The Day We All became Hokies:

An Exploratory Uses and Gratifications Study of Facebook Use

After the Virginia Tech Shootings

Presented to the Faculty

Liberty University

School of Communication

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Arts

In Communication Studies

By

Sabrena Michelle Carter

December 1, 2008

Thesis Committee

_____
Professor Todd Smith, M.F.A, Chairperson

_____
Dr. Cliff Kelly, Ph.D.

_____
Dr. Randall Pruitt, Ph.D.

Copyright © 2008

Sabrena Michelle Carter

All Rights Reserved

Abstract

Facebook has been incorporated into the regular activities of over 100 million users. After the Virginia Tech Shootings, individuals began interacting with Facebook in a unique way. This exploratory project analyzed uses and gratifications of Facebook use in the time following the Virginia Tech shootings. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with seven college students whose Facebook profiles acknowledged the event in at least one area.

The study found preliminary evidence of Blumler's categories of Surveillance, Diversion, Personal Identity, and Personal Relationships. The category of Curiosity was not substantiated in the findings. New categories were suggested based on the results. These included memorialization, showing support, and use of Facebook as a support group in conjunction with the Therese Rando's mourning process.

Key Terms: Uses and Gratifications, Virginia Tech shootings, internet, Facebook, and qualitative.

Dedication

Since the beginning, the plan for my continued education has belonged to God. Without His guidance, and the support of those around me, I would have quit long ago. Professor Todd Smith and Dr. Cecil Kramer were instrumental in helping me through, thank you. I have to thank my father and mother, Jerry and Linda Carter, for the grit and determination which have never let me down. A final thank you to Josh Deal, who was willing to postpone our wedding for the sake of this project and was the reason I stayed sane throughout the process.

This project is dedicated to the victims of the Virginia Tech Shootings and those whose lives have been forever changed by the day we all became Hokies. My hope for this work is that it will further understanding of this incomprehensible event and be a catalyst for healing. All glory to Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals.

Table of Contents

Chapter One- Introduction……..1

What is Facebook? 3

Chapter Two- Literature Review……... 7

Uses and Gratifications …….……..... 7

Uses and Gratifications and the Internet...…….……..... 10

Chapter Three- Methodology…… 19

Chapter Four- Results…… 27

Chapter Five- Discussion……... 56

Limitations of Research.…… 64

Recommendations for Future Research……. 64

References…….. 66

Appendix A…… 71

Appendix B…… 74

Appendix C…… 76

Appendix D…… 82

Appendix E…… 84

The Day We All Became Hokies: Discovering Uses and Gratifications Derived from Facebook Use After April 16, 2007

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Shots fired, screams echoed and confusion ensued. The safety and sanctity of the Virginia Tech campus were shattered and the world was alerted within minutes. Conflicting reports were released while students watched the bodies of anonymous Hokie brothers and sisters being carried out of the building, praying the parade of bodies would end. The word got out, the death toll rose and phone lines were completely jammed. Did my roommate have class in that hall this morning? Was my child involved? How could this have happened? Is everyone okay? The busy line offered no response on April 16, 2007, and the nation turned to a new medium for answers: Facebook.com.

Hours after the event, the news began reporting the information phenomenon. Reporters commented on a peculiar use for the social networking site Facebook.com. In those hours, Facebook became something more than a social networking website; it became a place for friends and family to search for news about loved ones anywhere near or around Virginia Tech.

The Facebook website did not change its format, content, layout or capabilities after the event; however, several news reports verified what was observed on laptop and desktop computers. Facebook use increased as it became a forum for discussion about the incident on many levels. Virginia Tech sophomore Katie Olson started a Facebook group called "I'm Okay at VT" on Monday morning, fifteen hours later, according to the Washington Post

(2007), the group had nearly 3,000 members. In record time, students turned to the internet to communicate about the event. *The Washington post online* copied posts from Facebook, several of which modeled the one reported below:

> We are looking for Jeremy Herbstritt, tall white male, 26 yo, brown hair, skinny. he was in Norris 206 :(
>
> Please contact me immediately if you have any info
>
> prayers go out to those who have lost, but that is all of us i suppose...
>
> -- K.S. (2007)

ABCnews.com reported posts by Virginia Tech students with a desire to use Facebook as a medium for truth-telling. Chris Banks of Virginia Tech wrote: "We need to get a Facebook group started to keep this news story factual and not sensationalized." (2007)

Amanda Lenhart, a senior researcher at the Pew Internet & American Life Project, which monitors high-tech culture, explained to AP reporter Martha Irvine:

> No longer do you need to drive to a headstone in a cemetery or a roadside flower strewn-cross, or fly across the country to a funeral, but you can log on and express yourself, and interact with others who are feeling the same thing. (2007)

The scale of the event was likened to September 11, 2001 in shock value. Emil Steiner, of WashingtonPost.com, wrote of his observations, "In colleges across America, students are using Facebook to rally around Virginia Tech, in a show of uniform solidarity not seen since September 11th," (2007).

What is Facebook?

Facebook.com is a social utility that enables people to understand the world around them according to the website's "About Us" page. Facebook's self proclaimed aim is to develop technologies that facilitate the spread of relevant information through social networks, allowing people to share information online the same way they do in the real world. Facebook.com has been in existence for just over 4 years and has attracted over 110 million active users worldwide in that short time (Facebook.com, 2008). ComScore data quoted in an article on *Tech Trader Daily* (Barron's Online, 2007) shows that 60% of users logged on once a day in 2007. When updated with current active users, this translates into 66 million users currently logging on daily who spend, according to the Tech Chronicles article, an average of 20 minutes per day on the website.

Facebook is a customizable website geared toward social interaction. In order to understand the phenomenal way the website was being used after the Virginia Tech shootings it is important to introduce several basic features and areas of the website. The first feature is the network feature. The network feature allows a user to create an affiliation which is available to every other user of Facebook to see, based on privacy settings. A network is an affiliation a user can select. At the time of the shootings, networks had group-like pages which allowed everyone in the network to write wall posts and view photos, much like a group. This feature has since been removed from Facebook but is included because it was relevant during the time of the event. Examples of networks include Liberty, Liberty Grad Students, Brazil,

Boston, etc. Networks require geographical affiliation within a location, building, city or country whether it is college, university, employer, high school, city or country.

Groups are different than networks. Groups are created by individuals and can range on any topic from the serious to the mundane. When members join groups the groups are displayed in a section of their profiles and groups enable a group moderator to be able to send messages to members. Group members are also able to upload photos to groups; post on the group wall and discussion boards; and add photos to group albums.

While group and network features allow a user to identify himself or herself with a larger association, the profile picture is uniquely personal. Each profile posted on Facebook has space for a picture to appear next to the information provided by the user. Profile pictures are seen as thumbnails in search results next to basic information like name and network affiliations. Profile pictures also appear next to comments posted by a user on another user's account, above a user's name on another user's profile in the friends section and on another user's wall next to a wall post.

A wall is a section of a user's profile, group page or network page, set apart for friends or group and network members to post messages. Walls display the posting user's profile picture, name and message. Walls also provide links with each post to allow User C outside of the conversation between User A, the owner of the profile, and User B, the user posting a message, to see all wall-to-wall posts between User A and User B as well as a link for user C to send a message to User A. Wall posts refer to text posted on the wall area of a profile, group, or network page.

A user's status is a line of information which appears next to a user's profile picture that during the time of the event began with the statement "User Name is". Users will fill in the rest of the sentence with information. Examples of status' include: User Name is procrastinating. User name is praying for his grandfather. User name is almost finished with her paper. This feature has been changed to allow individuals more freedom in their status. The word "is" no longer appears in the status line but as the status is involved in this paper it will refer to the traditional "User Name is" format. There are several other features of Facebook which have not bee included in this brief introductory. These specific features were included because they were the features which were adjusted by Facebook.com users in the hours, days and weeks after the incident.

As of May 2007, the Virginia Tech network had over 42,000 members. University networks include alumni, faculty, staff and current students in their numbers. The exceptional thing about the Tech tragedy was that it was not just the Virginia Tech network that was accessing Facebook and using it to communicate intranetwork, students from Universities all over the country posted messages of prayers via status bars, profile pictures and wall postings. Hundreds of groups were created with titles like "Praying for Virginia Tech," "4/16/07 The Day We All Became Hokies," and "AASU Supports Virginia Tech Students."

Additional groups were created as the names of victims were released to the public. Groups like the one created for Austin Michelle Cloyd: "R.I.P Austin Michelle Cloyd" which had over 1500 members at the time of this study. In groups like this, group members posted texts to the deceased friend and texts of encouragement to other group members. There were

over 150 wall posts of this nature. Pictures were posted by group members of themselves with Austin or photos of her alone, over 130 of these images could be viewed on the group page.

This is just one example of one such group. Other groups and similar memorials were created and messages were sent. One group was set up called "A Day of Remembrance." In this group over 500 photos were posted which included the Virginia Tech black ribbon logo and the logos of schools users were attending with the words "The day we all became hokies." Users from hundreds of different networks changed their profile pictures to the Virginia Tech black ribbon logo or a version of the photos posted on the Day of Remembrance group page. The tragedy at Virginia Tech was unprecedented and the response through the outlet of Facebook was unlike one ever seen before.

An event of this magnitude deserved to be studied. As the examples above have shown, various uses can be observed based on a brief survey of the media coverage at the time. Thousands of students turned to Facebook for information both at Virginia Tech and others around the country as reported by MSN, ABC, The Washington Post and the Associated Press. The interviews and writings of the students reported in those media outlets create incredible interest. The questions of why students would select that specific medium during that specific time are, for this research project, best answered through a Uses and Gratifications lens.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications theory served as the framework by which to understand and draw conclusions about the interview transcripts collected during the research project. Uses and Gratifications theory is a mass communication theory. According to Massey (1985), "What the uses and gratifications approach has attempted to do is provide a framework for understanding when and how different media consumers become more or less active and what the consequences of that increased or decreased involvement may be (para. 3)."

Mass media communication theory was traditionally focused on understanding the process of communication and how media affected users. Several theories became popular and then faded from the mainstream view including mass society theories, normative theories and limited effects theories. By the 1960s researchers began to develop active-audience theories (Baran & Davis, 2006). Instead of focusing on how media affect audiences, whether negatively or positively, active-audience theories attempt to assess what people do with media. The Uses and Gratifications approach falls under this audience-centric approach.

Scholars were conducting audience centered studies as early as the 1940s. Paul Lazarsfeld is credited with publishing the first work on Uses and Gratifications during his time as the director of the Office of Radio Research at Columbia University. Herta Herzog was studying under Lazarsfeld and her research titled "What Do We Really Know About Day-Time Serial Listeners?" was one of the first published studies using the Uses and Gratifications framework. Her research surrounded women who habitually listened to day time radio soap operas. A preliminary study based on 100 participants revealed three major types of

gratifications experienced by habitual listeners (Lazarsfeld & Stanton, 1944). It revealed gratifications of emotional release, wishful thinking and attainment of advice. Herzog's probe into the minds of female radio consumers was the first of its kind and provided a research perspective which challenged the powerful effects paradigm. It was aimed at isolating motives and gratifications derived from radio use but came before the development of Uses and Gratifications as an approach.

Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) selected the medium of television and continued Uses and Gratifications research in ten cities on how children were using television from 1958 – 1960. The studies emphasized which programs children were choosing to satisfy their interests and needs. The primary gratification, according to the study, was entertainment. Other gratifications included having something to do on dates, having people to emulate and having something to talk about with other students. This study was larger than Herzog's isolated study. At the time of printing, the authors were able to boast that it was the first, full length study of television and North American children. The three year project sought to understand the effects of television on children by finding out what the children were using the television for and what functions it served. The results were ambiguous:

> For some children, under some conditions, some television is harmful. For other children under the same conditions, or for the same children under other conditions, it may be beneficial. For most children under most conditions, most television is probably neither particularly harmful nor particularly beneficial. (Schramm, Lyle & Park, 1961, p.1)

Despite the summary statement, this study sparked interest in many other scholars who followed Schramm, Lyle and Parker further into the unclaimed territory in the Uses and Gratifications camp.

Katz, Gurevitch and Hadassah of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Israel Institute of Applied Social Research published a study in 1973 which greatly furthered the area of Uses and Gratifications research by making practical application of research findings. The scholars assembled a list of possible social and psychological needs to be satisfied by exposure to mass media (Katz, Gurevitch & Hadassah, 1973). The list was supplemented by additional items based on the researchers' insight into media functions in Israel. Within the context of the study, the researcher's decision to create a new list of media functions was appropriate but the decision, when viewed in the larger scope of Uses and Gratifications research, can be questioned because the functions did not build off previous research findings of uses from various other media studied as categories.

Interviews were conducted with 1500 participants. Questions based on needs were posed during the interviews. Then additional questions were asked about mass communication media in relation to use to satisfy specific needs identified in the first question (Katz, Gurevitch and Hadassah, 1973). Needs were presented in the paper according to which media were reported to give the best gratification.

Numerous studies occurred after 1973. One example is Johnston's study called "Adolescents motivations for viewing graphic horror" (1995). Based on a Uses and Gratifications model, Johnston organized a study of youth age 13-16 years old through focus group and survey techniques. She identified four motivations for adolescents viewing of horror

films including gore watching, thrill watching, independent watching and problem watching. Uses and Gratifications theory was the basis of her argument that viewing motivations were predictors of responses to graphic horror.

Johnston's study connected Uses and Gratifications theory with Zillman's excitation-transfer model of media effects to predict what conditions are associated with viewing-generated arousal is transferred to a positive or negative affect. Johnston's study was an example of applying the theory to a very specific group for information about their interaction with a very specific aspect of media. The proposed study would model this by choosing a specific group of people targeting their interaction with a very specific aspect of the Internet at a very specific time.

In 1979, Blumler published a journal article in Communication Research which succinctly summarized the major issues with Uses and Gratifications theories and research. His main concerns were a lack of uniformity in method, a lack of a lack of definition for the meaning of key terms and a lack of precision when determining potential connections between uses and gratifications. In response to the disarray he published a critique of Uses and Gratifications which included a summary of areas where theories did overlap. He suggested further research be done in this vein to add credibility to the Uses and Gratifications approach. He suggested, based on findings from his study at Leebs and the works of Katz, Gurevitch and Hadassah as well as Kippax and Murray, that "despite many other differences, three orientations have surfaced from these studies which such regularity and distinctness that they clearly deserve focal attention. (Blumler, 1979, p. 17)"

From these three studies, Blumler identified three basic needs which were fulfilled by media. They were Surveillance, Diversion and Personal Identity. Blumler, often cited as an

authority in Uses and Gratifications research, discovered two additional categories in other studies. Curiosity was identified in a project that went unpublished, but was reported to the Leebs University Centre for Television Research (Blumler, 1979) and Personal Relationships was listed in the results of (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972). The media about which these studies were conducted included newspaper, television, books, film and radio. Essentially every available media was studied and these five categories arose out of the work of the forefathers of Uses and Gratifications research. This work shaped many following studies and can be seen as a beacon of consistency in the murky world of Uses and Gratifications research as many researchers have sought to prove or disprove this framework.

