean score of 3.17 for exchanging beliefs and opinions. The one sample t test was significantly different from 3.17, $t(64) = 3.549$, p = .001 with the alpha set at .05. The effect size d of .44 was a medium effect. These results supported

the conclusion that the women used the February mom group to exchange beliefs and opinions more than the other social networking sites and platforms.

To determine whether February mom group source of entertainment mean score, 4.51, was significantly different from the next closest score, the Facebook mean score of the same measure, 4.40, another one sample t test was run. With alpha set at .05, the one sample t test was not significantly different from 4.40, $t(64) = 1.544$, $p = .128$. The effect size d of .192 was a small effect. The results did not support the conclusion that members used the February mom group as a source of entertainment more than the other social networking sites and platforms.

There were similar findings in the one-sample t test conducted on the February mom group form of relaxation score, 4.17, to determine whether its mean was significantly different from the next closest score, the Facebook mean score of the same measure, 4.02. With alpha set at .05, the one sample t test was not significantly different from 4.02, $t(64) = 1.402$, $p = .166$. The effect size d of .174 was a small effect. This did not support the conclusion that members used the February mom group as a form of relaxation more than the other social networking sites and platforms.

A one-sample t test was conducted on the Facebook professional advancement score, 2.32, to determine whether its mean was significantly different from the next closest scores, the Twitter and Instagram mean scores of the same measure, 2.09. With alpha set at .05, the one sample t test was not significantly different from 2.09, $t(64) = 1.549$, $p = .126$. The effect size d of .192 was a small effect. The results did not support the conclusion that members used Facebook for professional advancement more than the other social networking sites and platforms.

For the last measure, another one-sample t test was conducted on the Facebook socialization (sharing personal pictures and stories) score, 4.66, to determine whether its mean was significantly different from the next closest score, the February mom group's mean score of the same measure, 4.60. With alpha set at .05, the one sample t test was not significantly different from 4.60, $t(64) = .875$, $p = .385$. The effect size d of .109 was a small effect. The results did not support the conclusion that members used Facebook for sharing personal pictures and stories more than the other social networking sites and platforms.

In order to supplement the questionnaire results, the researcher conducted an informal interview with the point of contact within the group, the researcher's sister. She described the group as unique to other sites and platforms because of the common bond between all of the women. The initial shared bond of the children united the members and formed a connection that she describes as stronger as and more important than most other mediated communications and shared bonds such as professional or educational similarities.

She strongly agreed that she used the group to find and share information with the reasoning that the members all had the common bond that they were moms to children in the same age group but they all come from diverse backgrounds and locations so there was a greater diversity of information to draw from rather than her previously established social media circles. She said that there was also a greater freedom to discuss topics because the group was closed to outside eyes so there was less worry about posting questions concerning sensitive information. The format of the group encouraged discussion topics so it was easier to respond to another person because they were expecting a response rather than just sharing information such as in a traditional Facebook status.

The use of the February mom group for emotional support was described as a type of emotional support that would normally be too intimate to seek out on social media. She says the emotional support was different for this new chapter in the mom's lives. While she may seek emotional support for other issues, it is sought out in personal offline connections without the use of social media sites. Her motivation to seek out this emotional support in an online setting was the time constraints and the inability to join an offline group of a similar nature because of her work and life schedule.

While the February mom group still had the highest mean for sharing beliefs and opinions, it was only a relatively low score of 3.72. She said this was a result of seeing negative impacts on the group's dynamics after members shared opinions on topics that were sensitive or divisive in nature. Some sensitive issues that led to debate within the group and loss of membership were discussions of same sex marriage and marital infidelity. She reports that there was no specific need to post pictures only in the mom group because so many of them were friends with one another on their personal Facebook pages or other applications. She says that while personal pictures can be private and some moms treat them as more intimate, personally, she feels that posting pictures was less intimate than posting personal information and questions.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

RQ1: Why do these highly participatory community members expand their membership to
different platforms?

