

ONLINE COMMUNITY

RITUALS

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PREFACE

Rituals are key to our understanding of consumers' participation in online communities. Rituals are present in online communities, create a sense of community, and are important to providing community experiences. Rituals hold the key to the secret of community. According to Banks and Daus (2000, p. 317):

“Ask any Internet Entrepreneur about the secret to successful Websites and you'll likely hear the knee-jerk answer: content, commerce, community, the holy trinity of Web portaldom, with stress placed on community...[W]hen you ask the same crowd about what makes a successful online community, you'll likely hear about the suite du jour of Internet communications tools. Tools do not make a community. It does not work that way in real life; it does not work that way online.”

The ritual identification model can identify and rank the rituals that make community.

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Stacie. Stacie, I love you. Thanks for being there with me during the whole process. Only you know what we have been through to get this degree completed. This degree belongs as much to you as it does to me. To my children Joseph, Kathryn, Jessica, Eric, Lisa, and Kylie who know that daddy loves to go to school; I love you all and want you to achieve your goals and dreams. You have made these years the best ever in Stillwater, Oklahoma and as loyal fans of your OSU dad. My parents have also been very supportive throughout my entire college education. Thanks Mom and Dad for setting the example by going to college and working hard. I hope that you realize in your childrens' successes your own success. I also give thanks to my Savior, Jesus Christ, and pray that I will say, do, and become what He wants me to be.

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CHAPTER I

PROBLEM AND PHENOMENON OF INTEREST

Recent research in communities have described social networks as the strongest form of online community, and yet some firms running these communities are struggling to survive while other companies are flourishing (Chmielewski 2009; Fournier 2009; Fullick 2011; Mathwick, Wiertz, and de Ruyter 2008). For example Myspace, which was launched in 2003 became the largest online community in the U.S. by 2006 and was valued at \$12 billion (Barnett 2011; Cashmore 2006). In February, 2011 Myspace was put up for sale with an estimated value of only \$50-\$200 million (Saba 2011). What occurred with this online community that caused it to lose its value so rapidly? How can existing and new online communities (e.g. Facebook, Google +) avoid the same fate as Myspace and build strong, enduring communities?

Rituals are frequently mentioned in community research, yet rituals have not been the focus of past community research studies (Cova 1997; Cova and Cova 2002; Kozinets 2001; Martin, Schouten, and McAlexander 2006; McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001; Muñiz and Schau 2005; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Schouten, McAlexander, and Koenig 2007). Research on communities suggests that rituals may be key to building and maintaining community growth (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) state that there are three key markers to

building and fostering a community – rituals, consciousness of kind, and a shared sense of moral responsibility. Of these three markers, rituals are vitally important for understanding how to foster community and in shaping consciousness of kind and a shared sense of moral responsibility. First, through daily rituals individual members form social relationships and share experiences that help to create “we-ness” or consciousness of kind¹. Consciousness of kind is described as a social connection that makes the community and gives members their own collective identity (distinction) from other communities (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Ritual experiences create feelings of belongingness and integrate new members into the group (Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993). Second, daily rituals help members learn moral responsibility for other members in the community by creating the boundaries of what behaviors are expected of them. Product loyalty and the desire to help others manifests moral responsibility (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Insights into the importance and nature of rituals in which consumers engage as they interact online can help marketers to better build and sustain online community.

The purpose of this research will be to investigate online community rituals and their role in building ongoing community participation. In this chapter we will first review what is known about rituals from the community literature. Second we will discuss the types of rituals that have been investigated in order to determine the best approach for looking at rituals within an online community context. Finally the research questions that have yet to be addressed in this literature will be introduced.

¹ Prior to the work on brand communities, researchers focused on similar concepts for consciousness of kind such as *communitas*.

We know from past research that rituals are important for creating a sense of community, in providing community experiences, and that the use of objects or ritual artifacts is part of the ritual experience. For example, Arnould and Price (1993) discuss a shared sense of community that resulted from the intensity of the ritual experiences and the social interactions that were part of rituals experienced during river rafting. These rituals became transformational for the members who took part in them. In another study, rituals were shown to be an important part of the community experience in interacting with other community members (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993). New members were celebrated when they engaged in the ritual experience for the first time. During and after the experience, rituals were a part of the community interactions, reinforcing the group's collective ties. These ritual experiences within the community have been shown to increase the bonds among the group members. More research has been called for in order to understand these ritual practices that take place within communities (Schouten, McAlexander, and Koenig 2007).

The marketing studies that have focused on rituals have tended to do so in context of special life events (e.g., Thanksgiving holiday, weddings, birthdays) rather than routine, ongoing consumption or those affiliated with brand communities (Nelson and Otnes 2005; Otnes, Lowrey, and Shrum 1997; Otnes and Nelson 1995; Otnes and Scott 1996; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). Consumption rituals are defined as “holidays, special occasions, and other sacred events characterized by the intensive (and sometimes excessive) consumption of goods, services, and experiences” (Otnes 2007). Following this definition, consumption rituals seem more closely aligned with the ritual transitions²

² Ritual transitions are also referred to as rites of passage in the literature.

that are described in the sociological field. Ritual transitions are events/celebrations that mark a change in one's life in terms of role or status (Stanfield Tetreault 1990). Daily ritualized behaviors, rather than the major rites of passage, are extremely important because the everyday rituals continually reinforce and help complete the transitions that the rites or consumption rituals celebrate. Examples of daily rituals include activities that are usually social in nature and involve forms of expression that allow us to make social connections with others. Rook (1985) mentions several activities as examples of daily ritualized behaviors such as media usage, household chores, religious observations, business behaviors, food preparation and consumption, athletic participation/events, gaming, socializing, gift giving, and shopping, are all forms of daily ritualized behaviors in which consumers engage. New rituals and groups forming around rituals are occurring in the online environment. Firms have created online communities that consumers are participating in, yet many of these firms have failed to understand the important role that daily rituals play in fostering community through the bonding or linking elements of rituals.

Such rituals can occur for individuals as well as for groups, however research in this area has also largely neglected to focus on collectives such as communities (Epp 2008). Instead, much of the consumer research on rituals has focused on individual consumers and their families' involvement with ritual traditions such as holidays, religious rites, and rites of passage (i.e., a major role transitions such as a wedding or birth of a child) (Collins 2004; Otnes 2004). A vital aspect of the rituals is that the practice creates a common communal consumption experience (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Further study of ritual experiences in a community setting is needed.

Past studies in the consumer behavior literature on rituals have focused more on the construct of ritual rather than drawing from theory that specifically examines the meanings and structure of the ritual practices themselves (Knottnerus 2010; Rook 1985; Tuncay and Otnes 2008). A theoretical understanding of how consumers come to ritualize specific aspects of their daily behavior is needed (Rook 1985).

In summary, scholars recognize that ritual experiences play an important role in building and sustaining communities, but greater insights are needed about the nature of rituals that are occurring in these online communities and which rituals are important for creating sustainable communities. Structural ritualization theory will be introduced to guide this investigation into daily ritual experiences and the meaning which consumers derive from them. This particular theory is useful because it offers a structured framework for daily rituals in a social group setting. An understanding of what rituals “affect and perpetuate the community’s shared history, culture, and consciousness” (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001, p. 413) is undertaken.

Research Questions

Qualitative methodologies involving in-depth interviews and netnography research will be employed to explore the effects of rituals in online communities and their importance by investigating the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent can structural theory be used to investigate and discern between the practices/activities that are meaningful rituals in online communities and those practices/activities that are not rituals?

RQ2: Which ritualized practices are most important (using underlying characteristics of structural ritualization theory in terms of their salience, frequency, homologousness, and resources) in developing ongoing community affiliation in these online communities?

Contribution to the Literature

This paper investigates the important role of rituals in understanding consumers' consumption practices and participation in online communities. Ritual theory is used to identify ritual themes and the importance of ritual behaviors within online communities. Although rituals have been mentioned in association with online communities in the past, more focused ritual research can help provide a better understanding of how consumers are contributing to these online communities and developing the character/image of these communities.

Structural ritualization theory (SRT) is introduced to the marketing literature and provides a framework for studying daily consumption ritualizations in a community context. SRT can help companies influence their online communities by providing a better understanding of consumers' ritualized enactments, their meanings for consumers, and the role that these rituals play within the online community. This theory can help provide a framework for identifying the more meaningful rituals in community experiences and involvement. SRT helps to clarify the role that ritual practices play in affecting not only the proper actions that the consumer should follow within the online community, but also the important role that rituals play in affecting the markers of community involving consciousness of kind and shared moral responsibility. SRT may help to describe the common linkages between rituals and the other markers of community. Rituals warrant further consideration as to their effect on consumers' experiences and "linking value" that occurs within these online communities.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized as follows, first, in Chapter II a review is given on rituals and the use of rituals in consumer research. Second, rituals are investigated within the collective context of online communities. Third, a new theoretical framework for identifying ritualizations in daily life is introduced. This theory also helps to identify the importance of these ritualizations. Chapter III provides an overview of the methodology and research design. Finally, Chapters IV and V will present detailed findings and implications of the ritualized practices for both the consumer and the firm. An appendix will also be provided that includes the interview protocol/consent forms, diary template, and definitions of terms as a reference for readers.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the research on rituals with particular attention to the literature on the meaning of rituals for consumers and how these rituals have been shown to affect both the consumers and online communities. First, the role and nature of rituals will be discussed. Second, the influence other consumption collectives have had on the structure of online communities, and current community building strategies will be investigated. Finally, SRT will be introduced as a framework for understanding and identifying rituals in daily life, and as a means for ranking the importance of these rituals. This framework is applied to online communities in an effort to understand the affect of daily rituals on consumers involved in online communities.

Rituals and Ritualization

What exactly are rituals? Rituals are constructed of multiple behaviors that have expressive and symbolic qualities. These behaviors are personally meaningful, are typically a plural experience, and occur in a fixed episodic sequence that tends to be repeated over time (Rook 1985).

Early work on the importance of rituals in daily life and the role of rituals in social experiences associated with rituals originated with the theoretical work of sociologists such as Durkheim and Goffman. Durkheim noted the important role of rituals within collective groups in creating and producing social structure (Durkheim 1964; Knottnerus 1997). Rituals were shown as essential for preparing individuals for social life and social interaction (Durkheim 1964). Rituals play a key role in binding

individuals to the social groups and provide self-discipline and shared common experiences for individuals participating within these collective groups (Durkheim 1964). Goffman looked at the role rituals played in individual relationships and social interactions. Through daily contact, people are in each other's presence most of their lives. People in these groupings rely on "contact" rituals as a system or set of ground rules about how to interact with others in social situations (Goffman 1967, 1983). The next section will explore what the parts of ritual experiences are and will use dramaturgical metaphors to describe these experiences.

Components of Ritual Experience

This research focuses on daily rituals that continuously occur in consumption collectives rather than focusing on a specific rite of passage. These daily rituals offer an important strategic opportunity because they make up the majority of consumers' consumption experiences, help to integrate new members into the community, and maintain consumer relationships for more experienced members. To understand daily rituals, first it is important to understand what the components of the ritual experience are, and second to use theory to understand consumer rituals and their importance within the online community context. Rook (1985) suggests that the ritual experience can be broken down into four tangible components or elements which is shown in table 1³ and is discussed below.

³ Table 1 is adapted from Rook 1985 p. 253 and Knottnerus 2010

Table 1
Ritual Experience

	Description	Examples
Ritual Artifacts	Non-human resources that accompany or are consumed in a ritual setting.	Clothing, photos, stories, products, gifts, food and drink, icons, logos, colors.
Ritual Script	Guides consumers in product usage as part of the ritual enactments by providing proper structure and cognitions, roles, and behavior sequences.	<i>Formal</i> – Written pledge to agree to expected activities, wear similar clothing. <i>Informal</i> - Interacting with friends by sharing pictures, music, and telling stories.
Ritual Performance Role(s)	Expected performance of individuals or groups that may be strictly or loosely scripted. Participation in roles range from active to passive and may be formal or informal.	<i>Strict</i> - Riding position in biker club.) <i>Loose</i> – Behavior at rallies. <i>Active</i> – Riding with biker club. <i>Passive</i> – Attending biker meetings, but not riding with club.
Ritual Audience	Direct or indirect participants of the ritual, or non-participant outside observers.	<i>Direct participants</i> – bikers riding during a rally. <i>Indirect participants</i> – bikers at rally watching other bikers ride. <i>Non-participant</i> – non-bikers attending the rally.

Ritual Artifacts

Ritual artifacts⁴ are non-human resources that accompany or are consumed in a ritual setting (Rook 1985). Examples of ritual artifacts have been described by Belk (1988) and Ahuvia (2005) and may include such things as photos, clothing, products, gifts, food and drink, and logos. Essentially, ritual artifacts are goods or resources that are important or meaningful in the ritual enactments. According to Belk (1988), ritual

⁴ Ritual artifacts are also referred to as ritual objects, loved objects, sacred objects, and ceremonial objects in the literature.

artifacts have been shown to reflect the consumers' self-identity, where the object becomes an extension of the actor's self (Belk 1988). Ahuvia (2005) has stated that consumers invest in ritual artifacts with large amounts of work, time, and dedication, and as a result, over time the ritual artifacts increase in importance and meaning for consumers. Ritual artifacts can be part of the consumers' internal meaning as an extension of one's self-identity. They can also be part of one's external meaning as an extension of one's group identity through shared meaning (Ahuvia 2005). Ritual scripts also govern the use of ritual artifacts during the ritualized behaviors (Otnes and Nelson 1995).

Ritual Scripts

Rituals involve dramatic enactments, so dramaturgical metaphors have been applied to ritual social practices (Goffman 1967). Ritual scripts give individuals and groups the structure or framework (cognitive) for their behaviors, action repertoires, situations, events, object use, and sequences of actions (Knottnerus 2010). Scripts range from casual to highly formal and may be formally codified (written) or implied. Like a script, rituals helps the consumers to determine what behaviors are appropriate in a given situation and what the proper sequence of events will be (Rook 1985).

Repeated daily ritual engagements in these scripts cause the rituals to become more salient for consumers. Also by continued participation, artifacts are generated from ritual enactments that further remind consumers about the feelings from past ritualizations. These artifacts also serve as a stimulus, reminding consumers to engage in the ritualizations again (Collins 2004). Repetition of ritual scripts also leads to feelings of group solidarity drawing individuals together (Collins 2004; Durkheim 1964).

Ritual Performance Role(s)

Similar to ritual performance are the roles that individuals and groups play. These roles can be extensive to non-existent, and are either active or passive (Rook 1985). In the community setting, roles are performed by members of the community as well as by the firm. These ritualizations contain symbolic meaning or themes. Rook (1985) suggested a ritual “may be aimed a larger audience beyond those individuals who have a specified ritual performance role” (p. 253).

Some consumers take an active role in the community and engage in ritual performance roles. For these consumers the rituals have meaning. Other consumers tend to just be “lurkers” i.e. individuals who observe but who do not participate directly in the ritual performances. For these more passive non-participant consumers the community rituals may not be as meaningful.

Ritual Audience

The performance of the ritual involves display, or a ritual audience. This is in line with the individual's ritual-role enactment which can be either extensive, limited, or nonexistent - passive or active (Rook 1985, page 253). Just as consumers may choose to engage in the ritual, they may also chose the role of an observer during the ritual and thus participate only indirectly with the ritualization as part of the ritual audience.

Several consumers for example will belong to an online community participating part of the time but also doing a great deal of observation of ritual involvement of other members. The ritual audience can be more than just the direct or indirect participants of the ritual, since the rituals may be observed by outsiders. Once an individual posts something to an online community it is hard to say how many observers there are of these

posts and even if it had an original target audience (Rook 1985). It is clear that ritual experiences are important to building and fostering online communities. The next section will review how research in tribes and virtual communities has influenced the concept of community giving added emphasis to the ritual experiences of consumers.

Consumption Collectives

Recent research suggests that the larger proportion of consumer research tends to explore consumption from an individual perspective and few studies tend to address collectives (Epp 2008). There are several different types of collectives in consumer behavior research that focus on shared consumption behaviors (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2002; Belk and Tumbat 2005; Cova and Cova 2002; Kozinets 1999; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). More research is necessary to understand how one type of consumption collective relates to other community types (Thomas 2011). Such groups have been referred to by various titles such as subcultures of consumption, brand cults, postmodern tribes, e-tribes, brand communities, and virtual communities.

These collectives range from large online diverse groups such as virtual communities to smaller homogeneous groups such as tribes. The research on tribes, brand communities, and virtual communities have had a large impact on online communities by shaping community strategy and redefining what online communities are all about.

Tribes

Research on tribes has focused less on the commercial aspects of the brand, and more on the social aspects of the experience. Social linkages through brands and the marketplace are being sought by consumers who lack traditional communities to turn

toward. Individual consumers are turning toward objects and services in order to provide them with the social aspects and social value that they seek.

Consumers become involved with tribes because of the linking value that these tribes provide for communal social interaction (Cova 1997). In reference to tribal marketing Cova and Cova (2002) state that tribes “concentrate on the bonding or linking element that keep individuals in the group” (p. 602). Rather than relying on predefined categories to identify consumer segments and consumer purchase behaviors, postmodern consumer researchers are beginning to use daily consumption rituals as a means for understanding consumption behaviors of consumers (Cova 1997).

The literature on tribes also suggests that advertisers would benefit from cultural understanding of rituals through the language used to describe the rituals within tribes, the meanings that rituals have for members of the tribes, and the ritual practices members engage in (Kozinets 2006). Firms would do well to apply the lessons learned from the tribal marketing approach, which is meant to support products and services that hold people together as group by strengthening community links (Cova and Cova 2002).

Brand Communities

Brand communities are similar to tribes when the “linking value” of the brand helps in establishing or reinforcing bonds between the members of the tribe who are enthusiasts or devotees of the brand. Brand communities can be online or offline and are based on a structured set of social relationships as well (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001, p. 412). According to McAlexander et al., “Geography is one dimension on which communities differ. Although brand communities have been defined as nongeographically bounded (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001), they may be either

geographically concentrated (Holt 1995) or scattered (Boorstin 1974). They may even exist in the entirely nongeographical space of the Internet” (p. 39).

A recent definition of brand community is “a collective of consumers organized around one particular brand, which is sustained through repeated online and/or offline social interactions and communications among its members who possess a consciousness of kind, feel moral responsibility toward one another, and embrace and propagate the collective’s rituals and traditions (Dholakia and Algesheimer 2010, p. 9). Here too it is shown that brand communities can be online or offline and are sustained through social interactions and communications among the members of the brand community. The markers of brand community are included within this definition that the community both “embraces and propagates”.

Complex social linkages can be found in brand communities including bonds or linkages between consumers, the brand, marketing agents, and firms that manage the brand. McAlexander et al. (2002) first referred to these social relationships in brand communities as a “web of relationships” and today scholars argue that these linkages can be used in brand strategy. By sharing in ritual consumption experiences consumers strengthen their social ties to other community entities (McAlexander et al. 2002). Similarly, literature on tribal behaviors has shown that everyday rituals should result in shared emotional experiences, and result in increasing communication between individuals and others in the community (Veloutsou and Moutinho 2009).

Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) describe how brand communities are able to strengthen social ties within the community when “members engage jointly in group actions to accomplish collective goals and/or to express mutual sentiments and

commitments” (p. 45). Thus, it is important to community members to be able to interact with others through ritual experiences within these communities, as well as be offered the means to connect with their community friends regardless of physical location. Through such connections, consumers have been shown to actively help other members and to participate in joint activities to create value both for themselves and others in the community. This is critical for more experienced members to have the enjoyment of sharing what they know about the brand by helping new members, and for new members to be helped to integrate into the community (Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann 2005; McAlexander et al. 2002). These connections help members to find and fulfill social needs through community involvement, shared ritual experiences allow for this consciousness of kind to occur.

Consumers who participate in online community rituals should also develop a shared sense of moral responsibility. As McAlexander 2002 suggested with the Jeep owners. Before participating in the brandfests consumers did not have a shared sense of moral responsibility for others. It was through the participation and sharing during the experience that created this shared moral responsibility for other members. For members of an online community it has been suggested that through participation, a stronger the sense of moral responsibility among the members is created (Madupu and Cooley 2010).

Virtual Communities

Just as principles from tribal research and brand communities can benefit an online community strategy, research on virtual communities can also help firms to understand more about online communities. Early work in the areas of brand communities showed evidence of brand communities in both face-to-face and computer-

mediated environments as well as the importance of social connectivity to these groups (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Consumers are seeking social interaction in virtual communities. The social benefits of being able to maintain interpersonal connectivity and social enhancement are significant drivers of participation in virtual communities (Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo 2004). The 'consumption experience' occurs during the consumers' participation in the community. "In virtual communities in contrast, social interaction is the objective and the draw for the individual participant. The resulting joint communication and the positive experience are the direct products that are consumed by members" (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2002, p. 17). Rituals are likely to help generate these consumption experiences by creating the social interactions consumers are seeking.

Recent work in the popular press has also shown support for a focusing more on social interactions within virtual communities. Firms running these virtual communities were encouraged to allow their consumers to have uninhibited group interaction and discussion (Dholakia 2009). It was speculated that firms, by allowing consumers the freedom to discuss whatever they wished, would increase the consumers' social bonds with one another, and generate more honest feedback and the generation of new ideas for the firm. Shared rituals arise from such open, consumer-generated social interactions and help to create a rich tradition and unique jargon within these virtual communities (Dholakia 2009). Rituals also play a key role in strengthening ties between members of the virtual community and the firm.

Community Building Strategies

Online communities are known as firm-managed communities when the community is organized and orchestrated by the firm (Dholakia and Algesheimer 2010).

Xbox Brazil would be an example of a firm-managed community (Almeida 2009). Firms are also interested in influencing existing communities of consumers that use the firm's products or services in consumer run communities. These brand communities are referred to as customer-managed communities (Dholakia and Algesheimer 2010). An example of a customer-managed community is the Newton community (Muñiz and Schau 2005). In essence, the differences between these two types of communities is that customer-managed communities are own and run by the users much like a tribe, and the firm provides the online community to consumers for their use. Marketing to one's customer base using online or offline communities has been noted as a potential alternative for engaging customers and improving the consumer's relationship with the brand (Algesheimer et al. 2010). Despite their potential, firm-managed online communities typically have not been as successful as customer-managed communities run by enthusiasts and consumers of the brands (Dholakia 2009).

