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# The Social Media Bubble: An Examination of Social Media User Motivations and Their Implications for Future Users and Communication Technologies

Cary A. Bryant Ms.  
cbryant7@siu.edu

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THE SOCIAL MEDIA BUBBLE: AN EXAMINATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA USER  
MOTIVATIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE USERS AND  
COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

By

Cary A. Bryant

B.S., Southern Illinois University, 2009

A Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
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Department of Mass Communication and Media Arts  
In the Graduate School  
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

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in the field of Professional Media and Media Management

Approved by:

Robert Spahr, Chair

Anita J. Stoner

Graduate School

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

CARY A. BRYANT, for the Master of Science degree in PROFESSIONAL MEDIA AND MEDIA MANAGEMENT, presented on OCTOBER 24, 2011, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: THE SOCIAL MEDIA BUBBLE: AN EXAMINATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA USER MOTIVATIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE USERS AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Robert Spahr

This research project focuses on examining social media user motivations and their impact on future users. Analysis of previous communication technologies is included in this paper to show how human behavior has changed in the past century. A survey was conducted among current communication students to study social media behaviors and to help new developments for social media. Populations of social media users, such as small businesses and students, were also looked at to determine the strength of their social media presences. A website, [TheSocialMediaBubble.com](http://TheSocialMediaBubble.com), was developed to accompany this project to provide free tips, advice and research to small businesses, students, and educators. The [SocialMediaBubble.com](http://SocialMediaBubble.com) was designed as resource to advance the ideas of how social media is evolving and affecting other technology advancements.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In truth, the internet has always been “social,” but only in recent years has the term social media been coined and used to describe the communication taking place online. Many businesses and users debate all the time how social media is a fad, but the reality is this is not the case at all. To date, social media is already eight years old and shows no signs of slowing down. The first functions of the internet were about sharing files, information, research and now, our daily lives. The origin of social media began in bulletin board systems (BBS) and social media has taken the internet by storm in how users connect daily. Some online users connect with social media websites multiple times an hour to different email accounts, blogs, and gaming platforms.

To provide historical background to the project, contextual analysis has been included that looks at the behaviors and motivations of users from the technologies of the telegraph, air conditioner, cars, radio, television and the telephone. By looking at the behaviors that developed as a result of these technologies; one can begin to see how social media behavior has become a combination of all these behaviors, in both good and bad aspects. A survey has also been conducted within the research to better provide an example of current social media behavior from media students at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Today’s online society is living in a participatory culture, so it is important to understand what motivations drive users to become a part of that

culture. A brief history of social media will also be discussed to show the progress social technologies have made.

The social media bubble has burst, meaning that social media is here to stay and it is essential that users learn to use it correctly. Research has led to the conclusion that two of the largest groups using social media, small businesses and students, are misinformed about maintaining their online presences. All internet users need to realize that there is a strong call for social media literacy to not only help their own relationships, but also to become better internet navigators, consumers, and creators. The internet is heading into unknown territory as the issues of net neutrality and privacy are continually discussed and new laws are passed. If social media literacy is pushed now, users have a better chance of helping protect their participatory culture and develop their voices to shift technology for new ways of communication. Essentially, my research has concluded that users will learn the strongest use for social media: communication used in response to social causes, disasters, and protests.

To begin describing the online project that represents the overall goal, I have created the website [TheSocialMediaBubble.com](http://TheSocialMediaBubble.com) as an online portal that offers free tips, advice, and examples to help educate small businesses, students, and educators on how to create and maintain their social media presences. As small businesses and students are the constant users of social media, my research suggests they will be driving forces behind how social media evolves next. The true currency of social media is not the technology, but the



behavior of the users trying to remain authentic in their online presence. In social media, users are able to form direct, unmediated relationships, but are not using them to full potential or worse, creating a negative image. Communication in social media is in real-time, and therefore, little can be done to retract information when released online. Social media literacy needs to be taught to curb social media users' current behaviors that are damaging their businesses or images.

Technological determinism is a theory that presumes society's technology drives the development of its social structure and cultural values. Technology invented within the past century has been focused on increasing the speed of communication and creating more leisure time. American society now highly values leisure time, but too much leisure time also casts a negative perception. In social media, technological determinism has created the foundations to motivate users to want to use social media technology. In the end, however, the behavior of online users will directly influence the evolution of social media technologies. Social media is already changing the world rapidly with several groups using social media as a tool to organize groups, revolutions and protests. More social media tools will be developed and refined as users discover the voids that need to be filled. The future of social media lies with how the technology evolves for people during revolutions, crisis, and weather disasters.

## CHAPTER 2

### WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA IS – A BRIEF HISTORY AND “STATUS” UPDATE

Social media has been developed as we know it today as a result of improvements in the technology fostering online communities. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2009) define social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Web 2.0 describes the second generation of the internet that is focused on the ability for people to collaborate and share information online (O'Reilly & Batelle, 2009). Web 2.0 refers to the transition from static HTML web pages to more dynamic sites. Other improved functionalities of Web 2.0 include focusing on two-way communication with an emphasis on web-based communities of users and collaboration (O'Reilly & Batelle, 2009).

The earliest form of two-way online communication was email, developed by ARPANET in 1972, and it still is one of the most frequently used communication tools on the internet (Williamson, 2011). List servers, which allowed sending emails from one to many, were not invented until 1975. The basic form of this technology has not changed much since that time, but email usage has improved greatly due to widespread adoption in the business world (Preece, 2003). However, email communication was not instant communication, and it created a desire for a technology that users would allow users to instantly communicate.

Social media started out as nothing more than software called a Bulletin Board System (BBS), which allowed users to exchange software, data, messages, and news with each other (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). The first BBS was developed and opened to the public in 1979 by Ward Christensen (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). Bulletin Board Systems were online meeting places that independently produced chunks of code for individual use. Bulletin Board Systems allowed users to communicate with a central system where they could download files or games (many times including pirated software) and post messages to other users (Nickson, 2009). Nickson (2009) states that BBSs were accessed over telephone lines via a modem and were often run by hobbyists who carefully nurtured the social aspects and interest-specific nature of their projects. The downfall of BBSs was that they were slow systems, only allowing one user in at a time and the content was typically associated with “shady” material.

The code for the World Wide Web was written by Tim Berners-Lee based on his 1990 proposal, along with the standards for HTML, HTTP, and URLs. By Christmas 1990, Berners-Lee had built all the tools necessary for a working web: the first web browser, the first web server, and the first web page, which described the project itself. On August 6, 1991, Berners-Lee posted a short summary of the World Wide Web project on the alt.hypertext newsgroup. This date also marked the debut of the web as a publicly available service on the Internet. Berners-Lee made the internet accessible to the public and sparked the era of the dot-com boom and a more social web (1995).

The late 1990's saw a popularity surge in user-created homepages where information could be shared about the user's personal life or business, i.e. today's equivalent of what a blog or social media profile can do (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). The late 1990's and early 2000's also became a popular time for online chat rooms, forums and instant messaging services (Nollinger, 2009). Internet relay chat (IRC), a protocol for instant internet communication, was created in 1988 (Oikarinen & Reed, 1993). The company ICQ developed in the mid-1990s and created the first instant messaging program for PCs (ICQ, 2010). ICQ was at least partly responsible for the adoption of avatars, abbreviations (LOL, BRB) and emoticons (Preece, 2003). Other IM clients soon followed, namely AOL Online, which turned instant messaging into a social norm (Wired, 2009).

The first social network site (SNS), SixDegrees.com launched in 1997 and allowed users to create profiles and list friends (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). At the same time, Classmates.com allowed people to affiliate with their high school or college and surf the network for others who were also affiliated. However, users could not create profiles or list friends until years later (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Six Degrees was the first SNS to combine user profiles, friend lists, and school affiliations, while also being a network to send messages. The problem that faced most early social networking sites was that the early "adopters" of the internet did not have a large number of other friends that were online and the "adopters" were disinterested in meeting strangers (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The only early social networking sites to succeed were those that found a specific niche.

LinkedIn survived by catering to business professionals, while Tribe.net focused on creating smaller online communities dedicated to a variety of member interests to remain afloat (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

The beginning combination of social networking and blogging began with the launch of LiveJournal in 1999. On LiveJournal, a user could create content and have friends subscribe to that content, while also managing privacy settings. Friendster launched in 2002 and it was designed to compete with Match.com, a profitable online dating site (Cohen, 2003). Friendster was designed to help friends-of-friends meet, based on the assumption that friends-of-friends would make better romantic partners than strangers (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Friendster failed as users left after being faced with the combination of technical difficulties, social collisions, and a trust breach between users and the site (Boyd, 2006). Eventually, this led Friendster to reinventing itself and become a social gaming site.

