Social Media and the Networked Self in Everyday Life

CARLOS CANO VIKTORSSON

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY

SUPERVISOR: PAULA UIMONEN

JUNE 2010
Abstract

Internet has become increasingly ubiquitous and with the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies and concepts it has almost become second nature for many Internet users. This study attempts to view the “social life” of this “new” online environment through its current manifestation in the form of the popular social networking site Facebook. It argues that Facebook has become a tool for the management of one’s self both online and offline and that people’s reflexive relation to their self-identity is made visible through their engagement with this social media. How such a new form of social media incorporates itself into everyday life but also how the media acts as an extension of the reflexive self has been the main focus of this study.

Keywords: user-generated content, social media, consumer culture, reflexivity, symbolic interactionism, impression management
Acknowledgements

It never crossed my mind that this thesis and its topic would become such an interconnecting tool in itself. Each time someone asked me what my study was about – a quite common question to ask here in Sweden – the reaction was “don’t forget to add this or that” or “how interesting, let me tell you about my experience” or “then you have to check out this on the Internet.” As a result, any possible doubts from my side concerning people’s ability to use the Internet are now far (and I do mean) very far gone. Likewise, any doubts considering the importance of the Internet for people’s everyday life have now been relegated to a remote and abandoned little island somewhere in my mind, an island surrounded by binary numbers and Internet terms where a user-generated sun burns away any doubts of its existence.

Being as such, I want to thank all of you who have shared your views and experiences with me, I wish I could have included them all. I also want to thank Paula Uimonen for her help in supervising this thesis and her unwavering dedication to the study of the Internet and its cultural characteristics.

Thank you!
# PART 1: INTRODUCTION

**THE AIM OF THIS STUDY**

**DISPOSITION**

**METHOD**

**ETHNOGRAPHY**

**PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND INTERVIEWS**

**CONCERNS**

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

**THE INTERNET AS MATERIAL CULTURE**

**SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE SELF**

**IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT AND THE PRESENTATION OF SELF**

# PART 2: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE RHETORIC OF INVOLVEMENT

**THINKING IN TERMS OF WEB 2.0**

**WHEN THE USER BECOMES THE PRODUCER**

**FINDING MEANING THROUGH CREATION**

# PART 3: THE NETWORKED SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE

**NETWORKING OURSELVES INTO BEING**

**INTERCONNECTING THE SYMBOLIC COMMUNITY**

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE PRESENTATION OF SELF**

# PART 4: NETWORKING AS A FORM OF LIFE

REFERENCES
Part 1: Introduction

“The most exciting breakthroughs of the 21st century will not occur because of technology but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human.”

John Naisbitt, futurist

“This is definitely Facebookable!” my friend remarked, while scrolling through some pictures taken from a recent trip he had made. I guessed what he meant was that the pictures fulfilled some type of criteria in order to get posted on the popular social networking site Facebook and that he probably would upload some of them later on. The expression he used became a subject of contemplation for me later on when I caught myself wondering about its meaning and implications; was it telling of a certain criteria or style one should adhere to in ones presentation of oneself, were things Facebookable and was it possible to be Facebookable; ultimately, was it maybe representative for a shared set of understandings among Facebook users on how things should be done?

All these questions triggered my curiosity and impelled me to look closer at Facebook and its users. It wasn’t difficult to see how important Facebook and other social media had become since people’s current engagement with Internet media seemed to occupy such a significant part of their daily lives.

According to Facebooks own statistics¹ more than 400 million active users spend more than 500 billion minutes per month on the site and have an average of 130 friends per active user. It is a social networking site launched in February 2004 that is operated and privately owned by Facebook, Inc. (Eldon 2008: online). The website provides users with the possibilities of adding friends and sending messages together with updating their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Users can join networks organized by workplace, school, college or shared interests.

As soon as I realized how important Facebook had become my principal concern became with how this social networking site had become a popular tool for managing our relationships and connections in what I would call the management of our networked self. I use the term ‘networked self’ to describe how each one of us is interconnected to one or

several networks that connect us to the world around us, through networks that we most often choose to belong to (Cook & Buckley 2008:276). The manner in which we engage with this media in our managing of our network self is strongly dependent upon the possibilities for self expression presented by the media. As Michael Wesch points out, every medium is predisposed towards certain types of expression as a result of their structure, format and mode of creation and transmission. (Wesch 2007:14).

With the rise of Web 2.0 technologies that permit the Internet to be more interactive and participatory and concepts that have made the Internet more socially connected there has been an upswing in the development of what is often called Internet media as ´social media´. There have been several studies on this technological shift and its implications. Danah boyd (2007a:online) is interested in its role as a technology of everyday life that permits people to create but that also alters their lives. She talks about how the “underlying architecture of life” has changed and how things on the Internet spread much faster and “spread far greater than we ever would've imagined” (ibid). Echoing a similar view Michael Wesch reminds us that every medium is different and have different sets of potentials and restrictions.

In her treatment of Web 2.0 technology as a form of social media boyd brings forth certain properties which according to her alter how people engage with one another through this media. One is “persistence” where everything you say “sticks around” and all the things you have said or done becomes part of your “permanent record” (2009 :online). Another one is “replicability” which permits the “copy and pasting” of content that in the worst case may lead to the alteration of “what has been said”. A third property is “searchability” which boyd argues permits users to quite easily find what they want and makes information available “at our fingertips”. A last property that I have included from her discussion lies in its “scalability ”where social media according to boyd “scales things in new ways”. Conversations that were intended for a select few could for example boyd argues “spiral out of control and scale to the entire school or…the whole world” (ibid).

These properties shape not only users engagement with social media but also their views on how to interconnect and present oneself in other Internet mediums. Considering that these Internet mediums have become more ubiquitous Wesch sees the technologies
of the Internet as becoming more and more integrated with each other creating what he calls a “highly integrated webscape” that he considers as being highly user generated and respondent to the user’s needs. Wesch believes that the Web, as it is emerging today, may be seen as a global consciousness that learns from us the more we use it, and in another sense may also be using us. (Wesch 2007:12).

The combination of a more socially interconnected Internet through Web 2.0 in the form of social media together with a more ubiquitous level of Internet praxis in our everyday lives has prompted David Beer and Roger Burrows (2007) to argue that a sociology of and in Web 2.0 is much needed. Taking up this call for more research there have been several studies made on the implications of Web 2.0 all from how relationships between performers and their audience have changed in a Web 2.0 environment (Beer 2008a) on to how the use of Web 2.0 based social networking software changes the nature of the relationship between researchers and researched (Cook & Buckley 2008) to how the “spirit” of Web 2.0 can be seen as a social revolution that empowers us to rethink our notions of education and the teacher-student relationship (Wesch 2009).

In contributing to this research I have looked at how social networking sites such as Facebook have become important tools for people’s management of a networked self both online and offline. I argue that the combination of social media and its ubiquitous media presence provides us with a perfect opportunity for viewing reflexivity and self making in action. I firmly believe that online research in combination with offline observations should provide us with what Clifford Geertz (1993) calls a ‘thick description’ of what this new “social” inclusion of Internet technologies entails and what it implies on the level of personhood, the self and our understanding and dealing with meaning building in general. Most importantly, I am interested in how we view our networked self as interconnected with other people, places and objects and what strategies we make use of to manage this networked self.

The Aim of This Study

This study is an attempt at understanding the implications Web 2.0 technologies and concepts are having on our perception and reflexivity of self in everyday life. By
considering the Internet to be a form of material culture I focus on the way in which Internet media such as Web 2.0 based social media is not only used as an attempt at “making oneself at “home” on the Internet” (Miller & Slater 2000:1) but also as a cultural practice for the reflexive self to engage in self making and meaning making in everyday life.