In an online community, where the community members interact socially with one another, whether it is realized or not, the firm has turned over much of the control of the community to the community members (Veloutsou and Moutinho 2009). This occurs as a result of the community members joint production of online community content and forming their own social linkages. Regardless of whether a community is formed by the firm or by a group of consumers a brand community once begun is owned by the members within the community (Fournier 2009). Since consumers have more control over the online community, this should affect how firms should view their online community strategies.

Firms can control what consumers can and cannot do within the online community, by focusing on the product or services they provide, and offering few ways for them to interact. These communities often result in consumers leaving the community because they become uninviting (Dholakia 2009). A recent article on the Myspace online community is a good example of the effects that resulted from the firm's increased control of its content. In an effort to attract younger users, in 2008 Myspace decided to move its strategy away from its original social focus where friends could connect, becoming more of a content provider of music and entertainment. This resulted in the consumers spending 59% less time on the site and losing 44% of its members (Steel 2011).

Online communities have great potential since these communities are built on an existing strong web of social relationships (Fournier 2009). Some of the largest online communities include MySpace, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Blogger. Consumers utilize the companies' tools and applications and the internet to enable consumers to co-create these sites as well as the brand image for the site. This becomes a fertile seedbed for rituals to be adopted and generated by the consumers. Online communities could benefit from a better understanding of the meanings that consumers derive from their daily ritual experiences on these sites. Structural ritualization theory (SRT), which will be discussed in the next section, can be used to explore what rituals consumers are engaging in and creating within these online communities. SRT can also be used to determine what rituals are most important to these consumers as well.

Structural Ritualization Theory

Knottnerus (1997) introduced SRT as a means for understanding the ritualized actions that occur in groups or collectives such as communities. Ritual practices can be copied, but they also emerge from and are expressed by members of these communities. The ritualized actions performed within these communities become part of the members' individual scripts that tell the member the proper behavioral patterns within the community's social environment. Rituals play a central role in the creation and reproduction of social actions and social organization in groups such as online communities.

How do rituals compare to ritualization? One can think of the term ritual as a *noun* and the action of ritual (i.e. ritualization) as a *verb*. All behavior is ritualized to some degree (Driver 1991). The term ritualization is used in this theory since it has a broader meaning than rituals, which normally refer to ceremonial or religious activities. Ritualization refers to activities involving rituals performed as part of routinized interaction and social behaviors that occur in everyday life (Knottnerus 1997). Knottnerus (2002) gives several examples of ritualizations such as traditions, social customs, athletic or hobby pursuits, and standardized ceremonial or non-ceremonial practices of social groups to name a few.

Assumptions of SRT

There are five basic assumptions of SRT are given in figure 1, which shows how important rituals are in providing a common framework for studying the workings of rituals at the micro level between two individuals up to the larger societal or macro level (Knottnerus 2010).

Figure 1

Assumptions of SRT

1. Rituals are a fundamental component of human behavior and social processes and have always been present in society.
2. Rituals occur in both secular and sacred context.
3. Rituals are dynamic in nature and subject to change.
4. Rituals are important to social agency and social life.
5. Rituals have great explanatory value.

SRT focuses ritualizations of social actors in their daily social lives. Daily rituals are made up of both personal and social rituals. Knottnerus (2010) notes that “although the theory addresses both personal and social rituals and recognizes that in certain situations some rituals may be carried out individually, SRT has emphasized the *social* nature of rituals” (p. 10). The theory also takes into account how rituals at the macro levels can influence interpersonal behaviors of individual actors and vice versa (Knottnerus 2010, p. 10). These rituals help to create stability in social life and have symbolic meanings that give significance to individual actions of the actors.

The social setting/environment in which rituals occur involves two or more actors using communication interactions at least part of the time (Knottnerus 1997). Individuals have a delimited sphere or region of social activity where the individual actor has power to produce effects that involve both the actor’s cognition and behaviors (Knottnerus 1997, p. 261).

Ritualized Symbolic Practices (RSPs)

Ritualized symbolic practices (RSPs) are a means for providing a way to measure the importance and intensity of ritualizations (Mitra and Knottnerus 2008). RSPs refer to standardized social practices of the group that are regularly engaged in, and are action

repertoires that are schema driven. Each of these factors will be illustrated with examples from Schouten and McAlexander (1995) to illustrate RSP themes as outlined in both table 2 and the following discussion of salience, repetitiveness, homologousness and resources.

Table 2

Ritualized Symbolic Practices

	Description	Example
Salience	The degree to which RSPs are conspicuous, prominent or noticeable and how central the RSPs are to an act, action sequence, or bundle of interrelated acts.	Distinctiveness of the act of riding a Harley motorcycle. Clothing developed for the biker group. Grooming of the biker. Customization of the bike.
Repetitiveness	The frequency and or degree with which ritualized behavior is repeated.	Frequency of group and individual activities involving ones Harley such as meetings, rallies, rides. Rituals involving caretaking of the bike.
Homologousness	The perceived similarity among different RSPs.	Similar image with other Harley riders. Dress, bike, appearance is usually the same for biker groups. This is reinforce by the other RSPs. Ideas of Freedom, Americana, and Outlaw help reinforce this image.
Resources	Materials or skills needed to enable participation in RSPs	Bikes, riding skills, license, group membership, clothing, ability to travel and participate.

Salience

First, salience is the degree to which RSPs are conspicuous, prominent or noticeable and how central the RSPs are to an act, action sequence, or bundle of

interrelated acts. More frequent reference to certain ritual practices within a group as well as the length of time that ritualized actions take have been suggested as ways to measure the salience (centrality) of an RSP within a group (Knottnerus 1997). The salience of the ritual may actually help to connect consumers rather than isolate them, as Cova (1997) seems to imply for online communities that are relying on technologies to create social links in their daily rituals with other members. It has been suggested that formation of lasting identification as a member of an online community of consumption, depends on more than just the consumption that occurs during the ritual experience. Lasting identification also depends on the salience of these rituals and the salience of the social relationships that the person possesses with other members of the online community prior to the experience (Kozinets 1999).

Bikers for example are noticeable. Clothing, leather, and tattoos are used both to dress the bike as well as the biker in symbolic elaboration of their devotion to the rituals of the group. The biker's appearance is also a central to these rituals. Many bikers choose to have long hair and beards. Women bikers tend to also develop a distinct look and manner that fits with other members of their group, except with a softer look, but still maintaining the same attitude of independence (Schouten and McAlexander 1995 p. 59). Bikers also tend to form strong social bonds with each other that are salient and are manifest in their group collective behaviors on rides, similar dress and appearance of members and the bikes they ride.

Repetitiveness

Second, repetitiveness refers to the "frequency with which a RSP is performed" (Knottnerus 1997 p. 262). Repetitiveness can look at the degree ritualization increases

when the number and intensity of these behaviors increases (Grimes 2004). A range of occurrence can be used to determine if RSPs are practiced rarely or are engaged in frequently within a social setting or domain (Knottnerus 2007, p. 5).

Bikers tend to engage in similar riding activities, meetings, events as a group. Many biker communities attend several organized events throughout the year. Bikes are usually of a similar style within the community. The rituals of taking care of the bikes and keeping them in top condition are repeated on a frequent basis. When cleaning the bike, other individuals are not allowed to help with this ritual. Out of respect, only the owner is allowed to wash, touch, and maintain his or her bike (Schouten and McAlexander 1995 p. 51).

Homologousness

Third, homologousness is the degree of perceived similarity “sameness” (in meaning and form) among RSPs (Mitra and Knottnerus 2008). The more homologous are the RSPs, the greater the likelihood that they will reinforce each other and enhance the dominance/impact of the RSPs on the actors in the social setting (Knottnerus 2007). Schouten and McAlexander (1995) stated that the different subgroups of riders created customized clothing and mannerisms that lead them to be distinctly different from other HOGS while at the same time creating greater homogeneity among the clubs members.

Past similar practices also have an effect on current practices that are also similar. For example past ritualized activities have a successive effect by having an impact on consumers in different time periods. This impact can also occur from reviewing similar practices from previous generations which can impact the current social environment, such as when stories are shared from the past in a the present social environment

(Knottnerus 2010). An example of past practices affecting current practices within community activities has been given by Schouten et al. (2007). Successive experiences help build on new experiences with the communities' rituals to form a halo affect that endures long after the experience is over.

Resources

Fourth, resources refer ritual artifacts which have already been mentioned. Ritual artifacts are needed to engage in RSPs which are available to actors (Knottnerus 1997). The ownership or availability of ritual artifacts needed for engaging in the RSP the more likely the actor will engage in the RSP. A distinction has been made between resources being either human or non-human. Non-human resources are defined as other resources that are not human but are perceived to have value for the individual actor or the group. Examples of non-human resources could be those provided by the firm such as a brand, computer resources, marketing, or by the individual or group such as pictures, equipment, money products, texts and so forth.

Human resources refer to the abilities and characteristics of actors as perceived by the group members that have value for the individual actor or the group. Some examples of human resources include physical, emotional, social, and mental resources that allow one to actor to interact more easily with other actors (Knottnerus 2007). Human resources also involve attributes or abilities of individuals such as knowledge, status, positions of authority, etc. (Knottnerus, 2010).

In biker communities for example, the biker will tend to ride in the same position within the formation when participating in these rides. The reason for this is that riding formation is based on the skill and or experience of the biker. Typically more

experienced bikers lead the group (Schouten and McAlexander 1995 p. 49).

McAlexander et al. 2003 also found that the RSPs were cumulative and created more loyalty towards future community activities as a result of these experiences.

These four factors of RSPs give us a measure of the overall rank or strength of the RSPs. This allows for the theory to test the importance of the ritualized practices within the social domain of interaction. Rank is defined as the relative dominance or standing of an RSP (Knottnerus, 2010). RSPs from SRT will be used to test the rank that different emergent rituals have on a sample of community members. SRT will be used to help to identify the rituals that are occurring within the online community using qualitative methods. Once these rituals have been explored, it is possible to rank the rituals using the RSPs in order to understand how important different rituals are within online community.

Summary

The focus of this research will be on consumer rituals in online communities. These online communities are a rich source of rituals that create the community experience and foster community growth. This reflects current thinking on online communities in that the ritualized experiences of the community is what is valued by the consumer, and not just the service or product (Fournier 2009). This research specifically examines the ritual practices of consumers in online communities. Consumers involved in these online communities have more control to create the value and meanings in the community through rituals (Mathwick et al. 2008). The firm provides resources that consumers may or may not integrate into the ritualized behaviors as well as providing some behavioral activities that may become rituals.

SRT has been applied to several different research areas in the field of social psychology, but this is the first study to apply this theory in the marketing domain. We have yet to understand how these daily ritual experiences and meanings affect the online community. Research in consumer behavior, especially in work regarding behaviors that are ritualized could greatly benefit firms by applying this new theory to online communities.

Since this research is exploratory in that much remains to be known about these rituals and their effects on the online community. We still need to learn how rituals affect communities and how meaningful and strong these rituals are. It makes sense to explore the meanings of these rituals with consumers (i.e. online community members) in this research study.

If firms can begin to understand the types of ritualizations that are more meaningful to the individuals and groups within the online community, then the firm can do a better job of supporting these practices with the firm's resources, marketing messages, and strategies. This increased knowledge should help to strengthen the web of relationships between the firm's employees/brands and with the community members – resulting in a stronger online community.

SRT will be employed in Chapter III for studying online communities using a qualitative mixed methods approach involving in-depth interviews and netnography. These methods were chosen due to the exploratory nature of the work and because prior studies have recommended these methods for understanding the social interactions in online research. This research also helps to answer a recent call for a better understanding

of the drivers of consumer participation and motivation for consumers involved in communities (Casaló, Flavián, and Guinalú 2008).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the qualitative approach used in this research, rationale for these research methods, descriptions of the community context, preliminary research, and research timelines for its completion.

Qualitative Methodology Approach

The purpose of the qualitative research method is to explore and understand the meanings and significance of a phenomenon (Creswell 2009). Qualitative research is oriented towards analyzing social behaviors in their natural environments for studying social narratives, communication, practices, and experiences. In this study, using qualitative methods will allow for an exploration of the rituals and their meanings that occur within an online community.

In order to conduct studies of online communities, researchers suggest using in-depth interviews together with observation and document analysis (Mann 2004). This research will follow these suggested guidelines for online research by using both in-depth interviews and netnography. In-depth interviews are meant to provide an exploration and rich description of the rituals and their role within online communities in addressing the research questions (Plano Clark 2010). Netnography is participant-observational research based on online fieldwork. As a method netnography was designed for studying online

social environments by gathering data resulting from online cultural interactions (Kozinets 2010).

The findings from the in-depth interviews should also be consistent with the findings from the netnography research. This employs the strategy of triangulation by using two qualitative methods as a strategy for improving the quality of qualitative research (Flick 2006). Using more than one qualitative method in the same study also adds rigor, a richness, and depth to the research inquiry by (Flick 2006). Having consistent findings across qualitative methods, increases the confidence in the research results (Rank 2004).

In this research RSPs from SRT will also be used to identify the strength and level of involvement consumers have with ritual experiences. This research is meant to provide substantive results that firms who are employing community websites can apply to their organizational strategy.

Community Context

Similar to past research on communities, this research has employed a qualitative methods approach for exploring an online community. For example, recent research studying the effects of the social environment on the Hummer community focused on qualitative methods including in-depth interviews with key informants and netnography to look at communities (Luedicke 2006). Muñiz and Schau (2006) also used qualitative methods to analyze data from the Apple Newton online community. Their research included in-depth interviews and participant observation as well as analysis of online websites. Following in this vein, this research will explore the topic of rituals and the

subsequent impact on consumers in an online community using a variety of qualitative methods.

A qualitative methods design will be applied to explore the effects of ritual experiences on consumers in an online community. Facebook offers much opportunity to study an online community given the robustness⁵ of the community and the number of daily rituals⁶ that are likely to occur in the community. For these reasons, Facebook seems an ideal context for investigating the effects that rituals have for creating and sustaining online communities.

Developed in 2004, Facebook was based on the concept of an online site where high school and college students could chat and post photos without having other adults on their sites (Loten 2008). Facebook overtook MySpace by focusing on enhancing the experience on its social network. MySpace on the other hand focused more on being the provider of entertainment content (Chmielewski 2009). In 2010, Facebook's earnings were estimated at \$1.9 billion the company was valued at \$50 billion (Fullick 2011). Facebook is the largest display advertiser on the internet, accounting for nearly 1 in 4 online display ads in the U.S. (Triggs 2010). According to the Facebook website, Facebook has over 500 million active users, and comScore reports that 71% of internet users are on Facebook (Triggs 2010). In addition to providing a good context for the study in order to answer our research questions, the scope/scale of Facebook shows the

⁵ When Myspace began to decline Facebook doubled in size Chmielewski, Dawn C. and David Sarno (2009), "How Myspace Fell Off the Pace," *Los Angeles Times*, June 17, 2009.

⁶ See the previous discussion on examples of daily ritualizations by Rook 1985

impact that a well-designed online community can have on consumers, their rituals, and as a business strategy.

Data Collection

The main tools of data collection included semi-structured interviews and netnography. These qualitative methods were used in order to explore the online social environment of Facebook. Additional insights can be obtained by using qualitative research to generate “thick descriptions” of a social experiences occurring within online communities by allowing the participants within the online community to structure the experiences as they see them in order to come to a deeper understanding of these experiences (Geertz 1973).

In-depth, Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews rely on a guiding set of questions while at the same time allowing for some latitude and freedom to talk about what is of interest to the community members that I will be interviewing (Hesse-Biber 2006). Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the principle researcher using volunteer subjects recruited online using Facebook and in two undergraduate marketing classes at OSU. The online interviews were conducted using Skype tools which allowed for screen sharing of the participants Facebook site. The interviews were also recorded using two audio devices. Other interviews were also conducted on campus in rooms located on the 3rd and 4th floors of the Spears School of Business that were reserved for that purpose.

The first and last few minutes of the interview will involve informal conversational chatting in order to create involvement and good relations for the interview process (Miller 2004). Opening discussion for the interviews will focus on the

purpose of the study, will describe the IRB informed consent (see Appendix 3) and will lead into the interview guide. Interviews will explore the social rituals and the meanings that these rituals have for individuals who participate on Facebook. The strength and nature of these social linkages together with the RSPs from these activities will be explored. The openness of the in-depth interviews should help in establishing rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee so that the discussion during the interview will reflect what is actually occurring on Facebook. The interviewees Facebook page will be used during the interview to facilitate the discussion of the rituals that are occurring on the site.

These interviews lasted approximately an hour. Some interviews ended up being more or less than this time given the nature of the discussion. Collecting this data required frequent revisions and feedback especially during the first part of the data collection process to insure that both the theory and the questions being asked were addressing the research questions and providing an understanding of the rituals.

Prior to conducting the interviews two test interviews were conducted under the supervision of an experienced faculty member who is an expert in qualitative research in order to verify that the principle researcher was building a level of rapport and allowing the respondents to tell their story. I found these practice interviews to be very helpful before interviewing actual research subjects in helping me to probe more with follow up questions and to listen more to respondents.

In-depth interviews were transcribed from the audio/video recordings soon after the interview by two trained transcriptionists. Transcriptions were checked for accuracy and changes were made to help to improve the interview data. I used audio/video

recordings and compared these to the transcriptions in order to check for accuracy in both meaning and content. The actual transcriptions take about 4 to 6 hours for every hour of interviews (Miller 2004). As the transcriptionists became more experienced and by using a set of approved abbreviations over time the transcriptions were less time consuming.

Recruitment of Subjects

Participants for this research were recruited using purposeful homogeneous sampling. Purposeful sampling applies to both sites and individuals and allows the researcher to intentionally select both sites and individuals that make sense for understanding the central phenomenon. Homogenous sampling for the selection of participants who are similar to one another (Plano Clark 2010). I chose to do this type of sampling with college students as they would be most experienced with this community and would be more likely to be frequent users of the Facebook community which was originally created for their use. I also wished to focus on adult participants for this study. Adults are more likely to have been on Facebook for a longer amount of time (i.e. the site was created in 2004), increasing the likelihood of these participants familiarity with the site and participation on the site⁷. Interviewees were screened in order to insure that they met the minimum age. In addition to these screening guidelines, college students were selected to participate in the interviews who had a Facebook account, had been a member of the community for at least a year, and who had contributed by posting during the last week.

Participants also were also required to own and use an smart phone, such as an iPhone to access the online community. I intentionally selected users who owned smart

⁷ Facebook's privacy policy prohibits use of the site for users under age 13.

phones for participation because the ease of use of these types of devices increases the users connectivity with online communities such as Facebook. Such increases in connectivity should subsequently lead to increases in the user’s interactions and use of such communities. For example, such devices allow the user to be always connected to the community and eliminate steps in the connection process, freeing up more resources such as time and effort it expended to connect with other community members.

Within purposeful sampling there are several types of sampling that can be employed. Since Facebook is made up of a 57% female to 43% male representation, I followed similar demographic ratios in selecting participants for this study (Goudreau 2010; Plano Clark 2010). Since these interviews were semi-structured, an interview guide was used in order to help structure these interviews (see Appendix 1). Interviews were conducted with 28 college students (see table 3 for a description of participants). Interviews continued until a level of satiation was reached where a theoretical understanding of these ritualizations that emerged from the research process was obtained (Miller 2004).

Table 3

Characteristics of Informants

Name	Age	Gender	Class	Major
Josh	18	Male	Freshman	Information Systems
Suzie	29	Female	Graduate	Marketing
Megan	22	Female	Junior	Strategic Communications
Kevin	21	Male	Sophomore	Undeclared
Amy	23	Female	Senior	Design, Housing and Merchandising
Seth	21	Male	Sophomore	Management
Holly	22	Female	Junior	Health Education and Promotion

Name	Age	Gender	Class	Major
Troy	21	Male	Junior	Finance
Bridgett	34	Female	Junior	General Business
Alex	22	Male	Junior	Management
Damien	20	Female	Sophomore	Undeclared
Cameron	20	Male	Sophomore	General Business
Justin	22	Male	sophomore	Management
Max		Male	Junior	Art
Naomi		Female	Junior	Accounting
Tom	23	Male	Junior	Marketing
Kelly	20	Female	Sophomore	Strategic Communication
Nikkei	20	Female	Sophomore	Art
Rae Anne	22	Female	Sophomore	UAS-Assessment Program
Brenda	21	Female	Junior	Strategic Communication
Jim	24	Male	Senior	Construction
Colette	22	Female	Sophomore	Agribusiness
Edwin	23	Male	Sophomore	Agribusiness
Andrew	20	Male	Junior	Undeclared
Katie	20	Female	Sophomore	Marketing
Kylie	21	Female	Junior	Management
Mary	20	Female	Sophomore	Undeclared
Monique	23	Female	Sophomore	Undeclared

*All names are pseudonyms

The majority of the participants stated in their interviews that they joined Facebook between 2005 and 2008. Most students were sophomores or juniors in high school when they joined the community. As per the IRB guidelines students were offered either \$10 or extra credit to compensate them for their participation in the study.

Trustworthiness of Data and Ethics

Both transcriptionists did a wonderful job in transcribing the data. They also were provided training and equipment as well as compensation for the work that they performed. In order to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions, the recordings were checked for accuracy and abbreviations were agreed upon to speed up the transcription of the data.

All audio files were assigned a unique number to identify the file for transcription. This number became the name of the transcribed file. In addition field notes were also taken to capture thoughts, feelings, and an overall assessment of the interview just after the interview took place. Members of the dissertation committee verified the accuracy and detail of these transcriptions. Because funds were provided for the transcription services, the files were tracked so that the transcriptionists were reimbursed for the work that they performed for each file. Invoices stated the file name assigned as well as the length of time for transcribing each file.

In order to verify the accuracy of coding the data, expert checks were done to see if the principle investigator's inductive and decoding methods were identifying similar themes in describing the ritualized behaviors. These expert checks were done by a more experienced qualitative researcher who helped to verify the coding process by conducting her own coding and then comparisons were made to see if similar themes and observations were being made in the analysis of the data. Having another experienced researcher provide similar results for ritual themes helped to provide more evidence for the existence of the themes that were developed (Plano Clark 2010).

Ritual themes that were identified in the in-depth interviews were also verified during the second phase of research using triangulation by observing these themes using the netnography (Flick 2006). I was able to observe many of the daily ritualized behaviors and themes that were developed as described in the findings in Chapter IV. This helped to further substantiate the accuracy of the findings in the study as I was able to draw on more than one qualitative method and provide corroborating evidence about

the ritual themes developed in the in-depth interviews in answering my research questions.

