

## **What Do People Do Online? Implications For the Future of Media**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the activities performed by users of social networking sites. Social networking sites rely on content created by the millions of users who develop profiles, communicate with friends, meet people, participate in communities, post comments to Web logs, and create multimedia. This project analyzes the usage of and activities performed within social networking sites to better understand their value to users. A survey was administered to users of social networking sites, and it revealed that users performed a wide variety of social networking activities. And, while some of the activities were influenced by demographic factors like gender and age, more variability was described by experience with social networking, measured by frequency of login and years using social networking.

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Social networking sites are “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). Social networking, considered a recent phenomenon, possesses characteristics that have been available since the early Internet. Message boards, discussion groups, email, chat, forums, recommendations and user comments have long been a regular part of Internet culture. Social networks are simply more elaborate ways to help people make connections and perform these activities using technologies known commonly as Web 2.0.

### **Introduction**

The Internet has been both praised (Katz and Aspden, 1997) and criticized (Kraut, et al., 1998) for its ability to create community and simulate face-to-face interaction. It is now used by three quarters of a billion people worldwide and over 153 million in the U.S (comScore, Press

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Release, March 6, 2007). Many social networking sites have quickly become part of the fabric of Internet culture and daily life, receiving millions of visitors per month. Facebook, started in 2004, initially invited users associated with a university community to interact with friends and engage relationships. It is now open to all users. MySpace, started in 2003, whose early inhabitants were bands and musical groups seeking a way to share their music and announce engagements, has grown to one of the most popular spaces on the Web. It allows users to set up a Web presence and to communicate with those in their network of friends. YouTube, started in 2005, is a recent phenomenon allowing a space for uploading videos and for user discussion of multimedia content. The number of total unique visitors to each site is detailed below, illustrating the widespread popularity of these services.

### **Total Unique Visitors June 2007 (millions)**

MySpace	114
Facebook	52
YouTube	43
Friendster	25
Bebo	18

(comScore Press Releases, July 15, 2007 & July 31, 2007)

Social networking is a global phenomenon. Although Friendster has lost popularity to MySpace and Facebook in the U.S., eighty-eight percent of Friendster's users reside in the Asia/Pacific region. Sixty-three percent of Bebo's users reside in Europe. (comScore Press Release, July 31, 2007)

While each of these sites has a unique business model and demographics, the characteristic of user-generated content is common across all social networking spaces and is

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critical to their popularity and success. What do users do online and what factors are useful in predicting that usage?

Understanding the ways that users are contributing content on social networks holds particular importance to the world of journalism. "Social Networks, codified or not, provide a mechanism for prioritization and filtering of information, including news" (Ó hAnluain, 2005). The concept of citizen journalism is a likely area for these concepts to be explored, but with major news sites, including *USA Today*, implementing social networking characteristics, such as rating stories and creating discussion groups around coverage, the ideas around social networking become more relevant in regard to regular engagement with news media. No longer simply a passing trend for young Internet users, social networking has grown to mainstream usage and acceptance. But, until recently, most newspapers have done little in terms of using these features to more formally engage readers. "I know of very few major U.S. newspaper sites that allow readers to comment on articles. Most channel interaction is through 'Letter to the Editor' from posts or e-mail addresses," (Ó hAnluain, 2005). Providing tools for social networking is one thing. The biggest challenge comes in encouraging reader participation. News consumers receive news from a plethora of online sources, including aggregators like Yahoo and Google, social media sites like Digg.com, and a host of Web logs. Craigslist is social network that is supplanting classified ads previously performed by the news business. "Social networks are going to continue to evolve, and all the media need to pay attention to it," according to Neil Budde, Yahoo's Director of News (Ó hAnluain, 2005).

These issues gain a broader relevance as Google's OpenSocial (<http://code.google.com/apis/opensocial/>) concept comes to fruition. OpenSocial is a set of common application programming interfaces that allow any site on the Web to take advantage of

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social features. Users will be able to network across sites, taking their contacts with them and creating content that will be automatically published in multiple venues. Social networking appears to provide many opportunities, and shows no signs of disappearing or being relegated as a passing trend.

