

CREATING SOCIAL ACTION THROUGH FACEBOOK

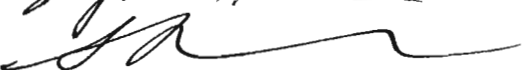
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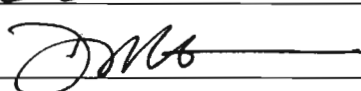
Kelly S. Vandersluis
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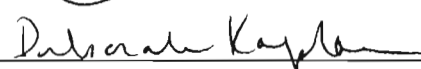
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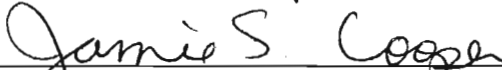
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Creating Social Action through Facebook

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

By

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my patient and loving parents and husband-to-be Eric for their support throughout this graduate experience.

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ABSTRACT

CREATING SOCIAL ACTION THROUGH FACEBOOK

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Facebook, as a popular representative of the social network site genre, has changed the way that social network site users manage their on- and offline social lives and communication, and creates a new rhetorical situation in which users create and perform their identity roles to an unknown audience. This new rhetorical situation requires connectivity, integration, and an understanding of both self as a performer of identity and as a member of a greater audience of other performers.

Facebook creates Facebook-specific social action. This social action can be seen in how users manage their social information, communicate, and gather and share information.

This thesis is framed by Lloyd F. Bitzer's theory on elements of rhetorical situation (exigence, constraints, audience, and author) and is inspired by Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd's genre study of blogs, "Blogging as Social Action: A Genre

Analysis of the Weblog.” Bitzer’s theory and Miller and Shepherd’s method assist in demonstrating that social network sites, and Facebook specifically, are functioning rhetorically and are a fitting rhetorical response to American social exigences.

INTRODUCTION

The popular social network site Facebook has changed the way that social network site users manage their on- and offline social lives and communication, and creates a new rhetorical situation in which users create and perform their identity roles to an unknown audience. This new rhetorical situation requires connectivity, integration, and an understanding of both self as a performer of identity and as a member of a greater audience of other performers. Facebook strives to model its online connections and features after offline social lives, and as a result, Facebook has been adopted wholeheartedly as a primary mode of communication and information gathering and sharing by over 67 million active users from around the world (Statistics). Facebook developers envision the site as a social utility that will “make it really efficient for people to communicate, get information and share information” (Locke).

Facebook’s developers respond to common social needs and desires as well as those needs that are specific to the site’s users. Facebook’s features allow it to satisfy American society’s desire for connectivity in the macro sense (connection to the rest of the Facebook world), in the micro sense (user-to-user connection with direct communication), and everything in between, as seen in Facebook’s organization of users by geographical, school, and company networks. Facebook also responds to society’s desire for mediated exhibitionism and voyeurism by providing both direct and indirect

modes of communication. With its attention to privacy and networked connections based on real life, Facebook technology strives to meet the complex and growing needs of users who live a portion of their lives online and seek an online life that compliments and represents their offline lives.

Facebook creates Facebook-specific social action. This social action can be seen in how users manage their social information, such as photos and events; how users communicate in direct and indirect ways; the way information gathering and character assessment has been made more efficient; how users construct virtual identities and perform them through profiles and Facebook features; and the consideration of appropriateness when identity performance occurs with an unknown audience.

In his work “The Rhetorical Situation,” Lloyd F. Bitzer claims that there are three elements of a rhetorical situation that must be present prior to discourse: exigence, constraints, and audience. Exigence is a need to be fulfilled through discourse. An exigence is considered to be rhetorical when it is “capable of positive modification” and requires discourse for this modification (Bitzer 6). Constraints are “persons, events, objects, and relations” influencing the rhetor’s and audience’s actions and decisions that are necessary to modify the situation (Bitzer 8). The audience encompasses all those who are capable of being changed in some way by the discourse (Bitzer 3). Through the discourse, the audience becomes a “mediator of change” (Bitzer 4). This thesis uses Bitzer’s elements of rhetorical situation—exigence, constraints, and audience—in addition to the rhetor, or author in this case, as its primary theoretical framework. This

method serves to solidify that social network sites, and Facebook specifically, are functioning rhetorically.

Using Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd's model from "Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog" as direction for analysis, this thesis examines the rhetorical climate in which Facebook developed and examines the social action that results specifically from the site. Miller and Shepherd discuss the key events that shaped a rhetorical situation where blogs were needed and accepted. Their goal is to approach blogging as a genre in terms of what made it a fitting rhetorical action "within its cultural environment" (Miller and Shepherd). Miller and Shepherd's analysis of the blog genre in relation to this cultural environment proves to be an effective method for analyzing how and why a genre comes into existence and what will make it persist. As they aptly demonstrate, analyzing a genre's cultural context will clarify the genre's evolution and future, as well as "the available social roles and relationships and the possibilities for social action" (Miller and Shepherd). Miller and Shepherd analyze 1990s culture where social, entertainment, and political issues came together to create a public need and desire for mediated voyeurism, a concept defined by Clay Calvert as "the consumption of revealing images of and information about others' apparently revealed and unguarded lives" that occurs not just for entertainment's sake, through media such as the Internet (Calvert). Miller and Shepherd show how the blog was a fitting response to the societal needs that emerged during the 1990s and how the blog functions rhetorically as a genre of its own.

This work is an extension of Miller and Shepherd's and the following analysis takes the next logical step of using their analytic strategies to examine Facebook rhetorically as a genre and catalyst for social action and show that though Facebook is a fitting response to current American social management, communication, and identity performance exigences, it will have difficulty keeping pace with ever-evolving and complex online American social needs.

This thesis is framed by Bitzer's theory and inspired by Miller and Shepherd's work, it is organized as a defense of Facebook as a fitting rhetorical response to American social exigences. It is assumed that social network sites are accepted as a genre separate from other Internet media. This thesis closely examines Facebook rhetorically as a representative of the social network site genre by analyzing the site in terms of its exigences, constraints, audience, and authors to prove that Facebook creates Facebook-specific social action that has been accepted by society and absorbed into both on- and offline culture.

RHETORICAL THEORY, GENRE, AND SITUATION

Lloyd F. Bitzer's three elements of rhetorical situation, exigence, constraints, and audience, along with author, can be used to frame social network sites rhetorically. The exigence and constraints associated with social network sites emerge because of cultural changes that affected the way that the society of Internet users communicates and manages varying lifestyles. In the environment that precipitated social network sites, the line between author and audience has blurred as a result of the social need for connectivity, celebrity, and efficiency. Social network sites are the rhetorical response to the multiple exigencies and complicated set of constraints of Internet users.

Exigence

Bitzer defines a rhetorical situation as "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence" (Bitzer 6). Exigence, in this sense, refers to a need or rhetorical problem to be addressed. Bitzer sees exigence as "an imperfection marked by urgency" and a "defect" that is "other than it should be." He claims that in order to be rhetorical, the exigence must be "capable of positive modification" that requires discourse for modification (Bitzer 6). According to Bitzer's definition, exigence is central to creating the rhetorical situation and guides the situation by specifying "the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected" (Bitzer 7).

Only when the exigence allows for a potential change, an audience is identified, and it is evident that discourse is capable of altering the reality of the situation, can rhetorical action create a fitting response to satisfy the situation.

In “Genre as Social Action,” Carolyn Miller shapes her definition of exigence and its role in the rhetorical situation to apply to social action. Miller disagrees with Bitzer's need for exigence to be a “defect” or danger (Bitzer 5). Miller instead defines exigence as the identification of “an objectified social need” through a common social knowledge of “objects, events, interests, and purposes” (Miller, “Genre” 157). She substantiates this claim by locating exigence in the social world, “making public [society’s] private versions of things” and seeing exigence as capable of creating social action through its introduction to a common rhetorical situation (Miller, “Genre” 158). By Miller’s definition, Internet users’ desire for better connection speeds was the exigence that encouraged Internet providers to offer high speed connections in addition to dial up connection. This exigence was not a defect in Internet service, nor were users in any danger if they continued using dial up connections. Rather, this exigence was grounded in a common social desire for faster connection speeds out of convenience. Miller characterizes this common social motive as “a set of particular social patterns and expectations that provides a socially objectified motive” for addressing society’s needs and shortcomings. Exigence that will precipitate social action requires members of the society to understand the social need through social patterns and, as Bitzer notes, will have the ability to participate in the resulting social action (Miller, “Genre” 158). This

thesis employs the idea of exigence in Miller's terms—as a social need that is a collective desire rather than a material defect or danger.

To further pursue the social aspect of exigence, Miller characterizes exigence as social motive and “a set of particular social patterns and expectations that provides a socially objectified motive” for addressing society's needs and shortcomings (Miller, “Genre” 158). Exigence that will precipitate social action requires members of the society to understand the social need and, as Bitzer notes, will have the ability to participate in the resulting social action. Society's understanding of social needs and its participation in social action creates a new culture that internalized the social action as a solution to the common social exigence.