Because most of the moms' needs were met by this online motherhood group, it does not
seem that the evolution to other platforms was a result of the users' needs not being met by the
February mom group. While some of the alternate social media sites and platforms did receive
high scores in a few of the categories, such as Instagram for entertainment and socialization, the
means scores of the February mom group were the highest in 6 categories, 4 of which were
statistically significant. The only exceptions were the means scores for professional
advancement and socialization where Facebook was ranked higher although the means were not
statistically higher than other platforms. In the four categories found to have a significantly
higher mean, informational, emotional, companionship and exchanging beliefs, the February
mom group fulfilled all of these needs for the women more than any other social media site or
platform. It was clear that the February Mom Group was able to satisfy the important needs of
social media as defined by Papacharissi & Mendelson (2011) and Bonds-Raacke and Raacke
(2010), including informational needs and new connections, among others. The creation of this
group certainly seems to have filled a gap for these women and provided a central platform that
was able to meet their social media needs.

There was no evidence that these women joined Instagram and Twitter because certain
media needs were not being met by the previously established groups. Similarly, the
Buy/Sell/Trade group did not fill a gap that was not met by an existing social media platform.
According to the interview, this secondary group on Facebook was a result of trying to remove
some of the original February mom group rather than presenting a platform to fill an unmet need.

The mom group, rather than expanding to different platforms to fulfill unmet needs, expanded to different platforms based on genuine connections formed with the moms and a context collapse between their offline and online identities.

RQ2: What needs are met by each platform for these women?

The only platform to have met the women's needs in a significant way was the February mom group. The use of Facebook for professional advancement was not significant nor was it for the use of socialization. All of the mean scores for professional advancement were low, with the highest score (Facebook, 2.32) still on the side of disagree. The interview supported the idea that the February mom group acts as an "alternative to interpersonal and mediated communication, providing options or complements for aspects of an individual's environment that are not as fulfilling" (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011).

It seemed that the February mom group operated under the "strong norm of reciprocity" (Sun et al., 2009) that encouraged users to be active and engage with the media because it fulfilled their needs. The format of the group also fostered discussions in that members posted topics and questions expecting responses from the other women. This was differentiated from Facebook, where status updates could be seen as simply sharing information. The fact that the users turned to the group for belonging and companionship supported the idea that the group fostered a strong sense of social capital. The interview also supported the idea that the group offered both bridging and bonding social capital.

There was a strong form of bonding capital because these women all shared the very strong bond of having a child around the same age. The women all turned to this one group to fulfill these needs suggesting that that this common bond was a high priority in their lives. The unique ability of the group to focus on this one important aspect of their lives, their children,

31

separated it from other social media sites and platforms where the audience is larger and may not all share this bond. This also gave the women an outlet where they could feel an intimacy regarding the topic of child rearing and pregnancy without judgment from others. This strong type of bonding social capital contributed to the women's feelings of freedom to seek out emotional support within this previously unknown community.

In addition to the bonding social capital, there was also bridging social capital within the group. One of the reasons listed for turning to the February mom group to find and share information was the diversity of viewpoints within the common bond. The women were able to gain knowledge from their differences by drawing on different experiences as well as different geographic locations. The women preferred not to seek out this information within their established social media communities where there was previous bonding capital unrelated to their due dates. The women used this bridging capital as defined by Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe (2007) to reach out to these other women to form this new community with shared information and support for one another.

In comparison to other online mothering communities and female oriented groups, the February mom group is similar in nature in that the mean score for emotional support is very high (Boneva & Kraut, 2002). Like the group described by Ley (2007), the February mom group is private with no restrictions placed on its members by its administrators. This privacy enabled users to have greater freedoms when discussing personal issues they may not have shared with a more general audience in their social networks. There was also a similarity in that the group described by Ley (2007) linked others to their personal pages and pictures. The February mom group went one step further by allowing other members to have access to their personal Facebook profiles, pictures, and statuses by friending one another on the social media site.

Much like the group described by Ley (2007), there was little to no moderation in the February mom group when it came to discussion of controversial topics. In the case of the February mom group, this led to some members leaving the group after such topics were discussed on the site. The relatively low score for sharing beliefs and opinions on the group may be the result of the negative outcomes of such discussions. It may be beneficial for online communities to allow open communication for members but self-moderate when it comes to certain controversial issues and end discussions before there are negative consequences for the group.