Newspapers have been considering the social aspects of news for several years. In a *Wired* article (Kahney, 2003), Ralph Terkowitz, vice president of technology at the *Washington Post*, said the paper is interested in exploring new ways of "helping readers to communicate with the paper and each other." Terkowitz mentioned possible features: the paper's news editors might set up discussion groups devoted to world politics, or the arts pages may run virtual book clubs. He also mentioned user-generated classified ads. "There are a number of ways it could be used to reach under-served segments of the newspaper marketplace," he said. "We are very excited about the service and what it could do."

Most recently, the Austin, TX social media company Pluck, that worked *with USA Today* on its Web site's redesign incorporating social features, has contracted to partner with *The Guardian* in the UK to develop social networking applications (Luft, 2008)). News processes are also being influenced by social networking, as reporters can use social networks to perform a variety of activities, from finding sources, to interviewing people, to coming up with story ideas (Rosen, 2007).

## **Review of Literature**

Early scholarly studies of social networking were focused on the number of people engaged in social networking and which sites they were using. A 2005 survey found that 90% of

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undergraduates participated in a social network community, primarily Facebook, MySpace, and Friendster (Stutzman, 2006).

Other studies focused on the activities engaged on social networking sites and motivations for doing so. In ethnographic work on the Friendster online site, Boyd (2004) noted that users had a variety of motivations for using the site, including connecting with old friends, meeting new acquaintances, dating, and furthering professional networks. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2006) studied the extent to which users participating on Facebook engaged their existing social ties or formed new ones, finding that 94% of their respondents were Facebook users and that frequent Facebook users reported higher social capital across all dimensions studied.

According to a Pew Center Study, young people who are savvy with technology, known as “digital natives,” are frequently creating and contributing online content. The study reported that “more than half of American teenagers have created a blog, posted an artistic or written creation online, helped build a website, created an online profile, or uploaded photos and videos to a website” (Rainie, 2006). This trend reflects not only an opportunity, but an expectation on the part of young people to participate in content creation, not to simply consume it.

Network analysis is a popular way to conceive of social networks. Heer and Boyd (2006) developed a system that facilitates exploration and navigation of social networks. They visually and graphically explored node-link connections within social networks. Studying the online social network Facebook, Ellison and Lampe (2007) found social capital benefits associated with certain types of usage. Facebook helped users maintain relationships between offline communities, such as when one graduates from high school or college. Online networking can improve career prospects, something that colleges may want to encourage. Their results report different findings than the early literature on virtual communities in that “they are using the

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online channel less to meet new people than to intensify and solidify relationships that started offline.”

The relevance to communication theory comes in its engagement with traditional theories, made current with new media technologies. The uses and gratifications line of theory has long differentiated between what media did to people and what people do with media (Katz, 1989). Studies in this area seek to understand why people use media, and why they make certain choices about media in their lives. The process is considered active. In 1972 McQuail et al. wrote “media use is most suitably characterized as an interactive process, relating media content, individual needs, perceptions, roles and values and the social context in which a person is situated.” But, the meaning of interactive has changed significantly since this time, when media choice was approached as a process that was actively influenced by a variety of factors. Now, when we speak of using media interactively, we are usually discussing the two-way communication features of social media and the concept of user-generated content.

The emergence of computer-mediated communication has re-energized the application of uses and gratifications theories in studying media. “Uses and gratifications has always provided a cutting-edge theoretical approach in the initial stages of each new mass communications medium: newspapers, radio and television, and now the Internet. Although scientists are likely to continue using traditional tools and typologies to answer questions about media use, we must also be prepared to expand our current theoretical models of uses and gratifications” (Ruggiero, 2000). Several recent studies have engaged uses and gratifications theories in understanding users’ engagement with and creation of online media (Chung & Kim, 2008; Yoo & Robbins, 2008; Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Ferguson, Greer & Reardon, 2007; Li, 2005).



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The Internet has been studied as a community since its inception. Howard Rheingold (1993), in his studies of the early online community The Well, defined virtual community as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace.” The key element of virtual community is the participation of the members in these public discourses.

