

**What are the social benefits of digital communication
and sharing in Web 2.0?**

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A research paper submitted to the University of Dublin, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science Interactive Digital Media

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Declaration

I declare that the work described in this research paper is, except where otherwise stated, entirely my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

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Summary

The growth of the Internet over the last ten years has yielded a huge change in the way we communicate and share our lives with others. This change is due to the creation of Web 2.0, a term used to describe the uprising of the social media platforms that have created virtual communities where the once passive viewers of Web content are now given the tools to be active contributors. With the establishment of social media and its newfound ability to spread information quickly to the masses, it has evolved into a valuable vehicle for interacting with others in order to construct and foster social connections that would otherwise be difficult.

This big change has caused problems for some users that have subsequently created Web 2.0 into a social stigma often focused on in today's media. This research aims to demolish this stigma by analyzing Web 2.0 from both positive and negative perspectives, with an overall focus on understanding its beneficial qualities and their importance and providing suggestions on how to maximize these benefits.

In light of this research, this paper concludes that Web 2.0's qualities create contradicting effects on the social health of its users is due to their differing personalities and uses of the platform. However, the overall benefits achieved from being able to connect with others on social media is benefitting our inherent need for human connection on a larger scale than ever before, thus maintaining an overall positivity that promotes the popularity and survival of social media.

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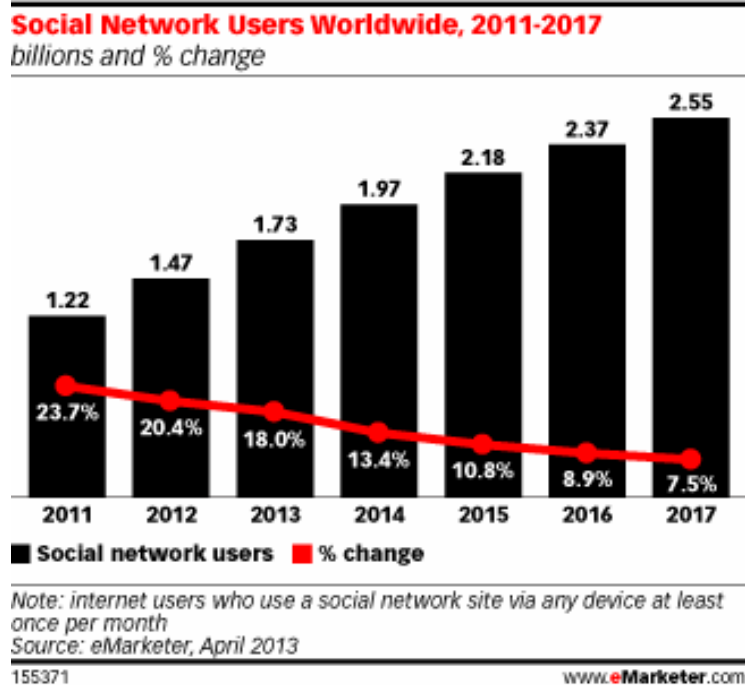
Chapter 1. Introduction.

1.1 Introduction and Motivation

In the last few years the terms ‘Web 2.0’ and ‘Social Media’ have emerged as definitions for the second-generation web based services and communities that emphasize online collaboration, networking and user created content (Eikelman et al. 293). The monumental growth of Web 2.0 since its creation has caused quite a few qualms amongst its users and contributors. For example, when the term “social media” is typed into the search bar of the ever-popular human-interest news blog *The Huffington Post*, the following titles appear:

- “Eating Disorders: How Social Media Helps Spread Anorexia and Bulimia”
- “More Youngsters Seeking Counseling for Mental Health Problems and Depression”
- “The Emerging Problem of Cyber-Bullying”
- “Could Over-Sharing on Facebook Ruin Modern Relationships?”
- “Social Media is Destroying Our Ability To Be Social”
- “Data Sharing: A New Kind of Theft?”
- “Does Social Media Kill?”
- “5 Reasons Social Media is Dangerous”

The titles of these articles reflect an analysis on only a few of the increasing social problems that have arisen from the emergence of Web 2.0. Ironically, as mentioned earlier, these headlines are found on *The Huffington Post* – one of the many news blogs that surfaced during the arrival of Web 2.0. The fact that the website is not only a news site but also a blog allows users to convey and discuss their thoughts and stories via comments as feedback to the articles presented. This provides the Huffington Post with information to keep its users interested and engaged, while still allowing for the previously non-contributing readers to express themselves in a way that news via a television or a newspaper have never been able to allow them to. This new way of interacting within a digital economy has revolutionized mass communication and allowed for a broader spectrum of knowledge to reach more and more people across the globe (Brooks 2011).



(Figure 1 - source: www.eMarketer.com April 2013)

In 2007, the *Strategy Analysis Report* estimated that social media users would exceed 1 Billion by 2012 (Barton, p.2). Their hypothesis was correct; according to a new *eMarketer* report, the number of social network users around the world rose from 1.47 billion in 2012 to 1.73 billion in 2013, an 18% increase (see Figure 1) meaning that in 2013, nearly one in four people worldwide are users. The same report estimates that by 2017, the global social network audience will total 2.55 billion (2013). Figure 1 above demonstrates that as social network users increase, the percentage of change between the years decreases. This is because as growth continues, the number of people left in the world capable of actually being able to interact with social media decreases. According to the growth rate depicted in this graph, one day the world could virtually have every single able-bodied person with an Internet connection as a social media user.

As demonstrated by *The Huffington Post* article titles, the benefits of engaging with Web 2.0 are not often focused on in today's media. Being an active user and lover of social media

myself, this new form of communication is something I cherish - yet from all of the negative things I hear and read about it, I have often pondered how it affects me on a daily basis. All of the negativity surrounding it makes me feel that as an active user my lifestyle must be somewhat unhealthy, and that the days of pre-Web 2.0 are reason for nostalgia. Upon deeper thought, I rationalized that the popularity of this phenomenon must mean that Web 2.0 has some positive and healthy social attributes to offer its users and contributors.

The entire uprising of social media and Web 2.0 has been aggrandized by its ability to provide users with a virtual vehicle for being social. The term social in general refers to the ability to communicate, share, and relate to society and its associated groups (Turner 93). The terms communication and sharing go hand in hand, for in order to communicate, a thought, idea, emotion, expression or other form of information must be shared. Communication in all of its forms has long been considered a key to happiness, as it has the capability to bring us together, allow us to express ourselves, inform us of opportunities or threats, and enable us to rationally discuss coordinated activities (Luxton et al. 2012). The rise of Web 2.0 gives us the means to engage in all of these activities faster, with more people, and over greater distances of time and geography (Bray 2013).

This realization, along with my own involvement and love for Web 2.0 and social media, is what sparked my motivation to research the question – what are the social benefits of digital communication and sharing in Web 2.0?

1.2 Aims and Actions Taken

The main aims for this research can be split into two categories: identifying benefits, and providing suggestions on how to maximize those benefits.

Identifying Benefits

The first task is to find quality information on Web 2.0, from the way it first began to the way it currently operates. Within this research, the goal is to find demographics and information on groups and individuals who have achieved some form of social success from being active

contributors to Web 2.0. The statistics found in this information will be analyzed in order to discuss why the qualities social media possesses are important in fostering our psychological need to communicate and share information with one another.

Suggestions to Maximize Benefits

From the findings and analysis on the benefits of Web 2.0, the newfound information will be used to briefly suggest and postulate how the current users of social media can operate in order to minimize detriment and maximize benefits in terms of conducting themselves in a digital social habitat. In order to provide this suggestion, the social networking website Facebook as an example. The potential detriments and benefits for users will be discussed in order to illustrate how to use the website in a way to promote the health, happiness and positivity for consumers of this social media platform.

1.3 Brief Reader's Guide

Chapter 1: Provides an introduction to this research. Background information is given as to why and how I chose my research question. The aims and actions taken in order to achieve desired results are deliberated.

Chapter 2: This chapter is a literary review that discusses the facts, figures, and statistics that are found during the initial steps of research. Focus is taken on three different aspects; first, the reader is presented a brief history of Web 2.0 and social media. Information is given on how it came about and why it survived during the downfall of 'dot com' companies. Next, data about the negatives and social detriments of Web 2.0 and social media is succinctly presented in order to give the reader a well-rounded view of the material. Finally, facts and statistics about the benefits of Web 2.0 and social media are discussed and separated into two categories: social and socioeconomic development.