As shown in Figure 1, cultural changes lead to a new rhetorical situation. The emergence of a new rhetorical situation with new exigences and constraints calls for an appropriate rhetorical response that calls on society as facilitators of change. Rhetorical responses then lead to social action as a reaction to the responses because of society's active participation in the responses. Social action eventually transforms into a way of life where culture adapts to the rhetorical situation and exigences, the rhetorical response, and the social action and absorbs these changes into the culture, creating a new culture.

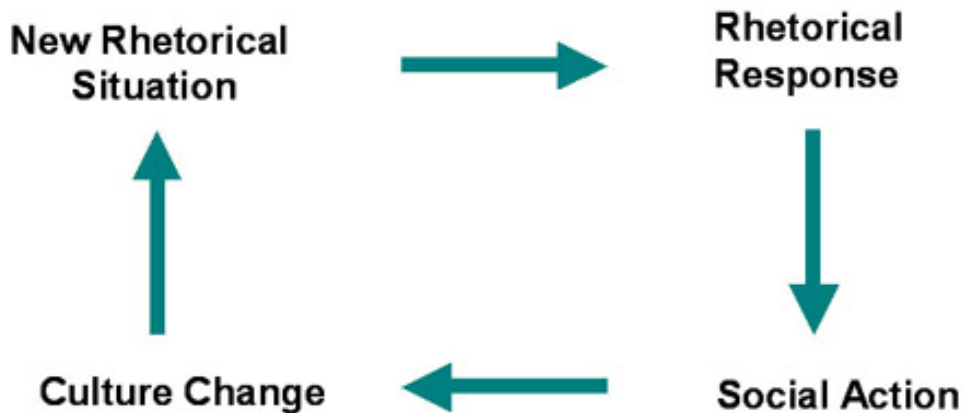


Figure 1. The Rhetorical Cycle

According to Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd in “Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog,” a new rhetorical opportunity arises when new technology is accessible and “adopted so quickly and widely that it must be serving well established” rhetorical exigences (Miller and Shepherd). Like with Miller’s definition of exigence as an “objectified social need” (Miller, “Genre” 157), this classification of rhetorical exigences as “well established” argues that exigences, and therefore genres, are created deliberately and are based on concrete social needs that are universal enough that they respond to more than just an individual’s exigence. In “Genre as Social Action,” Miller shapes her definition of genre in terms of social action, asserting that “genre is a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence” where motivation comes from connecting the private with the public and the “singular with the recurrent” (Miller, “Genre” 155). Using this definition, it is clear that the public nature of genre requires exigences to be based on common social, rather than individual, needs or

material constraints. This thesis applies Miller's definition of genre to social network sites in the same manner that Miller and Shepherd have for blogs.

Miller and Shepherd's classification of blogs as a genre is analogous to the social network site. Social network sites are similar to blogs because they are responding to the same social exigences, and they developed in the same social climate "of mediated voyeurism, widely dispersed but relentless celebrity, [and] unsettled boundaries between public and private" society (Miller and Shepherd). Like blog users, social network site users engage in self-disclosure, binding "together in a recognizable rhetorical form the four functions of self-disclosure: self-clarification, social validation, relationship development, and social control" to serve a common social exigence of being seen and remembered (Miller and Shepherd).

Constraints

Bitzer states that "every rhetorical situation contains a set of constraints made up of persons, events, objects, and relations . . . beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives" (Bitzer 8). Many of these constraints may be understood by examining the cultural environment in which a rhetorical situation develops.

In their work, Miller and Shepherd discuss the events in the 1990s that created the rhetorical situation in which blogs emerged and became widely adopted. Miller and Shepherd identify MTV's 1992 launch of *The Real World* as the beginning of the reality television craze (Miller and Shepherd). After the wild popularity of *The Real World*,

reality television became a television genre of its own, and the number of reality shows grew exponentially through the 1990s and early 2000s, with five of the top ten broadcast television shows being reality shows during the week of March 18, 2008 (Trend Index). Reality television became an extension of the tell-all talk shows, like *Ricki Lake* and *Maury Povich*, and gained even more popularity because of the genre's perceived raw, unfiltered reality.

The reality television revolution had a particular social affect on American people—they felt an entitlement to immediate, raw truth and access to the private details of all other Americans' lives, and they demanded more opportunities to experience this perceived reality. Whether they elevated normal people to celebrity status on game shows, such as 1998's *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, or monitored and discussed the love lives of participants on 1999's *The Bachelor*, Americans craved information and a view into others' lives. This desire extended into the political arena, most notably during President Clinton's scandal involving Monica Lewinsky. People learned the sordid details of Clinton's affair and viewed both Clinton and Lewinsky with fascination, rather than disgust. In fact, Lewinsky gained instant celebrity status, which led to a career move into the entertainment business with endorsement deals and a hosting job on the reality dating show *Mr. Personality* (Miller and Shepherd).

The late 1990s were a turning point for American culture. With the ability for Americans to achieve their dreams of celebrity, whether it is enduring celebrity or of the 15 minutes of fame variety, Americans saw that celebrity was in their own hands. They were their own publicists, and if Monica Lewinsky was any example, the saying that “any

press is good press” rang true for the first time for the average American. In a perfect storm of television and Internet media availability, Americans’ interest in the lives of normal people and public figures as well as advancements in accessibility and usability on the Internet prompted Internet companies to respond with online tools for sharing ones life and creating one’s own Internet identity. These tools were widely accepted by an interested audience. With the potential for celebrity, Internet users’ focus moved from online communities with contributing members, such as message boards and chat rooms, to online media where an individual’s identity performance became the key element. Photo sharing sites, weblogs, and early social network sites, like Sixdegrees or Friendster, focused on the user’s ability to create his own world where others could visit. This change to a culture of accessible celebrity was the catalyst for the fast-paced evolution in culture that has persisted since the 1990s.

Since Miller and Shepherd’s 2004 article, more Americans are connected to the Internet and are comfortable with its navigation and use. The dynamism and immediacy of the Internet in the 2000s creates new rhetorical situations and responses at a high speed. Social action in this time period is created and transformed into mainstream culture so rapidly that social action has become cumulative and difficult to separate from culture itself.

Social network sites not only emerged from a culture of instant celebrity, but from a growing social need for a new way to communicate quickly, whether directly or indirectly. In 1997, America Online launched its AOL Instant Messenger, a program that allows users, or “buddies,” to type messages to each other that can be seen and responded

to instantly. This direct communication was a faster method than a phone call, and served the needs of users who only needed to communicate for a small bit of information (such as a time to meet their buddy) as well as those who wanted to hold a conversation with a buddy while talking to others or doing other tasks at the same time. This precursor to the text message includes a feature called an “away message” that can be customized to display any message that the user types in when another user sends her an instant message (Stepp C01). This away message feature turned into its own form of communication, with users leaving notes to their buddies about their exact whereabouts, their mood, a quotation or song lyric, and even pointed messages to ex-lovers. This type of indirect communication set the stage for the use of indirect communication later in social network sites.

With the abundance of wireless devices that have become more advanced and more available between the late 1990s and 2008, the ability to be connected at all times to other people, email, and more recently, instant messaging, text messaging, music, videos, blogs, and social network sites has changed the rhetorical situation once again. This connectivity has changed the way that people communicate and how they send and receive information. In 2008, 62% of Americans use their wireless devices to upload and download their lives virtually anywhere from their phones, laptops, and other wireless devices (Horrihan). Americans have embraced this connectivity and have created a demand for more types of wireless devices with more features in response to an overwhelming desire for connectivity as a status symbol and as a way of life.

The tragedies on September 11th created a broad American exigence for a way to connect to loved ones at home, abroad, and at war. The Internet has become a popular medium for this type of communication through blogs, email, and social network sites. Americans are able to connect with each other at any time from any location with Internet connectivity. Additionally, post-September 11th Americans have found a resurgence of a need to connect with likeminded individuals around political and social causes. While much of the focus has been on the war in Iraq, Americans are now also increasingly interested in causes that relate to the 2008 presidential election and issues that are addressed by the candidates. The Internet, especially blogs and social network sites, has facilitated these meetings of likeminded people. In response to their need to have a place to gather virtually, communicate, catalogue related news stories, and organize events, social network sites have moved this discourse into a collaborative and connective space rather than having users keep up with multiple blogs and associated commentary. Many social network sites provide features that facilitate community discussion, like groups based around causes and political action, discussion forums, and event organization tools to advertise an event and invite other site users. Sites like Facebook and MySpace create an even more personal forum by allowing the presidential candidates to have their own site profiles and groups that they use to connect to the politically and socially active users.

