Participation in Online Communities: Reconfiguring Relations of Participation

Author:
Harris, Geri

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Participation in Online Communities: Reconfiguring Relations of Participation

PhD Dissertation

Geri Harris

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UNSW Business School

The University of New South Wales

Abstract

Objective – To better understand participation and non-participation in online communities.

Research questions – Understanding of participation focuses on a digital divide denying access to online communities. Policy assumes individuals will participate given access to technology. Social capital theory claims online participation benefits society through increased collective action. Critique of prevalent ontological assumptions underlying existing understanding of participation challenges the separation of the social and the technological. The objective is to understand participation from a relational perspective, explaining (1) why and how people participate and (2) why people do not participate and the impacts.

Methodology – An ethnographic field study in a parenting community using interviewing and participant observation techniques yielded rich data on participatory behaviour and relationships with social media. Data were interpreted through iterative thematic and narrative analysis and theorized using sociomaterial concepts.

Major findings – Participating online is motivated by needs for well-being, information sharing, autonomy, social contact, and entertainment. Online participation materializes as changes to what is communicated, when and where. Reasons for not participating online emerge as perceived lack of value, discouraged by some feature of online communication, and fear of repercussions. Not participating online affects relationships, limits participation in the lives of community members and reduces ability to capitalise on opportunities. This challenges assumptions of participation with access, creating an opportunity to better inform policies.

Contributions – The study extends understanding of what it means to participate in community in the digital age. Participation, performed as a sociomaterial practice, is enacted online and offline contemporaneously through entanglements of social actors, social media, community values, beliefs, norms and rules for communication. Multicommunication theory advances existing knowledge of participation, explaining socializing that is online and face-to-face simultaneously. Furthermore, Habermas' theory of communicative actions (TCA) is reinterpreted to contribute a deeper understanding of how communication differs through social media. The infusion of a sociomaterial research perspective into TCA helps better explain how relations of participation are reconfigured, revealing the materialization of social media. An important implication is the demonstration that sociomateriality can be adopted to extend a social theory, like TCA, to include both human and technological agency.

Acknowledgements

My inspiration for researching community participation came from growing up in a rural village on the west coast of Ireland, where my parents both instilled in me a tremendous sense of community. Although my father may not be aware, he plays an important role in our village. Via his regular visits to elderly friends and neighbours my father transmits news, shares gossip, passes on information, and lends a helping hand where needed. He strengthens community ties and serves as a communication medium for those less able to participate physically themselves. I am lucky to have found that same sense of belonging and community spirit in suburban Sydney, surrounded by a wonderful network of friends and neighbours. But is community the same online?

I have been helped by many people during my PhD journey, and while I mention only a few of them, I am deeply grateful to everyone who has encouraged me in my studies. Along the way, those around me have had their own trials and tribulations, yet even then, despite the most tragic and heartbreaking personal losses, I could always count on each and every one of you. Some special thanks are warranted. To all my friends who participated in the study, thank-you. To my mother-in-law without whose loving support and child-minding I could not have succeeded, thank-you. To Professor Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic, for supervising my work, for challenging me to explore a new research approach, and for your infinite confidence in my ability, thank-you. To Professor Patrick Finnegan, for supervising my work, for encouraging me to stay committed, and for giving me perspective on balancing family with academia, thank-you. To my dearest mother, for teaching me the virtues of never giving up and always trying my best, for believing in my academic dreams and giving me opportunities to realise these, thank-you. To my darling son Leith and my beautiful daughter Leura, for being patient with me when I did not have time to play, for giving me a bright future to work towards and for all the ups and downs you have given me along the path to a PhD, thank-you. To my wonderful husband Dan, to thank you is insufficient. I am indebted to you for all your support and encouragement over the past five years. Without you by my side none of this would have been possible. Your loving and unending commitment to me and to my endeavours has been overwhelming. Thank-you for being you.

This time has been a journey of self-discovery; in the weak moments I have discovered new levels of resilience, determination, patience and creativity. I look on the PhD as a phase in my life, it

was so much more than just a project or an undertaking. With the support of those around me, this was a team effort, and to all of my friends and family I extend enormous gratitude and humility in all that you have sacrificed in getting me to the end.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

After reading about this study of online community participation, researchers and practitioners will better understand participation and nonparticipation. The relations of participation are shown to be reconfigured in the digital age by revealing participation to be a sociomaterial assemblage of both the social and the technological. To reach that understanding, it is important to recognise why this is an area warranting theoretical development. I will demonstrate that participation in social media–based online communities is progressively becoming the expected way for doing business, for socializing, and for engaging in society. The phenomenon of social media (which is receiving increased attention in the popular media) will be shown in the findings from this study to be encroaching into everyday life. I articulate social media's pertinence as a topical issue drawing scholarly attention, through a comprehensive review of research appearing in refereed journals and reputable conferences. However, as I will introduce to you as the study unfolds, technological advances enabling this way of living are fast outstripping theoretical explanation, particularly in the understanding of how and why people participate online.

This introductory chapter contextualizes the research and articulates the organisation of upcoming chapters. Section 1.2 provides a background discussion of the changing nature of community participation resulting from the advent of online communities. In doing so, an empirical problem is identified in the expectation (at a national policy level) that given access to the required technology, equipped with the skills to use it, and in possession of the time to interact with it, then, by and large, members of society will participate online. As I will show in upcoming chapters, a problematic assumption emerges from analysis of literature in that people are assumed to be willing and able to engage socially, economically, and politically by participating in online communities and activities in the course of their daily lives. Section 1.3 reveals the motivation for undertaking this research, explaining that a concern for society emerges when poorly informed social and telecommunications policies are implemented, aimed at equalizing social inclusion by ensuring access to technology based on the taken-for-granted assumption of participation. I demonstrate the rationale for the research, which is solidly based on the identification of a primary focus for policy initiatives in overcoming the digital divide to participate online. I show that in challenging the assumption of participation with access, we are given an opportunity to re-examine the phenomenon of participation. Section 1.4 formally states the objective of the research to better understand participation and nonparticipation in online communities, and presents the

two research questions designed to inquire about this social phenomenon. Section 1.5 states the contributions of this study for both the Information Systems (IS) research community and social policymakers in advancing scholarly understanding of participation and discovery of reasons other than digital inequality for not participating in online communities or activities. In section 1.6, the organization of upcoming chapters is outlined, providing a synopsis of the conclusions drawn from review of literature, asserting the sociomaterial philosophical underpinnings of the study, introducing the field study methodology, presenting techniques for interview-based and observational data gathering, and explaining thematic and narrative data analysis. I also explain my approach to theory development through a sociomaterial lens.

1.1 Participation and the Digital Divide

The purpose of this section is to position the study of online community participation and explain how it fits within a wider debate about equality of access to digital technology. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to understand why participating in online communities and activities represents an empirical problem in the context of assumptions and expectations about participation. The central argument within this study is that participation in online community life is not a given. This section, and the following sections 1.3 and 1.4, build towards this argument, highlighting that the underlying reasons for and implications of those who opt out of fulfilling their needs for community support through electronic media are not theoretically well understood. I explain that of concern from a sociological perspective is that we end up living with misinformed policies.

1.1.1 Empirical Problem

The research problem motivating this study centres upon the potential for further theoretical understanding of participation in online communities and activities. Despite having the technological means and skills to socialize and otherwise participate in online communities, I do not. On several occasions, I have missed key moments in the lives of my friends or been excluded from an offline event by not being a member of the online medium through which the event is organized. My situation reveals a contradiction to what I will show is a widespread assumption that if you have access, then participation in community life online will follow. The examination of information systems and sociological literature locates this as an empirical problem that, if investigated, could better inform the design and development of information and communications technology (ICT)–enabled social policy initiatives—such as work on improving the affordability of communications (cf. Pavlidis and Gadir, 2013).

1.1.2 The Changing Nature of Community

How we live is changing with the proliferation of online communities and portability of mobile communication (Davidson, 2011; Johnson, 2009; Qualman, 2012). One might assume that the basic human desires for social, emotional, and physical support sought from membership of our local communities, as claimed by Wellman and Wortley (1990), motivate us to interact in online communities. Online community theory (e.g. Barab et al., 2004; Preece and Maloney-Krichmar, 2005; Zhou, 2011) tells us these communities allow connections with wider networks; however, it reveals debate over the quality of electronically mediated interactions and the perceived value of relationships formed online. Online communities in everyday life are increasingly becoming a venue for socializing, engaging in politics, and conducting business (Gibson and Cantijoch, 2013; Halpern and Gibbs, 2013; Kumar and Singh, 2013; O'Murchu et al., 2004; Ravasan et al., 2014). The use of social media is second only to e-mail in terms of online communication trends in Australia, for instance (Nielsen, 2012a). Market research (cf. Nielsen, 2012a) indicates an upward trend in consumer engagement with business via social media. According to their Social Media Report in 2012, Nielsen claim that "social media is transforming the way that consumers . . . make purchase decisions . . . using social media to learn about other consumers' experiences, find more information about brands, products and services, and to find deals and purchase incentives" (Nielsen, 2012b p.2). As of January 2014, statistics on social networking sites worldwide ranked by the number of active accounts placed Facebook as the most popular, surpassing 1 billion registered accounts (The Statistics Portal, 2014).

A trend towards social networking sees online communities increasingly become the medium for much social contact (Dolcini, 2014; Laumer et al., 2013; Nusair et al., 2013; Oh et al., 2014). Online communities, however, receive criticism from a sociological perspective over fears of security, privacy, and antisocial behaviour (Cohen, 2013; Sun et al., 2014) that come from immersion in a world where relative anonymity provides protection from criminal retribution. The highly variable nature of online community membership (Jadin et al., 2013; Schneider et al., 2013b), where members dip in and out of different communities for different uses and gratifications, creates an added layer of complexity to understanding participatory behaviour. Elements reportedly affecting an individual's engagement with ICT are as follows (DiMaggio et al., 2001):

- Technical means (inequality of bandwidth)
- Autonomy (log on from home or work, limited times or at will)
- Skill (knowledge of searching and downloading)

- Social support (access to advice from more experienced users)
- Purpose (increase economic productivity, improve social capital, consumption, and entertainment)

1.1.3 The Effect of Digital Inequality in Limiting Participation Online

The absence of one or more of the elements identified, the Australian Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE) argue, may limit participation, a view that supports the focus of telecommunications laws and social policy on eradicating digital disparity (Maldonado et al., 2006). Digital exclusion, according to the UK government, means the lack of access to or the inability to enjoy the benefits of digital technologies (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000). In the sense of being on the wrong side of the digital divide, digital exclusion is hailed as the primary barrier to online participation. The digital divide has been defined as "the gap between those who do and do not have access to computers and the Internet" (Warschauer, 2003 p.1). The digital divide is claimed to manifest in "inequalities in access to the Internet, extent of use, knowledge of search strategies, quality of technical connections and social support, ability to evaluate quality of information, and diversity of uses" (DiMaggio et al., 2001 p. 310). The digital divide, it is argued, leads to social exclusion through lost opportunities to access resources, such as reduced opportunities to jobs (Norris, 2004; Schienstock et al., 1999). Empirical support for the existence of a digital divide links Internet access to factors of education levels, income levels, work status, and living arrangements (ABS, 2004; ACMA, 2009). Debate (e.g. Katz and Rice, 2002) on what constitutes a digital divide centres on the issue of an individual's technology access, determined by whether that person "with or without effort can have access to a networked computer and is able to use . . . [it] to find material or to communicate with others" (Padmanabhan, 2009). The consequence of digital inequality, it is argued, is that it can lead to exclusion from society (Maldonado et al., 2006; Schienstock et al., 1999). Exclusion becomes an issue because it limits participation in online communities (Katz and Rice, 2002; Maldonado et al., 2006; Schienstock et al., 1999). Exclusion from participating online denies certain subgroups of society access to social capital resources and other opportunities (Katz and Rice, 2002; Maldonado et al., 2006), challenging assumptions that exclusion is enforced by digital disparity.

1.1.4 Challenging the Digital Divide Debate

For some time, there have been claims that those at risk of exclusion from the digital society are not necessarily those you would expect, with large subgroups choosing not to participate in community life online (cf. Foth, 2003). A study by the Australian Communications and Media

Authority (ACMA) in 2009 revealed that of those online at the time of the study, 80%–90% were not participating in community activities. The category "used Internet group/community" ranked only ninth in the top ten online activities for 14- to 17-year-olds and was not featured among the top ten usages of the Internet for 17- to 65-year-olds (ACMA, 2009). Furthermore, despite having access to the Internet, in 2009, it was estimated that 2.6 million Australians do not use it (ACMA, 2009), and in 2013, the proportion of Australians participating in online communities such as Facebook was a little more than half the adult population (56.44%) (Murton, 2014; Nielsen, 2012b). Reluctance and fear manifesting in concerns over privacy and security is causing individuals to choose not to log onto online communities. There is an assumption that users are dealing with only low barriers to participate in online communities because the required technology is readily accessible, for example, through a web browser or smart phone (Li, 2012a). The potential implications of this are not well understood because few studies have empirically investigated the utility of participating in online community in the context of social exclusion. The theory focuses on nonadoption (of the Internet), with little explanation for the anomalous patterns of behaviour in online community participation or in understanding the influences other than digital equality that affect how individuals participate online in ways in which social policy hopes will make positive contributions to society. Evidence that the postulated excluded groups are not those actually at risk of exclusion gives reason to open the digital divide for debate and redefinition.

