



**AN EXPLORATORY EXAMINATION
OF
SOCIAL WEBSITE QUALITY**

THESIS

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Abstract

With websites becoming the frontend for numerous systems, the system's benefits require customers to have a favorable evaluation of the site and an intention to re-use it. It must be considered to be of high quality. With websites increasing adding collaborative technologies (such as tools for social networking, forums, and blogging) a new instrument to evaluate the quality of these types of sites is needed. Before such an instrument is developed, an understanding of the applicable theories is needed. This study offers that background.

First the potential benefits of this research and its guiding questions are presented. Next is a literature review outlining possible constructs upon which an instrument to evaluate the quality of social websites could be based. Then the focus group's background and details are provided along with the analysis strategy, content analysis. After that, each constructs is discussed with the supporting/non-supporting evidence from the groups. Finally, the discussion concludes with discussions of limitations and suggestions for follow-on research.

From this investigation, nine constructs (Ease of Understanding, Intuitive Operation, Informational Fit-to-task, Relative Advantage, Trust, Response Time, Visual Appeal, Innovativeness, and Social Presence) were discovered which could provide the basis for an instrument to measure social website quality.

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Unfortunately, my family deserves more than I could possibly say here, but I must try... Dad, thanks for never telling me I can't do something. Mom, you show your love through “service”, yet somehow you taught me independence - thanks. To my wife... the love, understanding, and support you show me are astounding. All the time I had to spend away from you was made much easier because of this, hopefully you understand the depth of my gratitude. God, our father, thank you for demonstrating your love through these wonderful people who have helped me through this time.

Joseph B. Werling III

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I. Introduction

- As of 31 Dec 2007, there are approximately 1.32 billion Internet users (MMG, 2007).
- Marketing executives expect a majority of their future customers to discover new products or services online and a third to purchase goods there [online]" (Martin, 2007, p. 2).
- The United States Air Force has established a cyber command.

These seemingly random facts all symbolize the importance of the Internet to people, business and government. This infrastructure is not static, but continues to change and evolve. A changing mix of technologies, capabilities, and expectations causes the Internet itself to change and reflect these new possibilities. These changes are not lost on businesses, academia or government. This year, McKinsey Quarterly surveyed 410 marketing executives and noted that websites are increasingly adding collaborative technologies for advertising, product development and customer service.

As the Internet changes, so does our terminology to describe it. The current thought concerning the newest aspects of the Internet and how society is using it, has been termed "Web 2.0". Tim O'Reilly, founder and CEO of O'Reilly Media, discussed on his company's website how they coined the term and provides a mostly succinct definition. "*Web 2.0 is the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the*

move to the Internet as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform. Chief among those rules is this: Build applications that harness network effects [applications that are designed] to get better the more people use them” (O'Reilly, 2006). This definition is still incomplete because Web 2.0 is a very broad term that tries to encompass a majority of the public's use, expectations and understanding of today's current Internet capabilities.

The dynamic aspects of the Internet, or networking capabilities in general, are not lost on military theorists. The US military's idea of Network Centric Warfare (NCW) recognizes how these changes can mean significant military benefits. While it is another broad term, almost as broad as Web 2.0, it can be defined as the “articulation of the set of tenets that link a robustly networked force to dramatically increased combat power. It describes how information coupled with changes in Command and Control can transform military organizations” (Alberts & Hayes, 2003, p. xix). The same collaborative technologies, technologies that are part of the Web 2.0 Internet, are forming the infrastructure upon which the military may realize NCW.

The web 2.0 Internet is also becoming more “social” in nature and this fact is significant to business and military. The term “social websites” can be considered to refer to the population of websites sharing characteristics that enhance communication and interpersonal relations. It is a subset of websites powered by *Social Software*, the “various, loosely connected types of applications that allow individuals to communicate with one another, and to track discussions across the Web as they happen” (Green & Pearson, 2005, p. 1). For a better understanding, this term can be contrasted with informative websites (which simply post information, like an encyclopedia) or e-

commerce websites. Specific website types considered to be social websites are blogs, forums, and social networking sites (SNS). See the glossary (Appendix A) for definitions of these terms. An instrument to measure social website quality would be extremely beneficial.

Potential Benefits

In an effort to develop such an instrument, this research endeavor will examine applicable theories to capture evaluative criteria for social websites. By supporting the development of an instrument to evaluate social websites, it is hoped that a better understanding will be gained about important aspects in the manufacture and promotion of such websites. The understanding of these factors can provide academic, commercial and military benefits.

Academic Benefits

Past research has created a number of web evaluation instruments mostly out of necessity, because an empirically strong instrument had yet to be developed. WebQual™, an instrument designed for evaluating informational and e-commerce websites, was designed to hopefully fill that void. This research concerns a specific domain of websites (social websites) but will hopefully have the same chief benefit – to allow researchers “to focus more of their time and energy on their research agendas rather than on measurement development” (Loiacono, Watson and Goodhue, 2003).

Commercial Benefits

High profile social sites have user bases that make the sites very valuable. In 2005, MySpace sold for \$580 million to US News Corp. Blogs that are well trafficked

provide ad revenues to the writers. Company sponsored forums provide avenues customer service, reducing demand and providing feedback into the design process. Today technical costs for social websites have fallen to inexpensive levels. Companies are hosting free blogs and SNS. The biggest costs for most social websites are promotion/advertising. To ensure that advertising money/effort is well used, you must understand how users/customers view the website. An instrument such as a *WebQual for Web 2.0* could help provide that feedback.

Military Benefits

Like any major organization, the military spends millions of dollars on IT systems to increase their effectiveness and productivity. Its hierarchical structure allows it to force these systems on users, but forcing systems on users does not guarantee system reuse. Forcing the system on users will guarantee some experience with the system, but a negative first impression leaves a lasting impression that will cause users to avoid the system (Anderson, 1981, 1982; Lindgaard, Fernandes, Dudek, & Brown, 2006). Users with negative first impressions will only use it to the extent they are required to, which will keep the investing organization, like the U.S. military, from realizing the full benefits of their investment.

Social websites are appearing in the military too. Some commanders are using blogs to speak to their people. The Air Force has its *Knowledge Now* website for Communities of Interest (COIs) and Communities of Practice (CoPs). New commanders have a military sponsored website to turn to for advice “Commanders Connection” (*Commanders Connection*, 2007).

Similar to commercial IT systems, Military IT systems are increasingly adding collaborative components to enhance decision making and knowledge transfer. These components are turning the web front-ends of these systems into social websites that need effective evaluative criteria in order to ensure maximum usage and the greatest return on investment.

Research Questions

This thesis is a search for the logical framework and ideas upon which an instrument for social website quality could be based. The literature review helped propose these constructs, while the focus groups provided support for the ideas found.

WebQual™, although designed for informational and e-commerce websites, provides a strong foundation upon which this work can build because it seeks to answer a similar question to ours. WebQual asked “*What makes consumers prefer one website to another?*” (p.8). this research concerns a specific domain of websites (social websites) and has two comparable questions:

- (1) *What makes users decide to use social websites?*
- (2) *What makes users prefer one social website to another?*

Thesis Overview

The next chapter will detail WebQual’s constructs and theoretical background. Additionally it will present some theories that would only apply to social websites. Chapter 3 provides the background and details about the focus groups conducted. Chapter 4 examines each of the proposed constructs from chapter 2 while highlighting the supporting/non-supporting evidence from the focus groups. Finally, chapter 5

discusses concludes with the significance this research and provides suggestions for follow-on research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Quality and measuring the users view

"Quality" as a term is ambiguous because its meaning is dependent on the object of discussion. There are generally two types of quality, product quality and service quality and they are measured differently. Products have tangible aspects upon which users can determine quality; services do not (Loiacono, 2000). The American Heritage Dictionary (4th ed.) defines a service as "the performance of work or duties for a superior or as a servant." A website performs duties for the consumer and can be considered a service.

Some have argued that regardless of status (product or service), quality should be examined from the user's perspective. Peter Drucker, the esteemed writer, management consultant and university professor has also noted on how quality should be examined from a users perspective saying that only what gives customers value, and they are willing to pay for, constitutes quality.

Studies within Information Technology (IT), outside of quality issues, also tend to focus on users. Turner (1997) discusses this "User-Centered thought". He presents the view that studies within IT may focus on users for practicality because other types of factors can be "very difficult to define and measure consistently across situations" (p. 15) or "open to a wide number of interpretations depending upon the context" (p. 16).

What to measure? – Behavior, Intentions, Attitudes, Beliefs

Behavior, Intentions

Having suggested that website quality should be measured from a user view, the question now is – What about the user's perception of quality should we measure? It is tempting to measure "use" of the site (a behavior), but there can be difficulties in measuring website use. There are technological problems with ensuring accurate tracking of users and privacy concerns. Thus measuring "intention-to-use" is a useful proxy for determining website quality. This is supported by DeLone and Mclean's 2003 work, which suggests that "intention-to-use" may be a worthwhile alternative measure to "use" in some contexts. Additionally, measuring a website after it has been released and fixing problems can be harmful to the websites reputation and a more costly option than pretesting to ensure adequate quality, because initial user impressions carry a lot of weight. Intention-to-use is dependent on the user's beliefs & attitudes. An *expanded* explanation of beliefs, attitudes, and intentions can be found in Appendix A.

Attitudes, Beliefs

An attitude can be defined as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object" (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p. 6). Attitudes are affective (emotional) or evaluative (rational) in nature and its type is determined by the set of beliefs about the attitude object. While these concepts are inter-related, different processes underlie the formation of each. The most influential theory interrelating them is the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA).

TRA also offered the notion of behavior as primarily a consequence of intention to perform the behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Under TRA, intention is influenced by the person's attitude toward the behavior and the Subjective Norm concerning the behavior. These have been predisposed by the related set of beliefs. These relationships are modeled in figure 1.

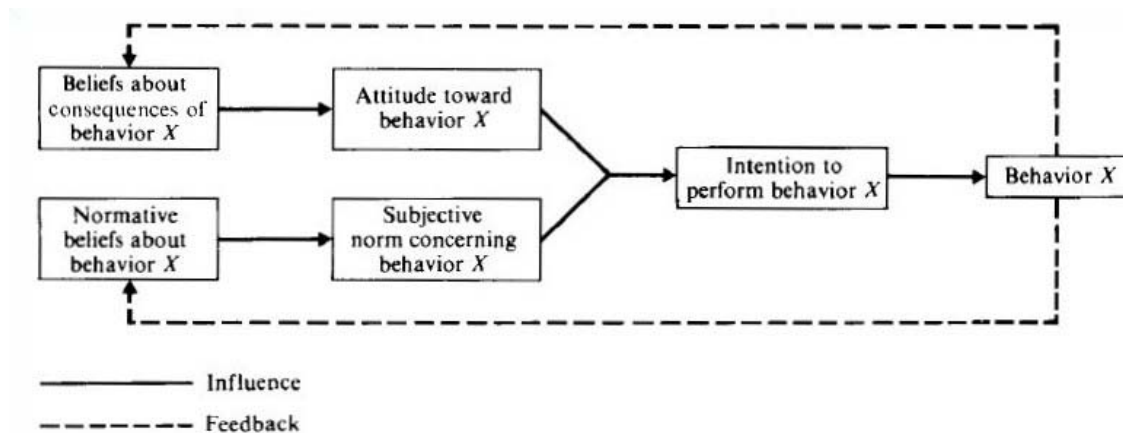


Figure 1. Theory of Reasoned Action
 (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 16)

TRA is not an IT theory, but a psychological theory that is a well-accepted paradigm for understanding the determinants of behavior. It is supported by a large body of research across multiple subject areas (Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988; Venkatesh et al., 2003 and Hansen, Moller, & Stubbe, 2004). This includes "a great deal of theoretical research aimed at understanding the theory's limitations, testing key assumptions and analyzing various refinements and extensions" (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989, p. 985).

Davis found that "attitudes only partially mediated the effects of these beliefs on intentions" (Davis, 1989, p. 335) unlike what TRA would suggest and "argued that it made more sense to focus on measuring these beliefs as direct predictors of intentions

rather than trying to measure attitudes as well" (Loiacono, Watson, & Goodhue, 2007, p. 54). Additionally, a focus on beliefs rather than attitudes provides a finer grain measurement giving businesses information useful to improvement. TRA and its IT focused descendent, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), form the theoretical basis upon which many website evaluation instruments are formed.

Evaluating Websites

A plethora of instruments

The need for instruments to evaluate the consumers' perception of a website has lead researchers in advertising, e-commerce, and MIS to develop a number of instruments, including six which were published in the *Information Systems Research* special issue on Measuring e-Commerce Net-Enabled Organizations (June and September 2002).

Loiacono, Watson & Goodhue (2007) tested those six instruments and others against seven instrument requirements (Table 1) from development/testing research in IS and behavioral sciences. The last two of these characteristics were specific to testing consumer perceptions of websites.

Table 1. Instrument development requirements with applicability to websites (Loiacono, Watson, & Goodhue, 2007)

Issue	Description
Literature Review	A careful review of the literature and relevant practice to identify the specific constructs that should be part of the measure. Too rapid a convergence on a particular set or framework of constructs runs the risk of excluding important characteristics of the phenomena. Out of this comes a set of clearly defined and distinct constructs.
Number of Questions	Multiple questions for each construct, with each construct being unidimensional. Since error is common to all measures, multiple questions make it possible to assess measurement quality and to address measurement problems where they exist.

Adequate Discriminant Validity	Adequate discriminant validity tests as well as reliability tests. Reliability without discriminant validity can mislead developers into thinking that the constructs are distinct when, in fact, they are not.
Sample Size	Samples of a size appropriate to the statistical techniques used for assessing measurement validity.
Nomological Validity	A test of nomological or predictive validity. It is necessary to know that the measures of the constructs interact in reasonable ways with other constructs.
User Focus	The focus must be on the consumer's reactions to many specific Web sites, and not on e-commerce or Web sites in general. An instrument intended for this purpose must be tested in this context.
Testing Domain	The scope of data collection must include reactions to many different Web sites (even if only one per respondent). Given the method of testing for discriminant validity, restricting the focus to a single Web site (even if evaluated by many consumers) will surface individual differences of opinion about a single object, rather than the ability of the instrument to accurately track the dimensions.

Note: During this research, this author searched for instruments specific to social websites. None were found.

WebQual

Despite the proliferation of instruments, there was “no extant general measure for evaluating websites and no consensus on what such an instrument should measure” (Loiacono, et al., 2007, p. 51). This need lead them to develop and test an instrument called “WebQual”. Eleanor Loiacono developed the WebQual instrument to measure the consumer's evaluation of websites. Its development started with her doctoral dissertation work using an “extensive review of marketing and MIS literature” (Loiacono, 2000, p. xv) while following Churchill's 1979 instrument development steps. The questions and constructs of this instrument have undergone refinement since her dissertation work. WebQual has undergone four rounds of testing over the last seven years using 1533 respondents. WebQual initially started out with 88 questions measuring 12 of the 13 dimensions identified in her work. This refinement work has been reported in a

conference paper (Loiacono, Chen & Goodhue, 2002) and a journal publication (Loiacono et al., 2007). Today it contains 36 questions measuring twelve dimensions (Table 2) with ten dimensions remaining mostly unchanged throughout the work.

These twelve dimensions compose five second order constructs: Ease of Use, Usefulness, Trust, Response Time, and Entertainment. Ease of Use is composed of “Ease of understanding” and “Intuitive Operation”. Usefulness is made of “Informational Fit-to-task”, “Tailored Communication”, “Online Completeness”, and “Relative Advantage”. Aspects of Entertainment include: “Visual Appeal”, “Innovativeness”, “Emotional Appeal”, and “Consistent Image”. Trust & Response Time have no corresponding first order components. Table 2 provides a summary of each dimension. Additionally, each dimension will be discussed below.

Table 2. WebQual Dimensions
(Loiacono et al., 2002)

Second Order Constructs	First Order Constructs	Description
<i>Ease of Use</i>	Ease of Understanding	Easy to read and understand.
	Intuitive Operation	Easy to operate and navigate.
<i>Usefulness</i>	Informational Fit-to-task	The information provided meets task needs and improves performance.
	Tailored Communication	Tailored communication between consumers and the firm.
	Online Completeness	Allowing all or most necessary transactions to be completed on-line (e.g. purchasing over the website)
	Relative Advantage	Equivalent or better than other means of interacting with the company
<i>Trust</i>	----	Secure communication and observance of information privacy.
<i>Entertainment</i>	Innovativeness	The creativity and uniqueness of a site design.
	Emotional Appeal	The emotional effect of using the webs site and the intensity of the environment.

	Consistent Image	The web site is compatible with the image projected by the firm through other media.
	Visual Appeal	The aesthetics of a web site.
<i>Response Time</i>	----	Time to get a response after an interaction with a site.

WebQual Dimensions and applicability to social websites

What makes social websites different from informational and e-commerce sites?

Like many graduate students, this research started in an entirely different direction. The author was originally attempting to examine the aspects of New Media that made some of it go “viral” (exponential propagation of a message via individuals who are acting individually). These earlier readings of New Media lead this researcher to his current understanding of the difference between social websites and informational and e-commerce sites.

In looking to understand what is New Media, the most informative, though verbose, definition found was not defined in “technologically determinist terms, focusing on the impacts of particular technical features, channels or content”(Livingstone, P. 227) but instead “sought to integrate technological, social, political, and economic factors” (Livingstone, P. 228). The social, political, and economic factors in the concept of New Media, (which social websites are a part of), concern people and whenever this researcher was trying to understand the differences between informational and e-commerce sites, this researcher keeps coming back to “people”. To borrow from a cliché, social websites are built for the people, by the people. They are about people and embody a way to *communicate with others* which are key differences in this comparison. Not only are they

used to communicate with people, but with multiple people, which when the traffic is examined is a network.

Determining which constructs are of value

Each of the following sections discusses WebQual's constructs individually and provides a recommendation towards possible inclusion/exclusion of the construct in an instrument for social website quality. While every effort is made to discuss the reasoning behind this researcher's inclusion/exclusion *during* the construct introduction, a general overview of my reasoning is provided here for your convenience.

Some of these constructs concern factors that are required for any website to work. Since on the low level of the factors, they are an antecedent to quality, they are recommended to be kept. These factors are *Ease of understanding*, *Intuitive Operation*, *Informational Fit-to-Task* and *Response Time*.

The essence of social websites is about making communication(s) among people possible. Additionally, high quality social websites should have constructs among dimensions which make communications among people more enjoyable (than other social websites). Some *Trust* of the site, and its host, is necessary for communications to be possible. WebQual constructs that should influence the communications to be more enjoyable are: *Visual Appeal*, *Innovativeness*, *Emotional Appeal*, & *Relative Advantage*. Note: Relative Advantage needs a slight re-focusing to apply to social websites.

The following WebQual factors appear to not be required for site operation and appear to not make communications among people possible or more enjoyable: *Tailored Communication*, *Online Completeness*, *Consistent Image*. In my humble opinion, these do not provide value and therefore in the interests of parsimony I recommend that these

are dropped. Emotional appeal, with its questions about whether the user feels happy / cheerful / sociable when using the site, despite having some value, does not provide enough explanatory power. Finding out that your site does not have emotional appeal does not provide the creator with enough info to guide how to fix/mitigate this. Therefore, in my opinion it should be dropped and replaced with construct(s) that do provide more explanatory power.

I recommend Relative Advantage for re-focusing because this researcher can conceive of how it can be refocused and the value that such a refocusing brings to understanding social website quality, but I am unable to conceive how the other dropped constructs can be redefined in a way that enhances social website quality.

Ease of Use

WebQual considers Ease of Use to have two determinants “Ease of understanding” and “Intuitive Operation”, which are explained below. WebQual’s theoretical foundation finds Ease of Use as a construct from Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) which has its roots in TRA. TAM was developed by Fred D. Davis (1989) and Davis et al. (1989). It posits that two particular beliefs, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are “fundamental and distinct constructs” (Davis et al., 1989, p. 988), unlike how beliefs are treated in TRA.

Perceived Ease of Use (EOU) refers to the degree to which the user expects the target system to be free of effort (Davis et al., 1989). The system in question is the particular website. Research empirical support for TAM includes Venkatesh et al., 2003 and Taylor & Todd, 1995. The following figure presents the relationships between

External Variables, Usefulness (U), EOU, Attitude, Behavioral Intention (BI) and usage under TAM.

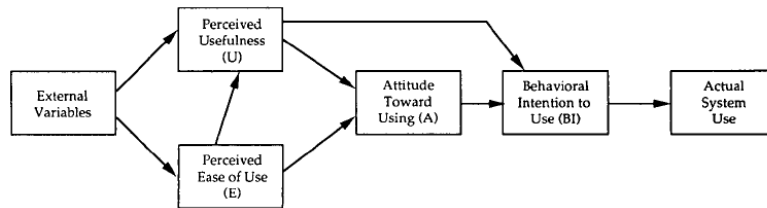


Figure 2. Technology Acceptance Model
(Davis et al., 1989, p. 975)

There are a number of differences between TRA and TAM. While TRA is a wide-ranging model describing any behavior, TAM is describing only one behavior, “system use”. Under TRA, the beliefs determined from specific person/context are not intended to be generalized, while “TAM’s U and EOU are postulated a priori, and are meant to be fairly general determinants of user acceptance” (Davis et al., 1989, p. 988). Unlike the role of external variables in TRA, Davis et al explicitly includes external variables in their depiction of TAM. It models a direct effect on Behavioral Intention (BI) which is counter to TRA. This idea is supported by several alternative intention models (Davis et al., 1989).

In both Loiacono 2002 & 2007, EOU did not show up as a significant predictor of website revisitation, probably because it may be an essential element of usefulness as suggested by Davis (1989). Loiacono’s data analyses support this with a high correlation between EOU and U (.83 & .77). The importance of EOU (and its first order constructs) would not be diminished in the domain of social websites. On the contrary, it might have more importance to social websites, because other mediating factors that limit a person’s

freedom to act are not present (such as limited time, or environmental/organizational limits). Next we will examine WebQual's two Ease of Use determinants.

Ease of Understanding

During the search for a website, the user has a large number of websites to search through. While automated search engines help the user, it does not give a reliable answer of which site a user needs. The user ultimately needs to decide which website to use. Simple criteria that are quick to evaluate, such as the ease in which a person can read and comprehend the information provided (Ease of Understanding) are particularly useful. In most websites Ease of Understanding is a critical component of their overall opinion concerning the website's ease of use.

Intuitive Operation

Intuitive Operation can also be described as operational/navigational complexity. Over the last 10 years, recommendations from webpage designers have stayed consistent concerning the issue of navigational complexity. Whether its advice from 1999, [do not] "require users to go through a confounding number of twists and turns to find a product on the companies' websites" (Shand, 1999, p. 53), or new advice in articles like "Easy Navigation Is Critical Part of Web Design" (Web Design Blog, 2008), the importance of intuitive operation is almost always highlighted. Websites that are hard to navigate do not fare well with users.

Usefulness (& fit to task)

WebQual's Usefulness has the first order constructs of "Informational Fit-to-task", "Tailored Communication", "Online Completeness", and "Relative Advantage".

Perceived Usefulness (U) is defined as the prospective user's likelihood that using a particular system will increase his or her job performance (Davis et al., 1989). Usefulness is the second of the distinct constructs from TAM which is part of the stream of research described as “attitudes as predictors of utilization” (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995, p. 213). Many of the first order constructs under Usefulness come from a second stream of research “Task-Technology-Fit (TTF) as a predictor of performance” Goodhue & Thompson, 1995, p. 213). TTF is a measure of “the degree (fit) to which a technology assists an individual in performing his or her portfolio of tasks” (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995, p. 216).

Goodhue & Thompson (1995) recognized the value of including these streams, (attitudes as predictors of utilization & TTF as a predictor of performance), into a new model, the Technology to Performance Chain (TPC). The use of many theories is to (eventually) be able to determine useful facts/actions from it. In the field of IS/IT, many studies are designed to help understand how to develop and promote systems that increase *organizational* performance. Goodhue & Thompson’s core principle in TPC was that “for an information technology to have a positive impact on individual performance, the technology must be utilized, and the technology must be a good fit with the tasks it supports” (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995, p. 213). Models that focus on utilization (e.g. TAM) imply that increased use will lead to positive performance impacts, but does not explicitly recognize that more utilization does not necessarily lead to greater performance and that use itself is not always voluntary. Models that examined Fit alone paid no attention to fact that systems must be used to get performance impacts. Thus,

TPC is composed of Goodhue & Thompson’s TTF model incorporated with utilization aspects (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995). This is demonstrated in the following figure.