The Internet, now driven by Web 2.0 technologies that enable collaboration and sharing, has fostered a new age of participation. In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Henry Jenkins (2007) studied the themes of media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence. Driven by digital technologies, Jenkins described a world that is bound not by a particular medium or industry, but one in which consumer and producer are merged, and culture is created by means of sharing and participation. With the Internet as the primary driver, consumers of culture are able to participate in ways that are both sanctioned and non-sanctioned by powerful media industries.

Collaboration is also a concept that is considered in online discourse. Wikipedia, the online collaborative encyclopedia, is one of the best known online collaborations. But, the Web itself is a document that is constantly undergoing change by those who are the contributors. Based on the wisdom of crowds, a concept posited by James Surowiecki, online collaboration consists of the aggregation of collective intelligence, thought to provide better knowledge and decision-making. At the heart of collaboration resides the open source concept, its roots in software development. One of its most notable projects is the operating system Linux, which operates under the conditions of allowing and encouraging multiple developers. Raymond (1997) compared this style of development using the metaphor of bazaar and cathedral. “No quiet,

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reverent cathedral-building here - rather, the Linux community seemed to resemble a great babbling bazaar of differing agendas and approaches out of which a coherent and stable system could seemingly emerge only by a succession of miracles.” Open source is contrasted with propriety development environments in which only those with proper license and authority can modify and implement source code. Benefits of this approach are the inclusion of many and varied voices and agendas, the speed to which development can occur, and policing of the environment by the community itself as opposed to regulatory or governing bodies. Social networking has allowed collaboration to become as relevant to content creation as it has been to software development.

### **Methodology**

A survey was developed to assess users' activities on social networking sites. Since no listing of users of these spaces is readily available, a convenience sample was developed by the researcher's creation of profiles on each of three sites: Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube. These sites were selected based on recent popularity and media speculation about their potential and value. Users were invited to discuss the topic of user-created content and to participate in the survey. Direct email correspondence was also used to engage the researchers' friends, family, colleagues, professional contacts, and current and former students. Users were asked to forward information about the survey to their network of friends and to encourage them to participate. In October 2007, a survey was administered via Survey Monkey, an online survey service. Since the goal of this project was to analyze the activities of users of social networking sites, using an online survey was an efficient way to reach this group.

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Research questions:

1. What percentage of members performs specific activities on social networking sites?
2. How do activities differ based on gender?
3. How do activities differ based on age?
4. How do activities differ based on login frequency?
5. How do activities differ based on years using social networks?
6. How do activities differ based on social network membership?

## Results

A survey was developed to assess trends and attitudes regarding social networking usage. The survey was primarily intended for users of social networking, so a snowball technique was used to generate a wide sample of users. The survey spread very quickly, with users forwarding messages to their network of friends, and encouraging others to participate. Although this technique did not yield a random sample, the breadth of social networking users it engaged was, in and of itself, an interesting experiment in social networking.

The sample yielded 384 respondents, of which 245 (63.5%) were female and 134 (34.7%) were male (5 did not indicate gender). Of the 384 respondents, seven responses were discarded due to insufficiently completing the survey. Fifty-one indicated that they were not currently members of a social network, with three of those indicating that they had never visited a social networking site.

The responses of the remaining 326 who completed the survey and had indicated that they were currently members of at least one social networking site were analyzed and the results are presented below. Of this group 210 were female (64.4%) and 116 were male (35.6%). Just under half of the sample indicated that they were students (44.8%), also indicative of the way that the survey was generated. But, since more than half are not students, this sample provides a

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comparison of the ways that social networking activities differ across age groups. A cross section of ages is also represented, with the majority of the respondents in the 18-24 age range (38%), but also a large number aged 25-34 (36.8%). A small number of teenagers were represented in the 12-17 group (1.2%) and older age groups were represented in the following manner: 35-44 (14.1%), 45-54 (5.8%), 55+ (4%). While this study does not capture the teen demographic on which other studies have focused (Lenhart, et al., December 19, 2007), it does have a strong representation of older users, which is increasing becoming a larger portion of these sites' user bases (comScore Press Release, October 5, 2006).