Uses and Gratifications and the Internet

A new medium gained popularity after Johnston's study, the medium of the Internet. This medium gave researchers a new plain of investigation and many researchers opted to view the new medium through the Uses and Gratifications paradigm. Studies have been reported as early as 1998 (LaRose & Eastin, 2004), three short years after the internet began to gain popularity (Baran & Davis, 2006). Stafford and Stafford have been pioneers in applying the Uses and Gratifications perspective to internet use with three studies published to date. They began applying Uses and Gratifications theory to media in 1996 with a study on commercial avoidance in television viewers. The pair continued their work by applying the perspective to the World Wide Web. A second study, conducted in 1998, which explored Uses and Gratifications of the World Wide Webb, was presented at the 1998 American Academy of Advertising and was a precursor to the 2001 study "Identifying motives for the use of commercial website" (Stafford & Stafford, 2001).

Having had experience applying Uses and Gratifications theory to the Internet, Stafford and Stafford added Lawrence to the group and sought to build upon existing Uses and Gratifications research by engaging in the formal Uses and Gratifications development process and determining whether the classic process and content gratifications hold in the internet context in a third study (2004). This study was instrumental in furthering the Uses and Gratifications perspective between the old and new media.

The study was conducted on users of the America Online Internet service provider and focused on consumer internet usage. In the primary stages of the study, qualitative methods were employed and participants were asked a series of questions from which were built a preliminary list of descriptive terms to serve as a sampling of possible uses and gratifications. The list of 45 descriptors from the preliminary portion was then given to a second pool of 1,258 participants who were asked to rate each of the terms based on a 7 point scale. The data was analyzed and was found to fit into two pre-existing Uses and Gratifications categories (Stafford & Stafford, 2001), of internet process gratifications, internet content gratifications, and a third new categories of internet social gratifications. The authors recognized a deficiency in the study of the Uses and Gratifications theory as applied to the internet and recommended further study based on the evidence of the social gratification category. Social gratification was explored in this study and Stafford, Stafford and Schkade (2004) was instrumental in preparing interview questions and coding information about a potentially new area of the Uses and Gratifications paradigm as applied to Internet use.

Other independent studies were launched around the same time, and shortly after the second Stafford and Stafford study, which employed the Uses and Gratifications perspective to

analyze internet users. Several studies were published in quick succession which continued development of the Uses and Gratifications and the understanding of the uses and gratifications attained by internet users in various areas. A 2000 study, published in the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media,* by Papacharissi and Rubin explored computer mediated communication through the Uses and Gratifications lens. They posed several research questions and explored the relationships between them. A survey was distributed to 279 communication students at a university and data was statistically analyzed for significant relationships. The questions focused on relationships between motives for use, effect of antecedents and media perceptions on motives, and outcomes of use based on motives. A summary statement of the findings in the discussion section of the document explained the findings this way:

> It appears those who were more mobile, economically secure, satisfied with life, comfortable with approaching others in an interpersonal context, and who felt valued in their interpersonal encounters preferred the more instrumental Internet uses, such as information seeking. Those who were less satisfied and who felt less valued in their face-to-face communication used the Internet as a functional alternative to interpersonal communication, or to fill time. (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000, p.192)

The frame Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) have created will help to establish a foundation of Uses and Gratifications of computer mediated communication in “normal” situations before exploring the uses and gratifications of computer mediated communication in

a crisis situation. Papacharissi and Rubin define computer mediated communication as communication facilitated by computer technologies including asynchronous electronic mail and computer conferencing, by which senders encode in text messages that are related from senders' computers to receivers,' borrowed from Walther (1992).

A study by Ko, Cho and Roberts (2005) also identified relationships between social motivations and interaction on the internet. While other studies have been criticized for not building from previous work done in the Uses and Gratifications vein, Ko, Cho and Roberts (2005) built their Uses and Gratifications frame upon the work of Papacharissi and Rubin (2000). The researchers identified hypotheses related to interaction with internet advertisements using Papacharissi and Rubin's motivations and correlated them with survey questions revealing relationships, both significant and insignificant according to statistical analysis, between human-message interaction, human-human interaction and duration of time spent. A sample of 385 American students and Korean students participated in the research project by providing survey responses which were analyzed for statistically significant and insignificant relationships (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005).

The findings suggested that consumers who have high information motivations are more likely to engage in human-message interaction on a website, whereas social interaction motivations are more strongly related to human-human interaction, as reported in the study. According to the authors, this study should be viewed as a benchmark study for an empirical examination of the structural antecedents and consequences of interactivity in the Internet usage context (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005).

Also published in 2005 was "Predictors of Instant Messaging Use: Gratifications Sought, Gratifications Obtained and Social Presence" by Hwang. Hwang's study applied the Uses and Gratifications perspective to instant messaging (IM) in college students. Like Johnston (1995) this is an example of a study with a specific group in a very specific media. Hwang's first two research questions are similar to those which this study sought to answer. His first question was what gratifications are college students seeking and obtaining from using IM. The second question was what is the relationship between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained from IM use (Hwang, 2005).

Though the questions are similar to this study, the methodology is different. In Hwang's study, an online survey was posted to the electronic bulletin boards of undergraduate communication classes at three universities in the United States and elicited 602 responses. Questions for the survey were adapted from six previous Uses and Gratifications studies in different areas (Hwang, 2005). Hwang found that IM fulfilled needs for social utility, interpersonal utility, individual connection, convenience, entertainment and relaxation, and information. The survey responses indicated that the gratifications sought correlated with gratifications obtained. Hwang referenced the previous studies in his discussion and included whether the method adapted supported or opposed the seminal findings. This study was one step toward building a consistent and unified Uses and Gratifications approach.

The Uses and Gratifications theory has changed and developed over the years as researchers have added to the body of research. This has been exemplified in the studies above as different relationships between media users and the media have been explored in various

situations with differing goals. This perspective is an example of an axiomatic theory because its principles are generally accepted and it is readily applicable to a varying range of situations connected with mediated communication (Stone, Singletary & Richmond, 1999). The basic principles revolve around the concept of an active audience choosing to use specific media either consciously or subconsciously based on a need. The Uses and Gratifications theory hinges on the idea that a person will actively choose a specific medium to best fit his needs and will achieve some gratifications from that use.

Though complex relationships have been discovered and explanations have been rendered through the use of Uses and Gratifications, three simple aims underlie all Uses and Gratifications research. The first is to explain how individuals use mass media to gratify their needs. The second is to discover what conscious or subconscious motives exist for individuals' media use. The third aim of the researchers building this theory was to identify consequences of individual media use (Infante, Rancer & Womack, 2003).

There exists a stigma about Uses and Gratifications theory implying that it is a theory easily inserted in studies without careful consideration. This study employs the basic uses and gratification tenets to frame and code the interview transcripts and answer the research questions through a theory based perspective. Uses and Gratifications is relevant to this study because the focus of the study is Facebook. Facebook is a new interactive social networking website and as Thomas Ruggiero stated, "uses and gratifications has always provided a cutting-edge theoretical approach in the initial stages of each new mass communication medium" (2000).

There are three key reasons that Ruggiero (2000) used to identify interactive computer-mediated mass communication as a treasure trove of possibilities for Uses and Gratifications scholars. The first was the concept of interactivity. Interactivity connects with the idea that of core tenet of Uses and Gratifications theory that consumers are active users. The second characteristic of interactive media Ruggiero identified as prime for Uses and Gratifications research is demassification. Demassification is the "ability of the media user to select from a wide menu…unlike traditional mass media, new media like the Internet provide selectivity characteristics that allow individuals to tailor messages to their needs." In interactive computer mediated communication, users create profiles with as much or as little information as possible. They can post photos, tag photos, start or join groups according to affiliation, share information about summer plans and more. Information can be instantaneously updated and alerts are sent to others when information has been changed. The third reason is the asynchroneity of interactive media. Asynchroneity is the idea that mediated messages may be staggered in time. Reactions can happen at the convenience of the users in both the sending and receiving areas. This convenience makes computer mediated communication an option to meet the needs of many users.

Facebook.com is a prime example of computer mediated communication which studies have only begun examining. It is completely interactive in every sense of the word, offering as much or as little information shown as a user desires and allowing users to completely explore any area of another person's life that is shown. All information on Facebook is a link to further information offering the user a mediated, interactive social situation. Facebook is organized

into networks of people as they choose to be affiliated. Though the website boasts active users in the millions, it has been demassified to meet the needs of individuals in each network. Interaction between users is asynchronous allowing a user to invest time when able and not miss vital parts of interaction. According to these standards and the availability for new research in this field, Facebook.com offers a unique opportunity for research through the use of the Uses and Gratifications theory.

This exploratory study through the Uses and Gratifications perspective is built on the assumption that Facebook.com users select Facebook as a media that meets specific needs. This study identifies identify some of the needs being met and which gratifications were received as a result of that use as it relates to Facebook use after the Virginia Tech shootings. It explored reasons why Facebook was selected among other media to meet those needs.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

In reviewing the studies listed above, it was discovered that survey techniques were employed in almost all of the seminal and relevant studies. The Uses and Gratifications perspective is based upon research conducted through surveys. Self reporting survey answers may be suspect according to Infante, Rancer and Womack (2003), who asked, "If respondents cannot supply reasons when asked open-ended questions but quickly select answers from a list provided by the researcher, are those answers reliable and valid?"

In 1974, Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch wrote of the areas where Uses and Gratifications theory needed to grow, "It is evident that further development of a theory of media gratification depends…on systematic efforts toward conceptual integration of empirical findings." (p.22) Despite the use of surveys, which would seem an easy method to adapt and test, Uses and Gratifications has lacked consistency in approach.

Lowery and DeFleur (1983) echoed this concern in *Milestones in mass communication research,* with a criticism that many studies have tried to set forth lists of needs, in survey form, satisfied by media content, or typologies of motivations involved in attention to mass media but such lists and typologies varied from one investigator to another. Consequently, no agreement exists about why people select particular content, what needs a given form of content satisfies or how such gratification leads to behavioral consequences. This is not to say that strides toward unification of the motives sought have not been made since 1983, but inconsistency is still an issue as the approach as a whole has not moved toward a unified approach and list.

Qualitative research methods offer an opportunity to explore Uses and Gratifications without this weakness in the survey method because they are less focused on finding causality than they are exploring the multidimensional causal relationships in situations (Keyton, 2006).

Many Internet-related Uses and Gratifications studies have also reaffirmed a basic weakness of Uses and Gratifications:

> They did not explain media exposure very well. Consistent with Uses and Gratifications studies of other media, the Internet studies that hewed most closely to the Uses and Gratifications tradition have explained less than 10% of variance in Internet usage from gratifications. (LaRose & Eastin, 2004, p.359)

By approaching a Uses and Gratifications study that varies from the standard survey technique, this study may be able to avoid the same issues that LaRose and Eastin (2004) observed in others. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) acknowledged a weakness in their own research design:

> Because our method did not allow respondents to describe their internet conversations [in relation to interpersonal utility motivation], we could not be certain as to the users' intended behaviors. In the future, researchers should focus on illuminating this aspect of personally oriented internet communication (p.190).

Facebook.com is an interpersonal utility through computer mediated communication. Interpersonal utility was just a small section of Papacharissi and Rubin's model but it is a much larger part of this project. Through interviews, college students using Facebook were able to

explain their experiences, something Papacharissi and Rubin realize would have added to their results.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to uncover uses and gratifications of some college students who interacted with Facebook.com in the wake of the Virginia Tech shootings. The following research questions were examined in this study.

RQ1: What uses and gratifications are some full-time college students currently seeking and obtaining from using Facebook.com?

RQ2: What gratifications were some full-time college students seeking and obtaining from using Facebook in the time directly after the Virginia Tech shootings?

RQ3: What are some motives which existed for use of Facebook.com in the time following the Virginia Tech shootings?

The study employed qualitative research techniques including one-on-one interviews with voluntary participants. To determine the needs met by Facebook after the Virginia Tech shootings, a typology with two categories was formed based on a previous exploratory qualitative study completed by the researcher and results of other qualitative uses and gratifications studies (Gupta, 2007, Ray, 2007, Richardson, 2003). The categories included memorialization and identification.

Selecting Participants

The initial target audience for this study included both males and females, from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, who were full-time college students during the 2007 and/or 2008 calendar year. The participants have an active Facebook account and must have interacted in some form with content specifically related to the Virginia Tech shootings.

Participants were recruited according to a methodology approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board. Individuals who met the criteria were contacted via e-mail or a Facebook message. A general outline of the project was included with a request for a phone number at which to call the individuals in order to provide them more information about the project. The phone call detailed the project with an emphasis on what would be required of the participants, as well as information about consent and privacy issues. Interviews were scheduled after the phone call.

Rationale Behind Selection of Individuals Included

Owen was a full time staff member at a medium sized private University in Central Virginia. He displayed Virginia Tech affiliations in his clothing and on his Facebook account. He fit the criteria and was asked him if he'd be interested in the study. He did not know more about the study than any other participant.

Theresa and Thomas were contacted a mutual a mutual friend who contacted them and if they would be interested in hearing more about the study because they had attended Virginia Tech during the time of the shootings. They both expressed they would like to hear more about it. At that point they were contacted via Facebook as outlined above.

Own, Thomas and Theresa were the first three participants. After their interviews were complete the researcher sought more participants through Facebook. The researcher went to several of the groups dedicated to the event and sent Facebook messages outlining the basic study to individuals who were members of the group, who had posted on the wall of the group or who were administrators of groups. The only criteria for deciding who to send messages to was to look at the "network" next to the individual's name for networks connected with Universities and to seek individuals who weren't connected with Virginia Tech. Fifty messages

were sent on two different days to try and find participants. Additional information was given to individuals who responded and interviews followed with those who followed through within the timeline for completing interviews.

Individuals who weren't associated with Virginia Tech were sought because a perspectives from Virginia Tech were already represented. It is not uncommon for a community to grieve for its loss and to show this in varying ways. It is far more unique for hundreds of thousands of individual with limited or no connection at all to make significant changes in their behaviors as a result of a loss.

Interviews were conducted from September 4 – October 5, 2008 with five taking place over the telephone, one through e-mail and one in person. Four males and three females participated. All participants were Caucasian. All participants were college students; one in a Seminary program and the rest pursuing Bachelor degrees. All of the participants except two attended public colleges or universities. Participants ranged in age from 20 years old to 24 years old (see Appendix E). Three US states, Florida, Nebraska and Virginia, were represented as well as the country of Greece. Participants' self described connection to Virginia Tech at the time of the shootings ranged from no connection; knew people who attended VT at the time of the shootings; had close friends who attended VT at the time of the shooting; and attended VT at the time and lost close friends as a result of the shooting (see Appendix E). Participants averaged between 0-30 minutes a day on the internet to over 10 hours a day (see Appendix E). The participants had profiles listed on Facebook.com from 2years – 5 years (see Appendix E). Having this variation proved interesting for exploring potential relationships between variations.