1.1.5 An Assumption of Participation Given Access

Telecommunication laws demonstrate an assumption within social policy that broadband access is all that is required to encourage everyone to engage with online media for positive social, civic, and economic outcomes (Dobson et al., 2013; Hudson, 2013; Panayiota et al., 2013). The central argument within this study is that participation in online community life is not a given. The underlying reasons for and implications of those who opt out of fulfilling their needs for community support through electronic media are not theoretically well understood. Worryingly poorly informed policies are developed from an expectation that if we build it, they will come.

1.2 Motivation and Rationale for Study

The primary purpose of section is to explain why it is important for academics and practitioners to better understand the phenomena of participation and nonparticipation, in a context of online communities. Argument is based upon evidence of concerns for the effects of participating (and not participating) online in an age where communication technologies are embedded in the fabric

of everyday society. Specifically, this section opens up the debate about a digital divide and challenges the assumption of participation with access. I raise the issue of developing policies that are aimed at equalizing social inclusion by ensuring access to technology based on a taken-for-granted assumption of participation. I explain how this gives rise to the need for an understanding of how society's freedom of choice not to participate or engage is undermined, resulting in the emergence of a new group of people that are excluded from everyday life events in their communities and wider society.

1.2.1 Motivations to Understand Participation and NonParticipation

Social networking is an emerging phenomenon receiving extensive media attention, yet lacking theoretical development. Political and scholarly concerns raised a decade ago feared nonuse (of the Internet) would limit participation in the digital economy (ACMA, 2009) and affect quality of life (Rice and Katz, 2003). Ten years on, living with and observing online communities in my daily social world reveals a continued concern for the effects of participating (and not participating) online, raising sociological fears that not all online participation has value in terms of positive social outcomes.

How we participate in a world where communication technologies are embedded in the fabric of society (Kilpeläinen and Seppänen, 2014; Kwon et al., 2013; Niemi et al., 2013; Nyblom and Eriksson, 2014) is a phenomenon of interest to both scholars and social policy makers. "The relations between what is on line and what is off line . . . are particularly relevant areas of investigation, especially when leading towards the concrete implementation, in the real world, of practices, actions, situations previously organised in the Internet" (Mascio, 2012 p.24). Increased connectivity is considered a vehicle for greater social cohesion, facilitating community participation, enhancing well-being, and creating access to resources (DCITA, 2005). The focus of broadband initiatives (such as Australia's National Broadband Strategy published in 2004) has been to get every citizen online, with the attitude that if you provide access, then people will participate. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, at the end of December 2010 there were 7.6 million actives Internet subscribers with non dial-up household access (ABS, 2010). There is, however, an emerging realization that "if you build it, they will not necessarily come" (Foth, 2003 p.1). A study by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) in 2009 revealed that of those online at the time of the study, 80-90% *were not* participating in community activities. The category "used Internet group / community" ranking only ninth in the top ten online activities for 14-17 year olds, and not featuring among the top ten usages of the Internet for 17-65 year olds (ACMA, 2009). Political and scholarly concern for society emerges

in the continued development of poorly informed policies aimed at equalizing social inclusion by ensuring access to technology based on a taken-for-granted assumption of participation. Political and scholarly concerns fear non-use (of the Internet) will limit participation in the digital economy (ACMA, 2009) and affect quality of life (Rice and Katz, 2003). Analysis reveals sociological fears that not all online participation has value in terms of positive social outcomes, revealing concern over the unhealthy amount of time spent by some immersed in online worlds. Identified as a primary focus for policy initiatives, overcoming the digital divide to participate online and hence leading to greater social inclusion is a heavily debated topic (Economides and Viard, 2013; Mulligan, 2013; van Deursen and Van Dijk, 2014). This illuminates a need for greater understanding of how such assumptions undermine society's freedom of choice not to participate or engage, creating a new group of people that are excluded from everyday life events in their communities and wider society.

At a practical level, finding ways to engage with the sub-groups who choose not to participate in online communications is important. National policy development claims that "building on the early success of technology implementation it is now timely to develop our understanding and activities towards deepening public understanding and appraisal of what access to ICT entails and the potential social ends that may be achieved through its effective use" (DBCDE, 2008). Research calls for "a clear and empirically validated understanding of sense of community" (McMillan and Chavis, 1986 p.19), upon which policy can be developed to strengthen and preserve community. From a sociological and psychological perspective, a deeper understanding of both the human and technological dimensions influencing participation will complement and extend extant literature on online communities.

1.2.2 A Flawed Assumption of Participation Given Access

The assumption of participation with access to technology is challenged as being fundamentally flawed. This is important from both a practical and a theoretical perspective. Practically because the current understanding of community and participation is informing national social policy initiatives. Theoretically, in challenging the assumption of participation with access, we are given an opportunity to re-examine the phenomenon of participation and to do it from an understudied sociomaterial research perspective.

1.3 Research Objective and Questions

The overall objective in undertaking this research is to *better understand participation and nonparticipation in online communities*. The proposed enquiry will empirically investigate

participation in online communities, where the participatory behaviour of those studied is not impeded by the lack of technological access or digital literacy. The research seeks to better understand through the experiences of study participants how and why they participate in online communities and activities. The study will advance scholarly understanding of the phenomenon of participation, providing further explanation about what motivates online participation and how the practice of participating is performed in an actual research setting. Thus, research question 1 is stated as follows: How and why do people participate in community, face-to-face, online, or both? In exploring this empirical problem, I will critically reflect upon conceptualizations of participation and how these limit scholarly understanding of participation when technology is not a barrier. To this end, I propose a sociomaterial conceptualization aimed at overcoming the limitations of existing separatist theoretical perspectives. In addition, the research will investigate a second, related problem, which is to understand the reasons for *not* participating in online communities, and the effects for those who do not participate in business or society or socialise this way. Thus, research question 2 is stated as follows: Why do people not participate in online communities, and what are the impacts?

1.4 Theoretical Contributions

The contributions from this study centre upon reinterpreting the phenomenon of participation, identifying challenges to long-held assumptions about how humans appropriate technology to communicate with one another, and progressing a sociomaterial understanding of participation that accommodates the view of the human and the technological aspects as intrinsically inseparable in everyday instances of online community participation.

Specifically, the study makes the following contributions to research and practice:

- It expands current understanding of online community participation, providing a sociomaterial perspective on participation and a deeper understanding of how individuals participate in communities face-to-face or online, and why they do so. Findings illuminate the intertwined nature of communicative actions and social practices when participating in online communications and raise challenges for current perspectives on participation online that are related to the digital divide.
- The study poses a radical reconceptualization of what it means to socialise in a world dominated by constant connectivity and ubiquitous access to online communities and demonstrates a reconfiguration of participation when the practice of socialising is enacted as digital omnipresence in more than one community at the same time.
- The concept of participation is shown to be altered when communication norms change in a

digital age where communicative practices are enacted differently online. That is, what, where, and when communicative practices are performed differs online as opposed to face-to-face. By doing so, it challenges long-held assumptions about the nature of communication between humans, particularly communication that is enacted through relations with technology. I theorise the material role of social media in enacting different communication practices, norms and expectations, demonstrating that communicating different things, communicating at different times and communicating in different spaces online reconceptualises the concept of participation.

- Understanding what socialising looks like in a digital age where social media devices are embedded in everyday communicative practices offers insight into experiences of inclusion in or exclusion from the life events of community members when online communication opportunities become possible. It demonstrates the intra-actions of humans and technology in sociomaterial assemblages, reconceptualising the nature of agency and materialising social media in online community participation.
- It articulates the challenges for individual members of society that arise from their nonparticipation in online communities and exposes the effect of such challenges on their participation in other forms of community (e.g., offline).
- The study radically reconfigures relations of participation in electronically connected communities. Reinterpreting TCA to explain sociomaterial communicative practices better explains the appropriation of social media for social interaction and theorises how the emergence of sociomaterial communicative practices change the conditions for communicative actions. The role of social media is shown to be fundamental to communicative actions, allowing the representation of concerns, desires, and values in written words and symbols such as emoticons.
- The study provides an example of how a sociomaterial research perspective can assist in creating a different and richer understanding of phenomena than epistemological paradigms traditionally used in IS research. This perspective challenges established, competing perspectives that privilege either a technological or a human-centric understanding of social phenomena such as participation. It surfaces and theoretically develops the temporal and emergent nature of participation, alongside theorising the role of technology in everyday community activities, where technology is materialised beyond a question of adoption versus non-adoption. Such a richer understanding of participation recognizes the intertwined nature of communicative actions and social practices when participating in online communications.

Methodologically, this study answers scholarly calls to "come up with novel research questions through a dialectical interrogation of one's own familiar position, other stances, and the domain of literature targeted for assumption-challenging" (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011, p. 252). Furthermore, research contains calls for "studies that cross different disciplinary boundaries" for their potential to "better understand the complex web of relationships, cultures, and identities that are formed and reformed in cyberspace" (Wang, 2012 p. 13). This study adds empirical evidence to a problem area that is predominantly theoretical. Because little is known about the people who *do not* participate in online communities and activities, and little is also known about the impacts at the individual or societal level of not engaging in social, economic, and political initiatives online, developing a better understanding has important implications for social policy initiatives aimed at reducing social exclusion. The benefits of participation are fuelling a growing awareness of the need to broaden social inclusion policy by re-conceptualizing the long-standing accessibility-based digital divide debate. Further understanding of how and why the deployment of ICT and the development of social capital co-construct one another, informed by theory, will form the basis for policy makers to challenge the assumption of participation in online community life, enabling the design and development of more socially inclusive policies.

A contribution of the research is also in the novel research methodology and approach taken to investigate the phenomenon of participation. A new sociomaterial conception of participation is proposed, founded upon the integration of different dimensions—technology (ICT), actors, social outcomes, and inclusion. The study provides an exemplar of how a sociomaterial research perspective delivers a radically different and richer understanding of phenomena than epistemological paradigms traditionally used in IS research.

1.6 Plan of Research

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical grounding for this study, describing what the literature says it means to belong to a community. A theory on community membership, belonging, and online communities is presented, with an ensuing discussion of the types of community and the perceived value of community belonging. Review of literature reveals the effects of ICT on communications and sociability, particularly in the changes that are seen in participation in online communities. The concept of participation is examined in depth, discussing areas of agreement and disagreement on the definitions of the types and levels of participation in different contexts, for different purposes, at different times. Social capital literature is applied to understand what is

known about the motivations to participate and the value of participating in online communities and activities from a social inclusion perspective. The results illuminate a shortcoming of existing knowledge in that theoretical understanding privileges either a social or a technological perspective. In addition, analysis reveals that what is known about those groups who are outside the social networks and online communities is limited, specifically in terms of the reasons for exclusion and the impacts of not participating. This is proposed as a promising area for further theoretical understanding grounded in rich empirical evidence. From literature review, the research problem is argued for, and from that two specific research questions that the study seeks to answer are developed. Research is intended (1) to understand why and how people participate in communities, face-to-face, online, or both, and (2) to understand why some people do not participate in online communities and the impacts of not participating.

Chapter 3 articulates a sociomaterial research approach and underpinning philosophy for the enquiry into participation and nonparticipation in online communities and activities. Sociomateriality is operationalised as a framework for conceptualizing the phenomenon of participation and a theoretical lens through which to interpret findings from the study.

Chapter 4 describes the design and development of an ethnographic field study of a particular group of people, identified for their potential to provide rich empirical insight into the phenomenon of participation. This is achieved by following their everyday engagement with online communities and by probing reasons for doing so through in-depth field interviews. As a research methodology, a field study is a suitable means of empirical enquiry for its ability to gain access to the participation behaviour of the selected group as enacted in their everyday realities. The selection of a geographically co-located group of parents all with preschool-aged children is justified for the potential it offers for access to a rich research setting in the context of a similar demographically positioned group with the shared interest of raising children—a time with many developmental stages and also a time of great uncertainty for new parents. The use of in-depth field interviews in combination with researcher observations of instances of online community participation and participant observations of face-to-face group meet-ups is explained as a multidimensional approach to data gathering. Interpretive thematic and narrative analysis techniques are described.

Chapters 5–7 collectively present findings from the analysis of empirical accounts and instances of participation in online communities and therefore answer research question 1—designed to enquire about how and why people participate in online communities and activities.

Chapter 5 focuses on the explanation of why people participate, as demonstrated in the accounts and instances of participation described by and observed of field study members. Analysis reveals five key reasons motivating field study members to participate in online communities of other parents and online communities that are unrelated to parenting. Motivating factors are (1) well-being, (2) information sharing, (3) autonomy, (4) social contact, and (5) entertainment. I present evidence of why field study members participate in online communities and/or activities in the form of empirical accounts of community life from the field, explaining these accounts of participation by giving additional contextual and cultural information to the reader.

Chapters 6 and 7 present findings from analysis revealing how people participate in online communities and activities. Empirical evidence from field study member accounts and observations of participation online are analysed to reveal in Chapter 6 that field study members participate by communicating different things, by communicating at different times, and by communicating in different spaces than they do in face-to-face community settings. In Chapter 7, findings are presented of the embeddedness of ICT in everyday social life. Empirical accounts from and observations of field study members' participation in online communities are analysed to reveal that participation results in socializing differently. Field study member accounts reveal evidence of asynchronous communication encroaching into a synchronous environment as emerging norms of online communication interrupt the daily interactions of face-to-face community participation. An emerging phenomenon in the ability for field study members to simultaneously engage in multiple spaces (face-to-face and electronically) is discussed as a type of digital omnipresence.