The survey was completed primarily by those identifying themselves as white/Caucasian (268 respondents, 82.2%). The next group indicated that 6% of respondents were Hispanic, 1.5% were African-American.

Income representations were distributed as follows. The large student demographic explained the low income category.

<10k	27.9%
10-29.9k	19%
30 – 59.9k	30.7%
60-89.9k	10.7%
>100k	11.7%

The majority of respondents were found in the Southwest, the location of the researcher. But, the social networking techniques used to create the sample yielded the following geographic representation, with 50% of respondents outside the Southwest:

Northeast	13.5%
Southeast	16%
Midwest	8%
Southwest	50%
West	3.7%
Outside U.S.	8.6%

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When respondents were asked which social network sites they had visited, YouTube garnered the most attention at 91.1%, with MySpace at 88.3% and Facebook at 80.4%. Twenty-one percent indicated they had visited Friendster and 35% had visited LinkedIn. The high numbers for MySpace and YouTube are indicative of the open nature of these sites. While members can post content, much of the content of these sites is available for the general public. Many bands and other artists use MySpace pages as their primary Web site, and YouTube is generally used to propagate a variety of videos that can be viewed by all.

When asked about membership in social networks, different trends were revealed. Facebook was used by 72.4% of respondents, with MySpace used by 54.3%. Only 27.3% indicated that they were members of YouTube. Membership is required to upload a video and to comment on content on YouTube. Only 3% are currently members of Friendster (indicating their lessened popularity with U.S. users) and 27.3% are members of LinkedIn. This begins to reveal a trend that highlights the difference between passive surfing of social network content and actively engaging as a member of certain sites. 46.3% were members of one social network, with 40.8% indicating membership in two, 8 % with membership in three and 1.8% holding membership in four of the sites we polled. An open ended response was provided for respondents to add additional social networks that were not asked in the survey, several different sites were identified, such as Tribe.net, Last.fm, Flickr, Orkut, and Ning.com, but none emerged as serious competition to the main sites of MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube.

37.8% of the respondents indicated that they were members of both MySpace and Facebook, with 16.8% using only MySpace, 34.7% only Facebook. The trend toward having multiple social networks strengthens the goal of Google's OpenSocial to consolidate social networking activities across the Web and to streamline social networking usage.

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Comparisons between demographic groups were tested for significance using cross tabulations in SPSS with Chi-square analysis. A list of common activities was developed to assess users participation on social networking sites. Activities tested were selected to identify the ways in which users were contributing to online content. Figure 1 shows the activities in which survey respondents had participated, the most popular being uploading photos, commenting on sites, or joining groups or networks.

**Figure 1 – Activities Performed By Respondents**

<b>Activities</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Uploaded photos	271	83.1%
Commented or made a wall post	268	82.2%
Joined a group, network, or channel	259	79.4%
Changed profile layout	207	63.5%
Sent or received an instant message	198	60.7%
Responded to a survey or poll	189	58.0%
Blogged	132	40.5%
Played games	91	27.5%
Uploaded video	85	26.1%
Clicked on an ad	79	24.2%
Purchased something	54	16.6%
Uploaded audio	54	16.6%
Created a survey or poll	51	15.6%
Sold something	32	9.8%

In addition to the specific content items that were listed in the survey, an open-ended question revealed that users also enjoyed adding widgets, searching for friends, marketing products, and participating in online events. One respondent said he/she used social networking to check out the profiles of potential baby-sitters. The uses are wide-ranging and variable.

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In a separate question, respondents were asked to identify one main reason for using social networking. By far, the main reason was to communicate with friends (56.7%). Only 1.5% said their main reason for using social networking was to meet new people. Professional networking was mentioned by 6.4% and “all my friends use it” was mentioned by 5.2%.

Looking at the gender distribution of such activities revealed interesting results. Figure 2 shows that for the majority of the activities performed, there was no difference between males and females. Females were more likely than males to change profile layout, upload photos, and send or receive instant messages.