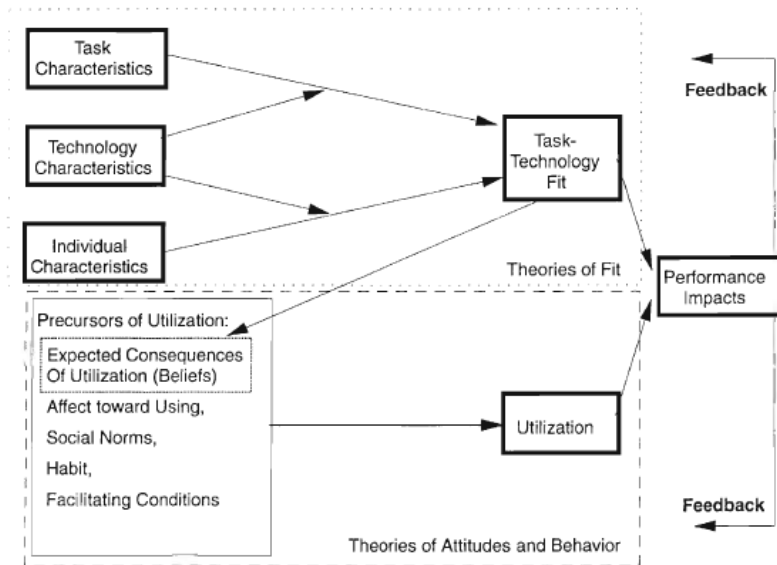


Figure 3. Technology-to-Performance Chain
(Goodhue & Thompson, 1995, p. 217)

Goodhue and Thompson defined Technologies and Tasks generally, *technologies* being the “tools used by individuals in carrying out their tasks” (p. 216) and *tasks* as “actions carried out by individuals in turning inputs into outputs” (p. 216). For websites, the technology is a particular site. Overall, WebQual used TTF with the tasks of *gathering information* and *carrying out a transaction*. For social websites, the first order constructs supporting *carrying out a transaction* may not be applicable or probably will need redefinition to apply. Additionally, some new and probably unique tasks are thought to be applicable to social websites (see next section). The exploratory focus groups conducted (Ch 3) serve to identify some of those tasks.

Informational Fit-to-task

Informational Fit-to-task means simply “the information provided meets task needs and improves performance” (Loiacono et al., 2002, p. 302). With new and expanded tasks, this construct also applies to social websites. Blogs and Forums particularly are potent sources of information. Bloggers are increasingly being recognized as reporters and getting press passes for the White House (Seelye, 2005) and Fashion Week (Dodes, 2006). The recognition of bloggers as part of the “press” speaks to the fit of the information/commentary provided in social websites and that these people can be part of the press through these mediums (social websites). But just as the Informational Fit-to-Task can range across different mediums, it can range across different social websites as well. As an example, Social Networking Sites can vary on the status and personal information about people that they provide within the user’s network.

Tailored Communication

Tailored Communication is the use of tools (such as search fields) or customer data to more adequately provide information to customers. Since social websites are primarily concerned with one-to-one or many-to-one communications, dimensions such as tailored communication (which focus on the business to consumer (b-c) relationship and their one-to-many communications) are either not applicable or should have very little effect in this domain of websites.

Online Completeness

This dimension can be defined as “allowing all or most necessary transactions to be completed on-line (e.g. purchasing over the website)” (Loiacono et al., 2002, p. 302). It directly supports the *carrying out a transaction* task that WebQual was developed for.

It represents a subjective opinion about whether purchasing in the online domain is comparable to purchasing off-line and whether full support is available for the transaction. Similar to Tailored Communication this dimension is not seen as being applicable to social websites.

Relative Advantage

Early Internet sites provided an extra communication channel. Today, it is the only channel available for some companies. For companies with multiple channels of communication (such as phone, fax, email, website), the website should be “equivalent or better than [these] other means of interacting with the company” (Loiacono et al., 2002, p. 302) for it to be perceived as high quality. Just as some companies have multiple channels for communication, many people also have multiple communication channels (face-to-face, land-line phone, mobile phone, email, personal social site, etc.).

With a slight re-focusing of this dimension, it is applicable to social websites because the usefulness of a social website is related to the range of options one has for interacting with people (on both sides of the communication) and the preferences that one has for that communication. For example, one may want to use computer based communication (IM, email, etc.) for keeping a large number of people updated on your well-being, a feat that is time-consuming with other channels of communication. A person may want to keep the conversation asynchronous to avoid lengthy discussions, etc.

Trust

While Loiacono et al. (2002) simply defines trust as the “secure communication and observance of information privacy” (p. 302), they recognize that trust as a concept is

multidimensional (Loiacono, 2002). While the exact number of dimensions is still up for debate, McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar (2002) found four primary dimensions of *initial* trust: disposition to trust, institution-based trust, trusting beliefs, and trusting intentions. Trust, as used in WebQual, is a necessary enabler to purchasing and since *carrying out a transaction* was a main task for websites, there is face validity in including it as a concept.

While users are not necessarily carrying out a transaction on a social website, trust is an important factor to social website use. This is because users provide personal information into-and-through the website and will only do so if some trusting beliefs are present or its lack is compensated by the other dimension of trust. The loss of trust can have serious consequences for a website. The break of trust between users on the site Friendster was one of the main reasons that many United States (US) users left Friendster and went to MySpace (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). It should be noted though, in two out of four rounds of WebQual testing, Trust did not show up as a significant predictor of website reuse (Loiacono, et al., 2007).

Entertainment

“Consumers expect to be entertained. In order to hold visitor's attention, web sites must possess a level of *fun* and *creativity*. “Although an entertaining Web site may include graphics and some means of interaction, its entertainment value cannot be directly determined by measuring those factors” (Loiacono, 2000, p. 36). Consumer expectations have even brought entertainment to the car, with manufactures adding DVD players and video screens.

In the creation of WebQual, Loiacono found entertainment mentioned in marketing and MIS literature in a peripheral manner. In MIS research, entertainment is mentioned in theories of flow. In marketing, it can be found in studies concerning the effectiveness of ads (Loiacono, 2000). Social websites, while having utilitarian aspects, provide much more entertainment value than informational and e-commerce websites. Therefore, this construct along with its sub constructs of Visual Appeal, Innovativeness, and Emotional Appeal should have increased importance to social websites. The exceptions is Consistent Image, since a social website is not about the company, it is about the users. While Emotional Appeal probably does apply to social websites, a more focused construct is needed. Ideas on such a construct can be found in the following section, Social & Communication Theories.

Innovativeness

Innovativeness is described as “creativity and uniqueness of a site design” (Loiacono et al., 2002, p. 302). Creative and unique sites are more entertaining, but innovativeness could also affect perceived website quality in a different way. Since social websites are closely tied to the user(s), users may get some defining characteristics from the website, i.e. use it to establish their social identity. If so, websites that exhibit innovativeness will be more desirable to users and thus reflect better quality sites.

Emotional Appeal

Many of the constructs of WebQual measure properties that effect or are part of the cognitive processes. Conversely, most dimensions within the Entertainment construct relate to affective processes. Innovativeness and Visual Appeal effect affective processes, while Emotional Appeal is a holistic attempt to measure the affective state that the

website inspires. Emotional Appeal is defined as “the emotional effect of using the web site and the intensity of the environment” (Loiacono et al., 2002, p. 302). Emotional appeal, with its questions about whether the user feels happy / cheerful / sociable when using the site, despite having some value, does not provide enough explanatory power. Finding out that your site does not have emotional appeal does not provide you with enough info to guide how to fix/mitigate this. I feel that other constructs outlined in ‘Social & Communication Theories’ are a better replacement for Emotional Appeal.

Consistent Image

Advertising research has found that a firm’s image should be consistent across media to ensure they do not create dissonance (and receive a negative customer reaction from it). Thus, for informational and e-commerce websites about a firm, a consistent image is important. A social website is not about the firm, it is about the users. Since most social websites do little advertising in other media, this construct is either not applicable or will have very little effect in this domain of websites.

Visual Appeal

Statements such as '*First impressions are everything*' or '*You never get a second chance to make a good impression*' highlight the importance of first impressions. Its effects are studied in multiple literature streams, from marketing where it is called the ‘Halo effect’, to human-decision making and judgment literature (‘confirmation bias’). Neurophysiological evidence supports the notion that emotional responses (such as those from aesthetics) occur before the person has had a chance to analyze or evaluate the incoming stimulus/stimuli (Lindgaard, Fernandse, Dudek, & Brown, 2006). The first impression, based on the aesthetics of a web site (or its Visual appeal) can draw attention

away from usability problems. Lindgaard et al.'s work "suggests that web designers have about 50 ms to make a good first impression" (2006, p. 1).

Note: These facts also provide support to the following construct "response time" construct because they speak to the importance of speed. Everything must build quickly in order for the aesthetic effect to be presented as intended.

Response Time

Response time or the "time to get a response after an interaction with a site" (Loiacono et al., 2002, p. 302) is a very important characteristic of websites. Website developers and academics have reached the same conclusions concerning response time. "Users prefer response times of less than a second for most tasks" (Shneiderman, 1984, p. 265) and "are unwilling to tolerate substantial delays" (Jacko, Sears, & Borella, 2000, p. 427). Maximum times computed by researchers vary considerably between 6 to 15 seconds due to a number of other factors, but overall times around 8 seconds (Shand, 1999; King, 2003) seem to be the consensus. While response time is a distinct construct, it has large effects on both ease-of-use and usefulness. As response time increases, the site becomes less usable and is perceived as harder to use, because non-optimal interactions incur a high (response time) penalty. Response Time's importance should remain high for social websites since the mechanisms that it affects are not specific to e-commerce or transactional websites. A summary of this section's findings can be found in the following table.

Table 3. Summary of WebQual Dimensions Applicability

First Order Constructs	Valid to Social Websites?		First Order Constructs	Valid to Social Websites?
Ease of Understanding	Y		Trust	Y
Intuitive Operation	Y		Response Time	Y
Informational Fit-to-task	Y		Visual Appeal	Y
Tailored Communication	N		Innovativeness	Y
Online Completeness	N		Emotional Appeal	N ₂
Relative Advantage	Y ₁		Consistent Image	N

₁ - Redefinition of Relative Advantage is needed for social websites

₂ – A more focused construct is proposed in the next section

WebQual provides a number of useful constructs for determining social website quality. But new concepts/theories are applicable when you examine websites that are outside of the business-consumer (b2c) relationship, a fact that does not go unnoticed by Loiacono. “Other ways of using the web are evolving, such as networking and blogging. These types of activities are not the focus of current WebQual research but may be included in future research” (Loiacono, Watson, & Goodhue, 2007, p. 73).

Social & Communication Theories

The Internet is no longer a simple information depository or just a medium for conducting commerce. The explosive growth of networking sites and the increased spending in advertising on these sites are examples of this change. This is noted by researchers studying the social aspects of the Internet. Nicovich and Cornwell (1998) have noted “no doubt that the Internet is more than strictly a vehicle for communications; it has developed as a social organism that is more than the sum of its parts” (p. 23). Giese (1996) suggests that, “while it might have been overlooked early on, the Internet cannot now be ignored as a cultural phenomenon” (as cited by Hansen et al., 2004, p. 542).

Research on the social and cultural effects of the Internet has its roots in the earlier research on Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). Before the network we know as the Internet was established, research in CMC produced and tested a number of theories which are applicable to many mediums, including evaluations of social websites. Additionally, the notion of social networks has driven and guided additional theory related to attitudes and behaviors.

Social Presence Theory

Social presence theory concerns the social effects of communication technology. “Within human-computer interaction, social presence theory studies how the ‘sense of being with another’ is shaped and affected by interfaces” (Biocca, Harms, & Burgoon, 2003, p. 456). Short, Williams and Christie (1976) is credited with popularizing the term Social Presence, in mediated communications research, with the following definition – “the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships” (p. 65). It was envisioned as a property of the medium. While Short’s et al.’s work was focused on telephone technology, the theory has been applied to a much wider area of communication mediums including the Internet. Perhaps different types of websites foster a different amount of social presence. If so, the degree of social presence it fosters would be an important factor in the evaluation of social websites.

While Short et al.’s (1976) definition appears to be functional at first glance, and is one of the most widely used definitions; it is certainly not the only definition. The term was not created by Short, but was already in use in social psychology. It had a binary definition similar to “another person is perceived as present or absent” (Biocca et al.,

2003, p. 460). Short's work changed social presence to a property that varies on a continuum describing a psychological phenomenon, not merely phenomenon relying on the subject physical senses.

The multitude of definitions/theories of social presence, that have developed over time, have lead researchers to call for the development of a more robust and detailed theory. Biocca et al.'s 2003 work is one such example. In it, they review, classify and critique existing theories and measures of social presence and provide a set of criteria and scope conditions to help guide the future development of more robust theory and measure of it.

Perhaps though, for social websites, social presence can be best defined as a feeling of "*connectedness*" or "*of being in touch*". Jean-Louis Seguineau presented this view of social presence in his blog, "Anticipate."

"The concept of "*connectedness*" is one of the basic principles which underlie social behavior. In psychology, the fundamental needs for belonging and connectedness are described as powerful drivers to promote social relationships. Even without direct information exchange, people want to maintain connection with others. Look how instant messaging users monitor the availability of their buddies, and exchange greetings without any need for a real information exchange. Similarly, witness how mobile phone users exchange SMS and share a common, although asynchronous, experience. There are also situations where connectedness does not imply direct awareness of another person, but rather of an object. Receiving a post card may create a feeling of connectedness although there is no direct awareness of the other person" (Seguineau, 2006).

With social websites being about people, this construct is an affective dimension possibly addressing a social website user's motivation. For social sites, Social Presence should trigger the happiness, and cheerfulness that Emotional Appeal was designed to measure. Social websites providing higher levels of Social Presence should be of higher

quality to people seeking a feeling of belonging and connectedness, which will produce positive affect. This construct is proposed to be more focused than WebQual's

Emotional Appeal.

Social Networks – Capital, Size, Composition

“As widespread communication via computer networks develops, analysts need to go beyond studying single users, two-person ties, and small groups to examining the computer-supported social networks (CSSNs) that flourish in areas as diverse as the workplace and virtual communities(. . .) Social network analysts seek to describe networks of relations as fully as possible, tease out the prominent patterns in such networks, trace the flow of information (and other resources) through them, and discover what effects these relations and networks have on people and organizations. They treat the description of relational patterns as interesting in its own right -- e.g., is there a core and periphery? -- and examine how involvement in such *social networks* helps to explain the behavior and attitudes of *network members*” (Garton, Haythornthwaite, & Wellman, 1997).

“Social network analysis has been used for the past seventy years to advance research in the social and behavioral sciences” (Monge & Contractor, 2003, p. vii). While researching social networks three related concepts seem most applicable to social websites: social capital, network size and network composition.

Social Capital

How people use social websites is a determinant for the criteria upon which they evaluate them .The acquisition of social capital is one reason for social website use. Social Capital, or social resources, is the “sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.119). Acquisition of Social Capital provides information benefits that can be leveraged to gain economic benefits.

It has been noted that “managers with more social capital get higher returns on their human capital because they are positioned, *in social network(s)*, to identify and develop more rewarding opportunities” (Burt, 1997, p. 339). In studying the economic value of social capital, Burt showed that its value is inversely related to the number of peers (or “people doing the same work”) as the manager.

Blogs and social networking sites (SNS) can facilitate the acquisition of social capital. In the realm of SNS, some sites are focusing on niche markets including business professionals. One such site is called “LinkedIn” (<http://www.linkedin.com/>) and is enjoying much popular press (as of Jan 2008). Sites such as LinkedIn advertise themselves to building contacts (and thus social capital). The mechanisms which make social capital valuable are not limited to business professionals, but make it valuable to anyone skilled enough to properly leverage it. With social websites being about people, this construct could be a cognitive dimension addressing a possible reason for social website use. Social websites that facilitate the acquisition and maintenance of social capital will provide a better quality service to users and therefore would be considered a better site (than competitors).

Network Size & Composition

Just as a telephone is useless without others to call, social websites are of little value without others in which to communicate. Robert Metcalfe, inventor of the Ethernet standard and founder of 3Com Corp, summarized this notion as - “a networks value grows proportionately to the number of its users squared” (Ross, 2003, p. 34). This “folksy rule of thumb” (Ross, 2003, p. 31), has taken on the mantle of law as “Metcalfe’s law”. There are disagreements on how to calculate the “value” of a network and whether

its value grows to the number of its users *squared* (Briscoe, Odlyzko, & Tilly, 2006), but there is a wide general recognition that network growth does provide an increase in network value.

A large network size per se does not increase the quality of a social website. Instead it is the whether there are users on the site that the user (userA) wants to contact. A sufficient network size, or critical mass, is only a necessary condition for quality. For example, if userA creates a blog to keep family in the loop, but his family will-not or cannot view it, then the site has no value for anyone (userA or his family). Hence the concepts of task-technology-fit and usefulness reappear. Another example: A dating site that has predominantly one heterosexual gender, becomes increasingly useless (as the site grows) for that majority gender.

With social websites being about people, this construct could be a technical dimension addressing likely reasons reason for social website use. These reasons are outside of the host company's control, but not out of their influence. Refer-a-friend and similar programs help to publicize the networks within the host's domain and encourage word-of-mouth to support network growth and a more fitting composition.

These theories as a replacement for Emotional Appeal

Emotional appeal, which measures a user's happiness, cheerfulness, or how social they feel, does not provide you with enough info for corrective actions. Since social sites are about communicating with people, the Emotional Appeal feelings should come from communicating or having the opportunity to communicate with others. Two of the these three ideas, Social Presence and Network Size & Composition, effect the emotions in Emotional Appeal. If the site helps me feel connected to others, I will likely feel more

happy and cheerful. If a particular site is part of a larger network, the group may make me feel more sociable. If the network is composed of people I want to communicate with, I am likely to feel all three. I believe that Social Presence and Network Size & Composition make a good replacement for Emotional Appeal because they effect the same emotions, but provide the site owner with an understanding of areas for improvement to increase the emotional attachment of users.

Moving On

This chapter detailed the constructs of WebQual and discussed their applicability to social websites. Afterwards, new theories and ideas were presented that also apply to social websites. The next chapter discusses the focus groups that were conducted to examine whether these ideas have support.

Chapter III: Methodology

“If we value the pursuit of knowledge, we must be free to follow wherever that search may lead us. The free mind is not a barking dog, to be tethered on a ten-foot chain.”

Adlai E. Stevenson Jr. (1952, 10).

Speech presented at University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 explained why focusing on evaluating social websites can provide benefits across academia, business and government. Chapter 2 examined a particular instrument for informational and e-commerce sites (WebQual) and discussed its applicability to social websites. Furthermore, other concepts/theories were presented that may apply to social websites. This chapter outlines the research methodology, providing background and the reasoning for the researcher’s use of qualitative research. Also, the applicability of using focus groups and detail on how the groups were conducted is discussed.

Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research

Characteristics

Qualitative and quantitative research serve different purposes and generally employ different tools, while not being entirely distinct. Since both are approaches to research, they share some common terminology, tools, and theories. Qualitative research is often used to explore, describe and explain concepts/theories which are then normally tested with quantitative methods. “In comparison to quantitative research, qualitative

research is a contact sport, requiring some degree of immersion into individual’s lives” (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007, p. 12).

This research served to explore the sub-domain of websites called social websites in order to establish the evaluative criteria that people use to determine a high quality social website. Since it is exploratory, a qualitative approach is most applicable. Table 4 provides a comparison of the characteristics of both types of research.

Table 4. Distinguishing Characteristics of Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p.96)

Question	Quantitative	Qualitative
<i>What is the purpose of the research?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explain and predict • To confirm and validate • To test theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To describe and explain • To explore and interpret • To build theory
<i>What is the nature of the research process?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused • Known variables • Established guidelines • Predetermined methods • Somewhat context-free • Detached view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic • Unknown variables • Flexible guidelines • Emergent methods • Context-bound • Personal view
<i>What are the data like, and how are they collected?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numeric data • Representative, large sample • Standardized instruments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textual and/or image-based data • Informative, small sample • Loosely structured or non-standardized observations and interviews
<i>How are data analyzed to determine their meaning?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistical analysis • Stress on objectivity • Deductive reasoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search for themes and categories • Acknowledgement that analysis is subjective and potentially biased • Inductive reasoning
<i>How are the findings communicated?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers • Statistics, aggregated data • Formal voice, scientific style 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words • Narratives, individual quotes • Personal voice, literary style

Qualitative Tools (Focus Groups versus Individual Interviews)

While there are a number of qualitative tools, they can generally be classified as either observations or interviews, with the difference dealing mostly with the level of interaction the researcher has with the study participants. Since this study is exploring the decision processes of individuals, an interview process seemed most appropriate. Next the decision was made to conduct focus groups over individual interviews because of the advantages they offered.

Originally called “focused” interviews (Merton & Kendall, 1946), focused groups were first embraced by the sociology field for use in studies of persuasive communications and the effects of mass media (Stewart et al., 2007). “The main logic for conducting the research in a group rather than an individual setting is to allow observations of how-and-why individuals accept or reject others’ ideas” (Stewart, et al., 2007, p. 10). Focus groups provide advantages, over individual interviews, for the respondent and the sponsor. The respondent receives stimulating, synergistic effects that encourage snowballing. This provides inspiring spontaneity under a security umbrella. The sponsor often receives faster, serendipitous ideas and benefits from the flexible structure of focus groups. Table 5 provides an expanded explanation of the advantages of focus groups relative to individual interviews.

Table 5. Advantages of Focus Groups Relative to Individual Interviews (Hess, 1968)
As presented by (Stewart et al., 2007, p.46).

Respondent Interaction Advantages
<i>Synergism.</i> The combined effort of the group will produce a wider range of information, insight, and ideas than will the cumulation of the responses of a number of individuals when these replies are secured privately. (But note, some researchers suggest that this is not always the case.)

<p><i>Snowballing.</i> A bandwagon effect often operates in a group interview situation, in that a comment by one individual often triggers a chain of responses from the other participants.</p>
<p><i>Stimulation.</i> Usually after a brief introductory period, the respondents get “turned on,” in that they want to express their ideas and expose their feelings as the general level of excitement over the topic increases in the group.</p>
<p><i>Security.</i> In an interviewer-interviewee situation, respondents may not be willing to expose their views for fear of having to defend these views or of appearing “unconcerned,” “radical,” or whatever the case may be. In the well-structured group, on the other hand, “the individual can usually find some comfort in the fact that his feelings are not greatly different from those of his peers, and that he or she can expose an idea without necessarily being forced to defend, follow through or elaborate on it. He or she is more likely to be candid because the focus is on the group rather than the individual; the respondent soon realizes that the things he or she says are not necessarily being identified with him or her” (Hess, 1968, p.194).</p>
<p>Sponsor Advantages</p>
<p><i>Spontaneity.</i> Because no individual is required to answer any given question in a group interview, the individual’s responses can be more spontaneous and less conventional, and should provide a more accurate picture of the person’s position on some issue. In the group interview, people speak only when they have definite feelings about a subject and not because a question requires a response.</p>
<p><i>Serendipity.</i> It is more often the case in a group, rather than an individual interview, that some idea will “drop out of the blue.” The group also affords the opportunity to develop it to its full significance.</p>
<p><i>Specialization.</i> The group interview allows the use of a more highly trained but more expensive interviewer because a number of individuals are being “interviewed” simultaneously.</p>
<p><i>Scientific scrutiny.</i> The group interview allows closer scrutiny. First, the session itself can be observed by several others. This affords some check on the consistency of the interpretations. Second, the session may be tape recorded or even videotaped. Later, detailed examination of the recorded session allows additional insight and also can help clear up points of disagreement among analysts.</p>
<p><i>Structure.</i> The group interview affords more control than the individual interview with regard to the topics that are covered and the depth with which they are treated because the “interviewer” in the role of moderator has the opportunity to reopen topics that received too shallow a discussion when initially presented.</p>
<p><i>Speed.</i> Because a number of individuals are being interviewed at the same time, the group interview permits the securing of a given number of interviews more quickly than do individual interviews.</p>

Uses of focus groups: Applications, Advantages, and Limitations

Focus Group Applications

Stewart et al., (2007) list several general applications for focus group research (FGR). FGR may be used to find general background info on an issue of concern. It is useful for “generating research hypotheses that can be submitted to further research and testing using more quantitative approaches” (p. 41). It has been used to inspire novel ideas. It can be used to diagnose problems or generate impressions about products, programs, services, institutions, etc. FGR is sometimes used to interpret previously obtained quantitative results. Finally, FGR is useful for “learning how respondents talk about the phenomenon of interest. This in turn, may facilitate the design of questionnaires, survey instruments, or other research tools that might be employed in more quantitative research” (p. 42). This last application describes the reason focus groups were employed in this research.

Table 6. Focus Groups Advantages and Limitations

Focus Group Advantages
Data can be gathered more quickly and at less cost than individual interviews
The researcher can extract greater clarity with follow-up questions, probes and non-verbal cues
Synergistic effect due to the reactance-to & expansion-of other’s responses
Results are user friendly and easy to understand (unlike other methods)
“One of the main strengths of [FGR] is that it may be adapted to provide the most desirable level of focus and structure” (Stewart et al., 2007, p. 38).
“Robust versatility for shedding light on almost any topic or issue” (Stewart et. al, 2007, p. 42)
“Rich body of data in the respondents own words and context” (Stewart et. al, 2007, p. 38)
One of the few tools to obtain data from children and the illiterate
Focus Group Limitations
NOTE: <i>The limitations of focus groups are basically the negative side of the advantages already listed. Many of them are not unique to focus groups.</i>

Open nature of responses make it difficult to summarize and generalize
Interaction of respondents may have two undesirable effects (Stewart et. al, 2007) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Responses are not independent ○ More reserved group members may be hesitant to talk
Small samples may not be representative of the population of interest, severely limiting generalization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (this limitation is not unique to focus groups)
The “live” and immediate nature of findings may lead the researcher to put undue faith in findings (Stewart et. al, 2007)
The moderator may bias results knowingly or unknowingly through cues or seeking consensus on certain points
The greatest limitation is that “each group really only represents a single observation” (Stewart et al., 2007, p. 165)

Focus Group Theory

Despite focus groups also satisfying the garbage-in-garbage-out rule (like most research techniques), some practitioners are still able to get adequate answers to their questions without a proper understanding of focus group theory. But, an understanding of focus group theory allows researchers to “design studies in ways that improve the likelihood of discovering things that are more interesting, useful, and valid” (Stewart, et al., 2007, p. 8). Stewart et al. (2007) highlights four normative criteria concerned with the proper usage of focus group research: Focused Research, Group Interactions, In-Depth Data, and a Humanistic Interview. These criteria are common across the various disciplines that employ FGR. Each one is discussed in more detail.