This post-September 11th exigence of connectivity has also contributed to a desire to manage their lives online. In the early 2000s, many Internet users moved their banking, money management, and commerce online. In 2008, Internet users are capable

of managing most of their lives online. Google offers a suite of free products for managing email, photos, multiple calendars, and documents and spreadsheets. Apple's iTunes service allows users to manage their music, movies, television shows, and ebooks online. When much of America's life management moved online, a new rhetorical situation developed. The American exigence for complete online life management precipitated a way to manage one's social life online rather than just make connections to others' profiles, as with Friendster and LinkedIn. Between 2003 and 2008, social network site forerunner MySpace created a usable interface where users could not only manage their friends, profiles, photos, videos, and varied communication needs (email-like messages, instant messaging, blogs, comments), but where they could "hang out" and view others' content and respond to communications (Boyd, "Why Youth").

It is relevant to view MySpace as Facebook's predecessor rather than contemporary because of Facebook's growing popularity and the imminent toppling of MySpace's status as a useful social management tool, as felt by movements such as "International Delete Your MySpace Account Day." Fed up MySpace users cite "glitchy pages, annoying banner ads and an abundance of spam" as reasons for making the move from MySpace to Facebook (Wortham). Such social action as a vocal change in public opinion about MySpace and the subsequent move to Facebook or away from social network sites altogether appears to have caused Facebook to respond to the needs of the MySpace refugees, as well as its original users with clean formatting, real connections based in offline life between people who use real names, and a more controlled environment with options for privacy settings.

With a multitude of accessible information about people's personal lives on social network sites, the question arose about what is appropriate to post, to see, or to acknowledge that one has seen. The discomfort of being able to see someone else's identity performance led to awkward exchanges, and the idea of "stalking" one's friends on MySpace or Facebook. This problem persisted as Facebook opened its service to all Internet users with an email address in September 2006 and eventually came to a head with the introduction of the News Feed in that same month (Sanghvi). Facebook groups protesting the News Feed popped up rapidly, voicing concerns about information on their profile updates being automatically published to their friends through the feed on the users' homepages. The "Students against Facebook News Feed (Official Petition to Facebook)" group, still boasting 209,659 members in 2008, includes angry statements about Facebook's invasion of "personal privacy" and lack of "good taste" in automatically posting information through the News Feed (Kazerooni). As Facebook added privacy settings and users came to accept the News Feed, user actions on Facebook for those who did not choose to regulate their privacy settings became more performative. Users began to accept and enjoy the mediated voyeurism and performed strategic actions with their appearance on the News Feed in mind. Now it has become socially acceptable to take what a friend has in his profile or what is streamed in the News Feed as public information that is as good as if he told friends personally. With this change in social interaction, Facebook's open and integrated culture has brought about Facebook-specific social action as well as resulting offline cultural changes, such as the social acceptance of gathering and displaying information indirectly.

The shaping of this new type of celebrity-seeking, Internet-based culture created such a new way of communicating and managing identities and lifestyles that there were more options available to society for life management. All of these constraints come together to produce the common social needs that constitute the exigence for social network sites.

Audience

Bitzer theorizes that all rhetorical situations include an audience that “consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (Bitzer 7). The audience, as potential mediators of change, is responsible for addressing social needs that require rhetorical action and understanding what action is required to satisfy these needs. Their adoption of the appropriate rhetorical response causes social action, and therefore, cultural change.

When considering social network sites, users are performers as well as each others’ audience. This duality responds to the exigences for efficiency and integration and also creates a pressure to both perform and interpret others’ actions appropriately. Within the social network site community, there is the potential for not only all site users, but anyone online to be in a user’s audience, as some sites are searchable through search engines. This creates a tension between the facts that anyone can see a user’s information, even if it requires a lot of Internet search prowess, and that, as Boyd found in her research, users tend to only socialize with those they already know. Boyd notes that social network site users tend to use the technology to compliment their offline social

networks, and that “in an environment where anyone could socialize with anyone, they don't. They socialize with the people who validate them” offline, such as their offline friends and those they admire and are unable to communicate with in the physical space, like celebrities (Boyd, “Socializing”). This is especially true of Facebook, where the utility is designed to manage an offline social life rather than to connect strangers like dating sites or LinkedIn. Despite users’ tendency to socialize primarily with those they know, there is always the opportunity for an unmediated public to see a user’s profile or other action on the site. This circumstance creates a situation where users must write under the assumption that they are addressing an unmediated public in order to appropriately participate in the social network community.

In addition to the recognition of an unmediated public, the rhetorical situation in which social network sites exist has different rules and conventions than interactions in physical space that users need to be aware of before creating an online persona. In her publications, Boyd asserts that social network site users learn how to act online by observing other users’ profiles and communications on the sites to know what types of identity presentations are appropriate in the social context (Boyd, “Why Youth”). Boyd advises that these unmediated publics are one of the difficult aspects of communicating in a virtual space. In “The Significance of Social Software,” “Profiles as Conversation: Networked Identity Performance on Friendster,” “Socializing Digitally,” and “Public Displays of Connection,” Boyd addresses the tension between the ability to compartmentalize one’s public personas in the physical world (a professional persona, at-

home persona, at-the-bar persona, etc.) and the inability to gauge which persona will be seen in this unmediated public (Donah and Boyd).

This inability to reflect one all-encompassing persona on a social network site contributes to the rhetorical problem of how one should construct an online identity that will please other users as well as reflect the user's identity in the manner that he wishes when the user is attempting to fit into a social network site community.

Author

Bitzer describes the rhetor as one who alters reality through engaging his audience in discourse so that the audience becomes a "mediator of change" (Bitzer 4). In a social network site community, the rhetor operates within an entire community of rhetors, as all users are authors who have written profiles that reflect the identity that they want to project to others. This community of identity authors read each others' identity performances in the context of the overall social network community that enacts social action.

In "Rhetoric and Community," Miller describes the self as being created by its social surroundings, circumstances, and experiences, which become the "definitive" and "integral" elements of self. Miller sees one's experience as primarily social and as orienting future experience and motives (Miller, "Rhetoric and Community" 82).

Gregory Ulmer addresses the same concept with his "popcycle," where he identifies three institutions relevant to social network site study (Family, Community, Entertainment) that shape a person's social identity and dictate a person's way of identifying and solving

problems (Ulmer 24). Ulmer's popcycle serves to show how ideas that are important to the culture have the ability to arise in an institution and produce effects through the other institutions (Ulmer 27). The Family institution is an individual's earliest influence and includes oral culture, ethnicity, gender, and family discourse. The Community institution occurs next in an individual's development. Ulmer describes this institution as encompassing the influence of one's education and the view of nationality, culture, and sciences through the lens of the school. This viewpoint would provide a "common body of references or symbolic capital" from which the individual would draw. As a compliment to the other two institutions, the Entertainment institution conveys the "dreams, anxieties, and emotional dimension" of the ruling values of society that are conveyed through the media (Ulmer 25).

In "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory," Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke state that society's structure exists prior to an individual being born into it. Individuals, as members of a society, gain a sense of identity largely from the social categories they have been placed into, but also because of their personal histories. Like Ulmer, Stets and Burke believe that an individual's unique set of social identities and histories is derived from a preset social structure that creates his or her self concept. Stets and Burke theorize that a role-based identity must also contribute to an individual's overall identity. Identity theorists believe that an individual's identity is based on the occupancy of a role and "the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance" (Stets and Burke 225).

Like in offline society, there is a tension between preserving an individual's personal history and popcycle and fitting into a social network society. Social network sites are like millions of users shouting at once to be heard, appreciated, and understood for the complex identities that are a composite of their experiences, popcycle, social place, and their roles. These users bring their own exigences and constraints to the online community, as dictated by their identities. Users enter a social network site community with the desire to display their social and role-based identities, and their actions are dictated by their popcycles, as seen in their lists of interests, quotations, education, hometown/geography, connections to groups and other users, and even in elements as basic as their language. The popcycle is a personalization of "the way ideas important to the culture may arise in any one of the institutions and then circulate through the others," and social network sites then project these internalized and interpreted ideas back out to the culture through identity performance on the site (Ulmer 27).

The social network site community is a greater online group where individuals play their roles off of one another, but the mediated social contact alienates users and does not allow them to function as a group or society would in real life. This alienation leads to the need for exaggerated social performance where one's "actions, words, and appearances . . . become significant symbols" (Burke and Reitzes 84) that other users will use to judge the appropriateness when compared to one's perceived identity in the online society (Burke and Reitzes 85). In order to create the online identity that the user desires, whether it is representative of one's real identity or based on what one wishes to be, the user grapples with knowing how to "write" [his identity] into the virtual sphere with this

disembodied projection of one's 'self'" (Ulmer 312). This writing is like creating a self-portrait, and is distorted by one's self image, as well as the image that the user would like to project. Ulmer describes the art of impersonation, noting that one has to find the identifying characteristics that are the essence of the person being impersonated (Ulmer 131). The difficulty with social network site profile creation is that one is always impersonating oneself when trying to write an online identity into existence, becoming a caricature of himself in order to be noticed and remembered.

