

Which Web 2.0? Facebook, MySpace and why context matters

Charlene Croft

Atlantic Centre for the Study of the Information Society (MSVU)

**To be presented at “Towards a Social Science of Web 2.0” Conference at the
University of York, UK, September 5-6, 2007**

1. Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) are a key feature of the participation architecture of Web 2.0 and an element of the broader concept of the virtual community as a whole. The first “official” social networking site emerged in 1995¹ and since then has exploded in popularity, particularly among youth and those who have been using the Internet to communicate since the early stages of the Internet (Boyd in press; Lenhart and Madden 2007).

It is a commonly held belief that all SNSs provide the same types of services and have the same general purposes for the user. However contextual differences, both technological and social, exist among SNS platforms. These differences can lead to assumptions of privacy and trust and, in turn, will attract different users and facilitate different types of social interactions. Which Web 2.0 platforms a user will choose comes down to 1) an important distinction towards the purposes of individual use and 2) trust in the other community members specifically and the networking platform in general.

That contextual difference exists among SNSs, and is profound enough to warrant differentiation, is demonstrated with a comparison of the two leading social networking sites online today, Facebook and MySpace. This paper proposes that the contextual differences which exist between Facebook and MySpace are primarily due to the technical specifications of each site. Differences in profile pages lead to differences in identity representation which in turn lead to differences in the way people both perceive and use the sites. Use of these sites is reinforced by the types of social relations these platforms encourage and support, whether these are bonding types of relationships as is the case on Facebook, or bridging types of relationships, as is the case on MySpace.

This paper will be a comparison of these two leading social networking sites using quantitative and qualitative data collected from a small sample of older users of the sites. Additionally, analysis will be complemented by observations made through my own personal use of both sites. Comparisons will be made in terms of each site’s technical specification, the perceptions of users regarding their own use of the sites, and the types of social relations that occur on each. From this, it will be argued that the context of online interaction and community influences how users negotiate their selves and their online social relations.

¹ The first official social networking site is reported to be Classmates.com which went online in 1995 (Boyd 2006).

2. Theoretical and Research Foundations

Today, there should be little doubt that the Internet is a technological application with powerful networking capabilities. For better or worse, the Internet is changing the way we communicate with, and relate to one another on a daily basis.

The term virtual community has been commonly and broadly used to describe any network of interpersonal relationships that occur in a virtual setting (see Hagel and Armstrong 1997; Jones and Rafaeli 2000; Rhinegold 1993). More recently the term has been employed to conceptualize the types of networks and websites that have emerged from the participation architecture of Web 2.0 where these “communities” are bounded in specific, formalized and (usually) privately owned virtual spaces.

While there are a number of theoretical virtual community models (see Akkinen 2005 for an overview of these models), it is perhaps more useful to operationalize types of virtual communities in terms of the types of software that powers them for purposes of clarity. An emergent grassroots discourse classifies the types of social media software into: social networking sites, wikis, blogs, video and pod casting, messageboards, listservs, and collaborative tagging systems (Mayfield 2007). Each of these categories represents bundles of communities of individuals using the software towards their own individual networking and identity needs.

The overall supporting features behind the hype of computer mediated communication and the rise of the unbounded virtual community are: 1) the vast and asynchronous network linkages ICTs can support (Blanchard and Horan 2000; Looker and Thiessen 2007; Wellman, Quan Haase, Witte, and Hampton 2001; Wilson and Peterson 2002) 2) the ability to anonymously or publicly interact and contribute to public discourse (Chan, Bhandar, Oh, and Chan 2004; Dale and Naylor 2005; Kennedy 2006) and 3) the shift from one-to-one to many-to-many information dissemination (Dale and Naylor 2005; Looker and Thiessen 2007; Wellman, Quan Haase, Witte, and Hampton 2001).

It is thought that online social relations can either be bridging or bonding types; where bonding relationships strengthen existing ties of “thick trust” within networks and bridging relationships connects people with “dissimilar others” (Conrad 2007; Looker and Thiessen 2007; Thiessen and Looker 2007). As social capital researchers have noted, bonding social relationships are used for “getting by” and bridging social relationships for “getting ahead” (Conrad 2007; Looker and Thiessen 2007; Thiessen and Looker 2007). In either case, trust is necessary for the establishing and maintaining relationships which have been facilitated by the Internet in general and social networking sites in particular. This is not only in terms of trust in other, sometimes anonymous² user, but also in trusting the platforms themselves.

Uslaner (2000) pins any contextual and effectual differences in virtual spaces to the broader concept of “trust” among people and networks. He states that the Internet neither

² Anonymity being a feature for those who are traditionally excluded from public discourse or discriminated against due to their physical appearance (gender, ethnicity etc)

destroys nor creates trust, “trust reflects an optimistic world view and belief that others share our fundamental values... going online does not make people either more or less trusting, though trust shapes how people interact with one another” (2000: 62).