Interview Process

An informal interview approach was taken. Three types of interviews were conducted – phone, face-to-face and email. Face-to-face was used for participants within a close proximity, while phone interviews were used for individuals outside of close proximity but still within the country and one e-mail interview was conducted with a participant living in Europe. Mediated techniques including telephone and e-mail interviews have been criticized because of a lack of rapport with participants and the commitment level of the participant is difficult to measure (Keyton, 2006). This concern can be addressed in this study because due to the electronic nature of the subject of the study, rapport may be established through contact on Facebook, which is how the electronic interviews were initiated (Sipple, 2008).

Participants were asked questions broken into four categories: Personal and Educational Background, Facebook Use and Habits – General, Connection to Virginia Tech and Facebook Use and Habits – In connection with the shootings (see Appendix B.) These questions were based on other qualitative Uses and Gratifications research by Gupta (2007) and Ray (2007). The categories were made with the idea of exploring the variations in reported uses and gratifications across respondents in mind. Observation, informal rhetorical analysis and previous exploratory studies resulted in the formation of two typologies upon which the semi-structured questions were centered around exploring: memorialization and identification.

By asking questions of this nature the researcher was able to explore the differences between current Facebook use and Facebook use in the wake of a traumatic event. Participants were given the opportunity at the end of the interview to note anything of relevance to the research topic that was not adequately covered in the interview.

The purpose of this method was to determine any potential themes found among participants. This method was chosen to gain further insight into what participants thought or

felt while accessing Facebook, from their perspective. Strengths of this methodology include the opportunity for further investigation based on real time interaction with participants and interviewing as an opportunity to gather information that is not observable on Facebook (Keyton, 2006).

Interviews took place during a time suggested and agreed upon by both the interviewer and interviewee. All applicable interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. Participants were assured anonymity and protected as per the standard of research practices. They signed an informed consent document guaranteeing these rights. The interviews were taped and transcribed for analysis purposes. Analytical memos were employed by the researcher during the interviews to make note of and highlight tentative conclusions with care to make sure to realize that they are not part of the data.

After the data had been collected, the researcher employed a holistic approach for analysis which involved reading the transcripts several times to become familiar with the texts. After a familiarization occurred, the researcher went through each transcript and highlighted different subject areas, grouped together ideas that compare and contrast.

Segments of the transcripts were highlighted based on three criteria developed by Owen (1984) to enhance credibility. The first of the criteria is recurrence which was the appearance of a report having the same thread of meaning even if the wording wasn't the same. The second was repetition or the same phrase occurring several times and the final was forcefulness in tone, volume or inflection. This was accomplished with the assistance of a QSR International qualitative research software called XSight which stored the transcripts in one interface. XSight allowed for a more streamlined organization of data and made multilevel

comparisons possible. All data was sorted and arranged in uniform categories. XSight catalyzed queries and reports which were used to interpret the data (http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_xsight.aspx.)

Chapter 4 – Results

This study sought to identify the uses and gratifications of full time college students' Facebook use both currently and after the time of the Virginia Tech shootings and potential motivations for this use. This information was collected through interviews. Once the interviews were compiled, the findings were compared with Blumler's five needs established needs: Surveillance, Diversion, Personal Relationships, Personal Identity, and curiosity. Before expressing the results in conjunction with Blumler's five established needs, it is important to understand Blumler's categories independently. The answers to the research questions are sorted out into the categories below as they apply or do not apply to Blumler's approach to the Uses and Gratifications theory.

Surveillance was classified as a news viewing behavior. McQuail, Blumler and Brown described this as more than just exploring. "More towards having some information and opinions about events in the wider world of public affairs than towards stimuli for reflecting upon a set of more immediately experienced personal problems. (1972, p. 452)."

Diversion can be broken down into three sub categories: escape from the constraints of routine, escape from the burdens of problems as well as emotional release (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972).

Personal relationships can be further broken down into two headings according to the findings of McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972). The first category is companionship. The researchers explain this as, "a process whereby the audience member enters into a vicarious relationship with media personalities (fictional characters, entertainers or presenters) as if he was on friendly terms with them, and as if they were a real person. (McQuail, Blumler &

Brown, 1972, p. 448). The second category is social utility. They described social utility as a category:

> Covering those uses of media which are instrumental for social interaction with real people in familiar surroundings….refer[s] to media use as a source of conversational material, as subject of conversation itself, as a common activity for a family or other group engaging…or as something that helps an individual to discharge a definitive social role or to meet the membership requirements of one or more of his peer groups. (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972, p. 449)

Personal identity is broken down into three parts. The first is personal reference. This is explained as "use of a program content to characterize or highlight for the viewer some feature of his own situation, character or life, past or present. (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972, p. 451)" It also includes the concept of self reflexivity which is described as "the notion that the central element in the world of every person is some notion of himself, and such a notion is formed in great party by looking at oneself through the eyes of others. The researchers found that "not only interpersonal exchanges but mass communications can help some people to form or reassess impressions of their own 'selves.' (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972, p. 450)"

The second part is reality exploration which can be simply described as the use of a program to stimulate ideas about certain problems the viewer is experiencing or might at sometime experience in his more immediate social environment." (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972, p. 451). Individuals in McQuail, Blumler and Brown's study (1972) also described gaining perspective through programs as the participants compared their lives to that

of the lives portrayed on TV. The third gratification category under Personal Identity is value reinforcement. Value reinforcement simply means that individuals choose a program because it reinforces their values.

Curiosity was not described in as much detail as the other categories but included statements from participants like, "I can use it to find out about things I need to know about in my daily life. It helps me satisfy my sense of curiosity. It shows me what society is like nowadays. It makes me want to learn about more about things. (Blumler, 1979, p. 34)"

Surveillance

In the section of interviews about current Facebook use, participants expressed that they used Facebook as a place from which to glean information. This can be defined as using Facebook to gain information about other individuals' activities, status, and change in profile information, relationship status and appearance in photographs displayed on profiles.

Participants explained that knowing what is going on with people, as observable on Facebook, doesn't necessarily involve two-way communication. Francis explained this concept saying, "[You are] able to see what people are up to but not having to schedule time…you don't have to worry about making sure that you spend time with the person all the time, so you can keep tabs I guess."

The home tab on Facebook.com reports to members the activities of confirmed friends in the members' networks. This page is the first a member sees after logging in through the Facebook.com portal. It is updated constantly as individuals change, adjust or participate in reportable applications or activities. "[Facebook] is a quick way for people to disseminate information to others. I tend to find out about things quickly like events and things like that," Theresa shared.

The use of Surveillance, or "finding out what others are up to," as Silus described, was primarily gratified by Facebook over other traditional means, according to Theresa who expressed an emotional reaction to being disconnected from the site. "I start to get a little crazy if I go more than a couple days without looking at it because I feel like I'm out of the loop because so much is tied to Facebook nowadays," she said.

Silus noted that Facebook was an available line of communication when other means were unavailable, "I can tell what people are up to even if I don't have the means to contact them directly via phone and email…it's just a nice at a glance look into their lives and seeing how people are doing."

Participants identified information gathering, also expressed in form of keeping updated, as a use that is gratified in a unique way by Facebook because it doesn't require two way communication to be updated on the lives of others, it provides an at a glance look into others lives, and it is a line of communication that is available while others may not be. Without Facebook, some college students feel they are "out of the loop."

Surveillance was a reported use during the time after the shootings as well. Immediately after each participant became aware of the situation happening on the Virginia Tech campus, they turned to some sort of corporate news source. CNN, CBS and ABC were specifically by several participants. Both internet and television news sources were accessed while the story developed. This is notable as it mirrors exactly what Blumler found in his studies. For the participants of this study, however, the available news did not meet the need to know more and for some, to get what they considered accurate information.

Theresa, who was on the campus at the time of the event explained that the telephone lines were jammed causing person to person communication through traditional media to come to a stand still:

> It was hard, I know now that there was a lot of false information on the news so it was kind of hard to wade through what was real and what was false so I didn't know what was released and what was not. Since the phones weren't working, we were basically relying on the internet to communicate with everyone so people created Facebook groups that, I know one of the big ones was 'I'm okay at VT,' you were supposed to join it if you were fine and safely in your dorm or at home just so other people knew who to look for, who was missing. I know a lot of groups like that and people were putting names of people who they hadn't heard from on the Facebook groups and asking if anyone else had heard from them. Thousands and thousands of students at a time were on these groups just trying to figure out who the specific people were that we needed to be really concerned about.

Francis, who had friends on the Tech campus, looked to Facebook, for evidence of safety. She explained, "It was basically an easy to way to tell if someone was alive at that point because you could see their history on Facebook and you could see if they were on there and if they were on there then obviously they were still okay."

The search for information was not confined to Facebook but took place over other messaging systems as Theresa explained, "I was talking to a lot of people online and that was

how we were getting information across to each other. That's how we found out that both of our friends were in that classroom."

"It was how we figured out who was okay and who wasn't, by who had updated their status. That's how we found out that some of the guys in the corps had been affected," Thomas shared of how he heard the news of his friend's injuries.

There were several motivations identified by participants for Facebook use specifically as it pertained to the seeking information use after the event. For some it was a matter of convenience. Tomas described that Facebook was easier to use than a cell phone and he was motivated to use Facebook because, "It freed up the phone lines allowing people to stay off the phone so important calls could come through. That way I wouldn't feel like my phone call was keeping someone else from being able to talk."

A motive that was frequently expressed was that Facebook's instantaneity allowed for the most up to date information about the well being of specific to be found. Theresa found this relieving, "When I was looking at people's updates on Facebook I felt relieved when people I knew turned out to be okay.

Following the event, participants turned to Facebook to find information about those who had been affected by the shootings. They looked to Facebook groups, status bars and updated news feed information as evidence of the status of their friends well being. If an individual displayed some sort of action on Facebook then it was safe to assume they were safe. Some participants, namely those who attended Virginia Tech at the time, used Facebook because it was available and instantaneous when other communication media were not. Facebook's instantaneity motivated some participants to seek information about specific individuals because they felt the information was reliable and quickly made available.

Facebook is used for Surveillance as described by Blumler through its reporting of individual's activities and the pooling of these reports for easy distribution in "realtime." Though Blumler's definition excludes surveillance as material that stimulated reflection upon a set of more immediately experienced personal problems, the researcher posits that it should be extended to include both behaviors in the case of the Virginia Tech shootings as individuals collected information for the purpose of processing the event.

Diversion

Diversion includes escapism and emotional release according to McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972). Only a few individuals reported using Facebook for entertainment which may be closely related to escapism as it allows individuals to interact with something outside of them which does not require thought of current situation or circumstances.

Some participants described using specific areas of Facebook for entertainment purposes. Facebook is organized into what it calls Applications. Applications are exactly what they are named, executable programs. Owen described his use of a Virginia Tech football application:

> I have an application for Virginia Tech football fans and you can play trivia on there where it will ask you questions and you get points, You get rankings and a certain title depending on how many trivia points you've earned. It tells you what kind of football fan you are. I forget my title, but I've got a couple of thousand points. I've invested a few hours in that application total.

The only other application for entertainment purposes mentioned was the Bumper Sticker application. Two participants mentioned this application.

Others described use of the standard Facebook applications as “entertaining” and “fun.” The applications described in conjunction with these statements include the wall, video and most popularly, photos. Selena used Facebook as a catalyst for outside entertainment through group discussion. “Here we have this group called The Husker Ticket Exchange so I’m able to get rid of my tickets or purchase tickets a lot easier,” she said.

Participants used Facebook applications, namely Virginia Tech Football and Bumper Sticker, for the purpose of entertainment as well as derived entertainment from standard Facebook features like the wall, photos and video. Facebook also offered opportunities for individuals to connect about outside entertainment possibilities through groups like Husker Ticket Exchange. This is admittedly a week connection between escapism and entertainment but it may still be seen as evidence that Blumler’s categories may be present in new media use.

The second part of the description of Diversion is that it provides individuals with emotional release. In one seminal study (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972) this was described as television viewers living vicariously through TV characters. In connection with Facebook use, the researcher would like to extend to say that Facebook use allows a forum for individuals to have emotional release. Several participants described using the status bar to express their emotions about the event.

Typically, the status describes what a user is currently doing, thinking or feeling. When a status is updated, it is immediately reported on the news feed of everyone connected to that account via “friendships.” Participants described changing their status to recognize the shootings during the time shortly after. Only some of the Not every participants engaged in this form of recognition. Recounted status changes ranged from general to specific memorial statements and statements of the safety of an individual attending Virginia Tech.

The popularity of status changes and the instantaneity of the report of status changes were the primary motivations for changing the status, Theresa expalined:

> I think mostly it was just following the crowd. I saw what everyone else had changed their status to friends they had lost or to say that they were okay so I figured that I should do the same. I guess it was just because I was following suit of others and using the features that made the most sense at the time that I knew other people would be able to see pretty easily.

Participants also experienced emotional release through using the groups feature. Through conversations with members of one of the largest groups dedicated to the event, Silus was able to make sense of the event:

> It was more of a good way to get their perspective on what happened. Converse with them about it and see where my reaction and that persons' reaction kind of overlapped or what the differences in perspectives were and talk about it that way, kind of reason through it.

At this point, the categories of Diversion and Personal Relationships converge. Through Diversion uses, Personal Relationships were being formed. Reported levels of feeling connected to other individuals during this time, as a function of Facebook allowing users to identify themselves with each other as part of the event and as a function of Facebook acting as a sort of "support group," varied according to the number of ways an individual acknowledged the event on Facebook and the individual's active level of participation as reported in the group section. Participants who described acknowledging the event through one or two features and who only joined groups felt some connection during the time directly following the event but

reported that this connection weakened considerably as time progressed. Participants who described acknowledging the event in two or more ways and who posted on groups described a greater level of connection which weakened to a smaller degree than those with "low" levels of activity. Francis explained:

> It's not as strong a connection because people have left the group and people have changed their profile pictures but I think there is still an underlying connection just to know at some point we had that one significant thing in common, that we were all trying to deal with the event in one way or another, through changing profile pictures or through joining groups or just in general dealing with the event.

Participants who were most active in groups and who reported acknowledging the event in at least two ways expressed a very high and sustained level of connection. This was attributed to the interactive, person to person basis of the interaction these participants engaged in. Silus explained:

> If you see someone else with a picture dedicated towards the event at the same time you do, you might think okay that's cool that person was affected too but actually talking to them and realizing the level at which it may have affected that person gets the message across that much more clearly.

The relationships made by Finn, the participant who both created and moderated a group, during this time were very meaningful. He expressed:

> I felt very much connected. After making the group I made great friends, four of which I can now even call best-friends. It was a dialogue opener,

> we all had questions and we all had the same emotions. Tragedies such as this can really pull a group of people together.