Looking at Web 2.0 as an innovation that lets us show off our creativity, skills and knowledge to the world in an open and participatory manner we find evidence for the claim that the reason for peoples engagement with new media is because it fulfills a certain need (von Hippel 2001). The need in this case is seen in our attempts at managing our interconnections with other people and things in life that we with the help of the Internet are affiliating with through our cultural practice of networking.

With these notions my research question becomes: How does Web 2.0 both as a technology and a concept manifest itself in people’s sense of being interconnected or networked, and in their management of their networked self both online and offline? On a broader level, are our engagements with social media creating a sort of Web 2.0 logic that we make use of when constructing and expressing an image of ourselves to others, in order to claim a personal identity that is networkable, a networked self?

**Disposition**

This thesis consists of four parts. The first part, in the form of an introduction, is an attempt at presenting the object under study together with the circumstances in which it has presented itself. I continue by describing the purpose, disposition, method, and theoretical framework that comprise the study of the object in question.

The second part contains a description of social media in the form of social networking sites together with a description of what constitutes Web 2.0 technologies and concepts. I begin this part by recounting my own first encounter with Facebook before moving on to a definition of the media in question. Having accounted for the definitions of social media and social networking sites I continue by describing what Web 2.0 is, both as a technology and as a concept. The sections that follow thereafter are attempts at treating Web 2.0 as a “rhetoric” of involvement. The relationship between technology
and self are discussed here in terms of crafting oneself through creational practices of media use. These sections move on to talk about the neoliberal and marketing ideologies implicit in the Web 2.0 rhetoric of involvement and how they manifest themselves in our attempts at meaning making and identity formation.

The third part brings the previous discussion into a pragmatist perspective of symbolic interaction theory and impression management. These sections attempt to analyze the interactions accounted for in the ethnography with regard to their symbolic meanings and representational value.

In the fourth and last part I gather all the previous findings and ideas into a coherent understanding of what it all means as a form of life and discuss its implications for identity making.

**Method**

**Ethnography**

According to Tom Boellstorff in his ethnography of virtual life in *Second Life* it is crucial that we study virtual worlds “in their own terms” and that we develop research methods that keep up with the realities of technological change (2008:4). Much of this argument sounds inspired by the practical metaphysics of Bruno Latour in the notion that realities as ontologies created by actors must be respected and treated as unique (Latour 2006:145). Considering that the Internet has become a more ubiquitous place with the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies I will argue that this has benefited the possibilities to conduct online ethnography or field work.

The distinction between online and offline worlds is becoming harder to make since activities in these realms are increasingly merged in our society, where they interact and transform each other (Garcia et al 2009:53). As these interactions become more lifelike we can put less focus on technology and more focus on content (Miller & Slater 2000:2). In considering the Internet as a “virtual” world there will be those who argue that ethnographic research of such a world will be different from that of the “real world”. Going against this view Garcia et al argue that ““virtual reality” is not a reality separate from other aspects of human action and experience, but rather a part of it“(Garcia et al
Only the interweaving of these two approaches, offline and online, will manage to deliver an accurate image of what role technologies play in everyday life, in identity formation and in similar issues (Miller & Slater 2000).

**Participant Observation and Interviews**

The rising popularity of social media in the form of Web 2.0 has of course sparked an increased interest in this new medium and its position within the relationship between Internet and society (e.g., Beer & Burrows 2007; Beer 2008; Wesch 2007, 2008; Fuchs 2010). Among the new inquiries the most relevant ones for this study have focused on why people are motivated to engage with this medium in the ways that they do. Calling upon previous ethnographic and interview-based studies such as those made by Miller and Slater, Howard Rheingold or Michael Wesch (Miller & Slater 2000; Rheingold 2000; Wesch 2007, 2008) just to name a few have proved indispensible in their orientation of this study and my own ethnographic approach.

By looking at the Internet and its medium as related to material culture a deeper understanding of the complexities that arise in everyday interactions with people involved with this new medium have been contextualized as rooted in our understanding of the world we live in and create. How the Internet and its new technologies give rise to new possibilities for re-interpreting notions of space and time, the self and its presentation, and interpersonal communication have proved paramount for this inquiry.

Martin Heidegger contends that in order to truly understand something one must begin by considering the everyday experiences of how things show themselves (1988:160). In acknowledging this statement I believe that it is only through immersion into the shared world in which social media is constituted that a basis for an ethnography can be made. As such, I will take into account my own perceptions since they are influenced by my own position and interest in what will be an “auto ethnography” of my own experiences of a social media in the form of a medium aimed at social networking. My aim is to discern how this medium for social networking may reveal a change in how some people construct their identities and manage their relationships with others.

In his study of virtual communities Howard Rheingold believed that it was valuable to include his own perspectives both as participant as well as an observer in his
accounts of community life online where he believes that the authors voice reflects both that of a “citizen” and a social scientists description of how it feels to “live in cyberspace” (2000:xxxi). Since many of us are familiar with Facebook I believe that my own role as both participant and observer of this media is made easier to follow and relate to. As such, this study has made use of observations that where made both as a participant observant and through interviews made both online and offline. Its ethnography relied heavily on my own activities and experiences together with those told by interviewees. The main part of this ethnography is situated within the online environment of the social networking site Facebook and is the product of more than 120 hours of observation during more than two consecutive months.

The following criteria’s or constraints were established beforehand in order to demarcate the object in study:

At first hand I would only observe friends on Facebook that I had met offline, permitting me to observe any possible differences or similarities between online and offline behavior. Secondly, I would only observe activities pertaining to my home page and in the news feed since there are a plethora of activities on Facebook which for a single observer with a limited amount of time was simply not feasible to observe in detail, which could undermine the quality of study. The third constraint would be to not observe anything leading outside of Facebook when online. This one proved to be quite difficult to adhere to since almost every activity involving the promotion of a video, website or similar online content required a closer look at the original owner or producer of that content. My solution was to open these objects within Facebook itself and if they didn’t open (which seldom was the case) I continued the investigation by asking the question whether this was an attempt by Facebook to choose what content they deemed suitable to display.

A fourth constraint was to not observe or make use of any applications, plug-ins or anything of the sort since my focus would be on peoples interactions through status updates and public\(^2\) messages including personal messages aimed at me but open for everyone to see. Implicit in this constraint was to not include any observations pertaining\(^2\)

\(^2\)Public in this context implies open for select friends to see.
to private messages out of view from the public, except the questionnaire which was sent and retrieved through this system.

The final constraint concerned the interviews I would conduct. These would be conducted offline face to face and be informal with open ended questions permitting any discussions to arise concerning views, experiences or own particular observations of Facebook behavior and its role for people.

I formulated five basic questions for my interviews that I would ask both offline and online. These questions formed the basis for longer more open ended interviews offline which at some occasions would turn out as several hours of discussion. Keeping notes would prove to be a cumbersome task, as for anyone else conducting field work. I took notes as much as I could, particularly of key words and concepts expressed during the interview together with notes of their immediate settings and events surrounding the interviews. The five basic questions were as follows:

1. **What are the main reasons for you having Facebook you believe?**
2. **What are your typical activities on Facebook?**
3. **Has Facebook had any impact on the way you keep in touch with your friend’s offline?**
4. **Has Facebook had any impact on the way you live your life (has it improved your social life, night life, hobbies, life view, better decision making...)?**
5. **Do you believe it is it important to be commented upon or ‘liked’ when posting on Facebook?**

**Concerns**

Having my potential subjects become aware that they were being monitored could easily disrupt the observing of any naturalistic behavior online. My decision became to not reveal myself as an observer online and instead focus on keeping my subjects completely anonymous. Any details on who said what and when would not be disclosed and I would avoid using any names or reveal sensitive information such as a subject’s age, nationality or even gender or any particular situation that could later be used to identify the person in question. In an attempt at anonymizing as much as possible I have employed the use of the term “facebooker” to describe a person that uses Facebook without describing or revealing any details on who this person might be.
Theoretical Framework

The Internet as Material Culture

“Changes in technology continue to shape the material culture of society. Technology refers to the knowledge, techniques, and tools that allow people to transform resources into usable forms and the knowledge and skills required to use what is developed.