It has been indicated that the levels of trust and reciprocity in online contexts will largely be dependent on the virtual community where the interaction takes place, where those which have grounding in physical reality can strengthen “real-world” ties between community members (Brignall 2005; Quan Haase and Wellman 2004; Wellman et al.2001). Underlying this perspective is the observation that “internet use is not a uniform activity” (Wellman et al., 2001:450); how and where the individual chooses to interact in a virtual settings will ultimately influence the effects of that interaction on an individual and collective level (Boase and Wellman 2006; Kennedy 2006; Robinson 2007). As different social networking sites offer a range of services and activities we can conclude that not all social networking sites will have the same effects on identity and interpersonal relationships.

Social networking sites are perhaps the most popular type of social media software today. SNSs can be topic or interest specific (such as deviantart.com and couchsurfing.com) or they can have a more general appeal (such as Facebook and MySpace). Currently MySpace and Facebook are the two leading social networking sites in terms of traffic, membership and media attention. At the most basic level, social networking sites are software applications designed to facilitate the networking of individuals and groups. Boyd (2007a) identified profiles, friends’ lists and comments (or testimonials) as the three standard features of SNSs. While most SNS research and popular media portrayals suggests that platforms like MySpace and Facebook are merely virtual hang-outs for teenagers engaging social relations with each other (Boyd 2007a; Boyd in press; Lenhart and Madden 2007), recent demographic information on SNS users indicates that more than half are over the age of 25 (Lipsman 2006)

In general, users become “members” of SNSs by setting up a profile page with basic personal information. At the very least, members must provide an email address and a screen name to participate. Beyond that, the level of personal information disclosed is user-determined and can be revealed through text, graphics, audio and video, links, quizzes and surveys (Boyd 2007b). While there are a number of limitations to the translation of identity into a two dimensional context, there are also many liberating aspects in re-creating your self into code. Gender, race, appearance, and personal history, elements of the self which can create barriers in face-to-face interaction, can all be minimized on a site like MySpace; especially if you only befriend people who have never met you in a real-life context (Kennedy, 2006; Robinson, 2007).

Profiles are linked together on the user’s contact or friends list. Friends’ lists are also user-determined and negotiated through the practice of friend requesting, where users send electronic requests to one another, asking if they can be on one another’s lists. The user who is receiving the request is the ultimate arbitrator of who gets on their own friends’ list. The comment feature is often located on the user’s profile and is a designated space for friends to leave messages or graphics or links for the user.

People represent themselves online in a variety of ways. From their avatar to the “tone of voice” they display with their choice in font. Embedding code in a profile page allows the user to expand and play with their self, creatively expressing and expanding identity through these simple elements of text, colour, design and graphics.

However, presentation is only one aspect of online identity. In an analysis of personal web pages, Walker (2000) explored how people represent themselves in an online context. She noted that the interpretation of someone else’s identity on a personal webpage (read profile page) depends on the predisposition of the viewer, “Because the creation of a page is a voluntary act, the presence of the page causes readers to assume that they are justified in making conjectures about the identity of the author” (118).

In MySpace, not all profiles are attached to “real people”. Boyd (2006b) identifies the development of fake profiles, or profiles which were attached to an idea rather than an identity. Fake profiles, however, have their own sort of value in that they can facilitate connections between like-minded people (Boyd, 2006b). This is particularly valuable for those who use MySpace to explore and sample music. As Boyd (in press) notes, “Music is the cultural glue among youth”. Not only could MySpace users listen to and download their own favorite musicians, they could use those musicians’ profiles as a portal to check out new music which was similarly associated with their favorite bands (Boyd, 2006b).

The popularity of SNSs, particularly among youth, has brought many issues of online privacy and safety to the forefront. On the one hand, sites like Facebook and MySpace are mediated public spaces, “environments where people can gather publicly through mediating technology” (Boyd 2007b). Users have the option of making their profile a private space where only their friends are allowed to view their profile and the other aspects of the particular site (photos, videos, blogs etc.). However, most users “live by ‘security through obscurity’ where they assume that as long as no one cares about them, no one will come knocking” (Boyd, 2007b). Privacy becomes a concern when unwanted people or organizations gain access to profile information that the user never intended them to access. As Boyd (2006) states, “Privacy is not simply about the state of an inanimate object or set of bytes; it is about the sense of vulnerability that an individual experiences. When people feel exposed or invaded, there’s a privacy issue.”