Member checks were used for clarification of the research findings once data was collected from both in-depth interviews and netnography. “Member checks are a procedure whereby some or all of a final research report’s findings are presented to the people who have been studied in order to solicit their comments” (Belk 2006 p. 136). Member checks were done with carefully selected key informants based on their experience with the Facebook community. The member checks helped to provide further clarification and accuracy of the research, and helped to give the community members a voice in their own representation.

In order to insure that the research was conducted in an ethical manner, research guidelines for disclosure, research interests, confidentiality, and feedback from members of the online community were followed, as well as seeking permission for posts, images/photographs, and quotes that were used in the dissertation (Kozinets 2002).

Netnography

Online research using observational techniques together with content analysis of website posts have been used in past community studies (Kozinets 2001; Luedicke 2006; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001; Muñiz and Schau 2005). Netnography was selected as a qualitative observational method as a means for observing users ritual experiences in the naturalistic setting within the online community of Facebook as a participant observer. The *Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods* defines netnography as “a qualitative, interpretive research methodology that adapts the traditional, in-person ethnographic

research techniques of anthropology to the study of online cultures and communities formed through computer-mediated communications” (Jupp 2006).

Netnography also allows for communication with those being observed as well as data checks for validating the findings from the research. Since the method is flexible, it can allow for the analysis of communication rituals that are occurring within these tribal social networks whether the user is using a computer or a mobile device, within the natural environment online, which is ideal for studying Facebook, which is an online community (Kozinets 2006). The method allows for observation as well as participation adding to its flexibility. For example, netnography should be useful in checking the emergent ritual behaviors from the in-depth interviews to see if the themes appear as described and asking members of the community if these emergent themes are accurate.

Participants in the in-depth interviews who expressed an interest in this study were invited to participate in the netnography. Of the thirteen participants were invited to participate and ten participants accepted the emailed invitation to participate in the second phase of the study (see appendix 4 for the consent form). Students were selected following the same proportional guidelines as per the in-depth interviews with six female students, and four male students making up the number of in-depth participants. Students who participated were all active posters on Facebook except for one of the male participants. These observations were collected once every two weeks for each of the participants over a period of two months.

For conducting the netnography permission was obtained to observe the Facebook pages of 10 key informants in order to assess their posts, newsfeeds, profiles, friend lists, and usage habits. This enabled me to access archival data and to analyze their ritual

behaviors on Facebook. Table 4 includes the individuals who participated in this phase of the study.

Table 4

Profiles of Netnography Informants

Name*	Age	Gender	Class	Major	Length of Usage
Megan	22	Female	Junior	Strategic Communication	7 years
Bridgett	34	Female	Junior	General Business	3 years
Alex	22	Male	Junior	Management	5 years
Damien	20	Female	Sophomore	Undeclared	3 years
Max	28	Male	Junior	Art	6 years
Kelly	20	Female	Sophomore	Strategic Communication	5 years
Edwin	23	Male	Sophomore	Agribusiness	2 years
Andrew	20	Male	Junior	Undeclared	6 years
Katie	20	Female	Sophomore	Marketing	6 years
Kylie	21	Female	Junior	Management	6 years

*All names are pseudonyms

Time Frame and Preliminary Work

Data was collected in the fall and continued into the spring. During the spring, the emergent themes from both qualitative methods were refined until important ritual themes emerged from the data. These important ritual behaviors were also observed in the online community and were classified using a classification scheme developed from previous ritual research and observable RSPs. A summary of my research engagement is provided in table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Research Engagement

Time Period	Research Phase	Research Methods
March 2011- May 2011	<i>Exploratory phase</i> Determine if rituals are present and observable in Facebook	Student questionnaires and diaries describing daily Facebook behaviors.
September 2011- December 2011	<i>Phase 1 - In-depth Interviews</i> Identify important rituals and ritual themes using SRT that are important in maintaining building community.	In-depth semistructured interviews with students beginning with high school experiences to the present.
December 2011- January 2012	<i>Phase 2 - Netnography</i> Observe and classify important ritual behavior and concepts of salience and repetitiveness.	Naturalistic/participant observation in the community with students.

Preliminary research was done in this past spring in order to test how SRT and RSPs could be applied to the online community of Facebook. Through observation, Facebook seemed ideal for this type of research as members seem to be involved with daily ritualizations involving text-based discussions, photo sharing, and email. During initial exploratory research, a questionnaire was circulated to a group of 25 students who were active on Facebook. These students were recruited from two undergraduate marketing classes. A separate data collection was used in order to see if the same ritual themes were present. Since these are two separate methods, I hope to find consistency between behaviors and their meanings. The same group of students were given extra credit to participate by filling out diaries of their behaviors on Facebook along with a general description of what they got out of their Facebook usage in terms of what it means to them, and how often they use the site, and what they use it for. Students were instructed to write for 10 minutes each day for four days (see Appendix 4). Although

most of these students participated in the diaries, only 13 diaries were usable for preliminary content analysis.

Initial analysis revealed that the students' ritualizations revolved around both daily rituals and ritual transitions. Daily ritualizations in the Facebook online community involve personal sharing and interacting about current and personal events as well as activities. These are shared through site features including the actor's personal profile, web page or wall, and sites of other friends and family members that are linked in to the actor's community as friends. The actor has control of their personal access and can include or exclude individuals from his or her community.

Sharing Rituals

Students commented on the questionnaire that they shared personal events in their daily lives including sharing their emotions and feelings. Many students said that they used Facebook as a way to keep in touch with friends and family, update their network on what they were doing, and to comment on what their friends and family were also doing. The diaries helped to show just how much people tend to use Facebook, and how important pictures are as part of the communicating rituals in the community. Not only were there several stories of providing information and pictures to friends in making social connections to them, there appears to also be a need to further these connections through texting or calling outside of the Facebook environment.

"Linking Value" Activities

A big part of socializing is to setup future encounters/activities offline using the online community of Facebook to connect with other friends who also desire to participate/attend similar activities. By providing access to other members, Facebook can

be used by community members to access other members in connecting with them within the Facebook environment through their phones/computers and creating further connections outside of the online environment that are then discussed afterwards within the community environment through documentation and storytelling rituals using the tools available on the site. Both a consciousness of kind and shared sense of moral responsibility were demonstrated in the diaries' entries by members in discussing how Facebook is used to get-together to share experiences, discuss relationships, re-connect with current and old friends, and reconnect with family and friends in socially meaningful ways. A summary of the daily ritualizations and ritual transition themes that were mentioned by the students in both the diaries and questionnaire responses (see table 6).

Table 6

Diaries and Questionnaire Themes

Daily Ritualizations		Ritual Transitions	
Sharing Daily Activities	Correcting (Posts/Photos)	Celebrations	Graduation
Friendshipping	Games	Misfortunes	Holidays
Get-togethers	Work	Birth of a child	Engagement
Changing ones Profile	Media	Birthdays	Gift giving
Chatting	Clubs		
Relationships	Sports		
Family	Community		
Shopping	Weather		
Food	Church		
Travel	Politics		

Personal discussion of these activities along with the individual's location were often mentioned. The use of tools for posting pictures, making comments, editing information, and transferring information from ones phone to the community were frequently mentioned. Not only are social rituals taking place, but individual rituals are

also occurring as members interact with their digital devices and the communities communication tools in order to convey their stories to others within the community.

Ritual Artifacts

This type of ritualization is enacted through the use of the individuals posts and comments involving the wall (page) and newsfeed pages on the site. Also mentioned were the profile and friend pages on the site. These pages control access to community member interaction, and portrayal of members and their information to others. It seems that there are many norms and ritual scripts involved with not only who to friend but also in the managing of information and photos within the larger community. Both of these areas are rich areas that involving rituals that will be looking into during the qualitative research stage. These walls are similar to diary or journal keeping except that it is more closely related to blogging where the information is more open to all those in the community who have access to their own and other members' walls within the community. Community members could write comments, post pictures, or express themselves through music or videos. Aside from daily activities, students also discussed work related issues, school, current events, and leisurely activities that are also part of their ritualizations within their Facebook communities. Facebook offers games, shopping, and applications created by third party companies that were also frequently referred to in the questionnaire and in the diaries.

Presence of Ritualized Symbolic Practices (RSPs)

By looking at the four elements of the ritual experience one can come to an understanding of the importance that these ritualizations have within the online community of Facebook. Four factors determine the degree that RSPs are important to

group members are salience, repetitiveness, homologousness, and resources (ritual artifacts). First, the ritual scripts or RSPs (see table 2) in the Facebook community appear to be salient in the preliminary research. The individual member has to consciously be involved with Facebook in order to have access/membership on the site. The actor's community has news feeds, wall posts, email, and phone messages that remind the user of the Facebook site and new information that has been posted to the site. These reminders occur in real time as new content is posted to the site.

Second, repetitiveness - Facebook use and participation in these RSPs within the members own community occur with great frequency. Over half of Facebook users are online each day (Triggs 2010). The average Facebook user has about 130 friends and creates more than 90 pieces of content each month (2011). Members, who access their Facebook community using their cell phones, spend twice the amount of time and provide more content on Facebook than users who access the community using a computer (Triggs 2010). According to SRT if the repetitiveness of the ritualization increases the rank of the RSPs will also increase.

Third, there is a high degree of similarity or homologousness among ritualized practices that occur in the Facebook online community. The fact that the ritualizations of relationships, activities, entertainment, work and community were discussed together by respondents as well as how these ritualizations were shared and communicated in a similar fashion demonstrates the similarity of the tools and resources on the site that allow for the sharing of RSPs and interactions socially with others as part of the RSPs.

Fourth, the resources (ritual artifacts) experienced in the Facebook online community consists of music, video, pictures, web pages, emails, chat histories, and

stories that make up the non-human *resources*. The human *resources* include the relationship of the actor to the others in the community as well as the expertise, and artistic skills of the actor in interacting/performing for others in the community that the actor has created for himself or herself. From this preliminary research, it appears that all four factors of RSPs are present in this online community.

Summary

Chapter III addressed the qualitative mixed method design for exploring rituals using SRT. These methods will test the effects of rituals on social linkages, the other markers of community, and the importance of these rituals. Goals for conducting and completing the research were set forth, together with general themes that emerged from preliminary research. Rituals seem to be present in the preliminary research. SRT seems to provide a framework for studying these rituals and to provide the means for assessing their importance.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I rely on SRT and the ritual literature to address both of my research questions in determining the types of rituals that are occurring on Facebook and how these rituals impact community participation and growth. During both the interviews and coding of in-depth data, distinct ritual themes emerged from the users as they described their behaviors. First, I will describe the ritual themes and examples of personal daily rituals from the in-depth interviews. Second, I will share my observations from the online netnography that was conducted by observing a select group of 10 users in naturalistic settings within their social communities.

Throughout this chapter I present a number of verbatim statements from participants in support of the rituals that help to build and sustain community. I will also provide select responses from the students who took part in the netnography of their impressions of the completed research findings. These member checks allowed student participants to view how their behaviors were interpreted as a result of my observations of their ritual activities. Member checks should help to provide clarification and improve the accuracy of the research as well as allowing the community members a voice in their own representation using follow-up interviews.

Ritual Themes and Behavioral Stages

To begin answering the first question I asked student participants before the interview began to think about what they did on Facebook each day and then to write down these daily behaviors on a sheet of paper. The behaviors that were reported if given a cursory look don't at first appear to offer much meaning. These behaviors aren't much different from that of email or other daily behaviors that one does on a regular basis with little thought or meaning going into these activities. A common list of behaviors can be seen from the following general behaviors: check my friends' statuses, check the latest pictures that have been uploaded, check my notifications, and check my messages. Without further inquiry these behaviors do not seem to contain much information or even importance to the user. When probing for more information about these daily behaviors from the students and applying SRT to these daily behaviors, it is possible to see different ritual themes emerge.

Identifying Rituals Through Coding

Structural ritualization theory (SRT) was used to explore the effects of rituals on the markers of community and to answer the first research question by using a qualitative mixed methods approach. An inductive approach for discovering these ritual practices was used in this research. This approach relies on the development of themes that emerge from the in-depth interviews that are manifest through observation and interaction within the community (Plano Clark 2010). Coding and memo-writing techniques were used to investigate the data. Both inductive and deductive coding were used to assess the data from the in-depth interviews. The inductive coding technique involves a categorization process of classifying or labeling units of data on the basis of its coherent meaning as the

categories emerge from the reading of the data (Lincoln 1985; Spiggle 1994). Segments were also created from *in vivo* codes (i.e. codes that are taken directly from the respondents' discourse) or may represent theoretical definitions of actions or events occurring in the data (Charmaz 2004).

Memo-writing techniques were also used to summarize the data, while at the same time helping to analyze and interpret the data. Memo-writing consists of taking the emerging themes apart by breaking them into their components (Charmaz 2004). These were done immediately after the interviews were held. This technique helps in exploring frequently mentioned categories between respondents and experiences that emerge. It is also useful in saving time looking through the material by creating summaries of findings along with analysis as part of the memo-writing task. Any changes to the coding resulted in recoding of the data, and classifying the data into segments until these segments seem to represent the data well.

Deductive coding is a process of locating passages, themes or ideas that were developed a priori to the data collection. These codes are specified prior to data collection (Hesse-Biber 2011). Using a theory to guide ones coding is a common practice in qualitative research in content analysis of the data (Auld et al. 2007). This type of coding involves applying preconceived codes based on SRT. This theory should work well as a lens to view the data as it is meant for analysis of common daily social behavioral practices that occur within a group or social setting. Since these interviews come from an individual's experience within a social network, the quantitative coding relies on a theoretical interpretation that matches well with this type of setting and can be used to analyze the importance of the ritualized behaviors within these groups using the ritualized

symbolic practices to code the transcripts. The a priori deductive coding structure is based on the four categories of ritualized symbolic practices from SRT as follows:

1. Salience - how noticeable is the ritual
2. Repetitiveness - how often is the practice engaged in
3. Homologousness - how similar are the ritual practices
4. Resources - Possession of resources used in the ritual

The RSPs were used for coding the transcripts. The current coding structure changed to include all of the themes that are described in the findings section as new categories and subcategories were identified in the data.

Four factors determine the rank of the RSPs for individual consumers and group members, which are salience, repetitiveness, homologousness, and resources (Knottnerus 2007). These four factors determine the importance or dominance of the ritual practices within online communities. RSPs are important for firms to understand since the RSPs help to identify which rituals are more meaningful, and are more likely to influence community building and affect consumer relationships. This addresses Rook's (1985) desire for methods that can begin to empirically operationalize the study of "symbolic consumption" and to "decode symbolic meanings" (p. 262). These occurrences contain ritualized behaviors and important meaning for the participants leading to continued repeated behavioral scripts that users are following.

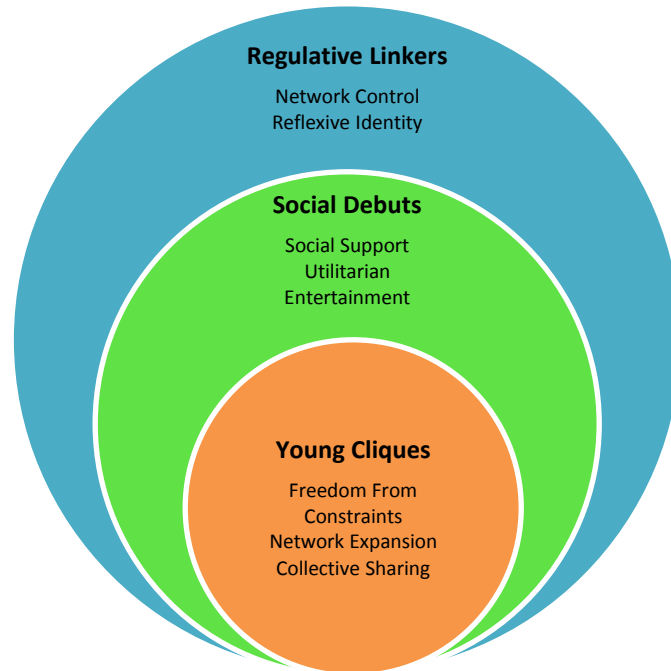
Ritual themes that emerged from this first stage of research are identified as freedom from social constraints, collective sharing, social support, network expansion, documentation, utilitarian and entertainment uses, and restructuring one's identity are common themes that were identified from the in-depth interviews of college students.

Each of these ritual themes is discussed in detail in the subsequent analysis of the in-depth interviews for this first stage of research.

Analysis of the data from the in-depth interviews using SRT can be used to investigate and discern between these behaviors by using RSP's to identify and rank ritualized behaviors. Another important outcome from this analysis involves how the availability of the different RSPs changed over time. During the interviews students first recalled when they joined the Facebook community and how they participated on Facebook initially. For most students this was in high school when Facebook was only available to students. In reviewing the data there were clear distinct differences in behaviors between how students participated on Facebook in high school when they were living with their parents and were surrounded by their friends and family to how they were using the community now as experienced college students. In assessing the rituals that were occurring within the online community, differences in the community members environment, behaviors, and RSPs became apparent over time. These three distinct behavioral stages are as follows: 1) Young Cliques, 2) Social Debuts, and 3) Regulative Linkers. The reason for these changes in RSPs will be discussed for all three behavioral stages together with ritual themes most prevalent in each stage (see figure 2.) along with examples and functions of these rituals.

Figure 2

Three Behavioral Stages and Their Ritual Themes



As pictured here the each of the behavioral stages relates to different phases of the community life cycle that users passed through. Particular to each stage are ritual themes that were present during these behavioral stages. As related during the in-depth interviews, the time period that was discussed began from the time the user first joined the Facebook community until the present. Of the students that participated in the study 4% were freshman, 50% were sophomores, and 46% were in or beyond their junior class in college. As suggested in figure 3 in this stacked Venn diagram ritual themes that were first started when users became members of the community are likely to be present during the different phases that the user passes through. Ritual themes have been matched with behavioral stages that emerged from the analysis of the in-depth interview

data based on the online/offline environments the user was in, the predominance of rituals expressed during the behavioral stage based on changes in usage behavior of community members, and changes found in the ritual themes that were highly ranked (using RSPs) during each stage as portrayed in Figure 2. These next few sections will be used to describe the behavioral stages and ritual themes that were identified as highly ranked according to the RSPs present for each of these behavioral stages.

Young Cliques

The first behavioral stage is called young cliques as the users that I interviewed usually created a Facebook account and joined this online community in high school. Part of the reason that they joined as teenagers is related to the Facebook company's compliance with the COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act) legislation. In the Facebook's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities which is their online legal document that discloses their terms of use or 'rules' that users have to agree to when they join, it states that "You will not use Facebook if you are under 13" hence users must be at least 13 to join this community (under rule four – Registration and Account Security) (Facebook.com 2012). I use the term cliques as students in high school typically have a small close nit group of friends that are commonly referred to as a clique. When I asked students how they first became involved with Facebook, many reported that they would join due to their close group of friends. These close friends would take their real world group into the online environment together as a group. In this section I wish to discuss the ritual themes that are present in this stage that are highly ranked are freedom from constraints, network expansion, and collective sharing.

As students discussed their initial excitement and ritual behaviors on Facebook during their time in high school, there were distinct differences in the RSPs that students expressed. Saliency, repetitiveness, and homologousness were all present in these ritualized practices expressed by community members during high school. The popularity of Facebook and the saliency of it can be partially attributed to restrictions placed on the users by their parents and the restriction of resources during this time. During high school it was socially popular to be on Facebook early on because it was previously restricted to only college students. These users joined Facebook in large majority as a result of their high school peer groups seeking their friends' participation on Facebook. Community members also expressed the desire to access content that they had heard about on Facebook. For example, to access pictures posted from a recent activity one would need to first be a member in order to have access to that content.

Freedom from Constraints

In asking students about their daily behaviors in high school on Facebook it seems that they were less concerned about what they said or how they said it in this online environment. It almost seemed as if the online environment and the tools available to communicate with others in the community led to these ritualistic behaviors that were unconstrained in comparison to behavior in a more public or open setting. I call this ritual theme freedom from constraints as users expressed less inhibition as well as restraint in expressing how they really feel about others. It seems that when users first start using Facebook in high school they are still figuring out how to behave and what is acceptable behavior in this new virtual environment where it seems no one else is watching:

Kylie: "I think about what I am posting a little bit more. In HS it was just like, oh let's just throw this up there. Like, oh we are at a party drinking underage let's

just throw this up there, not an okay thing to do. Now I just kind of, I do realize that employers are going to be looking at it and once it is on there...it's on there. So I am more careful about what goes up and what I post.”

Another member described his interaction with others and how he use to view Facebook as his own playground for saying and doing whatever he wanted when he was immature in high school compared to how he uses it now in college:

Seth: “Well back in high school is a lot different because, well there’s a couple different aspects of it that makes it different, I think that back then a lot of people. Like I wasn’t friends with any of my family on Facebook, so a lot of the things I would say, I wouldn’t necessarily have a filter on what I would say. As to now, it’s pretty cleaned up, I don’t cuss on my Facebook or post anything negative that I wouldn’t want my grandma to see, pretty much. But back in the day I was kinda worried about high school drama, like if I posted this on this girls wall, “is this guy gonna get mad, ya know”. Stuff like that. I guess more of it now is just like I don’t really use Facebook to talk to girls or anything I guess, not like that though. I’d say that’s probably the hugest difference. I think that has to do with maturity level, though.”

There are definitely problems with this freedom. Cyber bullying and posting inappropriate images is a real problem that was noted in some recent news articles about a girls yearbook photos that many thought were too inappropriate (Boyle 2012). This is just one of many stories just about yearbook photos that represent this dark side of these daily behavioral rituals that represent freedom from constraints. This type of behavior in the online community was mentioned by one of the students as the part of Facebook that she most disliked:

Rae Anne: “Cyber bullying, drives me crazy, I dislike...For instance a lot of my brothers’ classmates still go back and bash on each other, they are cussing somebody out, or talking about girls on there. And that really affects people and you shouldn’t do it, just because it is on the Internet doesn’t mean it is not affecting people cause now everybody can see it. When people bash each other, when people put other peoples business out there, inappropriate pictures that shouldn’t be there. There are just some really cruel people out there who

definitely use the Internet to hurt somebody. So that is definitely my pet peeve, putting other people down and bashing others via social networks.”

