*IxD Studio [DECO2010]*
*Hanley Weng*
*309248434*

# SOCIAL NETWORK RESEARCH

*part of a use-centred design project*

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# BRIEF

To some degree, we have always been defined, by our social networks (SNs), our ties with others that are forged by various relationships (friendships, beliefs, interests, exchanges). Awareness of these networks have risen exponentially over the past decade with the introduction of online social networks (OnSNs), such as Facebook, linkedIn, mySpace. These networks provide various services to facilitate the building and maintenance of many different types of relationships. OnSNs are not simply a fad, they reside in a constantly changing environment. Just three years ago, Hi5 (4.5million users) and MySpace (11.3m) were big names in this arena, with Facebook only as a startup of 2.6m users (Hsu, M., 2007). Facebook has since grown tremendously (Check out "Facebook Timeline", website-monitoring, 2010) to over 500 million users (if it was a country it would be ranked 3rd in population) (Facebook Press Room, 2010), and is part of the three largest social-media-related websites along with youtube and wikipedia (Nielsen, 2009).

OnSNs now take up more than 10% of internet time, rising to an average of 5.5 hrs per netizen (Nielsen, 2009). Due to it's 'online' and technological nature, OnSNs are predominantly taken up by the younger to middle-age demographics with technological access, and as such, the inverse of these segments (low-income, senior, etc.) are often neglected. The exponential increase of OnSNs have left major portions of offline networks neglected, and raised concerns about the sheer quantity of segregated services and issues such as privacy, procrastination, data freedom. These have prompted questions on various peoples abilities to use, access and control SNs, questions and issues which this study will approach.

# DEMOGRAPHICS

*Demographics of the 11 active participants.*

| DEMOGRAPHICS | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Age-Group** | *Teens* | | | | | *20s* | | | *30-44* | *45-54* | *55-64* |
| **Alias** | **Ninja** | **Jane** | **Joey** | **Jack** | **Quay** | **Oran** | **Aero** | **Jam** | **Rita** | **Zion** | **Greg** |
| **Gender** | F | F | M | M | F | F | M | M | F | M | M |
| **Net Usage (hrs/day)*** | 4 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 0.5 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| **Behaviour** | < Extrovert > | < Extrovert > | > Introvert < | \| Middle \| | \| Middle \| | < Extrovert > | > Introvert < | < Extrovert > | \| Middle \| | < Extrovert > | \| Middle \| |
| **Comp Literacy**** | High | High | Low | Medium | High | Medium | High | Medium | Low | Low | Medium |
| | * Net Usage is the median usage, measured in hrs per day. | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ** Computer Literacy is judged by usage factors, awareness of technology, | | | | | | | | | | |

# RESEARCH: METHOD





Jack }
Quay }
Jam }

{ Ninja
{ Jane
{ Joey
{ Oran
{ Aero
{ Rita
{ Zion
{ Greg

*Method:*

*Interviews were mainly used to acquire information. Starting off with closed questions which progressed to open ones. This form of inquiry was vocally recorded so the interviewer could take simple notes (as certain category of questions were determined by the participant's answers) whilst observing the participants in the environment. Participants were given consent forms to sign, access to the internet via a computer or laptop, which were observed along with their mobile-use.*

*Due to some settings having multiple people, interviews sometimes became mini-focus-groups where more open-questions were elaborated upon.*

*Extra information was also acquired via online research, with specific focus on large datasets.*

# RESEARCH: CONTENT

Content:

   The overall level of Awareness, Control and Access were assessed via these questions. The inquiries began by an understanding of basic habits and perceptions of social networks. This lead on to questions about Lifestyle (which were used to establish interests, hobbies, which acted as stimuli to later questions on Behaviour and usage). Afterwards, the level of usage of technology, internet, and social networks was judged along with the frequency and perceptions of different types of social networks. Then came prods on the levels of procrastination, 'read', and 'write' levels, and the online and offline behaviour of the personality.

   The state of a person's various social networks were also judged by their online and offline contact with Friends (close, far, historic), family, education, business, interests, and events. The technological prowess of the participant was also judged, along with potential concerns (privacy/authorship/authentication issues, etc.). A person's preferred form and rate of communication was also assessed via probes on the opinions and occurrences of text-based (sms), vocal (phone, voip), video (webcam) and real-life contact.