Chapter 3: In this chapter the research findings are analyzed by answering the question: why is this research important? The personal benefits of being able to express yourself socially over a digital medium are discussed, followed by the benefits we can generate from creating and maintaining relationships online, and lastly the benefits we receive by enhancing the socioeconomic aspects of life through social media.

Chapter 4: In this chapter, the research is concluded by suggesting and postulating how the current users of social media can operate in order to minimize detriment and maximize benefits in terms of conducting themselves in a digital social habitat. In order to provide this suggestion, the social networking website Facebook is used as an example. The potential detriments and benefits for users is discussed in order to illustrate how to use the website in a way to promote the health, happiness and positivity for consumers of this social media platform. This demonstration is split into four sections: identifying your needs, learning the website, educating yourself, and knowing your comfort zone.

Chapter 5: Provides chapter conclusions, research conclusions, and suggestions for future work that could potentially be done within this research topic.

Chapter 2. Literary Review.

This chapter focuses on presenting and educating the reader with information that has previously been reported on this topic. Facts, figures, and statistics found during the initial steps of research are brought together on three different aspects of this topic. First, a brief history of Web 2.0 and social media is delivered. Information is given on how it came about and how it has managed to survive and prosper since its implementation. Next, data about the social detriments of Web 2.0 and social media is succinctly presented in order to give the reader a well-rounded view of the discussion. Finally, facts and statistics about the social benefits of Web 2.0 and social media are discussed. The spread of news and information, interpersonal benefits, health benefits, educational benefits and socioeconomic benefits are considered.

2.1 A Brief History of Web 2.0

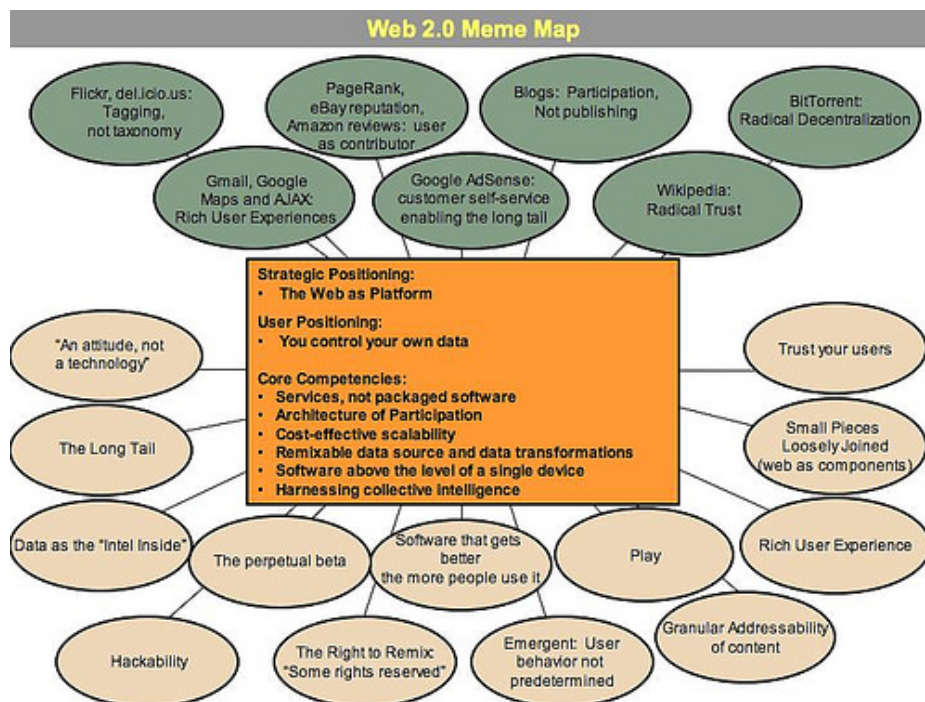
To have studied communication for the past 25 years is to have witnessed an explosion of new communication phenomena enabled by the rapid development of increasingly sophisticated information and communication technologies. (Harrison et al. 156)

Since the creation of ‘The ARPANET’ in 1969, the assembly of the Internet subsequently continued to rise through the 1980s all the way to the debut of the World Wide Web in 1990. These technological innovations and their associated software and hardware embellishments have had the combined effect of transforming the computer into a revolutionary new medium for interpersonal, group and mass communication and introducing users to a dazzling array of new communicative capabilities (Harrison et al. 156).

The bursting of the ‘dot com’ bubble in the fall of 2001 marked a turning point for the web. Many people concluded that the web was overhyped, but on the contrary it was more important than ever. Far from having ‘crashed’, the exciting new applications and sites popping up with surprising regularity emphasized that the web was far from dead, and all of them seemed to have similar attributes in common (O’Reilly 1). This led to the development of the term Web 2.0 to

emphasize the era when people came to realize that it is not the software that enables the web that matters so much as the services that are delivered over the web. (O'Reilly 2)

The services Web 2.0 provides do not have a hard boundary, but rather, a core commonality. Web 2.0 can be visualized as a set of principles and practices that tie together a system of sites that demonstrate some of these principles at a varying distance from that core (O'Reilly 1). Figure 2 (below) demonstrates the system of Web 2.0:



(Figure 2 – source: <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> Sept 2005)

Though there is a big divide between experts as to what the definition of Web 2.0 actually is, there are some general changes between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 that have been agreed on as shown in Figure 3 (below).

Web 1.0		Web 2.0
DoubleClick	→	Google AdSense
Ofoto	→	Flickr
Akamai	→	BitTorrent
mp3.com	→	Napster
Britannica Online	→	Wikipedia
personal websites	→	blogging
evite	→	upcoming.org and EVDB
domain name speculation	→	search engine optimization
page views	→	cost per click
screen scraping	→	web services
publishing	→	participation
content management systems	→	wikis
directories (taxonomy)	→	tagging ("folksonomy")
stickiness	→	syndication

(Figure 3 – source: <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> Sept 2005)

Web 1.0 was the era when people believed that software companies were the contender for the computer industry crown; Web 2.0 is the era when people are recognizing that leadership in the computer industry has passed from these traditional software companies to new kinds of Internet service companies like Google that are giving more to their users (O'Reilly 1). Google is not a server; though it is delivered by a massive collection of Internet servers, Google materializes in the space between browser, search engine, and destination content server as an enabler or middleman between the user and his or her online experience (O'Reilly 2).

Other companies currently thriving within Web 2.0 have created similar concepts where the user is allowed to create his or her own experience. Within this experience is the sharing of knowledge, ideas, digital creations and personal information with other users in system via certain websites that are now classified as 'social media platforms' (O'Reilly 3). Web 2.0 and social media go hand-in-hand, as social media websites are a vital part of Web 2.0 and a huge contributor to the success of its digital sharing economy.

2.2 Social Media and Negativity

As briefly mentioned earlier, along with the creation of Web 2.0 and social media comes a long, justified list of negativity surrounding its growth. Though the goal of this paper is not to analyze this negativity, in order to discuss a well-rounded view of Web 2.0 and its benefits, it is vital to research and understand how it can potentially be detrimental also. In this section I will disclose information on the major detriments of Web 2.0, with an emphasis on the potential spread of false information, the problems it can cause the human condition, and privacy issues.

2.2.1 The Spread of False Information

Web 2.0 and social media allow for people from all over the world to communicate quickly, and to the masses. Though any form of communication can transfer false information, social media makes it faster and easier than ever. According to the *Social Media Examiner's* article "How Social Media Helps Journalists Break News," 49.1% of people have heard false news via social media (2011). A prime example of false news spreading through social media occurred Sep. 5, 2012, when false rumors of fires, shootouts, and caravans of gunmen in a Mexico City suburb spread via Twitter and Facebook. The news caused panic, flooding the local police department with over 3,000 phone calls and temporarily closing local schools (Brooks 2012). In a separate event, a man named Shashank Tripathi, tweeting as @ComfortablySmug, spread false information in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy by posting on Twitter that the New York Stock Exchange was flooding and electricity in Manhattan will temporarily be shut off. The false information he reported was picked up by national American news outlets and broadcasted live to people around the country. (Brooks 2012)

News is not the only form of false information spread by social media. According to the *National Research Corporation*, one in five Americans use social media for health care information (2011). A study conducted by the *American Journal of Public Health* found that the health information found online may be a hazard to vulnerable people through the formation false information and influence of 'extreme communities'—online groups that promote and provide support for beliefs and behaviors normally unacceptable by the social mainstream such as

anorexia, suicide, and deliberate amputation (Luxton et al. 195). For example a North Carolina blogger was criminally charged with practicing dietetics or nutrition without a license for offering potentially dangerous nutritional advice about the 'Paleo' diet while posing as an expert (Garber 2012).