More of the women's needs were met by the February mom group than other social networking sites or platforms. The emphasis in uses and gratification theory is placed on the users, and the women were more likely to prefer the February mom group because it met those needs. This was supported by the finding that 80% of the women say they have daily interaction within the February mom group compared to 72% on Facebook, 59% on Instagram and only 2% on Twitter and 3% on the Buy/Sell/Trade group.

The creation of the separate Facebook group, the Buy/Sell/Trade group, did not seem to fulfill any of the needs outlined by social media uses and gratification. Instead, it was one of the "neighborhoods" described by Ren et al. (2007) that still exist within the larger community. While the group did not have a subgoal that fit in with a specific social media need, the group operated within the existing community of women and seemed to fulfill a structural purpose by simplifying the main group's posts.

RQ3: Do the women integrate their offline and online lives and identities on social media accounts?

It seems that in today's world social media sites are able to bridge the gap between online and offline presences more than ever. The information that 60% of the women were Facebook friends with 51 or more members of the Facebook mom group suggests that there was a relationship between the online and offline lives of these women. This was particularly interesting when 92% of the women disclosed the fact that they were unlikely to add people that they did not know in an offline context. The women used the social media platform of the February mom group to merge their online and offline lives through the Facebook site. Facebook is used primarily in a way that merges users offline lives to an online presence. This act of adding users that were unknown in these women's offline lives reversed this process and merged their online identities through the February mom group with their offline identities.

The women also integrated their Instagram accounts with 28 out of the 32 of those with an Instagram account following other February moms. The presence of linked accounts on social media sites, oftentimes with Facebook as the hub, blurs these boundaries of online identities. As a result of these linked accounts, these women were presenting their one personal account as their online identity to the group (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). The unique part of this online mom community was that it did not exist in a separate sphere from these social media accounts and instead actively used existing social media profiles to verify and link the women, building a sense of trust within the community (Dwyer, Hiltz, & Passerini, 2007). The bonding taking place within the community as well as the bonding of their offline identities contributed to a sense of "thick trust" (Radin, 2006).

The fact that the women were friends with one another on Facebook as well as Instagram suggested that these women were not as interested in "upholding structure" in their social networking identities as Binder et al. (2009) suggests. While these women were experiencing

context collapse by using their personal Facebook accounts to form an online community with those not from their offline settings, there was still a concern for privacy. This concern of broadcasting certain posts to a wide network (Binder et al., 2009) was evident in that 64 out of 65 of the women agreed or strongly agreed that the closed nature of the February mom group was important to them. This type of privacy may have enabled the women to turn to this group to meet their needs rather than the other sites and platforms (Brandtzaeg, Luders, & Skjetnes, 2010). The combination of strict privacy settings as well as the diverse audience that comprised the mom group could also enable more disclosures and participation (Vitak, 2012).

The women that formed the February mom group sought out a community that was able to fulfill their need of companionship as suggested by Wellman & Guila (1999) with members that had a common bond or shared interest. These moms had very strong mean score of 4.57 that used the group to find and share information rather than the lower mean (but still the highest of all the social networks) for those that use the group to exchange beliefs and opinions. This suggests that the motivation to participate was rooted more in information rather than beliefs as put forth by Herring's (1996) and Wasko & Farraj's (2000) assessments of online community participation.

This particular community did fit Tonteri et al.'s (2011) description of a virtual community in that the members brought distinct identities to the group while still having a strong common bond as well as a "strong emotional connection" between the women. The high mean for sharing information was also echoed in the fact that all of the women shared personal information through the process of using their Facebook profiles to validate one another and their friendships. This process of sharing online and offline identities fit Armstrong et al.'s (2012) criteria for building a sustained community with high levels of participation.

35

Limitations and Future Research

This study was unable to provide support for the idea that the women moved platforms to meet different needs. Since the other platforms did not seem to specifically meet the needs put forth by previous social media studies more than the Facebook moms group, interviews with members might have been more helpful to understand the motivations for utilizing other platforms. Interviews could help to determine why these women turn to these people that were not known in their offline lives rather than those already a part of their online lives and social media circles. Additional research might also look at why these women used social media sites and platforms in addition to sites that already meet their needs.