While people *say* that privacy is a large concern for users of SNSs (Acquisti and Gross 2006; Dwyer 2007), research indicates that most users of these sites are unaware of how their personal information is accessed and used, particularly with Facebook (Acquisti and Gross, 2006). Further, Dwyer (2007) found that while MySpace users could change their privacy settings few made an effort to do so. It was suggested that using a multitude of online communication platforms and employing pseudonyms made users “less vigilant” about privacy (Dwyer 2007).

3. Methods and data

This analysis will be a descriptive comparison of Facebook and Myspace based on data collected through my own observations and experiences with both sites. My research approach is best thought of as interdisciplinary, using a variety of methodologies and frameworks from cultural anthropology, sociology, philosophy and media studies. This analysis should be taken to be a critical interpretation of a community to which I am well acquainted as a participant. It is an insider account of a little public corner of the Internet.

When I ventured into my first SNS, I did not enter with my researcher hat on. I was using Myspace for my own personal social networking and identity needs. I started blogging in Myspace shortly after I joined and from there began to develop intellectual and interest-based relationships with other members. However, being one who can recognize a social phenomenon when I see one, in the summer of 2006 I began to ask my own “friends” about their use of MySpace on my blog. In early 2007 my social networking needs were expanding, so I joined The Facebook in an effort to connect with some of my real-life friends who refused to join MySpace. It did not take long to discover that The Facebook was a very different social networking site than Myspace, not only in terms of its technical specifications, but also in terms of my own purposes for each platform's use.

I developed a survey³ using software provided by freeonlinesurveys.com and deployed it from both my Facebook and Myspace profiles. I also placed the link in a local newsgroups which I participate (hfx.general), a sociology message-board where I maintained a profile (sociopranos.com) and my own Wordpress blog. The survey was 50 questions long, with both open and closed ended questions. There were 6 sections in total: a section on demographic information, a section on general virtual community participation, a section on Facebook, a section on Myspace, a section intended for users of both Facebook and Myspace, and a final section on cultural values and beliefs. Respondents gave their informed consent, and were notified that I would be potentially using the results in papers, blogs and other writings. Respondents remained anonymous and cookies were implemented to ensure that only one survey was completed per IP address.

In total 77 people responded to the survey, 46 maintained a profile on Facebook and 32 on MySpace. Some respondents did not use either platform, and 18 used both Facebook and MySpace. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the sample characteristics in total and for Facebook and MySpace users separately.

³ Due to my inclination towards quantitative analysis and my passion for survey design, I am more inclined to demonstrate my interpretation using statistics. However, my interpretation is largely based on a qualitative epistemology rather than statistics first. From that, this understanding is largely due to the feedback and reinforcement of ideas that I receive from people regarding the statements that I make about the patterns I have observed. Granted these interpretations are gleaned from observations of the subgroup of people who reinforce that “truth”, it is still an accurate interpretation of the social relations within that group of users. This is what makes it reflexive research.

Table 1 – Survey sample characteristics

		Facebook Users N=46	MySpace Users N=32	Total N=77
Country	Canada	72%	50%	65%
	USA	20%	28%	18%
	UK	2%	19%	9%
	Taiwan	4%	0%	3%
	Switzerland	-	-	1%
	South Korea	2%	-	1%
Gender	Male	44%	47%	49%
	Female	56%	53%	51%
Mean Age		33 years old	30 years old	33 years old
Age Range		(18-62 years)	(18-56 years)	(17-62 years)
Length of Time Using SNS	Less than 1 month	24%	0%	-
	1-6 months	54%	13%	-
	6 months -1 year	13%	29%	-
	More than 1 year	9%	58%	-

There were notable differences between users of Facebook and MySpace in regards to their geographic location and the length of time using the platforms. In this sample, Facebook was used more than MySpace by Canadian respondents, however for American and UK respondents, MySpace was more popular. Further, respondents with a MySpace profile had been using MySpace longer than respondents with a Facebook profile. The majority of Facebook respondents indicated that they had been using the site for less than six months (78%), whereas 87% of MySpace respondents indicated that they had been using the platform for over 6 months, with 58% of those being part of that community for over a year.

Interviews were also performed via Facebook, MySpace, and Gmail with 16 volunteer respondents from Canada, America, and the UK. Informed consent was given to republish the content of the emails in papers, blogs and other writings and anonymity, on behalf of the researcher, was ensured.⁴ The average age of interviewee was 33 years old, 9 were male and 7 were female.

4. Findings

4.1 Profile/Identity Differences

The first, most obvious difference when one has logged onto each site, is based on the profile appearance. Where the Facebook profile is uniform with the same colours and layout⁵, the Myspace profile allows users to edit the profile by adding html tags. Profiles on both sites display an avatar, which is a graphical icon that demarks the user, and also

⁴ Respondents were made aware that because the interviews would be taking place via third party applications, interaction would be subject to the terms of Facebook/MySpace privacy policies.