The massively popular website Wikipedia is another Web 2.0 development that harbors the spread of false information. Though not a social media platform, the website interactively allows users to create and edit digital encyclopedia pages to present updated information to other users. Though the pages are monitored by Wikipedia staff, the website is not considered reliable and is not well advised for academics because the amount of inaccurate information it contains (Marino 2012).

2.2.2 Social Media and the Human Condition

One of the biggest criticisms of social media is that it causes users to spend less time interacting face to face. A study at the USC Annenberg School found that the percentage of people reporting less face to face time with family in their homes rose from 8% 34% between 2000 and 2011. 32% of those surveyed claimed to have used social media or texting during meals instead of interacting with family or friends. 10% of people younger than 25 years old respond to social media and text messages during sex (2012). This increase in the lack of interpersonal connections is causing social networking users to become prone to social isolation. Social networking can exacerbate feelings of disconnect (especially for youth with disabilities), and put children at higher risk for depression, loneliness, low self-esteem, and eating disorders (Torevell 2012).

However, social networking has not just been linked to interpersonal disconnect through isolation, but also through conflict. According to *Pew Internet Report*, 15% of adult social network users had an experience on a social networking site that caused a friendship to end, 12% of adult users had an experience online that resulted in a face to face argument, and 3% of adults reported a physical confrontation as the result of an experience on a social networking site (Rainie et al. 2012). Social networking sites also cause conflict in terms of facilitating cyber-bullying. 49.5% of students surveyed reported being the victims of cyber-bullying and 33.7% reported

committing bullying behavior online (Mishna et. al. 362). According to a 2012 *Consumer Reports* survey, 800,000 American minors were harassed or cyber-bullied on Facebook. However, minors are not the only ones affected; adults can also be victims of cyber-bullying from social, familial, or workplace aggression being displayed on social media sites (Anderson 26).

The use of social networking sites is also correlated with personality and brain disorders. Pathological Internet Use (caused or exacerbated by social networking use) is associated with feelings of loneliness, depression, anxiety and general distress (Wolfling et al. 5). This includes social anxiety disorders, a need for instant gratification, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, self-centered personalities, and addictive behaviors (Torevell 2012). A 2008 UCLA study revealed web users had fundamentally altered prefrontal cortexes due, in part, to the fast pace of social networking sites rewiring the brain with repeated exposure (Dokoupil 2012). The altered state of social media users has become so extreme that the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) evaluated "Internet Addiction Disorder," for inclusion in their 2013 manual (Derbyshire 2013).

2.2.3 Privacy Issues

Many critics of Web 2.0 focus primarily on the lack of privacy users have while engaging with it. Many people dislike their information being sent to government and corporate intrusions. For example, the United States Department of Justice intercepted 1,661 pieces of information from social networking sites and e-mails in 2011 alone (McCullagh 2012). The 2009 IRS training manual teaches agents to scan Facebook pages for information that might assist in resolving a taxpayer case. 4.7 million Facebook users have "liked" a health condition or medical treatment page, information that is sometimes used by insurance companies to raise rates (Nance-Nash 2011).

The advertising practiced in social networking can also constitute as an invasion of privacy. The market strategy report *ExactTarget* informs companies that social media 'like' buttons belonging to their brand immediately grant them access to additional customer information including school affiliation, workplace information, birthdate, and other tools for targeting their market (2010).

When using social media sites, simple algorithms can determine where the user lives, their sexual orientation, personality traits, signs of depression, and alma maters among other information, even if users put none of that data on their social networking profiles (Giles 40). This problem continues to grow, as social media posts cannot be completely deleted. The Library of Congress in the United States has been archiving all public tweets from Twitter's March 2006 launch till the present day and will continue to do so (Raymond 2010). Facebook has a similar interface where a post can never be deleted once it has been uploaded. It is because of this that Facebook was named as a source of information in one-third of American divorces filed in 2011 (Tuchman 2012).

To add injury to insult, unauthorized sharing on social networking sites exposes artists to copyright infringement, loss of intellectual property, and loss of income, as social media sites have copyright regulations but they can be difficult to enforce (Baker 2012). For example, Pinterest (a bulletin board style photo-sharing website) relies entirely upon the re-publication of images from the web and, if users do not use the site conscientiously, the photographer's content can be posted without license, attribution, or payment (West 2012). Illegally downloading music through unapproved channels is also widespread by social media. Between 2003 and 2008 alone, the American music industry opened legal proceedings against 35,000 individual illegal downloading outlets that have lost them millions of dollars in sales (McBride et al. 2008).

2.3 Web 2.0 and Social Development

Despite the numerous drawbacks that come along with Web 2.0, the benefits it has provided the 21st Century are unparalleled. Social networking sites spread information faster than any other media. This newfound ease and speed of digital interaction and communication that Web 2.0 encompasses brings a lot of social prosperity that was once impossible – or at least, very expensive. People are able to share their news, ideas, creations, and emotions to an audience that was once virtually unreachable via traditional communication. In this section I disclose information and statistics on the positive effects Web 2.0 has on social development, including its ability spread news and information, improve interpersonal relationships, increase our physical health, enhance education, and initiate social change.

2.3.1 The Spread of News and Information

In terms of news, over 50% of people learn about breaking news on social media (Marino 2012). This is because 65% of traditional media reporters and editors now use sites like Facebook and LinkedIn for story research, while 52% use Twitter (Kidwai et al. 36). As of 2012, social networking sites are the top news source for 27.8% of Americans, falling right behind newspapers (28.8%) and above radio journalism (18.8%) and all other print publications including magazines (6%) (Marino 2012). For example, the 2012 Aurora, Colorado midnight theater shooting massacre was first reported via Twitter and YouTube before any news crews could arrive on the scene, and was further prompted by the Red Cross as they urged witnesses to tell family members they were safe via social media outlets (Sutter 2012).

2.3.2 Improving Relationships

From an interpersonal standpoint, experts now find that despite potential drawbacks, social networking sites ultimately allow people to improve their relationships and make new friends. According to Sponcil, the increase in online communication strengthens relationships between users who interact with one another on a regular basis (37). Statistics show that there have indeed been positive results due to an increase in online communication - 70% of adult social networking users visit the sites to connect with friends and family (Marino 2012), *Common Sense Media* reveals that 52% of teens using social media report that using the sites has helped their relationships with friends, 88% report that social media helps them stay in touch with friends they cannot see regularly, 69% report getting to know students at their school better, and 57% make new friends (2012).

All of this is potentially because social networking sites can facilitate face-to-face interaction, especially now that people use social media to network at in-person events in order to get to know people before personal, business, and other meetings (Baker et al. 879). Pew Research Center's *Internet and American Life Project* found that messaging on social media leads to face-to-face interactions when plans are made via websites. The same study also found that social media users messaged close friends an average of 39 days each year while seeing close friends in person 210

days each year (Rainie et al. 2012). Social networking dating sites like OkCupid and Match are specifically designed in order to facilitate in-person meetings between individuals who discovered each other via one of the sites. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* reported that 1/3 of Americans surveyed in 2013 have met their spouse via an online dating network. Those same Americans also scored slightly higher on a marital satisfaction survey and have since been deemed slightly less likely to divorce (Cacioppo et al. 10135).

Sponcil also reports that social networking sites help people who are socially isolated or shy connect with others (37). Of the 53% of teens who generally identified as ‘somewhat’ or ‘very’ shy in a survey conducted by *Common Sense Media*, more than 25% of them report that social networking makes them feel less shy. In addition, 28% report feeling more outgoing, and 20% report feeling more confident (2012). Youth surveyed by Eckard College who are considered "less socially adept" report that social networks give them a place to make friends and typically quiet students can feel more comfortable being vocal through a social media platform used in class (Wilks 5). According Baker and Oswald, adults who consider themselves shy also cite social media as a comfortable place to interact with others, similar to the results found in children (875).

