Reporting on the Reporters: Facebook and Journalists

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This article addresses results of a pilot study on the use of Facebook by journalists. The goal of the project was to acquire information about how journalists use Facebook and whether the results coincide with expectations. A secondary ethical issue reviewed in this study was whether or not journalists are concerned with maintaining professional distance on a social networking website. Uses and gratifications theory suggested the expectations of journalists are largely met on the social networking site. Social and business issues intertwine, with journalists generally split over ethical concerns. This pilot study introduces the subject and could be used as a foundation for further research.

1 Introduction

People are motivated to get involved in social networking sites for a variety of reasons, and those reasons may be changing as the sites continue to evolve. Journalists are among the many professions that have established group areas on Facebook. This Social Networking Site (SNS) began in 2004 and is now the most popular in history, surpassing MySpace in early 2009. This fact in itself makes it noteworthy, not only for its reach but for its economic impact. Valued at up to 15 billion dollars in 2009, (Holbrook 2009), the SNS has more than tripled in value since, estimated by Goldman Sachs Group Inc. at a worth of 50 billion in January 2011 (Brennan 2011). SharesPost Inc. has since gauged Facebook Inc.'s estimated worth at 82.9 billion (Levy 2011). Facebook is important not only for fostering social connections, but also as a consumer market that is highly desirable to businesses and organizations. Many are already involved at various levels, from advertising to branded group pages. The impact of Facebook is pervasive, entering homes, businesses and organizations worldwide, and reaching widespread demographic groups (Smith 2009). The reach and scope of this SNS may appeal to some journalists, though for others the attraction of Facebook may be simply its ability to connect individuals socially. Regardless of the reason, the fact that journalists are getting involved is important to consider and raises ethical concerns.

New technologies continue to influence the way in which users communicate. Innovations have always presented opportunities and historically, people have welcomed communication breakthroughs. While not in itself a new technology, Facebook has altered the way people communicate. Locating friends from previous periods of life has likely never been easier. Making new friends via communication links happens regularly (Sheldon 2008). Limitations of time and location hold little bearing now, with Facebook users often making acquaintances in countries around

the world. Communication is at the center of Facebook and the site presents myriad opportunities for further research (Casteleyn et al. 2009).

While on the surface it may appear free from controversy, Facebook has not been without its share of troubles. Several companies have banned Facebook during work hours due to concerns over effects on employee productivity and perceived liability susceptibilities (Wilson 2009). Privacy issues have also been an ongoing concern. Information that users desire to remain confidential has at times been compromised (Grimmelmann 2009; Latham, Butzer & Brown 2008). From a legal standpoint, the content of SNSs, which often include private information, fall under the guidelines of electronically stored information (ESI) and have numerous potential ramifications for individuals (Witte 2010). The issue of privacy is a matter of increased importance and remains a controversial subject for Facebook and other SNSs.

The sheer number of Facebook users worldwide speaks to the interest level in this SNS. Connecting individuals from various cultures around the world presents challenges for governments that are not as conducive as the United States to allowing free speech and freedom of expression. Companies and organizations that recognize the marketing power of SNSs are also paying particular attention to Facebook and similar entities. Likewise, researchers are interested in the dynamics and opportunities that the site provides for acquiring information and furthering knowledge. Reaching groups that share various commonalities may be accomplished more easily than in previous eras due to the predilection of Facebook users to join with others of shared interests. Journalists and aspiring media representatives are among those that have established a group on Facebook; in this case, a group that has grown to over 15,000 members (Walters 2011).

This is a pilot study, intending to acquire information that may be expanded upon for a more complete review of the subject. As such, responses were minimal in quantity and may not be reflective of the population of journalists as a whole. Nonetheless, the information does provide a good starting point for additional research, based on the review of existing studies pertinent to the issue and by virtue of the study design. Replicating or expanding the efforts in this study should be readily accomplished and may provide a more complete assessment of the current status of the uses and ethical concerns of journalists currently using Facebook.

2 Summary of Literature

2.1 Introduction

The rapid expansion in use of the Facebook SNS has caught the attention of individuals, businesses and organizations, and various professions. Both for-profit and non-profit organizations are among businesses that are advertising and branding on Facebook, with many providing links from the SNS to their primary websites. Similarly, groups of people with shared interests, sometimes guided by professional matters or affiliation, have embraced Facebook, establishing group

pages that focus on joint concerns. For journalists, the SNS presents ethical issues that many companies have, to this point, refused to address. In the absence of guidance, the concerns in using Facebook may elevate or diminish based on the desires of the individual journalists. Uses and gratifications theory is one method of assessing these and shedding light on this burgeoning issue.