   Questions were structured in a hierarchal manner as opposed to linear, this allowed for the buildup of facilitating variables (such as 'interests'), whilst actively culling irrelevant questions (e.g. less online network questions for people who don't use them), and allowed the exploration of more relevant points in a confined time-period. Inquiries ended towards open questions such as ideal networks and contacts.   [Link to Interview Sheet: http://img.skitch.com/20100909-1y5kc8tgar6rjn4bhi3pkq33hq.jpg]

# RESEARCH: FILTERING
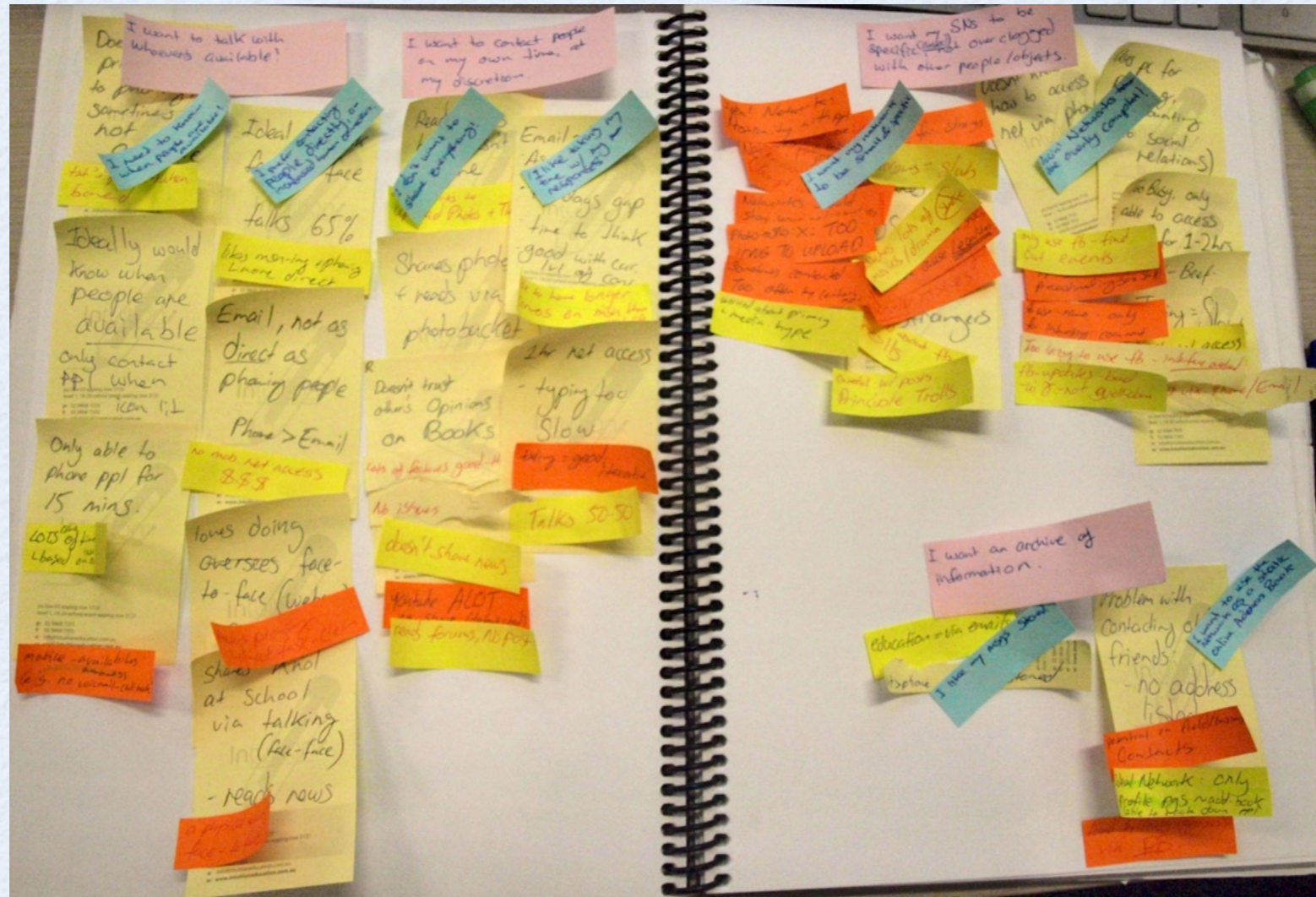


*Filtering:*

• *An overall glimpse of the environment of this survey was glimpsed from various data sources (see slide; "Extra").*