Focused Research

The basis purpose of FGR is to gather data from individuals who have experienced a “particular concrete situation” (Merton & Kendall, 1946, p. 541). Focus groups are relatively singular in focus and are normally built that way by selective screening of participants. This focusing provides their explorative research value.

Group Interactions

As stated earlier, “the main logic for conducting the research in a group rather than an individual setting is to allow observations of how-and-why individuals accept or reject others’ ideas” (Stewart, et al., 2007, p. 10). The group interaction allows the researcher to better understand the group dynamics that affect individuals’ perceptions, information processing, and decision making, giving the moderator greater insight in the phenomenon of interest. It should be noted that marketing research often has more “groupings” of people than groups (which have common identity, goals, or shared norms) and in those cases is more accurately described as a serial interview.

In-Depth Data

The main thread in focus group theory is the “belief that live encounters with groups of people will yield incremental answers to behavioral questions that go beyond the level of surface explanation” (Stewart et al., 2007, p. 11). This data has a depth beyond the words spoken. There are multiple ways in which the data can be examined: issue order, issue absence or presence, time spent on the issue, intensity of expression, people’s reasons versus reactions, etc. Since these groups were exploring what is essentially an unclear area, even to producers, the moderator had to be very flexible in the conducting the groups. Unfortunately time constraints forced the moderator to keep “moving the group forward”, thus ‘time spent on the issue’ and ‘intensity of expression’ were likely affected by this. As a result these paradigms did not seem to be reasonable ways to examine the data. This research predominately focused on issue absence/presence since these paradigms should only be minimally affected by the group’s time constraints.

Humanistic Interview

Developments in focus group theory and practice is part of the changes happening in qualitative research. This includes a “general orientation that includes empathy, openness, active listening, and various types of interactions with research participants” (Stewart et al., 2007, p. 12). This plus the emphasis on meaning rather than measurement, have lead to its depiction as “Humanistic” Research.

Moderator Question philosophy and main questions

The interview guide, used by the moderator, followed the question philosophy outlined in The Focus Group Kit, vol. 3, *Developing Questions* by Richard Krueger. There are five main types of questions: opening, introductory, transition, key and ending questions. Additionally, a summary plus question and an insurance question is also recommended.

Each question type serves a specific purpose. Opening questions are normally off topic and are designed to make the participants feel comfortable and identify with the group. Introductory questions set up the overall topic and help to focus the group. This gets the participants thinking in the area the moderator wants to scrutinize further. Transition questions move conversation toward key questions by providing a logical link. Key questions are the “meat” and analysis generally will center on the data generated from those questions. Ending questions bring closure to discussion. Participant responses to ending questions are normally useful in interpreting comments and assigning weight to what was previously said. Table 7 provides the key questions and possible probes. The full moderator guide can be found in appendix B.

Table 7. Key moderator questions and possible probes

Key Question	Possible Probes
What factors cause you to adopt a particular social website?	How did you find the site that you use most?
	At that time, had you heard of others?
	If you were not “invested” in your current site, what would you look for in a new site?
What factors cause you to continue to use these sites?	What are some reasons people use social websites?
	What do you think about this statement? <i>Some people get the same good feelings from using social websites as getting mail</i>
What would cause you to stop using your social website?	What would have to change about your social website for you to stop using it?

Focus Group details

Setting

The focus groups were conducted at the Air Force Institute of Technology, or AFIT, which is the US Air Force’s graduate school of engineering and management. AFIT accomplishes this mission through three resident schools: the Graduate School of Engineering and Management, the School of Systems and Logistics, and the Civil Engineer and Services School. Through its Civilian Institution Programs, AFIT also manages the educational programs of officers enrolled in civilian universities, research centers, hospitals, and industrial organizations. The student body is mostly composed of USAF officers. Some enlisted and foreign military students are also in attendance and add to the student body’s diversity.

The school is located in Dayton Ohio, but the majority of student body comes outside Ohio, (i.e. from all over the United States). Since most of the student body has “worked” after getting their undergraduate degree, the average age of most students is

likely greater than a typical graduate school. Reflecting the demographics of the USAF officer population, a large majority of the student population is male.

Participant Classification (producer or Non-producer)

While initially all groups were to consist of social website producers, four “producer” focus groups were held and one group consisted of “non-producers” (group V). This group was added because their insights help provide a different viewpoint for comparison. This study considered participants “producers”, if they either had their own blog, or were a contributor in forums. In contrast, participants that were considered non-producers were individuals who only read blogs, or forums. While one may be tempted to use the terms “posters” and “lurkers” for these group types, this would not be entirely accurate. In short, they had to be a “poster.” The researchers reasoning for this, is that lurkers are treating social websites as informative sites. Even if what they are reading is not factual, they are not interacting with others, which is what separates social websites apart from the Web 1.0 internet. Thus, participants that read blogs or forums, but weren’t posters, were classified as non-producers.

For SNS, the situation is somewhat different. While there can be lurkers in SNS, the mechanisms in place for privacy somewhat force would-be lurkers to do some posting. For example, to view profiles of other people, you sometimes have to ask for permission, thereby publishing your existence on the site to others. The more that people know you are on the site, the more traffic you receive (and therefore pressure to respond). In the researcher’s opinion, these factors, which influence one to post, were enough to consider SNS lurkers as producers and thus no distinction between lurkers and posters were made in the screening of SNS users.

Setup and scheduling

Groups were held during the end of February 2008. Volunteers were solicited as a part of the daily mass email sent out to faculty, staff, and students of AFIT.

Additionally, flyers were posted on the major bulletin boards. Finally, a copy of the flyer was displayed on the electronic screens across the school. A copy of the announcement and flyer are located in appendix C. A monetary incentive of five dollars and a chance to win a fifty dollar gift card was offered to ensure participation.

Volunteers were given a prescreening questionnaire, a copy of which can be found in Appendix B, to ensure they used social websites. Additionally, some basic demographics were also collected on the questionnaire. Most groups were timed in the morning or afternoon to provide participants a chance to come during off duty hours. This was necessary in order for the monetary incentive to be offered.

Typical Script

The focus groups were typically scripted to follow the Question philosophy and main questions mentioned earlier. The moderator had flexibility though, to deviate on relevant probes and reorder questions to match them to the group's current state of mind. In an effort to keep participants focused on the task at hand, an exercise on the dry-erase boards was conducted throughout the session(s). It should be noted that not every group had a board exercise and these exercises, while very similar, were not exactly the same across groups. As an example, the group exercise for the non-producers was very different because they often were asked questions about their perceptions of social website producers.

Participant demographics

Participants gave a preference to the group(s) they could attend in order to allowed them to choose a convenient time. This was done to enhance participation, but this limited the group size. While this researcher aimed for groups of 6 to eight participants, this did not happen. There were a total of 20 participants across the five groups (see table 8 for a breakdown by group). Participants were mostly male (85%). Of the 20 participants, eight (40 %) fell into the 26-30 age range, while eight (40%) were in the 31-40 age. A mix of participants using different types of social websites were found, but most participants used social networking sites heavily and talked from that experience. At the end of the recruitment period, few new participants were forthcoming. While faculty, staff and students were solicited, participants were mostly graduate students.

Table 8. Focus Group Participation

Group	Number of Participants
II	3
III	4
IV	4
V	6
VII	3

Note: Groups I & VI were cancelled due to lack of participants.

In the instructions on location and time, the participants were given a survey measuring: Social Desirability Bias, Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence, and Market Mavenism. They were encouraged to fill this out and send it back immediately. These measures were administered in order to equip the moderator with a better understanding of focus group members. This information allowed the moderator to adjust question strategy and focus as necessary in response to the group's composition.

On average, participants scored high on Social Desirability Bias, low on Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence, and high on Market Mavenism. The details of each measure follow.

Social Desirability Bias

The first set of six questions measured Social Desirability Bias. These questions came from the set of 33 possible questions designed to measure it. All questions were not selected in an effort to limit questionnaire size. By measuring Social Desirability Bias the researcher determined if the subjects might bias their responses. Respondents scoring above 4.0/7.0 on average have been shown to be more susceptible to biasing their responses. This scale has a published internal consistency coefficient for the final form of the scale, using Kuder-Richardson formula 20, of .88 and a test-retest correlation of .89 (Crowne & Marlow, 1960). Low social desirability scores are desired (Crowne, & Marlowe, 1960; Fisher, 1993). The moderator used more projective techniques / questions when high scoring participants were in the focus groups. For this study, the scale responses ranged from 4.3 to 6.3 with a mean of 5.4 (SD = .51, n = 19). Since one subject did not complete this section, only 19 responses (instead of 20) were obtained.

Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence

The next set of four questions measured susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Four of the 12 questions were selected to measure this, for the same reasons as stated earlier. Respondents scoring higher greater than 5.0 /7.0 are more likely to be influenced by others and are prime candidates for digging into the deeper motivations for their compliance. If subjects score higher on this category they are more likely to be

influenced by others (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989). The scale responses ranged from 1 to 6.5 with a mean of 2 (SD = 1.38, n = 20).

Market Mavenism

The third item set, (six items), measured Market Mavenism. The scale's purpose is to determine how likely a subject will try new products or in this case new websites. If subjects score high on these questions, there are likely to try new products. The items were answered on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. All six questions from the original scale were used in this research. Participants scoring 4.0/7.0 scale or higher were good candidates for digging deeper into their motivations and approaches for introducing new websites to others. The Mavenism scale normally has a Cronbach's alpha of .84 (Fieck & Price, 1987). For this study, the responses ranged from 1.3 to 6.5 with a mean of 4.9 (SD = 1.38, n = 19). Since one subject had difficulty with these questions, only 19 responses (instead of 20) were obtained. Note: This was a different subject than the one who did not complete the social desirability questions.

Data Analysis strategy

There are both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze focus group data. As noted earlier, since the research is exploratory, a qualitative approach is most applicable. A technique known as content analysis was chosen. In a content analysis, major themes are distilled from the set of focus groups and normally supported using quotations during the write-up. "The complexity of comparing discussions across several groups has led to several techniques for facilitating this comparison, including what

Wells (1974) termed the “scissor and sort” or “long couch, short hall” approach” (Morgan, 1988, p. 66). With the use of modern word processors, these techniques have also taken the alias “cut-and-paste” technique. Stewart et al. (2007) provides a useful outline of the approach.

The first step in applying the technique is to go through the transcript and identify those sections of it that are relevant to the research question(s). Based on this initial reading, a classification system for major topics and issues is developed, and material in the transcript related to each topic is identified (....) The amount of material coded for any one topic depends on the importance of that topic to the overall research question and the amount of variation in the discussion (....)

Once the coding process is complete, the coded copy of the transcribed interview may be cut apart (the scissors part of the technique). Each piece of coded material can be cut out and sorted so that all material relevant to a particular topic is placed together (....) The scissor-and-sort technique is a very useful and efficient approach to analysis, but it does tend to rely very heavily on the judgment of a single analyst (....) This analyst determines which segments of the transcript are important, develops a categorization system for the topics discussed by the group, selects representative statements regarding these topics from the transcript, and develops an interpretation of what it all means. (Stewart et al., 2007, p. 116 & 117)

The analyst’s thought process is similar to what is followed in analytic induction, but deviant cases do not necessarily “rule-out” the analyst’s generalization(s) since the focus is on *exploring* what the data *may* imply versus developing strict generalizations across groups. The results from the content analysis can be found in chapter 4.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology of this research demonstrating the applicability of using focus groups. Additionally, detail on how the groups were conducted and the composition of the group’s participants were offered. The next chapter provides the findings from these groups.

Chapter IV: Results and Analysis

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the results from the five focus groups conducted and presents these results under each of the constructs proposed in chapter 2. Next, a few new ideas came out of the groups and are briefly discussed. Finally, for a better understanding of these constructs, a discussion concerning the mix of dimension types is presented. The transcripts from the groups are provided in appendix D.

Data analysis classification system

Once transcripts of each group were prepared, they were loaded in MS excel to allow for filtering and searching (a virtual version of the scissor-and-sort method mentioned in chapter three). Each transcript item was given group, time, and sequence designators allowing for the transcript to be placed back into chronological order. Then, relevant bullets were coded with the question/topic and/or the evaluative construct it seemed to support/not-support. Questions often came from the moderator guide (appendix B) while topics were created from multiple viewings of group footage. Some topics not seen in multiple groups were discarded. The questions/topics and constructs used in coding are provided in tables 9 & 10.

Table 9. Transcript codes part 1

Code	Description	Relevant Evaluative Construct
Build Social Capital	Discussion/Comments about whether SNS	Social Capital

in other Social Networking Sites?	producers make use of those sites to build Social Capital	
Info Search Features	Discussion/Comments about searching for or finding people in social websites	Informational Fit-to-task
“Linked-In” (a SNS)	Discussion/Comments arising when the website “Linked-In” was discussed	Social Capital
Peer pressure	Discussion/Comments concerning peer pressure	Innovativeness, Social Presence
Positive Affect	Discussion/Comments from this statement: “Some people get the same good feelings from using social websites as getting mail”	Social Presence

Table 10. Transcript codes part 2

(codes for transitory/key questions & topics)	
Code	Description
Change in Internet	Discussion about the changing of the Internet over time
Difference between social websites and rest of Internet	Comments highlighting unique aspects of social websites
Evaluative Criteria	Discussion/Comments about criteria to evaluate one site (or one social site) from another
Experience using the Internet	Discussion about participant’s experience using the Internet
Introduction to Social Websites	Discussion/Comments regarding how (and when) producers found their particular social website
Learning	Discussion/Comments about using social websites for learning
Trend to adding social websites	Discussion/Comments on the trend of sites adding social websites to themselves
General uses of the Internet	Discussion/Comments about uses of the Internet
Validity of applying existing measures	Discussion/Comments about whether or not using informative or e-commerce criteria for social websites is valid
(codes for evaluative constructs)	
Ease of Understanding	Discussion/Comments about websites being easy to read and understand.
Intuitive Operation	Discussion/Comments about the easiness of website navigation.
Informational Fit-to-task	Discussion/Comments regarding if the information provided meets task needs and improves performance.
Relative Advantage	Discussion/Comments about social websites being equivalent or better than other means of interacting with the people
Trust	Discussion/Comments concerning trust issues in using websites
Innovativeness	Discussion/Comments mentioning social websites being “cool” or peer pressure to join
Visual Appeal	Comments concerning the importance of a websites looks

Response Time	Discussion/Comments about the responsiveness of websites.
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A number of codes were for questions used as transitional or key questions. For example, discussions about ‘participants experience using the Internet’ were used to transition to how the Internet has changed. This in turn was designed to lead participants to discuss what is special about social websites and what makes one better than another. Whenever participant’s comments were deemed to speak directly to an evaluative construct, this was also coded.

WebQual Constructs

While the outcome of each group varied considerably, overall most group discussions supported the WebQual constructs originally thought to apply to social websites and initially discussed in chapter 2. It did not seem sensible for me to mention WebQual constructs thought to not apply to social websites. Furthermore, the participants also did not mention these constructs, which reinforces my point. The following sections discuss the first order constructs from WebQual, except when support/non-support comes only at the “higher” second-order level.

WebQual constructs thought to relate to social websites

Ease of understanding

Ease of understanding, if not explicitly raised by focus group participants, was normally discussed during conversation about the change in the Internet. All groups made some comments showcasing the importance of ease of understanding. Many groups mentioned that over time, the demographics of Internet users have changed to include a

much wider audience who have greatly benefited from how easy sites have become to understand and use, for example:

“It doesn't take as much skill. The Internet in the early days... it was that community, but it was based on people with computer skills. Now the average Joe can get in and talk about their little itch, the grease monkey mechanic guy who couldn't do it in the early days, now he can, plus now it is a richer environment, because if you are trying to take out a carburetor, you can shoot a video clip and put it on your website, it is a lot richer and a more interactive environment compared to the old ASCII text.”

Considering the importance of ease of understanding to web use in general, this construct has a high importance for social websites.

Intuitive Operation

Intuitive operation was very quickly mentioned in the first two groups when participants discussed their problems using certain social networking sites. Producers who have used both of the major social networking sites (SNS) – MySpace and FaceBook seemed most sensitive to this. This is most likely because having multiple sites gives them greater insight, into how using the site (navigation and operation) could be accomplished. These participants highlighted that many MySpace producers, who have little knowledge of web design, often destroy the navigation of their profile/page while trying to customize it. Their customization attempts create pages requiring horizontal scrolling and extensive browsing to find relatively “standard” information.

In later groups, when website evaluative criteria were discussed, the moderator often gave intuitive navigation as an example. These groups overwhelmingly agreed with this idea. While the moderator is in a position to greatly influence the group, not all ideas/constructs expressed by the moderator were as enthusiastically received. This suggests that genuine agreement on this construct's importance was expressed (rather

than agreement being the result of moderator influence). Some SNS producers even mentioned their “dumping” of MySpace altogether or minimal use of it because of this concern like a participant in group III.

“[MySpace] at the time, I never like it because you could totally customize the way the page looked and half the people that did it, didn't know how to contrast colors so you couldn't read their text or their pictures were way too big [making navigation hard]... I ended up dumping MySpace because I didn't like the usability of it, and the retarded people that used it. So I stuck with FaceBook, mostly so people can find me.”

Since the first Internet websites, intuitive operation has been a major factor that webmasters have paid close attention too. Intuitive operation is still a concern for social website creators, because non-intuitive operation hinders a participant, and will keep some people from returning.

Informational Fit-to-task

Since most social websites are used to maintain contact with people, being able to find other users was a major reason expressed for using social websites. Groups II and III explicitly mentioned difficulty finding people and their frustrations with SNS search scripts that didn't allow for advanced searching, advanced search which would help them find the particular “John Smith” they were looking for. These discussions were coded “Info Search Features” in the transcript.

Participant 50: “well I think the thing you should add [to the list on the board] is that business sites don't have people able to look others up. That's what social sites are about; being able to contact those you want to contact. That's their primary purpose, [they should] have a user friendly search quality.

Moderator: “if all your friends are on MySpace or FaceBook but you have no way of looking for them...”

Participant 50: “yeah - you have a friend that says they're in FaceBook and you go to look them up and [it reports] no users found.

Participant 33: or you type in a name and it comes up with 200 [results]. FaceBook has a horrible search because it only goes by name, not what state they were born in and such. They don't have an advanced search option.

Since users are generally able to input whatever information they want, including false information, even if advanced search is present, the results may be poor because of false or incomplete information. The companies that host social websites for users should encourage new users to provide accurate information and find ways for new users to be found without making users feel like they are exposed. For example: during signup if a user doesn't want to put the state they live in, an option to enter a region or a group of states may encourage users to provide a minimal amount of accurate information, where their friends can find them, thereby improving the company's current search capabilities.

Relative Advantage

It was proposed earlier that this construct should be redefined when discussing social websites, because the usefulness of a social website is related to the range of options one has for interacting with people (on both sides of the communication) and the preferences that one has for that communication. Participants found social websites to provide an advantage to other means of communication for updating a large number of people with the same personal information.

Few participants mentioned using social websites for maintaining ties with people they were already close with. Instead these sites were generally used to re-establish or preserve ties to others in which they were either unwilling or unable to commit extensive time. One participant told me:

“Like me and my (significant other) go online to see how friends are doing and we can do that fast without engaging them in a 30 minute phone call.”

Another participant mentions his reason for creating a blog:

“The whole reason I added a blog to my MySpace is because I would get an email from somebody "saying hey what are you up to?" so I would type this long email back to this person and three days later I would get another email from someone else saying "I haven't heard from you in 2 weeks, what's going on. So I am getting the picture of my blogs are popular... so that's why I started having a blog.”

Non-producers (in group V) seemed to only see value in using social websites to maintain already close ties, rather than reestablishing lost ties or maintaining ties to acquaintances. The group of non-producers repeatedly mentioned how the time investment, of creating and maintaining a social website, was not worth the benefit and therefore they valued more “personal” means of communication.

“If you want to stay connected you can, it doesn't have to necessarily be through a website, you have a cell-phone in your pocket that can reach anyone, so I don't need a MySpace website to do that.”

Social websites seem particularly suited to reestablishing lost ties or maintaining ties to acquaintances over other means of communication, including email. While this construct, as now defined, separates social sites from other sites, it still seems a valid and compelling criterion to distinguish competing social websites.

Trust

This construct was not thoroughly discussed by producers except during discussions about difficulties finding people and the inter-related issue of lack of accurate information. Participants implied that the reason some users provided inaccurate or little information is because of low trusting beliefs or “perceptions of the competence, benevolence, and integrity of the vendor [or company]” (McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2002, p. 297). Inaccurate or missing information reduces the effectiveness of

search mechanisms, which reduces overall usefulness of the site. Low trusting beliefs can be compensated for by building trust along one or more other trust dimensions such as institutional based trust or the “legal, governmental, contractual or regulatory structures that create an environment that feels safe and secure to participants” (McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2002, p. 304).

On the other hand, the group of non-producers (group V) discussed the issue in some depth. These non-producers expressed no trust in the company running the site (low trusting beliefs) or in the technological controls put in place to secure information (low institution based trust). It should be noted that this group consisted of IT graduate students whose earlier course work has likely sensitized them to such issues, a fact they freely admitted.

From this same group came the story of one participant's 18 yr/old daughter who started receiving friend requests from a 41 yr/old gentlemen, (who was living 6 miles away), *within 8 hours after she signed up* for a particular SNS. His lack of using it was summarized up as “you open that up and you bring it right into your house.” Other group participants continued to utilize that analogy saying that using these sites is like leaving your home open for anyone.

Response Time

A site's response time was not explicitly mentioned in the focus groups, but when the discussion changed to criteria for evaluating social websites, participants expressed that they "expect the site to work" or expect it to load. The concept of having an adequate response time is integrated into their expectations and thus remains a valid criterion.

Visual Appeal

Visual Appeal, one of WebQual's first-order criteria under Entertainment, was only openly pointed out in group IV, but comments in other groups also provide support for this construct. Producers in group III mentioned that building social websites was "fun" and provided an avenue for them to be "creative". In groups that discussed the difference between the older Internet and today's Internet (which has social websites), I found participants mentioning a "richer" experience, which lends support to the concept of visual appeal being an important aspect of websites.

Innovativeness

While Innovativeness was not directly mentioned in the groups, its second-order construct, Entertainment, was often mentioned. Like many avenues of Entertainment, social websites are subject to public opinion and momentum. Innovative things are different from the norm, and for them to be widely accepted, public opinion and momentum seem to be the mechanisms that make it so. The importance of Innovativeness was raised indirectly through participants' comments, such as these sites are considered "cool" (group V) and they experience peer pressure to join (groups II, III and V). These discussions were coded "Peer Pressure" in the transcript.

When the non-producer group was asked why they feel people use social websites, they mentioned it as an avenue to escape:

Moderator: can you come up with anything else? Reasons to use blogs, forums, SNS?

Participant 13: to escape their current life, that's what my sister uses it for

Participant 94: when you go online you create your online persona, and how you present yourself is reality [online], so if you feel your current life sucks, you can go online...

(Group mentions and jokes about Brad Paisley song - I'm so much cooler online)

Participant 86: hey, would peer-pressure be lumped up there with cool? (General agreement)

From books, to radio, and TV, entertainment's appeal is often used as an avenue of escape. Innovativeness makes a particular avenue of escape more compelling. Innovative social websites will keep their user's attention and therefore can be considered to be of high quality.

WebQual constructs not thought to relate to Social Websites

From chapter two, four constructs were thought to not apply to social websites: tailored communication, online completeness, emotional appeal, and consistent image. In review, tailored communication and online completeness are constructs representing aspects of the business to consumer relationship, which is not the relationship social websites producers have with the sites they own and visit. A social website is not about the firm, it is about people. Since most social websites do little advertising in other media, the consistent image construct also is thought to not be applicable to social websites. A more focused replacement for emotional appeal is social presence, which is mentioned in the next section. To reiterate, none of the focus group discussions provided evidence to justify reconsidering these constructs.

Social and Communication Constructs

These constructs were difficult for the moderator to discuss with participants. There are a couple of explanations for this (other than shortcomings of the moderator). Participants may have had trouble shifting from the more physically linked aspects of web use (discussed earlier) to the more cognitive aspects of web use (which were discussed later). Participants may have been practicing impression management and thus were unwilling to acknowledge these reasons, etc. Regardless of the reasoning, the moderator normally had to extensively guide participants to (and through) both of these constructs.

Social Presence

The peer pressure to join social websites, mentioned earlier, can be considered to be an effect of the influencer's desire for connectedness. Some dual producers of MySpace and FaceBook expressed this peer pressure when they discussed their conflict on which one to use. Generally, they wanted to stick to one SNS but were unable to, due to their friends having already staked their virtual ground. Their continued usage of both sites seems to represent their desire to maintain those connections even though their "friends" seem unwilling to do the same.