Future research may also focus on the role of privacy when choosing online communities and engaging in online relationships. Future studies may consider whether the evolution of social media has led to expectations of verifiable online identities in all contexts and what the expectations of privacy are in different online communities. This study only focused on one very specific online community. Thus, the results are not generalizable and cannot be applied to all online communities in all contexts. The study only focused on the women that made the jump to the Facebook group. To get a fuller picture, a study that includes those that did not join the group and only utilized the original forum might be considered.

Conclusion

It is clear that the February mom group provided for users' needs more than the original forum; otherwise such a move would not have taken place. It is undetermined whether these needs that motivated the change are the ones listed in this study or if they are needs related to the structure of the new platform. The creation of the February mom group on Facebook coincided with the new needs that these women had as they prepared for the arrival of a child. These needs

were not met by traditional social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram in comparison to the February mom group. The means for finding and sharing information, emotional support, and belonging and companionship were significantly higher for the February mom group in comparison to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and the Buy/Sell/Trade group. The mean for sharing beliefs and opinions was also higher than the other social media sites and platforms but was not as high as the other three needs. It can be said that this online community for moms is the preferred way these women use social media for these four important uses of online communication.

The addition of alternate social media and platforms into a person's online life does not necessarily mean people will use them more than the original. In the instance of a social media platform like Instagram, the main purpose for its use is to share pictures, but the women in this study still reported using Facebook and the February mom group to share pictures with similar numbers. It seems that the building of a community through shared information and common bonds led to the strongest interaction with a social media site rather than how well its structure performs a specific function relating to fulfilling a certain need. Instead of adding new platforms to meet needs unmet by the moms group, the addition of platforms occurred as a result of context collapse between these women's online and offline lives. The women in the moms group formed tight bonds with thick trust. Thus, the relationships carried over into their networks on other platforms.

This study found that the women were more likely to depend on online communities structured from an online background, the Facebook moms group, for their needs rather than online communities from an offline background, such as Facebook. Previous social circles on Facebook consisting of friends, family, coworkers and neighbors were not sought out to meet the

women's needs in a social media setting in comparison with the February mom group. Even with the evolution of Web 2.0, online mom communities still serve a function for their users in today's social media world. Groups such as this one are very specific in nature and are more tailored to fit the needs of its users than broad social media sites appealing to the general public. As a result, these sites cannot fulfill the informational and emotional needs in the same way that a specific online community is able to.

Relatively newer social media sites and platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter serve their own purposes and may connect offline users in an online environment, but people will still seek out connections in an online context as well. These social media sites do not replace the communities and bonds users seek out to satisfy their online needs, especially when it comes to seeking out emotional and informational support for special topics, even more universal topics such as pregnancy and parenting.

This study found that the need to uphold structure in one's online presence is not as important as it has been in the past. The rise of social media sites puts users in the online world with their personal information and names as their main point of contact. This type of identifying information is a far cry from the anonymity of early forums and listservs. Today's social media accounts are linked in such a way that the women cannot be anonymous to certain groups in their online circles without taking extra steps to maintain these boundaries. The willingness of the women to move from an anonymity based site such as a forum with usernames to a Facebook group linked to personal accounts, suggests that the ease of use or the need to verify identities was more important than maintaining separate online circles. Despite the context collapse, privacy remained an important issue among these women especially in regards

to discussion centered on their children. The ability to verify other's identities was more important to the women than maintaining their own anonymity.

Open, anonymous online forums and discussion groups do not hold the same appeal as closed, private groups with verifiable personal information. It is in these types of closed online communities that the strongest bonds occur between these women who are more willing to seek out and share information and emotional support. These common bonds and the users' sense of thick trust overcame the women's previous practice of online friendships on spaces generally reserved for offline friendships. This study illustrates how members of online communities seek out active, reciprocal relationships with common identifying goals rather than less engaged relationships with previously established offline histories.