In the past ten years, many social networking sites have started and failed as each tried to provide a niche place for online users to communicate. The technology of social networking sites evolved and many websites began to include features that would allow users to start sharing media. Some sites even allowed users to incorporate media into websites like Flickr (focused on photo sharing) and YouTube (focused on video sharing). Everything changed in 2003 when MySpace was launched. MySpace targeted users who were fed up at other social networking sites (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). MySpace welcomed all users, especially music talent, since other SNSs did not have the capability to let bands

to connect with their fan base (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The bands and fans dynamic was mutually beneficial: bands wanted to be able to contact fans, while fans desired attention from their favorite bands and used friend connections to signal identity and affiliation (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

MySpace cornered the market on social networking personalization, which allowed users for the first time to customize their profiles (backgrounds & layouts) with HTML. As users became experienced with HTML, a copy/paste code phenomenon emerged (Perkel, 2006). From this point, other web tools and creative objects were easily spread via copy and pasting HTML. As MySpace grew in popularity, three different populations began to emerge: musicians/artists, teenagers and the post-college urban social crowd (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). News Corporation purchased MySpace in 2005, which attracted thousands of new users to the site and created new safety issues (Consumer Affairs, 2006). However, instead of drawing more users to MySpace, the situation created an opportunity for Facebook to start attracting MySpace users to its social networking site because of its added security features (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Facebook began in early 2004 as a Harvard-only SNS (Cassidy, 2006). As Facebook began supporting other schools, those users were also required to have university email addresses associated with their academic institutions. The university email requirement kept the site relatively closed and contributed to users' perceptions of the site as an intimate, private community. Slowly, Facebook opened to high school students, and eventually everyone. Facebook

developed a strong SNS dedicated to protecting privacy, by implementing several security options and updates (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). To date, Facebook is largest SNS with over 800 million users (Facebook, 2011).

Twitter was born in 2006 as a social networking site focused on micro-blogging where its users can send and read text-based posts of up to 140 characters, informally known as "tweets." Twitter's usage typically spikes during prominent events and users can create "hash tags" that can be included in their tweets to reference a certain topic or other user (Stutzmann, 2007). As of 2011, Twitter has more than 400 million users and more than 40% use Twitter via mobile phones to collectively post over 1 billion new tweets per week (Stutzmann, 2007). Twitter users have revolutionized how social networking websites work today, since this group has pushed forward for SNSs to be used widely via mobile phones and smartphone applications (Nakano, 2011). The rise of SNSs indicates a shift in the organization of online communities. While websites dedicated to communities of interest still exist and prosper, SNSs are primarily organized around people, not interests (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Twitter is a prime example of this, as it is more important about who you "follow," than what you are interested in.

The current trend towards social media can be seen as an evolution back to internet's roots, since it re-transforms the web to what it was initially created for - a platform to facilitate information exchange between users. The technical advances that have been made over the past 20 years enable a form of virtual content sharing that is fundamentally different from, and more powerful than the

BBS of the late 1970s (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Different forms of social media are being developed all the time and as long as there is motivation behind it, users will follow.

Social media's origins started in BBSs and have greatly evolved over the past 30 years. Email, the World Wide Web, and instant messaging each contributed to take communication to the next step and to change technology into social media. Early SNSs like Six Degrees and Classmates.com, led to social networking sites becoming the number one way to communicate online. Facebook is currently the number one SNS, but it has competition from Google Plus, which was introduced in July 2011 as a new SNS working to provide better communication tools and to let users distribute their information into organized circles.

According to Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2009), there are six types of social media: collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. Social networking sites make up the bulk of social media, but there will be more developments and more websites as users discover social media's collective power. Technological determinism states that society is shaped by technological innovation. The technological space has evolved rapidly and social media users are linked to these advances in technology. Social media's forte is to provide a way to communicate, and it helps us do that task even when people are under duress.

Social media has been used heavily in recent environmental disasters, revolutions, and protests. Social media was used in 2011 as a way for family and



friends to find one another or send messages during the Japan earthquakes and Joplin/ Alabama tornados. Social media was also used in the Egyptian revolution of 2011 to protest Egypt's president. Users can sign up for several social media alerts for weather, local disaster agencies, etc. to be informed instantly when an event occurs. The best thing about how people use social media is the way a message can be resent or go viral to thousands of users to raise awareness. The next of evolution of social media will involve refining its forms of communication during times of need.

## CHAPTER III

### UNDERSTANDING HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND HISTORICAL TECHNOLOGIES

Today's version of social media and the internet are rapidly changing how people all over the world communicate and how they let online factors influence their real lives. Before social media and the internet were invented, several technologies led to great changes to human behavior. Some of these technologies include: the telegraph, air conditioning, automobiles, radio, television and cell phones. Without any of these technologies, human civilization could not have advanced into the technological age people enjoy or have become poised to make other technological strides. However, some technologies drastically changed the way people interacted, while others created "leisure" time. Some of the behaviors that resulted from the technologies were positives while others were negative.

According to Standage (1998) the early optical telegraphs of the 1790s made long-distance communication possible at impossible speeds, at least for the governments that built them. In the 1840s, the electric telegraph enabled the general public to send messages over great distances very quickly (Standage, 1998). This was a big step for long-distance communication, though its social consequences took a while to percolate. At first, telegraph operators became the pioneers of a new frontier: they could gather in what we would today call chat rooms, play games over the wires, etc. (Standage, 1998). The average person was still excluded as there was no direct access to the real-time nature of the technology, unless you were a telegraph operator (Standage, 1998). The

invention of the telephone in the 1870s, however, would make real-time telecommunications available on the personal level.

Standage (1998) argued that the ability to communicate by telegraph globally in real-time was a qualitative shift in human behavior, while the change brought on by the modern Internet was merely a quantitative shift, since users are more interested about being online as much as possible, than the quality of the content they are posting. The invention of the telegraph greatly reduced costs of long-distance messaging and provided the faster way to send messages than the postal system could.

In today's online world, the telegraph's way of sending brief messages has been compared to the SNS, Twitter. The 140-character limit of Twitter posts was guided by the 160-character limit established by the developers of the short message service (SMS) for cell phones (Schott, 2009). During the late 19th-century telegraphy boom, some carriers charged extra for words longer than 15 characters and for messages longer than 10 words. Thus, the cheapest telegram was often limited to 150 characters (Schott, 2009).

The telegraph was the first communication technology that allowed short messages to be sent in a short time. Before the invention of the telegraph, the only form of long-distance communication was postal mail that was very unreliable. The telegraph was the first communication technology that altered human behavior positively and created the mindset that the people could now reliably communicate all over the world. Several technologies were invented in the years between the telegraph and the air conditioner, but a common factor

between the two technologies is that both allowed people to move across the country and settle new places.

Air conditioning is the one technology that most do not realize affected a major change in human behavior. In 1902, the first modern electrical air conditioning unit was invented by Willis H. Carrier in Buffalo, New York.

Arsenault (1984) states that the so-called “air conditioning revolution” was a long, slow process that stretched out over seven decades and changed people’s belief that air conditioning was a necessity, not an amenity or a luxury. By the 1970’s, air conditioning had made its way into more than 80 percent of office buildings, banks, apartments, homes and cars. Air conditioning, according to Arsenault (1984) changed the way of life. Air conditioning influenced everything from architecture to sleeping habits and even population growth. Air conditioning improved air quality and health longevity, leading to people to live longer lives and adopt the idea that staying home was the most comfortable place to be (Arsenault, 1984).

This behavior was adopted widely, Arsenault (1984) says, by “seducing families into houses with closed doors and windows,” and eliminating the commonality of neighborhood life and shutting down the “front-porch society.” Air conditioning improved the quality of life and helped industrialize and populate semi-tropical-like portions (Texas, Florida, etc.) of the U.S. However, it also changed human behavior by chipping away community behavior as families retreated into air conditioned homes for entertainment. (Arsenault, 1984). This behavior created a strong nuclear family, but hurt the relationships between

neighbors and extended family outside of “climate-controlled bubbles” (Arsenault, 1984).

The air conditioner is a perfect example of how a technology had both positives and negatives result from its invention. Air conditioning provided a way for people to work and live comfortably year round in any climate, but it also pushed people indoors, away from interacting with each other. The telegraph enticed people to send messages, but the air conditioner was the first technology individualizing entertainment. Automobiles also individualized human behavior, because they encouraged people to spread out at any time.

In 1914, Henry Ford started an empire by revolutionizing automobile production with mass production on assembly lines, which lowered costs (McCarthy, 2007). As automobiles caught on and more people were able to afford them, human behavior changed. The general public loved the idea of being able to travel anywhere comfortably, at any time. Automobiles allowed people to save time and move farther away, building new communities, towns, etc. (McCarthy, 2007). Also, automobiles helped fuel the drive for more technology advancements in other objects (i.e. washing machines) that would lessen the chore time and lead to more leisure time (McCarthy, 2007).

For the past century, more and more car companies have emerged and continually create and design cars that people are urged to buy. According to Eisenburg (2009), buying automobiles helped introduce the idea of “shoptimism,” which means consumers will keep buying as long as there are new products and alterations to old products. “Shoptimism” feeds the idea that consumers need to

stay up with current trends and technology (Eisenburg, 2009). The automobile industry fosters this idea because it introduces new lines of vehicles every year with new improvements. As each consumer buys a different car, his or her learning curve increases to adapt to that car's new technology, which as Eisenburg (2009) suggests, may be a reason why consumers want to stay current with other technology trends.