2.3.3 Social Media, Health & Satisfaction

Being a part of a social networking site can also increase a person's quality of life and reduce the risk of health problems. Social media can help improve life satisfaction, stroke recovery, memory retention, and overall well being by providing users with a large social group that can have a contagion effect, promoting and helping with exercise, dieting, and smoking cessation goals (Jayson 2009). Social media is also noted for contributing positively to the health of senior citizens (Zafar 2011). According a *Pew Internet & American Life Project* study, the 74-year old and older age group is the fastest growing demographic on social media sites with the percentage quadrupling from 4% to 16% between 2008-2010 alone (Zickuhr 2010). Seniors report feeling happier due to online contact with family and access to information like church bulletins that have moved online and out of print (Zafar 2011).

2.3.4 Using Social Media for Education

Web 2.0 also benefits education, allowing academic research to reach a wider audience, allowing information previously restricted to academia's 'ivory tower' to be shared with the public who do not have access to restricted journals or costly databases. Researchers from a wide variety of fields are sharing photos, providing status updates, collaborating with distant colleagues, and finding a wider variety of subjects via social media, making the research process and results more transparent and accessible to a larger public (Christie 2011).

Web 2.0 also provides teachers with a platform to share and communicate with other teachers and students outside of a classroom. More than 80% of American college and university faculties use social media; over 50% use it for teaching and 30% for communicating with students (Blankenship 39). Educators from around the world interact with each other to bring guest teachers, librarians, authors, and experts into class via social networks like Twitter and social networking tools like Skype (Cordell 2012). The education-specific social networking site Edmodo was designed specifically for contact between students, teachers, and parents, and reached over ten million users in 2012 (Edmodo 2013). Social networking sites are also being used to give students a support system at community colleges that tend to be commuter based and can leave students with no in-person social network (Whissemore 2011).

In addition, colleges and universities also use social media to recruit students; according to the *National Endowment for the Arts*, 87% of colleges and universities use Facebook to recruit students, 76% use Twitter, and 73% use YouTube (2010). Social media has also proven to be a useful tool in retaining students, as universities that utilize social media have lower rates of drop-outs and transfers (Whissemore 2011)

2.3.5 Using Social Media for Social Change

Along with enhancing education within school systems, Web 2.0 has become a useful tool in educating and facilitating political and social change. Social networking sites give social movements a quick, no-cost method to organize, disseminate information, and mobilize people.

The 2011 Egyptian uprising was organized largely via social media and motivated tens of thousands of protestors for eighteen days of demonstrations, ultimately leading to the resignation of Egyptian President Mubarak on Feb. 11, 2011 (Schaar 137). A July 4, 2011 tweet from @Adbusters with the hashtag #occupywallstreet started the American 'Occupy' movement, which gained traction in Sep. 2011 when protestors gathered at New York City's Zuccotti Park and remained there until November 15, 2011 (Dean 17). Social change on a community level is also prevalent with social media use. For example, shares on social networking popularized nine-year old Scottish student, Martha Payne, and her blog, "Never Seconds," which exposed the state of her school's lunch program prompting international attention that resulted in changes to her school and the formation of "Friends of Never Seconds" charity to feed children globally (Smith et al. 2012).

Web 2.0 can also be useful in finding and prosecuting criminals. A *LexisNexis Risk Solutions* survey showed that 67% of federal, state, and local law enforcement professionals think that social media helps solve crimes more quickly. When the Vancouver Canucks lost the 2011 Stanley Cup in Vancouver, the city erupted into riots. Social media was used to catch vandals and rioters as social networking site users tagged the people they knew in over 2,000 photos posted to the sites (Dalke 2011). In 2011, the NYPD added a Twitter tracking unit and has used social networking to arrest criminals who have bragged about their crimes online (McCullagh 2012).

2.4 Web 2.0 and Socioeconomics

Socioeconomics is a social science that analyzes social processes through economic activity (Amin et al. 41). Though the socioeconomic benefits of Web 2.0 is not this paper's focus, it is important to mention in a discussion of the social benefits, as sustained economic hardship leads to poorer physical, psychological, and cognitive functioning and thus influences the way that we interact in social situations (Lynch et al. 1889). In this section, social media's role in the creation of jobs, business, female empowerment, and charitable outlets is briefly examined.

2.4.1 Creating Jobs

The economy has severely benefitted from the rise of social networking. Social media sites have created a new industry and thousands of jobs in addition to providing new income and sales. A *McKinsey Global Institute* study projects that the communication and collaboration from social media could add \$900 billion to \$1.3 trillion to the economy through added productivity and improved customer service (Nathan 2011). Facebook posted \$1.26 billion for third quarter 2012 revenue, up from \$954 million for third quarter 2011 earnings. Twitter, a private company, earned an estimated \$350 million in just 2012 revenue (Crum 2012).

Social media sites also help employers find employees and job-seekers find work. According to a survey conducted by *Jobvite.com*, 64% of companies are on two or more social networks for recruiting because of the wider pool of applicants and more efficient searching capabilities. 89% of job recruiters have hired employees through LinkedIn, 26% through Facebook, and 15% through Twitter. One in six job-seekers credit social media for helping find their current job. 52% of job-seekers use Facebook for the job search, 38% use LinkedIn, and 34% use Twitter (2012). Social networking websites like *Monster.com* and *CareerBuilder.com* are used solely for employers and job-seekers to find each other.

2.4.2 Creation of Business

In addition to creating jobs and revenue, social media helps businesses both big and small benefit themselves and their consumers. Small businesses prosper from the free platforms to connect with customers and increase visibility of their products or services. Almost 90% of larger companies using social media have reported at least one measurable business benefit - for example, large chain restaurants are using social media to quickly disseminate information to managers, train employees, and receive immediate customer feedback on new items, allowing for quick revision if needed (Mullaney 2012). Web 2.0 has also made it possible to generate a personal business via social media. For example, the video-sharing phenomenon YouTube has been newsworthy for creating a system where users who create content are now being paid-per-views on the advertising that is shown before their videos. In some cases, people as young as thirteen and as

old as eighty have been making six-figure incomes by simple creating short videos about their interests and hobbies (Schepp et al. 13).

2.4.3 Promotion of Feminism in the Economy

Social media has also proven to help women thrive in business. In a world where female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies are outnumbered by male CEOs 15:485, being able to connect on social networking sites gives business-minded women a support group not readily found offline. Many social media sites are dominated by women: 72% of Pinterest users are women, 58% of Facebook users, 62% of MySpace users, 60% of Yelp users, and 53% of Instagram users. (Said-Moorhouse et al. 2012) An example of a progressive feminist website is One.org, which helps African female entrepreneurs connect on social media to grow their businesses (One 2012).

2.4.4 Social Media for Charity

Web 2.0 also benefits the economy with the rise of ‘crowdfunding,’ a process in which an artist or entrepreneur develops an idea and seeks monetary support to bring his or her own idea to the market (Brabham 10). Crowdfunding uses social media allows people to collectively accomplish their goal. For example, Crowdwise, a social network devoted crowdfunding charity projects, raised over \$900,000 for Hurricane Sandy victims (Crowdwise 2012). Kickstarter is another crowdfunding website that brings venture capital to the masses; it is not uncommon for entrepreneurs to raise \$50,000, \$100,000, \$250,000, or more. The highest amount ever raised on Kickstarter is \$10.3 million for an iPhone controlled ‘smart watch’ called Pebble (Steinberg 96).

Chapter 2 Conclusion

The history of the birth of Web 2.0 and its resilience began in the 1990s, and generally emerged as a major part of society in the early 2000s following the deterioration and downfall of many ‘dot com’ companies. The qualities that kept Web 2.0 alive during this era are based on its ability to allow the user to create his or her own experience and interact with others rather than simply interacting with a server of information. This same quality is what makes Web 2.0 different from Web 1.0.

Research and surveys since Web 2.0's development have collected information from users that show social media use yielding negative consequences. These negative consequences include the spreading of false information, lack of face to face interaction, an escalation in social isolation and anxiety issues, increased potential for fighting and bullying (both on and offline), Internet addiction, invasion of privacy, and loss of valuable information and work.