2.2 Facebook

The advent and growth of the Internet has opened opportunities for communication that never existed before. The practice of writing to pen pals in other countries around the world has been popular for decades (Barksdale Watson, & Park 2007), but seems quaint in an era where global communication occurs every day. Yet it was not that long ago that the idea of being able to communicate instantaneously with a friend in a foreign land seemed near impossible. Even a phone call to many countries was not easily accomplished. Now, modern technological advancements like email may seem outdated to some. Instant messaging, video conferencing, cellular phones and the like have advanced the ease of communication to levels never before seen (Katz 2007).

SNSs have also morphed into newer and more user-friendly versions (Tufekci 2008). MySpace dominated the online landscape almost from its beginning in 2003, but has since been surpassed by Facebook, which now boasts more active users (Holbrook 2009; Wakiyama & Kagan 2009). As the websites have developed, the content and characteristics have been shaped by the preferences of users (Smith 2009). Individuals, along with organizations and businesses, are getting involved at varying levels, and this trend is likely to continue.

Historical context. A mere idea from a student initially, Facebook quickly became a phenomenon. While it has officially been in existence for a relatively short amount of time, the social networking website has made quite an impact. The brainchild of Harvard undergrad Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook began in early 2004 as a SNS or "virtual yearbook" designed specifically for the Harvard campus (Christofides, Muise & Desmarais 2009). In fact, students had to have a Harvard.edu email address to be able to access the website (Urista, Dong & Kay 2009). As the popularity of the site grew, Facebook began quickly expanding to other campuses, attracting nearly one million users in less than a year (Holbrook 2009).

In 2005, high school students that were primarily using MySpace for social networking were provided access to Facebook and the SNS continued to expand. It was opened to the general public in 2006 (Urista et al. 2009). In May 2008, Facebook finally surpassed its predecessor with more visitors than MySpace for the first time, and it continues to grow with little sign of stopping (Casteleyn et al. 2009). The SNS reached 250 million active users (participants returning to the site within 30 days) in July 2009 and more than doubled to over 500 million active users within 12 months (Facebook 2011; Holbrook 2009; Wakiyama & Kagan 2009). About half access the site through mobile devices (Facebook 2011).

2.3 Typical use

There are a number of aspects about Facebook that seemingly have mass appeal, particularly to a younger demographic though certainly not exclusive to any age group. At its base level, the SNS allows users to create personal profiles, upload photos of themselves and others, post thoughts or comments to a "Wall" that are available for public viewing, send private emails to Facebook "friends," become members of groups, play games, and much more (Kryder 2010; Sheldon 2008; Tufecki 2008). Privacy settings allow some degree of control over access to personal information, though many have raised concerns over what they consider flaws in the security system (Urista et al. 2009; Wakiyama & Kagan 2009).

Adding friends is a core component of Facebook, and reasons for doing so may vary considerably. While sites such as LinkedIn are considered more business-oriented, Facebook is generally viewed as a site for connecting with and making new friends (Dutta & Fraser 2009). Many of the options are seemingly designed to support that purpose. What constitutes a friend on Facebook is up to personal interpretation, however. Users may request friendships with others or be referred as a possible friend by a third party. The individual then decides whether or not to accept the friend request. Doing so allows that person inclusion into your personal site. Many users number hundreds or even thousands of "cyber friends," though research has suggested that those numbers exceed human abilities to maintain true friendships (Acar 2008; Dutta & Fraser 2009). Some consider those users with large numbers of friends to be disingenuous, seeking popularity through quantity (Christofides et al. 2009).

Others have pointed out that SNSs such as Facebook allow users to control or construct identity (Urista et al. 2009). The profile created on Facebook may be at odds with reality, representing the best aspects of an individual's character while omitting the less flattering details. Much like the approach many take to building a resume, designing a profile may involve constructing a desired identity more than a realistic one. Additionally, online friends of an individual are visible to other friends, leading some researchers to suggest that social connections ("Facebook friends") may be added just to increase one's social credibility (Christofides et al. 2009; Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman & Tong 2008).

Regardless of the intent for using the website, the fact remains that Facebook has allowed users to build community around the world, and the viral nature of the site has contributed to its growth. Users connect to other users and then have access to their network of friends and circle of influence (Holbrook 2009; Sheldon 2008). There is little to suggest that the growth and use of the SNS will slow down anytime soon (Smith 2009). It seems simply too ingrained into the daily lives of users.