The automobile industry changed human behavior by offering a technology that continually improves itself and working to persuade users to keep with current styles. Radio is also a technology that changed human behavior. Radio encouraged people to create content at any time and then broadcast it. However, radio technology could not continue to expand and it became government regulated. The first regular broadcasting station started in 1920 when a few businessmen and engineers realized the possible uses of radios as "music boxes for the home" (Townsend, 2002). However, the objection was made that broadcasting couldn't support itself, i.e. what would pay for the programs?

Throughout the country, amateur radio hobbyists and businessmen were building tiny sending sets and talking to one another. By the end of 1923, there were more than 600 radio stations on the air and all of them were trying to learn the usefulness of the new gadget to be able to adapt it to other uses (Townsend, 2002). The broadcasts were mostly talk, recorded and concert music, or news read from the evening papers. Gradually, the more important stations began to expand their programs. The development of the new device was hampered,

however, by the lack of any sort of radio regulation (Townsend, 2002). Groups of sound waves couldn't get from the broadcasting studios to the receivers without being interrupted by other stations. More often than not, radio air would be filled with queer, unintelligible shrieks as the sound waves stepped on one another (Townsend, 2002).

In the area of land broadcasting, the government's interest was made clear. Congress maintained from the beginning that radio was a matter of public concern and that representatives of the people had a right to determine how radio was used. To straighten out the wave-length mess, a Federal Radio Commission was created by Congress in 1927 (Townsend, 2002). At that time there were only 90 channels available with 732 radio stations trying to use them. By assigning stations far enough apart to the same channel, specifying the power to be used, and staggering the time of activity carefully, all but about 150 of these were able to continue operating (Townsend, 2002). However in 2011, amateur radio is now considered almost impossible in wave form as government regulations prevent amateur radio from interfering with local emergency personnel (National Terror Alert Center, 2011). Many amateur radio hobbyists have moved their programming to online streaming to bypass government regulations and have better sound quality (Abacast, 2011).

Gradually, more and more rules for broadcasting were set up. At first Congress was hesitant about placing a permanent government agency over the whole industry (Townsend, 2002). However, it became clear to station owners, consumers, and officials that the job to be done was a big one. In 1934,

Congress passed the Communications Act, which abolished the Federal Radio Commission and transferred jurisdiction over radio licensing to a new Federal Communications Commission (Townsend, 2002). Radio changed how people were able to get information quickly on a variety of devices, but it also showed how a new technology was essentially locked down and regulated by the government when things got out of hand.

In the beginning, radio technology encouraged people to experiment with it and build a presence catered to that person's interests. However, amateur radio has been forced to move online as government regulations required radio stations to apply for licenses to operate. Radio and the air conditioner are good examples of how technologies have positives and negatives resulting from their inventions. To compare radio and television, television is also government regulated and has changed human behavior to accept communication one-way.

Television has drastically changed human behavior in multiple ways, including how audiences perceive reality and communicate. Television even has consequences on a person's health. The home presence of a television set is something most people take for granted and many often fail to notice how many hours are actually watching it. The television is primarily thought to be a household object and consumed privately. However, the socio-cultural significance of television's output has been readily acknowledged for decades because it changes how audiences perceive themselves (McCarthy, 2001). For the human psyche, television provides images that can be endlessly repeated



and when an image is repeated often enough, it becomes part of our cultural, collective memory.

Television has played a large role in shaping human behavior to favor a “visual culture,” where most are more apt to watch an event than read about it. When the Vietnam War took place in the 1960s, it was the first time that television viewers would see war events that were happening that could drastically affect their “real lives” (Mandelbaum, 1982). Mandelbaum (1982) also worried that images on television would desensitize viewers to what was really happening, and therefore, audiences would not pay enough attention to important news matters or become involved. However, television shows help create communities of fans that enjoy communicating with each other online (Hills, 2002). Some popular television shows have strong fan followings and will do anything to keep that show on the air.

Like all of these other technologies, television has had a strong effect on human behavior. Television led to more isolation and individualized entertainment. Cell phones became the next technology to individualize communication and entertainment. Cell phones allow a person to always be connected and have the option of being reached. Recent developments in mobile technologies produced a new kind of device: the smartphone, a programmable mobile phone (Livingston, 2004). With more and more smart phones being introduced to the cell phone market, human behavior has changed because of these devices mimic being computers on the go. With smart phones, people are

able to access the internet, social media, GPS, and countless other applications (Raento, 2007)

However, since smart phones allow anyone to communicate back instantly, there is not any type of filter or pause to think about what is about to be posted online. Without a “filter” other users’ reputations can be harmed if the content contains embarrassing photos, videos or other information (Schlosser, 2002). Communication between two parties used to be very methodical, with one having time available to think about what to write before sending a reply. With cell phones, human behavior has been modified to the mindset that replies need to be immediate to be polite (Schlosser, 2002). Human behavior has changed with smart phones to provide this instant communication between people and broadcast a message to many users in a very short time.

Each of these technologies changed human behavior. The telegraph became the first technology to make long- distance communication easier and encourage people to communicate all over the world. The air conditioner and automobiles allowed people to move to new places and be comfortable year round. Automobiles allowed people to accept technology changes on a regular basis, while also providing a way to speed up tasks. Radio and television are both government regulated, but both technologies still alter how humans get their entertainment and reality perceptions. Cell phones allow people to be connected at all times and alter how people think they need to communicate back. Together, all the technologies have in common the desire to move communication faster from anywhere in the world. Some technologies created behaviors that have had

negative effects on how humans conducted relationships with other people.

Many of the human behaviors resulting from the communication technologies can be found in how a user acts on social media.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA MOTIVATIONS

Today, social media requires users to understand strengths and weaknesses. Social media has numerous audiences, and to reach those audiences, it is important to understand each group's motivations to send a message. By understanding why users want to become a part of social media networks, students and small businesses can determine what messages they want to send and motivate their target markets. What motivates an internet user to use social media?

The concept of how a "social media revolution" is taking over the world and how the "revolution" greatly affects the way people are communicating (Smith 2009). The internet has created a shift to the discussion of personal topics and this demonstrates that the future of content will be mainly consumer driven. Social networking sites have redefined the way the internet functions because they incorporate the features that allow users to publish opinions, connect, build community, or produce and share content. With these types of opportunities, Smith (2009) argues that the desire to be part of a social media will only increase, motivating users to be involved in all types of media and conversation.

When users are trying to understand the different motivation factors among adults who participate in online social networks, the uses and gratification theory can show why adults use social networks, concluding two main uses: (1) social connections (keeping up with current and past friends) and also (2) information sharing about social and other events (Foster, Francescucci,

West, 2010). Other user behaviors studied included setting privacy and building social capital (Foster et al., 2010).

Since cavemen, communities have existed to satisfy human needs, so Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is another human behavior set to look at to understand why people use social media (Ray, 2008). Early human communities formed primarily to provide for people's physiological and safety needs, which are the most basic of human needs according to Abraham Maslow. It was easier for groups of people to specialize in growing or hunting different types of food than for an individual to do it all himself or herself.



Figure 1 - Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Online communities don't provide satisfaction for our physiological needs, but social media tools are providing more safety protection than most of us probably appreciate (Ray, 2008). Much of the software we use to keep our PCs safe from viruses, spyware, worms, and adware shares information about the malware it finds in order to keep other subscribers safe. If you ever had an infection on your PC and searched Google for help, chances are you ended up on a forum where people with similar computer issues share tips, ideas, and solutions (Ray, 2008).

Once our physiological and safety needs are assured, we strive to feel loved and part of something larger than ourselves; thus our belonging needs explain why we visit and join online communities (Ray, 2008). These needs are satisfied by gathering with people who share common experiences and interests. Finding these people online, listening to or reading their thoughts, and recognizing others share our beliefs, ideas, and values provides us a sense of belonging and acceptance.

The commonalities that draw similar-minded people together may include a sense of altruism, or a desire to network for career purposes (Ray, 2008). But since altruism, employment, and faith are not drivers available to most brands, what is available to small businesses that can bring people together? The answer is to provide the sorts of experiences that people find they cannot stop from sharing and wanting to repeat (Ray, 2008).

While communities must be welcoming to people in the belonging stage, vibrant communities do not develop unless members are encouraged (Ray,

2008). People seeking to satisfy their esteem needs are the ones who contribute new ideas, create subgroups, express opinions, share judgments, and reveal more of themselves within communities. The need for esteem includes being recognized, earning respect, and doing things that provide one with a sense of accomplishment and contribution (Ray, 2008).

According to Maslow, there is only one more stage to which humans could aspire: self-actualization (Ray, 2008). This condition represents the fulfillment of everything a person can be: mature, creative, accepting of others, and balanced in their perceptions and judgment (Ray, 2008). The question is can online communities help people reach this lofty human ideal?