⁵ With the exception of the ability to add different third party applications (i.e. mood apps, quizzes, videos etc) to the profile. Though the placement of these applications on the profile is malleable, the appearance of the application is standard.

show relevant user information such as location, sexual preference, job, and education. Facebook, however, allows for more detailed information regarding jobs and education. Both profiles also have sections dedicated to user favorites, such as favorite music and movies. The basic MySpace profile allows the user to play a song of their choice⁶ whereas the Facebook profile does not unless third-party applications are added. Where Facebook has a single type of profile, MySpace has specific profiles available for musicians, comedians and authors.

Both sites give the user default space to store photos. By default space, I mean that nothing has to be done to the profile to allow for uploading and sharing photos. MySpace gives default space to store video as well, but uploading and sharing video on Facebook requires the addition of a third-party application. The MySpace profile also comes with its own blog. The MySpace blog has a separate website address than the profile page. Users can subscribe to other user's blog and create preferred lists and blog rings as well. Facebook does not have a blog feature; rather it has something called "Notes" which is different than a blog because it does not allow for easy html embedding. In addition to the blog, the MySpace profile has a comment space, where users can leave messages or embed html tags of graphics or video for one another. The comment feature on Facebook is called "The Wall". The Wall is for text only messages, if users want their profile to handle graphics or videos they have to install third-party applications. Both sites have email and instant messaging options.

Another profile-related difference between the two sites was based on the perceptions of profile privacy. Overall more privacy is assumed on Facebook than MySpace, even though Facebook prohibits the use of pseudonyms. Of those surveyed that used of both platforms 68% believed that Facebook was more private than MySpace. It is possible that this belief is derived from the appearance of Facebook having more privacy settings simply because the Facebook profile is more complex and can potentially reveal more personal information. In both cases, users have complete control of their profile privacy, in terms of determining who can view different aspects of their profile however MySpace users appear to be less aware of this function.

Other users' identities are questioned more on MySpace than Facebook as well because Facebook does not allow users sign up with apparent pseudonyms. This led to an overall perception that "real-people" used Facebook, but on MySpace, the other user's identity was not as transparent. "Alex" (30, Male, New York) said of MySpace, "It's a house of mirrors," and went onto say, "Somehow Facebook seems more intimate - for better or worse - but I feel like there is a lot more communication through Facebook. After a while with MySpace, I started to wonder what it was all about - seemed like a space purely for self promotion... Facebook feels more private, which makes me less censorious of what I post - it offers more privacy, in turn, people end up sharing more of themselves, ironically..."

"George" (38, Male, Virginia) indicated that the real-life anchor of Facebook made it his preference between the two sites, "I prefer Facebook. I like it because the names you see

⁶ The song must have been uploaded to MySpace by the artist.

are the names of real people, and that they're sorted alphabetically so when you're looking for a specific someone that you haven't seen in a long while you can easily browse your friends friend list and find people you know.”

One respondent, who is a burlesque performer, made use of the anonymity that MySpace provides. She indicated that although she used Facebook more, the detachment of MySpace from her “real-world” made her feel more comfortable in revealing her performance identity. “I use Facebook more. I prefer it. It's come to the point where I use Facebook for the 'real' me and MySpace is more for my burlesque alter-ego... I post burlesque pictures on MySpace and have other burlesque performers and troupes as friends. I do have real friends on both sites, but on Facebook I try to keep it just as people I actually know. The two do intersect, because “KL” is a big part of me, however I try to keep my burlesque side off of Facebook. I have family on Facebook and they don't know about my burlesque life. I'd prefer to keep it that way so as to avoid having to justify my choices. I realize that they will find out eventually... But I don't have to make it easy for them.”

So while the main profile differences are driven by the technical specifications of each of the sites, these differences allow the user to negotiate how they represent themselves in their profiles. While both platforms allow the user to reveal the same types of information about themselves, users tend to consider the platform itself in that negotiation.

4.2 Friends

Both Facebook and MySpace operate on the notion of connecting friends. However, the differences in how people represent themselves will lead to differences in the types of friends that are made on each site. In fact, not a single Facebook user indicated that their friends list was mostly made up of people that they did not know compared to 26% of MySpace users who indicated that most of their friends were people that they had never met face-to-face. Of that 26%, 13% indicated that those people were musicians and 13% indicated that they were people that they had met on MySpace. On Facebook, when you add a new friend you are given the option of noting how you know that person. While there is an option for “I don't know this person” you are not actually allowed to select it.