Another student felt that information on Facebook should have some freedom of constraints because he saw the online community as more closed or private in his view. As such he felt it was fine to share this personal information with his friends without being judged by companies:

Alex: “I don’t feel that companies should judge you off of a Facebook page. That is actually something that me and my family talked about. My uncle had a co-worker fired because the employee was talking bad about their boss on Facebook and the boss saw it on someone’s thread I guess, so someone fired him based on that. I think that’s where it kind of gets, that’s personal life, that’s not work life. Everyone goes home and complains about their boss, just because they post it on Facebook doesn’t mean that they need to be held accountable, like that’s personal, like that’s not affecting their work ethic or what not. And even if it was, it’s still personal. They should handle it and not take action. Or they do that thing where some employers will not even hire you, or even interview you because they’ll look at your Facebook page; you have a picture of you drinking a beer or something. Like if you’re over age, I don’t understand why you have to go into my personal life to judge how my work ethic is because that’s completely different.

Many study participants reported that they are now much more careful about their daily online behaviors now that they realize how much more public the information in an online environment is. In the third behavioral stage of regulative linkers online community members are much more savvy and mature users who are careful about what they are contributing on Facebook and how they are viewed by others.

Network Expansion

It seems that most of the students interviewed were already involved with using the internet in some way to connect with others, but adding others became a big part of the user’s online ritual behavior. This ritual theme is called network expansion and

involves decisions surrounding whom one is allowing to have access both to themselves and also to their friends, family, photos, thoughts and feelings. Even though a user may have an account, they cannot interact with another user or view that user's information in most cases until they add that user by connecting with them as a friend. Students seemed to connect with others following a personal script or unique set of rules that each user has. Usually one's peer group would get students to first connect with them by adding one another as friends. This typically involved close friends of the student and when one friend from their group joined they would keep pressuring the rest of their friends to join. Soon it became popular just to have since everyone else had one. Requesting and accepting and rejecting these connections are what we are terming as the network expansion ritual theme.

New users on Facebook begin to first add their close circle of friends. Once this behavior is learned they will continue to follow this script as other users notice and request to add the user or others familiar with the user that would like to connect with them such as other familiar classmates. At a minimum, users usually have a rule that they will connect with others only if they have something in common with them such as a school or friend. Many members reported that they would add others that they saw frequently in school in addition to their close friends. Students might also know other students from activities or events they attended and would add them as well to their online community. Family also became involved as other members may have had an existing account and would then be added to the user's community. Usually users started to add siblings, then mom, maybe dad, and any other relatives or family friends that they

knew of that were also part of the broader community. The following quotes illustrate this network expansion ritual:

Megan: “At first it was mainly girls. Just my friends, over time more people got on so it became more like a social interaction instead of just using it for pictures. People would get on and write things on your wall and friends that you haven’t seen for a long time like switched schools or moved out of state would add you as a friend and “oh my gosh” I haven’t seen them in so long. Then starting a conversation that way and then further, more involved in leadership we got we would use it for organizing meetings and events and planning stuff. I have a group of like ten-fifteen close girlfriends and we ALL, I be the cheerleaders got it first and then some of my friends decided it would be fun so we got one too. Then it became, “she did it” so I’ll get one too. Snow ball effect of the more people that we knew had it the more of our friends got it. It spread quickly and soon our whole grade had it.”

Camron: “Uh, I kind of just got my immediate group of friends that had one and then I went on my high school list and just went down and add friend, add friend, add friend, add friend to the people I knew and then from there just kind of spider webbed. And then eventually my family got into it and now we are just connected all over.”

Niki: “ It was back in high school; everyone was kind of transitioning over to Facebook. I was never really big into the online stuff, like I had a MySpace but I only used it for like a month before I totally abandoned it. But all my friends started going there and then like oh this is kind of cool. And all my classmates were using it and people were talking about it all the time & I was like maybe I should try this again. It was like MySpace so I thought maybe my mom and dad would like this better. So it was mainly because everyone else was doing it and it was new at the time. It was around that time it was like sophomore or junior year or something like that.

I then inquired ‘When you got on there initially, who did you add?’ To which she responded:

Niki: “Uh mostly from my immediately circle of friends. There was only like one or two at the time. And a lot of people from orchestra because I was in a class and those are pretty much everyone I hung out with...so mainly those people and later on when I started making more friends and now I have more college friends than high school friends. [pause, thinking] It was mainly just people from class. Back in high school, I’d add people that I knew in class but a lot of them I wasn’t really well acquainted with any one of them. So it was just kind of like I added them because I knew them and I saw them everyday that was pretty much it.”

Collective Sharing

The theme of collective sharing involves sharing ones activities with their online community and having daily life documented. The ability to record the users own personal documentary was seen as being a big reason why many users were involved in the community. This theme is referred to as collective sharing since members are creating their own documentary and sharing it with their online community. Examples of these ritualized behaviors include documenting, photo sharing, and event planning rituals. Students expressed several of these ritualized behaviors in the interviews. Members mentioned in interviews how they would take and post photos of college life, mission trips, vacations, weddings, birthdays, parties, and daily life to share with their family and friends that they already were connected with. Through sharing these documentaries the students reported that they were strengthening their relationships with their family, extended family. They also strengthened friendships that they wished to maintain. Collective sharing helped to maintain relationships that would otherwise have been lost without the online community and the ability to share one's life with their old and new friends.

As this idea of creating and sharing one's own documentary emerged, I found that of the RSPs involved, resources were most frequently mentioned as being an important part of this collective sharing ritual theme. Resources that were often mentioned included photographs, instant messaging, internet access, digital cameras, and computers.

Some students expressed that the reason that they wanted to become members of the community was to access resources that were on Facebook. Students would become members in order to have access to photos taken at high school sporting events or social

activities. Many of the photos, activities, and events were commonly shared with community participant members.

New technology was also changing the way that resources were used. Digital cameras were replacing traditional film cameras at this time, making the taking and sharing of digital photos popular, however many students did not have access to such technology at this time. Limits on resources affected subsequent ritual behaviors of users at this time. During their time as high school students, resources most often used to access Facebook were available in school and at home. Only a few students had access to smart phones. One participant explained how as a cheerleader in high school digital cameras and cell phone resources that we now take for granted were restricted and how this affected community growth and use. She also explains collective sharing involving pictures. She tells how her friends who did have these resources, such as digital cameras, took on roles as photographers for school activities and would share these activities collectively with other students afterwards using the community:

Brenda: “I mean, I don’t think many of us had cell phones at that time and I don’t think you could get it on your phone I mean so maybe like the super duper high tech phones you could get on but I mean usually when I got home I’d be like ‘oh that was so much fun...we placed this this and this, and I’m so proud of the guard’ but during the actual contest there wasn’t much we could actually do at that time but nowadays if I’m somewhere and there is something going on I update my status and stuff like that but like at that point in time there wasn’t much we could do other than going home and being like ‘Oh my gosh, that was so much fun!... Well there was only a couple of my friends that had digital cameras at that time, cause we were freshman in high school so like or they would borrow their cameras. Um, I mean I think it is one of those things where every time we went to an event, they would definitely take pictures and post them, a lot of people would tag everyone. I mean that was cool, it kind of helped play a role in remembering the event and explaining it to people that weren’t there. I think it was just, I feel like pictures with Facebook have always kind of been together. I don’t remember a certain point where they were like hey add pictures or something like that. I just feel that they kind of coincided with each other, cause it is a social network so everyone wants to see because we are such visual creatures.

Many activities and social occasions such as school parties, dances, and sporting events were planned and coordinated using the Facebook community site. In order to know about these events and to volunteer, students would have to join and then become involved in the community. One student shared how she took on the role of her community's photographer and how she coordinated her prom committee using her online community:

Megan: "My sophomore year of high school and mainly because I was obsessed with taking pictures. All my friends always wanted copies of the pictures. The best and easiest way to share our pictures in Facebook and we knew that all of our college friends had gotten one. We got one too to be able to put pics up on line and share them. I was prom chair my junior year of high school. I had a committee, I used it a lot for delegating jobs. Like sending out Facebook messages to a group or having multiple people in the Facebook message spread. Like hey, can someone go pick these things up, can someone go do this? Organizing stuff like that. Or senior year I was historian. I would Facebook people "hey if anyone is going to this game could you take pictures, put them up on Facebook and tag me?" or "can you print off these pictures" or "bring whatever." So knowing that everyone checked Facebook all the time socially, then they'd also get the information too. I discussed meeting times, agendas, things that people needed to bring. Like say, for prom stuff I'd say, Allie could you go to the store and pick up all the vases that are on hold or whatever. Or could you have your mom go do this for us and okay, you two are going to come to my house tonight at seven and we are going to work on putting the flower arrangements together. Then so-n-so could you come pick up eleven boxes in your truck and take them to the thing. It was a lot of organizing times, locations, what to bring, what to do, what was going on. It was easy to do because everyone could see what everyone was saying. Since everyone is part of the same thing. Like everyone was updated to the group, everyone got a message about it. It was really easy to make sure that people got their information and people were like, "I didn't get it" – well you were on Facebook that day because I saw you on this post, so you can't tell me that you didn't check your messages. Like, you were on Facebook, I can see that. So it was a pretty good way to see if people got their information, because e-mail like you're not able to check it often in high school. In high school you didn't use e-mail for anything."

From her posts you can see how important these daily Facebook sharing behaviors were to users involved in these activities and how such activities became quite repetitive,

followed set roles or scripts that the users had, and were relied upon for information, event coordination, and carrying out events that students were involved with. We can see also the homologousness of these community behaviors even replacing other similar activities of emailing due to limitations on other resources such as access to email during school as was mentioned here.

Instant messaging was also used for collective sharing and as a replacement for email. A good example of this was shown in the students' frequent engagement in IM to gossip about others. Keep in mind that at this time the community was much smaller and tended to start with close groups of friends. Also at this time instant messaging (IM) was a popular thing for students to do during and after school. It was common to get online with ones friends and gossip about other friends using the IM feature. This feature was also used to plan activities during the school day and after school with one's group of friends. Friends would plan where the next party would be on a Friday evening, would coordinate what to wear, when to arrive or where to go after activities. At this time students were less concerned about who was looking at what they were posting in terms of text and photos. Although the students still lived at home where there is influence from parents, in this online community students found more freedom to express themselves that may not have been acceptable to their parents. IM also allowed high school students a certain level of privacy as these IM conversations usually were not recorded or copied and saved. Included here are a few examples of students explaining common behaviors which make up this ritual theme:

Brenda: "It was mostly, I was just trying to figure out what is going on. So pretty much what I took is like, with my friends that I already had on Xanga and the people that had talked about it, I just added them and was looking at their pictures and trying to figure out what I should put on mine and what not. And of course

you know my parents were like this is specific information that we don't want you to put on there and I would always tell my friends that we were just chatting which was the cool thing to do. They would just; I would say hey you probably shouldn't do that, so it was like we were learning it together, like the program. It was a social network so we gossiped and stuff like that. Gossiping was not the right necessary term. But it was my very close nit group of friends, like five of us we were the fab five. We got on and we would talk and chat and I think at one point in time the big thing that was going around was this honesty box, which in high school who wouldn't want to anonymously post someone's dirt or something on their Facebook. And of course, I didn't necessarily do that because I'm not that mean of a person but a lot of my friends would have these boxes, you're a dirty bad word and all this stuff, and I was just glad I didn't have that app on my Facebook. It was just high school gossip that they would do a lot."

Camron: "I did a lot of the IM chat things ...I mean yea if I was on it and I saw someone on that I hadn't talked too or I needed to talk to I would IM them. Usually I didn't like writing on anyone's wall or sending little inbox messages. That's how it used to be; now the both transpire with each other. But yea mostly if I was getting in contact with someone I would just use that IM. Once I had a smart phone, if you were sitting in class you would always look at it or something. But other than that it was like I would get home from school and get on it for about an hour and that's about it."

I then asked him about the type of activities that they would IM about.

Camron: " It was either you know, gonna go meet up to go to a movie or we would all say whose house we were gonna go too or if they had heard about a party that weekend. And then we'd post, or I'd post links on people's walls of videos or songs or something. Just music that like connected. If a song reminded me of someone I'd put it on or if we had just like that weekend heard a song I would post it back on Monday or whatever as a joke."

Having a space where one is free to express themselves freely as teenagers seemed to appeal to users during their years in high school allowing them a place to share things with their close friends within ones close group of friends.

The internet resource played a big role in this newfound collective sharing. The lack of internet coverage or access to the internet as a resource, led to problems and conflict for users involved in collective sharing. It would be common for students to go on trips and have no access to internet resources due to the expense and limited

availability of the internet at that time. One student involved with Facebook described frustration with this limited access when her family would vacation as well as the salience or centrality of the ritualized activities involving planning and informational functions:

Megan: “If I was ever gone and couldn’t check my computer, like if my dad would take me out of town, I’d be like no I have things happening and people are asking questions, I need to get things done and I used Facebook messaging more than anything. I never used e-mail in high school, only Facebook. My grandparents live in the middle of nowhere Oklahoma, no internet no computer at their house, I barely had cell phone reception. When I was thirteen, it was like the end of my life. It was just hard when I would get closer to big events, I was working on or leadership with or like something was happening I would be like, ‘hey dad I need to be home’. I didn’t relate it to being on Facebook. There is stuff that I needed to do, that was organized on Facebook. I had no means of getting to it when we’d go visit my grandparents. So it would get stressful and frustrating because I knew people were asking me questions about stuff. Or I knew that I needed to be gathering things – and making sure that stuff was getting done and I couldn’t because I didn’t have the computer.”

Students also accessed Facebook in school computer labs. Megan described how accessing Facebook became a really big problem at her school leading to restriction of the resources necessary to engage in the ritual behaviors online, and the behaviors of students on Facebook that led to it being banned:

“People had like AP study hour, so we had an hour off during school. My 4th hour senior year, I didn’t have any class so I had an hour to work on homework. I was in 2 or more AP classes so it was meant to do homework but a lot of times people would go to the library to work on homework but it became to where people would go to the library and then look at pictures on Facebook. They had to block Facebook on all the computers at school because some many kids were wasting time. Like the teacher would bring the whole class to the library to work on stuff, she would have to walk around monitoring, because it’s easy to just zone out and do nothing on Facebook. Just click through a million pictures and just get sucked in. You can’t exit you just like click click click and look through 5000 pics and ask “what did I just do with the last hour of my life” so they blocked Facebook on all the computers at my high school.”

Since Facebook was mostly off limits in school, most students accessed it more at home. Students would often access it at home in the afternoon after school and after they were done with homework. Parents also restricted the use of Facebook. In some cases students were banned by their parents from using Facebook until they were more mature and responsible. One student describes these restrictions as follows:

Amy: “I was in high school and everyone had it and I wasn’t allowed to have it. So I was at the end of my junior year, all of my friends just had it. But my dad wouldn’t let me have it because he did all this research on how people can get on your profile and don’t put your birth date and all this stuff. And so he let me have it but he didn’t let me put my birthday, so that people wouldn’t like hack in or something. I was a junior when I first got it.”

From these interviews I found that students became attached to these communities in part to obtain access to the resources that were being shared amongst the community’s members. Documentation rituals and collective sharing of daily lives lead to repeat usage and importance of the community itself as well as leading to increased connection to the community and its members. I also noticed that as the students described their behaviors in high school and compared those to the behaviors they were describing as current college students that there were distinct differences in the social behaviors that I was observing. I attribute these transitions to the current physical and social environment of college, where the students’ ritualized practices and behaviors were seen to evolve/change.

Social Debuts

Distinct differences in the ritual use of Facebook occurred when users discussed the transition from high school to college. After turning 18 years of age, society recognizes the social status of the individual has changed. In legal terms the individual’s status changes from being a dependent living with their parents to that of an adult. For

many of the participants this also resulted in environmental changes. Many individuals entering adulthood transition from their familiar home environment to a new environment when they leave home to pursue an occupation or further their education by attending college. In addition to this environmental transition, the individuals are also transitioning socially from their small group of friends into becoming a more socially active member of society. I call this next behavioral stage 'social debuts.' Debut is defined in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary as a "first appearance" or "a formal entrance into society." I use the word social to describe this group as college life is typically a more social period of time compared to one's small social circle in high school.

Ritual themes that were highly ranked during this behavioral stage are social support, utilitarian, and entertainment rituals. Students described during the interviews how they had to leave home and move to a new community where they were socially isolated from their close group of friends that they had back home. During this important social transition students relied on their online community and their ability to use that community to connect frequently with their friends and families from back home. They describe how they actually spend much more time (thus more repetition) using Facebook because they can reconnect with others to which they have existing relationships. Due to the change in resources, such as time and money, when they are new students, Facebook provides the means for doing so in a convenient time effective manner. Additionally students expressed how they used their online community to access information about events, study for class, and maintain their social schedules and announcements. Students also showed how creeping, games, and other activities could be used as a source of

entertainment. In these next few sections I will discuss these ritual themes in more detail and will give examples from interviews to support these views.

Social Support

The need to escape this social isolation and obtain access to their close relationships leads to a high level of participation resulting in increased repetition of use on Facebook. The main desire that the students are seeking is social support from these close friends. Social support involves an individual's desire to establish and maintain meaningful relationship connections (Henderson 1977).

Researchers who have studied socially isolated individuals that have either lost or moved away from their friends suggest that social needs require more than just merely being sociable with others. Instead socially isolated individuals will look for an escape to communicate with a diverse set of individual relationships in order to meeting their individual social needs to maintain their social well-being (Weiss 1969). Social networks are especially helpful in this regard as these communities can provide many different relationship connections that individuals are seeking in social support. This can help marketers understand why individuals in transition come to rely on these daily rituals and desire to join and maintain these online community relationships. One student described how these connections were of help in escaping her social isolation:

Suzie: "Because I'm lonely and miss my friends and family. Before I'd call my mom and whine and she would come over and hang out with me. Or I'd stop by my neighbor's after work. We don't have people here, my husband and I only have like five people we interact with. They can only come over to dinner so many times, before it's kind of strange. It is an outlet to talk to people and keep track of people without having to spend a lot of time on the phone. Which realistically, I don't have time to talk to my sister-in-law every day, mother-in-law, my mom, my dad for even like five minutes. So on here I can scroll through and feel like I got an update on everybody in ten-fifteen minutes and go on."

Another student explained how he depended on this social support, and how it helped him to fulfill his social needs until he had a new group of friends in his new college environment that he could socialize with.

Camron: “When I first came to college I mean I lived in Arizona so it was a huge step coming out here and I knew one girl who came out here with me from high school. And so when I first got here I didn’t know many people and I would just talk to them on Facebook back home and see how they were doing. And then once I started getting friends here, then I added them on Facebook, and slowly the gap went away from my friends back home. And now it’s just like I am focused here but it was a good transition period to have them kind of help me through the first couple months.”

How do socially isolated students then build connections within their current offline environment for social support? I asked about how documentation and collective sharing rituals may be different from those in high school now that they are in this college environment. This led to a better understanding of differences in these rituals for social debuts compared to young cliques:

Kylie: “Um, now I still say the things that I am doing but normally I am tagging people that I am with and... I like taking pictures of myself.”

I then asked her if she took pictures just of herself alone in the picture. This led to more of an explanation and understanding of the photo sharing rituals that are part of social support. She explained the nature and type of photos being taken and the reason for taking them.

Kylie: “People like to feel needed and they like to feel in the group. And I feel like Facebook is like a big, it is a huge way to be connected to people. I know that’s why I do it and my friends do it at least, otherwise people wouldn’t put up as many pictures as they do. They wouldn’t, I mean it is because people comment on them; people like their pictures, people like to interact with other people.”

She went on to explain that the types of photos taken are different than the photo taking activities from high school. It was popular to take mirror pictures of oneself in middle

school and high school but that most college students don't do those types of pictures but instead will take and share pictures of themselves in groups. When asked to explain she gave the reasons why along with a recent example of what she had taken pictures of:

Kylie: "I don't really know. I don't know why that isn't considered cool, maybe it is just considered conceded or something like that. Self-absorbed maybe...really just like needing attention. I mean that is the only thing I can really think of as to why people do that. Back then it was mostly scenery and myself. And now it is more pictures of my friends and also, still some scenery and places I have been to traveling and stuff. I really think that is about it. I don't really have a camera right now so I am using my phone. It doesn't really work that well so that is about it...Last night I put up a picture of myself with a scarf and a bracelet that my boyfriend brought back from Spain. And so I shared that so that family could see it. My grandmother gets on there and checks up on me and that is the easiest way for her to see how I am doing up here. And then before that I uploaded a picture of the food we made last night but that goes on to a group, public only that only my family can see it. I wouldn't exactly want to show my friends, 'Oh look I can cook.' So stuff like that."

Most students who participated in the study began during their sophomore or junior years in high school, so they are comfortable socially in their online environments and share these online network expansion rituals with other students. The familiar online community then both helps with social support by relaying on previous relationships and network expansion behaviors, and helps to build new social support in the new environment using the online community to screen and create new social support connections. By using their network expansion experience, users are able to check out/vet others that they wish to get to know socially. In this new physical environment students tend to add people who they see that they would like to socialize with using their online community. Instead of giving out their cell phone, , participants mentioned that, the safe thing to do is to add them to their online community:

Colette: "So it comes in pretty handy actually cause a lot of people would rather talk on Facebook than give someone their number because you can just delete them off of Facebook and don't have to add them back but if they have your

number you'll have to change your number and all that stuff if they turn out to be a real creeper. I know a lot of girls that do that. They just add people instead of giving out their number.”

Facebook has helped to add a layer of safety to this and allows students to get to know someone through their profiles, photos, social networks (i.e. friends that they may have in common between social networks) which makes socializing more dependent on this type of community in building new social support connections. If they then find that the person is not someone they wish to have a connection with they will simply delete the connection (friend) from their community. This gives the student real control and a sense of security over who they allow to be connected to them and how much interaction they wish to have with their new acquaintances.

At this time students are coming into a much more social environment – “college life” with many parties and other activities geared towards social interaction and meeting new people. Participants stated that they had typically added roommates, classmates, friends of their friends, people that they want to get to know better socially whom they recognized, and others that they meet at parties/events. Conversely, students mentioned that if someone is requesting to be part of the students social network and the student really isn't interested in connecting with that person they are often added and then deleted or ignored (i.e. not add) the friendship request/relationship. I found that almost all of the students will first see how they actually know the person. To do this if they do not remember the individual they will then check to see if there are common friends or other reasons why they should know them from the person's profile or images on the site of the one requesting the information. One student described how he went through the ritual of

adding someone that morning whom he didn't recognize at first but turned out to be a friend of a friend, so it was okay to add them:

Troy: "I actually did that today. It took me a second, I think I know everybody but every once in a while it takes me a minute to think, "How do I know this person?" so..."