Participant 33: "I go to MySpace because that's where everyone is, but if I meet someone that isn't on MySpace I tell them to go to FaceBook and not MySpace because I hate MySpace. I go there maybe twice a month. But I go to FaceBook maybe 2 or 3 times a week. I want to get my friends to FaceBook and get the ones on MySpace on FaceBook. But at the end you wouldn't just follow, you want to encourage others to be where you are."

Unlike the other groups, when the non-producers were asked *the reasons they perceive people to use social websites*, social reasons were the first ones mentioned.

They perceived social website producers as “social butterflies” who were seeking community with others. Relevant transcript codes include “Peer Pressure” and “Positive Affect” since these ideas are effects of social presence.

Social Capital

Discussion of this construct was normally introduced through the discussion of the website “linked-in”, a popular SNS built for business professionals to network. While most groups felt social capital could be a distinguishing criterion, they did not feel it was a compelling criterion to evaluate social website quality because it only applies to a minority of SNS producers who use social websites to advance their career or job. Examples of the types of people participants thought to be using SNS for building social capital were: sales-people, or others who need to recruit business, and job-seekers. The use of the website “linked-in” as a lead-in to discuss social capital, may have biased participant responses, but based on the group’s overall discussion it does not seem to be a criterion worthy of further consideration.

While most participants had difficulty seeing this concept outside of SNS, some participants saw its use in blogs (by writers). The most vocal producers of forums strongly felt that the concept was at play in forums.

Participant 53: “basically what you described is a hobby forum ... you have gurus, people who know lots of things. ... You are trying to keep the community alive, but the community has a reason for existing (specific game example), (Writer group example), The moral support is a huge issue.”

Participant 53: Most of the hobby forums usually do not have a commercial incentive, because someone at one point said we need one, we need a community, ... we are not going looking for commercial stuff (commercial incentive), we go to them for help or ideas, ..., the communities reach out to each other

An interesting note across the groups is that producers and non-producers alike were both aware of the same two groups of people who use SNS to acquire social capital: performers and politicians. This is likely due to the heavy use of MySpace by performers (bands, actors/actresses, comedians, etc.) and the current press covering candidates seeking to be elected the next United States president.

Network Size and Composition

During group exercises, Groups III and IV mentioned that the composition of people on the social website was a significant factor for evaluating it. While group II did not have an exercise, when asked *where would you go if your SNS(s) went down*, participant 45's comment is representative of the group.

Moderator: "you have your friends on one site, but what if that site was gone tomorrow, forever, what would you do with your friends?"

Participant 45: "I'd pick a site with a good backup system (everyone laughs)... I'd go wherever my friends are because they care about it."

These, along with the comments from other groups, provide support evidence for keeping the network size and composition as criteria.

One group had a webmaster that provided an interesting insight concerning this construct. As the amount of people interacting increases, different types of social websites seem most appropriate. When little interaction between the site owner and the public occurs, a blog is most appropriate (supporting multiple one-to-one communications). As the amount of traffic increases, the SNS become more desirables (supporting more one-to-many communication(s)). Finally, when the interaction ranges among many people (a group), forums appear most appropriate.

New Concept

The moderator gained rewarding insights about most of the previous constructs along with a new idea which may have applicability: The use of social websites for reassurance of oneself or to satisfy other emotional needs/wants. These ideas were mentioned in groups II & VII and may have been implied in other groups. This desire to watch others, hereafter referred to as “DTWO”, is a basic human feeling. This construct is being proposed here to separate it from the negative connotation of the only similar words the author could find: voyeurism and schadenfreude. The American Heritage Dictionary (4th ed.) defines a voyeur as “one who derives sexual gratification from observing the naked bodies or sexual acts of other.” Voyeurism thus would be condition which affects a voyeur. The APA defines some types of voyeurism under the family of disorders called ‘Paraphilia’. The American Heritage Dictionary (4th ed.) defines Schadenfreude are “pleasure derived from the misfortunes of others.” Both of these terms have negative connotations and voyeurism is generally thought of as a disorder. In contrast, DTWO as defined here is a general feeling experienced by everyone to some degree. Participant 41’s comment best summarizes this feeling: “People want be reassured by sending out pictures. Saying, “Comment on my pictures.” Well whose going to say, “Oh my gosh you’re ugly”? People like to come home and see that they have comments and they feel that other people like them.”

The desire to watch others (again DTWO) can have multiple possible have roots, including roots in positive behavior or feelings, such as learning. Learning through observation is a primary knowledge vehicle and is one of the first we encounter in human development. An eager desire to learn (through observation) would generally not be

considered to have negative effect and thus in this example DTWO would be considered a positive thing.

Psychologists/Sociologists have found that individuals look to others to evaluate their own opinions and abilities. This idea has been termed “Social Comparison Theory” (Festinger, 1954). This idea is even incorporated in TRA’s Subjective Norm and other models discussing attitudes and behaviors. The use of social websites for re-assurance, by people performing social comparisons, is not necessarily a negative action and thus DTWO in this example doesn’t necessarily carry a negative connotation. Other motives that are relevant to comparison include: self-enhancement, perceptions of relative standing, maintenance of a positive self-evaluation, closure, components of attributes, and the avoidance of closure (Kruglanski & Mayseless, 1990; Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002).

Based on the limited introduction to this construct in this study, DTWO appears to be an unconscious, affective, process that may be rational, but is not unique to social websites or even electronic communications. Within electronic communications, social cues are all the environmental factors that provide enhanced meaning to the message and help the recipient properly understand the message, are often nonexistent. Examples of social cues are: tone of voice, facial expressions, distance from receiver, situation in which the message is conveyed, etc.

The reduction of social cues in electronic communications should reduce DTWO, but with the evolution of the Internet, people are finding ways to compensate for some of these social cues that are lacking. One digital system design approach/paradigm, called “Social Translucence” is particularly focused on making “perceptually based social cues

visible to their [system's] users" (Erickson, Halverson, Kellogg, Laff & Wolf, 2002, p. 41). The products of this approach may be used to reinstate some social cues and thereby satisfy social website user's DTWO, which should make sites that utilize this approach of higher quality. This construct, DTWO and the use of social translucence to satisfy it, deserves further examination in future research on social website evaluation.

A Mix of dimensions

The dimensions identified in this study are complex. Given their nature, there are at least three broad categories, for which classification will provide some additional insight about each construct. Some constructs seem technical (or environmental), meaning that they are, or are influenced by, areas outside of the human mental processes. Other constructs seem cognitive, meaning that they influence, or are influenced by, rational evaluation. Finally, some constructs seem affective or they influence, or are influenced by, more subconscious processes than rational evaluation. While some constructs may fall across these domains, for simplicity they will be categorized under the domain with the greatest perceived influence. Also noted is whether or not I consider this construct to be an antecedent or precursor to social website quality.

Table 11. Construct / Category categorization

Construct	Category	Reasoning	Antecedent to quality
Ease of Understanding	Technical	This construct concerns a specific aspect of site design using an understanding of the user audience.	Yes
Intuitive Operation	Technical	This construct concerns a specific aspect of site design using an understanding of typical	Yes

		user expectations. It is not an antecedent of Social Website (SW) quality except when the underlying network(s) are of poor quality.	
Informational Fit-to-task	Technical	This construct concerns a specific aspect of site design using an understanding of the user audience.	Yes
Relative Advantage	Cognitive	This construct concerns the evaluation of the necessary/appropriate medium in which to engage in communication with someone/some-people.	No
Trust	Cognitive	In academic literature, this construct has dimensions that fall across all three categories. It is categorized here as cognitive because ultimately a rational evaluation of whether to trust or not and a decision of how much to trust.	No
Response Time	Technical	This construct is influenced by the hardware and software of the site and the connecting infrastructure. While response time appears distinct, it has large effects on both overall ease-of-use and usefulness.	Yes
Visual Appeal	Affective	This construct is influenced by subjective preferences. I.E. what is visually appealing can range from person to person, but there are theories concerning universal appeal.	No
Innovativeness	Affective	Innovativeness is an evaluation of differences between websites.	No
Social Presence	Affective	This construct concerns a subconscious reasoning for using social websites.	No
Network Size / Composition	Technical	This construct is a technical aspect since it is largely outside of the influence of the site designer and can only be influenced through advertising/promotion actions and applications.	Yes
<i>DTWO</i>	Affective	Social comparisons, which appear to happen outside of conscious thought, may be a fundamental force behind DTWO.	No

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the results from the five focus groups conducted. While the outcome of each group varied considerably, overall most group discussions supported the constructs thought to apply to social websites. For the constructs thought to NOT apply to social websites, no discussions provided evidence to justify reconsidering them. These results provide evidence that Social Capital should be dropped from consideration as a potential evaluative criterion for social websites. Finally, a new possible concept, DTWO and the websites ability to facilitate it, was discovered. Table 12 provides a final listing of the remaining constructs.

Table 12. Final Social Website Constructs

Ease of Understanding	Intuitive Operation	Informational Fit-to-task	Relative Advantage
Trust	Response Time	Visual Appeal	Innovativeness
Social Presence	Network Size / Composition	<i>DTWO</i> ₂	

₁ - Redefinition of Relative Advantage is needed for social websites

₂ – More research is needed on DTWO

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter overview

This chapter reviews the two questions of this research and presents the conclusions of this study. This is followed by sections discussing research limitations, follow-on research, and recommendations for future research. In the general conclusion, the benefits of this research are re-highlighted.

Research questions and Conclusions

This research was focused on theorizing and supporting possible evaluative criteria for social websites. Overall, its' guiding questions were:

- (1) What makes users decide to use social websites?*
- (2) What makes users prefer one social website to another?*

Going into the focus groups, there were eleven theorized constructs. Out of the groups came one new idea and only one idea did not find support. This suggests that the analysis of available literature was fairly comprehensive.

What makes users decide to use social websites?

Participant responses highlighted the usefulness of social websites to keep in touch with large numbers of people with minimal time commitment. Market Mavenism (MM) is the scale mentioned in chapter 3 that used to determine how likely a subject will try new products or in this case new websites. Most participants were “recommended” or “pushed” to social websites by friends. In contrast, 3 of the 14 subjects, who were social website users, indicated that they searched or independently found their social website.

Since these users did try new websites without being influenced, they should have high MM scores.

Analysis shows that these three participants had an average MM score of 6.1, while the rest of the user group had an average score of 5.0. While not statistically significant, $t(13) = 1.166, p = .13$, it is still interesting. Overall though, most social website producers seem to initially use social websites: to keep in touch with large numbers of people with minimal time commitment and/or because their friends recommended it.

What makes users prefer one social website to another?

The factor mentioned most frequently was network size and composition or “how many total people are on the site” and “who they know is on the site”. This result is not surprising since the effect of others on our attitudes and behaviors is documented in constructs such as TRA subjective norm. Factors, relevant to all types of websites, such as usability and easy navigation, were also mentioned in the groups. Surprisingly, the acquisition of Social Capital, or the sum of the resources one acquires by knowing people, does not appear to be a significant motivation for producers to choose one site over another. This idea did not come to producers minds, and when it was introduced, producers did not feel that most producers had this as a motivating factor. Thus, Social Capital does not appear to be a good criterion upon which to evaluate social websites.

The applicability of WebQual to social websites

The issue of WebQual’s applicability was not emphasized throughout this work, but it has been a key assumption and thus should be addressed here. In chapter 2, the main argument presented for WebQual’s inability to examine social websites is because

its foundational tasks, and thus the motivations that users have for using websites, are *gathering information* and *carrying out an economic transaction*. This author felt that *carrying out a transaction* was not an applicable task to social websites and that together, both tasks, do not offer enough explanatory capability to understand the motivations of social website users (and their perceptions of quality). Even the primary author of WebQual call's its explanatory capability into question for non-informative and E-Commerce sites. The discussions from the focus groups provide ample evidence that this author's assertion is accurate.

Limitations and follow on research

Focus group limitations

Many limitations of focus groups are the same as interviewing. The open nature of the group responses makes it difficult to summarize and generalize. The board exercises help to somewhat mitigate this. The interaction of respondents makes their responses not independent. Thus "each group really only represents a single observation" (Stewart et al., 2007, p. 165) and therefore this study has an $n = 5$. Additionally, the interaction of respondents may keep the more reserved members from talking. The moderator tried to ensure that this did not happen.

The "live" and immediate nature of findings may lead the researcher to put undue faith in findings (Stewart et al., 2007). The literature research conducted beforehand helps to somewhat alleviate this concern. The moderator may bias results knowingly or unknowingly through cues or seeking consensus on certain points. This moderator

solicited feedback after each group, which helped him stay conscious of this concern for other groups.

Sample issues

Size

For focus groups, there is no minimum number of groups that must occur, but (resources permitting) they should continue until the researcher reached theoretical saturation, or the point where no new ideas are coming forward. This researcher found a new construct in the last group (group VII), which suggests that theoretical saturation was not reached, but most ideas from the first group(s) were reiterated in various forms among the other groups.

Composition

While producers were recruited who used any of the three social websites (blogs, forums, and SNS), only one producer did not have experience with SNS and four producers only had experience with SNS. This may have lead discussions to focus more on SNS than blogs and forums. Therefore the theorized constructs for the evaluation of social websites may not apply to blogs and forums, but only SNS.

External Validity

There are some problems with the external validity of this study, or the “generalizability of the study’s findings to other populations, places, or times” (Dooley, p. 346). This study used USAF personnel as its sample population. While this brought people from across the United States, they all are influenced, or could potentially be influenced, by the USAF culture. At the time of this writing, I would describe this culture as risk-adverse and overall somewhere between hostile to cautiously accepting of social

websites, depending on the sub-USAF level organization. Overall, participant's usage is only outside of their career. Participants outside the USAF may have employers that encourage social website usage (for organizational goals) or require their use in performance of duties. With this study's participants coming from the USAF, where social website usage is not encouraged, theoretically this study may have received different results if it were conducted with people outside of the USAF.

Follow on Research

Now that this research has provided criteria upon which social websites can be compared, new studies can use it as a foundation to build upon. Follow on research could create and compile scale items into a single instrument for social website quality. Many items can be found in the WebQual instrument itself for the following constructs: Ease of Understanding, Intuitive Operation, Informational Fit-to-task, Response Time, Visual Appeal and Innovativeness. As mentioned earlier the items concerning "Relative Advantage" need to be re-written. The trust items could be used, but perhaps items for distrust are more appropriate (see suggestions for future research). A search would be needed for measures to determine a person's desire for connectedness/community (social presence) and a measure to calculate how much the site meets that need. Once this instrument is created, it can be tested on two controlled websites along with interviews of the users to determine its' validity.

Suggestions for future research

DTWO

As mentioned in chapter 4, DTWO is the drive to watch others, is a basic human feeling. This construct may even be of a wider importance because it is visible in dating

sites and rating sites (sites where people submit pictures/etc. to be rated) and not just blogs, forums, and SNS and thus deserves further examination. Since DTWO speaks to attitudes, interests, dispositions, and other personality traits, researchers examining this construct must be aware of social desirability bias and therefore incorporate approaches to reduce the influence of social desirability on participants. Additionally research from social translucence research may provide the tools necessary for site designers to satisfy user desires stemming from DTWO.

Trust

McKnight, Kacmar, & Choudhury (2003) suggested that for high risk issues, the disposition to distrust has greater potential for predicting high-risk outcome constructs such as: (1) a perception that the web is dangerous and (2) a willingness to depend on a specific unknown web vendor in light of that risk. When testing their model using both trust and distrust constructs, their results suggested that disposition to distrust has a larger potential for predicting high risk constructs. While their study was using examining e-commerce, distrust may also be a better predictor of social website quality than trust.

Perceived vs. actual time investment

Other than trust, the second major reason non-producers reported for not using social websites was that the (perceived) time required to setup and maintain a social website was excessive. Unfortunately the researcher did not acquire their perceptions of what they perceive that time investment to be. While blog owners, forum moderators, and SNS page owners can spend a lot of time on their site, they have much latitude in how much time they spend. Perhaps the minimum time required (to provide a site of sufficient quality) is less than what non-producers think it is? If this turns out to be true, this would

suggest that companies hosting social websites could boost usage by educating the public on the actual time investment that is needed.

General Conclusion

With websites becoming the frontend for numerous systems, the benefits to be realized from these systems require customers to have a favorable evaluation of the site and an intention to re-use it. It must be considered to be of high quality. With websites increasing adding collaborative technologies (such as tools for social networking and blogging), a new instrument to evaluate the quality of these types of sites is needed. This thesis was a search for the logical framework and ideas upon which an instrument for social website quality could be based. While a listing of cognitive criteria would have been a great outcome, social website quality appears to be a more complex concept than non-social websites quality, involving multiple affective dimensions. Hopefully, this research has provided a better understanding of the theories/concepts that are applicable to social website evaluative criteria so that instrument development can now be considered.

Appendix A - Glossary

Attitudes - An Attitude is “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object” (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p. 6). Unlike other definitions, in this definition of an attitude, the person is not predisposed to perform any specific behavior. Attitudes are affective (emotional) or evaluative (rational) in nature and its type is determined by the set of beliefs about the attitude object.

Beliefs - Beliefs provide the basis for forming an attitude about an object and can be evaluated to determine a person’s attitudes. They represent the information a person has about an object and link it to some attribute; for example, the belief “Iraq’s government is in chaos” links the object “Iraq” to the attribute “chaos”. People differ in the belief strength of these associations and the subjective probabilities (a judgment about how likely a particular event is to occur) that they assign to it. Beliefs “deal with the person’s understanding of himself and his environment”. More formally, a belief is “the subjective probability of a relation between the object of the belief and some other object, value, concept or attribute” (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p. 12).

Intentions - An Intention can be considered to be “a special case of belief where the object is the person himself and the attribute is always a behavior” (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p. 12). Each intention relates to a specific behavior. The intention is composed of two basic determinants: the attitude toward the behavior and the *Subjective Norm*. These determinants are influenced by the information the person gathers from himself and his physical/social environment.

Network Centric Warfare (NCW) - the “articulation of the set of tenets that link a robustly networked force to dramatically increased combat power. It describes how information coupled with changes in Command and Control can transform military organizations” (Alberts & Hayes, 2003, p. xix).

Social Software - the “various, loosely connected types of applications that allow individuals to communicate with one another, and to track discussions across the Web as they happen” (Green & Pearson, 2005, p. 1).

Social Websites - the population of websites sharing characteristics that enhance communication and interpersonal relations. It is a subset of websites powered by *Social Software*. For a better understanding, this term can be contrasted with informative websites (which simply post information, like an encyclopedia) or transactional websites (example: shopping sites).

Subjective Norm - the “individual's perception of social pressure to engage (or not) in the target behavior” (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p. 16).

Web 2.0 - the “business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the Internet as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform. Chief among those rules is this: Build applications that harness network effects [applications that are designed] to get better the more people use them” (O’Reilly, 2006).

Appendix B - IRB Exemption Packet



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
AIR FORCE MATERIEL COMMAND
WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE OHIO

18 Jan 2008

MEMORANDUM FOR AFIT IRB Reviewer

FROM: Capt Joseph Werling (secondary investigator)
AFIT/ENV
2950 Hobson Way Huber Heights, OH 45424
WPAFB, OH 45433-7765

SUBJECT: Request for exemption from human experimentation requirements (32 CFR 219, DoDD 3216.2 and AFI 40-402) for *An Exploratory Examination of "intent to reuse" a Social Website* (AFIT/GIR/ENV/08-M23)

1. This research is being accomplished to fulfill the requirements for the researcher's M.S. degree from the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT). The purpose of this study is to explore the concepts needed for a logical framework to understand the how a user evaluates a social website including the determinants for re-use of a social website. Only thesis publication is expected.
2. This request is based on the Code of Federal Regulations, title 32, part 219, section 101, paragraph (b) (2) Research activities that involve the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior unless: (i) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.
3. The following information is provided to show cause for such an exemption:
 - a) Equipment and facilities: Room at AFIT to accomplish focus groups. Audio and Video Recording equipment, Standard desktop computer for data analysis and report generation.
 - b) Subjects: Volunteers will be solicited from students, faculty, and staff assigned to AFIT - (approximately 1,050 personnel) via email. Ideal sample will contain approximately 30 acceptable subjects which will be interviewed in 3-5 focus groups. The purpose of the subject selection criteria will be to ensure wide variation in demographic variables, user experience, and social website choice (social networking, blog, and forum). Prescreening questions are attached. While subjects will most likely have an age in the range of 20-35, age will not be a selection criteria unless there are a considerable number of volunteers with ages outside of the 20-35 range.

c) Timeframe: Focus groups will occur during one week in the first quarter of 2008.

d) Data collected:

Pre-Screening questionnaires will collect demographic data and frequency of social website use information. Demographic data collected: name, age, and gender. Due to the nature of focus groups, the use of *names* is needed in order to facilitate a comfortable environment in which subjects can openly discuss their memories and thoughts. Upon completion of this research, names will be replaced with a unique identifier. *Age* and *gender* will be used to ensure a wide variation of participants in the focus groups.

Pre-Focus group surveys will help determine the subject's social desirability bias, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, and market mavenism. An understanding of these participant traits will help the moderator guide and focus discussion.

The focus groups will examine the subject's thoughts and opinions concerning their use of social websites, along with the benefits provided from use.

Expected questions during all stages of research are attached (attachments 2, 3, & 4).

e) Risks to Subjects: The topic and questions are such that the risks to subjects are disclosure of individual responses to how and why they choose to use social websites. Minimal risk to subjects present.

f) Informed consent: All subjects are self-selected to volunteer to participate in the focus groups. No adverse action is taken against those who choose not to participate. Subjects are made aware of the nature and purpose of the research, sponsors of the research (none), and disposition of the survey results. A copy of the Privacy Act Statement of 1974 is presented for their review.

g) Adverse Impact: If a subject's future response reasonably places them at risk of criminal or civil liability or is damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation, I understand I am required to immediately file an adverse event report with the IRB office.

h) I understand that the names and associated data I collect must be protected at all times, only be known to the researchers, and managed according to the AFIT interview protocol. All interview data will only be handled by the following researchers - Maj Alexander Barelka & Capt Joseph Werling. At the conclusion of the study all data will be turned over to the advisor and all other copies will be destroyed.

4. If you have any questions about this request, please contact Capt Werling (secondary investigator) – Phone 937-830-8616; E-mail – joseph.werling@afit.af.mil.

ALEXANDER J. BARELKA, Maj, USAF
Principal Investigator

Attachments:

1. Subject Research Summary
2. Pre-Screening Questions
3. Focus Group Participant Survey
4. Focus Group Moderator Guide
5. CITI Training Completion Report

Subject Research Summary

For

An Exploratory Examination of “intent to reuse” a Social Website
(AFIT/GIR/ENV/08-M23)

AFIT/ENV, Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT)
Wright Patterson Air Force Base – Dayton OH

Principal Investigator: Maj Alexander Barelka, DSN 785-3636 x7404, AFIT/ENV
alexander.barelka@afit.af.mil

Associate Investigator: Capt Joseph Werling, COM 830-8616, AFIT/ENV3
joseph.werling@afit.af.mil

Nature and purpose: You have been offered the opportunity to participate in the “*An Exploratory Examination of “intent to reuse” a Social Website*” research study. Your participation will be at the Air Force Institute of Technology, located on Wright-Patterson AFB.

The purpose of this research is to determine the conditions under which people choose to use social websites (such as social networking websites, blogs, and forums), and what makes a particular site more attractive than others.

The time requirement for each volunteer subject is anticipated to be 1 visit of approximately 90 minutes. A total of approximately 30 subjects will be enrolled in this study.

1. **Experimental procedures:** If you participate, you will be placed into a focus group where you will discuss your past experience with social websites and why you continue to use them. Snacks and refreshments will be provided.
2. **Discomfort and risks:** Discomforts may consist of speaking in public. Potential risks include exposure of your views by fellow participants in the focus group. Researchers will not directly attribute your views, but they may be presented during presentations of the group’s audio/video recordings.
3. **Benefits:** You are not expected to benefit directly from participation in this research study.
4. **Compensation:** In keeping with focus group research tradition, “off-duty” and “non-work status” participants will receive \$5.00 dollars in compensation, either in cash or gift card. Additionally, all participants have a chance of winning a random drawing for a \$50 gift card.

5. **Alternatives:** Choosing not to participate is an alternative to volunteering for this study.

Privacy Act Statement

Authority: We are requesting disclosure of personal information, to include your Social Security Number. Researchers are authorized to collect personal information (including social security numbers) on research subjects under The Privacy Act-5 USC 552a, 10 USC 55, 10 USC 8013, 32 CFR 219, 45 CFR Part 46, and EO 9397, November 1943.

Purpose: It is possible that latent risks or injuries inherent in this experiment will not be discovered until sometime in the future. The purpose of collecting this information is to aid researchers in locating you at a future date if further disclosures are appropriate.

Routine Uses: Information (including name and SSN) may be furnished to Federal, State and local agencies for any uses published by the Air Force in the Federal Register, 52 FR 16431, to include, furtherance of the research involved with this study and to provide medical care.

Disclosure: Disclosure of the requested information is voluntary. No adverse action whatsoever will be taken against you, and no privilege will be denied you based on the fact you do not disclose this information. However, your participation in this study may be impacted by a refusal to provide this information.

Respondent Screener

The following questions are to help us determine if you are the type of respondent we are looking for our study. Respondents will be chosen from across a wide range of responses, so please answers honestly and to the best of your ability.