Contrary to this research, many experts and surveyors have found contradicting results that demonstrate the use of Web 2.0 as being extremely beneficial and unparalleled to any other type of traditional communication. This is due to its ability to connect people from around the world in masses and speeds that we have never before achieved. The newfound ability for mass connection has shown benefits in the areas of information transmission, the strengthening of weak and strong ties, the ability to create new relationships (both romantic and platonic), the ease of social interaction for less socially adept people, increases in physical health, enhancements of traditional education. From a socioeconomic perspective, social media has stimulated the economy by creating jobs and allowing people to create and foster new business. It has also helped promote feminism in the economy and the initiation of social change.

Chapter 3. Analysis.

As powerful as it is technology is just an enabler and it's the technology in the hands of almost always connected people that make it so powerful (Li et al. 2)

The facts and figures presented in the previous chapter make it clear that Web 2.0 and social media have a very powerful effect on its users. Though the effects may not always be beneficial to everyone, there is no denying that its creation has completely changed the way we interact with one another. The statistics offered in the previous chapter show tangible evidence that despite the potential for negativity, Web 2.0 and social media are helping people around the world communicate with each other in order to share themselves and their knowledge with others who would otherwise be unknown. As the quote above suggests – it is not the technology itself that is powerful, but the community that it creates through connecting people. The boundaries for communication have been broken down and what is left is an entirely new world of sharing possibilities (Li et al. 2).

So why are the qualities that social media possesses powerful and beneficial in fostering our psychological need to communicate and share information with one another? Why is this research important? In this chapter the personal benefits of being able to express yourself socially over a digital medium are discussed, followed by the benefits we can generate from creating and maintaining relationships online, and lastly the benefits we receive by enhancing the socioeconomic aspects of life through social media.

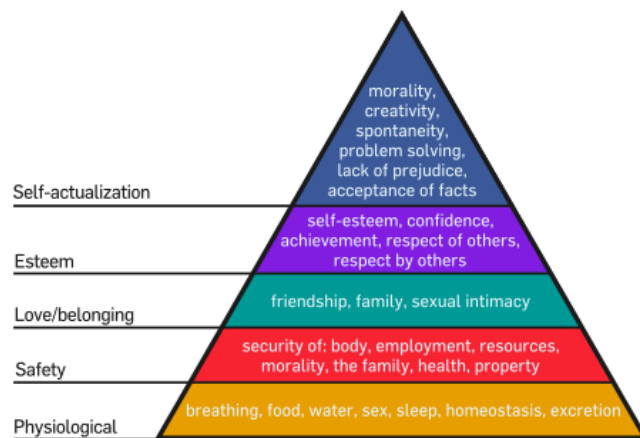
3.1 Benefits from Expressing and Sharing Yourself

One of the long-standing mysteries of psychology is the question of where the 'self' comes from, and what the 'self' even means. There is a region of the brain called medial prefrontal cortex that is activated the more a person is reflecting within himself or herself. It is the region that most clearly and unambiguously is associated with self-processing (Lieberman 15). Lieberman discusses how we tend to think of the self as something that separates us from others and allows us to know how we are different in order to "...walk on our own path" (6). However, studies have

shown that this same medial prefrontal region is involved in allowing the beliefs of others to influence our own. For example, the more active the medial prefrontal region is when someone is trying to persuade you of something, the more likely you will be to change your mind (Lieberman 7). Lieberman states,

Rather than being a hermetically sealed vault that separates us from others, our research suggests that the self is more of a Trojan horse, letting in the beliefs of others, under the cover of darkness and without us realizing it. This socially-influenced self helps to ensure that we'll have the same kind of beliefs and values as those of the people around us and this is a great catalyst for social harmony (11).

In other words - the way that we view, express, and present ourselves has a large influence on the way that we communicate and share with others. According to psychologist Abraham Maslow, expressing ourselves is human instinct and an inherent need for happiness (372). Maslow discusses human behavior in his paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" where he inquires what it is that motivates behavior in the first place. Within his paper he introduces his concept of a 'hierarchy of needs' (383).



(Figure 4 – source: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hide-and-seek/201205/our-hierarchy-needs> May 2012)

Figure 4 (above) is an accurate visual representation of Maslow's concept. According to his findings during his years of research, our actions are motivated in order to achieve certain needs. The hierarchy displayed in Figure 4 suggests that people are motivated to fulfill basic needs before moving on to other, more advanced needs. The lowest levels of the pyramid are made up of the most basic needs, while the more complex needs are located at the top of the pyramid. As one progresses up the pyramid, needs become increasingly psychological and social and the need for love, friendship, and intimacy become important, followed by the need for personal esteem and the importance of self-actualization (Maslow 2012).

The top three tiers of the pyramid - self-actualization, self-esteem, and love and belonging - are all achieved in one way or another through the sharing and expression of the self that one is inherently given. Through this interaction with others, one can further enhance oneself (Qualman 4). Achieving these higher psychological needs in Maslow's pyramid benefits us in many areas of our lives, allowing us to feel happiness and completion (Qualman 5).

Qualman mentions that these needs stem from humans being highly social animals by nature, which is why when the creation of social media came about we were very receptive. People who were not feeding their natural desires to share and express themselves due to personal shyness, parental influence, lack of supportive community or otherwise can and are currently using Web 2.0 and social media as a way to do so (4).

In addition to simply satisfying our human need for self-expression, social media enhances it. For example, extremely popular websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Blogger, and YouTube all give users the tools and outlet to freely create and share content where they can discuss their daily lives, feelings, creations, and successes. This content can be shared with millions in the form of speaking, comedic or dramatic writing, photography, video blogging, and other ways that are not typical for everyday interpersonal interaction (Spencil et al. 39).

The psychological benefits that social media use yields to the self are statistically demonstrated in Chapter 2, such as the ability to allow people to overcome their shyness, increase confidence, feel more comfortable in social settings, and engaging more academically.

3.2 Benefits from Socializing and Creating Relationships with Others

The third and middle tier of Maslow's pyramid revolves around our need to feel love and belonging. Friendship, family and sexual intimacy are illustrated as three main aspects in which the feelings of love and belonging are especially vital. This is because across many studies of mammals, from the smallest rodents all the way to humans, data suggests that our social environment profoundly shapes us and that we suffer greatly when our social bonds are threatened or severed (Lieberman 5).

Languages around the world use pain terminology to express social pain, for example: "she broke my heart" or "he hurt my feelings," but it turns out it is more than a metaphor. Social pain actually does cause actual pain and struggle (Lieberman 5). Both psychological and neuroscience researchers have found surprising evidence that social pain is not so different from the pain of physical injury. The things that cause us to feel pain are things that are evolutionary recognized as threats to our survival. We evolved to live in cooperative societies, and for most of human history we depended on those groups for our lives. Like hunger or thirst, our need for social acceptance emerged as a mechanism for staying alive (Weir 50). Social pain and pleasure are wired into our operating system. We do not focus on being connected solely in order to extract money, recognition, and other beneficial resources from people; being connected is an inherent human need (Lieberman 10).

3.2.1 Social Media and Enhancing Current Connections

Web 2.0 and social media offer a new kind of digital environment to foster our need for social connection. The main difference between a normal social environment and a digital environment is the factor of geographic separation. When using the Internet one is not engaging with someone else face-to-face in real life – there is a physical disconnect, whether it is two miles or two

thousand miles (Triandis 506). However, Stahlstein discusses how geographic separation is typical within everyday relationships. Many family, friends, and lovers eventually become separated due to different circumstances in their lives (692). In just the case of romantic relationships alone, there are just over 7 million couples (14-15 million individuals) in the United States alone who consider themselves in a long distance relationship (Weiner 662). Before the creation of social media, nurturing these relationships (romantic or platonic) was difficult, and often resulted in the faltering or loss of connection, causing us emotional pain and suffering. With the uprising of Web 2.0, its development and its ability to now connect billions of people around the world, the disconnect between geographically separated people can be healed. It is now easier than ever to foster relationships (Weiner et al. 664).