I look at their picture, like I have to just study their face for a second and think, you know, "did I have class them?" do we go to church together? Just try to go back, you know, flip through the files."

I then asked Troy, "where are you placing them in the files?"

Troy: "I feel like it's a lot of different... I mean it's all centralized on there but I feel like it's a bunch of things put together, because I have classmates and I have a lot of new church family on there so. It's kinda compiled. I almost feel like there is a Facebook folder in my mind."

Troy then went on to explain that he figured out that he knew this individual from a church camp that he had attended over the summer and that he also know his sister.. It was when he recognized the guy's picture on his sister's Facebook page. Connections to others social networks are critical for acceptance into one's own network..

Family connections during this transitional period into college become more important for students. New students desire to connect to both immediate family as well as extended family in order to share the college experience with them as well as to maintain their connections with them. One student explains the reasons why he wants to reconnect with extended family now in order to engage in collective sharing of college life with them:

Tom: "This is my first semester away from home; it helps keep me in better touch with my friends and what is going on back home. And now family members from around the country are on it too and helps us keep in touch. So always just seeing what is going on. Family members were on, but we got more in touch through it. Better communicated with long distance family members. My cousin in Florida is on there that uh went to Florida. And then my uncle I was named after in Rochester, who works for Kodak is on there along with his wife and his daughter. His daughter, him and his wife live in Rochester, and their daughter, Lizzy lives

in Brooklyn. She is going to Brooklyn Law School. So it is interesting to see what she is doing in the city and what not, all the neat things. It wouldn't be uncommon to message each other on a daily basis. Anywhere from a daily basis to once a week, whether is it regarding the football game or birthdays I don't know. We'd never be one to call each other on our birthdays just cause it'd be immediate family. Little things not like huge spectacular. If you see something cool walking around, like if I go to campus I'll take photos of the campus and then was able to share those, and my family is on there, like in New York and what not. Cause with my family in NY, reasons I keep going with them is uh, my uncle went to Virginia Tech, his daughter, Lizzy went to Cornell, and his now in Brooklyn Law School. My cousin in Florida was the first one to go, it was a big thing with her. And then I'm the first generation with my family in Texas to go. Also, I have a younger sister who is at UNT right now. More communicating cause they are into it, and I want to show them the campus and what not."

These social connections with immediate and extended family became much more important at this time in order to maintain and expand these social bonds. During this time students maintain strong ties with their old social network of friends. One student described how hard it was to connect with one of her old friends from elementary school, and how she has reestablished these social ties and used her friends' social groups to expand her own:

Bridgett: "I tried and tried to find her but I didn't know the area to look in. She found me. And we've maintained contact ever since. We've swapped numbers, sent pictures to each other, e-mail back and forth. Connection with family. Old friends from back in Kansas when I was in high school. I just ran into one of them and since you can put your – you have the privacy settings on there, you can adjust how your information that you want on there. She contacted my by phone, I forgot that I'd even put my number on there. She called me and I'm like 'who is this?' It was her. It's really neat. It's a really good way to run into old people that you haven't talked to in a long time and meet new people. Because there's people that your friends have that you can, you know, check out their profile and see if you guys have any interests or anything."

As time passes new connections are formed at college with a new group of friends. These friends do not connect using the same ritual behaviors. For friends in close proximity communication rituals would utilize different resources such as cell

phones through texts or communicating in person. Close friends that are now geographically separated by distances communicate more with each other using Facebook. These communication rituals become quite frequent and repetitive in order to maintain these social connections. More time is spent in rituals such as chatting or video calling such friends using Facebook due to the freeing up of resources in terms of efficient use of one's time (i.e. not having to repeat the same information to each individual friend) and the fact that the resource itself is free unlike phone calls.

Utilitarian

There are many uses within the online community of Facebook that are more functional that are useful as tools for organizing, calendaring, studying etc. These behaviors were so prevalent in the data that it warrants mentioning them as their own ritual theme, which I call utilitarian. I found that as young cliques move into the next behavioral stage of social debuts, they find themselves in a more rigorous academic and social environment. In order to help them in this new environment, students will use their existing online network as a tool. Because it is used a lot more as a tool the level of use increases (repetitiveness) as well as the centrality of the community (salience). Students check Facebook when they first get up in the morning, because both their academic and social schedules and information are being run through this online community.

Many individuals expressed how they use Facebook for academic purposes either on their own initiative, or because a group or class that they are a part of requires that they use Facebook for assignments, coursework, and or studying. Students enjoy it when this became part of the curriculum in one of his classes:

Edwin: "And now this semester, which is a pretty good idea, one of my classes put a group on there and everybody in the class can add it. It is a closed group so

you have to be added by the teacher or professor and it is pretty sweet. We can ask questions and the professor gets on there and answers them sometimes. Talk with other classmates and figure out just stuff for HW and that kind of stuff. It is pretty cool.”

From Edwin’s comments he is able to perform better academically as a result of using his group to help him study for class and do assignments. It also gives him more access to the professor as well. Other participants stated how they use Facebook to also help their siblings with homework:

Josh: “A lot of the time he posts about home work. That’s actually the majority of his statuses. I want to know how school is going. So it’s the perfect thing...When he has time to post a status and when something’s happened. Like having trouble with this math assignment, “does anybody know how to do it?” I can get it instantly, if I’m in class I won’t check it. Right after class I can. It is better than say, calling me where we both have to be in the same time frame to do it.”

We learn that Josh is using it because it provides form utility, time utility, and place utility in this example, by allowing him to communicate and help his younger brother when he has time. It also provides a valuable resource in providing a time delayed response that works with his schedule, keeping him connected but on his terms. Josh is connected wherever he is at, at the time, but it also allows him to choose when to check the message, and when and where to respond to it.

Many students mentioned how much time is saved compared to having to talk to someone individually versus just looking up information about them on Facebook and feeling like they have made a connection through the images that are on there. These gives the participant the social support that they were seeking, keeps them informed of those that they care about, and works with the time constraints that students have. One example was shared about a person’s good friend whom they liked to keep tabs on, but who can talk for hours:

Nikkei: “It is kind of like, okay so for example my best friend from high school will like, I’ll call her and she literally talks forever and she’ll want to tell me a million stories and this & that and that is great but I don’t always have the time for it. So in place of calling her all the time to see what she is doing, like how her date party went or what she went as for Halloween something like that, I just don’t always want to necessarily call her cause our schedules are so different anyways. And so I’ll just get on Facebook and look at her costume from Halloween or something like that and then the next time we talk we can talk about it but it is kind of just to figure something out before I talk to someone or try to like, I don’t know look at it before calling them and like talking about it for an hour.”

Socially Facebook is used on many levels by the university to inform students of activities or events, by their clubs, fraternities, and sororities, and as part of events like athletics. Walk-around is a good example of an event that captures these ideas and uses the online community of Facebook to help organize and coordinate volunteers for this event. Sororities and fraternities use it a lot to remind students when and where to meet in order to complete the house decorations for Homecoming Walk-around:

Andrew: “Homecoming, Facebook is I don’t know like necessary I don’t think you could do it as well as we’ve been doing it for the past few years without Facebook because Facebook gives us the ability to like mass communicate with both the fraternity and the sorority which is like 400 people at the same time and tell them when to be where, what to be doing ya know. Like you guys need to be here for this to pump this screen so that is gets done in time for homecoming and I don’t know. And like we are going to be doing double pumping hours this night so everybody needs to be there and stuff so they can communicate to them a lot easier than trying to, the old days where I couldn’t even imagine it honestly. I don’t know how before Facebook, I don’t know how they would like communicate to the sorority and the fraternity to every single person to get there and pump and stuff. It must have been a lot harder. So it is just easier with Facebook it makes everything easier.”

Friends will also use it to create party invitations or for other consumption rituals involving birthdays, graduations, or weddings. This is due both for the utility that it offers

in terms of group communication, calendaring, and scheduling. It is also useful for privacy reasons. We see many of these ideas in the following quote:

Seth: "I check birthdays everyday to see who's birthday it is, just cuz I love the feeling on my birthday, just like I haven't seen this person in years and they're saying happy birthday to me, it just kinda makes me feel good and for that day it just makes me feel like, I got a lot of friends or whatever. So I like to write on people's wall for their birthday, if I think that they would take the time to do it for me as well. And I would see if there's any parties or friends bands playing any time soon in or around my location. I mean I always check it before the weekend. 'Oh no way it's her birthday party at this place', you know cool. Or hey this band's playing at this venue, it's just right down the street, you guys want to go. Other than that I probably would never know if a band's playing because I don't really see fliers everywhere. The birthday parties, it's not like a lot of parties that people make Facebook invitations for but you know it's just something to do and like events too. We make groups for flow trips over the summer like, this is all who's invited to go don't tell anybody that type thing. It's like a little more secretive way, cuz like no body's really standing over your back on Facebook, who are you talking to, type of thing.

We see the social role that Facebook is playing from this as well as the utility it is providing to Seth. He is depending on and using Facebook more as a result. All of these uses help to raise the level of rank of these rituals among users according to the RSPs that were present and scripts that are followed by community members in the study.

Entertainment

Many individuals expressed how during their free time they would use Facebook as a source of entertainment for killing time looking at other people that were different from them or just creeping on other people's Facebook pages that they knew. This is perhaps why these ritual behaviors become so habitual in that users enjoy seeing what others are doing. Reality TV lets you see into the personal lives of different types of people. In much the same way Facebook could be viewed as a similar form of entertainment, only this time it is in the lives of others that we do know. Edward

described his reasons for using Facebook creeping as entertainment which includes aspects of both repetitiveness and homologousness in these ritualized behaviors:

Edward: “Yeah like almost all the time if I am sitting here or I am doing homework or something I am like gosh I don’t want to do this I will click my phone open and click on Facebook and see what else is going on... Just kind of entertaining, you get on there and see people, some people that are just different than the people I hang out with. It is funny to read what they say and I don’t know. I just like looking at it. There is a lot of people that are ‘aw my life sucks’ and all that. I like to read it and all the comments and stuff... I get on there and creep my friends and who they are talking to and see what they added. Just click through and if there is someone I don’t know I will try to figure out how my buddy knows them or whatever like that... I guess cause you can relate you know these people. It is not just a game; it is not just a high school where you can relate to what is going on and if you don’t remember last night because of drinking a little heavy you can remember sometimes. That is another reason I have cause I had a lot of pictures on Facebook before I even had a Facebook. I don’t know what is habit forming about it. It is just everybody is on there so you want to be on there and see what is going on I guess. I don’t know and then with like the phone and stuff the app, it will send you notifications and stuff like even if you comment on something it will send you if someone else comments on it and you are just always getting on it and stuff.”

These are ingrained habits in many of the students that I interviewed which lead to increases in repetitiveness with users being notified or reminded to engage in these behaviors through the same homologous activities as found in texting notifications, email messages, chat, and twitter functions.

During one of the interviews a student mentioned some of the more frequent daily behaviors that he engaged in with his friends. This quote demonstrates how media, politics and even scripture versus and quotes eventually end up being discussed or included on Facebook:

Troy: “Usually somebody will say something, usually I’ll say something stupid or joking and I’ll put it on here and we’ll have this crazy conversation on here and that makes it more memorable. As we say, ‘that’s Facebook quote worthy’. ‘Oh

crap I said that again didn't I' we do that a lot of the time, and a lot of the time we're encouraging each other to just keep pushing on. Like I put verses on there, you know it may just be what goes on today for you what you're thinking about. That's a lot of what we do...A lot of people do like politics and they comment on this or that but I kinda try to stay away from that because I think it's, you can offend people pretty easily, but a lot of movies and books. I do a lot of commenting on that, cuz that's what I'm really interested in. That's probably the majority of what we talk about. Or we went to a class together or something, and this teacher said this or this speaker said this, now what do you think about that?"

I then asked Troy about whether he commented with any of his friends about movies or books recently.

Troy: "I think, there's an old Disney movie called "Heavy Weights" and I – it's about summer camp and it has Ben Stiller in it so it's really silly, pretty stupid but some of the guys I'm friends with will comment back and forth about that. And nobody probably knows what we're talking about but we'll just say a quote and respond with a quote or stick somebody's name in where the character's name was. That's a lot of what we do as far as that goes. With books there was this girl I'm friends with, she read a C.S. Lewis book believe it or not and we talked about that back and forth. About some of the ideas he talked about and how 'I just finished the book, do you remember this part?' and she's like 'yeah'. Back and forth."

Most of the time students just find it is a fun way of communicating with friends and a place to have fun and be yourself. One student described ritual sharing done with status updates help to show how the participants find these rituals to be entertaining and a reflection of their personalities as well. Here are a few examples of status updates that reflect this:

Colette: "I hate school, stuff like that. It is cold outside I am thinking of recent ones I have posted. Um, for doing something excited for the weekend, football games, Thanksgiving, pretty much anything really whatever I am doing I can put it on there. If I am hanging out with people or tag people in statuses whatever we are doing, and tag the people that we are with. Yeah, I don't know pretty much whatever."

Others expressed how involved they were in online games to connect/interact with their friends using Facebook games or to reward themselves by playing games after studying. Gaming is a big part of the applications or apps that are on Facebook that help users to connect with one another as well as compete with each other. One user describes how games actually got her started on Facebook, she also describes the nature of the games and how the games have helped entertain her, and helped her to connect with other friends:

Bridgette: “The games. I liked the games. It was easy to maneuver them. Much easier than MySpace... bouncing balls or whatever. We do that one and deal or no deal. Who wants to be a millionaire and one other one I haven’t played it for a while, cuz it was stuck on the stupid ball game. Those are really the only ones I play. I’ve tried several of them. FrontierVille I used to be stuck on that one for a long time. I still have snow on my ground. I haven’t played that one for a while, I think a lot of things with that it gets annoying where you have your friends and you can’t play cuz every time they need something it says “ask your friends” then you have all these posts. Yeah. They’re kinda fun. Passes time. I had surgery so I couldn’t get out of bed so I like almost killed my computer playing games on it so much. I got my mom playing games on it.

Rather than watching tv or going out, one can stay home and use Facebook as a source of entertainment – news, discussion, movies, jokes, music etc. Many interesting topics/discussion threads are started on Facebook allowing members a chance to comment and express their views to others. Many feel the need to post sayings, quotes, links, or religious messages to others that have become part of their daily ritualized behaviors. The following examples illustrate these ritual behaviors and how entertainment and social support ritual themes can overlap:

Brenda: “I mean if we know something has happen either, kind of on the emotion thing, you know if we know someone has been hurt or injured, or something terrible has happened to their family a lot of condolences go out. I mean it is a lot of, on my wall my friends and I kind of have a very interesting relationship especially the ones in Stillwater, my college friends, they are a little crazy. So a

lot of it will be like people posting videos on my wall about crazy shenanigans and just saying that was crazy last night or like even just saying I am trying to think of other stuff we put on our walls. I mean a lot of it is information, like I said about the political stuff; I don't take Facebook very seriously anymore. In high school I was all about Facebook, but now that I am like grown up I kind of am a little bit less, I have less time to do things so when I do go on Facebook I am a lot more selective with what I do so I don't study my wall a lot but a lot of our interactions is very light, like how are you doing? I am trying to think of other stuff we put, like other than videos we joke a lot on our Facebook walls something that we do do is hack each others Facebook, like if they leave their screen up we will go on and post their status like I am a silly boy and I frolic in the wilderness, like we will put up random stuff like that on our friends Facebook statuses if like we are in a room and they leave their Facebook you are never safe. It is never harmful, we just joke around with each other like if they leave, if someone has been on your personal computer and they leave their Facebook up, it is not safe. One time we went through one of my friend, Matt's entire Facebook and changed absolutely everything like we changed his interests from girls to boys, and like we changed it to I think we might have changed it to the Facebook picture of Brent Musburger, we just went through and changed, we changed his likes to which that I felt kind of bad for that I think we copied and saved it onto another document cause there was so many likes, like I feel bad about this and we changed it to I like flowers and pink rainbows and like just random stuff like that. That is one thing that we are kind of bad about with each other's Facebook cause it is just not safe. Although some how or another my Facebook never got really go attacked that much it was mostly just the boys but that is also because I signed out and I would never check the box that said keep me signed in, especially when we lived in the dorms my freshman year in college cause a lot of us would leave our Facebook's up and not thinking much about it and it kind of just became this huge joke. I still do it to my husband haha. I mean he leaves it up so it is fair game.”

Students rely on their online community ritual connection practices to help them become familiar with others in their new socio-geographic environment. As shown in the previous quote there is an overlap of these ritual activities involving both online and offline environments. She also notes differences between how she used the site in high school, to how she was using it in the college environment reinforcing the distinction and differences between these environments and behavioral stages that have been set forth. In the next section I will introduce the next behavioral stage where most students who participated in the interviews – e.g. more established college students were at currently

who participated in the study. These students were again transitioning, this time in preparation for their future careers.

Regulative Linkers

The majority of students had already established themselves in their online communities socially and in their offline college communities as well during this behavioral stage. I found that at this point the students were very familiar with navigating both types of communities and were using Facebook differently from when they were more isolated socially as social debuts. I call this stage regulative linkers since students are much more in control of how they use their social network to manage online and offline relationships and access to themselves and their personal information – they regulate it. As to being linkers, students all continued to expand their online communities. They would selectively add and remove friends. Unlike young cliques and social debuts, regulative linkers are much more particular about whom they connect with and why they wish to connect or stay linked to certain individuals in their social network. It is more than just simply a close group of friends versus a larger loose set of friends.

Two ritual themes that were highly ranked and really stood out during this stage are that of network control and reflexive identity. I found the ritual of network control is very similar to the concepts involved with social support in that there are many reasons that were given to stay linked or form new links with others. A few of these reasons are to stay linked to someone because they are a family member, a friend of the family, a relative, someone from church in order not to offend those individuals, or by rights that those individuals may have as a parent to be connected with their child. Ex-spouses remained connected help link children with their parent. Ex-boyfriend or girlfriends

remained connected and continued to monitor new relationships that their old friends were entering into. Coaches remained connected to their former athletes, employers formed connections with their employees, employees linked up with the companies they worked for. Some connections were maintained because the individuals were good for information such as recipes or were such bizarre or interesting people that individuals liked to follow their antics.

In the network control rituals old links were deleted for just as many reasons. Individuals over time became annoying to people due to the nature of or number of their posts and had their links deleted as a result. Others shared too personal of information, or were cyber bullies and were deleted for those reasons. Some links were severed simply because the user could no longer remember the individual. A lot of links were deleted because the student had matured and no longer wished to be associated with the wrong sort of individuals that they had been linked to previously. As shown in figure 2 these behaviors can continue to overlap in this stage, but as with the previous two behavioral stages, regulative linkers also had some interesting ritual themes of network control and reflexive identity emerged as highly ranked according to the RSPs during this stage where the students were established socially in both the online and offline communities. The rituals that are highly ranked that occur during this stage are described in more detail below.

Network Control

Instead of just expanding ones relationships in their online communities', individuals began to show more signs of boredom with the ritual scripts being entered into. It seems that due to the habits the students had formed that they continued to

perform the ritual during their free time, but did so selectively. Most students expressed that when they were with their close social group of friends that they found no reason to connect with them on Facebook except to document the activities that they had participated in. Instead most of the connections on Facebook had turned towards individuals who offered other types of social support than ones close friends who they saw all of the time anyway. Rather than connect socially with these individuals they would use Facebook to connect with friends and family who were in a different geographic location. This is consistent with other recent research that looked at who students were communicating with. These researchers also shed that most students communicate with friends not on campus such as friend at other schools and old friends as well as with friends that they see rarely (Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert 2009).

Individuals shared that they liked how easy it was to update all of their family and friends at once rather than having to let each person know how and what they were doing. Different time zones, work schedules, and online behavioral usage made Facebook's virtual community ideal for these connections in providing succinct communication to one's group without having to spend too much in terms of resources of time or effort in order to maintain these important social support connections.

Individuals also would periodically clean up their social links with others by taking the time every few months to delete individuals especially when they had become tiresome, annoying, or simply forgotten about. Many times this occurs when students are checking there news feed. The following represents this cleaning ritual that is part of network control ritual theme:

Mary: "Defriending, if I go through my news feed and I see people's name who I have no clue who they are I will go through and delete them cause here recently I

have quit accepting people that I definitely don't know who they are but used to I would accept anyone. And so now it is just annoying when I go through my news feed and I have no idea who any of the people are so then I will just delete them that way. Or if they have a lot of negative posts or if they are just annoying and post too much, like stuff like that. And friending people, I don't really do that necessarily I don't know. I know whenever, like I just rushed this past fall so whenever I went through that I got all sorts of friend requests and stuff and now if I see that I have like a friend on the side that says you may know this person or something and there is like a 180 mutual friends then I would ask them to be my friend. But besides that not really, I don't really if they to ask me they can if not then I don't really care."

Some social trends helped members with this by providing an ideal number of friends to maintain connections with. Users that I found who had adopted this trend would try to delete a friend when they added a new friend in order to maintain a particular set number of friend connections that they had. Many of the women that I interviewed were much more particular with whom they connected with as they wanted to be more careful about whom they allowed to follow them.

Reflexive Identity

During one of my interview sessions a student had just finished the interview and then thought of a really important activity and asked me to turn back on my recorder. I was really intrigued and was more than happy to comply with her request. She expressed that it is very common for her and others that she know to post comments and then check on those comments to see if others had responded to or provided feedback about what they had posted. When time had passed without any activity to these comment threads, she would go back and delete these posts because she felt that they were either not well received or would second guess what she had posted, desiring to have received some sort of peer 'support' if you will for these comments:

Katie: "I have noticed if I post a Facebook status or post too many things in a row that aren't commenting on or aren't liking it than I will go to my Facebook wall

and I will delete some of them that way it doesn't look... I don't know if I really am that insecure and I need that constant assurance from people that what I am posting is okay or that people accept me. But I will go and delete some of the things that way there aren't like 5 statuses in a row or 5 different updates of some sort without people putting some sort of input...I know that my friends do that as well."

It seems that the same is true for pictures. It is very common for students to untag pictures that they find are embarrassing in context or situation, or where they feel that they didn't take a good picture. Many links have been severed as well where potentially embarrassing comments or pictures that students would not want others to see or comment on.