(Kendall 2008:58).

Christian Fuchs believes that the sociology of the Internet and its new media is a growing research area that has mainly been oriented towards micro-level empirical studies where basic philosophical and theoretical questions are hardly asked (2010:783). Whether this is the case or not I do agree with Fuchs that we need to consider these basic philosophical and theoretical questions since our involvement with the Internet and its new media seem to occupy such an important role in our lives. What basic needs do these technologies fulfill and what are the reasons for making use of them? How do they make our lives easier and how are we influenced by them? These are some of the most basic of questions that I can come up with, that contain an almost existential tone of inquiry.

In their study of Internet use in Trinidad Miller and Slater look at how attempts are made by a particular cultures members to find themselves and make themselves at home in a changing communicative environment while molding it in their own likeness (Miller & Slater 2000:1). In their account of Internet media they look at the way in which “a communicative technology is encountered from, and rooted in, a particular place” (ibid:4). They argue that Internet Media should be seen as continues and embedded in other social spaces “happening within mundane social structures and relations” that may be transformed but that “cannot escape into a self-enclosed cyberian apartness” and that this media is most likely being assimilated into various existing practices as supplements or complements, like for example websites supplementing TV or email supplementing the telephone (ibid:5,6). They believe that it’s possible that the Internet will after a while “become more mundane and taken for granted” (ibid:11). The essential part of studying the Internet, Miller and Slater argue, lies in observing the level in which it transcends dualisms such as “local against global” and how we acknowledge “a more complex dialectic” where specificity and generality are products of each other. They argue that
“new genres” of material culture can only be understood in accordance to Bruno Latours idea of the hybrid as “irreducible to either its human or its material agents” (ibid:8).

Symbolic Interactionism and the Emergence of the Self

“The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process.”

(George Herbert Mead 1934:135)

Looking at social networking sites as an extension of offline communities it becomes useful to make use of a theory of interaction that takes into account the dialectic character or nature of the relationship between subject and object, between self and society. The theoretical framework presented by symbolic interactionism, as a pragmatic and materialist philosophy on how the mind and self arises out of social process attracted me both in its hands on approach but more importantly as an example of pragmatism. This made sense to me since if I wanted to treat the Internet as material culture I should do so by making use of a perspective that considers humans as active, creative agents living in a world that they have a hand in making “and it, in turn, shapes their behavior which they then remake” (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney 2003:45).

According to Mead, whose ideas would become the basis for this perspective, it is through communal activity or what Mead refers to as ‘social acts’ that people realize their own role in relation to others when learning to see themselves from the perspective of their co-actors. Mead argued that it is through this process of realization that selfhood arises. Herbert Blumer, following Mead, advanced this notion by claiming that people not only react to each other’s actions but also interact with each other by interpreting or defining each other's actions. How and in what way we define these actions all depends on the meanings that we attach to these actions in question, hence according to Blumer “human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions (1962:79).

Symbolic interactionism states that people act toward things based on the meaning those things have for them; and these meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation (Blumer 1986:51). Blumer extends Meads initial idea on
the emergence of selfhood by viewing the “self as grounded on interaction, a self that continually and reflexively constitutes itself (ibid:63). While the self is a process that develops or arises, according to this perspective, Mead argued that the self also involves two distinguishable phases that he labelled the “I” and the “me” (1934:178) where the “I” can be seen as,

“The unorganized, undirected, uncertain, and therefore unpredictable element, of human experience is the “I”, it represents the person’s spontaneous, impulsive tendencies...What this means, then, is that the person never catches sight of himself or herself as “I”.

(Reynolds & Herman-Kinney 2003:75)

Mead argued that “If you ask...where directly in your own experience the “I” comes in the answer is that it comes in as a historical figure” (1934:174). The existence of this unpredictable and spontaneous “I” means, among other things, that humans are never mere reflections of the societies that they belong to; they are never passive agents.

Reynolds and Herman-Kinney believe that Meads “I” represents the individual’s impact on society whereas the other phase of the self labeled the “me” represents society’s influence on the individual (ibid:76). In the interplay between the two we are “provided with a basis for understanding the mutuality of the relationship between the individual and society” (Meltzer 1964:17). The dynamic interplay between the “I” and the “me” phases of the self has as its product what is called the act. (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney 2003:76). In the relationship between individual and society the most important concept grounded in symbolic interactionist theory becomes the notion of the “generalized other”. This notion doesn’t refer to people but to perspectives shared with others where,

“the generalized other is the means by which norms, values, attitudes, and standards of behavior of the primary group and beyond enter into the thinking of the individual.”

(Reynolds and Herman-Kinney 2003:499)

According to Meltzer it represents the incorporated other(s) within the individual as an actor (1964:17).

**Impression Management and the Presentation of Self**

“Knowing that the individual is likely to present himself in a light that is favorable to him, the others may divide what they witness into two parts; a part that is
relatively easy for the individual to manipulate at will, being chiefly his verbal assertions, and a part in regard to which he seems to have little concern or control, being chiefly derived from the expressions he gives off.”

(Erving Goffman 1959: 7)

As the reader may have noticed there is no exposed method or concept for observing phenomena in my previous account of symbolic interactionism. The very concrete ways presented by material culture studies to treat Internet as embedded in social and mundane praxis and vice versa are not as simple to apply when looking at the self and its presentation.

Erving Goffman, not himself a symbolic interactionist, devised several helpful concepts for looking at social interaction in relation to the self that would prove indispensable for the application of symbolic interactionist theory. One such approach was to look at interactions as attempts at impression management. According to this idea we are in our presentation of self, whether unconsciously or consciously, engaging in a kind of impression management that we believe will serve the desired function we aim at fulfilling (ibid:3-4). The desired function can be any number of things such as to strengthen relationships, convey ideas or notions about something, or anything else that relies on the successful presentation of ourselves to others. What governs a successful management of impressions is dependent on the social settings governing the culture of meaning making.

Goffman makes use of an analogy based on dramaturgy to explain self presentation, in which social life is seen as composed by performances. A performance occurs in two regions: a front region “with its fixed props” and a back region “with its tools for shaping the body” (1959:4). There is a team of people that constitute the actors that will share the stage where the self emerges and another team that constitutes the audience that will judge the performance (i.e., presentation) of the self. The attempts at winning the audience over can be seen in terms of social interaction as an attempt “to reaffirm a community’s shared moral values” (ibid :35ff). The performance is “molded and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented” and attempts are made to “forgo or conceal action which is inconsistent with these standards” (ibid).
My principal reason in making use of these theories and not any other theory of the self (e.g., such as ethnomethodology or existentialism) is that none of these other theories take into account the notion of a “generalized other” or “public” audience in one’s interactions, which is essential for a notion of a networked self. With a theory that describes the emergence of the self (symbolic interaction) together with a theory of its presentation, seen as an attempt at impression management, I believe that a theoretical framework for understanding the self as networked both to the Internet as material culture and to society is rendered feasible.
Part 2: Social Media and the Rhetoric of Involvement

One day it just happened, I had succumbed (in my view) to the pressures of joining the popular social networking site and I was now finding myself wondering why I had waited so long in order to join. It was September 2009 and I remember my first feeling after logging in and seeing my “home” page, it felt almost as if I had been electronically baptized when being admitted into this “larger than life” community, this membership of connectedness.