In "Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life," Boyd observes that identity performance occurs in profile creation and all other public communication, such as the users' blog posts and comments on friends' blogs posts, profile comment sections, and photos. Boyd finds that comments are a significant form of identity performance and social currency, and that "friends are *expected* to comment as a sign of their affection" and "reciprocate when they have received a comment." Boyd also observes that users openly solicit comments from each other in on- and offline social settings (Boyd, "Why Youth"). Like in Ulmer's theory, these users are constructing an image of themselves through what they write on other's profiles as well as their own. Ulmer uses the concept of haiku to describe this kind of web writing. He claims that using haiku's "principles of brevity and aesthetic design" will assist a user in creating online text (or images) that can survive "in the flood of language circulating in cyberspace" where enduring recognition is a result of writing that is "in shape" and creates an essence of one's identity that is enduring (Ulmer 51).

Social network sites are made up of networks of individual authors who, working as both author and audience build communities. These rhetorical communities have the same circles of intimacy as in offline life, where a list of one's group of "Top Friends" on Facebook is similar to an offline clique; friend lists are like one's offline collection of friends, colleagues, family members, and acquaintances; and greater communities like the entire site's community of users of the Facebook Washington, D.C. network mimic the offline larger population and geographical regions, respectively. These social network communities are able to operate rhetorically by using the genre "as the operational site of joint, reproducible social action, the nexus between private and public, singular and recurrent, micro and macro" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 74).

This interpretation of social network sites as a crossroads allows the genre to serve as a social repository for culture in which users create their own presence. Miller discusses the idea of genre as "cultural artefacts" that "literally incorporate knowledge" of the social rhetorical situation, such as the "aesthetics, economics, politics, religious beliefs" of the culture (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 69-70). Features on social network sites, such as event planning tools, interest groups, tools to post notes, blogs, or links, and photos and other images, allow users to create a collective knowledgebase of culture. This knowledgebase would serve site users in the same way that Ulmer's Community institution provides a "common body of references or symbolic capital" to those who are included in that institution of one's popcycle (Ulmer 25).

FACEBOOK, FORMAL FEATURES, AND SOCIAL ACTION

Facebook, as one of the most popular representatives of the social network site genre, provides ample examples of how social network sites function rhetorically. The site offers a unique perspective on social network site rhetoric and Facebook-specific social action through its 1) exigences, such as the need for efficient social management for on- and offline life; 2) constraints, like the inequality of user information sharing; 3) audience, with its consumption of direct and indirect information; and 4) authors, who strive to perform identity roles that both distinguish them from the rest of the Facebook and help them fit into the site community.

Exigence

Facebook was created to respond to the social need for efficient, integrated social life management, rather than to create an alternate online community that competes with offline social life. Mark Zuckerberg, the creator of Facebook seeks to separate the service from other social network sites. Zuckerberg defines the site's purpose as a "social utility" rather than a social network. Zuckerberg claims that Facebook exists to "make it really efficient for people to communicate, get information and share information." Facebook's belief is that the most valuable connections online are between those who have real relationships offline. Facebook developers have strived to model

these real connections and provide connection-based “information to a set of applications through which people want to share information, photos or videos or events” (Locke).

By developing a site that is based on using these connections to offline life to create efficiency, Facebook has changed the way that social network site users manage their on- and offline social lives and communication. The site gives its users the freedom to participate in mediated voyeurism as well as mediated exhibitionism. Miller and Shepherd stress the importance of mediated exhibitionism and voyeurism in the sense of the individual, where by disclosing information to an unmediated public, the individual engages in the “four functions of self-disclosure: self-clarification, social validation, relationship development, and social control.” Miller and Shepherd assert that a repeated effort to disclose the self will aid the individual in understanding his identity. In “Blogging as Social Action,” they assert that mediated voyeurism has become a way to gather news, whether online or in other media, and “has become synonymous with information access and the public's right to know” (Miller and Shepherd).

The Facebook developers, as well as their users, acknowledge a need to offer diverse methods of information exchange in order to satisfy the social need for both an influx of information and efficiency. In Facebook culture, there is an understanding that a user can share any information that she would like to make public and that her friends will know to look to her profile for these updates. This understanding of how information is exchanged is similar to the understanding that one’s buddies on Instant Messenger will check her away message to learn the information she would like to convey. Facebook’s features, such as News Feed (Figure 2), Status Updates (Figure 3),

and Mini Feed (Figure 4), replace the need for multiple individual phone calls, emails to friends and even the use of mass email.

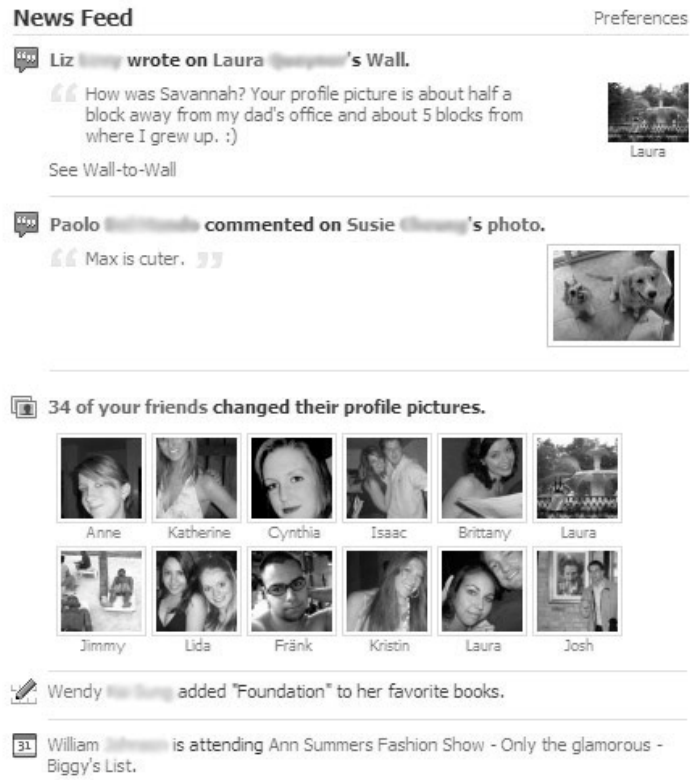


Figure 2. News Feed



Figure 3. Interface for Making Status Changes and Viewing Other Users' Status

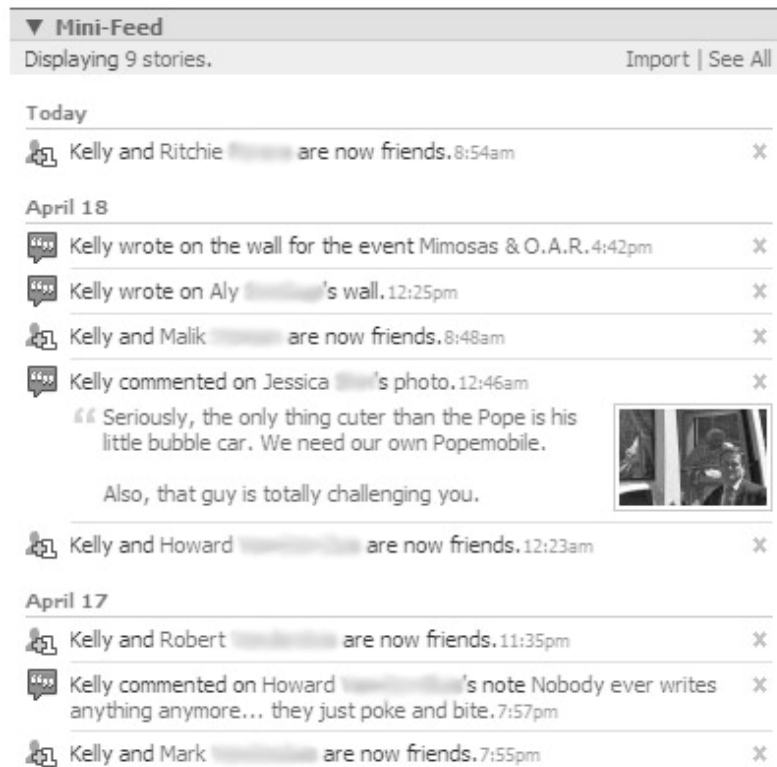


Figure 4. Mini-Feed Found on Users' Profiles

Facebook's mediation creates a culture of respect for users' time and interests by allowing users to display their information for other users to access at their leisure. Now that mediated exhibitionism and voyeurism are acceptable on- and offline as methods for sharing and gathering information, Facebook responds to the broad cultural exigence for connectivity, speed, and access to knowledge.