Chapter 8 presents reasons for not participating in online communities and activities, as explained in accounts from field study members. Analysis reveals three core reasons for not participating: (1) perceived lack of value or time, (2) discouraged by some feature of online community interaction, and (3) fear of the repercussions of participating online. In addition, the analysis of field study member accounts of not participating online illuminates three areas in which the effects of not participating are experienced by those outside social media–based online communities (at both an individual and collective level). These are (1) the effects on relationships with friends, family, and community; (2) the limitations on participation in the life events of community members; and (3) the inability to take advantage of community opportunities.

Chapter 9 demonstrates the achievement of the overall objective of this study to better understand participation and nonparticipation in online communities. This is illustrated in a reconceptualisation of the phenomena of participation and nonparticipation, presented as a sociomaterial account as interpreted through the accounts and instances of participation from field

study members. Findings from chapters 5–8 are discussed and theorised, revealing avenues in which the concept of multicommunicating and theory of communicative action can be reinterpreted and extended to explain participation (and nonparticipation) in online communities. The chapter concludes by presenting specific theoretical contributions of the study and by identifying future research and practice implications.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, existing scholarly understanding of the phenomena of participation and nonparticipation is reviewed and critiqued to reveal areas of agreement and disagreement, and to formulate an understanding of the state of current knowledge about both. Analysis emphasises the dichotomy in existing knowledge of participation and nonparticipation where both concepts are predominantly explained from either a social or a technological perspective. Introduced in Chapter 1, an expectation exists that in today's digital society, people will engage in business, democracy, and social life through social media–based online communities. As raised in that discussion, the intrinsic assumption of online participation given the technology access is open to challenge. Thus, the question arises, if people are not using information and communications technology (ICT) to extend their social networks or to keep in touch with existing networks of friends, family, and contacts, then what does that reveal about communities online and offline? In this chapter, I critically review literature to understand the state of the art of technology in social life in order to ascertain what is known about why and how people participate in online communities and activities. My analysis examines the existing conceptualisations of the concept of community in the digital age and investigates current theory about participation in online communities. The effectiveness of the review is demonstrated in terms of how findings inform theorising in later chapters.

The chapter is organised as follows:

Section 2.2 foregrounds analysis by providing a description of the hermeneutic approach adopted for reviewing literature, and clarifying the scope of the review across major bodies of knowledge about online communities, participation, social inclusion, and social capital.

Section 2.3 presents an overview of the key arguments from my analysis of literature, situating each argument into one of four established research perspectives in terms of how the social and technological aspects are considered ontologically. This summary highlights a primary critique of existing literature in that theories of the effects of ICT in social life and participation in online

communities are limited by the dualistic treatment of the social and technological aspects as separate entities existing independently of one another.

Section 2.4 articulates claims in existing literature of ICT's effects on social life, emphasising particular aspects and the relationship between participation and social outcomes. Current understanding of the role of technology in social life centres on the changes it makes to the nature of interpersonal relationships and the resulting creation of altered forms of and spaces for social contact. My analysis highlights a focus of existing theory on understanding the technological aspects affecting social life, with much less evidence uncovered of theorizing technology in social life as a social phenomenon. In this technology-deterministic understanding, I discuss areas of agreement and disagreement in existing theory over the role of ICT in social life. From my analysis, I reveal a view that having access to technology and the means to use it is assumed to be sufficient for participation online.

Section 2.5 demonstrates that the concept of community changes when it is enacted online. Emerging from the analysis of literature is a picture of a different community that forms and exists online. I present evidence to support this changing nature of community as a direct effect of the proliferation of ICT in everyday society. Review of literature exposes an emphasis within existing theory on the social aspects of understanding technology in social life. I examine what literature reports about where changes in social behaviour are seen and what is known about the concept of community when society engages in community activities online. I draw conclusions on how changes in socialising in the digital age affect the conceptualisation of community, discussing from a human-centric perspective that community changes when it is enacted online. I discuss what literature tells us about the concepts of community, online community and virtual community, addressing the definitions and what literature contains about the types of online communities that exist.

Section 2.6 examines existing theory on the phenomenon of participation, discussing the difficulty in defining it for its multiple meanings in different contexts and broad categorisations of the levels at which participation occurs. I examine what literature tells us about why people participate in communities (online and face-to-face), revealing what is known about the motivational forces. I illuminate theory on the shared motivations to participate in community life—face-to-face and online—while at the same time uncovering some different motivations for participating in online communities that centre on the fulfilment of commodity-type needs. I discuss what is theorised about the benefits of participating online from the perspective of what it means for social inclusion. Analysis reveals an emphasis in current knowledge on social outcomes, in the context

of social capital building constituting a measure of the value of participation in online communities. As a framework for measuring the value of membership of a community, I have identified the use of social capital development as a key indicator. I analyse the development of social capital in terms of its capacity to accrue as an online resource and the functions social capital fulfils in online communities. An outcome of the literature review is discovery of a human-centric view that social inclusion and exclusion manifest differently in online communities. There is evidence in literature that the social and technological aspects overlap and work interdependently to become sociomaterial over time. I also examine (limited) current knowledge about the reasons for and the effects of not participating in online communities and/or activities.

Section 2.7 concludes the literature review and problematises participation in online communities as an area warranting further scholarly attention, particularly from an understudied integrated understanding of human and nonhuman aspects. I present support for the identification of a flaw in the assumption of participation with access, in that given access, participation does not necessarily follow. The overall conclusion is the discovery that there is a lack of agreement in the definitions of online community participation and what *is* known about participation is based on the (problematic) assumption of participation (and hence inclusion in society) given the appropriate access to technology and the time, skills, and desire to use it. In addition, I reveal that current scholarly understanding is limited in terms of understanding why people *do not* participate (for reasons other than digital inequality) and the impacts of not doing so at both an individual and a societal level. In this section, I also articulate an argument that has been built throughout the analysis, that is, the existence of an ontologically separatist view of participation and online communities, largely privileging either a technologically deterministic perspective of the phenomena or an equally autonomous social-centric perspective. Throughout the analysis, as key arguments are revealed, I situate those arguments in their respective theoretical perspectives showing the different phases through which research on participation in online communities and the effect of social media–based communication on social life has moved over the years. I illuminate evidence that research moves through deliberate attempts to bring back together the social and technological aspects of understanding participation as a phenomenon in the socio-technical systems and emergent perspectives. Importantly, my analysis reveals an opportunity for adopting a fresh perspective to explaining participation in online communities that treats the social and the technological aspects as entangled in practice, thus ontologically inseparable. Finally, I present a conceptualisation of the research problem summarising the main arguments contained in existing knowledge, and articulate the area of proposed enquiry. From this I develop and formally state research questions within a contextual framework for the research.

2.2 Approach to Literature Review

In this section I explain my approach to critically reviewing literature. Adopting a hermeneutic circle approach facilitated an iterative process of literature review, analysis and critique. Section 2.2.1 explains how I moved from individual literature sources to the wider field of knowledge and back again several times in arriving at my conclusions on the state of the art in understanding of participation and non-participation. In section 2.2.3 I define the scope of literature reviewed, explaining that within the identified scope I synthesised existing knowledge of the value from online community participation and also the social inclusion implications of participating in community life online. The conclusion from this literature review was to illuminate what is known and not known about the problem area. It also determined the wider bodies of knowledge on online communities, social capital, and social inclusion that were to be excluded from review.

2.2.1 Hermeneutic Circle Literature Review

A hermeneutic circle approach (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014) allowed me to review the literature using an iterative process that moved from the analysis of individually recognised texts to the whole of relevant literature within the problem space and back to particular texts. The advantages of such an approach to the review of existing literature were in its ability to facilitate later theory development from the findings of the research, assisting in the closing of areas of literature where a large volume of research material exists and in uncovering new areas where research is needed (Webster and Watson, 2002). My initial searches (using databases including EBSCO, ScienceDirect, Scopus, and Google Scholar) on the terms *community, participation, and virtual community* were sorted by citations and relevance. I reviewed and annotated in EndNote[1] relevant frequently cited publications, extrapolating central terms, main authors, and core journals. Multiple redefinitions of the database search included supplementary publications, and I added the terms *online community*, *social inclusion*, *social exclusion*, *social capital*, and *digital divide.* I repeated this process until the main literature had been covered, as gauged by my confidence that the well-cited publications and key authors within the problem space had been examined. Concentrated within the IS and social science disciplines, my literature searches targeted high-ranking journals, including *Management Information Systems (MIS) Quarterly*, *Information Systems Journal* (*ISJ*), *Journal for the Association of Information Systems* (*JAIS*),

[1] EndNote is a software tool for publishing and managing bibliographies, citations and references. (www.endnote.com)

Organization Science, *Organization*, and *Communications of the ACM*. Results located a comprehensive body of literature on community, social capital, participation, and social inclusion dating back to the 1800s. I located sources of theory on online community and virtual community through citation searches, which in turn informed an assessment of the state of the art in existing knowledge. Literature of direct relevance to the problem area in high ranking sources was limited, therefore extending my search to lower-tier journals, and including proceedings from top-tier conferences yielded relevant papers on the digital divide, digital inclusion/exclusion, and online community participation. My approach was to follow frequently cited texts of relevance and to access literature from wider disciplines where interesting materials arose. I have reviewed a significant body of practitioner papers directly relating to the problem area. This may be reflective of the fact that social media is still an emerging phenomenon, an area where practice is outstripping theoretical development.

Throughout, I have drawn on a wide range of sources from both IS research and social policy. My aim has been to reach saturation point in the debate over definitions of participation and existing understanding of how and why people participate in online communities and activities. My approach has been to seek the coverage of a wide range of publications and definitions, consulting a combination of refereed journal articles, conference papers, edited books, text books, and government publications.

2.2.2 Scope of Literature Review

Adopting a hermeneutic circle approach allowed the decomposition of the problem into three main domains, as depicted in Figure 1.

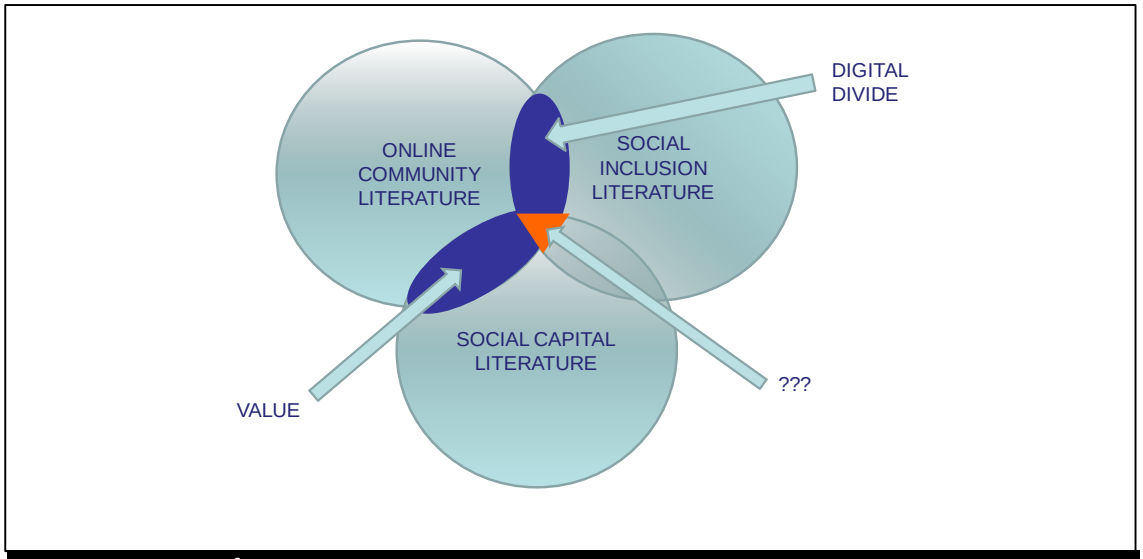

Figure 1. Scope of Literature Review

The purpose of examining literature where each body of knowledge intersects, as depicted in Figure 1, allowed me to synthesise existing knowledge of the value from online community participation and also the social inclusion implications of participating in community life online. Following this analytical approach defined for me the scope of the literature review and also facilitated the location of relevant existing empirical studies, illuminating what is known and not known about the problem area from both a social and a technological perspective. My literature analysis iterated between analysing theories at the intersections and where they fit into the wider bodies of knowledge to present state of the art in both online community participation practice and theory. Of particular interest was the search for existing theory of a relationship between the value from online community participation in the context of the social inclusion/exclusion debate (i.e., at the intersection of the three primary bodies of knowledge). Such an integrated view of participation and nonparticipation that considers both the social and the technological dimensions of participating would demonstrate current understanding that human and nonhuman are entangled in everyday enactment of participation in online communities. Furthermore, it would provide a platform from which to design a research project aimed at gaining deeper insights into participation and nonparticipation. The wider bodies of knowledge on online communities, social capital, and social inclusion were excluded from analysis.

According to the principles for a complete literature review (cf. Webster and Watson, 2002), the strengths of adopting a hermeneutic approach lie in the fact that it ensured coverage of all relevant literature on the topic of online community participation and furthermore, the search was not confined to any one research methodology or to any one set of journals. The outcome of the

literature review supports what Rowe (2012) considers to be the "ultimate goal" of such reviews, which is that enables me to "transform the identification of [a] research gap into research avenues" (Rowe, 2012 p. 471) with interesting problems to be investigated.

2.3 Key Arguments from the Analysis of Literature

The purpose of this section is to articulate the key arguments emerging from literature review. In summary, as presented in Table 1, a need emerges to further understand the phenomena of participation and nonparticipation in online communities in a way that recognises the entanglement of social media in everyday life. The analysis in Table 1 locates the key arguments from literature into one of four major research perspectives in terms of the focus on understanding participation and nonparticipation from primarily a social or a technological perspective. Key arguments are found to be developed from (1) a technological imperative perspective, (2) a socially-deterministic perspective, (3) a socio-technical systems view, or (4) an emergent-perspective.