A new world had revealed itself to me and I was quickly realizing its appeal. Almost all my friends from now to time immemorial could be looked up and contacted, discussion groups and fan pages ranged from anything from complexity theory groups to a particular German candy aficionados group. I quickly understood that I needed to learn this new world – its accepted ways of doing things, its language, and its culture. Since many of my friends and relatives had been part of this world for a long time I had stumbled upon words associated to activities and objects highly particular for this world. Now I could understand their meaning through a hands on approach, or at least I thought so. The sense of belonging struck me the deepest, I realized that now, finally, I was no longer a stranger or the boring guy that doesn’t have Facebook (i.e., a Facebook account). What I now was part of was a group or community that felt almost like a safe haven, a place to relax, to breathe, to interact with – but more importantly, that I could observe. Much of my previous apprehension in sharing my life with others was gradually disappearing the more I was looking at my friend’s profiles and their respective status lists and news/bulletin boards. I thought for myself, If they are sharing their life stories shouldn’t I do the same to some extent, for the purpose of reciprocity. I found myself being a spectator of life stories, what I later would look upon as my own private TV show. I discovered that there would almost certainly be some mention of Facebook in social gatherings with friends or even strangers offline. It seemed that the ‘networking tool’ to handle the ‘networked me’ was a much needed tool in my encounters with interconnected people, much more so than through my mobile phone or via e-mail.

As danah boyd is quick to point out in her presentation of social media sites, social media is nothing new. We have, boyd argues, been watching social media develop
around new genres before, like in instant messaging, chat rooms, bulletin boards, etc. (boyd 2009:online). The term “social media” as boyd sees it is “an umbrella term that refers to tools, services and applications that allow people to interact with others using network technologies” (boyd 2008:92). The way these tools are used, boyd argues may alter a plethora of practices such as “communication, collaboration, information dissemination, and social organization”. Boyd goes as far as to say that since social media has affected how people interact with one another it hence has the potential as she calls it to “alter how society is organized”. Social media includes systems that support several different types of interaction levels, from one-to-one to many-to-many interactions. Those that include all of these levels of interaction and permit the creation of spaces for people to gather are what boyd calls examples of ‘networked publics’. Social networking sites are one such example of a network public. Social networking sites are what boyd calls recent developments “in the history of social media” where the uniqueness lies in their combination of features and structures that allow people to demarcate relationships. (ibid:94). Boyd and Nicole Ellison define “social network[ing] sites” as being:

“web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”

(boyd & Ellison 2007:2)

So how many people make use of these services and how much time do they spend using social media? According to The Nielsen Company\(^3\) the amount of unique visitors making use of social media globally had 142.1 million unique visitors in the United States in December 2009, followed by Japan, which had 46.6 million unique visitors during the same month. Australia led in average time per person spent, with the average Australian spending nearly 7 hours on social media sites during that same month.

People spent more than five and a half hours on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter in the month of December 2009, an 82% increase from the same time the year before when users were spending just over three hours on social networking sites. Globally, social networks and blogs are the most popular online category when ranked by average time spent, followed by online games and instant messaging. With 223.1 million unique visitors, Facebook is the No. 1 global social networking destination as of March 2010. Time spent on the site has also been on the rise, with global users spending six hours and 19 minutes during one month (measured for March 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Unique Audience (000)</th>
<th>Time Per Person (hh:mm:ss)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>142,052</td>
<td>6:09:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>46,558</td>
<td>2:50:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>31,345</td>
<td>4:33:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>29,129</td>
<td>6:07:54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>28,057</td>
<td>4:11:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>26,786</td>
<td>4:04:39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>19,456</td>
<td>5:30:55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>18,256</td>
<td>6:00:07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>9,895</td>
<td>6:52:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>2,451</td>
<td>3:54:34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Nielsen Company

![Global Web Traffic to Social Networking Sites](chart1.png)

![Global Web Traffic to Social Networking Sites](chart2.png)

Source: The Nielsen Company
Considering the rise in popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook one is hard pressed not to wonder if it’s the promises of Web 2.0 technologies and concepts that are attracting its users (cf. Andersson 2007; Beer 2007; Wesch 2008).

“The Web we know now, which loads into a browser window in essentially static screenfulls, is only an embryo of the Web to come. The first glimmerings of Web 2.0 are beginning to appear, and we are just starting to see how that embryo might develop. The Web will be understood not as screenfulls of text and graphics but as a transport mechanism, the ether through which interactivity happens. It will [...] appear on your computer screen, [...] on your TV set [...] your car dashboard [...] your cell phone [...] hand-held game machines [...] maybe even your microwave oven.”

(DiNucci 1999)

Darcy DiNucci clearly perceived that a new step of development of the Web was beginning to manifest itself. Her focus was on the field of technical advances that will multiply and enrich the ways we use the Web, particularly in the concept of interactivity where “the ether through which interactivity happens” is made possible through the dissemination of Web 2.0 in various forms of technology. According to Facebook\(^4\) there are more than 100 million active users currently using Facebook through their mobile devices where “more than 200 mobile operators in 60 countries are working to deploy

and promote Facebook mobile products”. In addition, “these people are twice as active on Facebook as non-mobile users”.

**Thinking in Terms of Web 2.0**

Web 2.0 is a term introduced in 2003–04 that is commonly used to encompass various novel phenomena on the World Wide Web. The term is commonly associated with web applications that facilitate interactive information sharing, interoperability between different platforms, user-centered design, and collaboration on the World Wide Web. The Web 2.0 is not, as many would believe, a new web technology opposed to the Web 1.0. It is more about the attempts of conceptualizing a set of expectations or outcomes that are enabled by certain Web technologies (Anderson 2007:6).

With the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies and its concepts a new rhetoric of democratization has been introduced into the culture of Internet practice and the creation and exchange of user-generated content. With these new possibilities to get involved through collaboration and participation the opportunities for our thoughts to be heard, our creations to be seen and our voices to be listened to have never been this big. It sounds almost like Andy Warhol’s famous claim will be fulfilled, that “in the future everyone will be famous for 15 minutes”.

The Web 2.0 is about applications/services such as blogs, video sharing, social networking and podcasting sites that make use of a more socially connected Web in which people can contribute as much as they can consume (Anderson 2007:4). Examples of well-known Web 2.0-based Web sites that support the creation and consumption of user-generated content include YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, Wikipedia, Flickr, Blogger, and personal Web pages, among many others. What is alluring with Web 2.0 is that it is based on technologies that support real-life interactions and user-generated content that help make the experience online more lifelike and participatory.
Some schematic differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mode…</td>
<td>Read</td>
<td>Write and contribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Unit of Content</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Post/record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State…</td>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewed through</td>
<td>Web Browser</td>
<td>Anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content created by…</td>
<td>Web Coder</td>
<td>Everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain of…</td>
<td>Web Designers</td>
<td>A new culture of public research?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Web 2.0 is not only about technology but more about using existing technologies in new and innovative ways, changing the way people view the Internet. Tim O’Reilly (2005) mentions radical decentralization, radical trust, participation instead of publishing, users as contributors, rich user experience, the long tail, the web as platform, control of one’s own data, remixing data, collective intelligence, attitudes, better software by more users, play, undetermined user behavior as the main characteristics of Web 2.0. He provides the following more formal definition:

“Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an ‘architecture of participation’, and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences.”