1. Do you have your own blog or personal website?
Yes
No

2. Do you have your own page on a social networking site such as MySpace or FaceBook?
Yes
No

3. Do you participate in online forums (such as hobby forums, product support forums, etc.)?
Yes
No

4. In the last month, have you contacted someone through a social networking site like MySpace or FaceBook on more than one occasion?
Yes
No

5. In the last month, have you reviewed, rated or recommended something online more than once?
Yes
No

6. Do you have a BA or BS Degree?
Yes
No

7. What is your age?
18-21
22-25
26-30
31-40
Over 40

8. What is your Gender?
Male
Female

9. In a typical week, how many hours do you spend performing the following activities?
 - a. Contributing you your own website or blog _____
 - b. Reading blogs or online forums _____
 - c. Visiting social network sites _____

Focus Group Participant Survey

Thank you for agreeing to participate in these upcoming Focus Groups. As part of this project we want to develop a deeper understanding of why people use social websites such as Blogs, Social Networking Sites and Forums. Prior to participating in the depth interviews, we ask that you complete this survey. It will take you about ten minutes to complete.

Your participation in this study is purely voluntary. If you choose not to participate in this study or withdraw from this study you will experience no penalty. These questions are to help the research team better understand you. Your responses are confidential; no one outside the research team will be able to link your specific responses to you. The results of this research will be published, but your name will not be used.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please fill in the circle that best indicates the extent to which each statement is true about you.

	Completely False						Completely True
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am always willing to admit when I've made a mistake.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I always try to practice what I preach.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I never resent being asked to return a favor.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have never been bothered when people expressed ideas that were different from my own.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No matter who I'm talking too, I'm always a good listener.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I never hesitate to go out of my way to help someone in trouble.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

INSTRUCTIONS: Please fill in the circle that best indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is important that others like the products and brands that I buy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I rarely purchase the latest fashion trends until I know that my friends approve of them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

INSTRUCTIONS: Please fill in the circle that best indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I like to introduce new brands, products or services to my friends in these categories	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like to help people by providing them with information about products in these categories	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People often ask me for information to get the best buy, places to shop, or sales in these categories	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If someone asked me where to get the best buy in these categories, I could tell the person where to shop	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My friends think of me as a good source of information for new products or sales in these categories

Think about a person who has information about a variety of products and likes to share this information with others. This person knows about new products, sales, stores and so on but does not necessarily feel he or she is an expert on any one particular product. How strongly would you agree that this description fits you?

Focus Group Moderator Guide

Opening Questions – answerable in 30 seconds, make people feel comfortable and identify common characteristics, not for obtaining useful info

News event or local happenings... (TBD)

Or may ask who is in 08 class (highlighting that most are students) and thesis progress...

Introductory Questions – Introduce overall topic, typically open ended, could ask for definition, explanation, or overview of how people experienced the topic

What do you think the term “social website” means?

What are some examples of social websites?

All of you are active “social website” users. While most of you use XX type of social website, some of you choose to use Y or, ZZ sites more. How long do you think you have been using these sites?

The purpose of this research is to determine the conditions under which people choose to use social websites (such as social networking websites, blogs, and forums), and what makes a particular site more attractive than others. I, myself read blogs, have found excellent information in forums and visit friends MySpace pages, but do not “produce”. I am truly interested in your thoughts and opinions concerning your use and other’s use of social websites, along with the benefits you get.

Transition Questions – move conversation toward key questions that drive study, logical link, go into more depth than intro questions

Think back to when you first started using the Internet. How are sites different now (from then)?

Probably mention less graphics and more static information. May mention video sharing, which has some social aspects, but not of focus to thus study. Mention to ignore video sharing sites.

These classic types of sites are sometimes termed transactional and informational sites

Are social websites different from classic sites, how?

Probably mention real time, user content etc. A group consensus (yes/no) would be useful, but is not required.

Key Questions – 2→5 questions, normally the first to be identified, where most analysis happens

What factors cause users to adopt a particular social website?

*How did you find the site that you use most? (Probably WoM) – get category – family, friend, coworker
If search or ad, what was the most important reason you chose this one?*

At that time, had you heard of others?

If you were not “invested” in your current site, what would you look for in a new site?

What factors cause users to continue to use these sites?

(Get someone to write out the groups list on board)

What are some reasons people use social websites?

Probably get activities (keep in touch) not reasons (easier to keep in touch), may need to probe deeper.

----- IF connectedness and social capital not mentioned -----

What do you think about this statement?

Some people get the same good feelings from using social websites as getting mail, even junk mail.

If agreement, summarize as “connectedness” as a reason for using social websites.

Do you know about linked-in? (Explain if necessary, tie to “networking”)

Do people use other social websites for this purpose? Do you?

Ending Questions – bring closure to discussion, enable participants to reflect, the “All-things-considered question”, useful in interpreting comments and assigning weight to what was said

Which of these reasons also apply to “classic websites”?

(Briefly mention the needed to be able to evaluate a website.)

Should we use measures designed for classic websites for social websites? Why / Why not?

Summary Question – follows a short (2-3 mins) summary of discussion, ask about adequacy of analysis

Here is what we talked about...

Did I get anything wrong or not get something?

Final Question (Insurance Question) – begins with short overview of discussion purpose.

Well our goal was to discuss ...

What subjects or areas did I miss?

What can I change for the next group?

Appendix D – Group Transcripts

Group 2 Transcript

0:00	Mod	social websites, if there like a website where people interact with each other, that's what I've been calling them. In the thesis I've stuck to, if people use blogs, forums, social networking sites like MySpace, FaceBook. I think most of you use social networking sites right? (everyone agrees) if not, when we talk, if something's different for a blog or a forum, just make that known. That'll help with the confusion.
0:00	45	do you guys' blog?
0:00	50	No
0:00	33	I read other people's blogs
0:00	Mod	I do too. I'm strictly a reader. My wife has a MySpace and I'll use hers to keep up with friends and I'll find blogs and forums through Google but I don't produce. Ok, research purpose, what makes one social website more attractive than another. What makes one blog better than the other what makes MySpace better or more desirable than FaceBook and visa versa, I'm hoping to... at the end of my thesis will be that
3:00	Mod	if you want to develop an instrument this is what you need. I have my own ideas but I'm going to focus groups to see if what I think is correct.
3:00	Mod	How long have you guys been using the internet in general?
3:00	33	define using the internet, like how many times a day...
3:00	Mod	no a better question will be when?
3:00	33	when did you start?
3:00	Mod	me? my dad used to sign on to prodigy when I was this big (hand gesture of three feet off ground), and if was all text. he bought me a jean jacket from sears. we didn't see it, we just saw jean jacket and measurements and that was it. so it has been a while for me. so I just want to know how long has it been for ya'll.
3:00	45	1997 is when I started. I had my first email address. That was right when I graduated high school.
3:00	Mod	cool. I don't know the year but...
3:00	33	I was 8th grade 14.
3:00	Mod	I don't need the year. between now and then, how do you think websites have changed? I mean to me its night and day but in what ways?
3:00	50	there are so many things available
3:00	45	you can find anything you want on the internet. I remember still having to use encyclopedias.
3:00	Mod	yeah, the concept of wikipedia was not existent.
3:00	33	it's hard to answer because when it was first around I didn't do anything online. I mean even when there was stuff to do I didn't do it. there are a lot of things that just because how much I've changed that just the way I want to interact. like if someone says let's go to a restaurant and I'll go see if they have a menu online. I wouldn't have thought to do that even if that was there.

3:00	50	yeah, there are a lot of changed like I like to do online banking and I don't even think that was available until 1998 or 2000
3:00	45	it's like we are maturing with the internet
6:00	33	the perception was that in high school it was just Joe smoe's online chatting but now it's been incorporated into business and thing that are more formal and it's not just about going to my friends websites where you just play around.
6:00	45	it's like businesses have to be online now.
6:00	50	Absolutely
6:00	Mod	in order for you to interact with them.
6:00	45	I'll be like it's not convenient.
6:00	50	I'll get so frustrated if they don't update the site and I go to call them and they aren't there
6:00	Mod	yeah, take the time and make a new site
6:00	50	I can't even fathom what the world was like 10 years ago trying to get your thesis done.
6:00	Mod	yeah, having to photocopy everything, not even knowing where to look. I mean I still have trouble but you just have far more options to look at and search faster.
6:00	33	but your access is a little bit different. I did my undergrad thesis because my school was weird. and if you want to search on the internet, everything there is still very new so in order to get something historic you very rapidly narrow your scope because they have very different resources for that.
6:00	45	online?
6:00	33	Yeah
6:00	45	that's true
6:00	Mod	if you're looking for the root article for some theory back in 1920 when it started, you know it's in this journal but that is most likely not online yet.
6:00	50	there was an example email today about Barrack Obama speaking tonight at the Nutter Center and this guy made this comment about being a woman or something and this other guy countered
9:00	50	with a truth website and then yet another student came in with something and there are all this information out there, but it's a matter of weeding out the truth. I mean if someone was really stupid, like there was a quote from George Washington about how great Obama is and stuff. (everyone laughs)
9:00	33	did you watch the Colbert report?
9:00	50	No
9:00	33	he had this thing called wikeality, where people would go online and say that this is true then it becomes the truth.
9:00	Mod	I'm gonna look it up
9:00	45	it's about perceptions
9:00	50	it's like the information is good but then there's that information overload where things start to break down because there is too much
9:00	Mod	well back for me there was strictly place to get information and that was that. and most things are still like that. but it seems that social networking site in and of themselves don't fit in those boxes. now with Google indexing that then I sometimes get that. I don't get knowledge or conduct transactions from going to a social network like MySpace to do that. I don't start that way. it serves a different purpose and I don't always know what that is and that's the purpose of focus groups. those places serve as different information. do ya'll agree?

9:00	50	well it depends on what you mean by information. I'm thinking of families and how people who are separated and use those blogs to keep in contact. and I think morning news or something caught on to that and they went and interviewed her and did this big thing. I mean what do you mean by information?
12:00	50	like political blogs and all.
12:00	Mod	you are right; I should limit that to facts.
12:00	33	yeah, because there can be lots of political blogs and that sort of thing.
12:00	50	I guess for me the word transaction can mean lots of things like 'oh you've had a baby can I see pictures?' and they post it on their MySpace page
12:00	Mod	would you consider the type of transaction with a company, to be the same ones you used on MySpace? dealing with other users
12:00	33	you can buy gifts online. you can actually use virtual transactions.
12:00	50	that's probably the next step rather than going through Amazon or eBay just link it with paypal and so...
12:00	33	well, those are all linked, depends on which option you use on FaceBook. it will take you to the website so you can buy the book and such
12:00	Mod	without considering the connection, if there these three boxes, this is the 1994 web someone posts a page that people know about George Washington, facts that will pretty much matter to only one person and then on the other end you have Amazon with every major merchant. is there anything else in your eyes other than these two categories? are there sites that don't fit into the old web or
15:00	Mod	are there sites that don't fit into the old web or the modern economy web? does MySpace fit into these two or is it there own category
15:00	50	it's so hard because they advertise on those pages.
15:00	45	I think it's like a combination and not just facts on the page, but you're not just doing it for a transaction. it's a little more modern. you're not just doing it for business or for the purpose of making a dollar...
15:00	Mod	or increasing your knowledge or demonstrating your knowledge
15:00	45	um... increasing your knowledge maybe
15:00	33	back in 94 I had a bunch of friends that were nerds and it was all about them. in a sense it was a blog but it didn't have that kind of structure but part of it was that the technology didn't allow them to present the knowledge any other way but there were sites out there that were created about them and come look at me
15:00	Mod	it was about the people
15:00	33	yes there were sites created about and for them to say come look at me. the sites now have evolved from that into something
15:00	Mod	maybe they have their root here and have evolved in some sort of way.
15:00	33	yeah you can interact with sites now and they have blossomed from what they were
15:00	Mod	I've heard people say that a blog is nothing new. one thing I say in my thesis, which I could be wrong on, is that if a social networking site is different then it should be measured a different way. The same metrics you use to measure the quality of it, though I go into paragraphs as to what quality is but let's not go there. what makes a quality information site and what makes a quality social site are two different things. do you agree or disagree.

18:00	45	agree. I wouldn't go to a social networking site if I need information and it to be factual I wouldn't go to MySpace or Amazon or places like this. I'd go to one of these sites (points to the paper) to get facts. I mean if I wanted to site something I probably wouldn't even go to the internet and instead I'd use the library.
18:00	Mod	but you would hope that the criteria would say that it's a good site
18:00	45	Yes
18:00	Mod	you just wouldn't trust it
18:00	50	I don't think so
18:00	Mod	you disagree
18:00	50	I mean if we're talking about quality and looking at different information, because you're talking about the info about me. like in MySpace it's about you, most people lie. especially compared with the average
18:00	Mod	it's impression management
18:00	50	like when they look at the MySpace, 30% of people are blond but 50% of people on MySpace are blond. or like this is the average weight and so. we're talking about the sample size versus the population or the mean doesn't fail the hypothesis does. the point is that nobody is going on MySpace to validate this information.
18:00	33	I'm gonna take a different spin on this question.
18:00	Mod	Ok
18:00	33	when I go to a business website I want something that is easy to work with. the way they do MySpace is ridiculous and cluttered. when I go to a site to purchase something and have security issues and the sites malfunctioning.
18:00	33	That makes me nervous and not want to go to that site but when I use a social networking site like MySpace and I can't click on certain scenes because their server is down or something and I get frustrated. when I see how they organize it and have all the pictures and things, it's very messy because they allow people to do too much
21:00	33	you know MySpace is much more inferior to FaceBook and 50% of the time I can't go on MySpace there is some kind of problem. the quality I look for is the actual interaction and the ease you can do the things you want to do is the biggest thing. I want a website to be very user friendly.
21:00	Mod	I didn't make myself very clear. we do agree with some things. I have this instrument with 34 items measure 12 constructs, a little ridiculous it was pretty well developed to measure ecommerce and informative sites, and a number of those things do go across the board like ease of understanding and intuitive operation... I can't remember the others, but there are some things that go across but some I say no because this one measure Tailored communication pertains to a shopping site and this construct doesn't work on MySpace pages. there was one called relative advantage and in my report I'm saying rewrite it. It is useful but doesn't work as it is and for WebQual the concept of relative advantage is that the site should be as good, or better than, interacting with he company in another way. I should get the info I need as is I was talking over the phone or by snail mail. and for that concept I said that it's useful and this website should be as good if not better than all these other ways. for my family, if I don't want to contact every single one, this site should allow me to update them and keep them informed.
24:00	Mod	because I didn't say enough I think we're all in agreement that there are some things that go across all sites. but is there anything else that doesn't
24:00	50	oh but protection of information.
24:00	33	you mean your credit card information

24:00	50	yeah you want your credit card information protected but they're getting better with blocking who can see your information
24:00	Mod	lower expectation of security
24:00	50	let's say you want to post a picture; my friend emailed me a picture and told me not to post it. so if you want family only to see it then how to you protect that and I still think that there are backdoors to those places and people can still get it. so what do you do, I guess you just stop posting it period but then it loses its purpose.
24:00	Mod	you have more flexibility in what you provide and because of that the expectations of security are different. when I go to a ecommerce site I have to give them an mailing address and I have to give them my credit card information otherwise I can't do the transaction and because of that I expect more of them with security. but since I'm getting a free MySpace page and I can limit what I say I don't expect them to be as secure
24:00	50	right, but then you are limited to what you can do
24:00	Mod	TRUE
24:00	33	Although I would expect the same of my credit information. like if I went and bought something for someone on FaceBook I would expect the same security certificate of Amazon.
24:00	50	well there are things too with MySpace or FaceBook uses your user name as you account, and they do that so that they can access you site and find out who your friends are, and if you're not careful others can connect themselves in and you can compromise yourself, because there are definitely sites that can sneak in.
27:00	Mod	you can voluntarily open up back doors to yourself
27:00	45	that's the thing too with social websites. you voluntary put stuff out there as opposed to a business site where they need that information to do business and it's voluntary but the transaction won't happen otherwise. I mean I think that user friendliness needs to be on all sites but I would have different expectations than these three (points to page).
27:00	50	In terms of quality, the FaceBook and the MySpace and all, that's what you are looking for right?
27:00	Mod	(nods and says mmhmm) the instrument would compare social sites to others
27:00	50	well I think the thing you should add is that business sites don't have people able to look others up. that's what social sites are about. being able to contact those you want to contact. that's the primary purpose. have a user friendly search quality.
27:00	Mod	if all your friends are on MySpace or FaceBook but you have no way of looking for them
27:00	50	yeah. you have a friend that says they're in FaceBook and you go to look them up and no users found.
27:00	33	or you type in a name and it comes up with 200. FaceBook has a horrible search because it only goes by name, not what state they were born in and such. they don't have an advanced search option.
30:00	50	you can search and find out. Think about it you can go around the back way and look that up.
30:00	Mod	compared to the web of 1994, today we expect more quality from the websites. You can argue if the user content is different but we are more interested in what others are doing as opposed to what's going on in business. What makes FaceBook better than MySpace and the like?
30:00	50	our friends online I think. the popularity of the site.

30:00	Mod	in my paper I'm talking about the people that are there using it.
		the ease of it. FaceBook doesn't allow you to customize your page like MySpace. FaceBook has the same so you know where everything is but MySpace is great because it let's you be unique but if you want to contact someone then you're lost with all the designs.
30:00	50	
30:00	45	I like MySpace better.
30:00	Mod	you do?
30:00	45	yeah, because I have a hard time finding people's pictures on FaceBook.
		The things I don't like about it, is it's not intuitive. If you sign up on a page you get bombarded with all these advertisements asking you to do this and that. I guess your friends do it and then they encourage you to send it out to your friends.
33:00	45	
33:00	33	oh you have your friends sending you stuff
33:00	45	and then you get all these things. And I'm trying to find out how to get rid of that stuff.
33:00	33	there's a protest on FaceBook to get rid of that stuff.
33:00	45	in MySpace, the formats the same and the buttons are the same, though you can't always see them, but you can put your own pictures and background and I like that.
		the customization is desirable but customers mess it up by putting too much on there. you can set expectations (for a site) and have it that way or you can I open it up and you lose some things. So it's a balancing act.
33:00	Mod	
33:00	33	I like the applications for FaceBook where you can create things that others can enjoy. You don't get that with MySpace.
33:00	50	you want to take the surveys
33:00	Mod	(Group Laughs)
		if you want to have a site that is communicateable then you want to know how many people on the site.
33:00	33	
33:00	50	yeah you have to have all your friends on MySpace
33:00	45	yeah, so you have to be on both these days.
		one of the examples I give is having network composition. For instance, a dating site, that has all men, is no good for men, it's as simplistic as that
33:00	Mod	
36:00	Mod	If the things or people you are looking for are not on that site then the site is ruined.
		How did you hear about these sites? Was it a friend that said that I'm here come see me?
36:00	Mod	
36:00	Mod	(all nod and say yes)
		that's how it started for me, I had a friend I haven't seen in years ask me if I was on MySpace and told me that's why we can't keep in touch because I wasn't on MySpace.
36:00	50	
		it's like you're not a real friend unless you're on there. I think these sites become necessary when people travel around the world I did when I was younger. Especially with the military.
36:00	45	
		and then there's the other side of it, I have a friend request the other day and it was someone I don't know, it's like a contest to see how many friends you have. The meaning changes a little. Some people use it to keep in touch and then others have other purposes
36:00	50	
36:00	Mod	and then some people use it for status
36:00	45	some use it to advertise to.(gives examples)
		but the word of mouth of a site is important. That's how you are gonna know about it and that your friends are on it.
36:00	Mod	

36:00	Mod	How did you find the site you use most? Was it friends, family, or coworkers?
39:00	Mod	(All say friends)
39:00	33	I would say on the family side, the older side is not on it. For the younger ones, they are too young for it. For my husband, his parents refused to look at his blog because they thought that that was not something you did
39:00	Mod	(Mod talks about his grandmother in LA)
39:00	Mod	friends though, all in all, what about when your friends signed you up, did you have other options or even knew about the other site?
39:00	50	I didn't know about MySpace when I signed with FaceBook.
39:00	Mod	well for me, I know about these sites but I'm not involved with anyone but if I do go into one I'm going to compare it and I was wondering if you knew about the other one would you compare them?
39:00	50	but how do you do that? In most cases you can't even see the site until you sign up with them. You can look over your friends' shoulder
39:00	33	well that goes back to what I was saying about joining both. Some people are on one and not the other or on both and then do you say, "ok I'm gonna shut off that circle of friends."
39:00	Mod	well some people do.
39:00	45	so how do you handle it?
39:00	33	well I have several different circles of friends.
42:00	33	And the circles don't mix
42:00	Mod	you have your friends on one site, but what if that site was gone tomorrow, forever, what would you do with your friends?
42:00	45	I'd pick a site with a good backup system. (everyone laughs) I'd go wherever my friends are because they care about it.
42:00	Mod	the next set of questions, which might not make sense, is market mavenism. Which is how much you lead others to products are new sites or are you the one that follows others to sites.
42:00	45	you'll see on my questionnaire that I follow
42:00	50	I'm definitely not out there paving the way to the internet but I might like something. But I will find a site and then find my friends on it. I wouldn't actively find my friends that aren't on that site and tell them they need to be on it.
42:00	33	I'm mixed. I go to MySpace because that's where everyone is but if I meet someone that isn't on MySpace I tell them to go to FaceBook and not MySpace because I hate MySpace. I go there maybe twice a month. And I go to FaceBook maybe 2 or 3 times a week. I wanna get my friends on FaceBook and get the ones on MySpace on FaceBook. But at the end you wouldn't just follow, you want to encourage others to be where you are.
45:00	45	I guess so because I don't want to push others.
45:00	50	but you'd also say to that friend that I'm on MySpace and they'd want to contact you through that.
45:00	45	yeah I guess so.
45:00	50	better search engine though, but then again how do you go that without being a member. Unless they allow you to browse it without being a member. No matter what type of site you go on, they will always want you to join before you use it.
45:00	33	well it doesn't cost anything, just some time

45:00	Mod	well one day I went on FaceBook and created a bogus account and gave them an email address that gets forward. Spamgourmet
45:00	45	you're really skeptical on these sites.
45:00	Mod	a little cynical maybe
45:00	33	in FaceBook your email address is key to letting you into a network
45:00	50	you can't just use any email address because then they'll email you at that email and if you don't have it anymore then you don't get the information.
45:00	Mod	so if I wanted to use the AFIT program on FaceBook and use my AFIT email then I'd lose that when I leave.
45:00	33	you can't join it then yeah. Some places give students their own email address when they leave
45:00	Mod	yeah, I got to keep my LSU email address after I left for about 4 years because they said I could and then one day they took it away but said that I could join their alumni account.
45:00	33	yeah, AFIT is kinda different that way but most schools do give you an alumni address afterwards so you could still keep in contact
48:00	Mod	other than yourself can you think of different reasons others would join a site?
48:00	50	stalking
48:00	Mod	I don't know if I'd be able to write that but...
48:00	50	no, I mean going online and seeing their status
48:00	33	I don't think that's stalking I think that's keeping up with your friends
48:00	Mod	that's not necessarily talking to them, just curiosity of what your doing
48:00	50	yeah I don't need to talk to them to see how they are doing. For example, I could see how someone I was once in a relationship with was doing without talking to them and I saw some people doing that to me so you put yourself out there.
48:00	33	you see a side to them you wouldn't see unless you were on the sight. Like me and my (significant other) go online to see how friends are doing and we can do that fast without engaging them in a 30 minute phone call
48:00	50	here's something you might want to write done
48:00	Mod	ok
48:00	50	there were actually two young girls that got into a fight at school
51:00	50	Best friends and next door neighbors but got into a fight. One girl created a false account to pretend to be a guy and then woo the other girl for about a year and then abruptly dumped her in a bad way and the girl committed suicide. And I looked it up. And the worst part was the parent of that girl knew they created this account.
51:00	Mod	there was something similar with a parent that created a fake account and messed with one of the daughters enemies
51:00	50	I think it's probably the same story too. I mean that's the dark side of it with the pedophiles out there
51:00	Mod	MySpace went through with a couple thousand users
51:00	33	at least FaceBook does a good job asking you if you want others to contact you. People can agree to being friends with people they've never seen before but you open your self to that, MySpace is getting better with that I think.
51:00	50	(talks about a friend who had this unwanted thing put on his sight)
51:00	45	I think that's called 'fished'. That happens to me a lot. I mean because you can stop others from emailing you but if they 'fish' then not so much.
51:00	Mod	(asks if anyone wants more food. Some take some food)

54:00	Mod	ok, what do you think about this statement? And I wrote it kinda argumentative on purpose. Some people get the same good feelings from using social websites as getting mail, even junk mail.
54:00	33	people get good feelings from junk mail?
54:00	Mod	some do
54:00	33	maybe if your 12
54:00	50	you mean like getting a card from your friend
54:00	33	that's the same as getting an email from your friend
54:00	Mod	is it true? Is it false? Some people, not necessarily you, like someone who's so old that they've lost all their friends and are just happy to know that someone knows that they are alive.
54:00	45	I guess
54:00	Mod	that these people go to this site and are happy to just get something
54:00	50	oh yeah, I do. I'm even happy sometimes but then I read it and I think, "well, that was stupid".
54:00	Mod	what makes a site attractive and it's not specifically what you can do with it but the feelings that get attached to it.
54:00	33	sure, I had a friend and her status was that she was having a bad day. And I went to on a site and bought her a cute e-card and showed her that I was thinking about her and that made her feel better, and had she not written that then I wouldn't have known that she was having a bad day.
54:00	50	I think I like it because FaceBook has a system where it will send your messages to your phone.
54:00	Mod	not just any message but quality traffic that let you know that others are out there
54:00	50	yeah
54:00	Mod	yeah sites that help people connect in a meaningful way instead of just telling you that they are alive.
58:00	50	yeah exactly. When you take it to the next step you guys can send and receive message.
58:00	Mod	(talk about getting friends to join the focus group)
58:00	Mod	do ya'll know about 'linked-in'?
58:00	45	(nods)
58:00	Mod	it's more for business professionals that help them build their business contacts. I don't have a good example though. What do you know about it?
58:00	45	I had a coworker who was involved and got me to do it. I signed up but never go to it unless someone asks me to and it's like a business rolodex of all my friends from college and all.
58:00	Mod	well I'm calling that person who gets something from it to
61:00	Mod	have social capital that they are building and I want to know if you can build that in MySpace or FaceBook. I'm mean linked in is customized for that...
61:00	33	sure, especially people in the music business
61:00	50	I don't think that would work for business people because it needs to have more credentials
61:00	Mod	but do you think others do that to others even if they don't know if it's accurate