MySpace does not have such restrictions on friending practices. It is not uncommon on MySpace to get a friend request from strangers and for that initial contact to turn into an important connection in the user's life. One survey respondent noted, “I met a few people through MySpace that turned into "real life" friendships, including my closest pal.” Of MySpace users, 13% indicated that *most* of the contacts on their friends list were people that they had met on MySpace.

The average number of friends for those using Facebook was 90, whereas for MySpace users it was 347. Number of friends appeared to be more meaningful for users on Facebook than on MySpace, perhaps due to the assumptions of false identity on MySpace. When asked about the importance of “how many” friends one has, “Adrian”

(35, Male, Saskatchewan) offered an interesting interpretation of the potential value of “friends”, “We're so used to thinking about capital as a physical unit (coins, bills, bank card), capital finds different expressions in cyberspace. Or maybe, since capital is already a cypher, abstract cyberspace objects run the risk of becoming capital. Because those aren't really your friends - they're markers. Also, when you consider that information gathering for advertising has become a huge revenue model for the web, it's not surprising that social networks would encourage the friends-as-capital notion. I imagine that viral marketers are having a field day with Facebook.”

“Roger” (30, Male, Quebec) relates the same idea to basic notions of schoolyard popularity, “You can compete socially with an objective and empirical foundation to back you up - how many friends do you have? And of course subjectively as well - I have cool friends, look there they are, everyone thinks they are cool, and this makes me cooler by association. Whereas before, such things went unspoken (which they still are, for the most part) but now they are documented.”

Most people interviewed indicated that they would only actually interact with a small group of people within their friends list:

Charlene: Do you find that Facebook has allowed you to build stronger relationships with people? Like if you weren't on Facebook do you think you would still be as connected to your friends lives?

Adrian It's hard for me to say with any degree of accuracy whether Facebook has strengthened relationships with people, if only because it's a relatively recent site, and I still consider myself a Facebook novice. I mean, I've only got 200 friends. What kind of lame-o noob am I? I can definitely say that Facebook has enabled me to keep a closer eye on my friends' lives, and it's brought old friends back into my life. Most of it, though, is useless information to me, a highly personalized form of spam about other people. Sometimes it feels more like voyeurism or surveillance than genuine interaction, which is a truly important distinction. Simply knowing someone's movements does not substitute for actual interaction, and that's what Facebook encourages. It may be accurate to say that Facebook is designed to take all the hard work out of friendship.

On the other hand, the interactions I've experienced on Facebook have been a great joy. I've had conversations with people I never thought I'd ever see again. Out of the two hundred friends, though, I only keep with a handful. The rest are shiny objects that, crowlike, I've collected.

I'm wondering about our notions of being 'connected' on Facebook, since connection online is no guarantee of physical friendship or intimacy as we generally understand it. I feel it turns us more into surveillance nodes.

Charlene: Why do you think it's important to have a friend's list full of others that you don't really interact with?

Adrian: Maybe because it makes you *feel* connected, even if the connection is pretty much the equivalent of occasionally peering through their window and going away again. It's interesting to watch the paths of other people's lives, especially ones from your past. I said in my last post that Facebook takes the effort out of friendship, but it's probably better to say that it takes the hard work out of casual social relations.

On Facebook, this feeling of connectedness has much to do with connection to the user's past; 77% of Facebook users agreed with the statement "If it wasn't for Facebook I probably wouldn't interact with old friends". Further, 30% of Facebook users indicated that their main reason for signing up to the site was to get back into contact with old friends, compared to only 8% of MySpace users who indicated the same. Also 39% indicated that their Facebook friends list was *mostly* comprised of old friends or classmates or co-workers compared to 19% of MySpace users. Tables 2 and 3 show the summary of these survey questions.

Table 2 – Q. What is the main reason you signed up for...

	Facebook	MySpace
To get in contact with old friends	30%	17%
To keep in contact with current friends	41%	27%
To make new friends	2%	13%
To promote my art/music/writing	0%	7%
Everybody else was doing it	26%	37%

Table 3 – Q. Who are *most* of your friends on...

	Facebook	MySpace
Old friends/coworkers/classmates	39%	19%
Current friends/coworkers/classmates	46%	36%
Family	9%	3%
People that I met on Facebook/MySpace	0%	13%
Musicians	0%	26%
Other	6%	3%

So the notion of "friends" appeared to have different meanings for users of Facebook and MySpace. This was reflected in the types of friends people made on each site, and the ways that they became friends; friends could connect (and reconnect) on Facebook, and friends could be made on MySpace.