The categories of Facebook members which participants connected with varied in how well participants knew the members and whether or the members exhibited similar levels of acknowledgement. Participants expressed feeling most connected to other Facebook members who exhibited the same types of recognition and who they knew before the event. Participants expressed a weaker but still notable connection with individuals who they didn't know but who did exhibit the same recognition. There were exceptions in Finn and Silus who connected deeply with individuals they had not known before the shootings who also exhibited the same recognition behaviors.

Personal Relationships

The nature of Facebook as a medium is connected with Personal Relationships category because it touts itself as being a place for people to connect. This was reported in both current uses of Facebook as well as Facebook use after the Virginia Tech Shootings. Facebook calls itself a social networking site. Social networking, as defined by Webster's New Millennium Dictionary of English, is the use of a website to connect with people who share personal or professional interests, place of origin, education at a particular school, etc. Facebook began as a peer to peer connection between individuals at the same college or universities. This was Silus' original motivation for joining Facebook:

> The primary reason I got it was that I was going to college and I know that college users use Facebook all over the place so it was kind of like keeping in touch with people that I know that go to other schools.

Facebook requests that members validate friendship requests by confirming that one member agrees with another member on a "friendship." There is no requirement or distinguishing between degrees of friendship at the confirmation level. Some participants, like Selena, expressed use of Facebook to further connections. "I don't want to say you make friends through it but you meet people, you add them, and become friends with them over Facebook and then just grow in relationship," she said.

Like Theresa, Selena also used Facebook's networking features to connect with classmates, "If I have a class with someone too I'll add them on Facebook and if you miss anything, I've had people ask me 'what did I miss today' and vice versa."

Owen used Facebook features to provide live networking opportunities through an application called Events:

> You can set up the type of event you're having solely through Facebook. You never have to call people or try to notify them any other way. They'll check their Facebook account. You can have them RSVP and then you know exactly how many people are going to be coming to your event.

Silus explained other applications which made networking easier saying, "You can also join groups and have discussion with like minded people. There are the different group and fan pages you can [see]. Employers look at profiles and have their pages too which was then made easier with the changes Facebook has made in the past year or so."

Facebook calls itself a social networking website and this is part of how college students are currently using Facebook. Facebook meets the need to connect with others,

provides a place to "grow" into relationships, gratifies a need to communicate with others about shared courses, and enables live networking through applications like Events.

This gratification of personal relationship is related to Blumler's category but differs because of the capabilities of the new medium. While one way communication (i.e. radio, television, books, news) allows for vicarious relationships, two way communication allows for substantiated relationships. This does not remove the possibility for a vicarious relationship as Facebook use enables users to passively know what is going on in other's lives without the effort that traditional relationships require.

The category of relationships maintenance falls under the Personal Relationships umbrella. Relationship maintenance can be observed through relationship maintenance behaviors. Simply put, relationship maintenance behaviors are strategies for maintaining existing relationships. Seminal research in this area includes that of Stafford and Canary (1991) who established five strategies of relationship maintenance including positivity, openness, assurance, social networks, and sharing tasks. All of these are built on a foundation of communication between individuals. In this study, the desire to communicate, and subsequently maintain relationships, was expressed as "keeping in touch."

Finn described Facebook as an important medium for this because, "It keeps me close to my friends who are very important to me, and most of which live thousands of miles away."

Even those located geographically closer to friends and family still found it useful for this purpose. Tomas shared:

> It does help me keep in touch with my close friends from back home because as far as I know I am the only one from my school that goes here

> and the vast majority of people that I know from high school are still back home in Ohio. It's kind of a way to keep in touch with them.

"I have a few friends who live in Canada and don't have cell phones. [Facebook is] the best way to get in contact with them," Owen expressed.

Facebook enabled Selena to be better at keeping in touch better. "I'm not very good at picking up the phone and calling an old friend so Facebook is a big help in that area," she said.

"It allows me to keep updated on my friend's lives because it allows me to see things that we have in common, like friends that we have in common that we didn't know because we know them from different places," Francis responded. Her use went past a simple desire to communicate with others and can be categorized as a social networks relationship maintenance behavior.

Theresa explained which aspects of Facebook made "keeping in touch" easier:

> Friends that I have that I went to high school with that go to different universities it makes it easier to keep in touch with them because now there's Facebook chat and messaging back and forth and posting on each other's walls.

Facebook allows for relationship maintenance over distance. Participants expressed that it was easy because of the chat, messaging and wall post features. Some participants expressed that Facebook was a better medium for them to contact some friends who weren't available through more traditional mediums like the telephone and e-mail.

In the wake of a crisis situation, participants acknowledged the event through addressing the victims. The two participants who attended Virginia Tech at the time of the shooting were the only participants to report having lost friends. Both of them identified

messaging victims via the victim's Facebook accounts and/or with messaging victims via dedicated group walls as a way they or people they knew acknowledged the event.

"One of the girls who was shot, her Facebook is still up and people still post on her wall. They'll post previous memories and on her birthday, tell her happy birthday," Tomas explained. This activity is observable on Facebook as recently as September of 2008. Tomas believes it will extend into the future as well. "Everyone who was killed is going to receive an honorary degree in the semesters they would have graduated I think that when they receive those, people will post on their walls to congratulate them," he said.

The Facebook pages of, and groups dedicated to the deceased turned into virtual memorials. Interaction on these pages, according to Theresa, brought together those affected by the tragedy through shared relationship with this person:

> I was really relieved when Austin and Danielle's profiles remained the same and people would go and write on their page, as a way to connect to each other I think. It was really just touching to just look at one of their pages and see what people had written about them, people that you didn't know that had known them at a different point of life and to feel how much each of these people were cared for was really evident through Facebook.

A desire to connect may have motivated those individuals, according to Theresa, to address the victims as a way of acknowledging the event.

There were not descriptions of conscious motivations for this activity during the interviews. It is the researcher's position that a possible unconscious motivation for this activity may be that addressing the victims and others connected to the victims via dedicated

Facebook groups and the victims' profiles, assisted in moving participants through the mourning process. According to Therese Rando, there are six "R" processes of mourning (1993). The third "R" process is to recollect and re-experience the deceased and the relationships. The activity described in the participants' narratives can be classified as recollecting and re-experiencing the deceased and relationships. Sending messages addressed to the victim is an act of re-experiencing a pre-existing relationship because Facebook "friends" are linked to each other by mutual endorsement of a relationship. To cross the "bridge" from one profile to another is an affirmation of this relationship regardless of what the text in the message is. The following text was posted on April 18, 2007, the day after the shootings, on the wall of a group dedicated to one of the victims:

> You'll forever be in our hearts, minds, and prayers. rest in peace. we will always remember you, although at the moment many of us are more or less paralyzed, without a clue on how to deal with this loss. but we know that you are in a better place, and believe that He will show you the path that he has in mind for you. we miss you. we miss you…," ("*RIP*," 2008.)

There are over 250 similar messages of remembrance and messages addressed to the victim in this case. This message appeared on the same group wall September 28, 2008:

> I wear my ASP bracelet always...every time I see it, I think of you. This summer, when I couldn't go, I spent most of the week when my group was in Tennessee thinking not only of them, but of you as well, and that you'll never get to go again. It doesn't seem fair. ("*RIP*,"2008)

Individuals are still using these groups to acknowledge the event by addressing the victims over a year and a half later. Other activity spanning the time between is visible as well.

Acknowledging victims is an expression of personal relationship in so much as it allows users to have a vicarious relationship with an individual who no longer exists in a "real-life" form.

Facebook use as reported in this study can be categorized under Blumler's personal relationship category because it allows for substantiated and vicarious relationships as well as relationship maintenance. Facebook use as a social utility, which is a word used by the company to describe itself, was not observed directly in this study but the researcher feels strongly that future research may find evidence of Facebook use being classified as social utility according to Blumler's categories.

Personal Identification

There are several areas where the participants' reported Facebook use was related to Blumler's concept of Personal Identity. According to the narratives found in this study, the reality exploration was the category most strongly relatable. Reality exploration was described as "the use of a program to stimulate ideas about certain problems the viewer is experiencing or might at sometime experience in his more immediate social environment," (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972, p. 451). Reality exploration was expressed when participants were describing Facebook behaviors of adjustment of profile pictures and joining groups after the shootings.

Profile Pictures

Within 24 hours of the event, an observable tide had swept the Facebook community and it was maroon and orange in nature. Through several different Facebook applications and features, participants of this study and other students as well, observably, actively made changes to their Facebook profiles in some way to acknowledge the Virginia Tech shootings. The most popular form of recognition was changing a profile picture; all seven participants reported changing their profile pictures. Most images included the Virginia Tech logo imposed

over a black memorial ribbon. Others combined the participants' school logos with a combination of the VT logo, black ribbons and/or bible verses.

One motivation for this action was that a profile pictures directly reflects the member as an individual. A member's picture is equated with who he is. Tomas explained:

> Your profile picture is always connected to you. Everything you do has your profile picture next to it. It is much more visible than anything else. It seemed more fitting that my profile picture be about the event than to be about me. It was my way of showing that I was a part of what happened.

Owen said, "I chose to change the profile picture because I figured that whenever someone is looking at your account, your picture is really what [they] see first, it catches your eye."

Jean Laplance and J.B. Pontalis explained, from a psychoanalytic perspective, that identification can occur on two levels, one is what something is, such as: it is a door, a window, a person, etc. The other is just as if; not simply imitation, but assimilation of oneself with a subject. One identifies oneself with an object or characteristics of an object (as sited in "identification," 2008). In the case of changing profiles, the participants described changing their photographs from a representation of what they are, which is traditionally as a picture of themselves as they actually appear, to identifying with an object, or in this case an event or movement. This was summed up by Finn, "It was what I believed to be right. Thousands of people were grieving, and I wanted to show to the World that I too was grieving."

There were other motivations uncovered for changing profile pictures including a desire to express emotions:

> A national event like that especially one that affects so many people and directly affects a massive number of people in my age group, that are going to school just like myself, that will have a profound impact on somebody. It did have that sort of effect so I just felt that it would be an adequate representation of how I was feeling.

In addition to expressing emotion, participants were concerned with making others aware of those feelings. Participants were motivated by a desire to make an instantaneous impact:

> When you log onto Facebook you see updates that people have done on their profiles so I feel like it was more widely recognized because so many people were changing their profile pictures and I think it was a really good show of support and you could see it as soon as you logged onto Facebook.

Convenience was uncovered as a motive as described by Owen when he said, "The picture was readily available; it was convenient to be able to get that. It was a quick easy way. I think that I downloaded it from someone else's Facebook." How long individuals kept the profile picture varied, some as long as a month and others created combination photographs including themselves in images that still featured the Hokie memorial ribbon.

All seven of the participants changed their profile pictures after learning about the event. Motivations for this action ranged from identification, desire to express emotions, desire to make an instantaneous impact and convenience of availability of the image. This is just one of several ways participants recounted recognizing the events through their Facebook accounts.

*Grou*ps

Several participants reported group interaction after the event. This interaction took place on varying levels. Some participants joined groups, some posted in groups, some created groups and some moderated groups. These can be viewed as levels of interaction. The lease active level of interaction would be joining a group, the most active level of interaction would be moderating Groups created about this event ranged in purpose from general to specific. Some participants, like Selena, interacted in a group with a more specialized audience like Huskers for Hokies. Others, like Finn and Silus, participated with groups open to a much larger group. Silus described one such group:

> By far this group was the largest at one point it got up near, the highest it got, was over 750,000 maybe, I'm not sure on the exact numbers but it was well over half a million and it was close to a million. I'm not sure if we ever got there but we were really close.

Other groups were created in honor of specific individuals who were victims of the shooting.

Members of groups interact through wall posting, adding photos and using the discussion board. In the larger, more general groups, many of the photographs posted were renditions of the Hokie memorial ribbon photos. Photographs in the groups dedicated to specific individuals included uploaded photographs of the individual, sometimes with members of the group.

"I joined several Facebook groups at that point, one that was 4/16/07 the day that we all become Hokies and then another group that was like, 'Students praying for Virginia Tech'," Finn explained. On this level, the motivations discovered are in line with the idea above of identification. When a member joins a group, others are alerted via the news feed and a link to

that group is placed on the member's profile. Group membership is connected to identification as members display interest by identifying themselves *with* the name and content of the group.

The motivation in this, and other examples discovered in the study, is rooted in identification but also reveals a motivation of desiring to be proactive:

> It could have happened to us and I just wanted to show my support for people and I also wanted to be a part of everything in a more positive way I suppose by joining these groups of people. Rather than just sitting around and moping about it and crying, I showed my support.

Joining a group is an actual action members of Facebook take in that they have to search for the group, visit the group page and click to become a member of the group. Selena selected which groups to join based on the number of members in the group. This could be an indication of actively seeking to identify with the largest amount of people possible.

The final motivation for joining groups, in addition to identification and a desire to make an instantaneous impact, was expressed by Francis. "I joined groups partially just to show support and show that people are more united after the shootings than they were before hand," she said. The terms support, honor and unity came up frequently during the course of the interviews.

In addition to joining groups, participants also posted on group walls and discussion boards. This was a more active step than simply joining a group as it requires effort to express and attach an idea to a discussion thread or to a wall. From his interaction with individuals on the group wall and discussion boards, Silus was able to better understand the event:

> It was more of a good way to get their perspective on what happened, converse with them about it and see where my reaction and that persons' reaction kind of overlapped or what the differences in perspectives were and talk about it that way, kind of reason through it. It wasn't emotional as it was rational.

After posting on group walls or discussion board, is the level of creating a group. Chronologically, creating a group comes before both joining a group and discussing on a group wall. This is labeled as more active because it does not require as much effort to simply join an existing group; it is as easy as the click of a button. To create a group requires a separate series of activities with no less than four steps in the process. Only one participant had created a group as a way to acknowledge the event.

"I created the Facebook group. I wanted answers to my questions. And by making this group I was able to get these answers," Finn said. He expressed a desire to find answers about the event and found the answers he was looking for through his interaction in the groups. This is different than information seeking though it sounds the same. This motivation may be more closely related to a desire to process the gravity of the situation and will be discussed later in the paper.

The final, most active, reported group related activity was serving as a moderator of a group. A moderator's role, according to Silus was to "keep everybody under control." The group he worked for wanted to avoid spamming and even protected posting false accounts appearing under the same name as the shooter. While joining a group and posting on a group wall or discussion board are active steps, Facebook members came and went from the group pages. For moderators, like Silus and Finn, a much more considerable amount of time was

dedicated to not only recognizing the event but also preserving the quality of group interaction. Silus explained his dedication:

> There were some days when I didn't have class or when I wasn't eating or sleeping my computer was on and it was to the Facebook group and the MSN chat pretty much the entire time. The time probably skyrocketed in relative terms, probably 8-10 hours a day that I was actually on the Facebook group. This lasted for probably at least two to three weeks maybe even four. After that it scaled back as activity in the group slowed down a little bit. I would have to say at least four to five hundred hours total.