## Online Communities Satisfy Human Needs

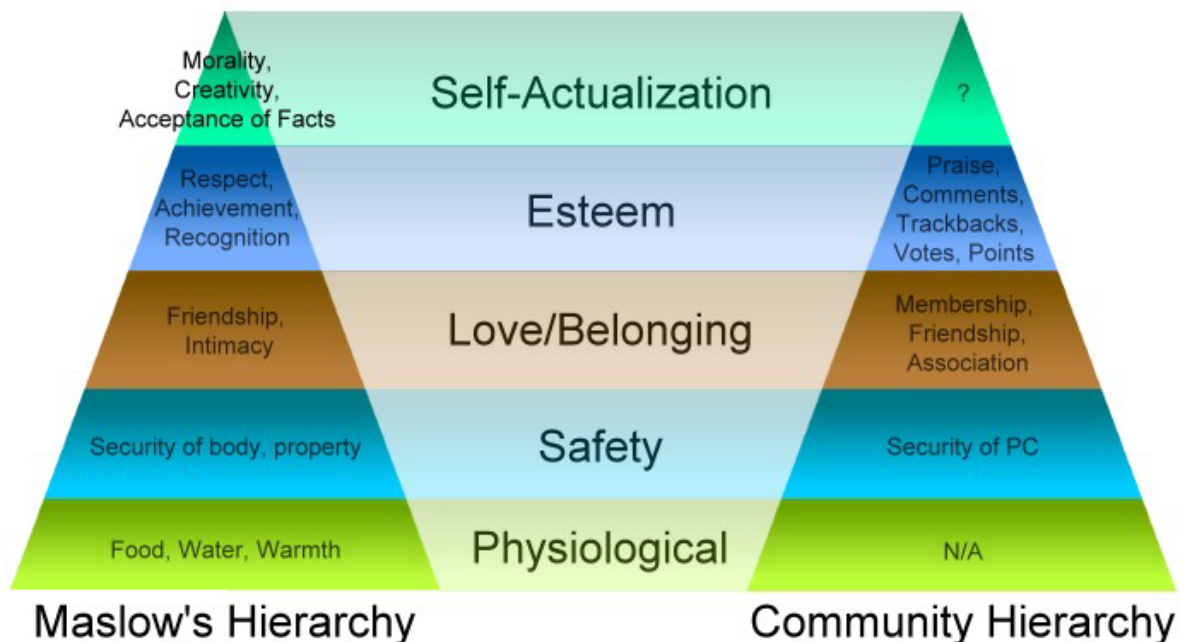


Figure 2 – Maslow's Hierarchy vs. Community Hierarchy

According to Jenkins (2006), there is enough evidence to suggest that internet users are living in a participatory culture, which is a culture that directly involves the people in the defining of the culture. The convergence isn't about technology—one screen (or one box) to rule them all, but rather about the way that the lines separating content creators from content users are becoming increasingly fuzzy (Jenkins, 2006). Social media shows signs of supporting this participatory culture, or a remix culture as termed by Lawrence Lessig (2008) that people use the internet to post content, create content and share content. Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff (2008) characterize their idea of participatory culture as "the groundswell," or a social trend in which people use technology to get the things they need from each other instead of from companies.

Internet memes are a good example of remix culture, as most memes are an idea that is propagated through the web (Lessig, 2008). Memes are not always copied perfectly, and might indeed become refined, combined or otherwise modified with other ideas, resulting in new memes, which may themselves prove more, or less, efficient replicators than their predecessors, thus providing a framework for culture evolution (Dawkins, 2006). The internet meme may take the form of a hyperlink, video, picture, website, hash tag, or just a word or phrase. The meme may spread from person to person via social media, direct email, news sources, or other web-based services. An internet meme may stay the same or may evolve over time, by chance or through commentary, imitations, or parody about itself. Internet memes can evolve and spread extremely rapidly, sometimes reaching world-wide popularity and vanishing within a few days



(Lessig, 2008). Once internet users become the content creators and spreaders, new behavior emerges to move ideas as far as they can go.

It is important to understand social media motivations to show users the strengths and weaknesses. The future of the internet will be consumer driven. Social media is supporting a participatory culture, so it is important to understand why users want to join communities. With Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, social media user behavior can be explained to why others seek communities. Finding people online, listening to or reading their thoughts, and recognizing others share our beliefs, ideas, and values provides a sense of belonging and acceptance into a community.

The internet meme is an example of a message that may spread from person to person via social media, direct email, news sources, or other web-based services. As internet users have become savvier, their motivations mature and increase to suit new needs, leading to a direct impact on social media and content creation. Due to that impact, small businesses need to work harder to break through "social noise" to communicate their message. Students need to remember to not get lost in the "noise" while using social media by creating content that is detrimental to their online presence. As all social media audiences are living in a "remix culture," small businesses and students have to be aware of keeping a good image to be able to evolve with new social media technologies and still participate.

## CHAPTER V

### SURVEY DATA

In an examination of current social media behaviors, a brief survey was administered online to a group of anonymous participants to gauge social media behavior. The survey was sent out to the undergraduate and graduate populations of the College of Mass Communication and Media Arts at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 35 and were both male and female. The survey was conducted in the third week of September 2011 and 52 responses were recorded. All of the respondents use social media and have been doing so for at least one year. (See Figure 3)

The 35-question survey was administered online through Google Documents' survey tool and the link was sent to participants through email via the college's listserv. The questions were a mixture of multiple choice, closed answer (yes or no) and open answer to determine social media usage habits. All of the participants were selected because of their affiliation with the College of Mass Communication and Media Arts at SIUC, students working towards degrees in various media fields. The survey provided a small snapshot of the social media habits from a population that is considered "digitally native" or those comfortable with using digital tools extensive ways. A surprising amount of the survey participants (38 out of 52) had been using social for more than four years, and 42 participants indicated that they had used social media during high school.

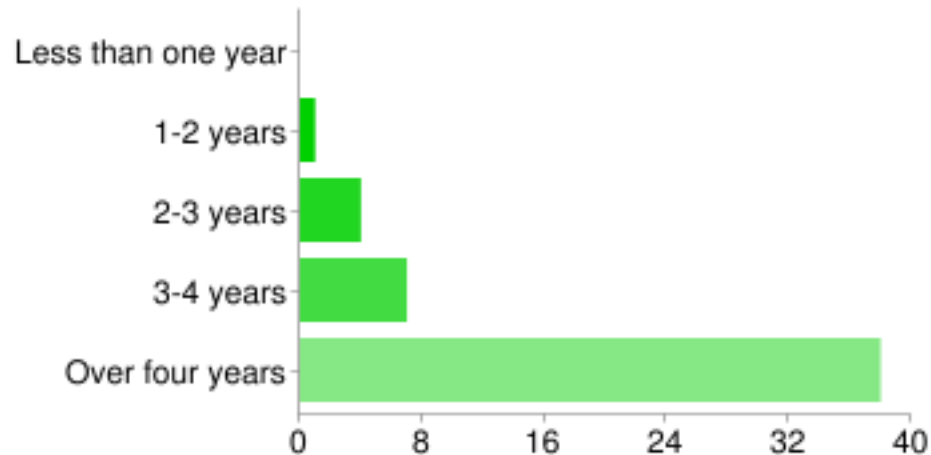


Figure 3- How long have you used social media?

The data collected showed:

- 93% chose Facebook over the other social media options: LinkedIn, Twitter, MySpace, Blogging, YouTube, Foursquare and Google Plus
- 54% of respondents spent 6- 15 hours per week on social media sites, compared to only 35% spending 0-6 hours surfing websites.
- Social media is increasingly becoming the number one function for how these student users spend their time online.

Respondents were to indicate if they did the following tasks [in Figure 4) online. Li and Bernoff (2008), authors of *Groundswell* developed a social technographics ladder (See Figure 5) to be able to categorize internet users based on their social participation and to provide better data to businesses and their target markets. These social media tasks can be categorized to measure how sophisticated social media users are outside of the typical social network (i.e. Facebook) and to understand some of their different motivations. The

majority of the survey respondents can be considered “creators,” while very few were less than a “critic” level. When a user is widely comfortable with online tools, it takes more effort to attract that user’s attention, which is focused on a wide variety of online activities rather than a specific type of social media.

Have own blog	<b>16</b>	32%
Have own website	<b>15</b>	30%
Upload videos/audio that you create	<b>31</b>	62%
Write articles or stories and post them online	<b>13</b>	26%
Update statuses on social media sites (including Twitter)	<b>44</b>	88%
Post rating or reviews of products	<b>22</b>	44%
Comment on other blogs	<b>20</b>	40%
Contribute to online forums	<b>12</b>	24%
Edit wiki articles	<b>2</b>	4%
Use RSS Feeds	<b>11</b>	22%
Particplate in online polls	<b>28</b>	56%
Use sites like Reddit, Stumbleupon, or Digg	<b>14</b>	28%
Maintain social media profiles	<b>34</b>	68%
Read blogs	<b>29</b>	58%
Listen to podcasts	<b>15</b>	30%
Watch online video from other users	<b>38</b>	76%
Watch movies or television shows online	<b>39</b>	78%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

Figure 4- Survey Results

## The Social Technographics ladder

*Each step on the ladder represents a group of consumers more involved in the groundswell than the previous steps. To join the group on a step, a consumer need only participate in one of the listed activities at least monthly.*