REFERENCES

Armstrong, N., Koteyko, N., & Powell, J. (2012). 'Oh dear, should I really be saying that on here?': Issues of identity and authority in an online diabetes community. *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal For The Social Study Of Health, Illness & Medicine*, *16*(4), 347-365.

Baym, N. K. (1997) Interpreting soap opera and creating community: Inside an electronic fan culture. In *Culture of the Internet*. Eds. Kiesler, S.

Binder, J., Howes, A., & Sutcliffe, A. (2009, April). The problem of conflicting social spheres: effects of network structure on experienced tension in social network sites. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 965-974). ACM.

Bonds-Raacke, J., & Raacke, J. (2010). MySpace and Facebook: Identifying dimensions of uses and gratifications for friend networking sites. *Individual Differences Research*, 8(1), 27-33.

Boneva, B. and Kraut, R. *(*2002*)* Email, gender, and personal relationships. In Wellman, B. and Haythornthwaite, C. (eds) *The Internet in Everyday Life*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. The forms of capital. Pp. 241-58. In Richardson, J.G. (eds) *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press

Boyd, D., & Marwick, A. (2011). *Social privacy in networked publics: Teens' attitudes, practices, and strategies.*

Brignall III, T., & Van Valey, T. (2008). Online Gaming Communities and the Neo Tribalism Movement. *Theory and Science*, *10*(1).

Buffardi, L. E., & Campbell, W. K. (2008). Narcissism and social networking web sites. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, *34*(10), 1303-1314.

Cao, Y., Glukhova, A., Klamma, R., Renzel, D., & Spaniol, M. (2008, July). Measuring community satisfaction across gaming communities. In *Ubi-Media Computing, 2008 First IEEE International Conference on* (pp. 414-419). IEEE.

Coleman, James S. 1988. Social capital in the creation of human capital. American Journal of Sociology. 95:S95-S121

Cooks, L.*,* Paredes, M. C.*, &* Scharrer, E*. (*2002*).* There's 'O place' like home: Searching for community on Oprah.com. *In* M.Consalvos *&* S.Paasonen *(Eds.), Women and Everyday Uses of the Internet: Agency and Identity* (pp. *139–168*). New York: Peter Lang.

Dennis, A. R.*,* Pootheri, S. K.*, &* Natarajan, V. L. *(*1998*).* Lessons from the early adopters of Web groupware*. Journal of Management Information Systems,* 14 *(*4*), 65–86.*

Durant, K. T., McCray, A. T., & Safran, C. (2010, November). Modeling the temporal evolution of an online cancer forum. In *Proceedings of the 1st ACM International Health Informatics Symposium* (pp. 356-365). ACM.

Drentea, P., & Moren-Cross, J. L. (2005). Social capital and social support on the web: the case of an internet mother site. *Sociology of health & illness*, *27*(7), 920-943.

Dwyer, C., Hiltz, S. R., & Passerini, K. (2007, August). Trust and privacy concern within social networking sites: A comparison of Facebook and MySpace. In *Proceedings of AMCIS* (Vol. 2007).

Fallows, D. (2005). *How Women and Men Use the Internet*. Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project. Retrieved from *http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Women_and_Men_online.pdf*

Flaherty, L. M., Pearce, K. J., & Rubin, R. B. (1998). Internet and face to face communication: Not functional alternatives. *Communications Quarterly*, 46, (3), 250-268.

 Fox, S. *(2005*)*. Digital Divisions. *Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project. Retrieved from* http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Digital_Divisions_Oct_5_2005.pdf

Gallant, L. M., Boone, G. M., & Heap, A. (2007). Five heuristics for designing and evaluating Web-based communities. *First Monday*, *12*(3), 1-11.

Goldberg, L. R. (1990). An alternative "description of personality": The Big-Five factor structure. *Journal of personality and Social Psychology*, *59*(6), 1216-1229.

Herring, S. C. *(1996*)*. Two variants of an electronic message schema*. In* S. C.Herring *(Ed.), Computer-mediated communication: Linguistic, social and cross-cultural perspectives* (pp. *81–106*). Philadelphia : John Benjamins.

Collins, P. H. *(2000*) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.* New York: Routledge.