**Figure 2 Activities by Gender**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Chi-square</b>	<b>P</b>
Changed profile layout	153	54	72.9%	46.6%	22.308	0.000
Uploaded photos	185	86	88.1%	74.1%	10.379	0.001
Sent or received an instant message	135	63	64.3%	54.3%	3.118	0.077
Commented or made a wall post	176	92	83.8%	79.3%	1.034	0.309
Sold something	23	9	11.0%	7.8%	0.861	0.353
Uploaded video	58	27	27.6%	23.3%	0.731	0.392
Blogged	88	44	41.9%	37.9%	0.49	0.484
Purchased something	37	17	17.6%	14.7%	0.475	0.491
Played games	56	35	26.7%	30.2%	0.456	0.499
Joined a group, network, or channel	169	90	80.5%	77.6%	0.382	0.536
Created a survey or poll	34	17	16.2%	14.7%	0.133	0.715
Responded to a survey or poll	123	66	58.6%	56.9%	0.086	0.769
Uploaded audio	34	20	16.2%	17.2%	0.06	0.807
Clicked on an ad	50	29	23.8%	25.0%	0.058	0.810

Figure 3 shows the distribution by age recorded in the survey. Age was responsible for differences in changing profile layout, uploading photos, sending or receiving messages, commenting on sites, joining a group or network, and playing games. Younger users were typically more likely to have performed these activities. But, no differences were found across a variety of activities, including the activities of purchasing or selling something online, blogging, and uploading video or audio.

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**Figure 3 – Activities by Age Group**

Age	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-62	63+	Chi-square	P
Changed profile layout	75.0%	79.8%	58.3%	54.3%	31.6%	36.4%	0.0%	32.881	0.000
Uploaded photos	100.0%	91.9%	80.8%	82.6%	52.6%	72.7%	0.0%	31.432	0.000
Sent or received an instant message	75.0%	74.2%	59.2%	43.5%	31.6%	54.5%	0.0%	25.671	0.000
Commented or made a wall post	100.0%	97.6%	75.0%	73.9%	42.1%	90.9%	50.0%	50.207	0.000
Joined a group, network, or channel	100.0%	91.1%	70.8%	73.9%	73.7%	72.7%	50.0%	19.467	0.003
Played games	25.0%	37.9%	27.5%	13.0%	10.5%	18.2%	0.0%	15.378	0.018
Purchased something	0.0%	19.4%	12.5%	10.9%	31.6%	27.3%	50.0%	9.636	0.141
Blogged	0.0%	45.2%	42.5%	30.4%	36.8%	36.4%	0.0%	7.519	0.275
Uploaded video	0.0%	23.4%	30.8%	30.4%	10.5%	27.3%	0.0%	6.836	0.336
Created a survey or poll	25.0%	12.1%	21.7%	10.9%	10.5%	18.2%	0.0%	6.342	0.386
Clicked on an ad	25.0%	29.0%	22.5%	15.2%	31.6%	18.2%	0.0%	5.207	0.518
Uploaded audio	0.0%	16.1%	18.3%	19.6%	5.3%	18.2%	0.0%	3.556	0.736
Sold something	0.0%	10.5%	10.0%	6.5%	10.5%	18.2%	0.0%	2.165	0.904
Responded to a survey or poll	50.0%	60.5%	56.7%	58.7%	52.6%	54.5%	50.0%	0.847	0.991

Figure 4 shows the distribution of activities by login frequency of user. Frequency of login was associated with significant differences in most activities, including changing profile layout, uploading photos, commenting on sites, joining a group, blogging, uploading video or audio, clicking on an ad, playing games, responding to a survey or sending or receiving instant messages. Significant differences were not found in selling or purchasing online or creating a survey or poll. Obviously, the more frequently one visits social networking sites, the more experience he or she has in performing a wide range of activities and learning about new ones.