61:00	33	I think it's a good idea to have the right tool for the right idea. There are a lot of music groups on MySpace because they can post things about their future gigs and such that they could not do at linked in
61:00	50	yeah because you're talking about professional versus personal life.
61:00	Mod	but some people do use this site for this purpose and have that be a criterion
64:00	50	honestly I kind of doubt that. I mean people have that criteria for things but I think it's for others to use too.
64:00	45	I wouldn't think it was a reputable business if they were contacting me through MySpace or FaceBook
64:00	33	but you would believe them if they said that they were a local band performing at this place and such
64:00	45	I guess I would
64:00	Mod	as far as what's written it's very general, you collect friends or acquaintances in order to maybe use them in the future.
64:00	33	well in FaceBook and MySpace you are using them for friends to have in a social network and that's really all your looking for.
64:00	50	well let's say that southwest airlines had a way to get future employees; I don't think that's legit. But sites that have .edu or .gov at the end, I will trust more. There may be a false sense of security but I think it's the reputations that people have at that site. An in MySpace, knowing that people can misrepresent themselves easily you wouldn't put a business on it. Keep them separate
67:00	Mod	I don't know for sure, but I think with linked in people put friends on it because they have met them in real life.
67:00	50	well let's say you are transferring from different places, linked in lets you talk to that person
67:00	Mod	part of the biggest thing in social capital. These people know things that you don't. like the acquaintances will know different things then your nearby friends and that's an example of the benefits it can give and I was wondering if that's a good way to judge websites?
67:00	33	I don't use social websites for that purpose
67:00	Mod	I didn't think I would find a lot of people you do or who would admit to that
67:00	50	I think the only way you can do that is if you make a big sample size to a lot of people to find the people who do that.
70:00	33	or you would have to go specifically and ask people
70:00	50	go to the engineering website and ask them. If you want to ask people how many friends that they have on their site
70:00	Mod	I know of people who have kept specific details with 1600 people. For the people who are like that they are connectors that get people together. Kinda asked this question before but don't remember the answer, something that says an old websites is good like Amazon and saying that its better than eBay, should the same measure that works on those be used onto places like MySpace?
70:00	50	no
70:00	Mod	all-in-all, there are still some things that apply overall
70:00	33	I think what I would add if you want to have a business you'd want some credibility
73:00	Mod	but the institutions aren't really in the...
73:00	33	you don't want to put your money into some place that doesn't have a reputation yet

73:00	50	it's kinda hard to answer that without knowing what the other sites criteria are
73:00	Mod	well ultimately the question is, should the criteria be the same
73:00	50	well I think for most things the criteria should be the same but there will be little differences
73:00	33	well as far as what my friends put on their blogs, I don't care. They can use any kind of blog.
73:00	Mod	I'm not actually talking about the site. More likely the blog and comparing them
73:00	33	well it's the same. Issues or lack of technical issues
73:00	50	I think there are distinct expectations in the site. I go in get my stuff and I'm happy. But with MySpace I guess I'm expecting to be able to customize my site and stuff
73:00	33	but in MySpace your still expecting those people to get your emails and if you post something on their wall then you expect them to get it and run smoothly
73:00	50	for my criteria, user, ease of use, criteria on a page, those are standard. But the terms are unique that you use between like a bank or Amazon. But your expectations of criteria are gonna be
76:00	50	different with each place it's like going to wikipedia, anyone going in thinking its all true is just diluting themselves.
76:00	Mod	(seeks feedback)

Group 3 Transcript

0:00	Mod	I would like to start with everyone saying a little bit about yourselves, first name, what type of site you use. Starting with me, I am not a user of these sites. So I hope I can approach this from a semi-objective manner. My wife has a page and I look over her shoulder. She's got the page, not me:
0:00	52	I use FaceBook and used to use MySpace, I host a picture website for family and friends. I also host a guestbook for my grandfather.
0:00	53	I use MySpace, I have a Blog on live Journal, and I help run a site for a local writing group. I am on several hobby forums and groups of that nature. ... books and things like that ... About the only thing on your list I don't deal with are consumer forum(s).
0:00	46	I'm (46), I do MySpace a lot, and I do a couple of blogs. That's how I do a lot of my communication with past friends I meet in the military and school
3:00	46	I am a member of a couple of a couple of AF forums. ...
3:00	81	I am (81). Don't use MySpace. I run 4 domains on a \$50 used Compaq in my basement. (discusses each domain, one for family member, 2 for hobby/business, 1 personal)
3:00	81	I don't use MySpace; however I have had folks on MySpace hard-link to my site. I go through the logs and check out what they linked to ensure it is not pornography. ... Basically the Blog site is what I am doing day to day.
3:00	Mod	How long have each of you use the internet (overall)? What have you seen in the transition of the internet? I have my own answer, but I'll put that out at the end
3:00	53	after college, 1995, mostly chat rooms. ... I had a lot of friends meet someone that way. It was kind of scary seeing some of the girls they were meeting.
6:00	53	we were like, ok not doing that anymore. ... (We are just now getting to the things they were advertising back when it first took off)
6:00	Mod	As you go around, I am going to start writing down "uses of the internet".
6:00	53	(long distance contacts)

6:00	53	the whole reason I got into MySpace was to find people I have not talked to in 10 years.
6:00	81	(customer management) to provide a friendly face. ...
6:00	53	it is a great way to bring very diverse groups of people together who would not normally be able to be together...
6:00	81	I would say not necessarily diverse people, but people with common interests
6:00	53	that's what I meant. I'm from Texas and use the wrong word all the time. (joking)
6:00	81	I from Mississippi, we don't use words with more than four or five letters at a time (joking)
6:00	52	I agree with all those and I would like to say that it is an advertising platform. Advertising to people is getting more fancy and increasing in number.
9:00	Mod	you mean commercial advertising, right?
9:00	52	(comparison between MySpace and FaceBook adds then and now)
9:00	46	also true in message boards, if you are just looking for info a lot of them say that if you just sign up the advertising will go away
9:00	81	of course the advertising does keep it running.
9:00	Mod	from myself to answer the question. I don't remember the exact year, but my dad was an early adopter. It was all text. It was cool to get to see it go from...
9:00	81	when I first started using the internet was around 1990/1991, upstairs and diagonally across on this building. ... When I graduated I went across base to work for ZZZZ. We had (list of tools). I remember going to the Croatian news group...Basically all the domains were pretty much .edu. Very few domains were dot com. That was before AOL.
12:00	81	once AOL hit the type of content went down. ... At that time, little to no commerce was done on the internet. ... so another thing is thesis work
12:00	Mod	(talks about how it is unfathomable the change in how theses are accomplished)
12:00	Mod	Today's social websites, which I am defining as blogs, SNS, and forums.... How do social websites differ from the rest of the internet? ... so I guess this is a two part question: (1) are they different? (2) if so, how?
12:00	81	For social websites you are mainly contacting people, which is not the case in commercial websites.
12:00	Mod	It is person-to-person
12:00	81	You will probably spend a lot more time on a social website than on amazon.com
15:00	53	I think one of the big things is the fact that you choose MySpace or FaceBook, because usually someone only has one, they usually don't have both. In my experience you might start at MySpace and move to FaceBook and so have to kind of have go to where the other people that you are looking for are. You may have to go several places if you are looking for certain types of people of a certain person.
15:00	Mod	For those of you that use SNS, do you have more than one account at SNS, like one a MySpace and one at FaceBook. (explained examples from previous group)
15:00	53	that's what I was kind of trying to get at, usually you get a lot of people that you have people who are dug in ... (comparison to IM's)
15:00	81	it's time investment
15:00	53	... I know I use MySpace the most for tracking down old friends from high-school and college, people I can't easy find. I don't meet a lot of new people on MySpace. I also have a closed profile on MySpace...
15:00	81	That brings me to my question. ... I am very careful about what I put online.

15:00	53	(mention about being in the military and online) I don't have that many pictures in civilian clothes. Just talking you can immediately determine if someone is in the military or not...
15:00	81	I have to be careful, because I wonder at what point
18:00	81	(continued) do I have to go to OSI and say that I have been made by this person from this country.
18:00	46	that's like some of those AF forums I go on, the moderators have to do a lot of opsec checking. (Site owner goes out and warns people)
18:00	Mod	(short dialog to determine that this is not a DoD sponsored site)
18:00	46	... there are some officers on there, but most of them are prior enlisted or people interested in joining. ... and some people do cross the op-sec (line) (example)...
18:00	81	On the blog site, I don't mention the fact that I am leaving town until after I get back. (mention about robbers)... It is not just opsec military wise, but personal wise as well.
18:00	53	It is like that commercial...
18:00	53	One thing, while I have my blog set to private, I know other people can read it ... fences are there to keep honest people honest, not keep thieves out, or they are there to mark where you can shoot them.
18:00	Mod	Texas?
18:00	53	Yes, we have those great castle laws.
21:00	81	(comparison to laws in Louisiana)
21:00	53	(Talking about where we are from)
21:00	81	(Talking about where we are from)
21:00	Mod	(Talking about where we are from)
21:00	46	(Talking about where we are from)
21:00	Mod	(talks about lack of Louisiana culture in NOLA)
21:00	Mod	as we are talking, if we say something that you feel doesn't apply to all three, please interject that. While I am lumping these together, maybe I shouldn't be.
21:00	Mod	For the site you use the most, how did you find it? (explanation)
21:00	53	For MySpace, a few years back, I had friend who like to send pictures to everybody, then she started sending a link to the pictures, which were on MySpace. (talk about little profile info is provided to create an account and see friend's pictures)
24:00	53	I didn't have a picture, only my name and age. I joined that to get access to my fiend's pics. Within 3 weeks I started getting emails from friends I have not talked to in 10 years.
24:00	53	people that said "hey are you XX from YY?" And I am going, "how did you get that from" (the little info he did provide in the profile)
24:00	52	I had some friends in college who had FaceBook, so I got FaceBook first.
24:00	52	... It was fine because at the time FaceBook was only open to college students and all my friends were in college (MySpace) at the time I never like it because you could totally customize the way the page looked and half the people that did it, didn't know how to contrast colors so you couldn't read their text or their pictures were way too big.
24:00	53	where did that one go (joke)
24:00	52	I ended up dumping MySpace because I didn't like the usability of it, and the retarded people that used it. So I stuck with FaceBook and mostly so people can find me.
24:00	81	(talked about experience on starting a website, mainly started to play)
27:00	81	(continued) (saw opportunity to start scroll-saw blog)
27:00	81	It developed into more of the face of the business...

27:00	81	(Checking logs, stretch hummer story, finding weird domains)
27:00	53	(concerning a scroll saw - question about what types of sites (81) has.)
30:00	46	I just got on MySpace because my wife had a page and I saw all the friends she had and what she used it for. As soon as I signed up I had 10 friend requests. I didn't really even have anything on, I just joined. But I got questions like "are you so-and-so" form this high-school? I have like 50 million fiends on there from high-school, people I met in the military and even friends from elementary school. I'm like, how do you remember me?
30:00	81	That's like one unique use of the site that I haven't mentioned, exchanging very large files between people. Most emails have a 10 MB file limit and I had to get a 100MB file to someone...
30:00	53	The whole reason I added a blog to my MySpace is because I would get an email from somebody "saying hey what are you up to?" so I would type this long email back to this person and three days later I would get another email from someone else saying "I haven't heard from you in 2 weeks, what's going on. So I am getting the picture of my blogs are popular... so that's why I started having a blog. I'm definitely not one of those people who updates it every day or even every week ... people asking "so are you done with your (degree) yet?"
30:00	81	what my mom does, she is a very big participant on this one message board, it's a crafting type message board. ... she puts pictures of her stuff up there...
30:00	53	I do similar things, of costuming type, how to make different things, I go to renaissance fairs. I'm a nerd.
30:00	Mod	(discussion about moderator going to fair in Germany)
30:00	81	yall are in AFIT and you have all this time on your hands?
30:00	53	(discussion about time management, and hobby as a release)
33:00	Mod	overall, I seem to hear that you adopted a particular site for one of three reasons. (Word of Mouth (WoM), creative/fun/innovative, usefulness)
33:00	81	and I would say that it can be also combinations of the above
33:00	53	and I'd add peer-pressure to that first one.
33:00	81	(mentions how his motives have changed)
33:00	53	or usefulness is how you justify your fun... (laughing)
33:00	81	when you are updating it at 11:00 at night is not fun (smiling)
33:00	Mod	when you first started with your social website, did you have other options? If you did (have options), why did you stick with the one you chose?
33:00	Mod	(SNS example)
33:00	81	In my case, I started with forums, (lack of time); with blog site I have complete control of the thing. There are no moderators to worry about. It's just me.
36:00	46	I didn't know about FaceBook, it was probably just still just on the college scene. When I joined MySpace it was just hitting mainstream, everybody had to have a MySpace page. Everybody talked about it. They had advertisements for it, (layouts) ... Other options were not advertised.
36:00	52	One thing that I did, when I had both of mine, I had my own web server that I hosted pictures on and I'd put where they are from, instead of updating pictures in either of those SNS, I'd would just have a link that would say "hey here is my pictures." That way I wasn't updating two profiles, I was just putting them all on my picture website and people can go there, through the link ... so that I didn't have the overhead of updating both.

36:00	53	as far at the MySpace / FaceBook debate, when I got into MySpace I hadn't even heard of FaceBook. (I'll probably move eventually.) As far as forums go, the ones I've stuck with are the ones that are the one that are the most active, the ones that actually have a community that comes back. It depends on what you are doing.
36:00	53	(examples of forums that he is active in, there are off-shoots, but there not active --> everybody stays on the main board)
36:00	53	(concerning a sub-board) but no one has posted in three weeks. In today's terms that is a dead forum. So you wind up staying where the people are and getting part of it into the area that you want to get into.
36:00	53	(most are open to new people, little hazing - not bad)
39:00	53	some sites I do think have people who are like the greeters, people designated to talk to newcomers and make them feel welcome, to help them want them to stay and keep them there and keep traffic going
39:00		I didn't know people took on that role
39:00	53	I've seen it on sever websites...
39:00	53	(talk about online gaming, mentions online guilds are social groups)
39:00	Mod	(tape audio recording problems)
39:00	53	(talks about guilds almost imploding/die)
39:00	53	forums are very similar that way (no activity causes imploding)
42:00	46	gaming is kind of an off-shoot of... (motions the games he plays and game clans) these guys create their own server to train together and do tactics on a VIDEO game. You never would have thought that was possible back on an Atari 2600, playing pong. Maybe one day there will be a relativistic war-game where there are tactics and snipers, and EoD people. It is just crazy how it has evolved that must. How you can play with anybody around the world at any time. Just by joining a server, And most of these servers have their own websites and message board were you can go on there and join their group.
42:00	53	what they are is an identity. It is interesting because I grew up with consoles, I hear Atari 2800, 2600, pong and all that stuff... When I transitioned to college and found a way to play video games with OTHER that's' when I moved from consoles to computer games. And I was thinking, oh I like computer games much more. But now with the XBOX 360 that's out, I thinking about going back to consoles
42:00	46	now all the consoles you can play online, they are PCs now with the amount of power they have. You can search the internet on them.
45:00	Mod	Basically, I am trying to figure out what are some of the reasons or tasks that people use social websites for and what makes a good social website. We have already hit upon a couple of things here. ... (mentions hearing people composition and its meaning)
45:00	Mod	Comparing older websites to newer social websites, what do you think are some things that are different, like the composition of the people on the site?
45:00	Mod	(explanation with comparison between sites from 1997 to today's sites - mentions the quality of information)
45:00	81	that is still true today (quality of info), under usefulness - I'd but learning, (provides personal example)
45:00	81	In the comments I have got back from people who have view comments about leaning, people have learned stuff from my site.

45:00	53	most of the hobby sites I go on are very much that way. If you are not posting good information or information that is easy to follow, that will keep people from coming to it. It's got to be easy to follow, easy to understand, pretty pictures are good. (not necessarily easy enough for 1st grader, but for an intelligent person)
45:00	81	sometimes you have different levels (of information) for the kindergartener, 1st grader, (College, etc)
45:00	Mod	(explanation that there are some constructs across both domains) The hard question is what is unique, is there anything unique? Is there anything special about...
48:00	53	the way info is presented and the tools. How effective those tools are. For example, the MySpace way of finding people. I still don't like it. Because in MySpace, you can look for their email address or their screen name or their real name, but that's assuming that they actually put it in there.
48:00	46	then you get 90 pages of john smith's (mentions trouble narrowing it down)
48:00	53	now, one of their better features is the high-school feature. (scripted example)
48:00	81	going back to the difference between now and then, the big difference is feedback. Instead of just putting information out there you get interaction with the people out there, back into it from comments in the website.
48:00	53	(mentions how some websites track how often you post and listing of how many posts people do, which implies skill/knowledge of poster)
48:00	46	It's an accomplishment, a lot of them (sites) will have a rank structure is will change below your screen name when you post ... the air force ones I go on use air force ranks. ... a lot people will respect that person because they have helped a lot of people
48:00	53	concerning feedback, the stuff with eBay right now, if you are following it, they (eBay) just had a boycott by a bunch of major sellers because eBay changed the way it is doing business. They changed their prices and are about to remove the ability for a seller to leave negative feedback on a buyer. ...
51:00	Mod	(discussion among all participants and mod, eBay traffic problems? craigslist, negative feedback retribution, buyer seems to have advantage)
54:00	Mod	(discussion continued)
54:00	Mod	I have a statement here - Some people get the same good feelings from using social websites as getting mail
54:00	53	I'd say probably more even so, because it is almost instantaneous. It is almost like getting a phone call more than getting mail I'd say. It is a much faster form of communication and if it is a good form of communication it is much more rewarding because you get the chance to say "I just had a great conversation with someone I never knew. Or I just met new people, or I just made a new friend.
54:00	46	Or "I got a comment from somebody on the other side of the world"
54:00	53	...
54:00	52	I think mail is going to be a time of the past eventually because how many people buy stamps as often as they use to? I buy stamps maybe once a year and I don't even go through a whole book.
54:00	Mod	(stamp talk about price changes)
57:00	53	I would say definitely it is more than that, you don't see people on the news killing themselves because they got bad mail. You will, every now and then see news about people who kill themselves over a social network site.
57:00	Mod	Or a mother who drives her daughter's rival to suicide

57:00	46	or people who leave their suicide notes on MySpace. You know, I've seen a couple of things on CNN...
57:00	53	and I've seen it become very addicting to some people. Have you seen the Dilbert cartoon where Dilbert gets a blackberry and goes through withdrawals when he stops get emails? I have seen people like that. ... you get into the unhealthy side of it too
57:00	Mod	(59:10 - explaining why mod asked the question)
57:00	53	depends on the people, depends on the audience because teenagers and young people like to be very negative and a lot of adults like to be very negative
60:00	81	If you start censoring things because they say "I don't like this", you are gonna destroy the site
60:00	52	That is what eBay is doing, and sellers are revolting against them
60:00	46	some people look at that like communism, how dare you question what we are doing, we'll do what we want and people will boycott it. It can be pretty effective if you lose 1000's of your customer base that are keeping the site alive for advertising revenue.
60:00	81	(flame wars) you are basically in a no-win situation at that point
60:00	53	what I've seen with a lot of sites is that you have an area that is moderated and a area that may not be or they will have terms of service displayed very blatantly like "constructive feedback or constructive is welcome but ..."
60:00	46	That's where you cover your bases, when you are starting off. ...
60:00	Mod	(62:00 - (52) leaves) Part of the argument in my work is that I address the issue on whether or not you can evaluate something that is not a social website the same way you would a social website. What do you think? (explaining further)
63:00	53	In some ways you can, (time on site, quality info, mentioned) (commercial feedback should not be like social website)
63:00	46	...
63:00	53	I think a general rule of thumb is that you can probably use similar things and get a good first impression base on that (example Newegg, feedback section should be social networking ish)
63:00	81	(discussion with mod about whose point of view a "good" site is based on)
66:00	81	(continued)
66:00	46	I think it is subjective, you can tell that he (81) runs websites, because he thinks of quality as what is successful.
66:00	81	It is not just that, because the site must bring people to the site to generate that ad revenue.
66:00	46	myself, I wouldn't even think about add revenue, I don't give two craps about that. I care about "is it easy to search for things?", "is it laid out well?"
66:00	46	"Is it free? Is it easy to read?"
66:00	Mod	(after explaining that question should be examined at lowest level, question is restated - answers are summarized, no but - parts of it you could)
69:00	81	the whole idea of the world wide web is http, linking from one to the other, about navigation
69:00	53	...
69:00	81	navigation on a commerce website is paramount...; so I use Google to search Amazon, which is a failure on Amazon's part...

69:00	46	One of the things I have noticed is that Amazon has added forums for certain products. They have created pretty much a social website within a commerce website. Allot of this commerce websites are incorporating, they see the benefits of getting people to discuss on sales.
69:00	81	That works on the bigger websites, but I see on the smaller sites, a lot of commerce sites with blogs attached to them. When looking at Google ad sense, I notice that Google has a Google blog.
72:00	81	It gives you more insight into what is going on. At a commerce site you are trying to get the information you are trying to sell stuff...
72:00	53	when you add forums to sites like Amazon, you get more general feedback like "hey this link doesn't work" or they give ideas for improvements A lot of times there's just people blowing their mouths because they don't like the way things are run, but every now and then you will get some good feedback from someone. I know everqust runs its own forums and those moderator and game masters, if respect those people so much ... kind of like politicians
72:00	81	I have found that forums tend to be better on high-traffic sites (as a webmaster, problems with people)
72:00	Mod	(trying to move forward, running out of time) Have yall heard of a site called "linked-in?" (NO) (explanation)
75:00	Mod	these sites are about building your contacts ... social capital...
75:00	Mod	Do you think in other social networking sites that there are people that act this way?
75:00	53	basically what you described is a hobby forum ... you have gurus, people who know lots of things. ... you are trying to keep the community alive, but the community has a reason for existing (specific game example) (Writer group example), The moral support is a huge issue. (costuming example)
75:00	46	I know a couple of military boards that I go one have a people who post jobs before they are available to the public, because of the relationships... They are networking through the message board. ...
78:00	Mod	Ok, outside of the business aspect, outside of someone strictly with a financial incentive, someone who (initially) goes into a social website for another reason, do you feel that the mechanism of collection of social capital a motivating factor, can it be a motivating factor?
78:00	81	(no)
78:00	53	(79:20) Most of the hobby forums usually do not have a commercial incentive, because someone at one point said we need one, we need a community, ... we are not going looking for commercial stuff (commercial incentive), we go to them for help or ideas, ..., the communities reach out to each other
78:00	81	...
81:00	53	(provides examples where rival groups have common needs and individuals bridge those links) you get this very big network of social networks I guess you could say.
81:00	Mod	(82:01) (summarizes) asks for feedback

Group 4 Transcript

0:00	Mod	(talked about interviewing Kids, research ask to do outsiders, therefore it is not approved)
2:00	Mod	I am trying to determine, what makes a good social website? A good blog. A good forum. A good MySpace page or FaceBook Page.
2:00	Mod	What types of sites are in the internet? Just general categories and I know it's a little broad. I have already mentioned blogs, forums... I recognized that most sites are a combination of many types
2:00	37	yeah, MySpace is a combination of a blog and a forum
2:00	Mod	Social networking sites. MySpace, FaceBook and 30 others
2:00	32	You have informative sites like CNN and fox news
3:00	37	(informative sites) are turning into more of news/blogs but you also have the interactive people and the dedicated news people
3:00	40	There is ZDNET which is exclusive blogs
3:00	87	Ars technica is an informative Blog
3:00	37	Is Digg a blog or a forum?
3:00	87	It's a forum
3:00	Mod	(Group mentions websites: Delicious and StumbleUpon, mod asks for classifications)
3:00	40	I'd called StumbleUpon a completely different type of site
3:00	32	(StumbleUpon - rate websites, share with others, 1 click new site)
3:00	37	Delicious uses bookmarks, clouds and Tags
3:00	40	StumbleUpon uses clicks to a make new website
3:00	Mod	where does that get hosted at?
3:00	40	I'm not sure the technical details.
3:00	37	there are pure media websites, like flickr and YouTube, but YouTube also has blogs with comments and is more like a forum
3:00	87	Flickr has that too you can comment on pictures
3:00	32	My daughter goes to fan-fiction sites. Is that like a forum, blog or something different?
3:00	87	(short explanation of site)
3:00	40	You have your search website and search engines.
3:00	Mod	(Mod suggests the category of user-generated content)
3:00	40	You have your search websites like yahoo and Google
6:00	Mod	(Group discussed user generated content sites. Some sites which might be classified as news or media also may contain user generated content. Such as MSNBC. Weather Channel - can upload clips, and others.)
6:00	Mod	there are very few sites which are pure to any of these. Are we missing anything else?
6:00	40	Yes, Gaming website, Web based gaming.
6:00	Mod	I say it is informative.
6:00	32	Actually there are playing games.
6:00	Mod	Group discusses online gaming, desktop tower defense
9:00	37	where does things like Craigslist fall into that?
9:00	Mod	Classifieds. It could be informative, but that the same problem with classifying a search engine.