4.3 - User Preferences and Activities

Of the users who maintained profiles on both MySpace and Facebook, an overwhelming majority indicated that they preferred Facebook. This was seen at both the quantitative and qualitative levels. More people said that if they had to give up one of the two, it would be MySpace that they gave up (72%); more people said that Facebook was more fun (82%) and more interactive (77%) than MySpace; and more people said that Facebook was easier to use (78%). Table 4 shows some of the comparisons users of both sites made between them.

Regarding the technical differences of the two sites, Roger said, "If I look at both with a critical eye, and try to assess which does a better job overall, I would give Facebook the nod for clarity of design and function. MySpace is a gigantic mess design wise and functionality wise." Alex reiterates this sentiment, "I also like the interface of Facebook more, and the way it functions. It feels like it is well taken care of, whereas MySpace feels neglected by its administrators, and doesn't quite know what to do with itself. The ads also seem more blaring on MySpace." "Fred" (20, Male, Ohio) said, "I prefer

Facebook and spend much more time on it. I think it's mostly the format that I like better...easier to communicate, faster to navigate without all the excess pictures and movies and music (although with all the new applications it's getting more like MySpace every day). I still maintain both accounts because there are friends on each that aren't on the other. They aren't arranged in any specific way.....I guess I'm just too lazy to get rid of one.”

Table 4 – Q. Which site is best for the following items?

	Facebook	MySpace
Which is easier to use	78%	22%
Which do you log onto the most?	83%	17%
Which would you recommend to your friends	82%	18%
If you had to give up one of the two, which would it be?	28%	72%
Which has had more real-life effects	78%	22%
Which allows you to be more creative	33%	67%
Which takes up more of your online time?	83%	17%
Which is safer?	75%	25%
Which is more private?	61%	39%
Which is more fun?	82%	18%
Which is more interactive?	77%	23%

Users had different reasons for signing up to each of the platforms. However, many users of both also indicated that they used the two platforms for different types of activities; where Facebook was mainly used to keep in contact with existing friends, MySpace was used for music and blogs; 26% of MySpace users indicated that most of the people on their friends list were musicians. Roger noted, “I prefer neither as I use them for different things. MySpace is excellent for bands and sharing music, which is my primary MySpace motivation. Facebook is excellent for keeping in touch with friends and stalking old ones.” “Elizabeth” (33, New Brunswick) also said, “I use MySpace for blogs and music, and Facebook for mail/finding old friends.” Adrian also indicated that he used Myspace for music related reasons, “When I do use MySpace, it's in a professional capacity. I often have to keep in touch with musicians as part of my job, and it's much easier to find and communicate with them on MySpace.”

“Rhonda” (31, F, Northern Ireland) preferred MySpace stating, “MySpace is the King. Facebook I don't understand yet. I'm on Bebo, too... but I can't post links or pictures on Facebook (or Bebo, for that matter- they both frustrate me-) whereas, MySpace, I know what I'm doing, and I have "friends" from Real Life; The Past; England, USA, and Canada... but it's the blogs, that hook me, on MySpace. There's comments, and mail, on all the sites- and my email addresses, too, of course- and IMing- it's great! - But blogs? Pure class. I don't need TV any more. I've got blogs to read. And these are high class blogs. The people I've discovered on Myspace are geniuses. (Genuii??)”

Given that MySpace is a popular place for artists of all types to promote their work, and the malleability of the user profile, it is understandable that it was viewed as a place which enhanced creativity; 67% of users of both sites indicated that MySpace allowed them to be more creative. Further, 45% of MySpace users indicated that contacts made through MySpace had benefited them creatively, compared to 29% of Facebook users.

When asked about other types of social benefits of each of the platforms, more users of MySpace also indicated that contacts they had made on MySpace have benefited them educationally; 32% compared to 20% of Facebook users. Neither platform was associated with direct professional benefits. More users of both platforms indicated that their use of Facebook had more real-life effects (78%) and 49% of Facebook users indicated that Facebook has benefited their social life.

5. Discussion

As demonstrated in this analysis, some users of Facebook and MySpace differ in the ways they both use and understand the two different SNSs. This is largely due to the technical differences between the two sites in the way they operate. Table 5 shows the summary of differences identified between the two sites in this analysis.

Table 5 – Summary of Comparisons

	Facebook	MySpace
Profile Differences	Standard profile	Personalized profile
	Real names only	Pseudonyms allowed
	Privacy assumed	Privacy not assumed
	Personal profiles only	Profiles for musicians, comedians, and authors
Networking Differences	Networks of existing friends	Networks of existing and potential new friends
	Personal contacts	Commercial and celebrity contacts
	Networks facilitated through people	Networks facilitated through people and ideas/interests
	Facilitates bonding relationships between members	Facilitates bridging relationships between members
Activity Differences	Few music options	Music sharing and exploring
	Few blog options	Blogging
	Communication activities	Cultural production

Where Facebook operates based on grounding in reality, MySpace offers a more abstracted social networking experience. MySpace is more used and perceived as a form of entertainment, or a stage for performance; whereas Facebook serves as a communication tool best.