Students also feel that their posts need to reflect their personality. One student explained that she crafts her posts to reflect what her audience would want to see from her, and what they might find to be interesting or entertaining:

Colette: "Well I mean I am pretty, I don't know like outgoing maybe, so my statuses are usually something that somebody can laugh at I guess they are usually worded funny or something like that. I don't usually put stuff on there that is stupid or that I mean I usually put stuff on there that people are going to read and laugh or want to say something too not just I am sitting in my bed or something like that. I usually put stuff that somebody is gonna want to read. I don't know I guess that reflects my personality in a way, not boring stuff maybe?"

This becomes even more interesting in terms of managing relationships with significant others or with family. For example, in relationships the girlfriend would read in a lot to the friendships and comments that their boyfriends would make on other girls' posts on their boyfriends wall. Edward explained how he had seen many relationships go downhill as a result of Facebook:

Edward: "I have seen a lot of them, I've never see them go uphill but I have seen all of them go down hill through Facebook. That is a very good thing to have if you are 20 and in college I guess. But I have seen a lot go downhill. I mean like even sometimes for me like this girl I was talking to she would get mad at me if I

would add somebody, some girl. And most of the time I wouldn't know the girl and I would have to talk to them and they would be in a class, and I talked to them once or twice. But she would get mad at me for that. I don't know a whole new jealousy.

When asked why he thought others read so much into these posts, Edward gave the following response.

Edward: "I don't know. I don't know I guess just cause the fact you can have messages on Facebook and hide them from everybody and no one will even know you are talking to someone on Facebook if you don't want them to you know. I don't really know. I have seen some things go pretty crazy like this one guy he was talking to this girl and I guess he was messaging this other girl, like he had a girlfriend. And they would always be writing on Facebook, and this other girl he was messaging and stuff, I guess finally looked at his profile and she wrote on his wall, who is this other girl. And then that one blew up real fast, that was fun to watch. I don't try to do too much on it just because and like there is no, there is no controls of who gets on it either. And I don't know, a lot of my buddies profiles aren't private or whatever and anybody in the world can type their name and click on it and just figure out everything about you, which isn't a bad thing I guess. But it could be a bad thing especially if you put something on there like your social security number or something. I've never seen that happen though."

Many girls expressed that they would definitely check to see who the girl was and what the relationships that the other girl had with their boyfriend. These other girls were closely monitored as were the actions of their boyfriends.

Students also set up rules for each other to go by when they were in relationships, and for family members who were connected to them. Parents unknowingly would read more into activities with their friends than was actually going on. The following example explains the difficulty in reflexive identity management when a community is involved in socializing and many of these things are outside of the member's control:

Kylie: "I don't want my boyfriend to ever post on my wall that he loves me. I think that is so annoying and I don't like; it is obvious to people that we are in a relationship; I don't need to make it..to me that is like showing it off on Facebook. I mean there is really nothing else, I don't want like I am not okay with the really sappy stuff on Facebook like that. I would almost be okay with my parents saying

something like that just because I don't get to talk to them as much as I do anybody else. But I am so tired of my mom posting on my statuses like all of them, and she is friends with my boyfriend and so drives me crazy when she posts on his wall and puts stuff on his statuses and stuff because I don't want him to feel uncomfortable, like he can't say what he wants to on Facebook. He shouldn't have to censor anything just because she is on there. And I actually told her this weekend whenever I went home to stop doing that and felt kind of bad."

Many students expressed annoyance with family members who were too intrusive on their site or who posted comments and pictures that they felt would be embarrassing to them. I found that for the most part however that with family members moms are given more leeway. Almost all the students that mentioned this as an issue gave their mom a free pass on this since they felt that their mom did have a right to be connected and into what they were doing because of the love that they felt for their mothers.

For some students there is a real dark side to reflexive identity, which leads to anxiety for students. One student described how she discovered this and actions that she took to help her overcome the anxiety brought on through the reflexive identity:

Katie: "I, I don't know because I am a very outgoing person when it comes to most things but I have the strangest issues. I get really bad anxiety walking to class by myself specifically. I also have a fear of crossing roads because I was almost hit by like a really big truck going extremely fast and I think it kind of messed with me a little bit and so I get anxiety doing stuff like that. But other than that I am very outgoing and I don't have any problems doing anything by myself so I don't know why something like that would bother me. I think it is just the way of FB; FB is constant interaction and constant... I was listening to John Tesh or something, I love John Tesh and he was saying something how you can actually feel less connected the more friends you have on FB, less connected to all those people because you see that they are out doing fun things and you are not included, like oh they forgot to invite me and then you start to question oh well do they not want to be friends with me anymore. And I don't know if FB has done that to me, I mean I am guessing it has because I have noticed I feel better without FB but so I try to stick with texting more with my friends to feel more involved and see what they are doing rather than asking them on FB."

As students entered into their junior years and above, they began to build a more professional reflexive identity that would be in keeping with their future employers. This also expands or overlaps with the rituals involved in network control as users would clean up or get rid of friends that would potentially post embarrassing or offensive content that they felt would be unprofessional:

Kylie: “Yes very much so for my sorority we can’t have any pictures where I am holding a cup even if there is not alcohol in it, we don’t want to give the wrong impression. There is not allowed to be alcohol in front of me but there can be alcohol behind me because clearly if I go to a party there is going to be alcohol. And I don’t want those pictures up there any ways, I don’t want pictures up where I look bad of course nobody really does or pictures that look like they are suggestive in any way. Other than that I tend to leave them because at the top, the five pictures you can like X off which ones you want on there. I just usually leave the same few up there, so even if I am tagged in something I don’t like I just take it off the top part and then that doesn’t really bother me anymore.”

Even though Kylie’s sorority had rules about it she comments that she wouldn’t what that stuff up there anyways as it pertained to the alcohol. She then explained other pictures that she wouldn’t want and the script or process that she goes through removing these pictures in performance of this reflexive identity ritual.

Also students were much more likely at this stage to become friends with others for those network contacts. Many became friends with potential employers or peer associates that could help them with their career search. Individuals also become friends with their companies where they wanted to work or with their current employers whom they worked for, as well as with their fellow employees and their supervisors.

Netnography

During the second phase of the research I was able to observe a select group of community members to see how users were participating in ritual experiences. I was able

to identify when and how much users participated on Facebook by looking back through their individual posts on their walls once every two weeks over a two month period.

In order to identify the salience (importance) of the rituals participants were asked when they participated and about activities that would help to identify how noticeable these rituals were to others in the community. For example, different times of the day were observed when students posted to see how central these activities were in the use of students free time rather than just focusing on the frequency of the occurrence as had been done in previous studies (Bulik 2009; Patterson 2011; Pempek et al. 2009).

Differences in behaviors were also observed to determine what posting behaviors matched the dramaturgical requirements and theoretical definitions of ritualized behaviors. Many of the behaviors included ritualized practices such as collectively sharing events through daily rituals including documenting by posting pictures, and related rituals of updating their profile photos. Documentation rituals would make the users content more salient to other members in their community and would be observable on Facebook postings. Frequency of use and the number of unique posts were also used to assess behaviors to determine if they were schemas or ritual scripts that were frequently engaged in. These behaviors if repeated would relate to the RSP factor of repetitiveness which helps to determine the rank or importance of a behavior in terms of SRT during the netnographic observations.

Homologousness and resources would not be as observable on Facebook, so follow-up interviews with observed users were used to help provide further information on these other factors of RSPs to help rank the rituals that were observed.

In addition to using SRT I also found that after doing deductive theoretical coding based on SRT and identifying ritual themes there was more that could be observed in the netnography than I had previously planned to do. Upon further review of the literature I decided to incorporate a classification system that I had found that would help me to identify the ritual behaviors that I was observing not just in terms of their importance, using SRT but also by using a classification of ritual experiences in terms of the rituals common behavioral elements.

This was accomplished by adapting and extending a classification of ritual behavior typology based on a framework from Levy and Rooks' primary sources of behavior to the netnographic observations during this second phase of data collection involving the netnography (Levy 1978; Rook 1985). As Rook suggests in his original framework, five primary sources of ritual behavior exist. These sources Rook used were cosmological (religious or magical), cultural values (including rites of passage or cultural events), group learning (rituals occurring in civic, small group, and among families), individual aims/emotions, and biological (animal greeting and mating rituals) and are given in table 7.

Table 7

Typology Framework: Sources of Ritual Behaviors

Primary Behavior Source	Ritual Type	Example
Cosmological	Religious, magical, supernatural	sharing of religious texts, sermons, spiritual experiences etc.
Consumption	Ritual transitions or rites of passage involving exchange of goods or services and usually excessive consumption	Birthdays, holidays, special occasions or life events.
Communal	Group building, <i>communitas</i> , shared moral responsibility	Civic/school/religious group rituals, small group rituals, and Family rituals
Individual	Personal behaviors, emotions	Grooming, household chores, complaint behavior, work duties, sensitive information
Relationships	Dating, mating behavior	Relationship seeking, FBO Exclusivity boyfriend/girlfriend displays of affection.

For the netnography coding and analysis (see Appendix 6. Facebook Netnography Coding Form) these adaptations included consumption in place of cultural values, communal in place of group learning, individual in place of individual aims, and relationships in place of biology. The reasons for these changes were first to use current terms from the literature and second, to provide for a clearer view of the ritual categories that were being observed.

Information gained from the in-depth interviews helped to guild this process in identifying observational manifestations of the ritual categories that emerged from the in-depth interviews. Consumption rituals have been widely researched and better captures the conceptual ideas and examples Rook (1985) was trying to describe in the source of cultural values. This reach literature is well defined by Otnes (2007) as “holidays, special

occasions, and other sacred events characterized by the intensive (and sometimes excessive) consumption of goods, services, and experiences”.

Communal source replaces group learning in order to distinguish rituals performed or observed by a collective rather than by an individual. This takes into account the broader view of rituals being engaged in by both those participants performing the ritual enactments as well as the ritual audience who are also taking part in the ritual.

Individual source is used to more specifically categorize the ritual behaviors according to performance of the ritual by distinguishing rituals performed individually from rituals performed in a collective. For example some rituals such as grooming, shopping, keeping a diary have been documented as being performed by an individual rather than being engaged in communally (Otnes and McGrath 2001; Rook 1985).

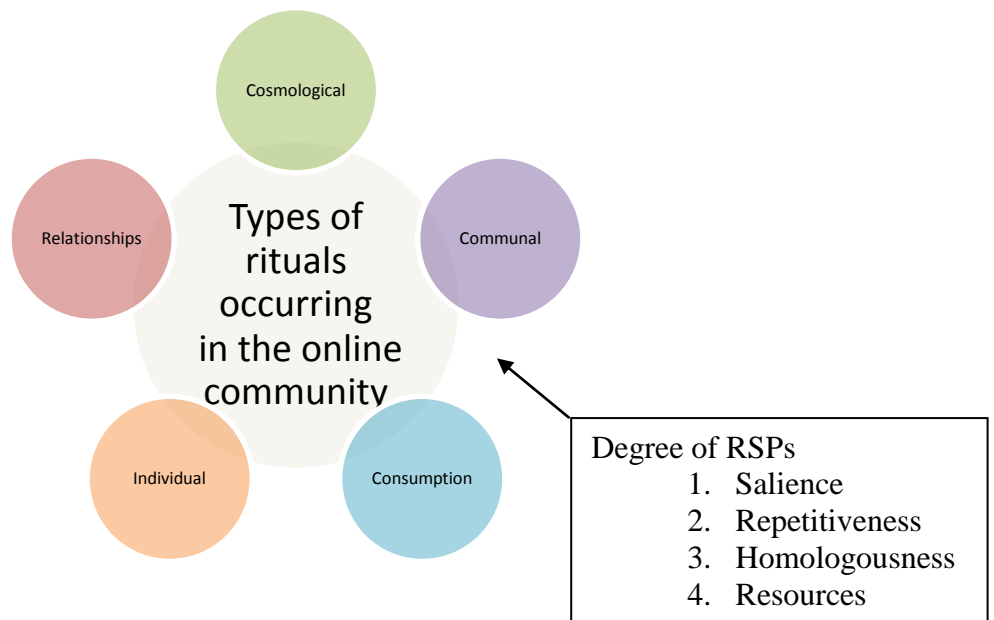
Biological was replaced with relationship rituals as relationships are a rich source of ritual practices. For example relationships are a rich source of ritual behaviors as seen in rituals that include courting, engagement, weddings, and anniversaries which have been widely written about and discussed in the literature (Mitra and Knottnerus 2008; Otnes 2004; Otnes 2003).

These primary source behavior categories (see table 7) incorporate further research done since Rook’s (1985) article on rituals to reflect more recent research on ritual behaviors and are used to help categorize observations during the netnographic phase of this study to classify ritual behaviors by type or category. The primary behavioral sources rituals were categorized based on the types of rituals that were being observed during the netnography coding sessions (see table 7). Observed ritual behaviors

were also ranked using SRT and the four factors of ritualized symbolic practices of salience, repetitiveness, homologousness, and resources (see table 2). Both SRT RSPs (from table 2) and the sources of the behaviors (from table 7) were used together (see Appendix 6. Facebook Netnography Coding Form) to answer the second research question which asks which rituals are most important. Both the ranking and identifying functions need to occur to fully address question two to determine this. The ritual identification model (see figure 3) is provided to help visualize both the ranking and identification processes for determining the types of rituals that are occurring in their online communities and their importance.

Figure 3

Ritual Identification Model



The ritual identification model can be used to assess the importance or rank the ritualized practices in terms of the rituals’ salience, repetitiveness, homologousness, and resources using SRT to rank the types of rituals occurring in their own online community. The primary behavioral sources of rituals include cosmological, communal, consumption,

individual and relationships (see table 7), as portrayed in the outer circles, can also help managers observing these rituals to classify and categorize the rituals that they are observing by type. For example, there may be many types of rituals occurring during a single session that members of the online community may be observed participating in, which is why the primary behavioral sources of the rituals are displayed as a Venn diagram in the ritual identification model. Viewing rituals using SRT together with the primary sources of ritual behaviors provides a valuable framework for identifying and ranking ritual practices that are being observed.

As shown in this model during an online session rituals may involve daily and or consumption rituals. This framework helps to classify which types of ritual experiences were being observed. Using the RSP's from SRT one can assess the level of importance of these rituals. This framework is useful for identifying the types of ritual behaviors that are more important in developing ongoing community affiliation for members of online communities such as Facebook.

Each observation took approximately 1 to 3 hours to complete, except for those involving Edwin, whom was mentioned previously as someone who turned out not to be a prolific poster. Looking more at the data from Edwin's in-depth interview he seems to be a prolific user of Facebook showing that most use is hard to observe. Observations for the remaining nine participants contained many of these ritual behavior typologies during each observational setting. The following sections describe findings using the ritual identification model in response to research question two. Examples from each of the five sources of ritual behaviors that were observed during the netnography that are highly

ranked using SRT are given. The ritual identification model proved useful for identifying which rituals were most important for building and sustaining the online community.

Cosmological

To identify religious rituals behaviors were looked at to determine if the content and nature of the behaviors included religious texts, sermons, spiritual experiences and the like throughout the week. During the in-depth interviews many of the respondents were observed to have shared religious messages with friends and received positive feedback and encouragement from their community for engaging in these cosmological rituals involving collective sharing. Megan was my most prolific informant in this regard. During the in-depth interviews she was observed actively participating in religious rituals with her church and as a youth minister. She also maintains several contacts from a year-long mission trip that she went on during high school.

As part of her daily behaviors Megan would create posts on Twitter and then tag these post so that they would be included on her Facebook page resulting in them being shared on the newsfeeds of all of her friends in her online community. Common themes were her religious praises to the Lord, sharing scriptures, providing religious encouragement to her friends, and engaging friends in gospel oriented discussions. One of her postings gives an example of these messages:

Megan (January post): “Gods lessons are learned by His making us wait, bearing w/us in love&patience until we can honestly pray ‘Thy will be done’-Elisabeth Elliot”

@Megan on Twitter · via Twitter

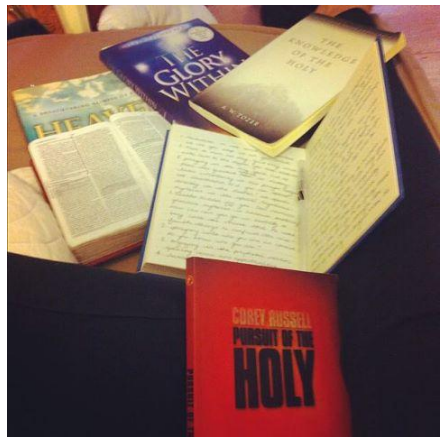
Many followers of Megan would comment on her posts providing positive feedback to her by thanking her for the messages, saying how much they looked forward to them.

Other friends simply would like the messages. By doing either action these served several

purposes. First, the audience appreciated these messages and were paying attention to them, adding to the importance of these postings and reinforcing the need for the role that Megan was providing as an actor from the audience. In a sense the audiences positive feedback encourages this script to be followed in the future. This behavior was observed to be very repetitive. Many days Megan would post multiple messages such as these. Megan also documented religious activities that she attended, shared online recordings of some of these sermons with her community, as well as religious rites that she attended such as weddings and religious music that she liked.

I was also able to observe religious study rituals that were then documented (documentation ritual) and shared (collective sharing ritual) on Facebook that friends responded to during my observation:

Megan (January post): “Just looked down and realized the insanity of how many books are surrounding me! Thankful for incredible resources and the time to just sit and explore His mysteries!! <http://instagr.am/p/jmQTI/>”



Five friends responded to this post by liking it, which would have put the post on their feeds making it more salient. Also when the member likes something she also gets the

other likes and comments about it as well, since the email account associated with Facebook is notified each time that occurs by sending a message to her email account.

A community member also posted a message to the post stating that he was reading one of the books pictured. This then allowed Megan to have an interaction with the individual about how much she liked the book. At this point it would be interesting then to see how much of the conversation was carried on with posts outside of the online community. This does give the example though of the rich data and detailed information within communities that is available. We can see what books are being read and also know who else in the community likes these activities.

In addition to Megan, Kylie, Bridgette, and Max also engaged in cosmological rituals online. Kylie posted about proselytizing, commenting on church activities, and her plans for an upcoming mission trip. Bridgette would find and post religious messages from time to time that she would share with her community and especially with her mom. She also took religious photos. Max discussed his upcoming wedding ceremonies. He mentioned who would be performing the wedding ceremony and the church where the ceremony would be held. Max also provided how when and where he was involved in his observations of religious holidays with family and friends during the Christmas break.

Upon further reflection I found that I too had shared articles from the On Faith columns in the Washington Post with friends. I also found on my own wall some videos that were encouraging and insightful that my church had produced which I had shared with my online community.

It makes sense that cosmological rituals which are such a big part of ritual behavior and ritual research that the performance of these religious rituals would also be

observable in an online environment such as Facebook where people are interacting socially with others from their church families as well as participating and sharing religious rites such as weddings that are full of consumption rituals with their friends.

Consumption

Students participated in daily ritualized behaviors often following ritualized behaviors offline with daily documentation behaviors online in a second reenactment or recreation of the ritual performances from the activities that they had recently been a part of. Consumption rituals were also observed during the second data collection using the netnography method. These observations took place during the holiday season. These rituals involve special events, including holiday celebrations and often involve excessive consumption and experiences for the participants (Otnes 2007). Some of the consumption rituals that were observed included holiday parties, weddings, anniversaries, birthdays and other important life events which online community members mentioned in the in-depth interviews and were observed participating in during the netnography.

Because the observations occurred over the holidays I was able to observe consumption rituals surrounding Christmas and New Year's celebrations. These consumption rituals included parties, gift exchanges, family traditions, and drinking and dining out. Before the rituals occurred there were a lot of plans made about meeting up with friends and what they would be doing during these celebrations. During the celebrations many of the informants were observed engaging in these rituals because of the photos that they or family and or friends had posted to their community pages. Many took albums of these events and posted them on their sites. Many of these events were very detailed as to the nature of the celebrations, individuals who were participating with

the actors, and how the rituals were performed because they posted so frequently and with so many photos and so much detail. It was much like a personal memoir or diary that was recorded of the events.

Since these were college students participating in the study I hoped to find many of the rituals associated with the college experience and rites of passage for drinking rituals when informants were able to drink. I also felt that I would see excessive consumption associated with these rituals since my observations occurring during the holidays. There were many consumption rituals that I was able to directly observe. Drinking rituals were often documented with pictures, as were social gatherings for fraternities/sororities. Interaction rituals at social gatherings were documented as well with photos and comments about these get-togethers. The following are two posts that portray drinking rituals and family rituals that help to reflect these types of community rituals:

Alex: “Here is to the nights may there be many more to come.”



3 people like this.

12 Comments: Gill: Recycle those already!

December 1, 2011 at 7:57 p.m.

John: whimps...

December 1, 2011 at 8:45 p.m.

John: And where is the Jameson at?

December 1, 2011 at 8:45 p.m.

Jenny: Alex first it was beer label boxes noe empty bottles..oh boy
December 1, 2011 at 11:28 p.m.
Sam: the one classy bottle of patron does belong at the front haha
December 4, 2011 at 4:35 p.m.
Mel: to good health
December 4, 2011 at 5:37 p.m.
Matt: weak
December 6, 2011 at 11:50 p.m.
Alex: Dont worry matt those are only the ones we kept.....too many to count other
wise
December 6, 2011 at 11:51pm · Like
Matt: Are you gonna try and glue all these to your walls too?
December 6, 2011 at 11:52 p.m.
Alex: gonna try hahah
December 6, 2011 at 11:53 p.m.
Matt: Haha you should stuff them all in that hole in the wall for insulation.
December 6, 2011 at 11:54 p.m.
Alex: dude I totally want to and then come back 10 years and break the wall and
find em all and tell the poor college students who will be living here what they
missed
December 6, 2011 at 11:55 p.m.

Alex and his friends clearly do a lot of drinking and do so with each other. As seen here the photo refers to the activities and the many inside stories that the friends have and could share with others is alluded to in Alex's exchanges with his friends and the comment that is made by Alex at the end.

Most of the photos that were taken of drinking rituals involve parties, dancing, or drinking rites of passage when the person celebrated with friends turning 21. The majority of these are taken by the person's friend at the party that then tags the friend in the photo. Most are of parties at someone's house. Most individuals pictured show the person with the drink in their hand and they are either with friends or guys and girls pictured together holding drinks. Many times the drinks are in cups or other no descript containers to appear less embarrassing if these photos were seen by someone else. This post seemed to be one that could be shared to capture the drinking rituals and still provide

a level of privacy to the subjects in the study. Many of these rituals involving group parties occurred during birthdays, holidays (Christmas and New Year's parties), school celebrations (tailgating, bowl game celebrations), and vacations and have some overlap with the previous section on consumption rituals. Alex displayed all of these bottles to his friends in the previous picture, but then for New Year's he displayed a similar picture:

Alex: "Happy New Year 2012!!!"



photo on Instagram. January 1 at 2:04 a.m. via Instagram

It is interesting that although Alex drinks, he is not pictured holding drinks on his Facebook page which supports the reflexive identity ritual theme found in the regulative linker's stage.