These arguments, in summary, are that community changes when it goes online; ICT impacts on social life; the nature of community changes from face-to-face to online settings; society adapts to changes in community participation; motivations to participate differ between face-to-face and online settings; there is value from participating in online communities; social capital is a measure of the value of online community membership; networks, norms, and social trust change within online communities; online community participation contributes positively to social inclusion; social inclusion and exclusion manifest differently in the context of ICT deployment and participation in online communities; ICT is used as a policy tool for greater social inclusion; and the digital divide debate is challenged when access to technology is not the reason for nonparticipation in online communities. I will show that people are not excluded from participation, rather they *choose* whether or not to participate. However, I demonstrate evidence from literature that if people are choosing not to participate online then these communities are found to be less effective at doing the things that we think they are, for example, disseminating information.

These key arguments emerging from my analysis of literature are discussed in more detail in the upcoming sections (2.4 to 2.6).

Table 1. Key Arguments Situated into Research Perspectives

What is known in existing literature	Treatment of social and technological aspects	Critique	Research perspective
Community changes when it goes online	Technology effects on sociality	Technology-deterministic perspective	Technological imperative
ICT impacts on social life			
The nature of community changes from face-to-face to online settings	IT is the dependent variable	Human-centric understanding of the world	Social-determinism
Society adapts to changes in community participation			
Motivations to participate differ between face-to-face and online settings	Bringing social and technological aspects back together in response to technology-determinist criticisms	Social and technological aspects both still separate entities	Socio-technical systems
There is value from participating in online communities			
Social capital is a measure of the value of online community membership			
Networks, norms, and social trust change within online communities	Interactions between human agency and the technology	Social and technological aspects both still separate entities	Emergent-perspective
Online community participation contributes positively to social inclusion			
Social inclusion and exclusion manifest differently in the context of ICT deployment and participation in online communities			
ICT is used as a policy tool for greater social inclusion			
The digital divide debate is challenged when access to technology is not the reason for nonparticipation in online communities			

2.4 Technology in Social Life

In sections 2.4–2.6, the arguments emerging from analysis are located in literature and critiqued from the perspective of dualistic treatment of the social and the technological. In this section I address four main themes that emerge explaining the role of technology in social life. These are as follows: that ICT changes the nature of interpersonal relationships; that technological advances are driving social change; that altered forms of and spaces for social contact are emerging; and, that there is a growing trend towards communicating in more than one place at the same time via social media. Arguments reveal that ICT does affect social life for those participating in online communication activities. I highlight a focus on technology's effects in current knowledge, critiquing literature in the context of representing a primarily technology-deterministic view of the phenomenon of participation. I demonstrate, by drawing on key publications in this field, the emphasis on a deterministic understanding of ICT's role in society, the impacts for online participating and nonparticipating members of society, and the general acceptance of changes in the norms of communication online.

I argue that my analysis of existing knowledge reveals that despite having technology access and skills, time, and inclination to use it, some groups are still outside their communities through their nonparticipation in the community's online activities and interactions. My review illuminates that the introduction of technology does not affect the social practices for some groups of society, who still continue to do what they always did, to communicate and interact in community life as they always have. I will demonstrate that while technology is claimed to change many dimensions of community interaction, literature on communities and participation predominantly assumes that participation will naturally follow—given access to do so. I raise the need for understanding of nonparticipation and participation, in the context of the degree to which ICT actually extends social networks for those participating in community life via online mechanisms. The integration of ICT in social life emerges from analysis, along with an understanding of the proliferation of social network technologies.

2.4.1 ICT Changes the Nature of Interpersonal Relationships

Drawing from the work of several academic and some non-academic sources in this field (including Li, 2012; Boyd et al., 2012; DCITA[2], 2005; Bargh and McKenna, 2004; Hampton and Wellman, 2003; Willmott, 1989; Cohen, 1982) is a claim that ICT changes the nature of interpersonal relationships. By enabling individual networks that are unrestricted by time, and supporting asynchronous communication, individuals have an opportunity to extend their social networks (Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). Communities once isolated by geography or circumstance can now be connected—networked communication reshaping offline social geography (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

The early effects of ICT on social life are attributed to the emergence of technologies such as Usenet, Multi-User Dungeon (MUD), Internet Relay Chat (IRC), and electronic mailing lists (Rheingold, 1993). Different communication norms (cf. Hampton and Wellman, 2003) enabled new forms of social interaction, changing the way people engage (DCITA, 2005; Wellman et al., 2001). Individuals could maintain and nurture existing social relationships and create other social networks beyond those possible within traditional geographically based communities (DCITA, 2005). As early as the mid-1980s, there was a recognition that electronic media had "altered the significance of time and space for social interaction" (Mayrowitz, 1985 p. viii).

2.4.2 Technological Advances Driving Social Change

Technological advances driving current social changes, such as Web 2.0, empower the user, offering access to individual networks unrestricted by time (O'Reilly, 2007), consolidating the Web in a more collaborative and interactive manner (Dantas and Silveira, 2012). The network serves as a platform where applications would learn and get better with people's use and contribution (O'Reilly and Battelle, 2009). As a collection of technologies, business strategies, and social trends (Dantas and Silveira, 2012), Web 2.0 is more dynamic and allows users to both access a website and contribute to it. Flickr, YouTube, and MySpace are examples of social applications utilising Web 2.0 functionality (Dantas and Silveira, 2012). According to existing scholarly understanding,

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[2] The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) is an Australian Government department that has published a significant body of practitioner papers and government reports on the role of ICT in social life.

> Web 2.0 has had a large impact on the way people use the Internet . . . Web sites supporting online collections of digital multimedia contents are very common nowadays, where people may exchange resources, opinions and information on content. (Dantas and Silveira, 2012 p. 56)

Web 2.0 is also regarded as promoting the development of virtual communities (Dantas and Silveira, 2012), where "members not only debate and exchange ideas, but also share information in the form of videos, articles, music, etc., and suggest content for each other" (Dantas and Silveira, 2012 p. 56). According to Mascio (2012), "Web 2.0 is contributing to change the idea of on-line community, thus stretching the boundaries of previous classifications" (Mascio, 2012 p. 19). Supporting asynchronous communication, text-based chat room, voice, video, text, and avatar capabilities within social software creates opportunities to extend social networks (Bargh and McKenna, 2004; DCITA, 2005). According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social networking sites (SNSs) (e.g., MySpace, Facebook, Cyworld, and Bebo) have millions of users who integrate these sites into their daily practices. The primary usage of these sites is to maintain existing social networks; however, there are other sites that help strangers connect based on shared interests, political views, or activities (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). It is reported by a global Internet usage statistics portal that,

> Due to a constant presence in the lives of their users, social networks have a decidedly strong social impact. The blurring between offline and virtual life as well as the concept of digital identity and online social interactions are some of the aspects that have emerged in recent discussions. (The Statistics Portal, 2014)

2.4.3 Altered Forms of and Spaces for Social Contact

Media theory (cf. Eisenstein, 1983; Febvre and Martin, 1997) illuminates how the emergence of computer-based media are "gradually displacing a tradition in the West . . . whereby the printed page has served as the medium *par préférence* for intellectual effort" (Styhre, 2010 p. 67). Human cognition is said to be "shaped by the capacity to think on the basis of written texts" (Styhre, 2010 p. 67). Consequently, it is argued that "the gradual loss of reading (reading books and magazines is becoming less and less frequent in the Western world) is a long-term threat to certain modes of thinking" (Styhre, 2010 p. 67). There are further claims that this threat manifests because "print emphasizes the visual to the exclusion of other senses; electronic media emphasizes sound and image" (Rajagopal, 2006 p. 285). Landow (2006) writes of the concept of digital text, by which the inference is on texts produced by digital (computer-based) media. Landow claims that "digital text is fluid

because, taking the form of codes, it can always be reconfigured, reformatted, rewritten" (Landow, 2006 p. 196). Further developing this argument, Landow posits that digital text is "infinitely adaptable to different needs and uses, and since it consists of codes that other codes can search, rearrange, and otherwise manipulate, digital text is also always open, unbordered, unfinished and unfinishable, capable of infinite extension" (Landow, 2006 p. 196). Bolter (1996) made a bold claim that "the electronic self is . . . unstable and polyvocal" (Bolter, 1996 p. 112), a claim that, if substantiated in literature, has ramifications for understanding how people socialise face-to-face versus online.

According to recent work (e.g. Wang, 2012), the Internet provides another space in which to socialise that lets the user interact outside the home or the workplace. "Individuals participate with people from all over the world . . . people with whom [they] may have fairly intimate relationships but whom [they] may never physically meet" (Turkle, 2011 p. 10). Individuals interact in these electronic spaces to socialise, to network. According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), SixDegrees.com[3] was one of the earliest social networks, launched in 1997, and users could for the first time set up personal profiles and search for and connect to friends all from one portal. As they continue to appear, SNSs have increasingly become the focus of much academic interest (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

In the late 1990s, SNSs began supporting various combinations of profiles and publicly articulated friends, instant messaging, buddy lists, guest books, and diary pages (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Subsequent iterations of SNSs aimed at leveraging business networks, such as LinkedIn[4] for instance, became powerful professional networking tools for their ability to connect networks of tightly entwined friends and professionals who could support one another without competing (Festa, 2003). With the growth of user-generated content (Boyd et al. 2007), websites such as YouTube[5] began to focus on media sharing features. Blogging services also became popular (Boyd et al. 2007). In 2004, Facebook[6] arrived, initially a "Harvard-only SNS" (Cassidy, 2006). In 2005, Facebook expanded to become available to the general public and was embraced globally. Marketing research indicates that

[3] SixDegrees.com allowed users to create profiles, list their Friends, and surf the Friends lists. SixDegrees was the first to combine these features and promoted itself as a tool to help people connect with and send messages to others.

[4] LinkedIn is a business-oriented social networking service. Launched on May 5, 2003, it is mainly used for professional networking (www.linkedin.com).

[5] YouTube is a video-sharing website created in February 2005. The site allows users to upload, view, and share videos, and it makes use of Adobe Flash Video and HTML5 technology to display a wide variety of user-generated and corporate media video (www.youtube.com).

[6] Facebook is an online social networking service that connects people with friends and others who work, study, and live around them. It was founded on February 4, 2004 (www.facebook.com).

SNSs are growing in popularity worldwide (comScore, Inc. 2007). According to this global Internet usage report provider in 2011, social networking is the most popular online activity worldwide,

> Social networking accounted for nearly 1 in every 5 minutes spent online globally in October 2011, ranking as the most engaging online activity worldwide. Social networking sites now reach 82 percent of the world's Internet population age 15 and older that accessed the Internet from a home or work computer, representing 1.2 billion users around the globe. (comScore Inc, 2011)

Another global Internet statistics source reported that "in 2012, more than 1.4 billion internet users accessed social networks and these figures are still expected to grow as mobile device usage and mobile social networks increasingly gain traction" (The Statistics Portal, 2014).

2.4.4 Multicommunicating

The concept of "multicommunicating" offers insight into what it means to socialise in a digital age, as exemplified in the scholarly work of Reinsch et al. (2008), Cameron and Webster (2011), and Zouhair and Cameron (2014). Multicommunicating is a term used in organisational research to describe the practice of work colleagues "engaging in two or more overlapping, synchronous conversations" (Reinsch et al., 2008 p. 391) or "the managing of multiple conversations at the same time" (Cameron and Webster, 2011). When multicommunicating, "a participant divides his or her attention among two or more speech events" (Reinsch et al., 2008 p. 392). Multicommunicating is an emerging communication practice (Reinsch et al., 2008; Zouhair and Cameron, 2014). The results from a study of multicommunication practices in an organisational setting concludes that multicommunicating is "facilitated by technologies, particularly chat software" (Reinsch et al., 2008 p. 391), and that this is happening "with the development of media that have two features" (Reinsch et al., 2008 p. 392). Reinsch et al. (2008) write about the technology features that enable multicommunicating, saying,

> First, they allow a communicator to divide her or his attention unobtrusively so as to be less likely to give offense to a partner; we term this compartmentalization. Second, they are objectively and socially constructed to allow gaps of silence; we term this flexibility of tempo. But even with media that have these features, multicommunicating remains a cognitively demanding practice. (Reinsch et al., 2008 p. 392)

Empirical studies (cf. Cameron and Webster, 2011; Reinsch et al., 2008) have explored the communication behaviour of work colleagues during interactions that have a work-related purpose,

where the participating individuals have access to electronic communication. Observing the communicative behaviour of workers "using their mobile devices to multitask and carry on multiple conversations" (Zouhair and Cameron, 2014 p. 1) demonstrates that having access, and availing of opportunities to consult with someone outside a meeting being held between work colleagues, or being able to look some information up on the Internet during a meeting "can contribute to performance" (Reinsch et al., 2008 p. 391). This has positive benefits for the individual's performance while participating in the meeting and for the overall effectiveness and productivity of the meeting (Reinsch et al., 2008; Zouhair and Cameron, 2014). Multicommunication can also, however, "point to problems, including inefficiency, irritation, and mistakes" (Reinsch et al., 2008 p. 391). Specifically highlighted is the disruption that multicommunicating can cause in face-to-face interactions, where multicommunicating "degrades coordination so as to delay some responses and create gaps of silence" (Reinsch et al., 2008 p. 392). In a study that investigated the relational outcomes of multicommunicating by integrating two perspectives—incivility and social exchange theories—empirical evidence emerged of "several factors influencing the partner's perceptions of focal individual incivility during MC [multicommunicating]" (Cameron and Webster, 2011 p. 754). In presenting their results, Cameron and Webster report these factors to include,

> Who initiates the conversation, whether one of the conversations being juggled is useful to the other conversation, the focal individual's performance during the conversation, whether the focal individual is more accessible to the partner, and whether the partner is certain of or only suspects the existence of the other conversation. Further, partners' perceptions of these factors are influenced by their individual orientations toward MC. Finally, the partners' perceptions of the focal individual's incivility influence their interpersonal trust in the focal individual. (Cameron and Webster, 2011 p. 754)

Largely investigated in organisational research, multicommunicating as a form of communicative action has primarily been demonstrated to be a good thing; to result in positive outcomes such as improved efficiency and effectiveness (Cameron and Webster, 2011; Zouhair and Cameron, 2014). Where there is a lack of empirical work is in the application of the theoretical concept multicommunicating to *social interaction* settings; situations involving groups of friends or family for instance. Further, as articulated by (Cameron and Webster, 2011), few studies have investigated multicommunicating as a type of "multitasking where one juggles not just multiple tasks but multiple people and often multiple media at the same time" (Cameron and Webster, 2011 p. 754).