2.4 Business considerations

Businesses and organizations have taken note of the interest in SNSs, and many have begun to adapt to the opportunities that Facebook presents. The audience (Facebook users) is huge and many believe that being able to tap into even a

portion of it could result in significant economic gain (Wilson 2009). Engaging with consumers in what is generally considered a friendly environment could enable brand enhancement and increased product exposure (Smith 2009). Treading cautiously may be wise, as little research has been done yet to determine how Facebook users will respond to overt commercial activities (Dutta & Fraser 2009).

Already, however, many businesses have a presence on Facebook. The American Cancer Society, General Motors, Public Broadcasting System (PBS), the New York Times and the Washington Post are among the major organizations deeply embedded in the Facebook culture (Emmett 2009; Neff 2008). Some utilize advertising to remain visible, while others offer branded pages for fans of the group. Becoming a fan of the company allows the Facebook user to access special pages not available to others. The exclusive content may include new items, blogs, photos, games and similar material. Most of the networks (excluding NBC) participate in "Facebook Connect," a project that enables registered users to import their SNS data into the new forum they participate in, and to export material from the network site back into their personal Facebook page (Emmett 2009). This creates a synergy between the forum insiders and the content providers; something the organizations hope increases their connection in the minds of potential viewers. Others are taking notice, as marketing to the Facebook audience remains on the up rise (Wakiyama & Kagan 2009).

This desire to be a player in the social networking market does not come without risks. The possibility to alienate potential consumers must be considered (Dutta & Fraser 2009). Researching the approaches that are effective without being considered intrusive may be a key (Wilson 2009). Discovering what consumers want and then responding appropriately has always been a staple of good business. Doing so tactfully in a SNS such as Facebook, may be imperative. Engaging consumers without violating the friendly environment could be a tightrope to be negotiated, but generating enthusiasm that results in recommendations among friends – a viral spiral – could result in significant gain (Smith 2009; Wilson 2009).

Also worthy of note are concerns over employee interactions with SNSs that some businesses have had. Primary areas of concern to chief information officers (CIOs) included possible productivity losses among staff participating in online activity, the leaking of confidential information, deceptive practices such as malware and phishing, and lackadaisical attitudes toward updating and guarding passwords. Concerns such as these have prompted the US Department of Homeland Security to prevent employees from viewing any Facebook pages at work. That includes the department's own page on Facebook (Wilson 2009).

2.5 Journalists

Journalists are using Facebook for typical social networking reasons but also for purposes that are beneficial to their work. Ethical concerns arise when social acquaintances mix with the stories reporters are often charged to investigate. Definitive responses to ethical concerns are not yet evident, with most companies failing to take strong stances. The opinions of journalists on the subject are also widespread.

Basic tenants of journalism require reporters to be as objective as possible in their reviews and summations, and to limit conflicts of interests wherever possible. Social network connections offer opportunities for journalists, but also present the possibility of ethical dilemmas. While not directly violating any of the core elements of the Code of Ethics from the Society of Professional Journalists, concerns over appearances and potential conflicts of interests could be just as difficult to circumvent ("Code of Ethics" 2009).

Possible benefits. Like many in the general public, journalists are turning to Facebook and other SNSs to acquire information. For reporters, researching for details and background information is often the most time-consuming element in formulating a story. Getting the facts straight before going to print is critically important for preserving the integrity of a reputable publication (Spencer 2007). As technologies change, the methods used to acquire information alter accordingly (Emmett 2009). The popularity of Wikipedia and the near evaporation of traditional bound encyclopedias support this claim. Likewise, the drop in newspaper subscriptions and readership attests to the fact that people today simply turn to different and newer sources to acquire information as they become available (Hau 2008).

Many journalists now use Facebook and other SNSs to assist them in their story research and investigation. Background information is often readily available on these types of sites (Urista et al. 2009). This is particularly useful when researching non-public figures, about which little is often known. Reporter Meg Jones of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel said, "Before you had the Internet, it was hard to find out a lot of the details about them. And now, that's provided for us" (Spencer 2007). Unless privacy settings prohibit public viewing, a visit to Facebook or MySpace may quickly provide a wealth of information about the individual under study, including their likes and dislikes, hobbies, marital status, and much more (Tufekci 2008).

The social network that is the core of Facebook creates an intriguing allure for the journalist as well. Often when researching a story, connections supplied by others lead the reporter to an important source. Since Facebook is all about creating and maintaining connections, the likelihood that someone within a journalist's group of cyber friends may be able to connect a reporter to a source, would seem to be great. Ethan Bear, the director of business development at Facebook, said, "The Internet has gone through a shift from people who get information to people who get to each other" (Emmett 2009, p. 41). For the journalist, getting to the other is often a difficult task. The informal communicative nature of Facebook may make it easier to reach a source; either the Facebook friend or someone they know (Mendoza 2008). This relationship between journalists and audience members may in the near future be much closer than ever before (Wilson 2008).