Social media not only allows us to maintaining relationships with distant loved ones, it also allows us to strengthen ties with people who we have lost touch with. For example, many users are tracking down and reconnecting with people from their pasts by searching through Twitter followings, hunting on sites like Classmates.com or LinkedIn, or by doing a Facebook classmates search (Purves 2011). In a more dramatic case, the website *Mashable* reported a story about a father locating his ex-wife and long-lost son through Facebook, after years of searching using various people finder sites and even a private detective (Freeman 2012). In October of 2013, *ABC News* in the United States reported a story about a brother and sister who were separated at a young age due to an abusive family and reunited within twenty-four hours after twelve years of separation when the sister made a Facebook post asking people for help reconnecting them (Chen 2013).

3.2.2 Using Web 2.0 for Creating New Connections

In addition to strengthening ties between loved ones and reconnecting with people from the past, social media also allows us to meet and connect with new people from around the world. According to Wilkins, meeting new people is equally as important as strengthening ties with people you know - increasing your presence in the personal and professional world can hold countless results that can subsequently benefit you for the rest of your life. Making an effort to go

out and meet new people is something that can greatly affect your chances of success, and subsequently, your happiness (2010).

As discussed previously, we are social animals that require the companionship of others, and meeting new people can provide us with friends and a support network that are important for our mental and physical well-being (Ellison et al. 1155). Researchers at Flinders University in Australia discovered that maintaining a steady flow of new friends throughout life helps keep your brain healthy and allows for a longer life (BMJ Specialty Journals 2005). Meeting new people also gives one the opportunity to learn new things and expand your own skills and general knowledge, as well as your cultural awareness. By continuously meeting new people, we learn about other races, religions, political systems and lifestyles. Engaging with new people in this way may cause one to notice their own misconceptions and work to overcome them. (Ellison et al. 1156) We can also enhance our business connections and networks by meeting new people, which in return benefit us not only by building stronger bonds with weak ties but by potentially increasing monetarily wealthy as well (Begole et al. 2008)

However, many people in the world have trouble meeting new people, possibly due to the inability to change their surroundings or a simple characteristic of their personality (for example: shyness, introversion) (Gray 253). In terms of one's current surroundings, there are many people who live in small towns or communities in which they are either monetarily or physically incapable of branching out from. These communities tend to share similar values, interests, and beliefs that may not benefit certain individuals to the best of their extent (Triandis 514). For instance – in Iran, homosexuality is a crime punishable by imprisonment, corporal punishment, and in some cases execution. 70% of websites (including social media) are blocked in Iran, but by changing IP addresses and proxy servers, the gay community has the ability to access social media and utilize it to find other people within the community to connect with (Penketh 2008).

In some cases, people who suffer from shyness or social anxiety benefit from social media by being able to indirectly interact with others. By doing this, they are slowly introducing themselves to the comfort of vocalizing their thoughts and opinions to other people. With good practice, this

can allow them to steadily gain confidence in online social situations, which can eventually transfer over to confidence with in-person communication (Wilks 2012). Though this observation has varied results from person to person, Ellison mentions that interacting with people via social media is better for mental health than having no human connection at all, as it stimulates parts of your brain that induce happiness and contentment (1158)

Online dating is an example of a social media tool that has the potential to enhance relationships for both shy and geographically isolated people (Valkenberg et al. 850). Match.com, OKCupid.com and PlentyofFish.com are examples of websites that allow people to search for potential mates of a similar sexual identity who live within a distance suitable to the user. In addition, you can also search for others with similar beliefs, interests, hobbies and physical characteristics you find attractive (Hitsch et al. 160). For people who are geographically isolated, this breaks down physical barriers (Valkenberg et al. 851). For people who are shy to approach a potential mate in real life, it calms nerves that are a result of fear of rejection, miscommunication and lack of commonality (Valkenberg et al. 852).

Above all, meeting new people and experiencing these things makes people feel better about themselves. When new people seem interested in you and your life it makes you feel warm, welcomed, and at ease. The way other people see you changes the way you see yourself; when people offer their support and encouragement, you experience a boost in your self-esteem, feelings of self-worth, and confidence all of which happen to be prevalent on Maslow's pyramid as inherent human needs for happiness (Wilkins 2013).

3.3 Web 2.0 and Socioeconomic Benefits

In Chapter 2, 'socioeconomics' was introduced as a term that represents a social science that analyzes social processes through economic activity (Amin et al. 1995). Statistical information was deliberated as to how Web 2.0 and social media have enhanced the economy in several different ways. While a broad overview of the socioeconomic benefits of Web 2.0 is outside the scope of this topic, not analyzing it in an examination of the social benefits of Web 2.0 and social media would leave this research incomplete. As briefly introduced in Chapter 2, our involvement

with the economy and our economic status greatly affect us. Sustained economic hardship leads to poorer physical, psychological, and cognitive functioning and thus influences the way that we interact with others in social situations (Lynch et al. 1997). Web 2.0 and social media's boost of the economy is subsequently enhancing our social nature. This section takes a closer look at why our economic advances and social environment are linked, with focus on social capital and economic gain, and the personal and social benefits that economic gain instigates.

3.3.1 Social Capital

Social capital¹ is a socioeconomic term used to describe the expected collective or economic benefits derived from the preferential treatment and cooperation between individuals and groups (Putnam 80). Different social sciences emphasize different aspects of social capital and use it to describe various social connections. For example, some researchers refer to social capital as strictly a measure of generalized trust in others, while other researchers prefer to treat interpersonal trust as something that is generated and supported by deeper social facilitations (Helliwell 43) However, most researchers agree that since social capital refers to the existence and strength of interpersonal ties, the core idea that social networks have value is agreed upon. Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a university education (cultural or human capital) can increase productivity both individually and collectively, so do social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups (Putnam 81). Social capital has been linked to a variety of positive social outcomes, such as better public health, lower crime rates, and more efficient financial markets (Adler et al. 26).

High levels of interpersonal ties make many aspects of life more enjoyable and more productive, in part by reducing the costs of dealing with risk and uncertainty. Thus, the idea of associating social capital with economic gain is credible (Helliwell 44). For individuals, social capital allows

¹ Pierre Bourdieu originally created social Capital in the 1970s as a concept that connected with his theoretical ideas on social class (Siisiainen 1). His concept was later re-conceptualized by Putnam, whose definition of social capital is more suited to this research.

a person to draw on resources from other members of the networks to which they belong and acquire useful information, personal relationships, or the capacity to organize groups. Access to these types of circles provides information and connections resulting in benefits such as employment connections and business partnerships (Paxton 88)

The economic benefits that have been seen from the emergence of Web 2.0 are due mostly to the social capital created by the human connection and interpersonal ties that social media facilitate (Nie 435). Internet-based linkages have been emphasized as an importance for the formation of weak ties, which serve as the foundation of bridging social capital. In social networking websites, new forms of social capital and relationship building occur. This binding of social capital and support of loose ties allows users to create and maintain larger, diffuse networks of relationships from which potential resources are drawn and used to create economic gain (Donath et al. 71). In layman's terms, social media promotes and widens social capital, resulting in the economic growth and success statistically demonstrated in Chapter 2.

3.3.2 Economic Success and Social Happiness

The question remains, if social ties are good for economic growth, is economic growth good for social ties? According to Harvard researchers Dunn and Norton, the answer is yes – money and economic growth can increase social ties and personal happiness, depending on how it is spent (Dunn et al. 37). When people feel secure in their financial standing, their levels of stress are highly decreased and their ability to achieve peace of mind is heightened. This phenomenon increases the likelihood of social interaction and time spent with loved ones, as many people view money as time - specifically, leisure time that can have a significant impact on one's well-being (Dunn et al. 38). A personal feeling of power and the ability to voice ones opinions more vehemently is also predominant as ones income grows, thus increasing the tendency to speak up in social situations (Flynn 2013).

However, researchers at Princeton University have found that happiness caused solely by monetary income continues to increase until an annual equivalent earning of \$75,000 is reached. This is because once this amount is reached most people feel the security they fundamentally

require (Sikar 2013). Dunn and Norton discuss how their research has shown that it is the way that money is spent that increases happiness and joy within the self and relationships with others, not the actual act of physically gaining money (Dunn et al. 57). People who use money to increase their social capital are the ones who are rated highest with overall life satisfaction. For example, using income to go out to dinner, go on vacations, and give to charity are all acts that research has shown increase social and personal gratification in life (Flynn 2013).