2.4.5 Theoretical Perspectives on the Effects of ICT on Social Life

The analysis of existing knowledge reveals a theory classifying the effects of ICT on social life from one of three perspectives. In their bandwidth model, Sproull and Kiesler (1985) claim that computer-mediated communications de-individuate and encourage self-centred and less socially regulated behaviour, and are characterised by gratification, anonymity, aggressive/hostile exchanges, and reduced inhibitions. Spears et al. (2002) offer a social science perspective, claiming that the effect of computer-mediated communication on social life is determined by an individual's personal goals and needs but is associated with depersonalisation and reduced personal accountability. A third perspective considers the interaction between features of the Internet communications setting, the communicator's goals and needs, and the social context of interaction (Bargh et al., 2002). Other researchers debate the benefit of technology for social life, decomposing the problem into technology's effect on social life (media determinism perspective) versus the deployment of technology void of value (neutralism perspective) (Warschauer, 2003). Of the empirical studies located situating ICT deployments into these categories, most are generic, with little research defining the type of community under investigation. Furthermore, debate on the quality of Internet communication compared with face-to-face interaction remains inconclusive, and there are concerns that social media may be sabotaging "real communication" (Hampton and Wellman, 2003; Tardanico, 2012). DiMaggio et al. (2001) argues, however, that Internet users have larger social networks, yet are "no less likely . . . to engage in social visiting or to call friends on the telephone." (DiMaggio et al., 2001). It is further argued by Antoci et al. (2013) that,

> Web-mediated interaction can play a major role in the preservation and development of interpersonal relations. . . [and] can help individuals maintain their social contacts from distant locations. (Antoci et al., 2013 p. 1912)

The prevalent view of ICT effects on social life is largely deterministic (cf. Chandler, 1995; De Castell, 1996; Ellul et al., 1964; Winner, 1977). Collectively, the claims of these scholars have been that technology, in particular ICT, transforms knowledge sharing and will be the catalyst for changes to how we socialise. Wang (2012) reflects on innovations in communications technologies, such as print and television, for their transformational effect on human society. This is a view supported by influential authors in the field of electronically mediated social networks, seen, for example, in the belief that technology changes human behaviour in everyday personal interactions and in family lives (Howard and Jones, 2004; Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). Wang (2012) urges caution in future research on SNSs over adopting a deterministic view of new technology. In Wang's claims,

the role of human agency and social context in the development and effect of technology becomes prominent in a social constructivist perspective (Wang, 2012). Within this worldview, technological advances are "gradually constructed or deconstructed in the social interactions of relevant social groups" (Bijker, 1993 p. 119). This perspective is limited by its emphasis on the impact of technology (Wang, 2012).

New media technologies, it is claimed, radically change how people organise their daily lives, do business, and engage in political activities (Wang, 2012). Furthermore, my analysis uncovers that the proliferation of SNSs changes the concept of community; community now supported by online interactions through SNSs. In early work by Wellman (1998), he posits that,

> The rise of SNSs indicates a shift in the organization of online communities. While websites dedicated to communities of interest still exist and prosper, SNSs are primarily organized around people, not interests. Early public online communities such as Usenet and public discussion forums were structured by topics or according to topical hierarchies, but social network sites are structured as personal (or "egocentric") networks, with the individual at the center of their own community. This more accurately mirrors unmediated social structures, where "the world is composed of networks, not groups." (Wellman, 1988, p. 37)

Since then comes a further claim that "the introduction of SNS features has introduced a new organizational framework for online communities, and with it, a vibrant new research context" (Boyd and Ellison, 2007 p. 219).

In studying the role of technology in organisations (cf. Orlikowski, 1992, 2000), the technological imperative approach credits new information technology and systems as *determining* new organisational design. The technological imperative is critiqued as a limited view of the world, a view within which technology is reified, as it impacts on sociality. Technology is seen as a discrete variable, whereas human agency is less prominent (Doolin, 2003; Orlikowski, 2007). Understanding the effects of ICT on sociability is useful but limited in that ICT and social life are intrinsically intertwined so that it makes little sense to theorise on the effects of one on the other. Social inquiry of the relationship between ICT and social life in a social media context challenges established, competing perspectives that privilege human or technological understanding. As discussed in the following section, the concept of community changes when it goes online, building upon evidence from the arguments uncovered so far that points to the impacts of ICT on how people socialise.

2.5 The Concept of Community Changes When Enacted Online

A fundamental part of uncovering what is known about online participation is an understanding of the transformation of community from an offline to online domain. This section investigates what is currently known about the concept of community and how it changes when it is enacted online. This section analyses definitions of community, types of online communities, the changing nature of community online, and how society is adapting to those changes. In section 2.5.1, I present current theoretical perspectives on the concept of community, illuminating a social-determinist focus on definitions. In doing this I explore areas of agreement and disagreement in the definition of community online and face-to-face. Section 2.5.2 examines what literature tells us about the types of online communities that exist. I show that different types are defined in existing literature, each operating with different social rules and norms than face-to-face communities, creating both positive and negative implications for society. In section 2.5.3 I present and discuss arguments from literature demonstrating that community changes when it is enacted online. Section 2.5.4 presents the results of my analysis of literature revealing that community adapts to changes in the nature of communication online. From this perspective, IT is the dependent variable, and in critiquing this human-centric understanding of the world, I illuminate how a dualist perspective limits scholarly understanding.

I will show that despite a substantive coverage of the positive changes to community when it moves from a face-to-face to an online domain, evidence does exist that there are subgroups of society not participating in the online interactions of the communities to which they belong. By critically examining the literature I will illuminate theory on a level of resistance to the changes in community online that discourages some members of society from interacting this way. I argue that while the current understanding of the impacts of technology for community engagement and insights into the adaptation of community to such technology-driven changes is useful, it is limited given that social media technology and the enactment of daily life overlap and mutually construct each other.

2.5.1 Definition of Community

Community is defined in literature at many different levels. For the purposes of this research, I will first deal briefly with the origins of the concept of community in a traditional sense, subsequently investigating in more detail the commonly cited concepts of online community and virtual community as found in literature. In exploring existing knowledge about online and virtual community, it is clear

from analysis that the two terms were at one point separate: online community referring largely to interaction with existing social networks and virtual community referring largely to extending social networks by connecting online. In my analysis, I will compare and contrast both concepts, uncovering current theoretical perspectives and presenting the subtle differences. This approach clearly articulates the distinction between both terms and the implications of focusing my research on understanding behaviour within *online* communities.

2.5.1.1 Communitas

The word community has its origins in the Latin word "communitas," deriving from *cum* (with or together) and *munus* (gift) (Esposito, 2009; Hillery, 1955). Definitions of geographically based communities can be traced back to the sociological definition of community (Li, 2004). Tönnies (1887) defines "Gemeinschaft" as intimate, private, and exclusive living together. This type of community, according to Tönnies (1887), represents one form of idealised society founded upon sentimentality, familiarity, and emotional ties. The metaphor for this ideal society is the small, tightly knit rural community (Berger, 1978). Community has a "shared emotional connection, the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences" (McMillen and Chavis, 1986 p. 9). In contrast, society based on "Gesellschaft" is characterised by self-serving individuals linked by impersonal ties (Tönnies, 1887). Fundamentally different to Gemeinschaft ideals and the principle of unity of will, members of Gesellschaft society are motivated to associate with others for the pursuit of self-interest (Sergiovanni, 1994) in community networks based around commercial dealings and networks of associations.

For the purpose of this study, community is defined in the Gemeinschaft sense, that is, a community operating with traditional characteristics such as moral voice, rights, responsibilities, and a public interest (Etzioni, 1993). Members are socially bound together by common interests and traditions (Wang, 2012), sharing a value system (Mascio, 2012). According to recent thinking, "when the community is already present, the user (subject) chooses to join a value system already in place (community) within which other relations are determined, which become the inner network of relations" (Mascio, 2012 p.6). It is thought that a contractual agreement exists between subjects. At one level, it exists between the member and the community (which has an established system of values and practices. At another level, there is a contractual agreement between members, formed in

the relationships between subjects of value chosen by the community (e.g., information, news, and gossip) (Mascio, 2012).

Community in this traditional sense is bound geographically, characterised by everyday face-to-face proximities and social interactions (Foth, 2006) where relationships between community members are mediated through face-to-face communication (Grossberg et al., 1998). Interactions take place in "social networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging, and social identity" (Quan-Haase et al., 2002 p. 153). This view regards community as having a spatial form (Li, 2004), implying boundary and a sense of belonging. From this Gemeinschaft position, community is a dynamic concept that grows over time (DCITA, 2005).

2.5.1.2 Online community

Little universal agreement exists on how to identify a community of people interacting outside the traditional bounds of a face-to-face setting. Early references to the existence of community beyond proximate borders referred to people maintaining relationships with friends and families outside geographically located community, using terms such as *community without propinquity* (Webber, 1963). Building on the dissipation of physical boundaries, the description of these meeting-places evolved to *imagined communities* (Anderson, 1991) and *virtual communities* (Rheingold, 1993). The concept of electronic community exploded to encapsulate the creation of new relationships online (Kenyon et al., 2002)—only possible in the mediated social spaces created by the digital environment (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002).

The academic definitions of online community are controversial, and no consensus has been concluded (cf. Gonzalez and Cox, 2012; Li, 2012b). Online community has been defined as the existence of a place to meet, by members who perceive and experience it as a space they have in common (Mascio, 2012). It has also been defined as "a group of people that share thoughts, ideas, or work on common projects, which does not exist offline" (Chung et al., 2010 p. 1678). Kim defines online community as a community whose members enable its existence through taking part in membership rituals electronically (Kim, 2000). The term online community, as presented in literature, retains the Gemeinschaft philosophy of tightly knit networks of familial relations, where people still meet face-to-face, but under new definitions of both "meet" and "face" (Stone, 1991). In this sense, the networks that form online are "direct heirs to the community metaphor . . . popularized nearly 20 years ago" (Parks, 2011 p.106). Because the definition of online community most closely represents

the familial and inclusionary aspects of community that I aim to further understand, I draw from the work of Hansen in defining for the purpose of this study that online community means,

> [electronic] association patterned on family and kinship-relations, on affective language of love and loyalty, on assumptions of authenticity, homogeneity, and continuity, of inclusion and exclusion, identity and otherness. (Hansen, 1993, p. xxxvi).

Literature largely refers to online communities in targeting specific communities, local issues, and engaging locals (Cushman and Klecun, 2006; Lundy and Dellow, 2010), providing new ways to communicate and increase volumes of contact with existing ties (Hampton and Wellman, 2003). Online communities, according to Hampton and Wellman (2003), increase the overall volume of contact with existing ties by facilitating communication in new ways. Literature analysis shows that communities, both offline and online, have a purpose: to network and collaborate, to provide emotional support or to improve quality of life (Joinson, 2003 p.169), or to maintain relationships with friends and family and make new contacts (Kenyon et al., 2002). Online and offline communities are similarly built upon relationships within social networks of interpersonal ties (Quan-Haase et al., 2002). Similar to Wellman (2002), Quan-Haase et al. (2002) claim physical and electronic communities create identity and selfhood, provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging, and social identity. In giving an analogy of a small local shop being akin to a place where local people interact and foster a sense of community, it is surmised by Rheingold in his observation of online communities that "perhaps cyberspace is one of the informal places where people can rebuild the aspects of community that were lost when the malt shop became the mall" (Rheingold, 1993 p. 10). Online and offline communities are based on agreed norms, values, and culture, comprising members who have something in common that distinguishes them in significant ways from members of other possible groups (Cohen, 1985; Kenyon et al., 2002). Online communities are often comprised of thousands of members with multidimensional online identities, rich communication media, and complex social norms (Weeks, 2012). Online communities are difficult to study as the field is still emerging and the development of empirical research has been slow (Weeks, 2012). Rybas (2012) claims a perceived failure of research about online communities to address many of the basic questions on the concept, thus opening opportunities for further research to develop a unified concept (Li, 2004) of online community. Rybas (2012) argues that a "dated statement by Wellman and Gulia (1999) . . . has held true for over a decade" (Rybas, 2012 p. 125),

> The subject [of online community formation and functioning] is important: practically, scholarly, and politically. The answers have not yet been found. Indeed, the questions are just starting to be formulated. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999 p.188)

Recent literature (e.g. Germonprez and Hovorka, 2013; Koch et al., 2013; Whelan et al., 2013) advances understanding of online communities by beginning to view these communities as assemblages or networks. Within what is referred to as Digitally Enabled Social Networks (DESN) (Germonprez and Hovorka, 2013) the actors participating online and the community within which they participate are treated in literature partly as the technology that supports engagement in the community and at the same time the "people and behaviours that constitute the…community" (Germonprez and Hovorka, 2013 p.525). Such a perspective represents a fundamental shift in the understanding of technology and people. Within this context of DESN, literature reveals an emerging reconceptualization of participation and nonparticipation to which further empirical examples could bolster existing knowledge. Authors call for "pluralistic investigations" (Germonprez and Hovorka, 2013 p. 525) of online communities as digitally enabled social networks, recognising the complex assemblage of engagement, reflection, action, technology, organisation and community in creating an understanding of online communities.