10:00	Mod	there is probably no right way. I am looking to go from here now... If, the web is a composure of these things. What do we use the web for?
10:00	37	to communicate.
10:00	87	Based on what we established to be different types of websites?
10:00	Mod	It can be completely new, but if we get alot of completely new, that suggests that we probably need to add something back to here (types of websites) again.
10:00	40	entertainment
10:00	87	collaborate
10:00	40	I used to love to back up stuff
10:00	Mod	Storage? I'll put it.
10:00	Mod	Let's see. I use it to learn.
10:00	Mod	Group continues to discuss communicate, entertainment and collaborate web sites
12:00	37	Do you want to break it down by front end and back end?
12:00	Mod	No (group generally agrees)
12:00	Mod	How can I change this heading (communication) to exclude that. What I am looking at is not websites that are front ends to other systems
12:00	87	because, you saying types of public accessible web sites?
12:00	Mod	(Brief discussion on email servers and forums and are front ends to a database)
12:00	87	we are talking about uses (said to the group)
12:00	Mod	These things present information in a way that provides additional value
12:00	Mod	Discussion continues about email, forums (public and private), chat and online applications
12:00	87	These are connecting people together, on the same pages
12:00	32	what about instant messaging (IM)?
12:00	87	IM is probably more of an application then a website
12:00	37	Google does applications like word and excel.
12:00	87	Right. But you are not looking to include them but exclude them.
15:00	32	Commerce is also used on the Web.
15:00	40	Product and buying stuff. Downloading stuff. Freeware, like free software downloading.
15:00	Mod	E Commerce. When I mean shopping, it does not necessarily mean that you have to spend money. So this is Amazon or I am downloading free software.
15:00	37	You say that to go to Amazon and looking. You are doing consumer research.
15:00	Mod	I am trying to lump this into 2 things. Amazon where I buy or another separate one where I download software. Still looking around, comparing and acquiring. Sometimes I have to exchange something for that transaction and sometimes I don't.
15:00	87	When we consider free. We mean Legal free right? (Group laughter)
15:00	Mod	Yes
16:35	Mod	(16:35) can we come up with other categories why we use the internet?
16:35	40	I use it to share information between family and friends (examples given)
16:35	Mod	Family, Friends. I am just going to say acquaintances here.
16:35	87	something else I don't think we have up there, but networking (Linked-In mentioned, classmates, and other examples)
18:00	Mod	(18:25) this may not be complete but considering this is what we have and we are not really coming up with something new now as a use, now which of these (uses of the internet) will apply to these (social websites).
18:00	87	For just those three. I would say communication. Maybe networking

18:00	Mod	Defiantly
18:00	40	entertainment
18:00	37	Shopping. Because you can go read forums and product reviews
18:00	87	Learning. You can definitely learn stuff.
18:00	Mod	One of the things that I excluded some people from participating is that they only use forums as an information source. It's just a place that the information was published and they went at it as they would any other information site. If I just typed into Google and get a forum and read a review, great. But I am not communicating. I like to offer that this right here (where we have seen the benefits of these kind of sites), Tell me if you think I'm wrong, I'd like to say communication is one of the key aspects? These sites are separated from a lot of the rest of this because of communication.
18:00	Mod	Informative site, (stumble upon) you could argue that, because you meet people with like interests and stuff, so maybe this is a type of one of these (blog, forum, SNS).
18:00	Mod	but Informative sites - no, entertainment in and of itself, a site that will host a video for you to go and see. Doesn't have interaction among people,
18:00	40	It is most entertaining to see what kind of freaks are out there (laughter)
18:00	Mod	Are you making a new friend?, are you making a new family?
18:00	37	Probably not
18:00	87	When you are talking communication, you are actually talking the sending and receiving of a message and making sure that it is understood.
18:00	87	I would argue that informative sites communicate but they just send it out. They don't necessary know that it has been received or that it's been received properly. They can tell you how many site hits, fox news (as an example) got today
21:00	87	but they don't know that what was viewed was interrupted the way it was written when as with blogs, well blogs maybe not, well forums and social networks site even more so, you get immediate feedback and response on the communication process, so that if you misspoke or people misunderstand you, you get that back really quick. Am I Right? (Asking the group)
21:00	32	When you think of a forum of the news type stuff, people will put comments down there but the people who publish that content don't really care about what your comments are. Not really.
21:00	87	Right
21:00	Mod	(Group chats about comments on blogs and forums, with examples)
21:00	Mod	I written this up here, what do you think? One of the things that separate these kinds of sites from the rest of the herd is that they are built, they are designed, and the spirit behind them, whatever... is a person or entity. A single entity focused to a specific "local" party. They kind of know who they are going after. A news site says I want to go after people in Chicago or something, but generally speaking these... In a forum you have people with like interest.
21:00	32	How specific are you talking about?
21:00	Mod	That's the example, Help me out.
24:00	Mod	(Group chats about sites with geared toward like interest. Examples are given. In particular, MySpace is discussed. Also discussed were craigslist and ecommerce sites.)
24:00	37	(25:25) ... common interests, that's what I was looking for
24:00	87	(27:35) epsi (a site) - similar to eBay or craigslist for handmade items, like a "online crafts festival"

24:00	87	(28:40) it is actually blending the SNS, with commerce, I would say that is the expectation, but it is definitely an emerging types site.
24:00	87	I think the biggest reason (for using social websites) is that it (Social websites) is a connector; it connects people to each other, which have a common interest
30:00	Mod	Quickly now, I want to run thru these three that aren't starred. Tell me if you think that if this use is in these sites?
30:00	32	OK
30:00	Mod	Storage.
30:00	Mod	Group discussed storage on MySpace. Yes it is stored but the purpose is to share
30:00	Mod	(31:35) Learning.
30:00	Mod	but the creator of this stuff, what is their motivation? Is their motivation to teach, or to share?
30:00	37	Yes, Absolutely both
30:00	40	Can be both
30:00	87	I think it can be both too, especially blogs
30:00	Mod	(Group discussed forums and blogs and agreed on learning and sharing, one way users (33) called "browsers")
30:00	Mod	what separates that then from an informative site?
30:00	40	the fact that you can respond
33:00	Mod	the option to expand across this...
33:00	Mod	We already hit up communication. (what about) Shopping.
33:00	40	(asks about slickdeals.net, group says it is a forum, whoot.com mentioned)
33:00	Mod	(Group discusses shopping sites)
33:00	Mod	(35:55) OK. You remember how I said shopping was getting something. It was buying or going someplace and downloading something legally.
36:00	Mod	I am changing that to acquisition. I use it to acquire something. Now a comparison among options, what is better or cheaper, of what is the best avenue to get something I need. THAT seems to be what we are taking about with shopping sites. (General agreement)
36:00	87	comparison shopping
36:00	32	Yes
36:00	Mod	(group continues discussion about comparison shopping experiences)
36:00	Mod	(38:00) new question. A little bit off of this (what we were covering) and back to individual users of social sites. OK. The site that you as individual users of social websites. The site you predominately use, how did you come across it? How did you find it? For some of you its forums, for others its social networks, how did you come across it?
36:00	40	Google. I used a search engine.
36:00	Mod	its forums you use?
36:00	40	Yes
36:00	37	Sites I use, I found from other people.
39:00	87	For me I just reading about stuff (mags and web) and tried it. (It was just curiosity)
40:30	32	(40:30 - commented that he found some sites because of his kids)
40:30	Mod	Listening to your responses. I went back and checked your scores on the 3rd part of the instrument. It's about how much of an early adopter you are.
40:30	37	I bet we are all high

40:30	Mod	Well you are all high. But for you two in particular that found your sites rather than work of mouth. You do have higher scores than the other two, interestingly enough.
42:00	87	I also have a whole bunch a junk that other people didn't buy (laughs - group laughs)
42:00	Mod	(group chit chat)
42:00	Mod	considering we are talking about these sites (social websites), generally used for these types of things (reasons to use social websites), what make one of these sites better?
42:00	Mod	What makes MySpace better that FaceBook?
45:00	Mod	(Group discusses pro and cons of both. MySpace quality of information, Ease of creating a page. Bad page framing on MySpace.)
45:00	Mod	I'm not saying that it has this feature that makes it better; I'm asking what factors can range?
45:00	40	The quality of information
45:00	37	The Quantity of information is limited right now on FaceBook
45:00	Mod	I'm gonna throw this one out there: Intuitive ops or navigation complexity. How hard it is to move around the site.
45:00	87	yes, I would agree with that
45:00	87	I think alot of that is frame structure, that's my biggest complaint with MySpace.
45:00	Mod	(talk about MySpace problems, with example of someone (87) knows)
45:00	Mod	(Directed to (87)) is that the way she wants it? Or it that the by-product of her lack of skill to build it like she wants it?
45:00	87	(some lack of skill, some is just MySpace's fault)
45:00		(47:00) But the 99% of MySpace users have zero html programming experience
45:00	87	TRUE
45:00	37	All they know is that when they click this website and it generates this "gobley-gook", they call it, they don't even call it HTML code, they copy and paste and it works
45:00	87	and it looks the way the example did
45:00	Mod	visual appeal, is it subjective?
45:00	37	Absolutely
45:00	40	Absolutely
45:00	32	yes, and I'll tell you why. My nephew had a picture of a girl in a bikini in the background of his MySpace page. I found that appealing (group laughs), but my wife had a problem with me looking at it.
48:00	Mod	(group gets a little off topic)
49:10	Mod	(49:10) what other characteristics distinguishes one forum for another, one blog for another?
49:10	37	number of users
49:10	37	how crisp it is. How often it's updated.
49:10	Mod	Quality of Info
49:10	37	Yes
49:10	37	Number of active users.
49:10	Mod	(chit chat about invites received in SNS)
51:00	Mod	At the same time I heard from "number of users", I heard something to the effect of "who they are". (Dating site example) It's who is there, that makes that site more useful, or better than another particular site. (MySpace is given as an example)
51:00	40	(52:20) that can be true of informative sites as well (group agrees, examples are given)

51:00	Mod	True, But in that case you have the option of going to multiple sites to expand your interest as much as you want. But these sites, because people latch into the specific site, who's there, who actually interacting with the site, effects your opinion of the site. If you have a hobby forum and everyone in there are freaking idiots, it's useless, and you don't want it anymore.
51:00	37	is there such a thing as an open or closed forum? Did they use to have such those?
51:00	40	yes, they have closed forums
51:00	87	Yeah, they are private.
51:00	37	It seems like the majority of forums were closed just 5 or 6 years ago now it seems like everything is open. If you want to subscribe to anything. They don't look at you and say well 'why are you signing up?' You can put any garbage in the registration form and you are in.
51:00	40	Depends on the site. There are still some that are very restrictive.
51:00	Mod	(brief chat about specific sites usefulness)
54:00	Mod	Can you say for the rest of the internet, that it is really a factor that is important? Does it matter to you that everyone is shopping at Amazon or that Amazon has the best price?
54:00	40	Best price (group agrees, mentions availability)
54:00	Mod	So I think and please tell me if I am wrong, that this is important very much on social sites and not so much on the rest of it. It's a factor just like intuitive operation but it has the strongest effect on those types of sites.
54:00	37	Right
54:00	Mod	What do you know about LinkedIn? You (87) mentioned it earlier, Right?
54:00	87	Yes. It's kind of like the FaceBook and MySpace of the business world.
54:00	Mod	Is it kind of like an online rolodex? I don't really use it.
54:00	87	That I have never used. Basically you go it and post your resume, you post your job experience and then you get linked it to other people and that... It's kind of like the 6 degrees of separation. So that if you can link-in to many people you get linked to their links which links you to those people's links and you grow your network that way.
54:00	Mod	(group continues to discuss LinkedIn and similar sites, (33) mentions relationship to composition of users)
58:50	Mod	Do yall know this word, what does it mean to you?
58:50	40	Social Capital
58:50	Mod	Yes
59:00	40	How much favors you have built up
59:00	Mod	could be, Yeah
59:00	87	How much influence?
59:00	Mod	In my description of what LinkedIn is about, it's about using the site to network and build social capital
59:00	87	Yes
59:00	Mod	You are building contacts to hit up later for information or for favors and I hate to say in a bad way but it is publicly acknowledged that this is why we are out to do. So it is not bad as maybe as some other ways. So the question I have now is now is what about FaceBook, what about MySpace, do people use these sites like they would use LinkedIn to build social capital. Do they use these sites to find people who have friends, acquaintances, family who have skills that they might want to tap later on?
60:00	32	(60:00) could they use it that way? Yes

60:00	32	I would think you could. I don't use it that way
60:00	Mod	I have found no one yet that says they do. Maybe no one does or maybe they are just too shy
60:00	87	I think MySpace from everything I have read about it, it started that way for Musicians from the music industry.
60:00	87	It started out as a place for bands to say here we are. Here's some of our songs to listen to, and then building social capital among the fan base. Maybe social capital is not the right word but it was for them to build a fan base. It was for them to expand their area of influence. So MySpace, I wouldn't say is used that way, defiantly not exclusively and probably not near as much now.
60:00	Mod	But for people that are looking to build social capital, a site that facilitates that, liked LinkedIn would be distinguished compared to other sites
60:00	32	Yes (group agrees)
60:00	Mod	OK
62:00	Mod	I am getting off the questions here and I am going to ask for feedback. What are the questions you expected to hear but didn't hear? What should I have asked? What could I do to be a better moderator for the group I have on Thursday?
62:00	37	I keep thinking more personal experiences might want to be bought up. But now that I think it out loud, maybe not. That's probably not where the research is going. (Right?)
62:00	Mod	(talks about previous group experiences)
62:00	Mod	(seeks feedback)

Group 5 Transcript

0:00	Mod	(instructions) Had you ever had your own social website?
0:00	96	(No, but considered it (maybe after school))
0:00	86	I haven't
0:00	94	(back in the day, picture site for family – new baby)
0:00	95	(family webpage class project)
3:00	Mod	(More explanation about what I mean about a social website)
3:00	Mod	(4:28) Why not (use)? I'm not a user and mostly for blogs, I don't have that much interesting to say, for forums - I just haven't really found a hobby forum I am excited about being in and for SNS - I have a couple of reasons, but I am going to see what you have to say first
3:00	94	Are you talking like we are the host/owners of these sites?, participants?
3:00	Mod	For forums - participants, for blogs - hosts, for SNS has a page
3:00	96	(mentions he's a private person, talks about data aggregation leading to bigger data breach)
6:00	96	I don't trust the tech and the medium (the internet) itself.
6:00	95	I am the same way. It's more to keep me and my family safe. I have a lot of opinions, but I keep them to myself until I present them in the right forum. blogs, forums, etc are open to everyone and is open to the lowest common denominator, is probably not a forum I want to voice my opinions in. I choose to do it at work, or in papers, or my thesis.

6:00	94	I would say that security is THE number one reason. There's the example of a stock investing forum that I am a regular reader on, in a matter of about the last three months, I have been able to gather enough info, just reading to gather: (host info - location, job, net worth, when he is out of town, etc.) If I was a criminal and wanted to break into his house, I know he has a little girl...
6:00	95	people can profile you quick and easy, in our profession (military) especially if we were overseas you would have to monitor it a bit more closely. (as compared to here)
6:00	Mod	(same reasoning - long lost)
6:00	Mod	is reconnecting with old friends not a driving force for you? Or is it mitigated by your security concerns?
6:00	86	I think in my instance, I never thought I would say this, because I'm the young guy, we didn't grow up with MySpace and YouTube and all that stuff. Its' just like our grandparents who didn't grow up with computers, we are not so (hungry) to use them. My younger brothers and sisters have that stuff, MySpace pages, but I don't.
6:00	95	I have an 18 yr old daughter in college and she has one
6:00	Mod	you ever thought of creating one to keep in touch with her?
6:00	95	she keeps after me to make one, but we email back and forth, I talk to her on a daily basis
6:00	Mod	(joking) where are you at? where are u going? when are you getting back?
9:00	95	If you want to stay connected you can , it doesn't have to necessarily be through a website, you have a cell phone in your pocket that can reach anyone, so I don't need a MySpace website to do that.
9:00	96	have you ever used it to communicate with your daughter? (No) if you did do that, you trust yourself, but when you start communicating with someone else, what will that person do with that info?
9:00	95	the one thing about that too, is that when she created her site, after I got her a laptop for graduation, all her friends had pages, and she wanted to get logged into that and up and running as soon as possible, within 8 hrs of creating her MySpace account, there was a 41 yrs old guy within 6 miles of her house trying to make a friend request
9:00	95	That's the type of thing that is out there, you open it up and bring it right into your house
9:00	86	they just had that, a bunch of state's attorney generals are getting together and saying that we need to start pushing to clamp some of this stuff down.
9:00	95	you open that up and bring it right into your house
9:00	94	You are inviting the entire world right into your house. I think this way, I don't let strangers into my house and say "come on it and grab some milk and cookies", "If you are there when I get home, OK" I don't do that physically, and I am not going to do the same thing online.
9:00	96	There's a level of trust you have to give a person to communicate with. We trust our banks to keep our financial info secure, we trust our fiends. How do we trust somebody that we are not dealing with face-to-face? I would trust him (another group participant) more then somebody over the computer, because we are face to face.
12:00	96	If he was on the other side of the world, what is he really doing, or thinking when I an conversing with home. When you are talking to somebody on the phone, that's old technology, but still applicable. I could sound very cordial but I am doing this (acting angry) because I am pissed off at this guy...

12:00	Mod	(If we go to far, my job to moderate) I am pretty much the same thing, I don't use SNS for some of the reasons as you ... I am starting to get a little more info ((13) arrives), (mention new controls on sites), You don't have any faith in those controls? (NO)
12:00	96	had I not been an IT professional, I might be more trusting of those controls
12:00	94	even before I came to this program, which really open my eyes to a number of things...
12:00	86	what I find utterly fascinating is these botnets, To think that a kind in India owns computers in America of families who had that time-warnner cable guy just put that cable in the back.
15:00	86	They don't really know... That kid monitoring your keystrokes, downloading your hard-drive. The idea of just owning all these computers and having them do what you want fascinates me.
15:00	Mod	((13) - ever had a social website?) ((62) enters room)
15:00	13	NO
15:00	Mod	((62) - ever had a social website?)
15:00	62	I read them if it's interesting, but No, I'm just not that personal
15:00	Mod	(summarizes previous discussion)
15:00	62	me personally, I'm just not that interested in social relationships for the most part
15:00	Mod	what do you think are the reasons other people use these sites for?
15:00	96	cause its cool
15:00	62	some people crave a lot of people
15:00	94	yeah, social butterflies, people that the more friends they have, the happier they are, Acquaintances - they call friends,
18:00	95	some people need a sense of belonging
18:00	95	it adds a sense of community
18:00	Mod	(suggests the word connected for that feeling - general agreement)
18:00	94	yeah, let's say there's a 68 mustang forum, all these people feel connected to people that relate versus when they talk to the wife and her eyes glaze over, they have a outlet
18:00	62	I think the old ham-radio operators would be a good example, my grandpa would set in a little shack 100ft from the house and talk to people around the world
18:00	96	I think that is funny, because I was in a CB club (group laughing)
18:00	62	I mean basically people can sit in the comfort of their bedroom and talk versus out in the cold because grandmas kicked him out of the house
18:00	94	your right, same idea, only different technology
18:00	Mod	can you come up with anything else?, reasons to use blogs, forums, SNS?
18:00	13	to escape their current life, that's what my sister uses it for
18:00	94	when you go online you create your online persona, and how you present yourself is reality, so if you feel your current life sucks, you can go online...
18:00	Mod	(group mentions and jokes about brad paisley song - I'm so much cooler online)
18:00	86	hey, would peer-pressure be lumped up there with cool? (general agreement)
18:00	96	well there's knowledge and education, just to learn something new (examples)
18:00	Mod	(mentions in previous groups most were encouraged to sign up)
21:00	Mod	(continues)
22:00	95	it's like some of these online games, a online game (MMORPG) is a SNS, WOW is an online site, you play the game, belong in a guild, you get that connectedness while you are playing the game
22:00	Mod	(group talks about not having time, and that you need time to play)

22:00	62	(mentions south park episode with WOW – World of Warcraft)
22:00	Mod	think about when you first started using the internet, and I am talking back in the day, to now - (someone crack joke "your day or mine"), mod gives his earliest experiences
24:45	Mod	compared from the older internet to now with blogs, forums, and SNS, what's different? is there anything different?
25:00	62	they are better connected, (asks to define better connected) like you said you could only talk to prodigy users
25:00	96	Usability (general agreement), they looked into this stuff, they studies the users
25:00	86	it's kind of related to the web 1.0 / 2.0 thing
25:00	96	they took these inputs and designed products that the public would like
25:00	Mod	some people argue that blogs are nothing new, just a rehash of usenet forums and bulletin boards (general agreement) so what's different, is there anything different?
25:00	94	it doesn't take as much skill, the internet in the early days it was that community, but it was based on people with computer skills, now the average Joe can get in and talk about their little itch, the grease monkey mechanic guy couldn't do it in the early days, now he can, plus now it is a richer environment, because if you are trying to take out a carburetor, you can shoot a video clip and put it on your website, it is a lot richer and a more interactive environment compared to the old ASCII text
25:00	62	it is not as hard to give people stuff as well...
25:00	Mod	(group mentions and jokes about limited bandwidth)
27:00	95	the infrastructure is better, but that goes back to usability
27:00	96	(mentions media richness theory)
27:00	Mod	so these are some reasons people use social websites, and for you as a group these reasons are not compelling enough, because of the security aspects, I'd like to throw out another reason and I'd like some feedback on it (explains social capital, intros to linked-in)
30:00	Mod	do you think this reason is behind the scenes for MySpace users or FaceBook users?
30:00	94	not for FaceBook or MySpace, there are other outlets better geared for that
30:00	62	what's the purpose of those friends lists that MySpace has?
30:00	95	so they can access your site, or get a notice of new content
30:00	62	I had an account to access stuff, and I got all types of friends requests (relates that most of the early friend requests were pornographic solicitations) so I cancelled the account after two weeks because I was getting so many requests ...
30:00	94	I don't know if this is related, but you mentioned using this for a b-b connection, in the Air Force we have that, with the USA, portal, we have the CoP, I know the public affairs committee
30:00	95	those are great useful tools, if you use them (agrees), but it is not really a SNS, you are not interfacing with people
30:00	Mod	its' forums, but you search it more than use it to communicate?
32:25	95	yeah you use it more as a knowledge bank, I've used it like that quite a bit, especially for thesis research
32:25	94	the problem I have in my career field, the public affairs career field, is that it is a really small field and people that tend to post things either: don't know anything or know-it-all. As far as making it useful, there is no anonymity, you are throwing your name and everyone can see it, if you say something that is wrong or sound like an idiot (that has effects on your career)

32:25	94	at least on the Air Force side, because you can't be anonymous on it, It kind of reduces the effectiveness of it, I won't post anything on it, people asks a question and everyone has the right answer. There is just not a lot of debate.
33:10	94	that is just one example of something that is out there that is a business to business
33:10	13	music industry, like new rock bands use MySpace as their avenue, if you are trying to build social capital
33:10	62	all the candidates have MySpace pages
33:10	95	(mentions radio-head, a music group, releasing their album directly online)
33:10	Mod	there are definitely people with business interests who use the site (social capital SNS question restated)
33:10	13	(talks about to people who have positions that require building social capital)
35:00	62	...
35:00	Mod	(puts note up that maybe this is effected by their job/position)
36:20	Mod	security was one of the biggest reasons you don't use these sites, other than (improved) security, can you imagine a new reason that will flip it for you? (cause you to use sws)
36:20	86	money and I don't have to log into it (laughing) (general agreement)
36:20	94	it is all about risk/reward, the risk of securing social benefits, being cool, peer-pressure, there is not enough of a reward on those areas for me to take on those risks, financial it would have to be a very healthy financial incentive for me to take on that type of risk.
36:20	96	Just because you are making money, you have to consider the reliability of that income
36:20	94	(mentions time/salary trade off)
36:20	62	my wife sits there on those different sites, when the first baby was born, she would join those mama sites, and she still communicates with those people and her little group of friends, I can't be bothered to respond to computer questions, I know the answer
39:00	Mod	I went kind of fast through most of what I have.(discussion of security and time tradeoffs with family) for some it enhances family life (example of grandpa given)
39:01	94	but they also have the time
39:02	Mod	(general joking)
40:00	Mod	well I went through most of my questions, so I am going to wrap it up now (request for feedback)

Group 7 Transcript

0:00	Mod	Mod introduces himself and asks people to tell what kind of social networking sites they use
0:00	4	well me personally, I got a blog on blogspot.com I think it's with Google. What else was there?
0:00	Mod	um, well that was it
0:00	72	I'm (72) and I have a blog on BlogSpot and I also have a MySpace account and I only use forms when I want to find out how to fix something
0:00	41	I'm (41); I'm on FaceBook, MySpace, and the Air Force one, that togetherweserve.com which is not really like MySpace
0:00	Mod	is that DOD sponsored?
0:00	41	um, probably not. So I guess they just decided to start one, their army had one before

0:00	Mod	I'll check that out.
0:00	41	it's more military. You fill out your rank, ribbons, and stuff. I don't blog on BlogSpot and I use forums for car searching and information on technical stuff
0:00	Mod	as far as the forums go, do ya'll post out there or Google to find postings
0:00	72	primarily as an information source
0:00	Mod	when a person says they use a forum as an information source, I don't really include that. If they aren't using the site to contact people and be engaged in the community then there is no point in including it.
3:00	41	I'll have to add something, there's an adoption forum that keeps up with adoptees and covers a whole range of topics. I and my wife use it to see what's going on and then we'll start an individual mail with someone and keep it from being public
3:00	Mod	alright, I'm going to ask some questions that we'll probably get to (starts writing on board). We've already talked about stuff like blogs and forums and social networking sites. What else is there in the entire internet?
3:00	41	ecommerce
3:00	Mod	ok, shopping
3:00	72	mail providers
3:00	Mod	there are very few sites that don't combine these things. So when you think of websites what do you think about?
3:00	72	news
3:00	Mod	ok (continues to write on board)
3:00	41	Are u asking about sites that you can interact with people or just general
3:00	Mod	just general right now
3:00	41	sports then
6:00	Mod	ok sports (continues to write on board). Any and all wikis
6:00	72	I guess there are aggregation sites where you can do it. What else, I guess photo sites photo sharing and video sharing. I'll say media. One thing I haven't heard yet was search.
6:00	Mod	search.
6:00	4	there are topic specific sites that I can't think of the name now but where you can look up one specific topic.
6:00	Mod	general information about news or fan sites for something. Medium or pictures. I'm having trouble commencing up with anything else, how about you?
6:00	72	um, there are more out there. Websites that test your bandwidth connection.
6:00	41	I bet torrents
6:00	Mod	well bet torrents either provide information or it's an apps but keep throwing them at me. I'm not trying to shoot them down. Email would be apps. These are some good categories though. I didn't get this much last time.
9:00	Mod	Ok, most of our discussions will be about these (circles some categories on board) where we will compare them. Next biggest questions here are uses for the web, what do you use the web to do?
9:00	41	news, games. I wonder if that's a type of website or a nap
9:00	Mod	well some sites are for e-commerce...
9:00	72	well, I use the websites to update my family specifically on my child. So that I don't have to repeat the information over and over again.