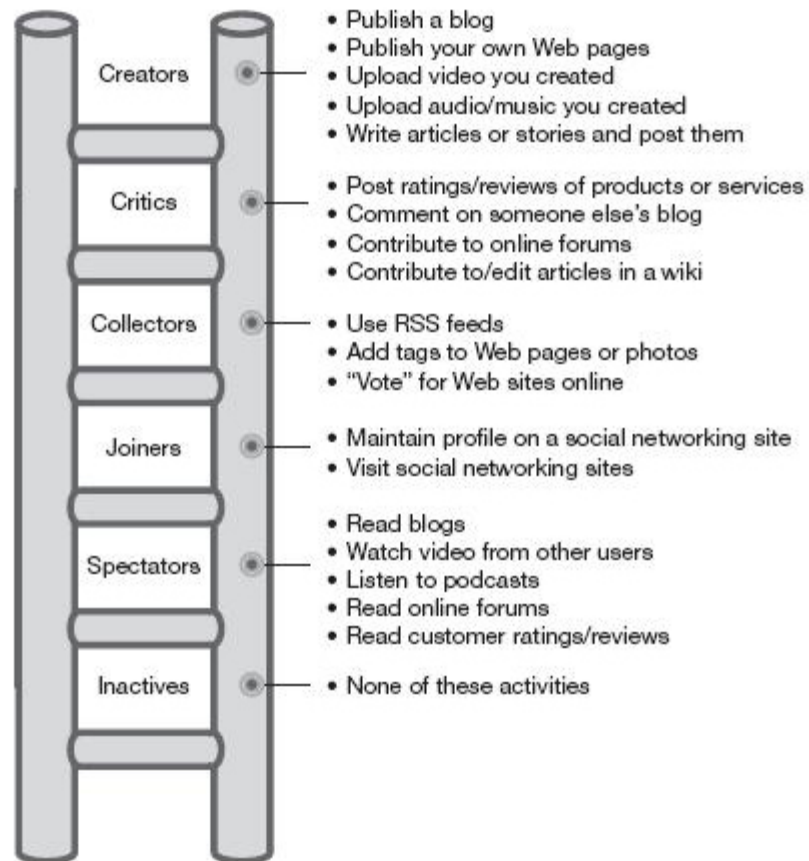


Figure 5 – Social Technographics Ladder

Levels of Social Technographics	Number Of Participants (52)
<b>Ladder</b>	
<b>Creators</b>	22
<b>Critics</b>	12
<b>Collectors</b>	8
<b>Joiners</b>	7
<b>Spectators</b>	3

Figure 6 – What Levels Are the Participants?

When the participants were asked to consider why they started with social media, many replied that it was appealing to them because they could keep in touch with friends when it was convenient for them. Only 56% of respondents said they felt compelled to keep with social media on a daily basis, but 71% answered that they talk to friends via social media almost every day.

Respondents were also asked how they would feel in a situation if they were disconnected from technology, and 73% answered that they would be a mixture of relieved and stressed that if could not access social media to check to see what was going on.

All of the respondents indicated that they were very truthful in their online presences, unless it came to having others being able to access personal cell phone numbers (See Figure 6). Some respondents said they felt it was important to be honest online, and they would not trade their privacy to talk to strangers.

Others felt concerned that they would have to censor their social media if family members asked to be a part of their different online presences.

Email address	35	70%
Home town or city	39	78%
Mobile Numbers	10	20%
Photographs of yourself	48	96%
Photographs of others	41	82%
Display real name	41	82%
Display relationship status/ sexual orientation	31	62%
Display Religious/ Political views	22	44%
Display Birthday Date or Activities/Hobbies	43	86%

Figure 7 – What do users display on social media?

The survey also asked how they viewed businesses trying to attract their attention via social media. Participants rated their interactions with businesses and reactions were mixed:

- 65% viewed businesses on social media as dishonest and a sneaky way for businesses to get personal information.
- 35% enjoyed being updated and experiencing that business's community.

Participants favorable to business communities reported that they would allow businesses to access their information in exchange for an incentive (coupon, free sample, etc.). Participants also would allow businesses on social media to be a part of that community and build rapport.

Participants were given a hypothetical situation to find a recipe online, with the options of going to an industry blog (i.e. Betty Crocker), reading a stay-at-home mom's blog, and looking at a food critic's blog. Most respondents (46%) replied that the most reliable place to go look would be at the stay at home mom's blog. The more authentic a person is online, relatable to an audience, or how the content is presented will increase users to your online presence.

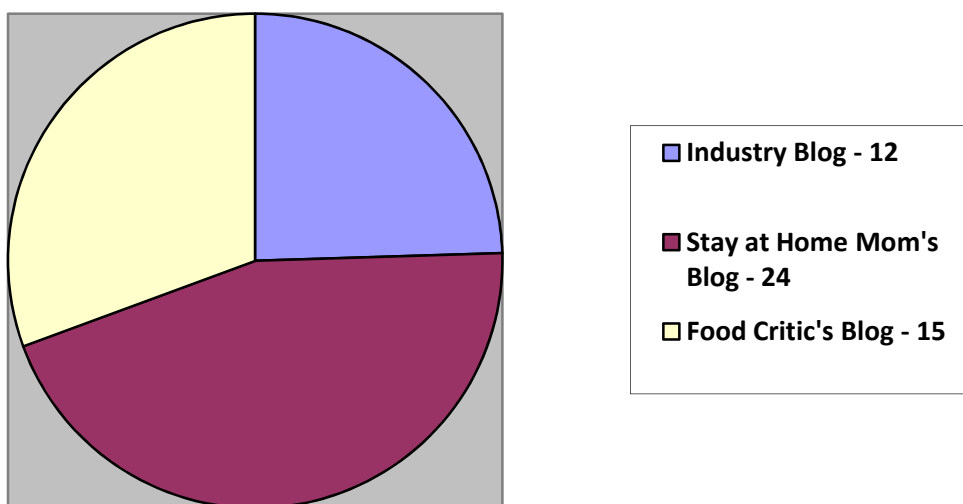


Figure 8 – Who's the most reliable?

Overall, the respondents viewed that social media as a large part of their lives and they would have a difficult time communicating without it. The data showed that the participants are comfortable using a variety of social media tools, but are concerned about privacy. When the participants' responses were compared to Li and Bernoff's (2008) Social Technographic Ladder, almost half (22) of the students were considered "creators," which is categorized as the internet's highest level of participation. Very few of the participants were rated



less than a level of “critics.” The survey data also showed that the participants favored social networking sites over any other type of social media and remained honest as possible on personal profiles. However, when it was asked what participants would allow access to, most participants would deny access to email addresses and phone numbers. Half of the participants also replied that they would repress their social media profiles if family or co-workers would ask to see that social media presence.

With regard businesses and social media, over nearly two-thirds of the participants (65%) believe that businesses on social media are dishonest and use social media as a tool to get users’ private information. The remaining 35% enjoyed being a part of a business’s social media presence, but would feel more comfortable allowing access to their information if the business would offer incentive. The participants’ data also showed that when a small business or blogger is more authentic online or relatable to your audience, the participants believed it would increase users to your online presence.

The participants were a group of sophisticated social media users, and highly involved in different online tasks. This data proves that small businesses need to work on improving their company’s social media image and learning about what a customer wants to be offered. This data also supports the idea that since students are highly involved in social media, it can become a barrier to communication and a challenge to keep up with different tasks. If a student has multiple social media presences, it is of the utmost importance to make sure each is presenting a positive image to an outside audience.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSING SOCIAL MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS

The purpose of this research is to provide better guidelines for small businesses and students to use social media. Johnson (2008) projected that by 2009, there would be over 600,000 small businesses using social media. In 2011, the number is well over the 1 million mark (Pew, 2011). The small business definition that is used in this research includes privately owned businesses that have less than 100 employees. This definition was determined as a result of looking at the European Union small businesses and U.S. Small Business Administration guidelines. According to Crowd Spring Statistics (2011), only 50% of small businesses are having some success with social media. The research has also found that 51% of Facebook users and 64% of Twitter users are more likely to buy the brands they are a fan of, or follow (Pew, 2011). Small businesses have adopted social media rapidly in the last couple years, but as more businesses work through social media online, some researchers worry that it will become more difficult to stand out in a crowd.

High school and college students are the probably largest audience on social media. However, there is an increasing problem of keeping students professional on social media, when social media is being ignored by most public junior high schools and high schools (Stoner, 2010). Students need to realize that there is a need for social media literacy, not only for their own relationships, but to become better internet users, consumers, and creators. As students, most of them have worked on projects that involve using online tools. If there are

better guidelines given to these students at an earlier age, they can learn how to balance their internet content to be professional on social media and still be able to openly communicate.

Small businesses and students share factors that greatly influence their social media relationships. Both groups need to work hard to maintain their presences because internet data can never be permanently deleted from online. Over half of new small businesses are developed by students while still in school (SBA, 2011). The small business world has seen a huge jump in entrepreneurs and if students can learn from an early point that social media can help them achieve their goals, there will be better results. Small businesses and students are two of the largest populations dominating social media, and yet each group is inundated with incomplete advice or completely ignored on how to cultivate their online presence.

Creating social media relationships is not unlike creating a relationship with another person; there is a need to be honest and to remain in contact. The key to success is how authentic the user is online. Small businesses and entrepreneurs have a strong advantage over big businesses, because they can relate directly to their consumers or readers and reply fast. Internet users are more apt to read a blog or follow social media by how relevant the content is to the users. For example, when a new mother is stressed out about what kind of baby food to buy, she is more likely to look online at sites that offer advice from other moms. Unless specifically for moms, name- brand baby food websites are not going to tell the pros and cons of their food. In the last two decades,

researchers have seen consumers distrust businesses more and more, which creates a ripple effect because users want to talk to other users about a product, brand, or even their experience in creating a project.