2.5.1.3 Virtual community

There is no consensus in theory or practice of an appropriate definition or types of virtual communities (Wang, 2012). Rheingold (1993) coined the term *virtual community* in his seminal 1993 book of the same title *Virtual Community*. He characterises virtual communities as groups of people linked by their participation in computer networks who have no face-to-face contact and are not bound by time or place ("social groups that emerge from the Net"; Rheingold, 1993, p. xx). Virtual communities, as explained by Mascio (2012), are social aggregations finding their place in specific Internet locations. Further explaining the concept, Wang (2012) describes virtual community as a term that can be used loosely to describe a variety of social groups interacting on the Internet.

Similar to the definition of online community, in a virtual community, a group of people "carry on . . . public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 1993 p. xx). Likewise, virtual community "forms through electronic communication medium and is not bound by space and time" (Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001 p.299). In the mediated social space that constitutes a virtual community, groups are allowed to

form and be maintained through ongoing electronic communications (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002). Again, similar to the definition of online community, it is assumed that virtual communities arise naturally as the result of people gathering to discuss subjects such as "a hobby, medical affliction, personal experience, or even develop relationships" (Ridings et al., 2002 p. 271). Virtual communities are quite varied; as Mascio (2012) explains, group members may meet by electronic means in some Internet spaces, or can exchange messages without ever experiencing actual moments of real-time conversation.

From my analysis of literature, I can ascertain that the term virtual community in its early days of usage evolved from the Gemeinschaft principles characterising online communities. Virtual community is used to describe a particular type of community that exists online, a type of community based on the rational fulfilment of needs through associations based on shared interests and goals (Dennis et al., 1998). In this sense, virtual communities free communities from the constraints of geographic proximity (Bargh and McKenna, 2004), allowing communities based on interests to communicate regularly and for some duration in an organised way (Ridings and Gefen, 2004). Mason (2010) claims that virtual communities represent "encapsulations of meaningless connections made among people who have opted to live their lives through technological tools rather than with more accepted borders of society" (Mason, 2010 p. 1). According to Bargh and McKenna (2004), the scarcity of a particular group in real life motivates the creation of a community with shared practices online. Some researchers, for example, Bargh and McKenna (2004), purport that people associate (in the Gesellschaft sense of "association," based on pursuit of self-interest) with virtual communities to live the lives they cannot live in the physical world through social characteristics such as race or ethnicity, or through illness, disability, or other social stigma, motivated by the promise of online support.

It is important to understand the distinctions between online communities and virtual communities as this has implications for the research in terms of studying the actual behaviour of real people participating in communities that are enacted online. One useful approach to understanding the differences is in the work of the scholar Kozinets. Kozinets (2002) makes a distinction between online community and virtual community, claiming that online communities are more real than virtual communities, in the sense that virtual communities exist only online, without the physical interaction of community members. Kozinets (1998) points out, "These social groups [do] have a "real" existence for their participants, and thus have consequential effects on many aspects of behavior, including consumer behavior" (Kozinets, 1998 p. 366). However, from his perspective, in maintaining a

distinction between online communities and virtual communities, Kozinets draws on the idea of a computer-mediated social gathering more closely representing what he means by "online communities." Virtual community, as per Kozinets and Rheingold's definitions, is defined for the purposes of this study as groups of people linked by their participation in computer networks, who have no face-to-face contact, and are not bound by time or place.

Debate over the past twenty years has evolved so that the distinctions between online and virtual community are of less interest to scholars, and the terms are often used interchangeably in literature. However, because of the emphasis on the social and 'real' existence associated with the term online community, in the remainder of the study, I refer to the concept of an *online community*. In an online community as defined in this way it makes it possible for me to identify and study real people and their interactions within their communities online and face-to-face.

2.5.2 Types of Online Communities

Literature contains claims of the existence of many types of online communities; for example, DiMaggio et al. reports that online communities,

> Come in very different shapes and sizes, ranging from communities that connect geographically distant people with no prior acquaintance who share similar interests, to settings that facilitate interactions among friendship networks or family members, to community networks that focus on issues relevant to a geographically defined neighborhood. (DiMaggio et al., 2001, p. 317)

There is agreement that online communities are varied in the sense that group members may meet by electronic means in some Internet spaces or can exchange messages without ever experiencing actual moments of real-time conversation (Mascio, 2012). Joia (2012) builds upon a taxonomy for a participative environment on the web (cf. Armstrong and Hagel, 1996), classifying online communities as follows:

1. Communities of transaction: market space linking professionals and companies; developed to facilitate the buying and selling process of products and services and to give information about these processes.
2. Communities of interest: developed to connect persons with common interests in one or more subjects; interpersonal communication is far greater than in transaction communities.

3. Communities of fantasy: enable the participants to create, in a collective way, their own fantasies, environments, characters, and/or stories.
4. Communities of relationship: enable the participants to exchange personal experiences usually of great effect in their personal lives, leading to strong personal ties.

This taxonomy is useful for classifying online communities. Online communities of transaction and fantasy, based on their definitions, represent *Gesellschaft* attributes in the sense that both types of electronically mediated communities enable the pursuit of self-interest and rational fulfilment of needs. Communities of relationship closely aligns with what has previously been discussed about the concept of an online community built on traditional Gemeinschaft ideals of shared experiences and familial relations. Similarly, communities of interest reflect the bringing together of groups of people who share an interest or a passion for a particular subject or activity. These communities exist through interpersonal communication both online and offline. Defining a community definitively and exclusively within any one silo becomes problematic. Literature illuminates a shortcoming, in that normally an online community represents a combination of more than one of the types that are mutually influential (Mascio, 2012). Furthermore, it is difficult to investigate online communities taking a separatist view that members consciously and deliberately enact their participation in these communities. Looking at the defining attributes of online communities, regardless of where they sit in the above taxonomy, literature (e.g. Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002; Hannele, et al., 2013; Kilpeläinen and Seppänen, 2014) purports community interaction to be an everyday part of life for the interacting members. It is thus challenging to take a separatist perspective of online communities as found in much existing theory. Such theory purports that the community, the social media technology, and the member are separate concepts, impacting one another and influencing the type of community a member exists within, and what activities they engage in online (cf. Wang et al., 2012). In such an understanding of online community participation from a technology acceptance perspective, the community members, the web-based applications they interact with, and the mediation of human interactions are treated as discrete entities in an assessment of technology acceptance.

2.5.3 The Changing Nature of Community

The extent to which technology reshapes community life "remains an issue of contention among scholars" (Wang, 2012 p. 8). It is revealed that technology transforms social contact, with the Internet offering a "variety of technical tools and mechanisms to support online social interaction in groups" (Butler et al., 2008 p. 4). Examples are centralised mailing lists, electronic bulletin boards, real-time chat, group message archives and links to related groups, and members' individual web pages, and changes the nature of community (DCITA, 2005). Technology challenges the traditional framework of community based on proximate geographic space (Rheingold, 2000). This enables, according to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) online communities around interest and lifestyles (ACMA, 2009). Community online has little proximity or visual accessibility (Hampton and Wellman, 2003), interactions are absent of tone of voice, facial expressions and other interpersonal features that are important in face-to-face communication (Bargh and McKenna, 2004). Evidence exists of a swing from community that is geographically bounded and operates within networks of stable social relationships to a more flexible space that crosses through different boundaries (Wang, 2012). It is reported that individuals interacting through the use of information and communication technologies gives a "new face of community" (Wang, 2012 p. 7).

A deterministic view posits that ICT's effects are observable in the communities in which we live, changing the way that individuals within communities interact (DCITA, 2005). Individuals are bypassing existing organisations and using social media to create their own alternatives for participation (Brodie et al., 2009). Online communities change the environment for how we live and how we do business (Qualman, 2012). Entertainment, e-commerce, research, and collaborative work, accessible via highly portable, user-friendly interactive devices that decentre place, provide always-on access and asynchronous communication (DCITA, 2005).

According to some researchers, for example, Bargh and McKenna (2004), online communities operate with different social rules than face-to-face communities. There are claims that the "ubiquitous nature and pervasiveness of ICTs" (Cushman and Klecun, 2006 p.4) changes the environment within which social relations are carried out. It is believed that "the arrival of the Internet and mobile phones have provided another means to strengthen social ties and community fabrics" (Wang, 2012 p. 8). Online communities, however, reportedly experience a higher incidence of vilification and anti-social behaviour (Shirky, 2003), witnessing crime, addiction, and bullying (Willard, 2007) by offenders who are relatively protected by anonymity and less fear of reprisal than

in a face-to-face community (Armstrong and Forde, 2003). Online communities, it is argued, have the potential to contribute to loneliness, weakening neighbourhood and community ties (Bargh and McKenna, 2004), causing fragmentation and atomisation (Brodie et al., 2009). The boundaries of who is included in community reshape online the "haves and the have-nots are then sorted out between those who live in the hyper-real shrunken world of instant communication, cyber-dynamics and electric money transactions—and those, more disadvantaged than ever, who live in the real space of local villages, cut off from temporal forces that drive politics and economics" (Kaldor, 2003 p. 112). Online communities are claimed to have arisen from a need to regenerate a sense of community and re-establish social bonds (Mason, 2008). By integrating different communication media and content, the Internet creates an interactive, mass communication medium that overcomes distance barriers and allows instantaneous social networking (Bargh and McKenna, 2004; DiMaggio et al., 2001). Drawing from the work of Wellman (1999) and Yang et al. (2009), it is less about where people live and more about what they do for one another that is fundamental to constructing wider social networks (Wellman, 1999; Yang et al., 2009). Online communities overcoming geographic boundaries extend the context for reciprocal interactions, the principal defining criterion for community (Wellman, 1999).

2.5.4 Adapting to Changes in Community

Society is assumed to be adapting to the changing nature of community as evidenced in increased human capital and improved life chances online (DiMaggio et al., 2001). Wellman (2000) talks about *networked individuals*—individuals operating in a world where the Internet is being integrated into the day-to-day context and existing patterns of social life (Koku et al., 2001; Wang, 2012). Society recognises that community is increasingly about social networks based around individuals, rather than about location, groups, or place (DCITA, 2005). Elective or intentional groups (Hogget, 1997) formed online see individuals exercising rational choice in the types of communities they participate in. "Virtual mobility creates accessibility opportunities, both substituting for physical mobility and enabling access where previously there was an accessibility deficit" (Kenyon et al., 2002 p.213). Individuals, organisations, and communities are utilising social media-based technologies "as ways to stay in touch with one another. . . strengthening their social ties in a way that was not possible before" (Wang, 2012 p. 8).

SNSs, defined as connections mediated by electronic communications technology, facilitate the interactions of users in social spaces online (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). SNSs enable individuals to

connect and have "become deeply embedded in user's lives" (Boyd and Ellison, 2007 p. 221). For example, the SNS called Cyworld has become an integral part of everyday life for Koreans, respondents to a survey about Cyworld's usage listing "the maintenance and reinforcement of pre-existing social networks as their main motive" (Choi, 2006 p. 181). Boyd argues that SNSs are networked publics that support sociability, just as unmediated public spaces do (Boyd, 2008). Theoretical perspectives on SNSs come from diverse research traditions, and address a range of topics (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). However, analysis reveals a separatist perspective to the treatment of the social and the technological in knowledge of communities' adaptation to online social networking, the dominant explanatory perspective being one of human-centric understanding.

In the social networking possibilities that it enables, social media "touches nearly every facet of our personal and business lives" (Qualman, 2012 p. ix). Understanding how society is adapting to changes in community by participating in online communities to carry out everyday activities is important for this study. Current theories on participation in online communities are analysed in the next section.

2.6 Participating in Online Communities and Activities

Section 2.6 critically reviews current understanding of the concept of participation, examining how participation is defined, the different levels at which participation manifests, what is known about motivations to participate in communities, the value of participating in community life, and the implications of participation for inclusion in or exclusion from society. Understanding of nonparticipation in online communities or activities is also addressed in this section, demonstrating a limited view primarily focused on whether or not an individual has access or not to the required technology.

Through this section I will demonstrate suggestions in literature that society is adapting to the changing nature of community, presenting theory explaining the different ways in which individuals participate online compared with traditional face-to-face communities. In section 2.6.1, I discuss the definition of participation, presenting arguments that expose more intentionality in the actions of online community participants, demonstrating how virtual mobility enables access to wider social networks. In section 2.6.2 my analysis examines the levels at which participation is claimed to occur online, with existing claims revealed to be largely from a socially deterministic perspective in understanding participation in online communities. From reviewing literature, I present in section 2.6.3 what is known about the motivations to participate in online community life at both an individual and a societal level. I will show that theory on motivations to participate online demonstrates scholarly

efforts to bring together social and technological aspects, in response to criticisms of a technology-determinist perspective to understanding. My analysis reveals that participating in an online community is motivated by the desire to gratify needs beyond those fulfilled by interacting with others in a more traditional face-to-face community environment.