Motivations for this specific level of activity were not as overtly expressed by the individuals, though themes of duty and preserving the ability for individuals to express their opinions in a safe environment were subtle, possible motivations present in responses about this specific activity.

Participants expressed motivations of wanting to identify with the larger group of affected people, a desire to be proactive and a desire to show support when using Groups to acknowledge the Virginia Tech shootings. When analyzed, group interaction of participants created a curve from low activity level to high activity level depending on the amount of applications used within the group and the amount of time spent involved with group interaction. The low end of the spectrum included members who simply joined a group and the highest end of the spectrum included members who spent hundreds of hours moderating the groups. Interacting with individuals in groups, especially groups number in the 100's of thousands, shaped participants view of themselves as Blumler described (1972).

Changing profile pictures and joining groups were related to Blumler's category of Personal Identity because they stimulated ideas about problems which users were facing in their own lives. This study was not designed to seek validation of the personal identity characteristic during current Facebook use; however, based on the response related to Facebook use after the Virginia Tech Shootings it would be a worthwhile possibility for future researchers to explore.

Curiosity

Curiosity was not discovered in this study as a category. This does not mean that it may not exist as a potential category for Facebook use. Further research should be done to reach a conclusion on the viability of Curiosity as a category before it is ruled out completely.

Potential for New Categories

After having classified findings according to Blumler's categories, potential for a new category in the instance of a crisis situation arose. Individuals reported turning to Facebook for reasons connected with the mourning process. This included memorialization, showing support, and use of Facebook as a support group in conjunction with the afore mentioned inclusion of Rando's mourning process. Traces of these can be found in the other reported categories by several descriptions by participants made the case for separation.

One participant expressed acknowledging the event through the creation of new photo albums dedicated to images of a member with friends who were affected, the vigils and of the memorials around campus and through adding memorial text to her "About Me" section of her profile. This participant attended Virginia Tech at the time of the shooting and lost close friends

as a result of the event. She expressed that the purpose of these actions was to memorialize the friends she had lost.

Owen expressed, in the simplest terms, what several participants identified as a motive for using Facebook, “To show my support of Virginia Tech and the Virginia Tech community during that crisis time.”

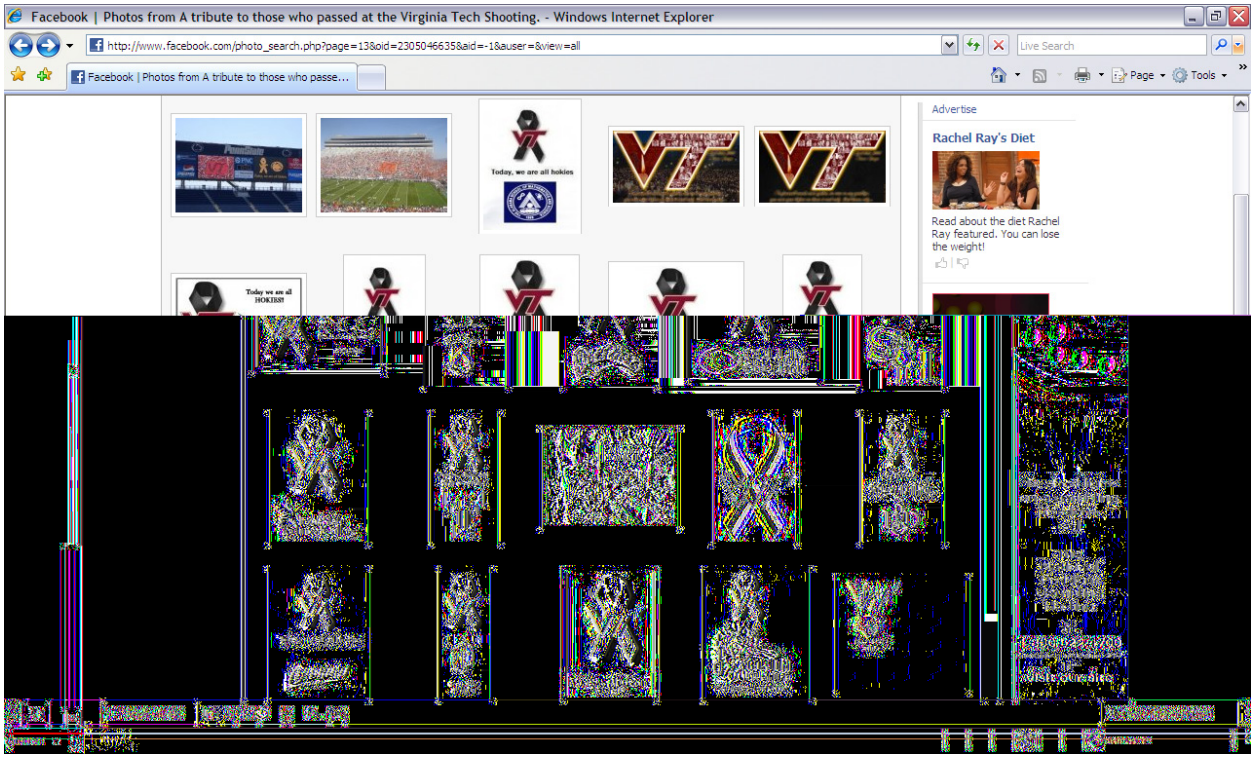
Francis recognized a special need to show support as a part of the University community as expressed:

> To show support of Virginia Tech because…with sports, universities are always at odds and fighting against each other. There is [sic] always rivalries of some sort but it was just to show that when it really came down to it I was supporting them and everyone else was too.

The “everyone else” she was referring to is representative of the vast amount of schools who had at least one student pledging the support of their university (see Figure 1 on next page).

When asked how they viewed the visual indications of support from individuals from other universities, the reactions of participants who were attending Virginia Tech at the time of the shootings were mixed. “The people who weren’t there, they didn’t know, they couldn’t understand what actually happened, but it was a nice gesture,” Thomas said.

Figure 1.



A screen shot from the photo section of “A Tribute to those who passed at the Virginia Tech Shooting.” This page shows 20 of over 1, 850 images added to this group. As of October 10, 2008, the group had 242, 853 members, 1,801 discussion board threads, and 21,426 wall posts.

Theresa explained how she felt about the virtual expressions of support and condolence:

> I think there was a little resentment toward people who didn't go to Virginia Tech but then once you saw all of the amazing support and money that was donated and all of these objects that the university got that feeling went away really quickly and I realized that as much as people may not have been there but they were trying to understand in their own way as much as possible what we were going through.

Not only did participants express the desire to show support as a motivation for using Facebook, they also discussed the instantaneity of Facebook as a motivating factor. Francis expressed, "When you log onto Facebook you see updates that people have done on their profiles so I feel like it was more widely recognized."

For the participants who were attending Tech, Facebook offered a mediated way of receiving questions and concerns from individuals connected to them through Facebook:

> Facebook was useful for the amount of people that it reaches and seeing how people I hadn't talked to in years and years were contacting me and asking me if I was okay. I guess just because almost everyone has a Facebook that I know and people spend a lot of time on it and check it as often as their email and just find out things really quickly.

For Tomas, his Facebook friends' probing into how he was doing was a very serious indication of their level of friendship. "I received messages from friends asking whether or not I was okay. That became how I could tell who was really my friend and who wasn't by who sent me messages or wall posts asking me if I was okay."

The motivation that came up most frequently, in 6 of 7 interviews, was the pervasiveness of Facebook and the ability to reach the widest possible audience. As Owen expressed:

> It's just something that's very common, a lot of people use Facebook and see it so I knew a lot of people were going to see my support of Virginia Tech through Facebook. There was probably a larger audience and definitely a different audience because there are a lot of people that I don't see face to face anymore that I am connected on Facebook with but they wouldn't have seen me wearing the clothing or at the memorial service.

Silus was overwhelmed by the volume of activity on the group he moderated. He used the term amazing to describe the volume of response:

> On the discussion board there is a topic entitled condolences from and the primary purpose of the thread was to post your school and the city and we had people from all over the world posting in this topic….it has over 2300 posts…the amount of sympathy and the response from people was confounding.

Participants expressed that it was very important to them to reach past their immediate sphere of influence in order to show that they were touched by the event. "Facebook is widely used across our country and…was the best way I knew to show my support. Anything else wouldn't have been reaching out to anybody besides my close personal friends. This way I was reaching out to everybody," Selena said.

Silus reported getting feedback from Virginia Tech students about the amount of support shown to them via the group:

> Yeah they absolutely loved what we were doing. It felt great to know that they had the support of virtually every other university in the United States. It was through the wall and discussion posts that they expressed their gratitude. I believe at some point I may have received a couple messages from students at Virginia tech expressing gratitude for the group and what we had been doing, with the group for them and that kind of thing.

College students, according to this narrative, were using Facebook features with a motivation to express gratitude for the support received as well as to express support.

Some participants expressed that Facebook activity helped them to process emotions during the time of the event. Owen explained, "It's almost like a support group, kind of. There are others out there that are experiencing the same things and it just shows community, people coming together."

Theresa's activity, in her words, was, "Kind of a method of healing to myself and to show others what these people meant to me and that they were a big part of my life and to fill a void and keep them and remember."

Chapter 5 - Discussion

Summary

Facebook use as reported in this study can be categorized under Blumler's personal relationship typology because it allows for substantiated and vicarious relationships as well as relationship maintenance. Facebook use as a social utility, which is a word used by the company to describe itself, was not observed directly in this study but the researcher feels strongly that future research may find evidence of Facebook use being classified as social utility according to Blumler's categories.

There are several areas where the participants' reported Facebook use was related to Blumler's concept of Personal Identity. According to the narratives found in this study, the reality exploration was the category most strongly relatable. Reality exploration was described as "the use of a program to stimulate ideas about certain problems the viewer is experiencing or might at sometime experience in his more immediate social environment," (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972, p. 451). Reality exploration was expressed when participants were describing Facebook behaviors of adjustment of profile pictures and joining groups after the shootings. This study was not designed to seek validation of the personal identity characteristic during current Facebook use; however, based on the response related to Facebook use after the Virginia Tech Shootings it would be a worthwhile possibility for future researchers to explore.

Facebook was used by participants of this study for Surveillance through its reporting of individual's activities and the pooling of these reports for easy distribution in "real-time," Though McQauil, Blumler and Brown's definition (1972) excludes Surveillance as material that stimulated reflection upon a set of more immediately experienced personal problems, the

researcher posits that it should be extended to include both behaviors in the case of the Virginia Tech shootings as individuals collected information for the purpose of processing the event.

Diversion was a category discovered by Blumler and his associates which was also described by participants in this study. The first two sub-points of Diversion were escapism. There was a weak link discovered between entertainment as described by participants and Diversion. The second part of the description of Diversion is that it provides individuals with emotional release. In one seminal study (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972) this was described as television viewers living vicariously through TV characters. In connection with Facebook use, the researcher would like to extend to say that Facebook use allows a forum for individuals to have emotional release. Emotional release was made possible through the status bar and group interaction by participants in relation to Facebook use after the Virginia Tech shootings. At this point, the categories of Diversion and Personal Relationships converge. Through Diversion uses, personal relationships were being formed.

Curiosity did not appear as a category of Facebook use. This does not definitively mean that it should not be included as a possibility as future researchers seek to challenge or solidify the findings of this exploratory study.

After having classified findings according to Blumler's categories, potential for a new category in the instance of a crisis situation arose. Individuals reported turning to Facebook for reasons connected with the mourning process. This included memorialization, showing support, and use of Facebook as a support group. Traces of these can be found in the other reported categories by several descriptions by participants made the case for separation.

This study found evidence of the social gratification use as proposed by Stafford, Stafford and Schkade (2004) as the terms "chatting," "friends," "interaction," and "people" were offered by

participants when discussing their uses and gratifications of Facebook.com. Results indicated that Facebook fulfilled needs for social utility, interpersonal utility, individual connection, convenience, entertainment and relaxation, and information as Hwang (2005) found in his study of IM use in college students.

Points of Interest

Concerning September 11, 2001

Several of the participants referenced September 11 during their discussion of the impact of this event. Owen described:

> One thing that I saw in the event was similar to what happened with 9/11 was that you really just saw really I guess the whole country, but especially here in Virginia where Virginia Tech is a local school for us, you know, relatively, you really just saw community come together. Even the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech's big rival had a memorial service I believe or something thereof for the event. You saw stores everywhere put on their signs by the roads something about the event saying 'we are all hokies' something memorializing it and things like that. You really just saw everyone, the whole country and especially here just really come together kind of like the country did after 9/11.

Owen continued to describe how he saw this reflected on Facebook as members changed their profile pictures, joined groups, and displayed memorials in varying ways. Thirty two individuals were killed and one committed suicide on April 16th. This is hardly numerically close to the 2,985 individuals killed on September 11th, yet participants still felt the events were connected enough to be compared during the discussion. This, when combined with the support

group function and the desire for identification expressed during the study, could have potential for remarkable implications. Perhaps a comparison can be made between the United States as a nation and the university community as a distinct group. As a result, generalizations from studies of one group facing tragedy may be applicable to the other. Future study to identify unique characteristics of persons inside the university community have and to analyze whether or not these characteristics were affected by the Virginia Tech shootings in a similar way that characteristics of being American were after September 11th may substantiate this claim.

Communal Grieving

Durkheim (as cited in Agnich, Hawdon & Ryan, 2008) explained that communal bereavement is the widespread experience of grief among people who did not know and never met the deceased; it is marked by mass gatherings of mourners and acts of condolence. Five of the seven participants in this study fall into the category of going through a process of communal bereavement. Those specific words were not used to describe Facebook use after the Virginia Tech shootings. The behaviors of joining groups, posting on group walls, creating groups and moderating groups, as well as changing profile pictures and altering the status bar can be considered acts of condolence because the motivation for these acts was identification and to show support. Groups themselves can be considered mass gatherings of individuals in a virtual sense. In agreement with Durkheim's studies, Agnich, Hawdon and Ryan, who studied communal grieving on the Virginia Tech campus following the events, found that communal grieving is beneficial because communal grieving itself can be healing. This is revealed in the interviews with participants who had a need to express themselves in reaction to the event and who were gratified as this need was met through Facebook. This study contains evidence that Facebook was the site of communal grieving after the Virginia Tech shootings and enabled

healing because it enabled grieving. To what extent grieving and healing were accomplished remains to be measured by future research.

Ease and Instantaneity

Facebook is used because it gratifies a need to get information immediately. It is also used because members describe it as "easy." Facebook is easy because it connects people who would otherwise be unable to connect. As Finn describes, "The majority of my friends are just a click away."

A primary reason participants gave for using Facebook is that it combines other technologies in one platform. "It acts as an e-mail account and text messaging and everything. It combines email accounts and text messaging and anything else into one website. It helps me keep in touch with people," Francis said. Selena likened her use of Facebook use to that of her cell phone.