9:00	Mod	I you don't mind I'm going to cheat a little and put up here communication. Friends, family, and so forth. Sending information. So let's see, games, what if you're on a site with pictures of games
9:00	41	well that's entertainment. It's just an easy way to host your photos
9:00	72	I don't think of the web as a permanent storage area that's what I have my hard drive for.
9:00	Mod	Mod. See I'm the same way (checks list)
12:00	41	do we have shopping
12:00	Mod	I'm going to cheat a little bit too. (continues writing on board) when you search for an application, you acquire something the same way you would if you were comparison shopping.
12:00	4	yeah, if I want a new application I go to the freeware just to see what's there.
12:00	Mod	both of these have this in common whether you're going out looking or what.
12:00	72	anything you want to do navigational wise is there.
12:00	Mod	if you think of anything else let me know. I'll go into my questions now. Think about the first time you used the internet? (goes into how he first used the internet)
12:00	Mod	but think about that point till today and how the internet has changed and tell me it.
12:00	41	speed
12:00	Mod	and? Going from text to graphics and flash
12:00	72	content changing. Well more like there is actually content on it.
15:00	Mod	what about the kind of people who use the internet?
15:00	72	freaks
15:00	Mod	(everyone laughs)
15:00	4	it used to be that just geeks used it but now it's pretty much just everybody. Like you were saying since 93 there has now been something out there for everybody
15:00	Mod	(Mod talks about dad)
15:00	4	(talks about classes in 1995, talking to teachers from Ohio, when he was in Okinawa)
15:00	41	(talks about his online schooling)
15:00	Mod	(writes on board) learning, teaching, if you're not using these sites for school then you are for yourself and curiosity...
15:00	41	what about online banking? Paying bills, all that
15:00	Mod	there you go. Specifically with another use, how the internet has changed. Talking about media sites? Back then it was unthinkable.
15:00	4	well it started back with the dial up thing and then the contact just shifted from...
15:00	Mod	chat rooms and such which still exists but I don't know anyone who uses it
18:00	4	the air force messaging has chat rooms in there.
18:00	Mod	when they send out message about that I don't even bother
18:00	4	I watched it one day and thought that it was useless trash. Yeah, why even bother.
18:00	Mod	(everyone talks about Wright-Pat's chat rooms)
18:00	41	my job is in that and actually you-tube was able to help us
18:00	Mod	if you can justify it for your job, I'd make a play to SC not to unblock it but to get a commercial network. (talks about how this happened in Germany)
21:00	4	there are isolated computers; they are not on the AFIT network computers. You can check anything you want.
21:00	72	you can look at hacker websites.
21:00	41	really?

21:00	Mod	Well maybe you should make a play for that. Where there's a will, there's a way and if you can justify using it for your job then there should be no problem in asking.
21:00	41	What's the next question (Mod)?
21:00	Mod	talking about how sites have changed since now and then
21:00	72	Sites or internet?
21:00	Mod	Well the sites are on the internet...
21:00	72	From a software engineering perspective it's gone from the computation happening on their computer to your computer. And then also programs used to have library all on machines but now there are entire corporations like Amazon.com providing API's,
21:00	72	Programming interfaces, to anyone who's on the internet. Now the internet and websites are becoming part of software's where it used to be software asking for data...
21:00	Mod	instead of there being a host and a client, they are becoming one and the same
21:00	72	the lines are blurred now, you can write a code on your computer that can connect to someone's server
21:00	Mod	Ok. I think I asked this before, the site you used the most, how you found it again
21:00	4	probably email
21:00	41	friends
21:00	72	I looked at a list of possible sites and I saw Google had one. Free.
21:00	Mod	most of the time it's word of mouth, especially with social networking sites. I imagine only the company
24:00	Mod	Of the site were the only original started to take it on and said why don't you join and then why don't you join and so on. So far I have not found someone who said I want to start being social. So far someone has always recommended them to it.
24:00	72	is that wrong?
24:00	Mod	no, no. that's 90% of the people. There's like 10% actually done some comparison shopping.
24:00	41	((41) says that he's in that 10%)
24:00	41	At the time that you chose you site, did you have any other alternatives? MySpace right (addresses (41), he nods) Did you know about FaceBook?
24:00	41	no
24:00	72	I used MySpace because I have particular friends. I search for them, found them and...
24:00	41	MySpace is great for the military because I can look up friend back home. I'm not going to call them every day.
24:00	Mod	of course, too much cost, fuss...
24:00	41	they can just send out a bulletin, "hey we're doing this tonight, want to come?"
24:00	Mod	cool
24:00	4	I think we had 3 blogs we could use. And we just looked at how easy it was for us to use them.
24:00	Mod	ok. Cool.
24:00	72	((72) and 3 talks about the advantages of that blog)
24:00	Mod	(refers to the board) going back to the general uses of the internet. Which of these, if any, are unique to these (social website) particular sites?
24:00	41	can you say that again?
24:00	Mod	(Mod repeats)
24:00	72	are you trying to get us draw a conclusion of communication update of sending info...
24:00	Mod	actual no. sending info...these gaps more then sending info

24:00	41	learning would be a big form of forums
24:00	Mod	that applies
24:00	72	but it's not unique to
24:00	Mod	but what about (points to board) these forums
24:00	41	it's unique to just those if nothing else
27:00	Mod	well let's talk about one at a time. News is information, that easily falls under here (points to something on board), but you can definitely learn something's especially through forums. It's not unique to that area. (Points to (72)) you seem to think that communication is unique so we'll come back to that. Entertainment. Media sites, some people are very entertained by conversations of flame wars and such so that's not unique. Does storage even apply in that domain? I mean you can argue about MySpace and all that, but is it a way to store or is it your storage? If you understand the difference.
27:00	41	yeah, it's a way to store like your albums and stuff
27:00	Mod	but do you feel confident that MySpace is going to keep your stuff forever on there? (Everyone laughs) ok so it's not the storage. It's just comfortable knowing that stuff is organized out there
27:00	72	the more stuff (advertisements) I see out there on MySpace the more I worry that it's just going to shut down someday
27:00	41	((41) and (72) talks about MySpace stuff)
27:00	4	are you asking us what's unique to the sites or do you want us to mapping between the two lists...
27:00	Mod	I'm asking what's unique to the site. You may have an answer but that answer may not be the same for the group. Acquisition, shopping, downloading ...no that's, ecommerce and other things. We already talked about banking. Now we're back to communication. Now you can use apps like email
30:00	Mod	To communicate or to send info.
30:00	4	when you're sending info, it's easier to send it through those 3 (social websites). I mean they can get it when they want and it's not filling up there box which is kind of annoying to the receiving site, so I look at the forums as communicating within a specific group of people.
30:00	72	it's not particularly the uses but how the uses are used together and organized.
30:00	Mod	explain that, I don't think I get it
30:00	72	Ok, if you talk about a forum you can organize it by topic, but if you talk about a blog, you can organize it by person. If you talk about a social networking sites you can talk to a group of people and have cross over between them. You communicate in an organized way for a purpose.
30:00	4	you don't do that with email, you could, but it's not suited for that. Social networking sties of communication there is a particular element of communication. It's not unique but it's useful
30:00	Mod	hopefully what I'm about to say will make sense, but if it's not please repeat. One of the other groups, a guy ran his own domain and he said that with the traffic involved, blogs verses forums, for a site that has a smaller amount of traffic blogs were better but if there was a lot of traffic then forums were the way to go.
30:00	4	then you're discussing whether then just informing with just a few comments. If you're having a lot of interaction than a forum is more appropriate
30:00	72	well we can make it a kin to having a conversation with someone versus

33:00	72	Going to look at something on the cafeteria bulletin board. You got one person versus several. What do you think (41)?
33:00	41	I agree
33:00	Mod	((72) and (41) talk about how many friends they have on MySpace)
33:00	Mod	If I had to redo this I would have asked people how many friends they have. But not today. Ok, we have across the web. You can use these as general references. Don't limit your thoughts to just that list. Why do you use social networking sites? Of course there is updating people.
33:00	41	so you're asking us why do we use these social websites?
33:00	Mod	yes
33:00	72	(41), why do you use these social websites?
33:00	41	personally I use them for, um, I don't know. I'm trying to get my associate's degree to work.
33:00	Mod	what do you think of this statement? Some people get the same good feeling using social websites as using mail.
33:00	4	as using mail?
33:00	41	what does it say?
33:00	Mod	(Repeats the question)
33:00	41	who writes letters these days?
33:00	Mod	((72) raises hand)
33:00	41	10% again. (Everyone laughs)
36:00	Mod	well, for some people that know that they have a blog, but know that no one reads it, they might print it out and mail it. Why do they do that? It's communication. Do people feel happy when they get mail? Not necessarily every piece of mail.
36:00	41	yeah, I guess you can say that.
36:00	Mod	(Talks about reading a story about a kid on MySpace)
36:00	Mod	(Mod talks about TiVo)
36:00	72	I don't think it's the same joy as getting email.
36:00	Mod	I'm not saying it's the same joy. Just that it's a possible use that people have for it. I use it because I can keep people informed and that makes me feel loved and respected or whatever. This is kind of getting into people's heads a bit.
36:00	41	yeah I like to keep my friends informed and know what they are doing back home even I you don't want to talk to them.
36:00	4	if you see someone expressing something you might feel that is well articulated, it gives you the feeling of, "Oh great. I'm not alone."
36:00	Mod	yeah, I'm not alone or people seem to think that this guy is smart and I already have that idea so therefore I'm doing pretty well over here.
36:00	72	I want to add to what (41) was saying.
36:00	Mod	ok
36:00	72	There are people I know that I wonder what happened to them. Either I don't want to talk to these people or I don't feel like I have enough social currency to call them.
36:00	41	I mean just because I'm friends with them on MySpace doesn't mean were friends, but really acquaintances.
36:00	Mod	Someone used the word stalking though that's not what they wanted to say.
36:00	72	Well, it kind of is.
39:00	Mod	stalking is knowledge of (starts writing definition on board)...

39:00	41	no, put voyeurism. I honestly think that's why they don't have the profile viewers. Someone can come see that forty times a day and like some girl could keep checking that and get all freaked out. I think that's why they have that, for privacy.
39:00	72	What do you mean?
39:00	41	you know the future profile
39:00	72	oh they don't have that on MySpace
39:00	41	Yeah and I think that's why. People keep coming in saying, "This works, this works." You just give us your IP address you know. People can search this and rate your page.
39:00	Mod	MySpace doesn't provide that because whether they don't want to or they feel like it will scare people.
39:00	41	They'll lose people because they'll feel like they are being stalked.
39:00	72	That need to be liked on the internet goes way back...
39:00	Mod	So maybe I shouldn't have added that. That's probably not unique. When I was talking about unique things on the list, I'm not doing that anymore.
39:00	72	ok
39:00	Mod	what I was trying to determine was how I can come up with a way to test my MySpace page to see if it is better than someone else's. If they have two pages or one, they want to test out their page and find out which one is the best one and that's ultimately what we want to find out. I've kind of got my own theories and I'm doing these studies to see what others think and see if I'm just wrong.
39:00	72	well I think (41) said that people use social websites to determine their own likeability. Hot or not.com. You throw yourself out there for reassurance.
39:00	41	people want be reassured by sending out pictures. Saying, "Comment on my pictures." Well whose going to say, "Oh my gosh your ugly"? People like to come home and see that they have comments and they feel that other people like them.
39:00	Mod	thank you. See I haven't had anyone put it that way, in the other groups, which is why you have several groups.
42:00	Mod	Do any of ya'll know about linked in?
42:00	41	yeah
42:00	72	I forgot about that.
42:00	4	Yeah, I've got a profile.
42:00	Mod	there's a social website called Linked-In, and actually can you describe it? (Talking to 4)
42:00	4	well, it's a place that you put your educational background, your business experience, and other. You can get really specific. It links you to others and you can find out that you're like two steps removed from this person which means that I am linked to this person by this other person.
42:00	41	so you can find out how many steps you are to the President.
42:00	4	yeah I guess.
42:00	41	I had a teacher like that....
42:00	Mod	but is that the only reason why it's there.
42:00	4	no, it looks like it started as a resume builder. People can actually put a recommendation on there, so you can refer your potential new boss to this site to see how great you are. It's pretty truthful too.
42:00	72	does it put family ties in there too?
42:00	4	yeah, I don't know if you can put that this is family or not.

42:00	41	so basically you can click on someone's name and then you can click on someone else's name and it'll just link you to others that way?
42:00	4	you have to accept. You can't just link to someone.
42:00	Mod	basically, this is a way for you to organize the people you know in order to help your job or career. It's geared to business people. Where is that on this list? (Referring to the board) Is it on here? Because that seems like a use for social websites that I don't have up here...
42:00	41	another use of the social websites could be to promote a band.
42:00	Mod	I'm going to put it right here (writes on board) because that seems to be both social networking sites and it's general, but in this area I'd call it more advertising.
42:00	41	Yeah...
45:00	Mod	I'm going to throw out the word "networking" (agreement), in some ways you can network on any (non-social) site (reinforces that in reality most sites are not "pure")
45:00	4	a friend of mine has 300 people linked to him on linked-in
45:00	Mod	does that help at all
45:00	4	I don't know, but he is in computer network security and he has networked with the people that do that. He gets some high-profile people answering his question of the week about network security.
45:00	4	but it all started with linking together the people with common interests
45:00	Mod	(introduces a word "social capital", jokes that it is 2 words, mod fires back "glad you can count" (joking))
45:00	Mod	do any of you understand with social capital is about?
48:00	4	The ability to get something done based on the relationship you have
48:00	Mod	when you network, you build social capital (further explanation, with tie to linked-in)
48:00	Mod	do you know anyone, or do you think that people use SNS to network?
48:00	41	yes that goes right there with promotion like bands; they are networking to go on tour, to pair up with another band, or to get picked up by a record label
48:00	72	It depends on how the site is organized, if you have a blog for family, you are not going to make more family
48:00	Mod	(cracks joke about rich old aunt)
51:00	Mod	of these three types of sites, which do you think is most suited to networking, in general? I'm not asking you to consider linked-in.
51:00	41	linked-in is a SNS, right? Then SNS
51:00	Mod	what about the other sites?
51:00	41	with blogs how would you (create social capital)
51:00	72	with blogs people come to you, if you become a popular blogger, then you can meet people as they comment on your blog. If you go to a forum, it's like much more anonymous.
51:00	4	for the one we on, you may not know their real name, but you know everybody that is there, there is a lot of people, but you know them, you can see who posted the latest comment on some thread, and you know what they are going to say before the write it. It is not really networking or building social capital, it is building a community, but it is not really networking to me
51:00	41	then again, on blogs and forums they don't know you as (Mod), they know you as (Mod)theShow72 (group laughs), so how does that help you?
51:00	72	(joking) what a coincidence, cause that is his name! (more laughing)

51:00	Mod	(repeats question)
51:00	Mod	I have heard in some forums, not sponsored by the military, the people that are active, that have provided good information, have gotten job offers through these things ((41): nods agreement) , indirectly I know people who through their link-in site have gotten job offers, writers use their blogs to keep a base of people informed about what they are doing in the promotion of their next book we can argue whether they have social capital or not because they were using it to promote, but I can think of a couple of books where the comments from the people they have been speaking to all this time, became their book
54:00	Mod	(continued) the last chapter of the book has: "I need to think these 300 people who have all wrote things that I picked up on and used to make a million dollars, thank you." (laughs)
54:00	Mod	so is the consensus that there isn't a site (type) that is better?
54:00	72	No, I thought the consensus was that SNS were better.
54:00	41	... How many people who have got jobs on blogs or forums, compared to SNS? I can guarantee you that it is much higher for SNS.
54:00	Mod	I've had groups that have argued that forums were best.
54:00	41	(argues that SNS are best, provides "video" example)
54:00	Mod	(provides fictional example where a videographer can get work after leaving USAF)
54:00	41	about SNS, look at apps, SNS have a lot more apps
54:00	Mod	very true, but it also depends on the exact site. Some are more open to 3rd party development than others.
54:00	41	FaceBook is ridiculous, like Oregon trial,
54:00	Mod	(group jokes about oregano trial)
54:00	41	on FaceBook, allows people to submit their games into it, that's not networking, but
57:00	72	(mentions that those games foster a more "traditional" social interaction), in blogging, people are attracted to your site by the quality of your content. It is like you have written a book, some likes it and they come to see you ... FaceBook the relationship is built on the interaction (through games)
57:00	Mod	(mentions he is not a social website user)
57:00	Mod	I have measures that help you rate a website's quality, but this stuff was not based on social sites...
60:00	Mod	If you have a way to say "Amazon is better than eBay" or to compare two different Wikipedia articles (probably look at info quality). You have this instrument that you can use on those types of things; can you use that instrument on these types of sites?
60:00	41	but, what are you comparing between two pages (sounds frustrated), "oh this one is cooler because it has ... picture..."
60:00	Mod	well you see that's the key to the question, because when you bring the question down a level, its now – "is the criteria, the things you look at, to determine if (media, wiki, etc) is good... are those criteria the same criteria you would see for social websites?"
60:00	72	let's say I have a blog and he has a blog and they are both on BlogSpot are you talking about BlogSpot versus (mod interrupts)
60:00	Mod	no I am talking down to the user level
60:00	72	in the case of blogs you can, because the success of a blog is determined by the number of readers and number of people who respond to it in their own blog
60:00	41	can you compare the two? Yours is about your family, his is about his family

60:00	Mod	they both provided info that can be graded on accuracy, or how well it was wrote, how easy it is to understand
60:00	72	there are sites like Lexus that can tell you how much traffic is going to a particular site and also you can ask Google to find out how many people are linked to your site
60:00	Mod	(discusses link count, and that (72) feels it is an accurate measurement of quality)
60:00	Mod	(Note: thinking about this was new to mod, but link-count is a after-launch metric, not what was being examined in this study)
63:00	Mod	(mentions evaluative criteria such as navigational complexity)
63:00	41	it all depends on what you are going to their site for, if you are going to one person's site more than another, then what does that one person have that the other one doesn't? Was there info better? How many times are you going to ready their "about me" info. Nobody changes their info every day. Maybe they have a game on their page you like to play. Yeah I have friends that you can't open their freaking page, their background, they have like 30 videos
63:00	41	maybe they change their video every day
63:00	4	It is a combination of usability and content. It's a mix, if it is easy to get around but I don't care what's there or there's good info there, but I can't find it...
63:00	4	like the old AFPC website or I will a say the new one, the new one is UN-useful. It has all kinds of information I want, but it is a lousy website because I can't find anything anymore.
63:00	41	yeah e-pubs, it was good before, but now they changed it to crap
63:00	72	you brought up a good point about the SNS. Maybe we don't care about the content; sometimes it is just that it is there at all
63:00	41	Exactly, why would you look at somebody's page every day?
63:00	72	because you want to send them a message or something
63:00	41	yeah, I think that is what most people use it for; people don't sign on to MySpace and go to the same person's page every time because it is sooo cool. (group laughter)
63:00	Mod	so what you are saying is that there are something's that make a page better, than another page similar to it, but that's totally different that what you would look for in these other types of sites (non-social websites), that there is something unique about a SNS as far as quality goes
63:00	72	(not exactly) (41) said that it depends on why you are going to that site, you are going to go there for one of those reasons, they you will evaluate base on that reason(s), right? (and a re-explanation)
66:00	41	I think you are going there more for 3rd party information than their information. Oh they have a good song on their page, I am going to add it to mine, that's a funny video, or that's a good game
66:00	41	but what are you there for (for them), unless you leave a comment. What does their page give you? What kind of satisfaction do you get?
66:00	Mod	(places 3rd party info on board)
66:00	41	do you look at somebody's page when they update their pictures? Or when they changed their layout and posted (I've changed my layout)
66:00	41	or they do those surveys (says that he hates those things)
66:00	Mod	we talked about networking and that that was something that was pretty much unique to social websites. (Explanation of using networking as a criterion)

66:00	4	(67:30) yeah it is easy, you can go there and find the next link. It's designed to do that. It's easy, and usable. (talking about a SNS for networking and a user who wants to do networking)
66:00	41	If Google did it all, would you go to another site? Probably not.
66:00	Mod	any that is what this question is about: why do you go to social websites? Why do use them? Hopefully this covers most of the things people use social websites for.
66:00	4	it's funny, I have got one blog that evolved into one forum and do one SNS
66:00	72	(mentions time)
66:00	41	there are a lot of people's parents that have MySpace now.
66:00	72	my sister had a MySpace site, and she is like one of those people you would see on 20/20 where it is like your kid(s) are going wild, and you post pictures about yourself and your parents see it (shocked look) why would you do that?
69:00	41	some people love to put their private information out there, they love it, I don't know why, what crossed there mind to do that?
69:00	Mod	(suggests reasons why from the listed things on the board)
69:00	41	(mentions, stats updates where users can write minute details about their life, "just got out the shower", "making hot pockets")
69:00	Mod	(talks about GPS enabled phones that automatically post your location to your profile)
69:00	72	(mentions story about someone on terrorist watch list)
69:00	Mod	(lists the categories on board, has new things to think about, seeks feedback)

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Vita

Capt Joseph Werling grew up in Chalmette, Louisiana and graduated from Andrew Jackson Magnet High-School in 1997. Following Graduation, he enlisted in the Louisiana Air National Guard where he was a jet-engine apprentice on the F-15 engine. While assigned at the Belle-Chase NAS, he enrolled at Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge) where he received an AFROTC scholarship after his first year. In May 2003, he graduated with his Bachelor's in Electrical Engineering and was commissioned in the USAF. That same year he completed his communication officer technical training and was married. Their first assignment was Ramstein AB, Germany where 2Lt Werling was crew commander in the 435 CS's communication control center (CCC) and later a communications project manager. After Ramstein, 1Lt Werling was assigned to AFIT's Graduate Information Resource (GIR) management program. Following graduation (March, 2008), Capt Werling will be assigned to the Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center (AFOTEC) Det 3. Kirtland AFB, NM.

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14. ABSTRACT With websites becoming the frontend for numerous systems, the system's benefits require customers to have a favorable evaluation of the site and an intention to re-use it. It must be considered to be of high quality. With websites increasing adding collaborative technologies (such as tools for social networking, forums, and blogging) a new instrument to evaluate the quality of these types of sites is needed. Before such an instrument is developed, an understanding of the applicable theories is needed. This study offers that background. First the potential benefits of this research and its guiding questions are presented. Next is a literature review outlining possible constructs upon which an instrument to evaluate the quality of social websites could be based. Then the focus group's background and details are provided along with the analysis strategy, content analysis. After that, each constructs is discussed with the supporting/non-supporting evidence from the groups. Finally, the discussion concludes with discussions of limitations and suggestions for follow-on research. From this investigation, nine constructs (Ease of Understanding, Intuitive Operation, Informational Fit-to-task, Relative Advantage, Trust, Response Time, Visual Appeal, Innovativeness, and Social Presence) were discovered which could provide the basis for an instrument to measure social website quality.				
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