Students also need to remain as authentic as possible in how they communicate online, but one problem remains -- how to “judge” students that use the internet as a creative outlet. Cognitively, young people move through adolescence with an increasing problem of self-image to how they appear to others. Trying to understand themselves and their role in a greater society (who am I?), students frequently look to their social world for clues about what principles and traits to internalize - although the mixed messages they encounter can be confusing as they figure out which to incorporate (Stern, 2007). With increasing experience and time, many of their self-doubts about beliefs and values are overcome, prompting late adolescents to focus more on their futures i.e., who will I be (Stern, 2007)?

Young adults generate personal sites at more than twice the rate of adults. Their comments and reflections demonstrate that online publications can provide important opportunities for managing the complex situations and shifting self expectations (Stern, 2007). In descriptions of their decisions about what to reveal, exaggerate and omit in their online communication, youth authors reveal a highly conscious self-inquiry. Students can negotiate the boundaries of public and private spheres as they deliberate about who they are and who they want to be, within their local community and the larger culture (Stern, 2007). The internet,

young adults suggest, affords space and place for such complex identity work (Stern, 2007).

As users build relationships online through social media and other websites, it is important to note the consequences that can result, i.e. losing people skills or grammar skills. Research from Pew (2011) actually states social media can help literacy in young children as they are learning to read, but in adults, grammar skills drop dramatically with continual use of texting and chatting applications.

Two thirds of the texters surveyed by Pew Center's Internet and American Life Project (2011) said they were more likely to use their cell phones to text friends than to call them. Fifty-four percent said they text their friends once a day, but only 33 percent said they talk to their friends face-to-face on a daily basis. Evidence from the Pew (2011) study suggests that there is a catch-22 with social media. While social media may be making some adults less interested in face-to-face communication with their friends, Pew (2011) suggests that social media serves as tool to compliment relationships.

Small and Vorgan (2008) believe that so-called "digital natives," are already having a harder time reading social cues because they do not practice face-to-face human contact skills. Receivers of a message can easily misunderstand the message, since electronic communication cannot suggest the tone of the message or show facial cues of the sender (Junco et al, 2010). However, Stout (2010) says some researchers believe that the impersonal nature

of texting and online communication may make it easier for shy kids to connect with others.

Social media relationships can be very complicated. Small businesses and students are two of the largest using social media groups and have a lot of room for improvement. Social media is about creating a direct, honest relationship. Small businesses have an advantage over large businesses, by being able to provide more relevant content. Researchers have seen consumers distrust businesses more and more, which creates a ripple effect because users want to talk to other users about a product, brand, or even their experience in creating a project.

Students benefit from being authentic because they gain credibility. With social media, students also must learn how to balance their online personal lives to avoid a negative image. The internet has “growing” space for students to develop their self-identity, so it is important that the student learn how to monitor who has access to that content. Some researchers argue that social media relationships can affect a person’s face to face communication skills and others argue that social media lets people build relationships little by little.

## CHAPTER VII

### SMALL BUSINESSES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

As technological advancements grow and more people are learning to find their information on the internet, the world has seen a change in how businesses advertise to consumers. The traditional ways of advertising (print, television, and radio) are sometimes difficult for the small business owner to manage because of shrinking advertising budgets and rising costs in business expenses, thanks to downfalls in the economy (Spors, 2008). While some businesses are wary of beginning social media marketing, many websites and articles have urged business owners to create a social media presence. With social media, small businesses can have a direct connection to consumers and build a better brand perspective at a low cost (Zittrain, 2008).

Internet users are a media savvy group and are looking for a way to bypass huge conglomerates (Zittrain, 2008). The more sophisticated a social media user is, the harder it is for small businesses to attract a user that has many connections (Li & Bernoff, 2008). Small businesses' social media upkeep will have to provide dialogue that attracts new users and keeps current users interested. Social media allows small businesses to cast their nets widely, but it is up to the businesses to make the nets reach deeply (Brogan, 2010). If a small business is aware of its target consumers, small businesses can learn about the ways their consumers use social media.

According to Grover and Vriens (2006), current market research for businesses mainly focuses on finding demographics of consumers. Grover and

Vriens (2006) believe that focusing mainly on demographics leaves too many questions for small businesses to answer. They argue more research needs to be done considering the consumer's behavior instead of determining their general characteristics (Grover & Vriens, 2006). By learning a consumer's behavior, small businesses can market towards consumers' habits, i.e. determining when their consumers go online or what types of ads do they respond to (videos, photos, etc.) (Grover & Vriens, 2006).

According to Sheth (1982) marketing research has focused too much on the individual consumer as opposed to group behavior and similarly too much on the rational models of decision-making as opposed to looking at other non-problem solving models of choice behavior. Sheth (1982) argues that small businesses need an understanding of group phenomena, or in today's world, studies of online consumption, trends, online behavior, and how word of mouth recommendations are influencing other customers. By understanding this, small businesses can create marketing ideas that attract online users. Online users have become sophisticated customers and believe in direct, open connections to companies (Ha and Lee, 2009). Online users prefer a company's social media presence rather than continual advertisements.

Some small businesses are very hesitant to begin a social media presence, and depending on their type of industry, their reasons may be founded. Research has shown that three types of businesses usually do the best in social media: service (i.e. restaurants), product-oriented (i.e. hand crafted merchandise), and non-profit (i.e. awareness groups, causes) (Li and Bernoff,



2008). For example, a local restaurant could create a deeper social media relationship, than say a local law firm, because there is simply more that the restaurant could talk about: i.e. deals, quality of food, long-time customers, etc. A local law firm would be hard pressed to have communication on social media that would not overstep client boundaries or feel pushy to its users. So before a small business begins working with social media, it should develop a plan to determine if there is enough information to keep their social media presence fresh (Livingston, 2011).

Three common motivational factors were found to help small businesses understand why a social media presence is vital. The first factor, high visibility, allows social media users to easily connect with the business or provide word of mouth recommendation with little effort (Weinberg, 2009). The second factor includes loyalty, believing that social users who interact with or read posts from the businesses they “like” or “follow” are more likely to be loyal to that business and complete more financial transactions (Li and Bernoff, 2008). The third factor, cost, provides small businesses with the opportunity of trial and error marketing with little financial consequence (Brogan, 2010). It has also been concluded that word of mouth of recommendations play a pivotal role in how the small businesses’ presence maintains and finds new customers (Levine et al, 2008). Content must remain fresh or offer benefits to not only attract customers to social media, but also encourage customers to visit any physical locations that the business may have.

When small businesses have limited resources, the downside can be the potential liability when employees, customers and competitors use social media. Although legal standards are still evolving, businesses need to be aware of the risks associated with social media and be prepared to take the necessary steps to address the ways that employees should or shouldn't communicate with customers while on the job (Robertson, 2011). Controlling consumer interaction via social media also remains a murky proposition, as negative comments/reviews cannot be hidden or downplayed without reflecting badly on the business. When small businesses approach social media, most dive in head first, without coming up with an actual plan (Torossian, 2011). Without a plan, most small businesses lose ground and fail to attract new users to the business's social media (Torossian, 2011).

With the usage of social media growing so rapidly – Facebook (2011) says it has 800 million users; Twitter (2011) claims 400 million visitors per month; and YouTube (2011) claims to have passed 10 billion views in a single month -- small businesses might want to move quickly to take advantage of the marketing opportunities. However, employers need to recognize that there are risks and must have a plan in place so employees understand what the parameters are, and the consequences for violating the business's online policies (Robertson, 2011). Small businesses also need to be aware of how they are being represented throughout the entire web. Areas of potential liability include defamation, harassment, privacy violations or other claims (Robertson, 2011). Other social media risks include the leaking of proprietary information, trade

secrets, or general damage to a company's reputation through false, disparaging or careless communications (Robertson, 2011).

In October 2009, the Federal Trade Commission issued guidelines for businesses aimed at their social media practices (Robertson, 2011). The guidelines stipulated that if an employee blogs or comments about the products or services of the employer, the employee must disclose the relationship to the employer (Robertson, 2011). There are some levels of protection for certain statements, but putting things on social media is like putting it on a billboard - it's going out to everybody. A problematic situation may arise if an employee says something negative about a competitor on a social media site using their employer's computer, then both may be held responsible and open to a defamation claim (Robertson, 2011).

Legal issues aside, many small businesses are faced with limited resources before adding social media to their marketing mix. Small businesses need to be aware of what is being said about that business or its competitors online before diving in online (Torossian, 2011). Small business owners need to search for their business and see if things like a domain name is available, reviews have been added, or even if the Google location is claimed etc. Using social media means looking online from consumers' viewpoints and determining what they see when they access information about your business across several online platforms (Li and Bernoff, 2008). For example, when a small business claims its location on Google Maps, a user can set a GPS or phone to easily find the address (O' Reilly and Batelle, 2009). Small businesses can survey the

playing field before jumping in to determine what social media platform is the strongest for their content, by looking at how customers want to find the business.