(O’Reilly 2005: online)

For Michael Wesch the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies has permitted the Internet to “operate on its own unique terms” instead of imitating previous technologies as he calls it (2007:12). He believes that the current Web demands a different approach than that of for example the print media since it speeds up the process of acceptance, response

---

5 From A research paper summary of Beer & Burrows, 2007 by Filiz Efe
and adjustment (ibid:4). Being as such, it can be regarded as a state of mind or what I would call a \textit{cultural practice}, a way of doing things based on a view of the Internet as live, open and social. What is interesting are the forms of socialization and interaction being made on social networking sites as examples of such an Internet culture.

Approaching the Internet as representing a cultural construct, Uimonen has defined Internet culture in terms of a ‘culture of networking’ (Uimonen 2001a:147).

\begin{quote}
“The culture of networking is both a reflection of the technical interfaces of computer networking and the ideas and values that have accompanied their development, patterns of meaning that in turn have been influenced by the wider social environment framing Internet development.”
\end{quote}

(Uimonen 2001b:37)

\textbf{When the User Becomes the Producer}

One of the most important ways that people engage with each other socially is through the mediation of things (Lury 2001:1). To see the Internet as material culture where things are seen as \textit{content} is helpful since it permits us to look upon activities being made on the Internet as in relation to possession, value and usefulness. It also helps in understanding how cultural identity and the self are expressed through the attempts at finding and constructing meaning through the use of these ‘materials’.

According to Facebook\footnote{Http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics, accessed 20010-05-20} there are more than 160 million objects on their site that people interact with (i.e., pages, groups and events) where each average user is connected to 60 of these objects\footnote{Facebook doesn’t specify for how long or if they mean at any given moment}. Each average user creates 70 pieces of content each month adding to the over 25 billion pieces of content (e.g., web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc) that is shared each month.

This creation and use of \textit{content} on social networking sites is of particular interest if we look at the Web 2.0 as an example of consumer culture. According to Celia Lury “a number of writers argue that contemporary consumption is largely about meaning, that it is ‘culturally drenched’” (Lury 2001:52). Looked upon as an example of consumer culture one may suspect that Web 2.0 was created to function as a marketing strategy. According to Christian Fuchs there are those who believe the rhetoric underlying Web
2.0 is also an expression of neoliberal ideology (Fuchs 2010:767). He underlines this by citing Kylie Jarret in that the interactivity of Web 2.0 would be as he calls it “disciplining” people,

“…into a liberal ideal of subjectivity based around notions of freedom, choice and activity. It would seem that the user being addressed in this interactive and participatory media is the ideal, active neoliberal citizen.”

(Jarrett 2008:online)

Since the main focus of Web 2.0 is on individual user contribution and self expression “the ideology of neoliberal individualism and competition is advanced” (Fuchs 2010:767).

With the previous discussion in mind I would like to discuss how the exchange of information, descriptions of happenings, status updates, links to products and commodities and similar interactions on social networking sites in the form of Facebook instill in the user a notion of what Nigel Thrift calls the ‘everydayness’ of the ‘knowledge economy’ (Thrift 2005: 3):

“through the auspices of Internet and wireless technologies, consumers and producers now increasingly interact jointly to produce commodities, and, increasingly, commodities become objects that are being continuously developed (as is the case of, for example, various forms of software). More and more consumer objects are becoming part of an animate surface that is capable of conducting ‘thought’; thought is increasingly packaged in things.”

(Thrift 2005: 7)

It may not come as a surprise that much of the attraction of Web 2.0 lies in the possibilities for people to produce their own content and broadcast it to an audience that is increasingly willing or interested in consuming their user-generated content. With the Web 2.0 we are reminded that the user-generated content refers to media content created or produced by the general public more often than by paid professionals.

One of my postings on Facebook was for example criticized (offline) by an experienced Facebook user for being too ‘vague’. Apparently, the posting had been both confusing and misleading – or “just plain stupid” (citing the person) – which according to the person explained the meager amount of feedback it had received (with only one ‘like it’ vote). The suggestion was that if I wanted to get my point across I should be more ‘selling’ and bring up the issue in question earlier in the sentence. I was surprised by this
comment since I believed the posting was rather descriptive and informative. My posting had been as follows:

Finnish airforce pilots flew in seemingly clear skies without any problems. Now they have found that hidden ash created glass inside the jetmotors! What will happen with the passenger planes that have been flying today? Imagine the cost of changing the damaged jetmotors, or worse still that the planes malfunction and crash later on!

**Finding Meaning through Creation**

In this section I look at how the cultural and social aspects of these participatory Web 2.0 concepts are triggering a need to *create* – to be masters or artists or authorities, to be someone important, ultimately to legitimize ones existence and find meaning in life. Tom Boelstorff uses the term *techné* when inquiring about virtual selfhood, which he maintains is dependent upon the idea that”people can craft their life worlds through intentional creativity” (Boellstorff 2008:25). At the core of “creationist capitalism” we find the idea of the self as a creator where production is reinterpreted as creation that “serves as a means to self-knowledge and social efficacy” (ibid :209-210). Whether it is by postings, status updates or referring to a webpage it becomes important to look at how these user-generated objects and activities may be representing a consumer culture where commodities, products and goods are aimed at reinforcing social ties. I believe that any consumption made on social networking sites with Web 2.0 technologies is in itself an act of creation. According to boyd the increase of what she calls content producers “creates an attention economy in which people must compete for visibility” (boyd 2008:32).

I want to draw into this discussion the notion of consumption and consumer society when looking at social networking sites and the economy of attention (i.e., for visibility and recognition). In the anthology *The Consumer Society Reader* we find according to Lee consumer society to be the expression of how we as societies organize our means to existence (Lee 2000: ix). A consumer society is about how we view the world, consider our position within it as well as how we measure our life trajectories.
Lee stresses how important the logic of capitalism has been in our understanding of consumption. The particular strength being that of Karl Marx who has provided us with the most organized and penetrating analysis of capitalism we currently have. According to Marx the connection between labor (i.e., as production) and consumption is considered in the most profound sense of all, which is that of its relation to human species being itself (Marx, 1995:115). Labor in this sense may demonstrate how we look upon the world and the unique character of our needs. This relationship emerges from and becomes manifest in our products, the product of our labor. Therefore, consumption as the process of using and employing these products becomes highly connected to our relationship to the value of creating (ibid).

For Marx the use-value (the value of a commodity in its use) is simply that property of a commodity which is capable of satisfying human needs which for him is an expression of the relationship between a need and a satisfaction (ibid). Marx view is highly “natural” in the sense that we all have needs that need to be fulfilled. Moving further from the natural aspect of the use-value of an object Jean Baudrillard extends Marx’s idea in considering that there is nothing “natural” about human needs. Rather, for Baudrillard all needs are socially and historically contingent. The satisfiers of these needs, seen as the commodities of consumption, possess a significatory capacity which he calls a “sign-value”. With Baudrillard we have according to Lee “the clear and unequivocal assertion that consumption is as much a cultural activity and process as it is an economic one (Lee 2000:xiii). In Arjun Appadurai’s book The Social Life of Things we find the following statement on use-value as seen by Georg Simmel:

“Value, for Simmel, is never an inherent property of objects but is a judgment made about them by subjects”.