During the netnography several weddings that informants were participating in were also observed. In addition to these weddings the planning, shopping, and get-togethers before the weddings were also documented. Many of these wedding ceremonies were recorded as albums in informants' photographs. It was interesting to see the bride planning shopping trips with her bridesmaids. The plans of the bridesmaids to meet up with old friends before and after the wedding. Events were well documented and included the wedding breakfast, open houses, receptions and parties. These events were all recorded and shared (collective sharing and documenting rituals) during and after the wedding using the online community almost as a play-by-play for the audience that could not attend the wedding.

Many consumption rituals were observed as well that were part of these rites of passage, including the dancing and drinking rituals, ritual artifacts such as food and drink, jewelry, candles and other ritual artifacts. Scholars have discussed these artifacts and rituals surrounding weddings and gift exchanges, and holiday gatherings. During the netnography these activities were observed taking place both during the activity and after the activity through collective sharing rituals of documentation, photography, and storytelling (Belk and Coon 1993; Otnes 2004; Otnes 2003; Rook 1985; Ruth, Otnes, and Brunel 1999; Sherry 1983; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991).

Community

When coding the observations for the netnography I looked back over the weekly postings to see if I could identify any meaningful activities involving community building experiences. The majority of rituals are mostly communal in nature that I observed during this study, particularly because I was observing rituals in a community context and focusing on a large social network for my data collection. Specifically I was looking for activities during the netnography observations that informants had participated in that involved group experiences. Rook (1985) focuses on rituals involving sporting events such as the Super Bowl Sunday or the observation of civic rituals such as parades and national holidays. He also mentions rituals that include ones family and help bind the family together. I looked for specific examples involving these types of rituals involving these themes.

Many individuals were pictured with gifts and giving gifts. It was also interesting to see just how many people posed for photos with their families for the holidays. There were also many pictures of individuals with their friends at gatherings for Christmas as

well. Rituals such as these pictured here are mentioned as popular ritual scripts that members are involved with building over the holidays as part of consumption rituals (Otnes 2007).

Clearly the individuals that communicate using the online community may also share this online community in an offline environment. I also found this to be the case in the in-depth interviews about how a family would be together and would pull up and share Facebook with each other in order to catch up using the photos on the site. This was also documented as well in the following photo⁸:



Megan is pictured here with her friends on their couch looking at Facebook photos together using a Mac laptop computer. It was fun to see proof of this collective offline sharing in the online community during the netnography observations thanks to the documentation ritual.

Rituals involving fan behaviors at games such as tailgating and documenting the stadium experience and viewer experiences leading up to bowl games such as predicting the outcome and winners of the game were also discussed extensively online in the social environment. I also observed many family rituals surrounding the holiday gatherings and

⁸ All photographs with respondents have been blurred for privacy.

family traditions that were part of these celebrations. It was interesting to see how pervasive these rituals are, and how these rituals help to build and sustain a sense of community between community members.

The following are documentations of family rituals:



The first picture shows a reenactment that Katie’s family did every year and was posted by Katie’s mom. This first photo shows the daughters showing their disgust, and the grandmother posing with the Tupperware. The family understands the meaning behind it and this post received many likes in response to it. The second is of Megan’s family, who were all playing games over the holidays together. As seen in this photo, fun times that families enjoyed during group activities are pictured here. These activities involved family members in contests that they had fun doing together. Both of these activities are

community rituals that help to build unity and togetherness (e.g. consciousness of kind (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001)).

Individual

Some of these ritual behaviors are personal and involve individual actors performing the ritual. During the in-depth interviews I identified several behaviors that were more personal and individualized behaviors that were highly meaningful and involved set scripts that were followed by the actors. For example rituals involving reflexive identity were largely done by the individual, such as the rituals involving reclassification of ones identity as reflected to others. Taking down ones posts would be hard to observe, unless I saw this during one of my data collections. The same would hold true for individual behaviors involving creeping rituals, and some of the entertainment rituals. However, it was easy to observe how often individuals changed their profile and what the profile was changed to. Diary rituals, along with some of the documentation rituals such as personal rituals involving reading were documented on Facebook and were also observable during the netnography. I also viewed an individual that had their Facebook site hacked as was described in the entertainment ritual theme for social debuts. Included here are two examples of individual rituals. The first is of the individual ritual involving reading and how it is reported on Facebook.

Bridgett: Posted January 24.

RECENT ACTIVITY

👤!Bridgett read [USDA Bans Whole Milk in Schools. Rolls Out Major School Lunch Reforms](#) on [Yahoo!](#)

👤!Bridgett read [Census releases data on American Indian population](#) on [Yahoo!](#)

👤!Bridgett read [J.C. Penney gets rid of hundreds of sales](#) on [Yahoo!](#)

👤!Bridgett read [Think your pet is safe from coyotes?](#) on [Yahoo!](#)

👤!Bridgett read [Brad Pitt on Marriage, 'Moneyball,' and Misery](#) on [Yahoo!](#)

Since Bridgett is using her Facebook site to log into Yahoo! to read these articles, it is also notifying her friends about the articles that she read and giving them access to the same information. This was an individual reading behavior that was repeated many days in the evening and over Bridgett's lunch hour that are part of her individual ritual scripts that she follows. Although these scripts are performed for her own enjoyment, because programs like Yahoo! are using her community information to access them, these individual rituals are being shared with others in her community as well. Knowing how she loves her pets and takes pictures of them as well as supporting the fight against animal cruelty we see these same themes reflected here in the article about keeping ones pet safe from coyotes. By knowing her reading interests and observing her ritualized behaviors, together both give a lot of information about her behaviors and interests.

The second example includes pictures taken of individual hobbies which have been displayed using photos. These individual ritualized behaviors although performed individually in their creation are shared with others using documentation rituals on Facebook after they are completed:

Drawing posted by Max's fiancé Kristine: "The picture Max drew for my dad of his plane. It turned out great!!"



Comments: Angie likes this.

Marl: Wow that's great work!

December 25, 2011 at 1:13 p.m.

Max: Thanks!

December 25, 2011 at 6:32 p.m.

Wendy: Max, this looks awesome! I Have some pictures that I was going through and didn't know if you would have time to paint one of them for me. I'll send them to you and you can pick one or I can pick. If you don't have time don't worry about it! :) Miss you, buddy!

January 2 at 4:05 p.m.

Max: Show me what you got Wendi, no promises but maybe we can work something out!

January 2 at 4:31 p.m.

Lexi: Kristine I didn't know you were marrying an artist!

January 20 at 8:41 p.m.

Kristine: lol yep! He's pretty good, too, isn't he? ♥

January 20 at 9:37 p.m.

In Kristine's post we can see how proud she is of her fiancé's talent, and how her friends are also interested in it as well. Note all of the praises in these comments of wow, awesome, good etc. Also the comment by Lexi – "I didn't know you were marrying an artist" with emphasis on it.

Not all of these talented creations will get comments, but a simple like will suffice as recognition of what they are doing individually as seen in this next example:

Cake posted by Bridgett:



4 people like this.

We can see that Bridgett also received positive feedback from sharing her baking and cake decorating talents with her community because four of her friends liked the job she had done. This feedback reinforces the individual ritual as well as following the documentation ritual scripts in the future to share these hidden individual talents with the group. Over time it would be easy to have a more complete profile of individuals when personal interests such as these are shared among community members.

Relationship

Relationship rituals involve socialization rituals leading to relationships. I looked for behaviors involving dating behavior, relationship seeking, and displays of affection. During my observations I observed many relationships by both single individuals who were not in a relationship and how they managed their profiles and social lives, to boyfriends and girlfriends in relationships and those demonstrated by an engaged couple. This section will give an example from a single individual not in a FBO relationship, and an example from a boyfriend in an FBO relationship on Facebook.

In terms of relationship seeking, as documented in the social debuts section individuals use Facebook to expand their social relationships with others. Girls and guys are more willing to first connect using Facebook rather than phoning each other. First impressions are important, and especially so in setting up ones profile photo. As was mentioned earlier by Troy in describing the process of posting content it is almost as if there are Facebook folders in mind when one begins to document for eventual sharing on Facebook. Profiles and their photos are a big deal for relationships and in making the right impression. It seems that part of forming a relationship with others is to present oneself well to others using reflexive identity. This post shows the individual ritual of reflexive identity as shown in an individual's new photo that was posted as her profile photo:



After posting this new profile photo her father responds, “Hey like the new pic.” Although hard to see in this rendering the scenery was also very important as the leaves pictured were in their vibrant fall colors. By receiving positive feedback from family and

friends the informant's behaviors receive positive reinforcement thus leading to the desire to continue to perform this ritual script for ones perceived audience in the future.

This second example is from a relationship that I saw change from Facebook Official (FBO meaning your relationship status with another person has been posted on Facebook – x is in a relationship with y) to single. It was interesting as this was after the meet the boyfriend's family visit:

Kylie: Kylie went from being "in a relationship" to "single".

January 13 at 4:21 p.m.

13 people like this.

Anne :O

What??

January 13 at 6:24 p.m.

Ash: Your cousin is here if you need me ♥

January 13 at 7:43 p.m.

Jason: David was gonna say something insensitive like "good thing you and casie were destined to get married since third grade!" but I talked him out of it.

January 13 at 8:13 p.m.

Kylie: casie, ya maybe lol

January 13 at 8:56 p.m.

Jason: Hahaha ok ok maybe that was too far.

January 13 at 8:57 p.m.

It was interesting to see that as soon as this status changed nine guys that she knew, many with whom she communicated frequently online were the first to like this post. Her family and close friends were the ones that expressed concern and surprise in the comments.

Because Facebook makes ones private social activities more public some students felt that being in a FBO made the relationship more intensive in college for the current generation compared to their parents' generation before the advent of online communities such as Facebook. The idea of being in an exclusive relationship was discussed by one of

my informants in the in-depth interviews which can shed more light on this netnography observation:

Andrew: "I think it has made relationships way more intensive. Like my parents have always talked about when they were growing up in high school, they were like dating tons of people, they would go on a date with this guy and then another date with this guy and uh now since Facebook and my space started there is nothing like that. If you are dating someone, it is closed relationship only. If it is my space official or FBO, otherwise it is you just hung out it doesn't...So I think it has made them, like early relationships more intensive, like closed off official you know. And it has made a lot of Facebook creeps, like people go crazy oh you are looking at this guys profile, I saw your message from this girl. It is crazy. Other than that I think it is besides the fact that it has made them more I don't know how to say it more um exclusive and intensive for each partner other wise I don't think Facebook has changed relationships that much."

During the observations there were two anniversary celebrations that were observed between two separate couples. Bridgett celebrated her relationship with her boyfriend by telling him how much she loved him on her Facebook site and taking a picture of a gift that she made to celebrate their anniversary together. Andrew was more conspicuous in how he celebrated the anniversary of his relationship with his girlfriend. They celebrated the occasion by attending a basketball game in Oklahoma City watching the Thunder. Both observations involved consumption rituals, and both used Facebook to discuss and share these events with their significant other as well as their respective communities.

This third example involves a post from Max about his upcoming plans for his honeymoon and the comments that he solicited from his community to help involve them with his honeymoon plans:

Max (December post): "Looking at possible destinations for Kimi and my honey moon. Current ideas include Atlantis in the Bahamas, Riviera Maya cancan, and Saint Lucia... Any ideas, comments, concerns? ... Hard decisions..."

14 Comments: Joe: Mexico or St. Lucia...while Atlantis is nice the Bahamas aren't all that great (in my opinion)

at 3:21p.m.

Amber: Do not go to sandles in Jamaica

at 3:21p.m.

Amber: Bahamas is not the greatest either.

at 3:21p.m.

Amber: Aruba, Tahiti, Hawaii, Italy, Santa Barbara, Key West and great!

at 3:23p.m.

Raquel: St Lucia! Atlantis is fun but not romantic

at 3:31pm

Max: Hmm. Thank you ladies! What did you all like about the places you reccomended? And dislike about the places you were against?

at 3:33p.m.

Mich: Def not cancun

at 3:34 p.m.

Noelle: I've been to most of the islands and Aruba is still my favorite. Its absolutly beautiful and the people are great

at 3:35 p.m.

Mich: Go where I went, punta Cana

It's beautiful

Go to Bookit.com for great deals on all inclusive trips type in punta canna

at 3:36 p.m.

Kristine (the fiancé): We can't do punta Cana because they don't have the excursions that we want... I want horseback riding on the beach and we want like jungle excursions and stuff like that

at 4:52 p.m.

Mich: They do have horseback riding cause I saw it with my own eyes & a jungle excursion....I don't understand what it is your referring to

at 5:33 p.m.

Mich: I would still use Bookit.com for wherever u go cause they the best deals on the Internet

at 5:34 p.m.

Raquel: Look at the typical climate during the time of year it will help you decide

at 5:45 p.m. · Like

Max: After looking at bookit.com I like the site but I just do not feal like it the packages are for a once in a lifetime honeymoon kinda deal that includes all that kristen and I want to do. I would use it for a vacation, but honeymoon? ...I dunno, I feal like I should not be cheap for that.... We found a travel agent willing to hook us up for a trip to maya Rivera all in clusive for 6 days 7 nights with food, travel, activities, lodging in a honeymoon suite for 6088... I think we can afford that.

From this post and subsequent comments to this discussion feed we see the rich back and forth involved in the online communication rituals on Facebook. We can

observe the time utility as individuals could respond when they felt it was convenient. The decision making process is very informative here as well. Notice the influencers in the process and their arguments based on personal experiences, and the justification for their reasoning. Note that these comments are from the participative audience. There is also an audience that is a passive one that observed the post and follow-up comments, but chose not to be active participants. Even though they did not participate they are still part of and involved with the consumption surrounding these interactions.

It was really interesting to see the consumption rituals that will occur on this trip such as horseback riding, exotic location (island or beach), and jungle exertions etc. These events are all part of the consumption rituals and the experiences that are being sought by the happy couple. Note how the bride specifies to the group about what her dreams are for the occasion. Also note the monetary and logistical considerations of the groom. Notice the discussion Max has in justifying not going with his friend's ideas for using Bookit.com: “, but honeymoon? ...I dunno, I feel like I should not be cheap for that.... We found a travel agent.” This is both letting his friend know of Max's gratitude for his suggestion, but that the bride and groom have to both make this decision together and are willing to pay more for the special experience for this occasion. As such they needed an expert (enter the travel agent) to help make the consumption ritual possible.

I also find it interesting just how much information is given here about the consumption ritual itself – the location, price, environment, activities, logistics, and planning that are involved and part of what makes up a complex decision process. Certainly we can see how this would qualify as ritualized behavior in terms of performance, roles, and audience. There are specific scripts that are being followed and

scenes, scenery and props (ritual artifacts) that were all involved in this planning consumptive experience being collectively shared and documented.

Summary

In doing the member checks of the information collected from the in-depth interviews and netnography study I found that of the daily rituals the daily documentation of one's life as well as the emotional benefits to connecting with others were cited by participants as the most important reasons why they continue to participate in daily ritualized behaviors as members of their online communities. The ritual themes involving these behaviors include collective sharing and social support.

In coding the interviews, daily rituals and consumption rituals are both a big part of the daily behavioral activity on Facebook. These behaviors are documented in the form of posts on Facebook and are either recorded as a timeline by the software in the program or are time and date stamped and then archived on the Facebook site. These posts can be thought of by market researchers as quasi diaries made up of photos and discussion threads surrounding both daily and consumption ritualized behaviors. Daily rituals on Facebook are similar to previously documented daily rituals of keeping a diary, photography and scrapbooking which have been mentioned in the literature (Rook 1985). Examples of daily rituals that were seen in the data from the Facebook community include photo sharing, event planning, creeping/gossiping, sharing memories, socializing, relationship rituals, pseudo diary, and managing identity rituals.

The ritualized activities may be individual personal rituals or communal rituals involving social interaction with others. Even though creeping is typically an individual activity, it involves traces of the communal, because the posts and photos are communal

in nature. Also there is overlap in the daily behavioral rituals involving documenting and sharing of photos, information about ones activities, often involve discussion of consumption rituals. I found that as soon as one big event was over such as a birthday party or anniversary the person was discussing and planning for the next big event. After Christmas many students were observed in the netnography discussing spring break.

The next chapter will conclude this research by reviewing both the scholarly and managerial implications of SRT. The study's limitations and future research in this area will also be discussed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Managerial Implications for Online Communities

There seems to be an over emphasis on the part of many communities to focus more on providing tools to the community members rather than focusing on the rituals that keep the community members active and involved in the community. Suggestions by Banks and Daus (2000, p. 317) reflects this view, “Ask any Internet Entrepreneur about the secret to successful Websites and you’ll likely here the knee-jerk answer: content, commerce, community, the holy trinity of Web portaldom, with stress placed on community...[W]hen you ask the same crowd about what makes a successful online community, you’ll likely here about the suite du jour of Internet communications tools. Tools do not a community make. It does not work that way in real life; it does not work that way online.”

Companies can directly benefit from this information and have a better chance at success rather than failure. Google attempted to enter the social networking and microblogging (like Twitter) markets, but failed to connect with users. These efforts both failed, likely because there are already established communities with established daily rituals and consumption rituals within each. Currently Google’s latest attempt into social networking seems to also be suffering this same fate, and is beginning to lose customers. For Google+, their current customer base of 40 million users is already beginning to decline (2011). Perhaps one of the reasons for this decline is due to their lack of focus on rituals. Since users already are comfortable with the ritual scripts and are happy with the

community membership, existing users don't feel the reason for switching to new social networks that are too similar for their existing communities.

Managers should look more closely at the existing rituals of consumers in their communities by following these three simple suggestions:

1. Identify the rituals that cause changes in community activity and usage
2. Classify the ritualized behaviors by the types of rituals occurring in the online community
3. View the rituals through the lens of SRT to identify the importance of the ritualized behaviors using RSP's

Identify the Rituals Causing Activity/Usage

The ritual identification model proved very useful as many different types of important ritual behaviors were often observed during each observational session. First, using the four factors from SRT (salience, repetitiveness, homologousness, and resources) rituals were ranked in terms of their importance. Ritual themes as well as three distinct behavioral stages (young cliques, social debuts, and reflexive linkers) were identified. Differences in the member's environment and the sharing and participation that was occurring between community members were noted. Over time as users became more involved in their online communities, distinct differences in the highly ranked rituals were identified. For example, as new community members in the young cliques stage, users' initial connections were more casual (e.g. users were more open to connecting with a wide variety of relationships). In the second behavioral stage of social debuts, users' ritual behaviors included more interaction rituals involving close friends and family members that were physically far from the user. Members also connected

more with their families during this stage as well. During the third behavioral stage of reflexive linkers, members were more in control of their ritual behaviors and chose to eliminate many of the users that they no longer wished to associate with. Reflexive Linkers were also found to be more cautious about what they were collectively sharing with other community members. This resulted in focusing more on one's more important connections and eliminating connections that were no longer valued from the community. Users were more in control of their community connections and more aware of others that they were collectively engaging with in shared rituals.

As member share information with each other changes in the users environment such as changes in the user's personal life or environment that may be contributing to big changes in their participation within the community as well. This study identified changes in the users' social environment, such as a move to a new location, increased participation in the online community. Table 8 summarizes these findings. As shown in this table, several of the environmental changes that were occurring both in the online and offline environments for users during different behavioral stages as the users became more experiences with and in control of their community over time.

The first column shows the three distinct behavioral stages that were identified together with changes to community members' environments. The second column shows the most important rituals in terms of rank according to SRT (see table 2 and figure 3). Finally in the last column these rituals are classified by type according to the source of ritual behaviors being observed (see table 5 and figure 3).

Table 8

Ritual Practices during Distinct Transitional Periods

Behavior Stage/ Environmental Changes	Highly Ranked Rituals	Types of Rituals by Behavioral Sources
<u>Young Cliques</u>	Freedom From Constraints	Individual
Living at Home	Network Expansion	Community
New Online Environment	Collective Sharing	Consumption
<u>Social Debuts</u>	Social Support	Relationship/Community
Away from Home	Utilitarian	Individual
Social Isolation	Entertainment	Community
College Life		
Established Online		
<u>Regulative Linkers</u>	Network Control	Community
Career Prep.	Reflexive Identity	Relationship
Relationship- Changes		

These behavioral stages exhibited consistent important or highly ranked ritual themes that were consistent across users during each stage that show similar daily behavioral rituals being performed by users as they transition from one stage to the next. Even though individual users may still exhibit rituals from other stages as Figure 2 suggests (i.e. the Venn diagram) for the majority of users the highly ranked rituals were very consistent among users during each of the three behavioral stages as shown in Figure 2 by the horizontal lines separating the behavioral stages (which are stacked vertically from early to mature (young cliques to regulative linkers)).

The important theoretical and managerial contributions of both SRT and the ritual identification model (i.e. the second and third columns in Table 8) will be discussed in detail in the next two sections. The remainder of the chapter includes a discussion of the studies limitations and future research areas, and then concludes with a brief summary.

Highly Ranked Rituals

Structural ritualization theory (SRT) helps to further our understanding of the different rituals that occur within online communities over time based on the availability and prevalence of the RSPs for community members. As previously mentioned, RSPs refer to standardized social practices of the group that are regularly engaged in, and can help measure the importance and intensity of ritualizations (Mitra and Knottnerus 2008). The four factors that determine the rank of the RSPs within the community are salience, repetitiveness, homologousness, and resources (Knottnerus 2007). Over time all four factors that determine the rank of the RSPs within the community became more or less prevalent among community members (see table 4). The last column in table 4 lists the rituals that were found to be highly ranked using SRT and ranking the rituals using RSPs in terms of the rituals salience, repetitiveness, homologousness, and access to available resources. The actors/users themselves also formed strong habits by following these ritual scripts and continuing their engagement in daily ritualized behavior.

The ritual themes of freedom from constraints, network expansion, collective sharing, social support, utilitarian, entertainment, network control, and reflexive identity were found to be the most important rituals according to rank, that are occurring during three distinct stages in the Facebook community. Using SRT as a lens, Managers can benefit from this type of research methodology in order to develop an understanding of unique ritual themes that pertain to their own online communities. A brief description of the RSPs that we found is given in the next few paragraphs.