Before a small business starts working with social media, the business must be fully committed to the task and decide who will be in charge (Torossian, 2011). Typically small business owners are already overloaded with the day to day jobs it takes to run a business, so it may be helpful to assign the job to fresh eyes (and hopefully someone knowledgeable about marketing and social media) or outsource the job. When some owners take over the task, they become too close to the situation and are unwilling to accept criticism online (Torossian, 2011). In a social media presence, honesty and authenticity are vital to prevent harm to the business image by deleting comments or ignoring users who have voiced concerns (Brogan, 2010).

A social media plan begins with an outline of goals. The next step to setting up the social media presence is to develop a plan, by outlining the number one goal for the social media to accomplish (Brogan, 2010). For example, is the business looking to increase awareness, or perhaps looking for an audience to test a new product in? Once a goal is defined, the small business needs to work on a guideline to determine much time to devote to social media, and outline if possible what to do on a daily basis, on what is to be talked about next. Generally, people are fueled by the need to answer or reply to someone if a question is asked and it begins a rapport. Social media users need to see a “likeable” side to small businesses (Li and Bernoff, 2008). Small businesses

should treat their social media audience as adults and consider them a target market that wants to listen (Brogan, 2010).

Once a social media plan is developed, it is necessary to understand that the results will not be instant (Weinberg, 2009). A social media plan needs to have time to be completed and evaluated, which can take weeks or even months. Social media is sometimes compared to a proverbial “cocktail party,” where you meet people and start a conversation, listen and ask questions, and trust others advice (Brogan, 2010). It is the conversation, not the technology, that allows small businesses to build a relationship with users (Levine et al, 2010). Businesses that also use multimedia break up the conversation, to prevent a continual push of new information (Weinberg, 2009). In the same way television cultivated audiences into a visual culture, social media audiences are more interested in seeing photos or video from a business rather than just read about it.

Many users only “like” or “follow” businesses via social media because of deals offered in exchange for their online information (Li and Bernoff, 2008). This relationship exchange falls under idea of the instant gratification theory, which in some ways is like bribing, to provide an incentive (i.e. coupon, deal, exclusive peek, etc.) in order for a social media user to become a part of a small business’s social media presence (Huang, 2008). Deal sites like Groupon and LivingSocial are examples of deal offering websites and the websites create concern for many business owners. However, small business owners are worried that if they use

social media deal-offering websites, the only time they will see success with social media is when a deal is offered.

Groupon (2011) and LivingSocial (2011) are both websites that require users to provide their contact information in order to access limited time offer deals for the largest city in their vicinity. While some businesses might consider it a downside to offer these deals at low prices, some contend that these social media sites allow large exposure to a business that might have never experienced that before (Dewing, 2011). If a small business can keep with the exposure and provide a good consumer experience, the “deal” marketing has paid off by possibly creating a new regular consumer (Dewing, 2011).

Even if a small business is limited by resources, a developed marketing plan can be completed if the small business remains in contact with its audience and is honest. Social media users will be loyal to those who show inklings of social responsibility or show interest in consumer feedback (Lepoutre, 2006). For a small business, it is best to think hyper local and talk to the community if there many competitors (Brogan, 2010). Thinking hyper locally means a mindset where the primary focus is directed towards a defined community (i.e. town, religious group, etc.) and the concerns of its members (Sutter, 2009). With social media being able to play out anywhere, a user is to more apt to join a social media conversation with a small business that is dedicated to its consumers in a localized area, or sponsoring different causes (Brogan, 2010).

To see continual success, a small business must keep up with its social media even though the “initial” stage may be completed. If businesses do not

keep up social media, they will be disadvantaged if they need to use it again (Zittrain, 2008). Social media users can be quick to join a business's presence and quick to leave it if the conversation stagnates. A good way for a small business to provide more content to a social media presence is to brainstorm with employees (or friends, if a sole proprietor) to discuss what they might hear from customers or if they notice an under discussed topic about the business (Weinberg, 2009). These meetings could prove insightful and help others in charge of that small business's social media presence.

Overall, a small business needs to understand its consumer behavior before committing to a social media presence. If a small business's core consumer group is not involved online or not established enough to create a conversation, the small business needs to have the ability to determine if social media is the tool of choice for online promotion. Once a small business does commit, there is a lot of work to be done and a plan needs to be developed. The conversation must remain open and authentic, as well as have a variety posts through a defined time period that include questions, multimedia and a way to giving to the community. Social media users are bombarded with small businesses wanting to connect with them every day and for those businesses to succeed, it is important that the online experience they provide is different than that of competitors.

## CHAPTER VIII

### STUDENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

According to the Pew Research Center (2011), the current high school and college student populations have been deemed “Generation Next.” These populations are more digitally active than any other previous generation.

Electronic media use includes email, instant messaging (IM), cell phones, social-networking sites (SNSs), video or online games, and television or movie viewing on a daily basis. More than ever before, students have to learn to balance their time both in reality and creating a life online. Recent studies indicate a negative association between academic outcomes and the use of video games, SNSs, and other types of electronic media (Jacobsen, 2010). For example, Bowman et al. (2010) found that students who IM and text more than others show more distractibility during academic tasks. In the experiment regarding multitasking, it was found that the students took longer to read a passage if they were IMing at the same time; but IMing did not affect comprehension relative to students that read without IMing (Bowman et al. 2010),

Human behavior encourages people to seek acceptance and find community. People go online to find others like themselves and to share in their interests. One of the most important things that students need to understand about user motivations and social media is that the online world greatly affects the “real” world. Online discussions have a tendency to find their way “offline,” especially if they come from a social network site where the user does not lock down privacy (Rau, 2010). Internet users at any age are living in this “remix



culture,” and need to understand that even if they are creating online content to be expressive, they need to monitor who has access to it (Lessig, 2008). For example, say a student produces what he or she thinks is a funny video mocking an educator and decides to show it to friends. Even if the incident is parody by nature and good-humored, the student could still face dire consequences if the video went viral and was discovered by education officials (Kravets, 2011). When students create content, they need to consider how their actions online could impact their eligibility for scholarships, college or even jobs (Rau, 2010). The earlier a student can use social media to create social media content that they become an authority in (i.e. local sports, being a musician, etc.), the better social media content provider they can become (Rau, 2010). The internet motivates users to find information, so almost nothing is private on the internet. Once a student feels accepted into a group, and especially online through social media, the student will begin to open up and divulge more information or be more likely to slip up and say something that wrongly reflects upon them (Rau, 2010).

As society grows accustomed to having its younger generations online, people are realizing how to take advantage of students online. Students issues online include cyber bullying, identity theft, or even stealing each other’s work (Rivero, 2011). Employers look at social media to get the “feel” of a job applicant. Once employers look at a social media profile, they have their first impression. CareerBuilder.com has found that 45 percent of employers check social media profiles during the hiring process. In the new age of social media, job applicants may never know that a potential employer found their political view

to be unpalatable and therefore passed them up for a candidate with a cleaner “net record” (Brown, 2011). When one adds the public nature of status updates, and the fact that online communications are less censored by the user, a tone of voice is difficult to determine online. So as employers check the information a person posts, the posting candidate may encounter difficulty finding a job when hiring is competitive due to slow economic growth (Brown, 2011).

The saying remains true, what goes on the internet, will forever remain on the internet. With new technology springing up all the time, digital trails of evidence are easier to find even if the content has been deleted by the user (Weiss, 2009). Social networking sites are experts at keeping copies of all the content that flows through site, due to an increase of technology breakdowns or lawsuits (Weiss, 2009). The typical age for a student to start using social media regularly begins around age thirteen, or what most consider the beginning of the pre-teen years. When most teenagers start using social media, they learn by trial and error or by the help of friends and they are unaware of how content is stored or accessed.

It is a bit of contradiction for young users and social media. Younger users should remain as anonymous as possible while publishing personal content (i.e. diary, stories, pictures, etc.) in order to protect their privacy from cyber stalkers or those who wish to mar their image (Junco, 2010). Yet, at the same time, students need access to social media to start being exposed to what is right and wrong about using social media. Unfortunately, most parents do not oversee what their teenagers do online and neglect to put precautions in place

(Rau, 2010). More preteen and teenager driven social media sites are beginning to take off in popularity and a good piece of advice is to let these users have freedom to originate ideas and expand their imaginations, but also for those users to allow parents to see their sites on a regular basis (Rivero, 2011).

Social media is a sore subject with most public high schools. Most schools have locked down students' access to social media and are not requiring their educators to learn what social media is about. Schools with larger student populations lock down computer access as a precaution from ruining computers with viruses, downloading inappropriate content, and keeping students on task. In smaller schools, social media has shed light on a socioeconomic digital divide that exists in access and use of social media, because some schools cannot afford upgrades in technology (Junco, 2010). Social media could boost students' attention and activity with a subject, because most students learn in classrooms with computers (Junco, 2010). "Digital natives" readily develop the habit of multitasking at an early age, and are drawn to social media as a free and easy way to communicate with several friends (Selwyn, 2009).

However, social media creates a digital divide, as students who adopt it early become familiar with technology shifts (Rau, 2010). Students on the other side of the divide face a problem communicating when social media is not allowed during schools. A student from a lower socioeconomic background actually does worse without learning social media, because he is "out casted" from his peers. Regardless of these ongoing concerns, social media technologies do serve important educational purposes.