Social life management on Facebook is a appropriate and accepted rhetorical response to the exigence for a better way to share information because there is an assumption of a multidirectional interest in both the self and others. Since mediated exhibitionism and voyeurism go hand in hand on Facebook, it is assumed that others care about one's profile updates as much as he cares about his friends' updates. There is also an assumption that users will update information on a regular basis and that active users will be rewarded with a constant flow of information on their friends' Facebook activity that will satisfy the need for knowledge access.

As Zuckerberg states, Facebook is intended to be a social utility that makes information exchange more efficient. This is a fitting response to America's desire for connectivity and immediacy, as evidenced by the desire for wireless devices, faster connection speed, and popularity of instant messaging and text messaging for quick, to-the-point communication. This intent to increase efficiency is supported by the user's portal-like Home Page, where upon sign-in, the user will see his News Feed, Status Updates, list of upcoming birthdays, as well as Notifications (Figure 5). These features on the user's Home Page allow for efficient knowledge gathering and timely acknowledgment of events in friends' lives like birthdays, engagements, and break-ups.

There is an expectation that one's friends who are active on Facebook will know about these life events without having to be told directly and will contact the person who is having a birthday to wish them well, preferably publicly in the form of a Wall post. These constant updates on a user's Home Page play into the desire for immediacy and mediated voyeurism. A user is gratified with new information on his or her friends with every log in. This insatiable need for Facebook information serves the same need for raw, seemingly unfiltered information that a blog would provide. Like those Americans who watch hours on end of Fox News and CNN to satisfy an American exigence for more information to consume, Facebook users refresh their Home Pages to see changes in activity happen before their eyes.

Table 1. Types of Notifications

Notification	Information
Requests	friend requests, event invitations, group invitations
Application Requests	requests pertaining to applications
Other Requests	acceptance of friend requests, photo/Notes/Posted Item comments

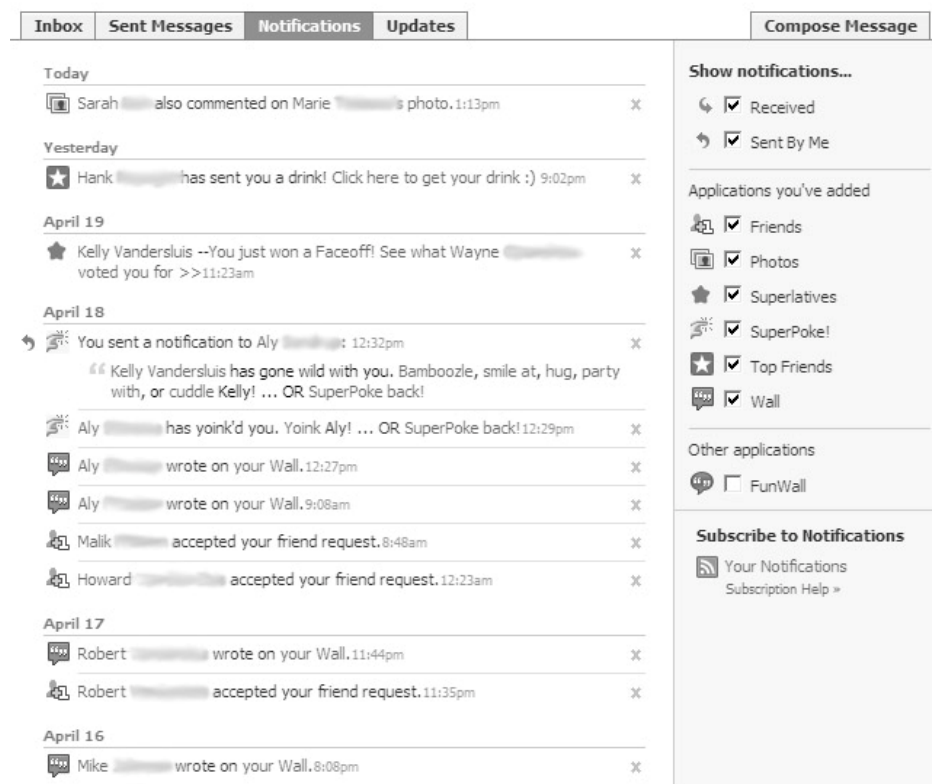


Figure 5. Notifications

Facebook's intent to increase efficiency is furthered by encouraging users to manage as much of their on- and offline social lives on Facebook as possible. This not only satisfies the exigence for connectivity and efficiency, but the desire for more information on their friends. Users understand that the more information one gives on Facebook, the more opportunity there is to participate in an online culture of immediacy and mediated exhibitionism and voyeurism. Facebook's unique suite of features allows users to do this by specifically integrating offline lives into the online experience with features like event invitations and photo albums. These features require an offline social life in order to use them, as most events take place offline (though there are exceptions

like January 31, 2008's "Delete Your MySpace Day") and photos are of offline life. Facebook encourages the social aspect of their site through the ability to connect to other users in their applications. Photos and Notes include the "tagging" feature that allows users to include an electronic tag that associates a person in a photo with their Facebook profile, or more abstractly, to tag someone in a Note by simply flagging them in it as a person of interest related to the topic.

Facebook's Events feature is interactive and multifunctional, and serves as a connection between users' on- and offline social lives that makes planning more efficient, responding to the social need for integration as well as efficiency. Event invitations allow users to invite others on Facebook as well as those who are not on the site, and the guest list includes thumbnail versions of profile photos for all Facebook members invited, whether attending or not. This feature satisfies the desire for mediated voyeurism by allowing users to track other users' offline social lives. Guests are able to RSVP as well as invite others, post comments on the event's Wall, post multimedia like photos, videos, and web links, and tag and comment on the multimedia. Events that one's friends are attending are listed in the New Feed. Often, the user may invite himself to an event that he sees a friend attending (when guest lists are not restricted). By using Facebook to manage events, the event begins in the online world with discussion, passed-on invitations, and photos. Once the event happens in the offline world, the excitement has already been created and the guests are able to recognize one another from the Facebook guest list of photos and names. The Events feature's ability to show a user what he should expect from an event, such as the type of people, photos of the venue, and tone of

the event as interpreted from Wall posts, meets the users' exigence for efficiency by responding to the cultural desire to gather and share information online to save time in the offline world.

In response to a social need for alternate ways to build identity online, Facebook Groups is a feature that attracts users who seek to find their place in smaller communities within the larger Facebook community, or who want build their online identity through displaying their affiliations. Groups on the site are created around a variety of purposes, whether a frivolous cause, such as "Society for the Preservation of the Subjunctive in English," or a social or political cause, such as "You were sexy until I saw that cigarette in your hand" or "If Hillary Becomes President Texas Will Secede (Official Petition)," that users will publicly rally behind. Group membership is listed on a user's profile, and the user's name, thumbnail photo, and link to her profile are listed in the Group's membership section. Groups based around social and political issues, especially current hot issues in the media, tend to be very active with members posting photos and responding to discussion topics. Users who have Group affiliations provide substantial information about their interests to other users through a more indirect manner than profile text.

Facebook has the potential to completely synthesize social management and communication into the site. Table 2 shows Facebook's potential, in its current state, of replacing the need for specialized communication such as specialty websites and limited communications such as phone or email.

Table 2. Facebook Features Omitting the Need for Specialized Sites

Specialized Communication	Facebook Feature
personal website	Profile
Evite	Events
blogging sites (Blogger)	Notes, Posted Items, importing blogs
photo storage sites (Flicker)	Photos
Yahoo Groups	Groups
Dating sites (Match)	"looking for" section of Profile, applications like FlirtMe
Hot or Not	Compare People and Hot or Not applications
directory sites, local newspaper Style section, AOL City Pages	Facebook Pages, BarBook application
Craigslist	Marketplace (sales and job listings), Groups (for forums)
LinkedIn	job and school sections of Profile
Classmates	school section of Profile
ecards sites (Blue Mountain)	gifts, Wall posts, comments, Poke, Super Poke application
email programs	messages, Wall, comments, Poke
phone	messages, Wall, comments, Poke
handing out fliers advertising events	Events

To further respond to its users' exigences for integration and efficiency, as well as respond to the corporate need to reach target demographics, Facebook allows businesses to integrate themselves into the site with features such as Facebook Pages (profiles for businesses), Social Ads (paid advertisements integrated into the News Feed and Home Page), and corporate-sponsored Groups and Applications. In addition to businesses, politicians have gained an increasing presence on Facebook with their own profiles, groups, and Facebook-sponsored debates between candidates.