Jones, Q. *(1997*)*. Virtual-communities, Virtual settlements & cyber-archaeology: A theoretical outline*. Journal of Computer Mediated Communication, 3 (3). Retrieved from* http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol3/issue3/jones.html*.

Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratification research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *37*(4), 509.

Kilsheimer, J. *(1997, April 7*)*. Virtual communities; Cyberpals keep in touch online. *The Arizona Republic, p. E3*.

Kumar, R., Novak, J., & Tomkins, A. (2010). Structure and evolution of online social networks. In *Link Mining: Models, Algorithms, and Applications* (pp. 337-357). Springer New York.

Lampe, C., Ellison, N., and Steinfield, C. A Face(book) in the crowd: Social searching vs. social browsing. In *Proc. CSCW 2006,* ACM Press (2006), 167-170.

Leung, L. (2007). Unwillingness-to-communicate and college students' motives in SMS mobile messaging. *Telematics and Informatics*, *24*(2), 115-129.

Ley, B. L. (2007). Vive les roses!: The architecture of commitment in an online pregnancy and mothering group. *Journal of Computer‐Mediated Communication*, *12*(4), 1388-1408.

Lin, N. (1999). Building a network theory of social capital. *Connections*, *22*(1), 28-51.

Marshall, G. (Ed.). (1998). A dictionary of Sociology (2 nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marwick, A. E., Boyd, D. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, *13*(1), 114-133.

Mazer, J. P., Murphy, R. E., & Simonds, C. J. (2009). The effects of teacher self-disclosure via Facebook on teacher credibility. *Learning, Media and Technology*, *34*(2), 175-183.

Mickelson, K. D. *(*1997*)*. Seeking social support: Parents in electronic support groups*.* In S.Kiesler (Ed.), *Culture of the Internet* (pp. *157–178*). Mahawah , NJ : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Miyata, K. *(*2002*) Social support for Japanese mothers online and offline. In* Wellman, B. *and* Haythornthwaite, C. *(eds) The Internet in Everyday Life.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Nyland, R., Marvez, R., & Beck, J. (2007, February). MySpace: Social networking or social isolation. In *AEJMC Midwinter Conference* (pp. 23-24).

Orgad, S. *(*2005*). Storytelling Online: Talking Breast Cancer on the Internet.* New York: Peter Lang.

Park, N., Kee, K. F., & Valenzuela, S. (2009). Being immersed in social networking environment: Facebook groups, uses and gratifications, and social outcomes. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *12*(6), 729-733.

Radin, P. *(*2006*).* "To me, it's my life:" Medical communication, trust, and activism in cyberspace*. Social Science and Medicine, 62(3),* 591–601.

Ren, Y., Kraut, R., & Kiesler, S. (2007). Applying common identity and bond theory to design of online communities. *Organization Studies*, *28*(3), 377-408.

Ridings, C.*,* Gefen, D.*,* & Arinze, B. *(*2002). Some antecedents and effects of trust in virtual communities*. Journal of Strategic Information Systems,* 11 *(3–4),* 271–295

Ridings, C. M., & Gefen, D. (2004). Virtual community attraction: Why people hang out online. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *10*(1), 00-00.

Ross, C., Orr, E. S., Sisic, M., Arseneault, J. M., Simmering, M. G., & Orr, R. R. (2009). Personality and motivations associated with Facebook use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *25*(2), 578-586.

Ryan, T., & Xenos, S. (2011). Who uses Facebook? An investigation into the relationship between the Big Five, shyness, narcissism, loneliness, and Facebook usage. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *27*(5), 1658-1664.

Schaffer, R., Kuczynski, K., & Skinner, D. (2008). Producing genetic knowledge and citizenship through the Internet: Mothers, pediatric genetics, and cybermedicine. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, *30*(1), 145-159.

Side, Katherine. 1999. "Government restraint and limits to *economic* reciprocity in *women's* friendships." Atlantis, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 5-13.

Smock, A. D., Ellison, N. B., Lampe, C., & Wohn, D. Y. (2011). Facebook as a toolkit: A uses and gratification approach to unbundling feature use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *27*(6), 2322-2329.