Research by both Greg Heiberger and the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) (2008) found a positive relationship between social media use and college-student engagement. For instance, a higher percentage of frequent users of social networking websites participated in and spent more time in campus organizations than less frequent users. More of the frequent users interacted face-to-face daily with close friends and felt strong connections to them. So if social media was incorporated earlier into high school and used in the classroom, it might increase college student engagement. College students have the greatest potential in using social media for personal goals. With social media, students can promote their work and projects and gain “followers” at a faster speed. Eighty-six percent of college students go online daily, and 59% of that time is spent on social media (Jones, 2008).

Students using social media still have a lot room to make improvements in their online habits. Once students realize that there is a fine line in social media usage that can result either in consequences or positives, social media will have a large impact on that student’s life. Ideally, a student should still be able to use social media to communicate with friends and create content (i.e. blogging), while not jeopardizing his or her future internet image. Social media literacy should begin early and be incorporated in schools to improve students’ attention and usage of online tools. If social media was incorporated into high schools and used in the classroom, it might even have an effect on increasing college student engagement.

## CHAPTER IX

### ABOUT THE WEBSITE

Social media users are faced with new dilemmas about what to do on social media every day. The website ([TheSocialMediaBubble.com](http://TheSocialMediaBubble.com)) was created to be a continuation of the research of this project. [TheSocialMediaBubble.com](http://TheSocialMediaBubble.com) offers free tips, advice, and research to help small businesses, students, and educators learn social media. The website contains content for each audience because each group faces different obstacles. Small businesses are offered advice and criteria to start their social media presence. Students are presented with the information of how to keep their social media presences safe and how to use the internet as a creative space. More research will be added later to help educators understand the need for social media literacy. The information collected will help the groups navigate social media by reading articles or watching videos.

The website also contains a variety of social media guides to explain social media tools more. The website was built on a Joomla content management system to allow a forum to be easily built in. The forum was set up to allow social media users to register for the website and have a place to ask questions or suggest social media issues. Future plans include other audiences and industries affected with the evolution of social media. The future of social media depends on the users, and the website was built to help social media users build a learning community.

The screenshot displays the homepage of 'THE SOCIAL MEDIA BUBBLE'. At the top, the site's logo is on the left, and a search bar is on the right. Below the logo is a navigation menu with tabs for HOME, ABOUT, SMALL BUSINESSES, STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, FUTURE, and FORUM. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA?:** A featured article with a dark background and white text. It includes a sub-header and a 'Read this Entry' link.
- MULTIMEDIA:** A section featuring three video thumbnails from TED.com. The thumbnails are labeled 'Students: Alexis Ohanian: How to make a splash', 'Small Businesses: Johanna Blakley: Social media and sex', and 'Educators: Jonathan Harris: The Web's secret stories'. Below the thumbnails is a note: 'The videos featured are from TED.com, which makes talks and performances available to the world for free.'
- LOGIN FORM:** A form with fields for 'Username' and 'Password', a 'Remember Me' checkbox, and a 'Login' button. Below the form are links for 'Forgot your password?', 'Forgot your username?', and 'Create an account'.
- THE SOCIAL MEDIA BUBBLE:** A section with a green header. It features an article titled 'FUTURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PART 1: SOCIAL MEDIA AND TORNADIC ACTIVITY' with a large image of a storm cloud. Below the image is a paragraph of text and a 'Read more...' link. Below the article is a 'WELCOME TO THE SOCIAL MEDIA BUBBLE!' message and a colorful word cloud containing various words like 'bienvenidos', 'namaste', and 'willkommen'.

At the bottom of the page, there is a search bar with the text 'search...' and a magnifying glass icon.

Figure 9 – TheSocialMediaBubble.com

## CHAPTER X

### THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA - CONCLUSION

Social media is changing almost everyone's lives. In today's age, social media is changing the way people communicate, learn, and even do business. Social media originated in the 1970s with Bulletin Board Systems and has evolved into today's dominant usage of the Internet. With blogs, social gaming and social networking sites, social media has taken over how users share and create content. Social networking sites have changed how we keep up with friends and family and even how we find potential jobs. Social media technology will continue to evolve and users will follow to the new technologies. Social media users need to remain focused on the content of the networks.

It is important to understand social media users' motivations and the precedent technologies that changed human behavior to predict new functions of social media. Each of the previous technologies -- the telegraph, the air conditioner, automobiles, radio, television, and cell phones--allowed humans to communicate faster, and eventually led to the creation of more leisure time. As per the human motivations that were discussed, social media serves the need for internet users to communicate and join communities to fulfill their basic human needs to be accepted into a group. While Putnam (2001) believed technology led to the "individualizing" our leisure time via television, internet and eventually "virtual reality helmets" (par.39), social media has actually increased communication between internet users across the world in various online platforms (gaming, blogs, SNSs, etc.) The internet's "participatory" culture is

growing stronger with social media, as users find faster ways to share content and collaboratively work together on new projects.

Data from the survey conducted for this research gave some insight into social media behavior. Fifty-two participants responded to a survey that asked several social media questions, pertaining to why users keep up with social media and how they felt towards businesses that use social media. Overall, the respondents said they felt that they could not function without social media after now being exposed to the technology. Many of the participants expressed concern about social media and privacy.

Small businesses and students are two of the largest social media populations on the internet and also are the populations with the most room for improvement using social media. In recent years, small businesses have readily adopted using social media as a cheap form of marketing, but now are being criticized for creating social media presences that are abandoned or mismanaged. Students are readily using social media as well, but many ignore the consequences and potential opportunities of social media. What goes on the internet lasts forever, so students need to be aware of the content they create to not damage future job opportunities.

Social media has been changing the world rapidly with several groups using social media as a tool to organize revolutions and protests. On Jan 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the world for the first time witnessed the beginning of a social media revolution that brilliantly leveraged the power of social networking tools to overthrow a corrupt regime (Crovitz, 2011). Facebook, Twitter and blogs were all



used to mobilize people all over Egypt to end the 30-year dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak, who was eventually overthrown after 18 days of demonstrations. The revolution began as a result of different Facebook groups, but mainly the “We are all Khalid Saed” Facebook group that attracted about 80,000 participants and citizens who coordinated their ideas and demonstration logistics via group posts, and comments, while communicating heavily on Twitter and sometimes cell phone SMS services (Crovitz, 2011). Khaled Saed was a young Egyptian who is widely believed to have been murdered by police.

Occupy Wall Street is an ongoing series of demonstrations in New York City based in Zuccotti Park, that are mainly being organized by social media (Dobnik, 2011). The protest was originally called for by the Canadian activist group Adbusters. The participants of the event are mainly protesting against social and economic inequality, corporate greed, and the influence of corporate money and lobbyists on government, among other concerns (Dobnik, 2011). By October 9, 2011 similar demonstrations had been held or were ongoing in over 70 cities (Dobnik, 2011).

The future of social media lies with what the technology can do for people during revolutions, crises, and weather disasters. In 2011 alone, two different tornados destroyed towns in Alabama and Missouri (NOAA, 2011). In Alabama, the twister outbreak was the second deadliest in U.S. history. FEMA estimated that there were more tornadoes in a single day during the Alabama outbreak than ever recorded in history. Of the 312 twisters that were spawned, 226 occurred within a 24-hour period (NOAA, 2011). Joplin, MO was destroyed later in the

year by an EF-5 tornado, which is the deadliest type (NOAA, 2011). After both situations occurred, thousands of people turned to social media as a way of communication to find loved ones, because cell phone towers and phone lines were destroyed. FEMA (2011) and the American Red Cross helped set up Facebook pages and Twitter accounts to keep track of who was missing in each storm, as well as to help people find out information about how to get back into their homes. Without social media, communication would have been extremely difficult and it has proven a necessary tool when to educate and help people when a crisis is about to happen.

Social media is not without its faults however, as new legal issues arise. Many cases have been tried at court to determine social media privacy and what can or cannot be said in a social media setting if you are an authority figure or even a teacher (Strutin, 2011). Courts can subpoena content from social media sites and users need take caution in what they are posting (Strutin, 2011). Law enforcement officers look for social media evidence in their cases.

Overall, social media has changed how internet users will forever communicate, learn and share content. It is important for people to understand that social media can be used for great things and as a way for the “little” person to have a voice online. Older generations are starting to use social media too, but for now it is dominated by business and students. Every internet user needs to improve their social media literacy. The social media bubble has burst and it is here to stay in the aspect that it has breathed new life into how people communicate and will wish to still communicate even though the technology may

change. Social media has the potential to be incorporated into a larger purpose, such as being the answer to organizing protests, major societal change and being the last communication standing in a crisis.

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## VITA

Graduate School

Southern Illinois University

Cary A. Bryant

Date of Birth: February 24, 1989

2511 S. Illinois Ave. Lot #126, Carbondale, Illinois 62903

302 S. Commercial St, Centralia, Illinois 62801

cbd327@gmail.com

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Bachelor of Science, Journalism, December 2009

Research Paper Title:

The Social Media Bubble: An Examination of Social Media User Motivations  
and Their Implications for Future Users and Communication Technologies

Major Professor: Rob Spahr