With the addition of corporations and politicians, Facebook fuses commercial, political, and social lives into one site that reaches the high school to late-20s demographic to serve the needs of users by creating an integrated social experience. If

Facebook successfully integrates all aspects of social and nonsocial life into one tool before losing popularity, users from different demographics will have more reason to become Facebook users, and Facebook will become a part of daily life management.

Though this synthesis of all aspects of life would theoretically make its users' lives more efficient, it is unlikely that Facebook will be able to accomplish this as it would require all of a user's friends to be on Facebook and to be active on the site. Additionally, the feasibility of Facebook accomplishing this before it loses popularity is unlikely. The negative feelings toward MySpace stemmed from it trying to take on too much and becoming cluttered and frustrating to navigate. Despite Facebook's mission to connect people with real relationships, as stated by Zuckerberg,

[Facebook] only works if those relationships are real. That's a really big difference between Facebook and a lot of other sites. We're not thinking about ourselves as a community — we're not trying to build a community — we're not trying to make new connections (Locke),

Facebook appears to be going against what it was developed to do, efficiently connect people online who were first connected offline.

Constraints

A lack of information on some users' profiles, users who do not update their profiles regularly, and privacy controls are constraints on Facebook's rhetorical situation. Without an equal and constant flow of information throughout Facebook, exigences such

as efficiency, mediated voyeurism, and the ability to have an integrated online solution for managing on- and offline social life are not met completely.

One can see frustration in active users over less active users' participation in the Facebook community in communications like, "Where have you been? I haven't seen you on here in forever!" and "It's about time you changed your profile picture." Facebook also encourages users to be active members of the online community as evidenced by the instructions to "Add people you know as friends to make these results even better for you" in its "People You May Know" section of its search function (Find Your Friends on Facebook).

Facebook's privacy controls allow a user to decide who will see certain information. In general, a user can limit his profile view to friends, or even to a certain network. Facebook also allows users to control what profile information an individual user sees (Figure 6). Users may block an individual completely which keeps the blocked user from even seeing that the user is on Facebook (Figure 7). The second option is to add users to a Friends List called "Limited Profile" where only the information a user selects can be seen by those he places on his Limited Profile list. These privacy controls are used in an attempt to control the user's Facebook audience to solve the problem of addressing multiple audiences within the unmediated public. The privacy controls do not completely solve the problem since they are not fine-tuned enough to have varied levels of Limited Profiles.

Basic **Contact Information**

Control who can see your contact information.

IM Screen Name No one

Mobile Phone No one

Land Phone No one

Current Address Only Friends
 My Networks and Friends
 People at UVA and Friends
 Friends of Friends
 Only Friends
 No one
 Customize...

Website Only Friends
 Limited Profile
 Edit Custom Settings...

ksv4j Only Friends
@alumni.virginia.edu Limited Profile
 Edit Custom Settings...

Save Changes **Cancel**

Figure 6. Privacy Settings (Profile Contact Information Screen Shown)

Block People
 If you block someone, they will not be able to search for you, see your profile, or contact you on Facebook. Any ties you currently have with a person you block will be broken (friendship connections, relationships, etc).

Block List
 Name of Person (Washington, DC) (remove)
 Name of Person (Air Force Academy) (remove)
 Name of Person (University of Edinburgh) (remove)

Person
 Block

Figure 7. Block Function

These constraints on information sharing, and therefore efficiency, affect Facebook's potential for cultural adoption as the primary social management solution. While mediated exhibitionism is becoming widely accepted, it is not as desirable to most

as mediated voyeurism. There will always be Internet users who are more concerned about their privacy than their contribution to the online community. With increasing numbers of Americans managing their lives online, there is also an increase in personal privacy issues, such as identity theft and child exploitation. These privacy issues have been highlighted in the media with shows such as NBC's *To Catch a Predator* and commercials on television from companies selling identity protection. There is a tension between protecting one's identity and safety and contributing information to an online community where one is consuming information from others for enjoyment. This tension will continue to constrain the growth of Facebook as a complete social management solution if Facebook exigences and culture remain as they are currently.

Audience

As with other Internet media, such as blogs, Facebook users are faced with the dilemma of creating an online identity that is appropriate for multiple known and unknown audiences. Boyd notes the issue of public identity performance, stating that "we know how to behave in public, but we don't know how to behave in front of a potential, unknown audience of all people across all space and all time" (Boyd, "The Significance of Social Software"). Search engine users and other savvy users can become part of an unintended audience, and the extent of one's online actions is not limited to the present. As Boyd suggests, one's digital footprint will last as long as the Internet, and audiences may become even farther removed over time when one's past online actions are seen.

Users have enough difficulty within the Facebook community creating and maintaining an appropriate online presence that addresses known audiences. The more friends a user has, the less able she is to keep track of them and their expectations. Though a user will focus on the friends who have an active presence on the site or communicate directly with her the most, the user’s entire Friends List is the actual known audience she is addressing and engaging (Boyd, “Digital Handshakes”). Profile creation is a delicate balance between self expression and self censoring. A user’s profile needs to speak to multiple unknown audiences, yet it also needs to convey the identity that the user hopes to project to other users. Boyd suggests that simply imagining an audience, regardless of accuracy, will assist new users in understanding the rhetorical situation in which they are creating a profile (Boyd, “Why Youth”).

Facebook users not only have a potential audience of 67 million users (Table 3), but they have a diverse age group to create appropriate content for, with high school students, college students, and a growing number of users over the age of 25 (Statistics).

Table 3. Statistics as of March 26, 2008 (Statistics)

Statistics	More than 67 million active users
	An average of 250,000 new registrations per day since Jan. 2007
User Demographics	Over 55,000 regional, work-related, collegiate, and high school networks
	The fastest growing demographic is those 25 years old and older
	More than half of Facebook users are outside of college
User Engagement	5 th most trafficked site in the United States
	45 percent of users return to the site each day

Bitzer argues that every audience has the potential to be changed in some way by rhetoric (Bitzer 3) and that a rhetor has the capability to engage an audience in a way that

it becomes a “mediator of change” (Bitzer 4). According to Bitzer’s theory, the most effective action for a Facebook user to take when creating a profile or communicating elsewhere on the site is to assume that his discourse has the potential to affect anyone and the conduct himself on the site with the proper gravity.

Facebook establishes a user’s connections to his known audience by using a system of networks that are based on the user’s geography, school, or company. Users are permitted to join multiple networks. These networks bring a sense of order to a user’s personal connections as well as give context when other users are viewing one’s Friends List. Presumably, this function is to help others locate their offline connections on Facebook by systematically browsing networked users.

In addition to ordering connections by network, Facebook allows users to select how they know a friend. Pre-populated options include: “lived together,” “took a course together,” and, a curious choice in light of Zuckerberg’s insistence of pre-existing connections, “through Facebook.” This feature is beneficial to the user because he is able to search his Friends List by connection type. These connection descriptions as well as the organization by articulated networks give context to other users when understanding a user’s discourse. By being able to view who the user believes to be his audience will assist other users in comprehending the user’s individual exigences, constraints, and chosen rhetorical action.

The most significant social management benefit to Facebook is the ability to easily communicate with others either directly or indirectly. Direct communication is defined as contact that is intentional and to a specific person or group, such as a Wall

comment. Indirect communication is defined as the display and gathering of information without direct, known contact with other users, such as learning about a friend's engagement from the News Feed.

Facebook offers multiple avenues for contacting other users directly through the site (Table 4). The most familiar to email users is the Facebook message, which is a private user-to-user communication that functions like email. The message is sent from one user's inbox to another through the Facebook interface, and may be replied to as one would through email. This is the most substantive form of private communication available on Facebook.

Table 4. Types of Direct Communication

Type	Purpose	Privacy
Message	functions like email	private, can only be seen by intended recipient(s)
Wall Post	similar to leaving a note on someone's dorm door	limited privacy; can be seen by those who have the ability to see a user's Wall
Comment	usually refers specifically to the item being commented on, like a photo, posted item, or note	limited privacy; can be seen by those who have the ability to see the item being commented on
Poke	functions like waving to someone and continuing on in real life	private, can only be seen by intended recipient

Facebook offers one other type of private communication, the Poke feature.

Facebook developers have playfully left the Poke's purpose unexplained; however, users have adopted it as the chosen form of direct communication for either just saying "hi" or as a way to flirt. The Poke has come to be the equivalent of waving hello to a friend

without stopping to have any conversation or winking at a cute member of the opposite sex from across the room.

The most common form of direct Facebook communication is the Wall post. A user's friends have access to posting on her Wall, which is the semi-public equivalent of writing a note on someone's dorm whiteboard or placing a Post-It note on a coworker's cube. Surprisingly, Wall communication is often used for holding full back-and-forth conversations that would have been conducted through email or on the phone before Facebook. If users are friends with both of the Wall conversation participants, they are able to trace entire conversations between Walls that detail plans or engage in small talk (Figure 8).