Overall, respondents preferred Facebook over MySpace; they used it more and preferred its technical specifications and design. But beyond preference, Facebook appeared to matter more in people’s lives. Perhaps this is because Facebook is a place where users can neatly “collect” all of their family and personal friends, from the past and present. In this, the Facebook version of the self does not have to be deliberately constructed; rather it emerges as the user forges more connections between Facebook and the real-world. While friend collecting is also a practice that has been identified on other SNSs, and MySpace in particular (Boyd, 2006b), the main difference on Facebook is that the friends collected are connected to users’ daily lives, rather than “fakesters, celebrities and commercial profiles” (Boyd, 2006b). Because of this, number of friends and types of

associations can be perceived as more meaningful on Facebook, so it becomes the high-school popularity contest, quantified.

Due to its grounding in reality, Facebook appears to facilitate bonding types of social relations; relations among people who already share similar social connections through contexts that are rooted to users' known realities. These contexts include geographic (place-based) and institutional (school, work, family) realities. Trust is implicit in these relations because they are largely occurring between people who have already met, or are in some way familiar to one another. There is little questioning of the authenticity of the other's identity because the other is already known to you in some other real-life context. Facebook is a tool best used to maintain friendships, or at least it leaves the user feeling more connected to their friends.

Social relations on Myspace are perhaps more complex than on Facebook due to the lack of implicit real-world anchors revealed through users' profiles and/or friends' list. There appears to be more identity negotiation on the site in terms of the user's representation of their own identity, and the user's trust in other members' identities. Because some users report that MySpace is a place for their "alter-ego" to exist, it may be that social relations are viewed as more abstract.

MySpace socializing appears to be based more on psychological factors, rather than social ones. Trust on MySpace needs to be negotiated among friends, who are often perfect strangers or potentially fictional "characters" (Dwyer, 2006). Because of this, social relations are viewed as more superficial and of less consequence, even though more MySpace users perceived real world benefits from their MySpace interactions than Facebook users. This may, however, be simply a matter of time, as most respondents of either or both sites had been using MySpace longer than Facebook.

Overall, social relations that are formed on Myspace, that is connections between 'real' users, are best thought of as the bridging type; members use the platform to reach out to strangers or "those which are in sufficiently different circumstances" than their own (Conrad 2007). Although there will be some type of bonding agent in these relationships (such as appreciation of similar music), these relationships are occurring between "unnatural acquaintances" (Conrad, 2007), in that they only exist *because of* MySpace.

The MySpace network is a more egocentric based one (Boyd 2006b) where users can not only define their self through the quantity of associations (number of friends), but also the quality of associations (interests, music, concepts). Relationships that are formed on Myspace which do not have real-life grounding are those which exist purely for their own sake and are based on representation and interpretation of the self alone. The Myspace platform appears to have more cultural value than social networking value. It is a means of staying connected to, and the creation of, user-created culture; music, visual arts and writing in the form of blogs.

Conclusion

The purpose of this analysis was to compare two social networking platforms (Facebook and Myspace) and show that not all Web 2.0 platforms are homogenous “communities” to be approached with the same theoretical assumptions. While further research with larger more random samples is necessary to expand each of these findings, in the differences highlighted here, Facebook is best approached to explore the nature of online social relations which are complemented by real-life anchors, whereas Myspace is best approached to explore online social relations between strangers, and identity play, which have been facilitated by the platform itself. This analysis also presents MySpace as a community which is rich with cultural production, and not simply in regards to “youth culture” but the user-created culture of creativity as a whole.

Also recommended for further investigation are the direct and indirect effects each of these platforms has on social relations in the real-life context. While very few direct benefits were identified by respondents from either community, my informal communication with members, as well as my own personal experience with the sites, leads me to believe that questions regarding benefits must be better defined to understand the true interplay of the real and the virtual. Indirect benefits appear to be largely psychological, or related to cultural production on Myspace whereas on Facebook, they appear to be related to a feeling of connectedness of the self to past and present social situations.

People who use both sites may derive different value from each of the platforms, depending on their own personal needs for use. Given the number of people who use one or both of these platforms to facilitate social relationships, there is an assumption that there must be some form of value to them in people’s lives whether or not users themselves understand what that value is.