Chapter 3 Conclusion

The importance of this research explains our inherent desire for connection with other humans, as it is one of our most vital needs that we require for happiness. Thus, it is not the actual technology of Web 2.0 that is powerful; it is the community that it creates by connecting us. Social media implements actions and ideas that strengthen certain areas of our lives that are beneficial for our connections with others, and thus our happiness.

Web 2.0 allows us to express ourselves to more people than ever, in more direct, creative, and interesting ways. This increase in self-expression subsequently raises our self-esteem and confidence, altering the way we present ourselves to others. A positive self-presentation has a large influence on the way that we communicate, share and connect with other people.

Connecting with others is also important because the social pain we feel is connected with actual, physical pain. The things that cause us to feel pain are things that are evolutionary recognized as threats to our survival. Social media allows us to strengthen ties between the connections we currently maintain, as it bridges geographic disconnects. This bridge also allows us to rehabilitate lost or faltering connections, and create new connections. Creating new connections is especially important for increasing ones presence in a professional setting, thus increasing our chances for monetary success. Social media also allows socially and geographically isolated people to connect with others who will benefit their lives – for instance, a support group or a romantic relationship.

Socioeconomically, social media helps strengthen social capital. Social capital is a term used to describe the expected collective or economic benefits derived from the preferential treatment and cooperation between individuals and groups. The economic benefits that have been seen from the emergence of Web 2.0 are due mostly to the social capital created by the human connection and interpersonal ties that social media facilitate.

Chapter 4. Maximizing User Benefits of Social Media.

My findings on the benefits of Web 2.0 and social media seem to directly contradict the drawbacks briefly discussed in Chapter 2. For example, social media has made sharing and communicating faster and more widespread than ever – but it also makes the creation and spread of false information more prevalent. Social media can cause users less face-to-face interaction, yet it can also facilitate it more than ever before. Social media is a reported cause of loneliness, depression, anxiety and general distress in some, while in others it promotes health, social and economic prosperity, and happiness.

The effects of social media use vary from person to person depending on lifestyle, personality traits, and how it is used (Jayson 2009). As the title of this paper suggests, the benefits of Web 2.0 social media are valid, strong, and achievable to its users and contributors. In this chapter, I will analyze my findings on the benefits of Web 2.0 and use my newfound information to suggest and postulate how current users of social media can operate in order to minimize detriment and maximize benefits in terms of conducting themselves in a digital social habitat. In order to provide this suggestion, I will use the social networking website Facebook as an example. I will discuss the potential detriments for users and illustrate how to use the website in a way to promote the health, happiness and positivity for consumers of this social media platform. My demonstration is split into three sections: identifying your needs, educating yourself, and knowing your comfort zone.

4.1 Identify Your Needs

When joining a social media platform (in this case, Facebook) the user should ask why they have chosen to join. Facebook has a lot of different prospects to offer people. Some may want to join for the sole purpose of connecting with loved ones and sharing their day-to-day lives. Someone who has just acquired a new job may want to utilize it to network with colleagues. If the user is a business owner or well-known personality, they may want to use it to promote their work to other users (Park et al. 730). Social networking sites are tailored to their users to be whatever it is they

need it to be (Kaplan et al. 60). This is important because the reason for joining social media coincides with the way one should present themselves while using it in order to minimize its downfalls (Park et al. 745). For example, if a user were engaging Facebook for social purposes, posting pictures of themselves and their friends at the beach drinking alcohol in swimwear would be acceptable. However, for business-networking purposes, those types of photographs could potentially make them seem “not serious enough” for certain employment positions and can even lead to job termination (Kaplan et al. 68). Duffy discusses how people tend to not think twice about the things they post on social media, but if they simply took a second to think about the potential repercussions of their actions, they have the potential to prosper as a social media user (298).

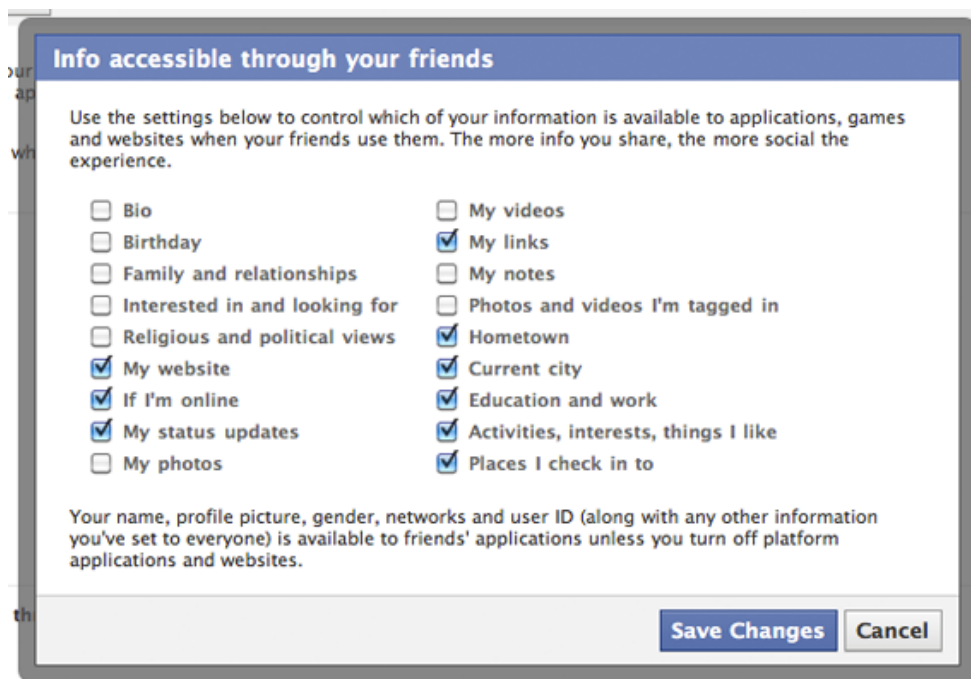
4.2 Learning the Website

In order for a social media user to avoid negative repercussions associated with the misuse of social media and the misrepresentation of themselves, they must become educated on the website and how it is used (Cigognini et al. 109). When joining Facebook (and many other social media websites as well) the site offers built in tutorials about how to add information, photos, posts, and other data. Learning what goes where and how to interact with the site are important aspects the user must understand in order to appropriately present themselves in correspondence to their desired outcome from using Facebook (Duffy 285).

For the many people who use Facebook to interact with others both leisurely and for business networking, it is extremely important that they become educated on Facebook’s privacy settings. According to *Social Media Frontiers*, 25% of Facebook users do not use any of the privacy settings offered (2013). Making oneself vulnerable online leads to information potentially getting into the hands of the wrong people. Those who may not be out for the user’s best interests can theoretically take their photos and information to create fake profiles on other social media sites and disrupt the harmony within their social circles (Kaplan et al. 63).

However the argument for privacy goes beyond just protecting social reputation. Without adjusting privacy settings, people can also gather information to sell out to companies for

marketing demographic information. This can lead to unwanted phone calls, spam e-mails, and letters in the mail. On a more serious note, online fraud is an industry of its own; behind the lighthearted side of Facebook there is a serious threat for identity theft. The amount of information we disclose about ourselves on social media is immense, and though we may think it is harmless, fraudulence has been committed simply by accessing an e-mail address, postcode, date of birth and name (Park et al. 730). Many people are careless and post things such as a passport or driver's license photos that contain vital information can be easily duplicated. Being careful about what is uploaded absentmindedly and checking privacy settings as often as possible will keep fraudulence and other negative consequences at bay (Park et al. 731). Facebook's current privacy settings are visually represented below, in Figure 5:



(Figure 5 – source <http://www.socialmediafrontiers.com/2013/11/facebook-privacy-settings-and-why-25-of.html> Nov 2013)

4.3 Know Your Comfort Zone

Creating a Facebook profile means interacting and sharing with others. Social contact is made, and this can be a touchy subject for some people. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the overuse of social media can lead to feelings of depression, anxiety, and even addiction. According to Wickelgrin, genetics suggests that social contact actually matters more to some people than it does to other people (2012). She writes,

“Recent research hints that the biochemical carrier of the benefits of social support is the neuropeptide oxytocin. It is well known that oxytocin plays an essential role in the regulation of social behavior and attachment, and has throughout mammalian evolution. When administered to volunteers, for example, oxytocin reduces stress responses and increases prosocial behavior. Your genes enter the picture because studies suggest that the gene for the oxytocin receptors in the brain comes in a “more social” and “less social” form. People having the latter form of the gene tend to be less empathetic and demonstrate more negative affect.” (Wickelgrin 2012)

The desire to socially connect with others is inherent in all of us and yields positive results; however, the amount of exposure one needs in order to feel the benefits varies from person to person (Wickelgrin 2012). This phenomenon goes hand in hand with the terms introvert and extrovert, and has evoked the creation of various ‘personality tests’ that will sort the test takers into different brackets based on the results, thus give them information about how they conduct themselves (Morgeson et al. 701).