Strong-Boag, Veronica. 1995. "'Their side of the story': *Women's* voices from Ontario suburbs." In *A Diversity of Women: Ontario,* 1945-80. Joy Parr (ed.). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 46-74.

Taylor, V. *(*1996*) Rock-A-BY Baby: Feminism, Self Help, and Postpartum Depression.* New York: Routledge.

Taylor, J. S.*,* Layne, L. L.*, &* Wozniak, D. F. *(Eds.) (*2004*). Consuming Motherhood. New* Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Tonteri, L., Kosonen, M., Ellonen, H. K., & Tarkiainen, A. (2011). Antecedents of an experienced sense of virtual community. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *27*(6), 2215-2223.

Vincent, S. (2003). Preserving Domesticity: Reading Tupperware in Women's Changing Domestic, Social and Economic Roles*. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, *40*(2), 171-196.

Vitak, J. (2012). The Impact of Context Collapse and Privacy on Social Network Site Disclosures. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *56*(4), 451-470.

Wasko, M. M.*, &* Faraj, S. *(*2000*).* "It is what one does": Why people participate and help others in electronic communities of practice*. Journal of Strategic Information Systems, 9 (*2-3*),* 155–173.

Kennedy, J., & Weimann, G. (2011). The strength of weak terrorist ties. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *23*(2), 201-212.

Wellman, B.*, & Gulia, M. (*1999*). The network basis of social support: A network is more than the sum of its ties. *In B.Wellman (Ed.), Networks in the global village: Life in contemporary communities* (pp. *83–118*). Boulder , CO : Westview Press.

Wellman, B. *and* Haythornthwaite, C. (*2001*) The Internet in Everyday Life. In *Wellman, B.* and *Haythornthwaite, C.* (eds) *The Internet in Everyday Life.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Wright, C. 1960. Functional analysis and mass communication. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 24.

APPENDIX A

Survey Tool

Have you previously been a part of an online group?

Are you currently a member of the February Moms Facebook group?

Which of the following accounts do you have?

Were you a member of the Bump's online message board?

Facebook

How many Facebook friends do you have?

Who are you friends with on Facebook?

Have you ever rejected a friend request from someone you know?

Not including the people from the February Mom group, do you only add people on Facebook

that you know in real life?

How often do you update your Facebook status?

How often do you comment on or like another person's content on your Facebook newsfeed?

I pay close attention to my privacy settings on Facebook

I use different privacy settings for different people on my friends list

I use Facebook to share and find information

I look to Facebook for emotional support

I look to Facebook for belonging and companionship

I use Facebook to exchange beliefs and opinions

I look to Facebook as a source of entertainment

I use Facebook as a form of relaxation

I use Facebook as a form of professional advancement

I use Facebook to share personal pictures and stories

I feel comfortable sharing the same information with all of my Facebook friends

Most of the people I know have a Facebook account

I had a Facebook account before I joined the February Mom Group

Facebook Group

How many of your Facebook friends are from the February Mom group?

How often do you post in the February Mom Group?

How often do you comment on or like another person's content in the February Mom's group?

I share information within the group's page that I would not share with all of my Facebook

friends

I use the Facebook group to share and find information

I look to the Facebook group for emotional support

I look to the Facebook group for belonging and companionship

I use the Facebook group to exchange beliefs and opinions

I look to the Facebook group as a source of entertainment

I use the Facebook group as a form of relaxation

I use the Facebook group as a form of professional advancement

I use the Facebook group to share personal pictures and pictures

I am more active in the group than I am on my Facebook newsfeed

I am an active member of other Facebook groups

The closed nature of the group is important to me

Twitter

Who do you follow on Twitter?

How often do you check your Twitter feed?

How often do you Tweet?

Is your Twitter only visible to your followers?

Do you follow any February Mom Group members on Twitter

Do any February Mom Group members follow you on Twitter?

I use Twitter to share and find information

I look to Twitter for emotional support

I look to Twitter for belonging and companionship

I use Twitter to exchange beliefs and opinions

I look to Twitter as a source of entertainment

I use Twitter as a form of relaxation

I use Twitter as a form of professional advancement

I use Twitter to share personal pictures and stories

I feel comfortable sharing the same information on Twitter with my friends on Facebook

I had a Twitter account before I joined the February Moms group

Instagram

Who follows you on Instagram?