References:

(Note: page references not available for material accessed from e-journals)

- Acquisti, Alessandro and Ralph Gross. 2006. "Imagined Communities Awareness, Information Sharing, and Privacy on Facebook." in *7th Workshop on Privacy Enhancing Technologies* Ottawa.
- Akkinen, Miia. 2005. "Conceptual Foundations of Online Communities." Helsinki School of Economics, Helsinki.
- Blanchard, Anita and Tom Horan. 2000. "Virtual Communities and Social Capital." in *Social Dimensions of Information Technology: Issues for the New Millennium*, edited by G. D. Garson. New York: Idea Group Publishing.
- Boase, Jeffrey and Barry Wellman. 2006. "Personal Relationships: On and Off the Internet." in *Handbook of Personal Relations*, edited by D. Perlman and A. L. Vangelisti. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Boyd, Danah. 2006b. "Friends, Friendster and Top 8: Writing community into being on social network sites." *First Monday* 11.
- . 2007a. "Socializing digitally." *Vodafone Receiver Magazine* The Home, June.
- . 2007b. "Social Network Sites: Public, Private, or What?" Knowledge Tree 13, retrieved July 31, 2007 from http://kt.flexiblelearning.net.au/tkt2007/?page_id=28.
- . in press. "Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life." in *MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Learning, Identity Volume*, edited by D. Buckingham. retrieved July 30, 2007 <http://www.danah.org/papers/WhyYouthHeart.pdf>; MacArthur Foundation.
- Brignall, Thomas Wells. 2005. "The Impact of Internet Communications on Social Interaction." *Sociological Spectrum* 25:335-348.
- Chan, Calvin, Mamata Bhandar, Lin-Bin Oh, and Hock-Chuan Chan. 2004. "Recognition and Participation in a Virtual Community." in *37th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. Hawaii.
- Conrad, David. 2007. "Defining Social Capital." http://www.sociology.org/content/2007/_conrad_social_capital.pdf.
- Dale, Ann and Ted Naylor. 2005. "Dialogue and Public Space: An Exploration of Radio and Information Communication Technologies." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 34:203-226.
- Dwyer, Catherine. 2007. "Digital Relationships in the "MySpace" Generation: Results from a Qualitative Study." in *40th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. Hawaii.
- Hagel, J. and A. Armstrong. 1997. *Net Gain: Expanding the Markets through Virtual Communities*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Jones, Q. and S. Rafaeli. 2000. "Time to Split, Virtually: "Discourse Architecture" and "Community Building" Create Vibrant Virtual Publics." *Electronic Markets* 10:214-223.
- Kennedy, Helen. 2006. "Beyond anonymity, or future directions for internet identity research." *New Media and Society* 8:859-876.
- Lenhart, Amanda and Mary Madden. 2007. "Social Networking Websites and Teens: An Overview." Pew Internet & American Life Project, retrieved July

- 30, 2007
http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_SNS_Data_Memo_Jan_2007.pdf.
- Lipsman, Andrew. 2006. "More than Half of MySpace Visitors are Now Age 35 or Older, as the Site's Demographic Composition Continues to Shift." comScore Networks, retrieved July 30, 2007
<http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=1019>.
- Looker, E.D. and Victor Thiessen. 2007. "Introduction." in *Bridging and Bonding Across Digital Divides: Equity and Information and Communication Technology*, edited by E. D. Looker. Waterloo Wilfred Laurier Press (forthcoming).
- Mayfield, A. 2007. "What is Social Media? An e-book from Spannerworks " Spannerworks An ICrossing Company,
http://www.spannerworks.com/fileadmin/uploads/eBooks/What_is_Social_Media.pdf.
- Quan Haase, Anabel and Barry Wellman. 2004. "How does the Internet Affect Social Capital." in *Social Capital and Information Technology*, edited by M. Huysman and V. Wulf. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Rhinegold, Howard. 1993. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading the Electronic Frontier*. Mass: Addison Wesley.
- Robinson, Laura. 2007. "The cyberself: the self-ing project goes online, symbolic interaction in the digital age." *New Media and Society* 9:93-110.
- Thiessen, Victor and E.D. Looker. 2007. "Bridging and Bonding Social Capital: Computer and internet use among youth in relation to their cultural identities." in *Bridging and Bonding Across Digital Divides: Equity and Information and Communication Technology*, edited by E. D. Looker. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press (forthcoming).
- Uslaner, Eric M. 2000. "Social Capital and the Net." *Communications of the ACM* 43:60-64.
- Wellman, Barry, Anabel Quan Haase, James Witte, and Keith Hampton. 2001. "Does the Internet Increase, Decrease, or Supplement Social Capital?: Social Networks, Participation, and Community Commitment." *American Behavioral Scientist* 45:436-455.
- Wilson, Samuel M. and Leighton C. Peterson. 2002. "The Anthropology of Online Communities." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31:449-467.