Media outlets are taking different approaches to Facebook and other social network opportunities. Some have largely ignored offering any directives to journalists (Mendoza 2008), while others encourage their reporters to actively engage in social network opportunities (Emmett 2008). News sites typically include many opportunities for interaction with viewers or listeners. Blogs, opinion polls, and

links to company pages on Facebook are fairly common. Most discussion of new media and SNSs, however, seems to focus on ethical concerns (Mendoza 2008).

Ethical considerations. The personal nature of Facebook may have professional implications and ethical considerations do exist. While the ability to acquire background information by visiting SNSs or to secure access to story sources through cyber-friends may be considered a benefit, some are concerned that becoming an online friend may hinder proper professional distance. In theory, maintaining an emotional separation enables the journalistic professional to not allow personal concerns to influence how a story is handled. This is similar to professional distance issues that SNSs have presented within the legal, judicial, and medical professions as well (Bennett 2009; Dixon 2010; Luo 2009). Some theorize that journalists involved in social networking leave themselves susceptible to these types of dilemmas. Even if the reporter responds appropriately, simply the appearance of a conflict of interest may be an issue.

Craig Whitney and Ari Shapiro are among those that disagree. Whitney, standards editor at the New York Times considers being a friend on Facebook as "essentially meaningless," implying that the term does not adequately express the reality of a true friend relationship (Mendoza 2008, p. 13). Likewise, Shapiro, justice correspondent for National Public Radio (NPR), asserts that such interactions are merely the modern equivalent of established communication between reporters and their sources (Mendoza 2008, p. 12). At this time, as the case study in the following section indicates, most journalists seem to be in agreement.

Authenticity of information acquired from SNSs is also a concern. While friends or sources may not intentionally mislead, the information provided by the Facebook user could be inaccurate (Wilson 2008). As discussed earlier, identity construction is sometimes a part of user profiles and all information reviewed should be subject to traditional reporting standards of accuracy (Friedman 2008). Spencer (2007, p. 38) offered seven tips that could prove invaluable for journalists to keep in mind as they research SNSs for information on individuals or events:

1. Never use MySpace or Facebook data without double-checking its authenticity.
2. E-mail MySpace or Facebook "friends" to verify information or arrange interviews. Always identify yourself up front as a reporter.
3. Remember: The information people post on a social networking page is self-selected. It could be biased, exaggerated or just plain wrong.
4. Sometimes, Google can be an easier way to find a person's MySpace page than searching for it on MySpace itself. And Google sometimes retains cached pages.
5. Get creative: Search for your state's governor, the mayor of a large city, a local artist or writer. You might learn more about them or, perhaps more important, who their friends are.
6. To help verify a site's legitimacy, check to see when the user joined, look for posts on his or her page from friends and go to those friends' pages and look for posts from your subject. In other words, look for activity. Check for blog entries, pictures and videos.

7. If you find a page that contains what might be controversial information, print it out. These pages can disappear as quickly as they surface.

These guidelines, coupled with industry standards outlined by the Society of Professional Journalists, seem reasonable in addressing many of the issues facing journalists interacting with individuals via SNSs.

2.6 Case Study

If anyone felt that journalists were not interested in SNSs, what happened in late July 2007 could change their mind. Pat Walters, a Naughton Fellow at the Poynter Institute, in conjunction with his 58-year old editor Bill Mitchell, launched a group on Facebook called "Journalists and Facebook." The two were interested in the Facebook phenomenon and its growing attraction for older users. They posted a few questions to the discussion board, sent the word out about the group to about 25 of the more than 800 members of Poynter Online and waited to see what the reaction would be (Wilson 2008). Walters later admitted he did not expect much response, certainly not anything like what actually happened (Walters 2007).

The expansion of the group began right away and still continues. Within a couple of days, membership in the group had risen to over a hundred people. After about a week, the group had increased to over 650. Participation in the discussion area remained relatively light, but membership continued to swell in the weeks and months thereafter, indicating substantial interest in the connection between Facebook and journalists (Walters 2007). Much speculation has since taken place to determine why interest in the group seems so high, but (perhaps surprisingly) little research has subsequently occurred. It may be just that networking with others in a similar profession has never been easier and is attractive for busy professionals (Wilson 2008).