From my review of literature, I conclude in section 2.6.4 that theory largely explains the value of participating in online communities in terms of the access it creates to resources, and how it contributes to social capital development processes. In section 2.6.5 I adopt the position that social capital can be used as a measure of the value of group membership, and through my analysis I decompose social capital theory into three perspectives—resource view, function view, and result view. I apply this framework to analyse the relationship between online community participation and its role in creating social capital resources, examining how participating online has the function of transforming resources into other capital and how this creates value by creating access to other resources both online and offline. I examine the effects of online community on the foundations of social capital development in terms of how participating online affects networks, norms, and social trust. Subsequently, in section 2.6.6 I explain what is known about the outcome of participating in online communities and activities in terms of what it means for inclusion in community and wider society. I demonstrate that in the sense of understanding interactions between human agency and technology, online community participation contributes positively to social inclusion. I investigate the perceived positive social outcomes, seeking to understand what is known about the implications of online community involvement for inclusion in society. I also examine the focus of telecommunications laws and social policy aimed at eradicating digital disparities by promoting ICT-related actions and by equalising digitally inequalities. Throughout the analysis I reveal evidence that the human nature of a community is absent from online communities both from the manner in which community members interact with one another and the value that community members place on their connections to one another. In both instances of this social-determinist worldview, IT is the dependent variable and somehow technology gets lost. Finally, in section 2.6.7 I demonstrate the discovery of a limited understanding of nonparticipation in communities, both face-to-face and online. What is known, I will show, is largely centred on an understanding of nonuse or disadoption of online communities, with little attention given to voluntary decisions to not participate.

2.6.1 Defining Participation

The concept of participation has become a social policy buzzword, advocated as a good thing by involving individuals more directly in decisions that affect their lives (Brodie et al., 2009), strengthening the legitimacy and accountability of democratic institutions (Cornwall, 2008; Creasy, 2007). It is also claimed, for example, by (Brodie et al., 2009), that bringing people together around a common cause can empower communities and help foster social cohesion. Personal benefits reportedly resulting from participation lie in increased effectiveness for politics and impacts on personal development and growth in self-esteem (CLG, 2008). The potential that ICT creates for participation is claimed to be a central element of community development processes (DCITA, 2005).

Participation is an ambiguous term, spanning a vast set of literature in disciplines beyond information systems. Participation is commonly studied in social terms, relating to an individual's associational activities in both formal and informal contexts (Jochum, 2003; Pattie et al., 2004). Participation also implies a decision-making capacity in management spheres (Cotton et al., 1988) and in economic terms is considered necessary for deriving benefit from stock-market assets (Li, 2004). The concept of participation "is contested and used in different ways by different authors . . . frequently qualified with an array of prefixes, such as civic, civil, vertical, horizontal, individual, political, public, community, citizen" (Brodie et al., 2009 p.4). Participation is defined in different ways depending on the environment in which the participant engages.

In a comprehensive review of participation theory, Brodie (2009) synthesises literature to reveal three broad categories of participation: (1) public, (2) social, and (3) individual participation. Public participation is the "engagement of individuals with the various structures and institutions of democracy" (Brodie et al. 2009 p. 5), such as voting in local or national election. Social participation is the "collective activities that individuals may be involved in as part of their everyday lives" (Brodie et al., 2009 p. 5), for example, being a member of a community group or a local volunteering group. This type of participation is also referred to as community participation, characterised by social engagement based on associational life, collective action, or civil participation (Brodie et al., 2009). Individual participation relates to "the choices and actions that individuals make as part of their daily life and that are statements of the kind of society they want to live in" (Brodie et al., 2009 p.5), for example, the everyday politics of choosing fair-trade goods, donating money to charities, or signing petitions. These definitions represent fluid categorisations of participation, demonstrating dynamic interactions and overlaps (Ginsborg, 2005; Melucci, 1989). Participation in community is the focus

of this research. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, participation is defined as *social participation*—the collective activities that individuals may be involved in as part of their everyday lives (Brodie et al., 2009 p. 5). This definition is aligned with the research objective of understanding participation of individuals in online communities and activities for its emphasis on "the associations people form between and for themselves" (Brodie et al., 2009 p. 7).

In the context of online community life, participation is not well defined, although participation in online communities is regarded as "an increasingly prevalent phenomenon (Wang et al., 2012 p. 782). An online community member or participant has been described as "anyone who participates in a community by either posting or reading messages regardless of frequency" (Ridings and Gefen, 2004 p.3). This definition illuminates some key issues that make participation difficult to define. The distinction between membership and participation is vague, with more clarification needed on what constitutes being a member of a community versus actively participating in that community. Community, it is argued, only exists online while members interact persistently (Smith, 1999). The activities that constitute participation are simplistically defined, that is, a member participates by contributing (posting) online content (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012) or reading (consuming) that content (Butler et al., 2008). Existing knowledge does not fully explain how or why each activity occurs, or if there are other unstudied dimensions to participation. The analysis of participation literature raises the issue of how to measure participation, some theory purporting it can be measured by frequency of activity, time spent online, kinds of users, expertise in use, specific skills online, and attitudes to Internet use (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007). For the purpose of this study, online community participation is defined as a combination of the above definitions as contributing online content or reading that content (cf. Gonzalez et al., 2012; Butler et al., 2008). The implications of defining participation in this way are as follows: I can access the motivations for, and mechanisms by which, the individuals studied engage in online activities at all levels, not excluding those who consume content but do not contribute. This is the practice termed in literature as *lurking*—the passive members of online communities (Schneider et al., 2013a) making "regular visits to the community, but [exhibiting] reticence or very seldom posting" (Blanchard and Horan, 2000 p. 33). The lurker, it is argued, has justifiable reasons for remaining unseen such as overcoming "the uncomfortable feeling when communicating in the online setting" (Simon et al., 2013 p. 52).

The participation of an online community's members determines the life of the community and its survival depends upon that community's ability to "attract and retain members who are willing to continuously participate" (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012 p. 74). Participating is considered to comprise the

open and voluntary contribution of time, knowledge, energy, and emotional encouragement (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012). According to Rheingold (1993), participation lacks any assurance for those contributing that they will ever receive anything by means of reciprocity from those in the community who access and consume what they have contributed.

Theoretical perspectives predominantly examine online community participation in terms of the relationship between ICT and those who interact with it. Wellman introduces the idea that "rather than increasing or destroying community, the Internet can best be seen as integrated into rhythms of daily life, with life online intertwined with offline activities" (Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002 p. 154). Ontological assumptions that we can separately examine ICT and its impacts do not allow this sort of explanation into how technology is influencing online community participation behaviour on a day-to-day basis. There is also a social perspective of participating in an online community. From within this perspective, theoretical conclusions are drawn on participation for its contribution to and engagement in society. Both social identity and group norms have significant effects on online community participation (Zhou, 2011).

Technology changes the spaces in which participation takes place, social media creating "more diverse social networks" (Hampton et al., 2009 p. 6), allowing people to express "their values and political identities in new ways" (Brodie et al., 2009 p. 10). Studies report that only around 10% of the user population of online communities participate actively, illuminating a gap in existing knowledge explaining what the other 90% of members are doing within the community (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012). Empirical evidence from research on lurking reports that overall rates of active participation in online communities supporting sufferers living with chronic diseases, for example, are low, while the number of registered members of these communities has a high count (Han et al., 2014; Nagler et al., 2010). Research by (Merry and Simon, 2012) investigating the benefits of membership of the online community LiveJournal[7] for both active and nonactive participants (lurkers) found that,

> The percentage of lurkers who felt a sense of community and high levels of satisfaction was lower than that of the respondents who posted regularly to the community, but nonetheless represented the majority of the lurkers. The majority of overall respondents said that lurkers

[7] LiveJournal is a social networking service where Internet users can keep a blog, journal, or diary, and it is also the free and open source server software that runs the LiveJournal website and online community (www.livejournal.com).

> are members of the community, in contrast to earlier research in this area. (Merry and Simon, 2012 p. 241)

Empirical evidence thus reveals, according to Merry and Simon (2012), "a different, developing understanding of how nonactive participants are viewed as part of the community" (Merry and Simon, 2012 p. 241).

Empirical data from a recent study reveal the tendency for existing research to focus on lurkers as the passive members of online communities, who, as such, dominate online communities in terms of membership (Schneider et al., 2013a). Yet according to this research, "lurking in online communities reflects a phenomenon largely neglected by contemporary information systems theory and research" (Schneider et al., 2013 p. 293). Review of existing literature on lurking behaviour in online communities (e.g. Schneider et al., 2013a) identifies an unexplored opportunity to further understand the nature and origins of lurkers' behaviour. Promising areas for research exist in exploring "the individual propensity to de-lurk, and the dynamic interplay between lurking and de-lurking behavior" (Schneider et al., 2013 p. 293). In addition, in terms of understanding reasons for lurking, and what role lurking plays in online community life, "the psychology of curiosity in general holds great promise for research on online communities in information systems" (Schneider et al., 2013 p. 293).

2.6.2 Levels of Online Community Participation

The participation of online community members in their associated communities is held to be the key resource and at the same time the biggest challenge for the survival of online communities (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012). Statistics on the typical demographic of those who participate online claim that it is actually very average people going online (Lundy and Dellow, 2010). Lundy and Dellow (2010) further argue that the demographic of online participants shows a spread of people going online, not just stereotypical teenagers playing games. I found in my review that there is much debate over how to define a user of an online community, in terms of how you are labelled when you engage and the extent of your participation.

Where there is consensus, different levels of online community participation exist. Analysis reveals agreement that a life cycle of online community participation exists, that is, theories situating participation within a hierarchy based on the extent of the participant's activity in that community. This evolving process of member's participation focuses on the idea that "people will continue participating in the online community because they have invested a lot of time, knowledge and effort"

(Gonzalez and Cox, 2012 p. 79). Furthermore, they argue that participation is "continuously enacted and shaped by . . . norms, routines, experiences and interactions patterns developed in the past" (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012 p.79). Although competing theories use differently labelled hierarchies (Li, 2004; Nielson, 2006), definitions cover both positive and negative degrees of participation, broadly falling along a continuum as follows:

- Those who have never used the Internet, covered mainly in the literature from the perspective of not having access or skills—nonuse (Eastin and Larose, 2006; Selwyn, 2003), nonadoption (Katz and Rice, 2002), and inactives (Li and Bernoff, 2008).
- Active online community members, decomposed based on distinction between the following:
  - Reading (lurker (Nonnecke and Preece, 2000), joiners or spectators (Li and Bernoff, 2008) and peripheral users (Katz and Rice, 2002).
  - Posting (which is further decomposed into frequency of postings; intermittent user (Nielson, 2006); regular, leader, elder (Kim, 2000); and creators (Li and Bernoff, 2008).
- Someone who ceases their online community membership—disadoption (Boase, 2010) and Internet dropout (Rice and Katz, 2003).
- Control, encouragement, infrastructure administration, and external promotion (Butler et al., 2007)—activities required to sustain online communities (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012).

Readers or lurkers are criticised in literature as *free riders*, characterised by a "lack of public participation . . . [and] self-centred use of resources without giving back to the communities" (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012 p. 77). Lurkers are at the same time seen as "helpful to maintain the vitality of their communities . . . [and] may engage into a more active participation" (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012).

A study into the psychology of trolling and lurking found that "a potential problem stalling the growth of an online community is lack of participation of members in posting content" (Bishop, 2012 p. 160). Empirical evidence reveals that "even with the right technology there is often still a large number of 'lurkers' who are not participating" (Bishop, 2012 p. 161), defining "lurkers" as "online community members who visit and use an online community but who do not post messages" (Bishop, 2012 p. 161). He further states, based on empirical evidence, that lurkers,

> unlike posters, are not enhancing the community in any way in a give and take relationship and do not have any direct social interaction with the community. Lurking is the normal

> behaviour of the most online community members and reflects the level of participation, either as no posting at all or as some minimal level of posting. (Bishop, 2012 p. 161)

2.6.3 Motivations to Participate Online

The emphasis in existing research into online community participation has predominantly been upon the "effects of user motivations such as perceived usefulness, trust and commitment on online community user behavior, and seldom considered the effects of social processes including compliance, identification and internalization on user behavior" (Zhou, 2011 p. 67). Furthermore, the questions of what motivates individuals to join virtual communities, in what frequency do they interact, and to maintain what kind of social relations are found in recent literature (e.g. Wang, 2012). Categorisation of the drivers for online communities is generic and offers little explanation for different community contexts.

Recent scholarship calls for a redefinition of the concept of participation, specifically to "develop a clear understanding of the motivational forces that affect people's decisions to participate in online communities" (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012 p. 73). Existing theories on motivations for online participation cite reasons including information sharing, development and maintenance of relationships, access to social and emotional support, and entertainment (cf. Wang et al., 2012). Empirical research demonstrates that the technology acceptance model (TAM) can provide a useful foundation for the theoretical explanation of online community participation. Three factors have been identified as influencing participation in online communities and activities: Internet self-efficacy, perceived community environment, and intrinsic motivation (Wang et al., 2012). This research posits that Internet self-efficacy influences the decision to participate online based on an individual's perceived ability to carry out certain required actions when online. It also builds into the proposed alternative model of technology acceptance the exogenous variable of community environment, claiming it influences participation decisions both from the perspective of the information and technology systems as well as their users in the context of online community. A third exogenous variable, intrinsic motivation, which is the motivation to participate that is internal to online community members rather than that provided by external reward, is incorporated into the alternative TAM. Empirical evidence from testing of this TAM using a sample of 537 online community participants in the United States reveal that "when participating in an online community or activity, the behaviour of "individual users" is voluntary and without external incentives" (Wang et al., 2012 p. 787).