Owen described Facebook as being easier or more beneficial in some cases:

> My friend that I can't communicate with by telephone and I can communicate with him by email but Facebook is quicker really because he checks it more often I think. Facebook is a better way to communicate than email with him.

In this case it would seem that Facebook is easier because more people are on it.

Thomas confirmed this in his statement, "Facebook can in some ways be more reliable than a phone call. Sometimes I'll hear back faster if I send a Facebook message than if I call and leave a message."

Tomas actually described Facebook as, "A primary way to get a hold of people because people are constantly checking it."

Facebook is updated instantaneously as individuals make changes to their accounts. “Whenever people take pictures they put them on Facebook right away,” Theresa shared.

Members receive e-mails as other individuals seek to get connect or contact them. “I’d say it’s a lot faster than other things because since it can send an email to another email account saying that you have things that you can check, it’s faster to keep in touch with people that way,” Francis stated.

Facebook is gratifying to users because of its ease and instantaneity. The site is beneficial because it is a combination of technologies and it reflects updates in real time. Instantaneity was a subject brought up by each participant in one way or another during the course of conversation about current Facebook use and about Facebook use in conjunction with the Virginia Tech Shootings. Facebook is deemed as a highly reliable medium for communication and in some cases is considered the preferable way to communicate with others.

COMPARISON OF CURRENT USE AND USE AFTER THE SHOOTINGS

A comparison of current Facebook use and Facebook use during the time directly after the Virginia Tech shootings reveals overlap. For the purpose of this discussion, the researcher assumes that current Facebook use is comparable to Facebook use before the shootings. This assumption is based on the length of time participants reported having Facebook accounts, the overlap of reported uses and the difference in motivations uncovered for the overlapping uses. The researcher observed different motivations for the same actions as evidence of situational circumstances affecting uses and gratifications of Facebook. The current social climate is comparably similar to the situation before the shootings and will be utilized that way for the purpose of this discussion.

Some uses and gratifications carried over from use before the crisis to use after, while others did not. The use of entertainment was not discussed at all when participants recounted their activity in relationship with acknowledging the Virginia Tech shootings. Of the three most prevalent features applications said they currently used, Photos, was one that was only reported once during discussion of Facebook use after the event. It was reported by the female participant who had been attending Virginia Tech during the time of the shootings and who had lost close friends. It is interesting that this feature, though observable in large volume on Facebook groups dedicated to the event or in memory of victims, was not reported by the other six participants, even those which spent a considerable amount of time moderating groups.

Information gathering was reported in both the current uses and uses after the shootings parts of the interviews though with a notably greater urgency after the Virginia Tech shootings and with a stronger, emotional reaction to both when information was reported and when information was not reported. A *lack* of activity was of grave concern during the time after the shootings. This reveals a difference in the assumptions participants had while viewing information presented on Facebook. The assumption underlying no concern for lack of activity is that an individual may or may not be using their Facebook profile as the individual sees fit. The assumption underlying a concern for a lack of activity is that anyone alive after the shootings would be on Facebook. This is a stark difference. Future research is needed to undercover all of the implications of this assumption.

Networking was also a reported activity across both categories of Facebook use. The current uses of networking for social, academic and business purposes were adapted in the face of the tragedy. Networking after the shootings was geared toward identification with others and served as a support group. Given the use of Facebook for relationship maintenance, this would

not seem particularly unusual in the face of extenuating circumstances but the networking within existing relationships did not lead to the deepest connections. The deepest reported connections were made between individuals who did not know each other before hand but would now describe each other as “best friends.” This raises many questions as to what constitutes a “real” friendship and the role of media in the forming of person to person relationships.

Ease and instantaneity were categories scattered throughout motivations for current Facebook use, motivations for acknowledgement in specific features of Facebook after the shootings as well as a general motivation to use Facebook to acknowledge the event. Combined with the perceived and actual pervasiveness of Facebook, the ease and instantaneity provided the optimal place for the participants to express themselves and show support. The themes of expression and showing support were repeated several times per participant, across the board.

It surprised the researcher to find that it was not enough for participants to express their identification, both with the event and those connected with the event, to the individuals who might see them in real life. The participants expressed a need to show as many people as possible, as quickly as possible, that they were part of this event too. Could this be connected with the advent of personality based reality television or the YouTube fad where normal people disseminate their opinions and reactions at the click of a button and the speed of coaxial cable? The participants were not surprised at the realization that they felt they needed a large audience to be made aware of their involvement before they felt they had done enough to acknowledge the event.

Limitations of Research

This study is limited by a lack of diversity in participants. While there are several states represented, they are all located on the east side of the country. It is limited because rather than having data about how individuals used Facebook before the Virginia Tech shootings, it assumes that Facebook use before the event and current Facebook use are similar enough to compare. This study also included only a small number of participants which were used to explore potential themes for the larger population. This was intentional as to allow the researcher to seek in depth interviews rather than breadth in numbers. The study sought to test whether or not some of Blumler's categories may be transferred to a new medium during a crisis situation. Future research must be done to test these tentative conclusions. Rather than discrediting the findings of this study, these limitations challenge future researchers by providing many opportunities for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could include a study with a more ethnically diverse sample of participants to see if there is variance in Facebook use across ethnicities. Participants from schools across the nation would address some of the limitations of the current study and allow analysis of the connection between using Facebook for the uses and gratifications found in this study, in relation to participant's distance from the Virginia Tech campus. This could be extended further and include Americans living in other countries during the time of the shootings.

Additional studies on Facebook users from other demographics, including high school students could add dimension and allow analysis of whether being a part of the "university community" impacted the uses and gratifications during the time after the shootings. Future

researchers could extend this study by interviewing more students from Virginia Tech to see if reactions of the two participants in this study prove to be representative of Virginia Tech students as a whole. This study could be broadened to include similar petitioning of individuals on other virtual, social networks like MySpace to see if results were equally observable.

This study might also initiate probes into the use of mediated communication as a means of relationship maintenance. Further study could include a study of the scope and depth of relationships made and maintained online and their crossover into “real life” situations. Rhetoricians may find a call in this study to analyze text in Groups dedicated to acknowledging the event and specific victims’ profiles as it pertains to virtual memorials. While this study was small in scope, it can serve as a spring board for the research community to explore several topics in a more in depth way.

References

Agnich, L., Hawdon, J. & Ryan, J. (2008). Communal grief and solidarity after 4/16/07 at Virginia Tech. Footnotes 36(4) retrieved from http://www.asanet.org/footnotes/apr08/va_tech_0408.html on October 14, 2008.

Baran, S. J., Davis, D.K., (2006). Mass media theory: Foundations, ferment and future. Belmont: Thomas Wadsworth Publishing.

Blumler, J.G, (1979). The role of theory. Journal of Communication Research, 6(1), 9-36.

Facebook.com, (2008). About us. Accessed April 23, 2008 at http://www.new.facebook.com/press/info.php?factsheet

Facebook.com, (2008). RIP Austin Michelle Cloyd. Accessed October 10, 2008 at http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2322528452

Gupta, S. S. (2007). Uses and Gratifications of game show reality programs. Unpublished master's thesis, San Jose State University, San Jose, California.

Guynn, J. (2007). Yahoops!. Accessed April 13, 2007 from http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/sfgate/detail?blogid=19&entry_id=15036

Hwang, H., (2005). Predictors of instant messaging: Gratifications sought, gratifications obtained, and social presence. Conference Papers: International Communication Association; New York, NY, p1-34.

identification (n.d.) In Wikipedia. Retrieved October 8, 2008, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_psychoanalytic_view_on_Identification#cite_note-laplanche-0

If you're OK, please update your profile. (2007, April 16). ABC News. Retrieved April 20, 2007, from http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=3046253&page=1

Infante, D.A., Rancer, A.S., & Womack, D.F. (2003). Building communication theory. Long Grove: Waveland Press, Inc.

Irvine, M. (2007, April 17). Technology becomes a coping mechanism. USA Today. Retrieved April 20, 2007, from http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-04-17-technology-coping_N.htm

Johnston, D. D., (1995). Adolescents' motivations for viewing graphic horror. Human Communication Research 21(4):522-552.

Katz, E., Blumler, J.G., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). The uses of mass communications: Current perspectives on gratifications research. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Katz, E., Gurevitch, M, & Hadassah, H. (1973). On the use of mass media for important things. American Sociological Review 38(2): 164-181.

Keyton, J. (2006). Communication research: Asking questions, finding Answers. McGraw Hill: Boston.

LaRose, R. & Eastin, M.S., (2004). A social cognitive theory of internet uses and gratifications: Toward a new model of media attendance. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media

Lazarsfeld, P.F. & Stanton, F.N. (1944). Radio research 1942-1943. New York: Duel, Sloan, and Pearce.

Lengel, L., Thurlow, C., & Tomic, A. (2004). Computer mediated communication: Social interaction and the Internet. London: Sage Publications.

Lowery, S., & DeFleur, M.L. (1983). Milestones in mass communication research. New York: Longman.

Massey, K. B. (1995). Analyzing the uses and gratifications concept of audience activity with a qualitative approach: Media encounters during the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake disaster. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 39, 328–342.

McQuail, D., Blumler, J.G., and Brown, J.R. (1972). The television audience: A revised perspective. In M. Marris & S. Thornham (Eds.), *Media studies: A reader* (438-454). New York: New York University Press.

Olsen, Stefanie (2006). Teens and media: A full time job. C/net news.com. Accessed February 20, 2007.

Owen, W.F. (1984). Interpretive themes in relational communication. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 70, 274-287.

Papacharissi, Z. & Rubin, A.M., (2000). Predictors of internet use. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 44(2)

Quick Facts (2002). The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation

Rando, T. A., (1993). Treatment of complicated mourning. Champaign : Research Press.

Ray, M. B. (2007). Needs, motives and behaviors in computer mediated communication: An inductive exploration of social networking websites. Unpublished manuscript.

Richardson, J.D. (2003). Uses and gratifications of Agnostic refuge: Case study of a skeptical online congregation. Journal of Media and Religion, 2(4), 237-250.

Roberts, S., (2005). Who americans are and what they do, in census data. The New York Times, available online www.newyorktimes.com

Rubin, A.M., & Rubin, R.B. (1985). Interface of personal and mediated communication: A research agenda. Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 3, 184-199.

Ruggiero, T.E. (2000). “Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century.” Mass Communication and Society, 3: 3-37

Savitz, E. (2007). Yahoo could regret not paying up for Facebook, Needham Says. Accessed April 13, 2007 from http://blogs.barrons.com/techtraderdaily/2007/04/04/yahoo-could-regret-not-paying-up-for-facebook-needham-says/.

Schramm, W., Lyle, J., & Parker E., (1961). Television in the lives of our children. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Schramm, W. & Roberts, D. F., (1971). The process and effects of mass communication. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Sipple, L. (2008). To watch or not to watch? That is the question. Identifying the common characteristics of the reality television viewing audience. Unpublished M.Coms. thesis, Master Thesis, Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia.

social networking. (n.d.). Webster's New Millennium™ Dictionary of English, Preview Edition (v 0.9.7). Retrieved October 07, 2008, from Dictionary.com website: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/social networking

Stafford, L. & Canary, D. J. (1991). Maintenance strategies and romantic relationship type, gender, and relational characteristics. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 8, 217-242.

Stafford, M.R., & Stafford, T.F. (1996). Mechanical commercial avoidance: A uses and gratifications perspective. Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising, 18, 27-38.

Stafford, T.F. & Stafford, M.R. (1998). Uses and gratifications of the World Wide Web: A preliminary study. In D. Muehling (Ed.), Proceedings of the 1998 American Academy of Advertising Conference. Pullman: Washington State University, 174-182.

Stafford, T.F., & Stafford, M.R. (2001). Identifying motivations for the use of commercial web sites. Information Resources Management Journal, 14, 22-30.

Stafford, T.E., Stafford, M.R. & Schkade, L.L., (2004). "Determining uses and gratifications for the Internet." Decision Sciences, 35, 259-289

Steiner, E., (2007). Washington Post Blog. Washingtonpost.com. Accessed April 20, 2007 from http://blog.washingtonpost.com/virginia-tech-blog-roundup/

Stone, G., Singletary, M., & Richmond, V.P. (1999). Clarifying communication theories: A hands-on approach. Ames: Iowa State University Press.

Technology becomes coping mechanism (2007). Associated Press News Article

Vargas, J.A. (2007, April 18). A chain of grief with links on Facebook. Washington Post, p C01.

Walther, J.B. (1992). Interpersonal effects in computer-mediated interaction: A relational perspective. Communication Research, 19, 52-90.

Appendix A

CONSENT FORM
The Day We All Became Hokies:
A Uses and Gratifications Study of Facebook Use After the Virginia Tech Shootings
Sabrena Carter
Liberty Universityss
Communication Studies

You are invited to be in a research study of the motivations behind Facebook use in connection with the Virginia Tech shootings. You were selected as a possible participant because you matched the criteria which included being an individual of any race, ethnic background, or health status who was a full time college student during the 2007 and/or 2008 calendar year. You had an active Facebook account and interacted in some form with content specifically related to the Virginia Tech shootings.We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Sabrena Carter of Liberty University Communication Studies department

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to ask individuals who match the criteria to reflect on their use of Facebook.com before, during and after the Virginia Tech Shootings in hopes to identify reasons why Facebook was chosen over other available media and what needs Facebook use met in the lives of participants.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to: participate in an informal interview where you will be asked to respond to open ended questions about your Facebook use before, during and after April 16, 2007. You may also be asked to fill out a survey with closed and open ended questions about their Facebook use before, during and after April 16, 2007. Interviews will be audio taped for transcribing purposes and the expected length of participation is one extended interview session (approximately 1 hour) with two follow up conversations if necessary.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has minimal risk: The risk involved in participation is no greather than every day activities. The small amount of risk may be connected with recounting what was potentially a very intense emotional time after the Virginia Tech shootings. In order to minimize this risk, questions will be posed to participants in a neutral and non-threatening way. Participants will not be forced to answer any question they are uncomfortable answering and will be given time to process thoughts in between interview questions. Questions will be posed to participants in a neutral and non-threatening way. Participants will not be forced to answer any question they

are uncomfortable answering and will be given time to process thoughts in between interview questions.

.

The benefit to participation is: that you have the opportunity to continue to recognize the importance of something they have already invested some measure of time in, which is commemorating the Virginia Tech shootings.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Digital recordings of the interviews, transcripts of the interviews and interviewers notes will be stored on an external hard drive, the hard drive of the interviewer, and a back up CD for an undetermined amount of time. Information will be recorded under pseudonyms. Only the researcher will have access to the tapes.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time with out affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Sabrena Carter. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at 505 Atlanta Avenue, Lynchburg, Virginia, 24502, 540-383-5847, smcarter@liberty.edu or her adviser at 535-582-2285, tasmith2@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 2400, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:_____Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian:_____ Date: _____
(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

Appendix B
Interview Guide for Semi-structured Interviews With Eligible Participants

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?
Do I have your permission to tape this interview?
I would like to remind you that you may decide not to answer any speicific question, and that you may discontinue the interview at any time.