In writing about the growth of the group, Walters asked such questions as, "Should journalists try to build their own social network? Or make use of existing ones? Or some combination?" All valid considerations, but his conclusion about the growth of social network is what is most compelling, "It seems clear that there's at least one thing journalists cannot do – and that's ignore it" (Walters 2007). An inspection of the current status of the group would indicate that journalists are not ignoring it, but are paying attention. On October 2, 2009, this author became group member 14,338 (Walters 2009). At the time of this study, that averaged out to about 531 new group members per month since the groups' inception. Growth has slowed since, though the ranks have still swelled to over 15,000 group members in early 2011 (Walters 2011).

2.7 Uses and gratifications theory

Theories for evaluating media use and consumer perspectives abound. As new portals open, so do new opportunities for exploration. The same circumstance may be evaluated in a number of different ways. All of them may be acceptable, but some more suited than others for particular situations. Uses and gratifications

theory has been around for decades, but was not the result of a single approach. It was a unification of several empirical efforts that converged around the theme of user reaction to media messages. Instead of being viewed as mere recipients, consumers are believed to respond to various media based on needs and goals unique to the individual. While sharing professional standards, journalists are really individuals with unique goals, interests, and personalities. Like the rest of the population, they too are consumers of media. And gratifications theory could shed insight into the ways in which journalists use and respond to Facebook.

2.7.1   Explanation

Uses and gratifications theory focuses on how individuals use the media for different reasons, both psychological and social. The motives and needs of the individual affect their responses to the media messages they receive. Katz (1959) indicated that reactions are interpreted through the filter of individual goals (as cited in Sheldon 2008). Westerik, Renckstorf, Lammers, and Wester (2006) compared the importance of having a need filled with the importance of the media in doing so.

U&G theory has not been static over the years, but has grown as a result of further study and interpretation. Attempting to measure media response in terms of gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO) has been one suggestion (Palmgreen & Rayburn 1985). Evaluations cannot be made until the media presentation is complete, giving the opportunity for comparisons between the GS and GO (Kink and Hess 2008; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke 2008).

Another suggestion has been to group gratifications sought into several categories to allow for closer inspection. McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) suggested categories to include such things as diversion, personal relationship, personal identity, and surveillance (as cited in Sheldon 2008). These classifications are designed to reflect the varying reasons that individuals pay attention to the media, indicating what they hope to receive from the interaction.

Other possibility categories for U&G assessment include process and content (Kayahara & Wellman 2007). These represent two entirely different actions that are linked together by the individuals' needs and goals. Process refers to the actual performance of an activity selected by the individual for a particular reason, while content addresses the acquisition of information and how it is assimilated (Urista et al. 2009). The relationship between the two is evident in the selection of media and the way in which the information is processed.

2.7.2   Existing studies

Uses and gratification theory has been employed in studies of Facebook already. One such project occurred at Louisiana State University, featuring a survey of 172 students. The intent was to determine if individual differences affected motivations for using Facebook and the subsequent outcomes of that interaction. 93 percent of the sample group already had a Facebook account. A major conclusion was that maintaining relationships was the primary motivating factor in using Facebook,

with females more likely than males to note this reason. Males sought new relationships via Facebook more often than did females in the study. Turning to Facebook for entertainment reasons also scored high, as did logging-in when bored, both actions more likely for women than men. These findings supported earlier research by Tewksbury and Althaus (2000) and Parks and Floyd (1996), though the sample was not representative and should not be generalized to the larger population (as cited in Sheldon 2008).

Other studies compared MySpace and Facebook, applying uses and gratifications theory to study the responses and actions of young adults in SNSs. One reviewed the internet habits of 116 students at an East-Coast University, focusing in on their use of MySpace and Facebook. Results suggested that college-age men and women were about equal in their SNS usage with little differentiation based on ethnicity. Most desired to make new friends or stay connected with old ones (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke 2008). Another utilized six focus groups consisting of 50 undergraduate students from a Central California university. U&G theory was engaged with results again affirming the use of the SNSs for connectivity with others. The approval and support of others was also a motivating factor (Urista et al. 2009). Again, a major limitation of this research was that the sample was non-representative and not acceptable for generalizing to the larger public. Nonetheless, it provided useful information and serves as a launching pad for further research.

Potential use. While revealing pertinent information to these groups, the studies are not particularly relevant to the issues surrounding journalists' use of Facebook and potentially other SNSs. Most studies are geared for high school or college-age users, though Facebook has become a staple in the lives of all ages, including older demographics (Christofides et al. 2009; Wilson 2008). This leads this area wide open for further research. Many theories could be employed to assess the situation, with uses and gratifications one that might yield interesting results.