(Appadurai 1987:3)

This statement is important since it provides a good platform on which to view the actions and the happenings of social networking sites as connected to consumer culture. Emphasizing the importance of the cultural dimension of consumption we find in the studies made by Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood an advancement of this argument in their view that “goods in all cultures function first and foremost as concrete manifestations of the social practices and rituals of their users” where goods make
“visible and stable the categories of culture” (Douglas & Isherwood 1979:59). It is however through the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu that we find a more detailed treatment of consumer culture. Consumption, Bourdieu contends, is motivated first and foremost by the need for social groupings or “class fractions” to achieve status or “distinction” (ibid). Distinction is an important concept in this study since it aids us in our treatment of the user/producer nature implicit in Web 2.0. Goods on social networks, whether they be user-generated content or internet material will present groups (i.e., of users or producers) with “the multiple possibilities to exercise their cultural skills, competences, and knowledge of the particular field in question” (in Lee 2000: xv). I would argue that social networking sites like Facebook are the perfect platform (playground) for such an activity. Through the “art” of knowing what to consume and more importantly in what manner groups are able, according to Bourdieu, to objectify their status and social standing in the eyes of others (Bourdieu 1984:208).

What we need to keep in mind is that Facebook is a business driven by capitalistic incentives that makes use of the prosumers archiving of everyday life and interests. In order to understand how people behave in social networking sites such as Facebook we need to acknowledge these circumstances and look at how “changes in the form of the commodity point to the increasingly active role that the consumer is often expected to take.” (Thrift 2005: 7).
Part 3: The Networked Self in Everyday Life

"It would be far easier to understand the physical, hardwired, connections of CMC [Computer Mediated Communication] than to understand the symbolic connections that emerge from interaction. Much of our energy has been directed toward understanding the speed and volume with which computers can be used as communication tools. Conspicuously absent is an understanding of how computers are used as tools for connection and community."

(Jones 1998:5)

I remember being rather confused by the initial ‘home page’\(^8\) that I was presented with when I first logged in to my Facebook account. I initially thought that these were personal messages aimed at me but after reading some of them I understood that most of them where directed to someone else but available for everyone to see. This made me realize that my own postings and probably my activities would be displayed in the same manner which felt a bit scary at the time. I observed that much of the “news” was at most incidental or trivial where it seemed that the postings were aimed more at maintaining relations than anything else. In observing these news updates gathered from the postings made by my friends I realized how globalized it was. My friends in Puerto Rico, Germany or France where all displayed together. Even though Puerto Rico was in another time zone those friends postings looked recent but had many times been posted several hours before. This also included posts made by friends living in Sweden; postings that could have been posted several hours before but seemed at the beginning to be recent for me; where one might be able to get a response at any time of the day or night. I realized that, what we follow are life stories on Facebook. Like a TV show we are presented with the stories of our friends if they choose to tell them or not, since what they say or don’t say communicates their activities as users of this medium. Their struggles, accomplishments, and opinions are broadcasted for all of us to see and partake in, if we wish.

---

\(^8\) When logged into Facebook, the first page users see is called ‘home’
What we are observing on social networking sites like Facebook are according to *Scientific American Mind* contributor David DiSalvo “ready made venues for people to test their social skills without the looming embarrassment of failing in the flesh”. According to DiSalvo an important aspect made possible through these “venues” is the possibility of self-presentation (2010:52). These “ready made venues” are paramount for the success of a social networking site since they extend the possibilities for self reflexivity. But there is a caveat to these “ready made venues” as tools for self reflexivity which presents itself in the design of the media itself. Facebook has built into their site elements in its interface that will include limited “choices” and functions that facilitate the gathering of valuable user data. All these data on lifestyle choices, taste preferences, consumer needs and so forth are then used by Facebook to direct their advertisements.

Fogg argues that computer mediated media in itself is persuasive since it provides a means of ”making target behavior easier to do” allowing people to “explore cause-and-effect relationships” and “rehearse a behavior” (2003:25). Apart from providing sensory information in the form of audio and video, computer mediated media in general also function as symbolic media in its use of symbols to convey information (e.g., text, graphics, charts, and icons) (ibid:25). Not only is this information often

---

9 Image retrieved from an “image search” on http://google.com, retrieved 2010-05-14
10 This includes any device that makes use of a graphical user interface such as in mobile devices
intertwined with sensory information but it is also infused with meta information in the way it is organized and presented. Meta information that in the case of Facebook encourages users to interact with each other in order to inform them of users consumer preferences and lifestyle.

Q: What do you think is the equivalent to a social capital on Facebook?
A: I think it is the amount of thumbs up, wait that’s digg[.com] I mean, you know what I mean, like feedback.
Q: That feedback, if it is a kind of social capital, is it important for you?
A: I don’t care about them but I’ve seen people [facebookers] remove things they have put up because they didn’t get any response.
Q: Is that normal, I mean does that happen a lot, that people take them back?
A: I don’t know, I’ve seen it happen sometimes. I guess its individual.
Q: Would you do it?
A: Haha! My status updates are the best. You’re the one that never updates.
Q: Ok, ok, haha. So it’s really a status thing?
A: I don’t know. Maybe. So did I answer your question?
Q: Yes. Thank you.

Facebook users are usually aware of this condition but they are, nevertheless, willing to “put up” with these conditions as long as there is some kind of authenticity in their engagements with the media. Since they are, as Wesch would argue “starving for something real and authentic and only get hungrier as the advertising machine keeps feeding them more and more fake authenticity which they quickly see right through” (Wesch 2008:13). This hunger for authenticity has somewhat been intensified by “a rhetoric of involvement” such as the one presented by Web 2.0 in that the “art” of knowing what to consume presented in Bourdieu’s concept of ´distinction´ has shifted with the “changes in the form of the commodity” stated by Thrift earlier.

Q: You seem to like [a famous artist] a lot. Those things you post are those excerpts or quotes from [the famous artist]?
A: Yeah, but my [other facebooker] from [another country] adds the music. I do the animation, so it is not only the material of [the famous artist].
Q: Does [the famous artist] know you’re doing this?
A: No, maybe. Could be. But I haven’t heard anything from [the famous artist].
Taking into account how the user has become both a consumer and a producer (i.e., a prosumer) we find that the new challenge has become to successfully re use an object in an attempt of showing of one’s skills at re-presentation or re-contextualization.

Implicit in this notion is the act of aligning ones self to objects one feel an attachment to, or that coincide with ones image of identity that one attempts to control through the management of the impressions one makes on others. This requires an examination of the implications of one’s owns actions in an act of self-referencing or reflexivity. The process of reflexivity, this ability for the self to be reflexive has much to do with the managing of our self image, our concept of self, and our sense of self-efficacy. As Anthony Giddens defines reflexivity it is seen as,

"…[the] defining characteristic of all human action. All human beings routinely ‘keep in touch’ with the grounds of what they do as an integral element of doing it."

(Giddens 1991: 35)

**Networking Ourselves into Being**

The old rules about what we are allowed, or supposed to do and be at each life stage have been torn up. To a large degree, we make our own futures now, which is both a new freedom and a new pressure.

(Editorial comment, *Psychologies magazine*[^11], November 2005)

In a private party I attended with four guests including myself it all of a sudden felt as there were at least twenty more of us in the room. One of the guests had logged into his account and people where now looking at each other’s Facebook pages and network of friends online. In doing so all of us could take part in each Facebook users ´mini cosmos´ of friends, photos, recent trips, postings and news wall. Their life stories unfolded together with their families and friends photos and names, their preferences and interests. The networked persona of that person was presented to us and we could choose to evaluate his or her assembling or networking skills in our minds “had that person been successful in linking together material for his/her presentation, was it coherent with how

[^11]: Hachette Filipacchi UK Ltd
the person was in real life or not?” More importantly “is this someone somebody I want to network with?”