Salience

Ritualized practices have a profound effect on both maintaining an ongoing affiliation with one's community and growing ones community. Community members become so active in the community that they realize the community is in fact a big part of their daily lives. In in-depth interviews users expressed accounts of salience (centrality of the activity) that the Facebook community had become through accounts of individual or group behaviors. Individual users expressed how they engaged in the Facebook ritual to both start and end their day.

Salience was also demonstrated by how central the community is for making connections when members in emergency situations. There were several accounts from users expressing how they were able to get a hold of someone through Facebook where other means of communication were not effective in doing so. Many students expressed how salient Facebook had become for organizing activities, study groups, managing employees, and running their businesses. Facebook has also become salient to users in studying for classes with some courses requiring the use of Facebook as part of the course to post discussions and organize groups. Some members shared stories of friends or family members who had to delete their Facebook accounts because it was taking up too much of their free time. Salience of the activity can also diminish as the rituals become less central to their daily social behavior rituals.

Repetitiveness

Repetitive use of Facebook revolves around the participating user's desire to remain connected and in the know with their family and friends. This need to be connected in a community that is constantly changing requires the user to connect

frequently with the community in order not to miss out on any important occurrences that families and friends have been experiencing during the period of time that the user was not connected to the community. As time passes users become more efficient with how these connections take place and how much time they are willing to dedicate also changes as the user's needs, roles, and environments change. During this study different stages were identified and described using SRT and RSPs to analyze and identify common ritual themes, environments, and community behaviors.

Homologousness

The actions to access the community are homologous (similarity to other practices/activities being engaged in by the user both in the online environment and on the users phone) to the actions of texting and using ones cell phone/internet connection to communicating it making it easy for the user to connect without requiring much new learning or effort on the part of the user.

Resources

Resources also play a key role in how salient Facebook use has become in keeping users continually connected to Facebook. During college students also have instant access to credit through student loans, or other sources of funding (Pell grants, scholarships, more work opportunities) providing the means/resources necessary to engage more in these online rituals.

This study purposely focused on resources by choosing study participants that connected to the community using both their computers *and* cell phones. The majority of the participants in involved in this study owned iPhones and were connected to their communities throughout the day with their phones. The reason for such a high level of

participants with iPhones was due to screening for volunteer participants to be both active current users who have cell phones that they use to connect with the Facebook community. These users were selected as they would be more likely to be super-connected users. Super-connected users are users who are permanently logged in and are continually checking in with their community (Bulik 2009). These users are community members with access to the internet, wi-fi, and mobile computing allowing them to always be connected to other users in their online community.

In just a few seconds the users of these devices were able to demonstrate to me how they could connect or post using such devices. New technology gains in the devices, speed, and the networks ability to transmit data more quickly have been parodied in television commercials like the iPhone/AT&T commercials. Such resource ownership and hence availability increases the likelihood that they are more involved in the community. Previous research has shown that the easier the activity the more likely it is to become habitualized (Minton 2003). Because the iPhone makes it so easy to document consumption experiences and social activities, the documentation rituals and collective sharing become even more repetitive for users who own this technological resource.

When at work or doing homework in the evenings many users mentioned that they would be connected to Facebook by having the program running in the background. By having cell phones as resources these super connected Facebook users can always remain in connection with others.

Types of Rituals by Behavioral Sources

Rituals were classified in this study using the behavioral sources from the ritual identification model (see figure 3) to classify the ritual behaviors by type in terms of

source of the behavior or ritual activity. In this online community I found that communal consumption rituals play a major role in consumers' documentation and collective sharing as well as entertainment uses of Facebook. Users both like to look forward to and participate as either an active or passive audience member in these rituals. The sharing of these events helps the user to become more connected and find more social support as a result of these interactions.

Individuals connected with each other for many reasons. Social support suggests that there are many and varied types of connections that are sought because they provide different types of support for the individual. There may be rituals that then are engaged in by the consumer that can be classified more as individual rituals. Consumers may also desire to engage in more communal rituals. Rituals may also involve daily ritual behaviors that frequently occur, or they may be looking forward more towards a life changing experience or celebration involving consumption rituals.

Relationships are more visible in an online community and also involve consumption rituals in celebration of relationship statuses such as anniversary celebrations and birthday or wedding related celebrations such as engagements. All of these occasions also involved documentation rituals as well as displays of social support and collective sharing.

Consumers benefit, as online community members through their connections don't feel so far away or socially isolated when they are involved in other's lives by participating in these online consumption rituals within their online community and with other community members. Many users described how they enjoyed following individuals who were going on a big trip or were celebrating the New Year in a big way

even when passive participants were stuck at home, these participants felt like they were a part of the adventures that they were connecting to through collective sharing rituals and documentation behaviors.

By classifying the rituals by type organizations will have a more in-depth understanding of the types of support that their organizations are perceived as providing well, and where the organization needs to improve their services. Consumption rituals involving rites of passage in the lives of other community members would be great sources of information for market researchers as well as providing marketers information about context specific needs or activity based events that would be important areas for products or service offerings that could enhance these special occasions or experiences.

Some of the major daily rituals involve individual rituals. For example documentation is an individual ritual such as keeping a diary, scrapbooking, photography or other means to memorialize an event or occasion several product and service offerings that cater to this type of activity would do well to advertise or partner with such online communities as Facebook to market these offerings and thus appeal to this important individual behavioral rituals that were identified in this study.

Companies will also be able to better relate to the customer in their advertising as a result of their understanding of the types of ritualized behaviors that are occurring within their online communities. Since many of the consumption rituals are communicated in advance of the event, are planned, in the online social environment, and celebrated during and after the activity, advertisers would also greatly benefit from this information. Online and traditional offline advertising could be used to focus on planned consumption activities that are currently being discussed about in the online community.

Given all of the benefits to research, product strategies, consumer product and service placement strategies, and promotion potential, managers would greatly benefit from a better understanding of the individual rituals, communal rituals, daily ritual behaviors, and consumption rituals that are occurring within their own company's online communities.

Limitations

This research relies on both in-depth interviews and netnographic research methods which have been used in previous studies of this type to help explore behaviors that are occurring in online communities (Luedicke 2006). Qualitative research is useful in generating a richer understanding of these ritual behaviors and in developing these ritual themes (Flick 2006). However since my research was limited to just one community it is likely that there are many more ritualized behaviors that are occurring in other social networks. The focus of this research was on daily rituals applying SRT from sociology together with the ideas from the sociology literature to an online community of consumers who were active in their communities. Applying theories from sociology to the marketing domain has been called for to help researchers to better understand these communities, actions, and their experiences from a broader co-creative perspective (Cova 2006).

Another limitation to this research was the fact that experienced users were asked to engage in introspection and then to focus on their current behaviors. It would be more beneficial to follow new users over the course of their lifetime to see the transitions that they go through from a SRT perspective to see how their ritualized behaviors evolve and change over time. Due to time constraints this was not possible. Instead a select group of

heavy users that engaged in many of the ritualized behaviors were followed and observed over a two month period during the netnography.

Future Research

Many users also expressed that these behaviors were addictive in some way and that they felt some helplessness in controlling their behavioral urges to participate in these daily ritualized practices that they had become involved in. Why is it that users express their attachment to Facebook and their ritualized behaviors in terms of addiction? At what point these behaviors may in fact cause actors to have a real dependence on these behaviors to the neglect of healthy behaviors to self and others possibly resulting in real harm? One student even stated that her mother realizing her dependence on Facebook finally shut down her account and put her newfound time and resources into opening a successful business.

In doing this type of research it may be more useful to look at other online communities that are known for their addictiveness and potential harm. Such communities would tend to have a social stigma or would be avoided by their reputation by outsiders. Researching this type of online community may have more pronounced results and possible application of findings and results from these communities to less harmful communities such as Facebook.

Summary

In closing, aided by a theoretical understanding of SRT, and applying the ritual identification model the types and importance of daily ritual behaviors becomes clear for which rituals are most important for community members at different stages of their community membership in helping them become involved and active members of their

online communities. Not only were rituals identified, but different rituals were more highly ranked during three distinct behavioral stages for community members. These rituals were also classified for each stage based on the sources of the ritual behaviors that were observed during the netnographic phase of the research adding further understanding and triangulating the findings from phase one of the research involving the findings from the in-depth interviews. These to identify, rank, and classify the ritualized practices that I observed in the online community of Facebook. Hopefully these insights will help managers to identify/classify the rituals that are occurring in their online communities and enable them to assess the impact that these rituals have for both building and maintaining community.

Viewing these ritual practices through the lens of SRT helps to provide a clear picture of the differences in community members daily ritual behaviors over time as well as the rituals that are more important during each behavioral stage as the members develop and take control of their community. SRT helps provide researchers and managers the ability to make sense of the complex daily behaviors. The SRT theory is also extended by being applied to a new consumer context. The theory is further enhanced with the development of the ritual identification model which helps to classify the types of ritual behaviors deemed important by the theory into different ritual classifications as shown in Figure 3.

Once managers understand what types of rituals are changing activity and usage within the community they will be better equipped at providing the types of services and products in terms of ritual artifacts, resources, new company produced rituals, and a

better online environment that can help consumers during these different behavioral periods in their lives.

These findings would not have been possible without this interaction and immersion into their online communities. As part of the interviews and netnography I observed them navigating their pages and interacting with others, seeing their behavior, the online interactions, and content being shared. By having the respondent in the community explaining their own reasons as to why they were engaging in these daily behaviors, members' believed that the observations and discussions about their behaviors represented in the study were accurately reflected. They also shared how important these ritual behaviors have become in their lives and how the community involvement is important to them emotionally in connecting them to others and also in recording a documentary of important stages in their lives.

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Appendix 1. Interview Guide Semi-Structured Questions⁹

Introductory Statement: Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview and share your Facebook page with us. The purpose of this interview is to gain a greater understanding about your use of Facebook and why this communication form is important to you. Remember your participation is voluntary and you may quit at any time. We will first take a look at your Facebook page and then I will ask you a few questions about it.

1. How did you become involved with Facebook?
2. Tell me about your Facebook use...
 - Your wall
 - Things you do on Facebook
 - Things you post
 - Time
 - Applications you may use
 - Games you may play
 - Likes and dislikes about Facebook
3. What activities have you discussed or posted about on Facebook, for example weddings, vacations, politics, sports...
 - Do you post pictures of your activities on Facebook
 - What else do you discuss on Facebook
4. What does Facebook mean to you?
 - How do you feel about your Facebook account?
5. How do you present yourself on your Facebook page?
 - Have you changed your privacy settings for different audiences on your Facebook site?
 - Does this reflect who you are?
6. How do you determine who you interact with?
 - Knowledge of individual
 - Face to face interactions or only virtual interactions
 - Distance

Thank you for your time (or other closing comments)

⁹ This interview guide will be modified after a few interviews have been conducted.

Note: Informants may report some basic information about themselves or their family, but this will be kept confidential as only general demographic information will be used. Interviewers will be encouraged to listen and prompt by repeating informant phrases and with general prompts such as “can you tell me more about that” or “please explain”.

Appendix 2. IRB Approval Letter
Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Friday, September 02, 2011 Protocol Expires: 4/18/2012
IRB Application No: BU117
Proposal Title: Online Community Rituals

Reviewed and Exempt
Processed as: **Modification**

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) **Approved**

Principal
Investigator(s):

Darrell Bartholomew
218 Hanner
Stillwater, OK 74078

Marlys Mason
418A Business
Stillwater, OK 74078

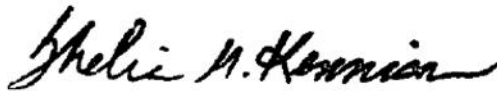
The requested modification to this IRB protocol has been approved. Please note that the original expiration date of the protocol has not changed. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. All approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

The reviewer(s) had these comments:

The modification request to change the title of the research and to amend the research procedures is approved.

Signature :



Shelia Kennison, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Friday, September 02, 2011
Date

Appendix 3. Informed Consent Script - Facebook Interview

Hello. We are currently conducting research of Facebook users. Your participation will help us in understanding how people use Facebook. This interview will focus on your involvement and activities on Facebook. Please help us understand both what you do on Facebook and what meaning these activities have for you. It should take about 15 to 30 minutes to complete the interview. There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. This research is being conducted by Darrell Bartholomew, the principle investigator.

We are asking for your participation in this research. *Your participation is voluntary.* You may terminate your participation at any time.

Participation in this research is anonymous. We will not record your name or any other identifying information during the interview. This interview will be summarized and written as a paper that will help to guide our research on Facebook usage behaviors and their meanings. The interview reports will be stored by Mr. Bartholomew in Spears #218. The data will be held until destroyed. There is no personal identifying information attached to the data. It is not possible to connect the data with any specific person. The data will only be reported in the aggregate (that is, in terms of means, variances, etc.). There is no risk that confidentiality will be compromised.

If you have questions about this research please contact Mr. Bartholomew, the principle investigator, Oklahoma State University, Hanner 218, Stillwater, OK 7407, or at darrell.bartholomew@okstate.edu. You may also contact Dr. Marlys Mason, Oklahoma State University, 418a Spears, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405)744-5109 or m.mason@okstate.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Participant's signature

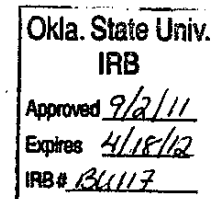
Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Researcher's signature

Date

Thank you for your participation.



Appendix 4. Informed Consent Script - Facebook Netnography Observation/Interview

Hello, I am conducting a follow-up study to my first Facebook study. Your participation in this study will help me to learn by observation how you use Facebook. To participate I have created a Facebook account for this research and will need your permission to become a friend of yours using this temporary account. I will be observing your Facebook use once a week for a month to document your behaviors. I will then be scheduling a time where we can visit to go over these observations and discuss them more in-depth with you for an hour interview in Spears 317. After the interview you will be compensated \$20 for your time and the temporary Facebook account will be deleted.

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. This research is being conducted by Darrell Bartholomew, the principle investigator.

Since you expressed an interest in this research I am asking for your participation in this follow-up study. *Your participation is voluntary.* You may terminate your participation at any time. *Participation in this research is anonymous.* Data from the screen recordings used during weekly observations as part of this study will only be used for research purposes or to demonstrate the research processes and will be deleted after the data has been analyzed. Screen recordings may be used to show the process of collecting the data when reported, but any personal information/participants will be blurred.

This interview will be summarized and written as a paper that will help to guide our research on Facebook usage behaviors and their meanings. I am not interested in your personal information, but rather in the daily behaviors that you are involved in on your Facebook page. The data collected from this study will be stored by Mr. Bartholomew in Spears #218. The data will be held until destroyed. There is no personal identifying information attached to the data that will be reported, so it is not possible to connect the data with any specific person.

If you have questions about this research please contact Mr. Bartholomew, the principle investigator, Oklahoma State University, Hanner 218, Stillwater, OK 7407, or at darrell.bartholomew@okstate.edu. You may also contact Dr. Marlys Mason, Oklahoma State University, 418a Spears, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405)744-5109 or m.mason@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Participants signature

Thank you for your participation.

Date



Appendix 5. Diary Template

Diary instructions:

- Diary format: Save the original diary file as a template for writing your diary each of the four days. For each days file, save the file as Day___ First name Last name (example: Day3JohnDoe).
 - a. Before you write in your diary, open up your Facebook page and look over the past days activities.
 - b. Use the following template to help you summarize what you did that day on Facebook and what it meant to you.
 - Time: For ten minutes each day you will write about your Facebook experience for that day.
 - a. Be sure and write for the full ten minutes total.
 - b. Set a timer to help you.
 - Writing Instructions: You can use as much space as you want below each question to write.
 - a. Be as detailed as possible – don't worry about spelling or punctuation, just write as much as possible about your Facebook use that day.
- Your participation is voluntary. Thank you for participating in this study.

My Daily Facebook Diary

1. Today how long were you connected to Facebook?
 - a. In total how much time do you think you spent on Facebook.

2. Here is what I did today on Facebook:

3. Was there anything you liked or disliked today on Facebook?

4. Describe your interactions today that were most meaningful:

5. Any other thoughts about what went on today on Facebook?

Appendix 6. Facebook Netnography Coding Form

1. What important things were shared by the user this week? (Salience)
 2. Did the user change their profile picture (Salience)
 - Yes (1)
 - No (2)
- If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To What did the new profile photo consist...
3. What did the new profile photo consist of?
 4. Number of friends in the network (Network Expansion/Salience).
 - Same (1)
 - More (2)
 - Fewer (3)
 5. What relationships did they connect with this week? (Communitas)
 6. What types of posts garnered the most reciprocity from the user? (Shared Moral Responsibility/Social Support).
 7. What posts did the user receive the most attention from? (Shared Moral Responsibility/Social Support)
- If What posts did the user rec... Is Not Empty, Then Skip To Click to write the question text
8. Who was providing the attention?
 - Friends (1)
 - Family (2)
 - Significant Other (3)
 - Other (4) _____
 9. How many posts were contributed by the user this week? (Repetition)
 10. What times during the day did the user post/respond? (Repetition)
 11. Was daily life documented this week by the user? (Documentation Ritual Theme)
 - Yes (1)
 - No (2)
- If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To Describe what was documented:
12. Describe what was documented:
 13. Were there pictures posted by the user during the week? (Photography Ritual Theme)
 - Yes (1)
 - No (2)
- If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To Write a brief description of the phot...

Appendix 6. Facebook Netnography Coding Form cont.

14. Write a brief description of the photos that were shared:
15. Now describe the rituals observed during this week in the following ritual behavior categories: 1. Cosmological/Religious rituals 2. Cultural Values/Rites of Passage rituals 3. Consumption Rituals 4. Group Learning/Communitas rituals 5. Dating/Mating relationship rituals 6. Individual rituals
16. Describe any cosmological/religious rituals that were shared this week. This could include sharing of religious texts, sermons, spiritual experiences etc.
17. Describe any rituals involving cultural values/rite experiences or life rites of passage (if any) that were shared this week?
18. Describe Daily rituals involving communitas/group learning behavior observed during this week (if any). Groups include civic/school/religious group rituals, small group rituals, and Family rituals:
19. Describe any consumption rituals (if any) that were observed this week. These rituals involve exchange of goods or services and usually excessive consumption:
20. Describe any dating/mating relationship rituals that were observed this week. These rituals involve boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, dating behavior, relationship seeking, displays of affection.
21. Describe any personal rituals (if any) that were observed this week. These rituals involve grooming, household chores or work duties or diary entries:
22. What was the overall mood this week for the person that you observed?
23. New observations or general thoughts/insights from this observation:

Appendix 7. Definitions

Brand Community: “a collective of consumers organized around one particular brand, which is sustained through repeated online and/or offline social interactions and communications among its members who possess a consciousness of kind, feel moral responsibility toward one another, and embrace and propagate the collective’s rituals and traditions (Dholakia and Algesheimer 2010, p. 9).

Rituals: are constructed of multiple behaviors that have expressive and symbolic qualities. These behaviors are personally meaningful, are typically a plural experience, and occur in a fixed episodic sequence that tends to be repeated over time (Rook 1985).

Ritual Transitions: Ritual transitions are events/celebrations that mark a change in ones life in terms of role or status that can occur as an individual or part of a group (Stanfield Tetreault 1990).

Ritual artifacts: non-human resources that accompany or are consumed in a ritual setting These artifacts may be represented by the clothing, consumer products or services that are part of the ritual (Rook 1985).

Ritual Scripts: the structure or framework (cognitive) for individual or group behaviors, action repertoires, situations, events, object use, and sequences of actions. These scripts may be codified or implied (Rook 1985; Knottnerus 2010).

Ritualization: activities involving rituals performed as part of routinized interaction and social behaviors that occur in every-day life (Knottnerus 1997).

Ritualized symbolic practices (RSPs): refer to standardized social practices of the group that are regularly engage in, and are action repertoires that are schema driven. Salience, repetitiveness, homologousness, and resources are factors that determine the degree that RSPs are important to group members (Knottnerus 2007).

Communitas: a shared sense of community emerging from a shared ritual experience (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989; Celsi et al. 1993).

Consciousness of Kind: “the intrinsic connection that members feel toward one another and the collective sense of difference from others not in the brand community” (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001, p. 413).

Shared Moral Responsibility: is a “felt sense of duty or obligation to the brand community as a whole, and to its individual members” (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001, p. 413).

Social Support: an individual's desire to establish and maintain meaningful relationship connections. (Henderson 1977)

Online Community: a group of two or more individuals linked in cyberspace through shared ritual experiences/performances involving social interactions and communications activities that both build/sustain personal relationships among its members. (based on Rheingold 1993; Belk et al. 1989; and Dholakia and Algesheimer 2010).

VITA

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Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: ONLINE COMMUNITY RITUALS

Major Field: Business Administration

Biographical:

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Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this research is to investigate online community rituals and the role that ritual experiences play in building and sustaining online communities. Specifically I explore: (1) What are the meaningful rituals occurring in these online communities? and (2) Which ritualized practices are most important in developing ongoing community affiliation for community members? I draw on structural ritualization theory (Knottnerus 1997) to study the ritualization of online interactions and experiences.

Qualitative methods are used to explore the effects of ritual experiences of consumers involved in Facebook. Facebook participants were chosen given the robustness of the community. Similar to past community research, both in-depth interviews and netnographic methods were used (Luedicke 2006; Muñiz and Schau 2005).

Findings and Conclusions: These ritual themes help to identify ritual practices that are most important for building a sense of community among members and increasing sustained community interactions at these different stages. SRT is extended in this research by applying this theory of daily rituals to the marketing domain and a new consumer context. The theory's rankings are given further emphasis in the ritual identification model by adding the sources of the behavioral rituals (cosmological, communal, consumption, individual, and relationships) to help classify the types of rituals being ranked and identified by SRT.

Community members were found to have formed strong habits by following these ritual scripts and continuing their engagement in daily ritualized behavior. Ritual themes were identified in both the coding of in-depth interviews and netnographic analysis of Facebook pages (Flick 2006). In addition to the ritualized elements of SRT, three behavioral stages of an online community were identified. These phases together with ritual themes that appear most prevalent in each stage are presented. Specifically, the ritual themes of freedom from constraints, network expansion, collective sharing, social support, utilitarian, entertainment, network control, and reflexive identity were found to be the most important rituals according to rank that are occurring during three distinct stages (young cliques, social debuts, regulative linkers) in the Facebook community.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Marlys J. Mason