2.8 Critique of the Literature

There is a substantial amount of research surrounding SNSs in general and on Facebook in particular. Most tend to evaluate the preferences and uses of Facebook with an emphasis on younger demographics, such as high school or college students. While this information is valuable, very little research has been conducted thus far on business and organizational use, other demographics (younger or older), or the responses of specific groups, such as journalists. Therefore, much of the data is relative to a particular demographic, but not fully generalizable to a larger population or other specific group. This allows considerable room for further research

2.9 Remaining Research Questions

There are therefore many options to consider for further research. One suggested in this review is to more fully determine how journalists around the country are interacting with SNSs such as Facebook and MySpace. Assessing how they negotiate their personal and professional identities and to what extent the

organizations that employ them exert influence on their decisions could be very revealing. Of course, this idea of focusing on a particular profession could also be expanded to include any number of unique groups. With the worldwide impact of Facebook and the clustering of particular interests that already occurs, the site will remain ripe for a myriad of research projects in the foreseeable future.

3 Method

3.1.1   Subjects

All subjects participating in the study were members of the "Journalists and Facebook" group on the Facebook SNS. This is a large online group with almost 14,500 members at the time the research was conducted in late 2009. There were few limitations imposed. Research subjects were required to be 18 years of age or older, members of the aforementioned group, and be willing to volunteer to participate in the study without compensation of any kind. There were no limitations imposed based on race, ethnicity, gender, or other socioeconomic factors. The subject responses to an online questionnaire provided the research data that was analyzed.

3.1.2   Materials

On online survey instrument was designed using Qualtrics software through Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The program allowed for complete anonymity for respondents and provided an opportunity for subjects to answer the questions at their convenience without the necessity of travel or third-party intervention. Basic demographic information was obtained at the beginning of the survey, with the bulk of the questions dealing with the subjects' current use of Facebook, their reasons for maintaining an account on the SNS, and whether the site tended to meet their expectations. A series of questions at the end focused on possible ethical concerns that journalists might encounter. Cumulative survey responses formed the data for analysis.

The Internet was an important element in the study as it provided a way to recruit subjects, communicate with volunteers, link them to the online survey, and protect anonymity. Facebook, email, and Qualtrics all played important roles in the process of securing the data for examination.

3.1.3   Procedure

After designing and testing the survey instrument through Qualtrics, the administrator of the "Journalists and Facebook" website was contacted to secure permission to recruit volunteer subjects through the group page. Upon receiving approval, a wall posting was made on the site providing information about the study and instructing any group members interested in volunteering to email the primary researcher. Upon receipt of such notice, an email was returned to the potential subjects including a link to the online survey. Volunteers never had to

provide any information to the researcher other than a working email address. This, in turn, was deleted from the researchers' email files to preserve total confidentiality. The link to the online survey enabled subjects to respond with the highest level of privacy; the survey completed anonymously online with the information considered only in combination with responses from all other participants. Results were tabulated through Qualtrics, with information compiled and coded for further analysis.

Risks to research subjects were considered minimal. Participation was voluntary and did not include vulnerable subjects. Neither was the topic of a particularly sensitive nature. The study did not involve mental or physical duress in any conceivable manner. The anonymity of subjects was preserved throughout and any that started the survey could opt out at any time without ramification simply by ending the session. No withholding of information or deceptive practices occurred, making the need for debriefing negligible. Results of the study were provided via email to any of the participants expressing that desire.

4 Results

The online survey instrument that was utilized for this study was designed to discover the reasons that journalists use Facebook and whether the results of their use meet their expectations. Additionally, questions were devised to assess whether journalists are concerned about possible ethical clashes presented by becoming "friends" with someone on the social networking site.

Respondents were asked to reveal how long they have been on Facebook, how often they log-in, and for what purposes they use the site. They were asked to comparatively rank their reasons for using Facebook and assess how well the site has met their expectations.

Ethical issues were also addressed with specific questions geared to determine to what extent journalists are concerned over several areas. These included the accuracy of the information derived from the site (as revealed by individual account holders), the possible loss of professional distance from the reporter and Facebook "friends," and challenges to remain objective when investigating or writing about online social contacts.

As a pilot study, this project sought only to gain a preliminary understanding of how journalists may be responding to the challenges and opportunities presented by Facebook. The intent from the outset was to acquire and compile the information, seek correlations and possible themes, and note similarities and dissimilarities within the data. With the response level so limited, basic comparative statistics formed the bulk of the analysis.

In all, there were 21 volunteer subjects that completed the survey instrument. 13 respondents were male and 8 female. Ages ranged from potentially as low as 18 to possibly as old as 64 (Table 1).