What seems to be the safest and most efficient way to peruse a vast amount of possible lifestyles, trends and materials that fit our image of what we would like to be seems without doubt to be through the Internet. How subjects are part of material worlds and how they understand and make use of objects are both important concerns (Wesch 2007:13). All the things that we like on social networking sites such as Facebook are fully interlinked, so we may express our identity through the tagging of these items which permits people to look at each other’s interests and find similar identities that may inform them in shaping their own expression of identity. (ibid :13).

Q: Has Facebook had any impact on the way you live your life (has it improved your social life, night life, hobbies, life view, better decision making...)?
A: Not for me but for others. It has given many people a way of instead of meeting others to keep their friendship they use Facebook. They believe they are connected to a person via Facebook or the Internet but they don't understand that it can be the wrong way. I mean how do you know it really is like that?
Q: So you mean that the person is being fooled?
A: Yes. The person makes all this things to be liked on Facebook, like a good profile picture and cool things in background. But your real friends should not care about that only. They should want to meet you or talk to you in flesh (you say like that?)

Miller and Slater see the Internet as a way for self realization or finding oneself through what they call the dynamics of ´Expansive Realization´, which is the attempt of realizing ones aspired identity through the use of the Internet (Miller &Slater 2000:11). In this process of finding oneself I believe that we are engaging in an assembling of one’s networked self through the interaction with objects and actors where, as Bruno Latour would call it, both human and non-human ‘actants’ are brought forward through their relationality as nodes in networks of meaning (Latour 2005). Further, I believe that the networked self is being assembled through what Miller and Slater call “a series of ´alignments´ or ´elective affinities´” between our Internet use and what we believe we are supposed to be (Miller & Slater 2000:3). In echoing this view Rheingold believes that:
“The new medium will be in some way a conduit for and reflection of our cultural codes, our social subconscious, our images of who “we” might be, just as previous media have been”

(Rheingold 2000:xxvi)

I would argue that people act as translators or re-assemblers through their use of cyber content, where their identity and their way of presenting the media works to de-virtualize, make it more concrete, more palpable, tactile and cemented. I would argue that we need to include both the medium and its settings together with other people’s comments and responses to fully understand how and why these alignments are being made.

Q: What do you think about Facebook?
A: Thank God for Facebook! I love it!
Q: Why is that? Any particular reason?
A: Cause if I’m bored or don’t know what to do I always get suggestions from my friends and groups. I have a life!
Q: What do you mean?
A: You know. You get invitations to events and they are from your friends and groups so you know that you don’t have to go alone. And many times it is exactly what you wanted. Life is so boring without it. But maybe I’m a Facebook addict.
Q: Do you go to all these events?
A: No. But at least I know that I have the option, that somebody wants me to go.

George Herbert Meads (1934) the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ that form a person together with his idea of ‘the generalized other’ are important terms to consider when looking at the networked self since the social meanings ascribed to the self (the ‘I’) online and its assembled identity (the ‘Me’) is not separate from the ‘generalized other’; the attitude of the larger community. One example of this can be seen in the Confucian model of the self as a wavelike model where the ‘I’ is defined by ones relationships but is not ‘pinned down’ since “there are many different kinds and circles of relationship and thus the boundaries of my identity are quite ambiguous and contextual”(Zohar 1997:110).

Q: What are your views on the Internet as of today, observations you have made?
A: Hm, well I don’t know. I don’t really think about the Internet like that…seems old fashion to ask like that. It’s an important thing in life. To find everything is nice, not having to look for it in the telefonkatalog (yellow pages) is nice. And I connect a lot through my iPhone that is practical.
Q: Ok, so you like being able to find things. But what do think about being found yourself, I mean that people can find you on the Internet.
A: That’s ok with me. I google myself from time to time and I don’t really have anything super sensitive on Facebook.

These very same qualities are what characterize the Internet where things are networked, made into ‘bite size’ or user-friendly’ content that permits for fast presentations of our tastes and interests (i.e., lifestyle) and easy sharing without any greater amount of time or energy being invested. The only pressure for us becomes to efficiently make use of all these “possibilities”, to concretize them, to gather them into a whole that isn’t too disfigured and communicates all those things we believe that we are. Interesting is to find out whether this behavior is manifested in our everyday life offline, where our skills at networking ourselves or interlinking and tagging things has become a cultural approach that we make use of in our daily life offline. Ultimately, what are the effects of such a cultural practice that views things as characterized by the Internet as linkable, instantaneous and multiple?

**Interconnecting the Symbolic Community**

When I followed happenings or life stories unfolding on Facebook I found myself being able to choose whether to participate or not, like or dislike or share linked material related to these accounts. I felt as if I was being in control of what I wanted to engage in, almost voyeuristically at times. I always learned from the happenings since they were being answered by the other members, turning us the viewers into experts on the issue at hand. With that notion I quickly understood the value of being networked. I was part of a network that permits us to equip ourselves with a way of dealing with life with and through others. Its usefulness reverberated offline since many members are real life friends there was a purpose in being informed on issues that concerned them, on issues that may very well become issues for me in the future. This possibility of bringing forth and discussing issues related to lifestyle and life in general is what we seek in society, in the social. In the case of Facebook we put our lives (or certain parts of it) on display, but often to a select few, our friends and family (if they have been added on Facebook).
Facebook becomes a tool or a means of bringing into attention one’s ones problems, ones issues, ones expectations before an audience.

Q: You told me about [a facebooker] that started posting status updates again, like much more than previously, what is strange with that you think?  
A: I just think [the facebooker] is sad or stressed since that [incident] happened.  
Q: How do you mean?  
A: I bet [the facebooker] is seeking comfort, like stability in the friends.  
Q: Is that something you usually see when something happens in a person’s life?  
A: Yes. Many of my [facebooker] friends do that.

Miller and Slater in their observation of behaviors related to Internet chat use on Trinidad point out that the sharing of “intimacies, problems, perspectives and values” contribute to the feeling that you really ‘are there’ for one another as a “persistent and ethical other”. (Miller & Slater 2000:66). Echoing a similar observation Rheingold describes how the virtual community felt as an “authentic community” because it was grounded in his everyday physical world (Rheingold 2000:xvi). Where virtual communities [as a form of cyberspace] become social aggregations when people invest sufficient human feeling in their discourse as to form personal relationships in cyberspace (ibid :xx).

Q: Is it ok to remove someone on Facebook?  
A: I don’t dare. I only remove people I have never met. I mean if you meet later [offline] that would be so embarrassing! It would be such a, what do you say like dishonest thing to be dissad (Swedish slang for ´removed´, ´shunned´) like that. I would get sad.  
Q: So you have never done it?  
A: Yes I have, but that was like an ex. Usually that’s the only reason.  
Q: Has anyone removed you?  
A: Yeah. But that is ok. I know why they did it and that’s alright, it is ok when I know why.

Weber considers these social aggregations to be a form of ´social relationship´ which he employs “to denote the behavior of a plurality of actors insofar as, in its meaningful content, the action of each takes account of that of the others and is oriented in these terms” (Weber in Freund 1968:26). Weber stresses that for behavior to be considered in terms of being a social relation it needs to be a meaningful symbolic interaction between individuals where “action is ´social´ insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the
behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course” (ibid:4). Martin Dodge and Rob Kitchin describe the same assumption in the following way:

“Although we can use the medium of cyberspace to play with our identity, our online personae are grounded in overall experiences and memories. An illustration of this experiential continuum is the extent to which cyberspace explicitly draws on material socio-spatial relations and geographic metaphors to create new spatialities and a ‘sense of place’”

(Dodge & Kitchin 2001:52)

Q: So what were you saying about extreme [facebookers]? What is your view on this again?
A: As I said before, I have seen [facebookers] reveal how they feel like every couple of minutes! I’ve seen postings between [facebookers] where they have sent messages to each other, and they live together!