Taking a personality test may be a little too far fetched for some, but knowing one’s own social boundaries is a step in the right direction for using social media to your benefit. If a user is not currently comfortable engaging with large amounts of people, they should make sure to only add certain, special people as Facebook friends (Park et al. 730). If the user is uncomfortable sharing their current employment or educational status, they should make sure to use the privacy settings to create an online social environment comfortable for themselves (Park et al. 731). As previously mentioned, social networking sites are tailored to their users to be whatever it is they need it to be (Kaplan et al. 60). However, social networks should be used to enhance one’s actual life, not

create a new one. By romanticizing social networks and comparing one's life to others, the user can start to experience unfavorable feelings (Elefant 36). If people begin to experience enhanced social anxiety, depression, or loneliness from social media, it is important to take a break and proceed to the necessary steps needed create comfort in one's environment again (Park et al. 731).

As previously mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, social media use does have the ability to eventually bring people out from their comfort zones and expand their social connections in a positive way. However, if at any time during their Facebook involvement they experience cyber-bullying or harassment, they should do everything in their power to prevent it (Park et al. 730). Within Facebook's settings, users have the ability to block others and report them to the Facebook team. Facebook has the option to report a user, group, page, individual post, news content, photos, messages, and cell phone abuse.

4.4 Educating Yourself

As it usually happens before trying something new, learning about the dangers and repercussions is essential, especially when health is involved. Just as a smoker should know the detrimental effects of cigarettes, social media users should be aware of the issues that can arise and use this knowledge to take preventative action (Elefant 47). Though social media use is not typically associated with health risks the way a cigarette is, this paper demonstrates the way we interact with others, especially on a large scale, has the potential to affect our mental and social health. Living in a time where people have become dependent on their Internet, and social media has overtaken pornography as the #1 activity to engage with on the web (US Census Bureau 2010), simply researching and understanding a well-rounded view of social media can be productive for positive progress (Elefant 50).

Chapter 4 Conclusion

Research on the positives and negatives of interacting with Web 2.0 seem to be contradictory. This is probably due to the fact that the effects of social media use vary from person to person depending on lifestyle, personality traits, and how someone uses social media. In order to maximize benefits and minimize detriment, users of social media should make sure to ask

themselves why they are joining social media, whether it be for general social connection, business networking, or self-promotion. Identifying this need will hopefully allow the user to realize how to conduct themselves appropriately within the given environment. By doing this, the risk of ruining a reputation via social media is minimized.

Part of being able to conduct oneself appropriately on social media is learning how to use the website in general and, more specifically, engage with the privacy settings. Privacy invasion has been a huge detriment to social media users since its creation, mostly caused by users not understanding how to use the privacy settings. Posting personal information on the Internet is risky in itself, and not protecting personal information does not support any positive outcomes of social media use.

Knowing one's personality and social preferences also helps to benefit social media use. The desire to socially connect with others is inherent in all of us and yields positive results, however, the amount of exposure one needs in order to feel the benefits varies from person to person. Social networking sites are tailored to their users to be whatever it is they need it to be, so creating a comfortable environment is encouraged in order to prevent feelings of social anxiety and depression. In addition, it is important to realize negative symptoms and take a break from social media if feeling overwhelmed by it, and to report and block any cyber-bullying activity.

Enhancing positive progress can also be made by educating oneself on a well-rounded view of the positives and negatives of Web 2.0, for as demonstrated by this paper, it affects our social and mental health. Learning about the repercussions gives users the potential to fight against it.

Chapter 5. Conclusion.

5.1 Chapter Outcomes

Chapter 1 introduced this research with background information on the negative media portrayal of Web 2.0 and statistics on its upward growth. This chapter also introduced the aims and actions taken in order to frame the discussions in the following chapters to achieve the desired results.

Chapter 2 began by examining the history of Web 2.0 by explaining the interactive qualities it possessed that led to its resilience during the downfall of Web 1.0 and many ‘dot com’ companies. It then went on to briefly confer the potential negative consequences of Web 2.0, including the spread of false information, lack of face to face interaction, an escalation in social isolation and anxiety issues, increased potential for fighting and bullying (both on and offline), Internet addiction, invasion of privacy, and loss of valuable information and work. Next, it evaluated contrary research that showed that the newfound ability for mass connection has shown benefits in the areas of information transmission, the strengthening of weak and strong ties, the ability to create new relationships (both romantic and platonic), the ease of social interaction for less socially adept people, increases in physical health, enhancements of traditional education, stimulation for the economy, job and business creation, feminism, and the initiation of social change.

Chapter 3 explained how the importance of this research surrounds our inherent desire for connection with other humans as a vital part of our happiness. It analyzed the theory that it is not the actual technology of Web 2.0 that is powerful, but the community that it creates by connecting us. It deliberated the importance of self-expression and its ability to alter the way that others view us. It also discussed how social pain is mentally correlated with physical pain, and how pain is evolutionary recognized as a threat to our survival. Information was divulged about social media’s ability to strengthen ties between the connections we currently maintain, rehabilitate lost or faltering connections, and create new connections. Social capital was introduced as a socioeconomic term to describe the expected collective or economic benefits derived from the preferential treatment and cooperation between individuals and groups. It was

further explained that economic benefits that have been seen from the emergence of Web 2.0 are due mostly to the social capital created by the human connection and interpersonal ties that social media facilitate.

Chapter 4 used research presented in the previous chapters to suggest and postulate how current users of social media can operate in order to minimize detriment and maximize benefits in terms of conducting themselves in a digital social habitat. Facebook was used as an example of a social networking website that poses beneficial and detrimental qualities to its users. The first suggestion was to identify needs in order to consider the appropriate way to conduct oneself on the platform. Second, to learn the website in order to achieved desired privacy. Third, to examine ones own comfort zone to determine the steps needed to create a health environment. And finally, to become educated on the repercussions social media can cause in order to give oneself the potential to fight against it.

5.2 Research Conclusions

A definitive conclusion to this research may never actually be achieved. Firstly, its continuous technological advancement and its growing number of users make it extremely difficult to thoroughly assess all of the potential social benefits. Second, as discussed in the previous two chapters, the users of Web 2.0 and their lifestyles, personalities, and choices differ. What is beneficial to one person may not be beneficial to another person. That being said, I believe that I have demonstrated a general social outcome that is beneficial to every user of social media: the ability to communicate, share, and connect with others on a global scale. Web 2.0 and social media have remarkably changed the world by making it smaller and more accessible. Geography is no longer a hindering factor in being able to connect with people from around the world. As indicated by my research, connecting with people is an inherent human need for happiness. Though human connection can obviously be achieved without social media, its ability to enhance and expand our connections is why it continues to succeed as a communicative medium.

Drawing to the end of my research, I have been enlightened and convinced of Liu's idea (discussed early in Chapter 3,) suggesting that it is not the technology itself that is powerful, but

the community that it creates through connecting people. The platform and the tools offered to us on social media sites are just vehicles for us to use. In the end, it is the actions of the users on the network that determine the beneficial or detrimental outcomes. Our own separate personalities combined with the way that we utilize the platforms are what decide whether or not social media is beneficial to us.

This research can be extended in many different ways in order to grasp a deeper understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of social media. Within my exploration of this topic, I found a lack of literature regarding the differences between connecting and re-connecting with others online versus offline. In addition, the socioeconomic benefits of Web 2.0 were touched on in this research, but more in depth research could be conducted on just that topic.

The research that I would personally love to continue to assess is what I focused on in Chapter 4 – maximizing user benefits of social media. There is a lot of information and research about how to use social media as a marketing tool to benefit your company and career, but very little about how to use it to achieve and maintain social benefits. In the future to continue my research, I would take the focus away from determining and understanding the benefits and focus on how best to utilize them.

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