#	Answer	Age of respondents	Responses	%
1	18 - 25		1	5%
2	26 - 34		8	38%
3	35 - 54		11	52%
4	55 - 64		1	5%
5	65 and over		0	0%
	Total		21	100%

Table 1: *Age Range for Survey Subjects*

#	Answer	Experience level	Responses	%
1	I have never been a journalist		1	5%
2	Amateur non-paid journalist		1	5%
3	Previously employed as a paid journalist		5	24%
4	Currently employed as a paid journalist		14	67%
	Total		21	100%

Table 2; *Experience Level for Survey Subjects*

19 of the subjects self-identified as "paid" journalists at some point in their careers,
with a wide range of experience levels indicated among the responses (Tables 2
and 3).

#	Answer	Number of years as a journalist	Response	%
1	0 - 5 years		7	33%
2	6 - 10 years		3	14%
3	11 - 15 years		7	33%
4	16 - 20 years		1	5%
5	Over 20 years		3	14%
	Total		21	100%

Table 3: *Number of Years Survey Subjects Have Been Involved in Journalism*

Most of the subjects were relatively new to Facebook, having opened accounts

within the last two years. Usage of the Facebook accounts varied considerably

among respondents (Table 4).

#	Answer	Average times logged-in to Facebook per week	Response	%
1	Never		1	5%
2	1 - 4 times		5	24%
3	5 - 7 times		3	14%
4	8 - 14 times		3	14%
5	15 - 20 times		4	19%
6	21 times or greater		5	24%
	Total		21	100%

Table 4: *Number of Times Per Week Subjects Log-in to their Facebook Account*

Uses and gratifications theory was employed to assess whether the theoretical desired reasons for using Facebook were met for journalists in actuality. Survey subjects ranked their reasons for using the social networking site in a variety of areas (Table 5)

Answer	Most important reason for using Facebook - Mean Rank
Other	0.00
Dating	0.00
Staying in touch with family	1.75
Maintaining professional contacts	1.80
Finding out information about others	1.82
Staying in touch with old friends	1.93
Making professional contacts	2.00
Finding sources for story assignments	2.25
Re-establishing old friendships	2.40
Making new friends	2.50

Table 5: *Reasons for Using Facebook – Ranked in Importance (lower to higher)*

Knowing the reasons why journalists tended to use Facebook led to the next area of evaluation; attempting to connect the intentions of the journalists (gratifications sought - GS, in uses and gratifications theory) – with the actual experiences (gratifications received – GR). The same categories of needs as in Table E were reviewed, with subjects using a Likert scale to assess how well Facebook has met their expectations (Table 6). This provided some interesting information for comparison and contrast, with results widely disparate.

#	Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Responses	Mean
1	Dating	0	0	21	0	0	21	3.00
2	Finding out information about others	0	1	0	19	1	21	3.95
3	Finding sources for story assignments	0	5	10	6	0	21	3.05
4	Maintaining professional contacts	0	1	4	16	0	21	3.71
5	Making new friends	1	2	10	8	0	21	3.19
6	Making professional contacts	1	1	9	10	0	21	3.33
7	Re-establishing old friendships	0	1	2	11	7	21	4.14
8	Staying in touch with family	0	1	1	13	6	21	4.14
9	Staying in touch with old friends	0	0	1	15	5	21	4.19
10	Other - as specified earlier	0	0	18	1	2	21	3.24

Table 6: *How Efficiently Facebook Met the Expectations of Subjects*

#	Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Responses	Mean
1	I would find it difficult to do a story that could reveal negative information about one or more of my Facebook friends.	3	7	10	1	0	21	2.43
2	I have concerns that profile information obtained on Facebook may be inaccurate.	0	2	4	8	7	21	3.95
3	I believe that information provided to me by a Facebook friend may be deliberately misleading.	1	3	8	6	3	21	3,33
4	I have ethical concerns over intermixing social and professional contacts on Facebook	0	8	3	3	7	21	3.43

Table 7: *Responses by Survey Subjects to Potential Ethical Issues Presented by Facebook*

Ethical concerns were the focus of the final four survey questions (Table 7 below). A secondary focus of this study considered whether journalists were concerned by the intertwining of personal and professional relationships on Facebook.

The data provided a significant amount of information for review and suggested some correlations and areas worthy of future consideration.

5 Discussion

The study – though small in size – yielded interesting results on how journalists are currently using Facebook and what ethical challenges may be developing. Uses and gratifications theory suggested that – in most circumstances – journalists were receiving from Facebook what they were essentially looking for.