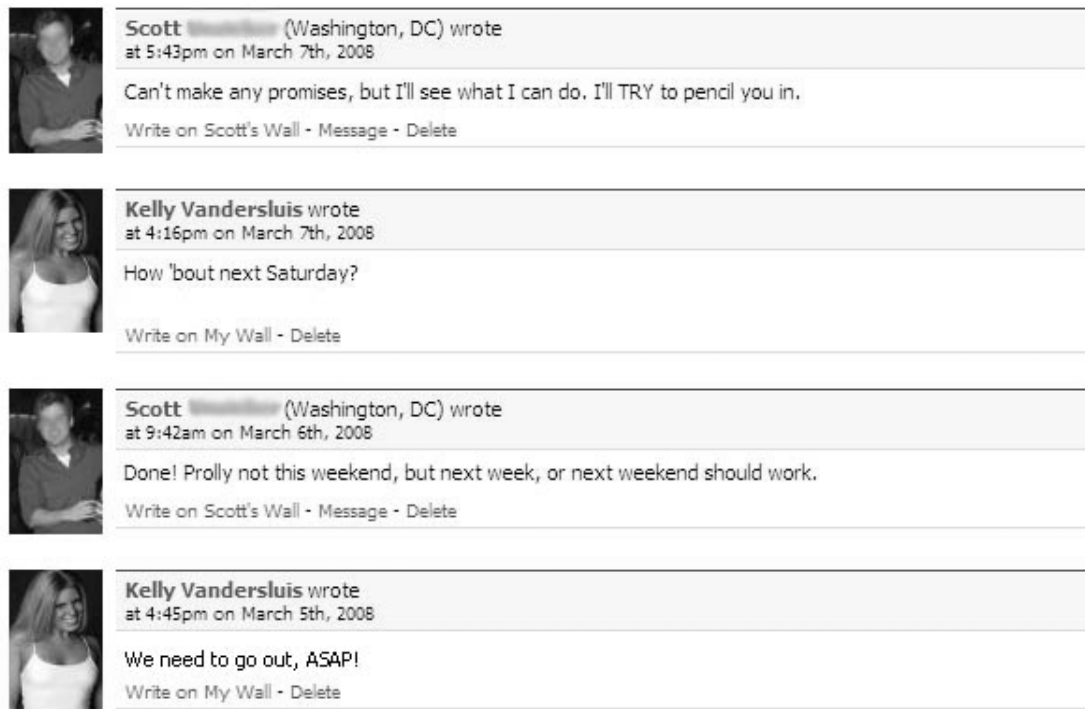


Figure 8. Common Example of Communication through Two Users' Wall Posts (Read from the Bottom to Top)

Like with Wall posts, users will often have conversations through the comments sections of Photos, Notes, or Posted Items. These conversations tend to center around the photo or other element that the comments section is associated with. This type of communication is only public to those who have access to the item being commented on. Facebook alerts users when an item they are tagged in or have commented on receives a comment. This allows users to keep up with the conversation and answer in a timely manner, if necessary. Conversations held publicly are performative and tend to be written deliberately and performances.

Facebook's facilitation of indirect communication seems to be based on the desire to make communication more efficient, and by gathering information without direct contact with others, this efficiency is accomplished. Features such as the News Feed, Mini Feed, status, the option to provide information on how one knows a friend to be displayed in the Friends List, and the Share functionality that posts an item directly to the user's Posted Items section of her profile instead of sending the item directly to friends support Facebook's preference for indirect communication. While this mediation of the information exchange limits the amount of direct contact a user has with his Facebook friends, it does not serve to alienate the Facebook population from one another. Rather, this more efficient way of conveying and gathering information allows users to keep up with more friends' lives than without the mediation. Mediated voyeurism is especially beneficial between old friends who only want to be updated on each other's lives through indirect information exchange rather than awkward conversation.

When Facebook users employ indirect communication to broadcast information to their audiences, they are assuming that the audience members, known or unknown, will access the information if interested. Instant Messenger away messages are directly comparable to the indirect communication used on Facebook. It is a social expectation of Instant Messenger users that their buddies read their away messages and apply the information in the same way as if they were told directly. Stepp's article on away message communication anecdotally reinforces this idea, stating that one of her interviewees posted an away message with his destination before traveling to Las Vegas. "Upon return, he phone[d] a friend. 'So, how was Las Vegas?' his friend [began] their conversation. No catch-up is required" (Stepp C01). Similarly, Facebook users post information for it to be seen. It is equally as socially acceptable to mention a friend's Facebook update in conversation offline as it is to mention information gathered from his away message.

The use of indirect communication as a way of sharing information complicates the integrity of the information. Though it seems that information gathered from Facebook would be more balanced and truthful, as it is being broadcast to both known and unknown audiences, the reality is that the indirect communication is a performance that is as based on the user's intentions as it would be in direct, in-person communication. This blurriness of information integrity causes Facebook to be a breeding ground for irrational, dramatic responses to indirect communication that may or may not have been interpreted as the user intended it to be. Therefore, while mediation is beneficial in many respects, the ability for information to be up to the performance of the user and the

interpretation of the other users causes the same trouble online as it would in a high school rumor mill offline. Though this indirect information is of questionable integrity and is open to interpretation by known and unknown audiences, it satisfies the culture's exigences of efficiency, mediated exhibitionism and voyeurism, and the desire for the discovery of raw and seemingly truthful information straight from the source.

Author

Miller and Shepherd claim that "both voyeurism and exhibitionism have been morally neutralized and are on their ways to becoming ordinary modes of being," which would direct rhetorical action to provide more opportunities for both voyeurism and exhibitionism if there were no change in current cultural desires and exigences (Miller and Shepherd). At this time, the line between public and private society has been blurred to satisfy these needs for mediated voyeurism and exhibitionism as well as the efficiency of information exchange.

Facebook supports a rhetorical situation in which users create and perform their identities and other users readily access this information to make character judgments. Users face difficulties in profile creation, such as addressing an unknown audience and creating an identity that both projects what the user desires and has the ability to be interpreted by other users with minimal variation from the user's intention, all while considering the pressures of online social status and popularity.

Standard Facebook profiles that do not include additional Applications are robust enough to provide a user with a template for online identity creation (Table 5). A standard profile includes a section called "Personal" where users list their interests such

as one's activities, favorite books, and a catch-all section called "About Me" where users can add in additional information that does not fit into the preset categories. The interests listed in the Personal section become hyperlinks that can be clicked on to bring up a list of others in the user's networks who have listed the selected interest in their profiles. This functionality reinforces Facebook's concentration on connecting people to one another efficiently, and serves to create a feeling of integration of the individual into the Facebook community.

Table 5. Elements of a Basic Profile (No Applications Added)

Type of Information Input	Basic Information	Contact Information	Relationships	Personal
	Sex	Emails	Relationship status	Activities
	Birthday	IM/Screen Name(s)	Former Name	Interests
	Hometown	Mobile Phone	Interested In	Favorite Music
	Political Views	Land Phone	Looking for	Favorite TV Shows
	Religious Views	School Mailbox		Favorite Movies
		Residence		Favorite Books
		Room		Favorite Quotes
		Address		About Me
		City/Town		
		Zip		
		Website		

Type of Information Input	Education	Work	Main Photo	On Profile Page
	College	Employer	Photo	Status
	Year	Position	Thumbnail Version	Wall
	Concentration	Description		Mini Feed
	Degree	City/Town		View Photos of [user]
	High School	Time Period		View [user's] Friends
				Send [user] a Message
				Poke [him/her]
				Mutual Friends
				Friends
				Friends in Other Networks
				Groups

Profile creation gives the user an opportunity to construct his identity in the way that he wishes, which may or may not be representative of his offline identity. The assumption on Facebook is that people are who they appear to be, both on- and offline. Facebook users generally respect the expectation that users represent themselves as accurately as possible, leaving room for creative expression and misinterpretation, as in the offline world. Regardless of congruency between on- and offline identities, users play a role on Facebook, whether it is as a party girl or as someone with a great appreciation for obscure movies. Profile creation allows a user to “write” his identity into existence through actual text, photos, and profile elements like Applications (Ulmer 312). As Stets and Burke explain, an individual will act within the confines of his identity role (whether natural or adopted for Facebook) and will attempt to act according to the “the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance” (Stets and Burke 225).

In addition to standard profile features, users can add Applications to their profiles. Some Applications are designed to pass time and amuse, but many serve in identity performance as much as profile text. Applications such as Virtual Bookshelf and Movies provide users with a place to identify their favorite books and movies and to make recommendations to other users. Facebook allows users to create their own content, making something as simple as a recommendation or as complex as an application. This content is created for Facebook users by Facebook users. In “The Significance of Social Software,” Boyd extols the value of user-generated content, and

the ability for the Internet to be more than a “broadcast channel” for media-generated and approved content (Boyd, “Significance”). Facebook provides the framework for users to utilize it as a social management tool that is tailored to their communication and information sharing and gathering needs.