Are your images on Instagram visible only to your followers?

How often do you add pictures to your Instagram?

How often do you use the Instagram application?

Do you follow any February Mom Group members on Instagram?

Do any February Mom Group members follow you on Instagram?

Did you have an Instagram account before you were a part of the February Moms group?

I feel comfortable sharing personal pictures on Instagram

I use Instagram to share and find information

I look to Instagram for emotional support

I look to Instagram for belonging and companionship

I use Instagram to exchange beliefs and opinions

I look to Instagram as a source of entertainment

I use Instagram as a form of relaxation

I use Instagram as a form of professional advancement

I use Instagram to share personal pictures and stories

Buy/Sell/Trade Group

Who do you know that is on the Buy/Sell/Trade group?

How often do you post on the Buy/Sell/Trade group?

How often do you comment on or like a post from the Buy/Sell/Trade Group

Do you use the Buy/Sell/Trade Group to replace other online shopping?

Do you use the Buy/Sell/Trade Group for financial support?

Do you use the Buy/Sell/Trade group to support other February Moms?

Had you used similar sites to buy handmade goods prior to the February Mom group?

I use the Buy/Sell/Trade group to share and find information

I look to the Buy/Sell/Trade group for emotional support

I look to the Buy/Sell/Trade group for belonging and companionship

I use the Buy/Sell/Trade group to exchange beliefs and opinions

I look to the Buy/Sell/Trade group as a source of entertainment

I use the Buy/Sell/Trade group as a form of relaxation

I use the Buy/Sell/Trade group as a form of professional advancement

I use the Buy/Sell/Trade group to share personal pictures and stories

General

I prefer using _____ to share and find information

I prefer using _____ for emotional support

I prefer using _____ for belonging and companionship

I prefer using _____ to exchange beliefs and opinions

I prefer using _____ as a source of entertainment

I prefer using _____ as a form of relaxation

I prefer using _____ share personal pictures and stories

When it comes to deciding who follows you or is friends with you, which platform are you most

selective in?

IRB Approval

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/projects using living humans as subjects, or samples or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.6792
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

➤ Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at http://appl003.lsu.edu/osp/osp.nsf/$Content/Humans+Subject+Committee?OpenDocument

➤ A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
(A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B thru E.
(B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1 & 2)
(C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
　　•If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
(D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
(E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB.
　　Training link: (http://cme.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/learning/humanparticipant-protections.asp.)

1) Principal Investigator: Shannon Snell　　　**Rank:** Master's Student　　**Student*? Y/N** Y

Dept.: Mass Communication　　**Ph:** 330-635-6337　　**E-mail:** sssnell3@lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank and e-mail for each
•If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

Kasey Windels, Assistant Professor

3) Project Title: Platform Evolution in an Online Mom Group

4) LSU Proposal?(yes or no) No　　If Yes, LSU Proposal Number_____

Also, if YES, either　○　This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant
　　　　OR
　　　　　　　　○　More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology Students) Online Mom Group
•Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature　　　　　　　** Date 5/14/13　(no per signatures)
**I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changed I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Effective August 1, 2007, all Exemptions will expire three years from date of approval, unless a continuation report, found on our website, is filed prior to expiration date

Screening Committee Action: Exempted ✓　Not Exempted　　Category/Paragraph 2
Reviewer Meghan Sandus Signature　　　　　Date 5/24/13
Roll

Study Exempted By:
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
225-578-8692 | www.lsu.edu/irb
Exemption Expires: 5/23/2016

IRB# E8213 LSU Proposal#_____
✓ Complete Application
Human Subjects Training

VITA

Shannon Snell graduated from Suffolk University in Boston, Massachusetts in May 2010 with a Bachelor of Science in communications and journalism. She enrolled in the Master's program at Louisiana State University in the Manship School of Mass Communication in August 2011. Following graduation, Shannon plans to pursue a career in the communications field.