Analysis of the data indicates that 90% of the respondents were between 26 and 54 years of age, with 52% being represented in the 35 – 54 age group. No one responding to the survey was 65 or older. 62% of the subjects were male. It is interesting that the responses by gender were similar to the percentages for those in journalistic positions overall in America, which tend to hover around two-thirds male (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes & Wilhoit 2003). Two out of three of those responding were also currently employed as paid journalists, with 91% of the overall total having received payment at some point from the profession. A wide distribution of experience levels were evident throughout with the largest percentages in the 0 – 5 years and 11 – 15 years categories.

Assessments of the Facebook accounts also provided interesting data. Two-thirds of those surveyed have been on the social networking site for less than two years. Only one respondent would be considered an early-adopter, having joined the SNS at least five years prior when the website was in its infancy. 43% have between 101 – 300 Facebook "friends" with another 29% having 100 or less. None had over a thousand. Close friendships and professional contacts were considered to represent 20% or less of the "friend" totals.

Reasons for using Facebook were varied, but indicating some interesting correlations. Staying in touch with family and finding out information about others were the two reasons cited most frequently by journalists, suggesting the unique dichotomy of the journalist role – perhaps using a social networking site to remain connected with family while also advancing a career. "Other" responses to the reasons for using Facebook included:

- News and information feeds

- Photos (with the note: It's a great source when you need a photo of someone for news…seeing that it's a public domain the photos are legal to use on the news)

- Playing games

- Finding story ideas

Three of the top four reasons given for using Facebook dealt with staying in touch with old friends or family or re-establishing old friendships. Finding out information about others was also a top reason for journalists. Similarly, when ranking the reasons by importance, the top two dealt with friendships (expected for a social networking site) and the next two were associated with business actions. Dating was of absolutely no concern to the survey subjects.

The crux of the study dealt with expectations and ethical issues. Based on the responses, in general, the gratifications sought (GS) by journalists on Facebook were seeming to be the gratifications received (GR). Most areas dealing with professional benefits through use of the site tended to meet expectations. The only area in which journalists were divided was in finding sources for story assignments, with five indicating Facebook did not meet their expectations in this regard, and six agreeing that it did.

Responses to questions regarding the social gratifications sought through the online network were heavily in favor of Facebook meeting expectations of journalists. Again, this should not be a great surprise as that is generally considered the primary reason for the general public to get involved in an online SNS. Journalists, apparently, are not much different than non-journalists in this regard.

On ethical issues, journalists tended to be skeptical of the information found on Facebook. 71.4% believed it may be inaccurate, with 42.9% believing that information provided by a Facebook friend may be deliberately misleading. Of those that took a position on that question, nine of 13 (eight were Neither Agree nor Disagree) or 69.2% felt that way. 10 were indecisive about whether if might be difficult to do a negative story about a Facebook friend, but of the 11 that chose a firm position, seven disagreed and 3 strongly disagreed, indicating support for professional integrity above personal friendships. Journalists were divided on the idea of intermixing social and professional contacts on Facebook overall, however, with 10 indicating an ethical concern over the issue and eight giving the issue little regard.

6 Further research

Due to the fact that this was a pilot study with a limited number of responses, the results are not likely generalizable to the larger body of journalists in the United States today. However, the results did yield some intriguing information and suggest areas in which further research might be conducted. First, expanding on this study with a representative sample might further substantiate or refute the information thus far disclosed. Additionally, digging deeper into the motivations of journalists on social networking sites could uncover new possibilities for review. Some of the "Other" responses in the reasons for using Facebook section provided additional insight and might be included in subsequent studies. Finally, the ethical issues were those that seemed to receive the most diverse responses. That would

indicate potential areas of conflict or at least widely disparate viewpoints. Researching these areas in particular might prove invaluable to journalists and the organizations they represent as new technologies continue to change the ways in which communication occurs.

7 Definition of Terms

The following terms and abbreviations are key to an understanding of the subject material. They include:

Facebook – The most-used global social networking website in history, a site where users can create a homepage with a personal profile, add friends, and interact with others (Wakiyama & Kagan 2009).

Social Networking Site (SNS) – Any of the online communities where individuals share interests, activities, and aspects of their personalities; such as Facebook, MySpace, and others (Casteleyn, Mottart & Rutten 2008).

Uses and gratifications theory – A communications theoretical approach with three objectives: to explain how specific viewers use mass media to meet individual needs; to discover a viewer's underlying motives for using the media; and to identify the positive and negative consequences of an individual's mass media utilization (Siraj 2007).

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