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton employ a theory on the importance of a ´symbolic environment´ for building such a social relationship where “the building of community” is seen as equivalent to the building of one’s home or safe haven in “which one can develop, maintain and change one’s identity” and where ”one can cultivate one’s goals without fear of ostracism or ridicule (1981:144). In this sense it could be that social networking sites like Facebook attract people since they provide people with a feeling that they are in control of their self presentation (Wesch 2007:12). 

Social Media and the Presentation of Self

“While social interaction requires little conscious effort, there are complex processes continually at play. People must process a situation, read the contextual cues, present their internal sense of self in a meaningful way, adjust their presentation depending on others’ reactions, and constantly negotiate what is socially acceptable. In all interactions, identity, performance, context and regulation are constantly operating and interacting.”

(boyd 2001:30)

Howard Rheingold describes his own introduction to a virtual community as finding himself being both audience, performer, and scriptwriter along with his companions, in an ongoing improvisation (Rheingold 2000:xvi). Using Goffmans metaphor of theatrical performance to describe the ways in which we present ourselves to others is a good way
of understanding interactions being made on these sites. Each time a user posts to a forum or chat room, he conducts a performance. According to Goffman, when an individual enters into the presence of others these people will attempt to find information on this person or bring forth information that they already posses about the individual (Goffman 1959:1). In an online setting I believe the bringing forth of information has been greatly simplified since it is networked and already present on Facebook in most cases. Goffman sees the performed self as an image rather than as a solid entity; the body of the performer provides a peg on which something manufactured in collaboration with others is hung for some time (Goffman 1959:252). In our presentations of ourselves we make use of our ability to reflect and consider who we are in relation to others and the settings in which we present ourselves. Echoing this notion Giddens argues that,

"actors not only monitor continuously the flow of their activities and expect others to do the same for their own; they also routinely monitor aspects, social and physical, of the contexts in which they move."

(Giddens 1984: 5)

**Q:** So when you post stuff on their [facebookers] profiles do you think about any particular way to do it, you have a style?

**A:** It depends, if I post something for my [closest facebooker] I don’t say much, [the facebooker] knows me and gets what I say. Others I just link my stuff to, like from my webpage plus add the text from that page.

**Q:** Why not do the same, use the webpage link for everyone?

**A:** Don’t know really. Maybe my friends get tired of my nagging, haha!

**Q:** So you spare them a lot of reading?

**A:** Yes, or no. It’s more personal I think. I want them to see it is for them.

When using/creating content on these social networking sites we also associate ourselves with the meanings embedded in the content (or linked content) and bring it into attention according to the possibilities presented by Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor. For the online performance to be successful according to Goffman, the performer must adhere to the community’s vocabulary and shared set of values. In this case being those set of values presented by the Web 2.0 notion of a rhetoric of involvement and democratization.
These activities that we engage in with one another on social networking sites such as Facebook can be seen as an exchange of values, ideas and impressions through self-presentation and self-management making use of Web 2.0 technologies and concepts. Being as such, when a person interacts and socializes through an environment such as Web 2.0 much of that activity of creation/consumption will be characterized by a ‘re-presentation’ of one’s self that is highly influenced by the Web 2.0 medium in itself.

Q: What are your typical activities on Facebook?
A: Mostly adding friends.
Q: Is that the only thing you do, you don’t post anything?
A: No. Ok sometimes, but not so much.
Q: So why do you have Facebook, what do you do with all your friends?
A: To be honest. Most of it is to show off I think. I get this many friends and I am sooo special, you know what I mean? That’s why I have it I think. Bad, yes I know, but yeah that’s it.
Q: Why is it bad you think?
A: It’s embarrassing to admit but I’m sure it is about the attention. I am somebody since I have all these connections.

What Tim O’Reilly in his definition of Web 2.0 calls the ‘wisdom of the crowds’ is what can be seen as determining the value of the content that is being presented on social media (2005: online). The manner in which we present ourselves on social media, the impression management we aim towards will, as Goffman pointed out, be dependent on the community’s vocabulary and shared set of values. As such, the ultimate goal for the social networking site user will be to make a successful impression or performance that leads to the further interconnecting of oneself with others, what could ultimately be seen as the realization of one’s networked self.
Part 4: Networking as a Form of Life

Why should anyone care about this study one might ask, particularly as it concerns itself with everyday life and the mundane practice of presenting oneself, even if it’s through the Internet? My response would be to ask the person to open his or her Gmail, Facebook or any other Internet site for interpersonal communication, review their list of contacts and then ask themselves the following: How many of these people do I actually meet in real life on a day to day basis? The answer will of course vary but just by realizing that many of these contacts are reachable through the Internet demonstrates my point.

Being *Facebookable* implies the very same thing. In making something presentable or particular for a certain media we are making them accessible to others whether or not we ascribe to any rules set by the media in question. By viewing technology as “the knowledge, techniques and tools that allow us to shape the material culture of society” as stated by Kendall this study set out to observe how new technologies permit people to “transform resources into usable forms” and acquire “the knowledge and skills required to use what is developed.”

By presenting the reader with a theoretical framework based on the perspective of material culture I have set out to treat self making as related to some of the main concepts of material culture; as the production, distribution and use of various products in an environment characterized by collaboration, openness and user creation. My purpose for this has been to look upon activities being made online as examples of a consumer culture where meaning making is dependent upon the particular relationship between its people and the material goods presented by the medium in use.

I have found that social media in its role as a tool for interconnecting oneself into a networkable being permits people to create and interact more openly and participatory but may also alter their lives by conveying Web 2.0 notions grounded in neoliberal ideology and ad friendly formatting (i.e., bite size and networkable) that determine their behavior and expectations both online and offline. These properties not only shape users engagement with social media but also their views on how to interconnect and present oneself.
How the Internet and its new technologies give rise to new possibilities for re-interpreting notions of space and time, the self and its presentation, and interpersonal communication have proved paramount for this inquiry. Because of this technological shift we are experiencing new ways to be human as interconnectable or networked where we see ourselves and others as connected to the world around us, as part of a greater whole.

What we find in the networked self is the symbolic interactionist notion of the “I” driven by a biological need to connect, as a means of survival, where the “generalized other” incorporated into the “me” part of the self is what defines the character of a networked self. Making use of Erving Goffman’s (1959) idea of impression management I have suggested that it is possible to understand the networked self as a reflexive self much like in everyday offline behavior. My concern has been with if the impression management we develop in social media are “brought back” into our offline behavior. I have attempted to demonstrate how Facebook interactions and activities are embedded within offline praxis and life and vice versa and how they become influenced by Web 2.0 notions of re-use and re-presentation.

One of the main implicit concerns has revolved around the idea that our online expressions of empowerment, aspiration, and idealization of our self could very well become common preoccupations in everyday life. What this implies has hopefully occupied the readers mind throughout the previous chapters since the whole purpose of this study has been to answer that very same question – what does being networkable imply on the level of the self and in our everyday life? One possible answer could be that we are triggered by an expanding concept of what it means to be human that impels us to rediscover one another, showing us all the ways in which we are interconnected (Wesch 2007:16).

Finally, what this study has attempted to demonstrate is how an essential human need for socializing is manifesting itself through people’s use of social media and how this medium makes it possible for people to view their place and part in the world through the interconnecting of themselves to other networks of people and objects in order to both discover and realize their networked self.
References


Antoniou, Grigoris & Van Harmelen, Frank. 2004. A Semantic Web Primer, Massachusetts Institute of Technology


Beer, David & Burrows, Roger. 2007. “Sociology and, of and in Web 2.0: Some Initial Considerations” Sociological Research Online, Volume 12, Issue 5 University of York; York St John University.