Personal and Educational Background
What is your date of birth?
How would you describe your racial/ethnic background?
What colleges or universities have you attended? What degree were/are you pursuing?
During the time immediately before, during and after the shootings, did you reside on or off campus?
On the one-year anniversary of the event did you reside on or off campus?

Facebook Use and Habits - General
How much time a day, on average, would you say you spend on the internet?
How much of that time is spent on Facebook or reading Facebook related emails?
How long have you had a Facebook.com account?
What is your primary motivation for having a Facebook.com?
What benefits are there to having a Facebook account?
What features of Facebook do you interact with most often?
What role does your Facebook.com account have in your life?
What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of Facebook having this role in your life?

Connection with Virginia Tech
Were you connected in any relational way to the event?
If yes, in what way?
How did you feel after you heard about the event?
What words would you use to describe your feelings?
What did you do to address these feelings?

Facebook Use and Habits – In Connection with the Shootings
Was this a motivating factor in choosing to interact with feature of Facebook.com to recognize the event?
Did your facebook.com use change after the shootings? If yes, in what way?
In what ways did you recognize the events on the Virginia Tech campus through your Facebook account?
Why did you choose those Facebook features to recognize the events as opposed to others?
Are there any special considerations you made as you chose what Facebook features to use to recognize the event?
What would you consider the most important reason for recognizing the events on your Facebook account?

Did you feel connected you with others who displayed the same behaviors? Even with those who you didn't know before hand?
If so, do you still feel connected to those individuals?
Did you participate in any other types of recognition during the time surrounding the event (i.e. purchasing clothing, wearing ribbons, participating in prayer vigils)?
If yes, why did you also choose to use Facebook.com to supplement other types of recognition?

Wrapping Up
Is there anything you would like to add that I did not ask you about?
Do you have any questions for me about y study or about the topic of narrative?

Appendix C
Liberty University Institutional Review Board Application

Ref. # _____

APPLICATION TO USE HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECTS

Liberty University

Committee On The Use of Human Research Subjects

---

1. Project Title: The Day We All Became Hokies: A Uses and Gratifications study of Facebook Use after the Virginia Tech Shootings

2. Full Review ☐ Expedited Review ☒

3. Funding Source (State N/A if not applicable): N/A

4. Principal Investigator:
   Sabrena Carter, MA COMS student 540-383-5847, smcarter@liberty.edu, 505 Atlanta Avenue, Lynchburg, VA, 24502

5. Faculty Sponsor (if student is PI), also list co-investigators below Faculty Sponsor, and key personnel:

   Professor A. Todd Smith, MFA Communication Studies, 582-2285, tasmith2@liberty.edu

8. The principal investigator agrees to carry out the proposed project as stated in the application and to promptly report to the Human Subjects Committee any proposed changes and/or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others participating in approved project in accordance with the Liberty Way and the Confidentiality Statement. The principal investigator has access to copies of 45 CFR 46 and the Belmont Report. The principal investigator agrees to inform the Human Subjects Committee and complete all necessary reports should the principal investigator terminate University association. Additionally s/he agrees to maintain records and keep informed consent documents for three years after completion of the project even if the principal investigator terminates association with the University.

_____
_____
Principal Investigator Signature Date

_____
_____

Faculty Sponsor (If applicable) Date

Submit the original request to: Human Subjects Office, Liberty University, 1971 University Blvd., IRB Chair, Suite 2400 CN, Lynchburg, VA 24502

APPLICATION TO USE HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECTS

10. This project will be conducted at the following location(s): (please indicate city & state)

- ☐ Liberty University Campus
- ☐ Other (Specify): Blacksburg, VA

11. This project will involve the following subject types: (check-mark types to be studied)

- ☒ Normal Volunteers (Age 18-65)
- ☐ Subjects Incapable Of Giving Consent
- ☐ In Patients
- ☐ Prisoners Or Institutionalized Individuals
- ☐ Out Patients
- ☐ Minors (Under Age 18)
- ☐ Patient Controls
- ☐ Over Age 65
- ☐ Fetuses
- ☐ University Students (PSYC Dept. subject pool ___)
- ☐ Cognitively Disabled
- ☐ Other Potentially Elevated Risk Populations_____
- ☐ Physically Disabled
- ☐ Pregnant Women

12. Estimated number of subjects to be enrolled in this protocol: _____8_____

13. Does this project call for: (check-mark all that apply to this study)

- ☒ Use of Voice, Video, Digital, or Image Recordings?
- ☐ Subject Compensation? Patients $_____ Volunteers $_____
- ☐ Advertising For Subjects?
- ☐ More Than Minimal Risk?
- ☐ More Than Minimal Psychological Stress?
- ☐ Alcohol Consumption?
- ☐ Confidential Material (questionnaires, photos, etc.)?
- ☐ Waiver of Informed Consent?
- ☐ Extra Costs To The Subjects (tests, hospitalization, etc.)?

☐ VO2 Max Exercise?
☐ The Exclusion of Pregnant Women?
☐ The Use of Blood? Total Amount of Blood _____
Over Time Period (days) _____
☐ The Use of rDNA or Biohazardous materials?
☐ The Use of Human Tissue or Cell Lines?
☐ The Use of Other Fluids that Could Mask the Presence of Blood (Including Urine and Feces)?
☐ The Use of Protected Health Information (Obtained from Healthcare Practitioners or Institutions)?

14. This project involves the use of an **Investigational New Drug** (IND) or an **Approved Drug For An Unapproved Use**.
☐ YES ☒ NO

15. This project involves the use of an **Investigational Medical Device** or an **Approved Medical Device For An Unapproved Use**.
☐ YES ☒ NO
Device name, IDE number and company:

16. The project involves the use of **Radiation or Radioisotopes**:
☐ YES ☒ NO

17. Does investigator or key personnel have a potential conflict of interest in this study?
☐ YES ☒ NO

EXPEDITED/FULL REVIEW APPLICATION NARRATIVE

A. PROPOSED RESEARCH RATIONALE

An unprecedented event of this magnitude deserves to be studied. As the examples above have shown, various uses can be observed based on a brief survey of the media coverage at the time. Thousands of students turned to Facebook for information both at Virginia Tech and others around the country as reported by MSN, ABC, The Washington Post and the Associated Press among others. The interviews and writings of the students reported in those media outlets create incredible interest. After a conversation with a staff member at Virginia Tech 8 months after the event, it became clear to me that the process of understanding this event has barely begun. It is my hope that this research may lead to a better understanding of the situation.

B. SPECIFIC PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED

Subjects will be invited to participate in an informal interview where they will respond to open ended questions about their Facebook use before, during and after April 16, 2007. Interviews will be conducted in a quiet, public area (i.e. a library, a coffeeshop, a restaurant). Only the interviewer and the interviewee will be present. The interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorded after the interviewee has given consent. The interviewer will be taking notes during the interview. Participants may also be asked to fill out a survey with closed and open ended questions about their Facebook use before, during and after April 16, 2007.

C. SUBJECTS

The inclusion criteria for the subject populations including gender, age ranges, ethnic background, health status and any other applicable information. Provide a rationale for targeting those populations.

The targeted population for my study is men or women of any race, ethnic background, or health status who was a full time college student during the 2007 and/or 2008 calendar year. The participant must have an active Facebook account and must have interacted in some form with content specifically related to the Virginia Tech shootings.

Individuals may be excluded if they were not full time college students during the 2007 and/or 2008 calendar year, do not have an active Facebook account or did not interact in some form with content specifically related to the Virginia Tech shootings.

The maximum number of subjects I am seeking approval to enroll is 15 individuals. The nature of this exploratory project is qualitative and will be based on interview material. Allowing more than 15 individuals would require work beyond the requirements of this project.

D. RECRUITMENT OF SUBJECTS AND OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT

Subjects will be approached based on the previously described criteria. They will be contacted via e-mail or a facebook message. A general outline of the project will be included with a request for a phone number at which to call the individuals in order to provide them more information about the project. The phone call will detail the project with an emphasis on what would be required of the participants as well as information about consent and privacy issues. Interviews will be scheduled after the phone call.

F. CONFIDENTIALITY

The subjects will be given pseudonyms by which their information will be categorized.

Digital recordings of the interviews, transcripts of the interviews and interviewers notes will be stored on an external hard drive, the hard drive of the interviewer, and a back up CD for an undetermined amount of time. All three of these devices will be stored in the private home of the interviewer. Information will be

recorded under pseudonyms. Access to the devices will be protected both digitally and physically by passwords and storage in discreet locations. Only the interviewer and other investigators as noted above will have access to the files.

It is not the researchers plan to destroy the research records for any reason. The interview transcripts may be used as evidence in further research purposes but none are planned at this time.

G. POTENTIAL RISKS TO SUBJECTS

This project has minimal risk associated with participation. The small amount of risk may be connected with recounting what was potentially a very intense emotional time after the Virginia Tech shootings.

Questions will be posed to participants in a neutral and non-threatening way. Participants will not be forced to answer any question they are uncomfortable answering and will be given time to process thoughts in between interview questions.

There are no anticipated reasons for any necessary medical or professional intervention. A list of local counseling options will be available to participants upon request should the interview cause any psychological discomfort.

H. BENEFITS TO BE GAINED BY THE INDIVIDUAL AND/OR SOCIETY

This project has several possible direct benefits to students. They would have the opportunity to participate in a ground breaking study. They would be asked to examine themselves in a way that may provide insight into an otherwise automatic response. The most valuable reason is that they would have the opportunity to continue to recognize the importance of something they have already invested some measure of time in, which is commemorating the Virginia Tech shootings.

This project will be a positive contribution by adding to the body of research surrounding an event which confused and shocked many people. Greater understanding of the event will hopefully lead to healing. It will also contribute to documenting one of the deadliest shootings in our nation's history.

I. INVESTIGATOR'S EVALUATION OF THE RISK-BENEFIT RATIO

The potential for risk is very low in the described project. The investigator believes that the minimal potential risk which may be caused by prompted reflection of events surrounding the Virginia Tech Shootings is not more than would be necessary for a healthy emotional healing process. The benefit of helping individuals understand what factors may have been underlying their use of Facebook as well as helping the culture understand the context of the deadliest school shooting in the nation's history outweigh the minimal potential risk.

J. WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(See Appendix A)

L. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS
(See Appendix B)

M. COPIES:
For investigators requesting **Expedited Review** or **Full Review**, email the application along with all supporting materials to the IRB Chair (Dr. Fernando Garzon, fgarzon@liberty.edu). Submit one hard copy with all supporting documents as well to Dr. Fernando Garzon, Liberty University, IRB Review, 1971 University Blvd., Lynchburg, VA 24502.

Appendix D
Interview Participants

Finn
Age: 20
Average Daily time on the Internet: 5 hrs
Average Daily time on Facebook: 20 minutes
Connection to VT: had close friends who attended at the time of the shootings
Degree pursuing: BS International Business and European Affairs
Gender: Male
Racial/Ethnic Background: Caucasian
University Location: Greece
University Type: Private
Years on Facebook: 2

Francis
Age: 21
Average Daily time on the Internet: 3hrs – 4 hrs
Average Daily time on Facebook: 45 min – 1 hr
Connection to VT: Knew people who attended at the time of the shootings
Degree pursuing: BS in Exercise Science
Gender: Female
Racial/Ethnic Background: Caucasian
University Location: Virginia
University Type: Public
Years on Facebook: 4

Owen
Age: 24
Average Daily time on the Internet: 20 min – 30 min
Average Daily time on Facebook: 5 min – 10 min
Connection to VT: Knew people who attended at the time of the shootings
Degree pursuing: MA in Theological studies
Gender: Male
Racial/Ethnic Background: Caucasian
University Location: Virginia
University Type: Private
Years on Facebook: 3.5

Selena
Age: 21
Average Daily time on the Internet: 10 hrs -12 hrs
Average Daily time on Facebook: 5-6 hrs
Connection to VT: No Connection
Degree pursuing: BS in Psychology
Gender: Female

Racial/Ethnic Background: Caucasian
University Location: Nebraska
University Type: Public
Years on Facebook: 3

Silus
Age: 20
Average Daily time on the Internet: 3 hrs -4 hrs
Average Daily time on Facebook: 30 min – 45 min
Connection to VT: No Connection
Degree pursuing: BS in Physics
Gender: Male
Racial/Ethnic Background: Caucasian
University Location: Florida
University Type: Public
Years on Facebook: 2

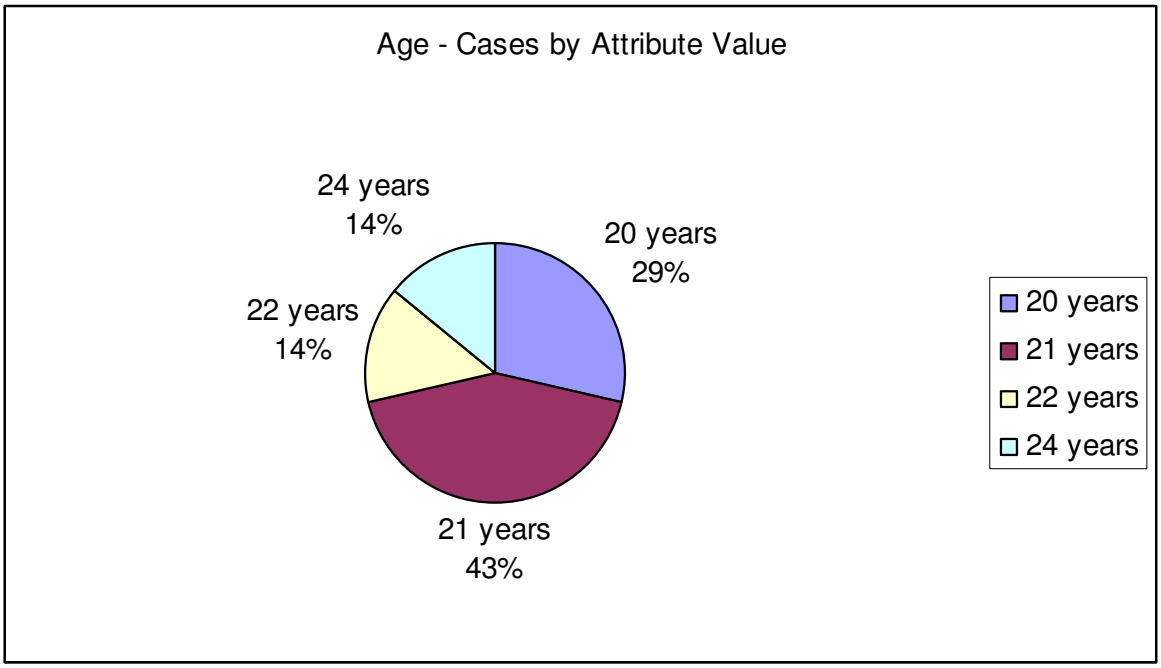
Theresa
Age: 21
Average Daily time on the Internet: 1 hr – 2 hrs
Average Daily time on Facebook: 30 min
Connection to VT: attended at the time and lost close friends as a result of the shooting
Degree pursuing: BS in Political Science
Gender: Female
Racial/Ethnic Background: Caucasian
University Location: Virginia
University Type: Public
Years on Facebook: 4