• *Vocal Recordings from the interview were transcribed to written notes.*

• *Notes were grouped together, alla an Affinity Diagram*

• *Issues and Personas were generated through this process of Groupings*

*Note: (As I ran out of notes, Yellows+Orange made up the first level. Blue the Next. Lastly Pink.)*

*[ Link to Larger Version of Image:* http://img.skitch.com/20100909-1y5kc8tgar6rjn4bhi3pkq33hq.jpg *]*

# FINDINGS

*The affinity diagram produced the following generic issues:*

*• (Blue) Some people like messages archived. Some want their social network to act as a directory. There are strong beliefs that networks should be small and specific (as stated by Paul Saffo; "The value of a social network is defined not only by who's on it, but by who's excluded."). There are also people who specifically want to contact people on their own time, or inversely, immediately. Knowing when people are available arose as an issue. And people can find social networks overly complex (especially the unconsidered low-computer-literacy demographics), and especially when people don't want to share everything.*

*• (Pink) In essence, there are two distinct roles that arose; wanting to be aware of others and to immediately commune with whoever's available, as well as responding asynchronously. Digital information should also be archivable and accessible, and social networks should be controllably closed off.*

*Other notable points that arose during the research included the facts that; very few people actually used a browser for it's plugins. Most of the higher, computer-literate persons (mainly the younger generations), had no problems with authorship, authentication, privacy, or like issues, which seemed to have been propagated by the media and swayed the less-literate. The less computer-literate generations are often neglected in modern-day's fully featured Online SNs.*

# MELISSA PARKER

**Student**

   After studying at Brown Institute of Higher Education, I have moved to Newtown to study Commerce at the University of Sydney. I also have a part time job at Sydney Centre as a Data Entry Assistant.

**Personal Details**

   I am 20 years old, and visit my family in Newcastle on the weekends. Most of my friends are within the Sydney region so I'm never too far away from them, and we usually go out to Karaoke, Movies or Dinner at least once a week. In my spare time I love to watch movies and dramas.
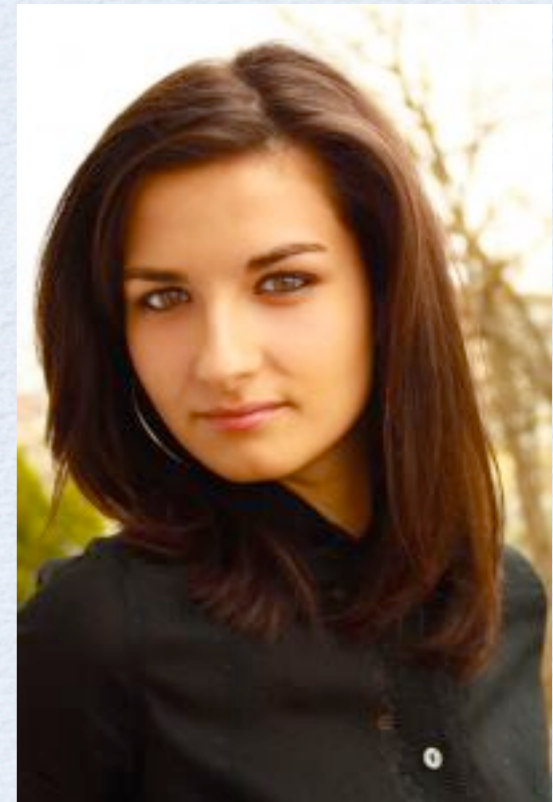
Photo from sxc.com
by geloo

**Day-To-Day**

   When I'm not out at uni or with friends I usually spend around 4 hours a day in total online, though this is often stretched over the entire day as I balance work and homework. I'm usually chatting with my friends on MSN or Facebook and browsing Youtube and Celebrity Forums.