No matter what popularity or status goals a user may have, he has created a profile for other users to see and to like, unless the user is deliberately performing an inflammatory identity. Favor and acceptance of his profile from other users equates to users liking and accepting his identity, which validates his view of himself. Facebook users are aware of the site’s dual function as a personal social management tool and as a performance outlet. Users embrace the performance element of Facebook by becoming Facebook users in the first place.

With all of Facebook’s features and the ability to freely craft profile text, profiles have the ability to function like social commonplace books that showcase identity. In addition to the user-inputted information and profile elements, Wall posts, comments from other users, and any links from user’s profiles on Facebook (tagging, Friends List) contribute to the overall collage of the user’s identity.

The effort put into identity performance on Facebook does not go unnoticed by other users. For active Facebook users, the site is a tool for finding out more about a new acquaintance. Meg Gregory and Joseph Evans, in their presentation called “Facebook.com: How Cyber Communities Are Affecting Our Campus Communities,” include a quotation from a college student who validates this use of Facebook, “You would meet someone and you would just run upstairs and go online and type in their

name.” Another student confirms that this method of learning more about a person’s identity is useful, “You get a really good sense on Facebook about people’s personalities and how they see themselves” (Gregory and Evans). Users who join Facebook are just as interested in finding out about others as they are in presenting their own identity. A Facebook search, or “Facebooking” someone, is the new form of “Googling” someone for site users to find information.

As in offline life, some Facebook users seek popularity rather than just a efficient way to connect to offline friends. Popularity in the social network site world is determined by the number of friends a user has in his Friends List instead of a character judgment. There are two ways to achieve popularity: individuals may seek it out or a user may construct his online persona to appear to be a friend that will give someone who adds her as a friend. Those in search of popularity will search for strangers to add to their Friends Lists. Often these strangers are those that will also imply some sort of status for the user who has them on a Friends List, such as aspiring models, club promoters, or celebrities. Again, Zuckerberg’s statement about Facebook being a social utility to connect existing friends becomes questionable. Facebook functionality not only allows, but facilitates strangers in contacting users and becoming friends. Those searching through lists of members of a network or even their friends’ Friends Lists are able to send a message, a Poke, or a friend request. Other features on Facebook support this ability to add strangers as friends for status and popularity purposes, like the ability to skip the step where a user indicates his relationship with the friend and the application iPromote that supports club promoters’ Event invitation spamming of networks.

Like with reality television, the Internet is a breeding ground for celebrity hopefuls. One of MySpace's original purposes was to popularize unsigned bands by allowing them to create pages on the site and promote themselves through MySpace. This same concept caught the so-called "Queen of MySpace" Christine Dolce by surprise when she gained wild popularity through her MySpace personality "Forbidden." Popularity in this context is determined only by the number of friends on a Friends List. Since her rise in popularity, Dolce has parleyed this surprising Internet notoriety into a business with appearances in men's magazines, hosting jobs, and her own clothing company (Ferrantino). Similarly, Tila Nguyen has turned her MySpace personality, "Tila Tequila," into popularity that would arguably make her more deserving of the "Queen of MySpace" title. Like with Dolce, Tila Tequila has been in multiple men's magazines, but her celebrity has been on a larger scale with two MTV reality shows and music that has gotten millions of plays on her MySpace page (Grossman).

Facebook users will be familiar with at least Tila Tequila's rise to celebrity. Those seeking Facebook notoriety will attempt to shift from simply being popular on the site to staging an identity performance that will make them stand out in the way that Dolce and Tila Tequila did on MySpace through their outspoken profile text and promiscuous photos. It appears to be only a matter of time before Facebook becomes more accessible to those seeking fame, as evidenced by a new feature to make one's profile searchable by outside search engines and the site's forthcoming band pages. A current application on Facebook, "My Band," includes the prophetic statement, "Start spreading your music. You never know what could happen..." (My Band). With the

addition of applications and the rising popularity of Facebook, increased Facebook use for self promotion and eventual MySpace-like celebrity results seem imminent.

The social effect of this quest for Facebook celebrity is a society of users striving to be validated as individuals rather than a community of users working toward being connected. Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler characterize the individual who has achieved a minimal amount of affirmation and celebrity and is in search of more as the “glorified self.” It is irrelevant whether this attention the glorified self has achieved is positive or negative, as American society accords “status and recognition for both fame and notoriety” (Adler and Adler 299). The glorified self often takes on the public persona, or identity role, that gained notoriety, and this identity role overpowers the individuals’ private persona and he continues to aspire to the level of celebrity. This public persona thrives on increasing reinforcement from others (Adler and Adler 299-300).

While Facebook is about linking individuals into a cohesive social utility based on connection, the individual’s role in the community has the potential to overwhelm this intention to emphasize networks. The Facebook community should function as a choir would, with individuals coming together to make an integrated whole rather than a group of unrelated soloists singing different songs at top volume. Facebook currently facilitates the efficiency of connection between users, but more recent features, such as the Applications Owned! (associates a monetary value to users) and Compare People (a face-off between users to determine superlatives such as prettiest and most datable), emphasize status and social stratification. Users not only use Facebook as a social utility

but as method of creating social hierarchy that is based on chosen identity roles rather than reality.

CONCLUSION

The site-specific social action that Facebook creates changes the way users manage their social lives, how they communicate, and how they perform and interpret identity. This social action may be seen online with the ability to communicate and manage relationships with more people than before Facebook, the use of indirect methods of communication to convey information to known and unknown audiences, and the use of profiles as a forum for identity performance. Offline, users are using information gathered online to enhance their social lives. The Events feature allows users to efficiently plan ahead for social events, and users are displaying and gathering information about each other that is expected to be acknowledged in either on- or offline life.

Facebook has developed to the point where it can be seen as its own rhetorical situation, separate from other Internet rhetorical media. The site's design reflects the exigences of both society and current users, as seen in its attempts to increase social efficiency by aiding users in connecting to more people online than in offline life alone, offering multiple modes of direct and indirect communication to satisfy all situations and tastes, and providing an outlet for the celebrity-seeking culture that thrives on mediated exhibitionism and voyeurism.

Facebook operates rhetorically by attempting to perform fitting rhetorical action to satisfy society's exigences, acknowledging the constraints of the genre and site itself, placing the power to enact social action and cultural change in the hands of its users who operate as both author and audience.

While there is a possibility that Facebook will evolve into a streamlined, social and life management tool with its continued effort to integrate on- and offline life with outside developers creating applications, and politicians and businesses taking an active part in Facebook culture, Facebook will need to be able to continuously satisfy society's growingly complex exigences to gain and maintain its user base. Facebook's history, as well as social network site history, show a few distinct reasons why it is more likely that Facebook will lose popularity before reaching its potential.

First, it is already clear to long-term Facebook users that the site has begun to take on too many features that compete with its usability and efficiency. Facebook will soon be too big for users' comfort, and users will not want to depend on one tool for both social and life management. These same users will eventually be turned off by the commercialization of Facebook with its efforts to integrate businesses and sell-out its users.

Second, as shown in the past, Facebook does not address privacy issues quickly enough to match site growth. Increased spam from the multitude of applications, businesses, bands, and politicians will turn off users as much as the issue of too much visibility to other users.

Finally, Facebook's incongruence with its mission and purpose predict that it will completely lose touch with what attracted MySpace users to change tools. Many users prefer Facebook to MySpace because it is less cluttered, less commercial, and there are more privacy settings. Facebook's recent growth appears to be a trend that will continue, and in Facebook's quiet attempt to emulate successful elements of MySpace (bands, businesses, freedom to add countless applications to a profile), the site goes against its stated mission of creating an efficient way to communicate and get information.

The continuous cycle of rhetorical situation and action, social action, and cultural change that was evident in the late 1990s has sped up to where social action in 2008 and beyond is created and transformed into mainstream culture so rapidly that it is a challenge to keep up with the ever-growing and more complex technical and rhetorical exigences that an Internet-savvy American population has. Culture outpaces technology as exigences exceed the technology's capabilities. When technology catches up to respond to these exigences, the resulting social action and change in culture respond by creating more exigences that continue the cycle of technological responses to the changing rhetorical situation and absorption of these responses into culture.

The constant change in the greater social network site rhetorical situation and technological response will be responsible for the next Facebook-like revolution in social and life management that satisfies the exigences of an even more connected, integrated, and efficiency-seeking culture. Each new iteration of Facebook-like technology will continue the evolution of the cycle of rhetorical situation and action, social action, and cultural change, shaping American online culture.

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