**Figure 4 Frequency of Login**

Login Frequency	Never	<1/month	1/month	1/week	2-3/week	4-5/week	1/day	2-3/day	4-5/day	>5/day	Chi-square	P
Changed profile layout	0.0%	21.4%	30.8%	32.3%	62.1%	75.8%	75.6%	79.2%	78.6%	86.7%	57.66	0.000
Uploaded photos	0.0%	21.4%	61.5%	71.0%	89.7%	97.0%	97.6%	94.4%	100.0%	100.0%	111.528	0.000
Commented or made a wall post	0.0%	35.7%	53.8%	54.8%	48.3%	63.6%	70.7%	66.7%	78.6%	80.0%	123.55	0.000
Joined a group, network, or channel	0.0%	21.4%	38.5%	71.0%	89.7%	97.0%	97.6%	97.2%	97.6%	96.7%	32.027	0.000
Blogged	50.0%	50.0%	69.2%	71.0%	82.8%	81.8%	82.9%	90.3%	97.6%	96.7%	24.048	0.004
Uploaded video	0.0%	7.1%	15.4%	12.9%	20.7%	30.3%	29.3%	31.9%	45.2%	46.7%	23.494	0.005
Clicked on an ad	0.0%	7.1%	15.4%	12.9%	17.2%	15.2%	22.0%	16.7%	14.3%	33.3%	23.336	0.005
Uploaded audio	0.0%	21.4%	15.4%	25.8%	27.6%	45.5%	48.8%	45.8%	61.9%	56.7%	23.542	0.005
Played games	0.0%	7.1%	15.4%	12.9%	20.7%	45.5%	19.5%	27.8%	33.3%	50.0%	20.047	0.018
Responded to a survey or poll	0.0%	21.4%	7.7%	9.7%	17.2%	12.1%	24.4%	12.5%	19.0%	26.7%	18.236	0.033
Sent or received an instant message	0.0%	0.0%	38.5%	9.7%	24.1%	18.2%	24.4%	23.6%	42.9%	43.3%	21.574	0.100
Sold something	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%	3.2%	17.2%	39.4%	9.8%	18.1%	26.2%	20.0%	13.104	0.158
Purchased something	0.0%	21.4%	7.7%	9.7%	3.4%	9.1%	7.3%	5.6%	16.7%	23.3%	8.158	0.518
Created a survey or poll	0.0%	50.0%	61.5%	41.9%	62.1%	57.6%	65.9%	63.9%	73.8%	76.7%	7.983	0.536



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Figure 5 depicts another measure of social networking experience, that of years using a social networking site. Significant differences were found in uploading photos, commenting on a site, blogging, creating a survey or poll, clicking on an ad, selling something, playing games, changing profile, joining a group or network, sending or receiving an instant message, responding to a survey or poll, and purchasing something. Significant differences were not found due to years using a social network in the activities of uploading audio or video.

**Figure 5 – Years Using Social Network**

<b>Years Using SN</b>	<b>1-2</b>	<b>3-4</b>	<b>5-7</b>	<b>8-10</b>	<b>11+</b>	<b>Chi-square</b>	<b>P</b>
Uploaded photos	48.5%	72.8%	72.4%	80.0%	66.7%	20.156	0.000
Commented or made a wall post	74.2%	93.0%	93.1%	100.0%	100.0%	34.756	0.000
Blogged	53.0%	63.9%	81.0%	70.0%	100.0%	23.037	0.000
Created a survey or poll	68.2%	94.9%	93.1%	90.0%	100.0%	19.736	0.001
Clicked on an ad	74.2%	90.5%	81.0%	100.0%	100.0%	18.212	0.001
Sold something	16.7%	31.6%	36.2%	40.0%	100.0%	17.434	0.002
Played games	9.1%	19.0%	19.0%	30.0%	66.7%	14.281	0.006
Changed profile layout	22.7%	43.7%	63.8%	60.0%	66.7%	14.231	0.007
Joined a group, network, or channel	21.2%	27.8%	32.8%	30.0%	66.7%	13.02	0.011
Sent or received an instant message	9.1%	13.3%	29.3%	40.0%	66.7%	12.565	0.014
Responded to a survey or poll	18.2%	25.9%	37.9%	0.0%	100.0%	11.108	0.025
Purchased something	13.6%	17.1%	20.7%	30.0%	33.3%	9.608	0.048
Uploaded video	4.5%	9.5%	13.8%	30.0%	66.7%	4.42	0.352
Uploaded audio	50.0%	62.7%	70.7%	90.0%	100.0%	2.694	0.610

Figure 6 depicts activities indicated by membership in the top three U.S. social networks. The social networking categories were not discrete, as users indicated membership in more than one social network, as mentioned above. Due to the origin of the user base of each of these groups, differences in the types of content were expected. But, this analysis shows similar trends in most categories. The largest differences indicated that YouTube members more likely to upload video content, given the video-sharing purpose of the site. YouTube and MySpace users

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were more likely than Facebook users to upload audio content. This is also not unusual, given YouTube's multimedia emphasis and MySpace's early band and music fan inhabitants.