**Common Activities**
- Homework
- Data Entry
- Forum Browsing
- Synchronous Online Chatting
- Online Video Streaming

# MR. PING

**Accountant**

I've been doing Accounting for the Australian Government for the past 15 years. It's not particularly interesting, but it supports my little grand-daughter, so I'm happy.

**Personal Details**

Hello, My name is Mr. Ping! I moved to Australia from Hong Kong 18 years ago. I'm a single parent, and just celebrated my 54th birthday with my little 'Míngxīng' (Star). On the train home from work I love to read the news or whatever books I have on me.

**Day-To-Day**

After a day of work, I usually come home and catch up on some news, especially the financial sections. I also like to see how my shares are doing. Since most of my relations and friends are overseas, I usually spend a good hour or so on the phone or webcam with the ones I have contact with. However, I love conversing via email because I can always take my time with my response.

**Common Activities**

- Accounting Job
- Reading the News
- Checking/Editing Shares
- Conversing with friends.
- Checking emails.

# EVALUATION

The **Research Method** utilised (interviews), was significantly beneficial in understanding the environment of this study, an understanding that grew exponentially throughout the eleven participants as methods were honed.

The sheer **Content** that was covered allowed for a very broad exploration of the environment, however, this also lead to long interviews, which had to be culled. The hierarchal nature of this content, however, facilitated in weeding out non-relevant questions at the expense of consistency. It was also discovered the perfect environments were very hard to obtain across all participants, especially due to geographical constrains and timetabling issues, as such, mini-focus-groups occasionally sprouted forth from inquiries, which were extremely beneficial in terms of exploration, but, again, at the expense of consistency.

It was also discovered whilst **Filtering** the information that the sheer amount of data wasn't given enough time too properly be handled, and only the most relevant (perceived) data was listed as the basis of the affinity diagram. There was also the issue that not all relating data could be fit onto a single point (such as a user's net usage).

The research was also augmented by a previous study of general **External Data**, such as demographical statistics and media-propagated issues. These were great in forming a basic knowledge of the environment (backed by thousands of participants) that resided throughout the interviews and affinity, but was not able to address finer points such as the behavioural usage of different users.

# EXTRA

*• Due to privacy concerns, please contact me at: hwen6932@uni.sydney.edu.au if you wish for rawer data sets than the ones presented (e.g. transcripts, affinity diagram, consent forms, notes, etc.)*

References:
• Hsu, M. (2007) < http://www.rapleaf.com/business/press_release/open_social >, Statistics on Google's OpenSocial Platform End Users and Facebook Users, Rap-Leaf
• website-monitoring (2010), < http://www.website-monitoring.com/blog/2010/03/17/facebook-facts-and-figures-history-statistics/ >, Facebook Facts & Figures (history & statistics), website-monitoring
• Facebook Press Room (2010), < http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics >, Press Room, Facebook
• Nielsen (2009), < http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/global/social-networking-new-global-footprint/ >, Social Networking's New Global Footprint, Niesen Wire
• Stock Photos; Girl from < sxc.com > by geloo, guy from sxc.com by mforman.

Extra Links:
+ Great Visual Comparison of the State of Social Networks
    • Socialnomics09, Social Media Revolution, < http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIFYPQjYhv8 > , Youtube
    • Socialnomics09, Social Media Revolution, < http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFZ0z5Fm-Ng >, Youtube
http://heidiallen.id.au/australian-facebook-stats-2010/
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http://www.slideshare.net/CMSummit/ms-internet-trends060710final
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http://mashable.com/2010/03/19/global-social-media-usage/
http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/global/led-by-facebook-twitter-global-time-spent-on-social-media-sites-up-82-year-over-year/
http://mashable.com/2010/08/02/stats-time-spent-online/
http://www.internetnews.com/webcontent/article.php/3896541/Social-Networking-Activity-Soars-Nielsen.htm