Tomas
Age: 22
Average Daily time on the Internet: 2 hrs – 3 hrs
Average Daily time on Facebook: 15 min – 20 min
Connection to VT: attended at the time and lost close friends as a result of the shooting
Degree pursuing: History
Gender: Male
Racial/Ethnic Background: Caucasian
University Location: Florida
University Type: Public
Years on Facebook: 5 years

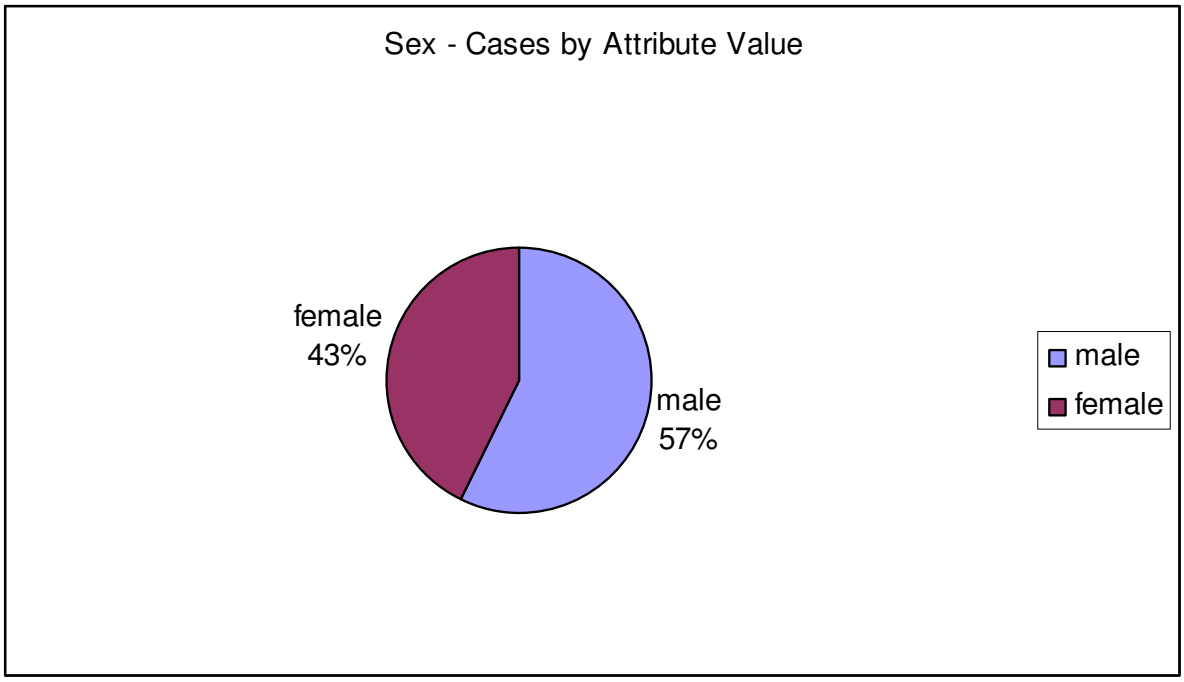
Appendix E
Charts and Graphs

These charts were created with data collected about participants. They only represent the seven individuals who participated in this study.

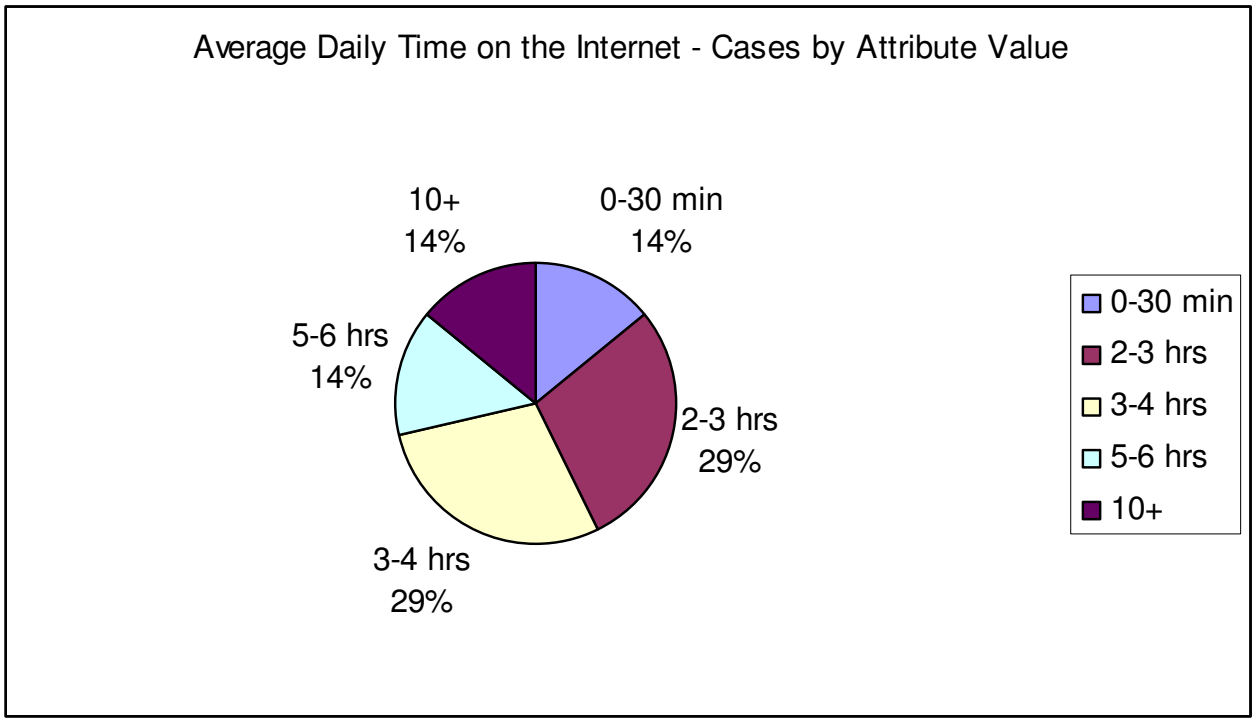
Age



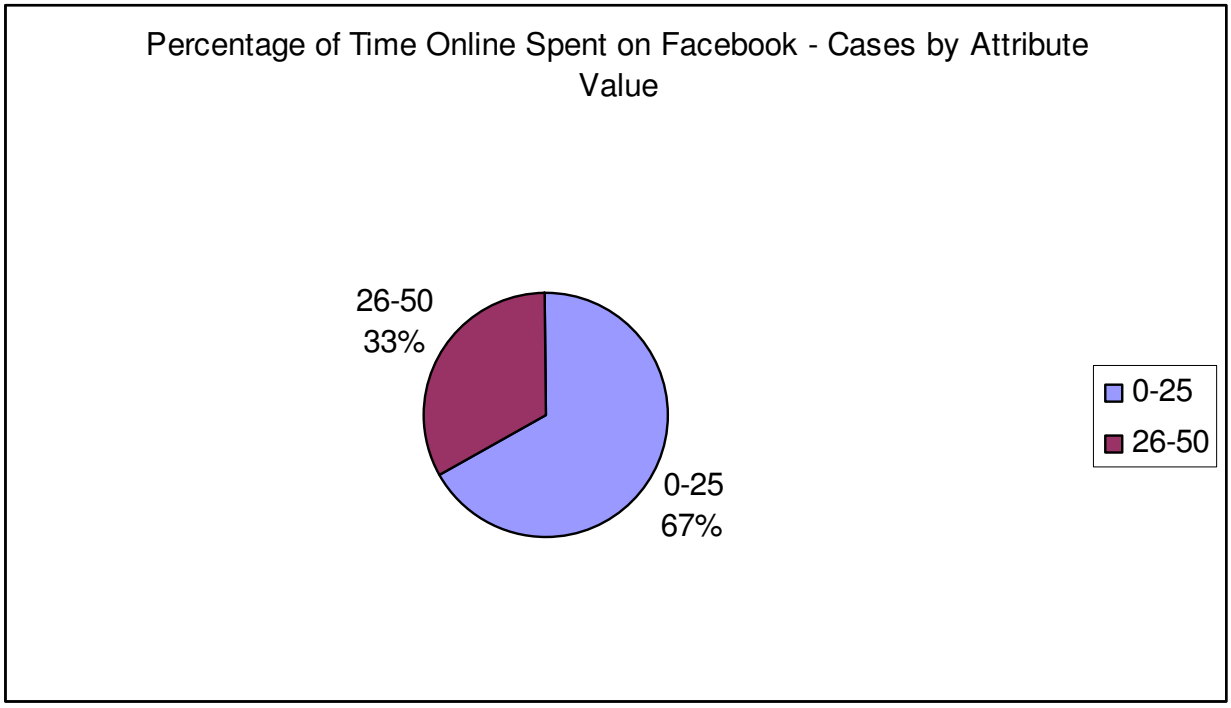
Sex



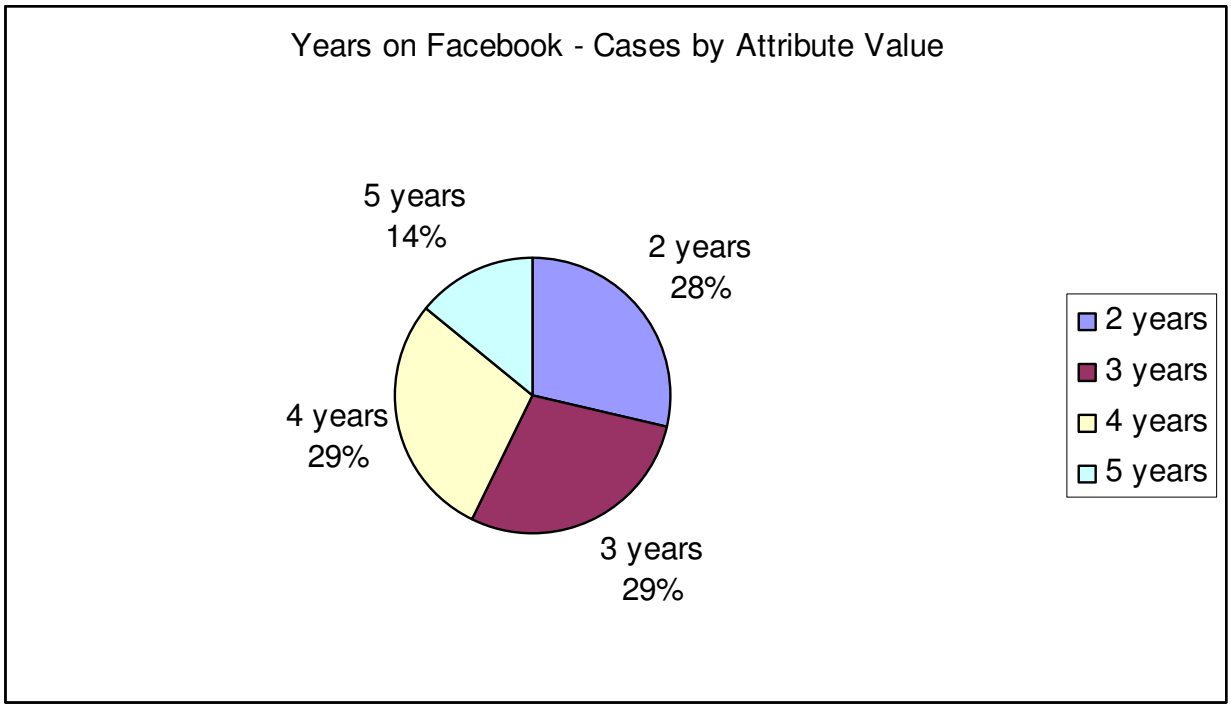
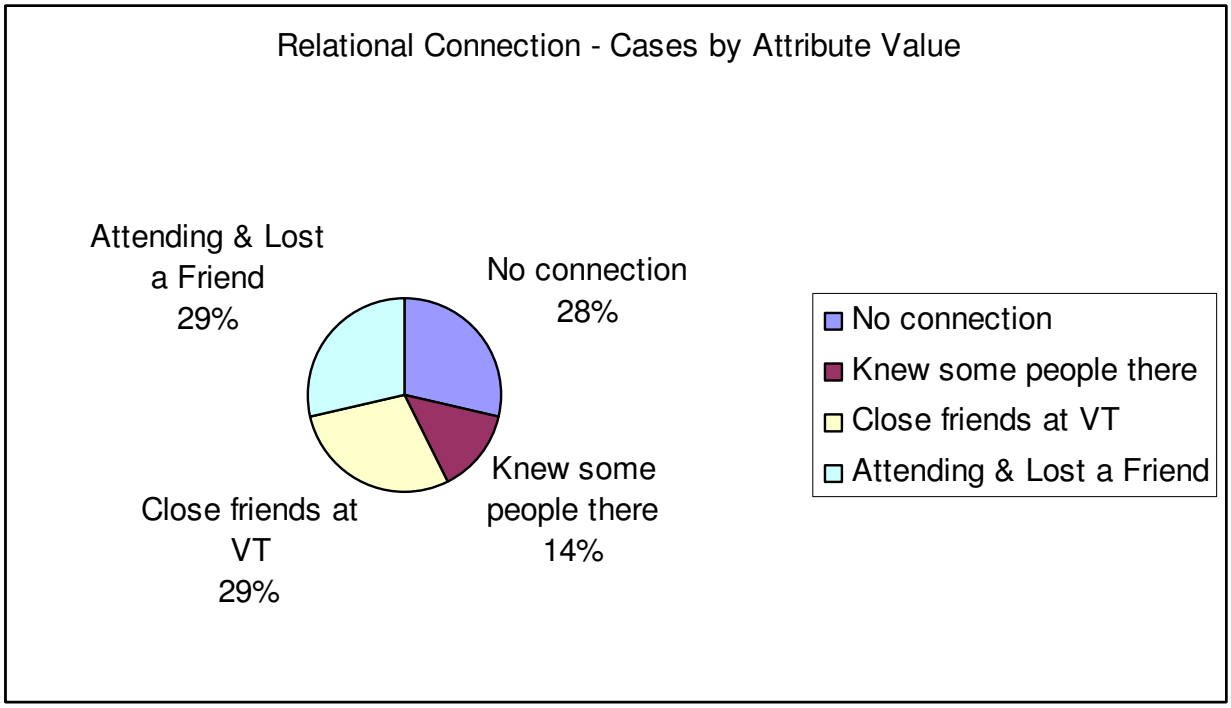
Average Daily Time on the Internet



Percentage of Time Online Spent on Facebook



Years on Facebook



Relational Connection to the Virginia Tech Shootings