Facebook and YouTube users indicated a greater interest in joining networks or groups, most likely due to the prominence of this feature on each site. MySpace and Facebook users were more likely to have changed their profile, and YouTube users were more likely to play games.

**Figure 6 – Activities by Social Network**

	<b>MySpace</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>YouTube</b>
Commented or made a wall post	87.6%	90.7%	87.6%
Uploaded photos	91.5%	89.8%	86.5%
Uploaded video	32.8%	28.8%	44.9%
Uploaded audio	24.3%	17.4%	24.7%
Joined a group, network, or channel	78.5%	89.8%	84.3%
Responded to a survey or poll	60.5%	61.4%	68.5%
Created a survey or poll	18.6%	16.9%	19.1%
Blogged	48.0%	42.8%	49.4%
Sent or received an instant message	62.7%	65.7%	60.7%
Clicked on an ad	22.6%	25.4%	24.7%
Purchased something	15.3%	18.6%	18.0%
Sold something	11.3%	10.2%	14.6%
Changed profile layout	70.6%	70.8%	66.3%
Played games	31.1%	33.5%	38.2%

## Discussion

This analysis shows a broad range of activities engaged by users of social networking sites. These activities reflect a strong trend in the frequency and variety of content created by online users, and the expectation of participation that these activities are creating. The most frequently mentioned activities across all demographics were uploading photos and making comments or wall posts. Gender predicted differences in only a few activities, with a wider range of activities being driven by age of participant and experience, measured separately by

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frequency of login and years using a social network. As users gained more experience, activities such as blogging, creating surveys or polls, and engaging with varied forms of multimedia become relevant.

At an early stage of the diffusion of this technology, this is an important trend to note. With more experience, across broader age representations, the expectation of participation will continue. And, as more sites implement Web 2.0 technologies, participation will not only be welcomed, it will be expected across the Web, not just on MySpace, Facebook, or sites designated as social networks. Interests of users will ultimately vary, with the content of such participation being predicted by demographic and situational factors. But, the general usage of social networking concepts is expected to increase, rather than decline as Internet users gain more experience with these features.

## **Conclusion**

This is the first phase of a project that delves into activities performed on social networking sites, the motivations of users to create content, and the social capital that is created by doing so. By first understanding the individual activities being performed, one can then analyze reasons for the behaviors and understand how certain demographics or personality traits influence these behaviors. The news industry will be interested in keeping up with these trends in user-generated content. Today's MySpace and Facebook users are gaining the expectation of participation and will expect to engage with media in this way in the future.

The possibilities are endless for a new generation to share, participate, and express themselves. But, we are moving from concerns about a digital divide in terms of access to a participation gap, just as these concerns have been voiced about Internet usage in general.

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Jenkins said, “Now, we need to confront the cultural factors that diminish the likelihood that different groups will participate. Race, class, language differences amplify these inequalities in opportunities for participation” (Jenkins, 2007, p. 258). Future studies should focus on differences in social networking across ethnic and global dimensions. The main limitation of this study was in the way the sample was generated. It did not yield a broad range of ethnic diversity and was primarily U.S. focused. But, the large number of respondents not only yielded a sample that was a strong user base in which to study, but also indicates users’ interest in participating in knowledge creation regarding social networking.

The next phase of this study will analyze users’ attitudes toward generating online content and the motivations they have for doing so. Social networking trends not only create a sense of urgency for news media to adopt these features, but provides an indication of where competitive endeavors might be emerging. At the heart, however, is a user base that remains engaged and interested in participation.

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