The motivations underpinning online community participation have been explored from several perspectives in literature, including communicational, psychological, social, educational, informational, economical, marketing, and engineering (Li, 2012b). A common theme for seeking to participate online is the fulfilment of some human need—for example, for belonging, for support, for information, or because of a perception of a value from participating (Cothrel and Williams, 2000; Cothrel, 2000; Cummings et al., 2002). Emerging from a study of web-based e-commerce learning communities in Brazil are two motivational forces for participation: (1) the benefits from the uses and applications of the community and (2) the inherent social characteristics of human kind (Joia, 2012). The number of online communities, it is claimed, is expanding to satisfy all kinds of human needs (such as for recreation, consumer needs, and gaining a voice) at individual, organisational, or societal level (Li, 2012b).

My analysis of literature so far reveals wide variety in the motivations thought to drive individuals to participate in online communities and activities. It also shows that there is no consensus on any one taxonomy of motivational factors, nor is there a rich body of evidence supporting the motivational forces thus far identified in existing literature. Rheingold, the author who coined the term *virtual community* in reflecting upon individual motivations to participate online, generalised that if you give people access to technology, they will use it. Rheingold is quoted as saying,

> Whenever CMC [computer-mediated communications] technology becomes available to people anywhere, they inevitably build virtual communities with it, just as microorganisms inevitably build colonies. (Rheingold, 1993 p. xx)

Literature (cf. Chiu et al., 2006) contains a view that the decision to participate in an online community is influenced, not inevitable. Participation is influenced by social ties, trust, considerations of reciprocity, and identification with the community and its goals. A framework for motivational factors, enablers, and barriers for knowledge sharing has been developed (cf. Ardichvili, 2008). Ardichvili's framework mentions the following social and emotional aspects influencing individual decisions to participate online:

- Emotional benefits (a sense of usefulness and by being able to contribute)
- Intellectual benefits (developing expertise and expanding perspective)
- Establishing ties with others
- Building a sense of community
- Protecting against external threats

In this framework, the focus is not on online participation in general; rather, the framework assumes participation in online communities and activities is specifically for information sharing purposes (Ardichvili, 2008). Furthermore, the motivations, enablers, and barriers are considered only in *communities of practice*, excluding the other types of community defined (transaction, interest, and fantasy). Gonzalez and Cox (2012) further categorise motivations for participation online as:

- Individual motivation
- Community-related outcome expectations
- Relational-capital motivation

This is an outcomes-focused perspective, emphasising the attainment of something more tangible than Ardichvili's classification by contrast. That is, a framework emphasising more intangible motivations at an emotional and intellectual level.

The motivations reported for physical community participation include informal self-help and solidarity, informal reciprocity and sharing of neighbourly help, mutual aid, philanthropy, and voluntary service (Brodie et al., 2009; Gilchrist, 2004). Other drivers for community participation centre on the fulfilment of needs for participatory democracy and localism, voice and choice in service delivery, individualism, consumerism, self-expression, global consciousness, and world views (Brodie et al., 2009). The analysis of existing scholarship reveals four primary reasons for membership of an online community: (1) for information exchange through weak ties, (2) to exchange social support through sense of belonging and self-identity, (3) for friendship and social companionship, and (4) as a new form of recreation (Kenyon et al., 2002; Ridings and Gefen, 2004). Further motivations for participating in an online community arise in technical reasons such as ease of use or "cool" search function (Ridings and Gefen, 2004). The scarcity of a group in "real life" is a motivation for some in seeking online community (Bargh and McKenna, 2004). Furthermore, online communities can grow out of a need to overcome anxiety and uncertainty due to an illness or stigma, social comparison needs, embarrassment, or lack of mobility (Bargh and McKenna, 2004).

Table 2 below collates the motivations cited in literature, identifying nineteen mutually exclusive categories into which all the motivations can be classified. Each category is independent of all other categories; however, each category may be found in one or more of the cited motivations. Table 2 indicates the categories into which motivations can be classified. Several motivations fall into more than one category, indicating that that motivation to participate online serves to fulfil more than one need for the participant concerned.

Table 2. Areas of Agreement in Motivations to Participate in Online Communities

Source	Motivation for participating in online community	Information	Relationships	Support	Entertainment	Worth	Environment	Intrinsic	Belonging	Value/benefit	Voice	Intellect	Safety	Democracy	Self-identity	Technology	Self-help	Helping others	Isolation	Illness/stigma
Wang et al. (2012)	Information acquisition and exchange	√																		
	Relational development and maintenance		√																	
	Social and emotional support			√																
	Entertainment				√															
Bandura (1997)	Internet self-efficacy					√														
	Perceived community environment						√		√											
	Intrinsic motivation							√												
Cummings et al. (2002)	For belonging								√											
Cothrel (2000)	For support			√																
	For information	√																		
	Because of a perception of a value from participating									√										
Joia (2012)	From the uses and applications of the community									√										
	Lying on inherent social characteristics of the human kind							√												

Table 2. Areas of Agreement in Motivations to Participate in Online Communities

Source	Motivation for participating in online community	Information	Relationships	Support	Entertainment	Worth	Environment	Intrinsic	Belonging	Value/benefit	Voice	Intellect	Safety	Democracy	Self-identity	Technology	Self-help	Helping others	Isolation	Illness/stigma
Li (2012b)	To fulfil needs for recreation				√															
	Consumer needs									√										
	Gaining a voice not possible through traditional community participation										√									
Ardichvili (2008)	Emotional benefits (a sense of usefulness and by being able to contribute)					√														
	Intellectual benefits (developing expertise and expanding perspective)											√								
	Establishing ties with others		√																	
	Building a sense of community								√											
	Protecting against external threats												√							
Gonzalez et al. (2012)	Individual motivation							√												
	Community-related outcome expectations								√											

Table 2. Areas of Agreement in Motivations to Participate in Online Communities

Source	Motivation for participating in online community	Information	Relationships	Support	Entertainment	Worth	Environment	Intrinsic	Belonging	Value/benefit	Voice	Intellect	Safety	Democracy	Self-identity	Technology	Self-help	Helping others	Isolation	Illness/stigma
	Relational-capital-motivation									√										
Brodie et al. (2009)	Informal self-help and solidarity																√			
Gilchrist (2004)	Informal reciprocity and sharing of neighbourly help		√															√		
	Mutual aid					√												√		
	Philanthropy																	√		
	Voluntary service																	√		
Brodie et al. (2009)	Participatory democracy and localism													√						
	Voice and choice in service delivery										√									
	Individualism														√					
	Consumerism									√										
	Self-expression														√					
	Global consciousness						√													
	World views											√								
Kenyon et al. (2002)	Information exchange through weak ties	√	√																	
	Social support exchange through a sense of belonging and self-identity			√					√						√					

Table 2. Areas of Agreement in Motivations to Participate in Online Communities

Source	Motivation for participating in online community	Information	Relationships	Support	Entertainment	Worth	Environment	Intrinsic	Belonging	Value/benefit	Voice	Intellect	Safety	Democracy	Self-identity	Technology	Self-help	Helping others	Isolation	Illness/stigma
	Friendship and social companionship		√																	
	New form of recreation			√																
Ridings et al. (2004)	Technical reasons such as ease of use or "cool" search function															√				
Bargh and McKenna (2004)	The scarcity of a group in "real life"																		√	
	A need to overcome anxiety and uncertainty due to illness or stigma																√			√
	Social comparison needs, embarrassment					√														√
	Lack of mobility																			√

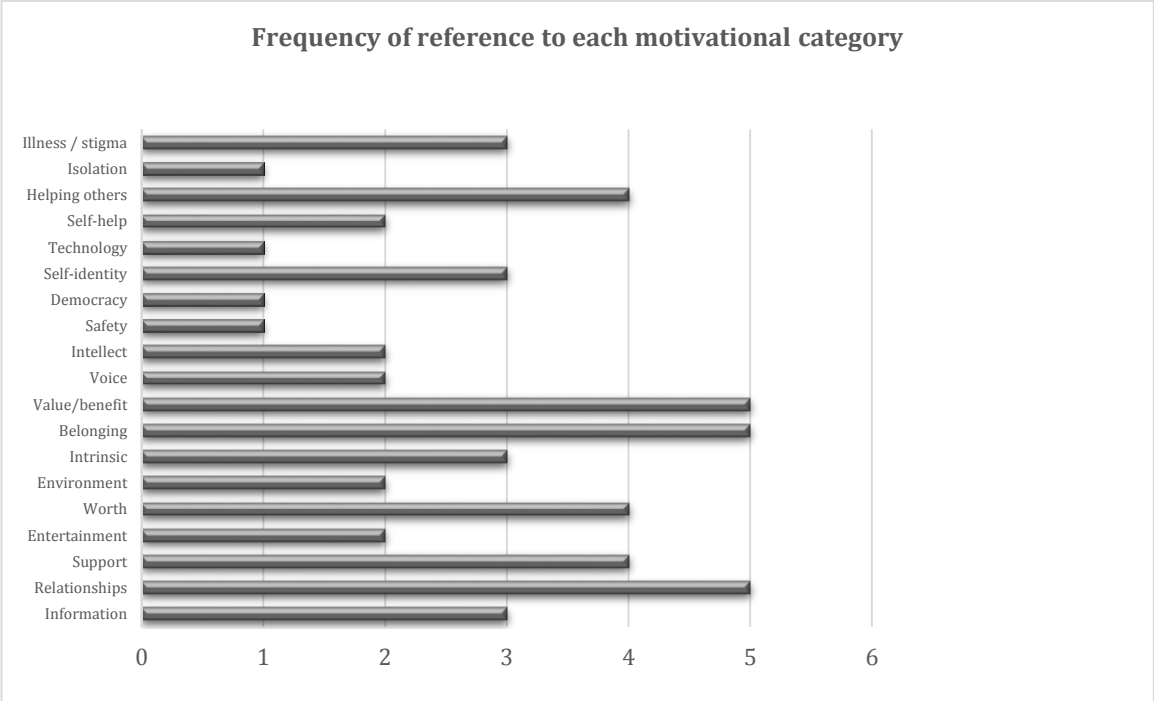

Figure 2. Frequency of Reference to Each Motivational Category

In Figure 2, I graphically depict the most commonly cited motivations for participating in an online community based on the motivations emerging from preceding review of existing scholarly understanding. Motivations relate to (1) the perception of gaining some (tangible) value or benefit from participation in an online community or activity, (2) the achievement of a feeling of belonging for the participant, and (3) the formation and maintenance of relationships. This indicates that both tangible and intangible reasons motivate people to participate online. Also common are reasons to do with helping others, feeling a sense of self-worth, and obtaining support. Cited motivations to participate online because of feelings of isolation, due to the attractiveness of a new technology, to engage in democracy, or for safety reasons are much less common, indicating that participation is much less likely to be because it shows the participant is following a trend, or that the participant sees their participation as having an effect on personal safety or engagement in wider society.

Linked to the motivations to participate is the intended purpose of the online community. The majority of online communities provided via SNSs are claimed to support pre-existing social relations and used to maintain existing offline relationships or solidify offline connections (Boyd and Ellison, 2012). Analysis further reveals that different online communities are reported as serving to satisfy different types of consumer needs (interests, relationship building, transactions, and fantasies) (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997).

The analysis of existing knowledge about what influences individual decisions to participate in online communities reveals that different types of online participation exist (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012). These authors identify the types of participation as (i) motivation-based participation and (ii) behavioural-based participation. According to this classification, motivation-based participation is when the individual considering participating online is influenced by self-interest. In this type of participation, self-interest determines the individual's willingness to contribute time, effort, and knowledge to the community (Gonzalez et al., 2012). Members of online communities are believed to be motivated because "either effort towards the task or successful completion of the task is intrinsically rewarding" (Kraut et al., 2012 p. 44). For example, the sentiment in some research is that "it is intrinsically rewarding to communicate with others . . . [to] directly fulfil some basic desire" (Kraut et al., 2012 p. 41). In another study, sixteen intrinsic motivations to participate in online communities are identified; these are to fulfil desires for: efficacy, wonder, freedom, self-importance, fun, vindication, loyalty, compassion, vitality, lust, love, stability, satiation, self-confidence, safe/relaxed, and ownership (Reiss, 2004). Drawing on Reiss' work, Kraut et al. (2012) further categorise four types of intrinsic motivations to participate in online communities: (1) social contact, (2) optimal challenge, (3) mastery, and (4) competition. Behavioural-based participation is the individual's willingness to participate in an online community to contribute content, for example, by adding new content, by asking questions, by responding to questions, and by uploading media content (Gonzalez et al., 2012).

Similar to the argument that a spectrum exists along which participation occurs at different times, in different contexts, it is claimed that participation online is an evolving process, influenced by the external environment (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012). Critique of this work highlights the shortsightedness of the researchers in focusing on active community contributors to the exclusion of understanding the participation of the wider population of the community who are not actively contributing. Furthermore, the researchers themselves acknowledge that little is known about those members of online communities who lurk, not actively contributing to the community's content or purpose.

Members' motivations to participate in online communities are not understood in great depth in existing literature, with little identification and classification of specific individual drivers. In this sense, my analysis of existing literature exposes a gap in the primary theories of participation to fully explain how or why individuals participate in online communities, with an associated lack of empirical evidence. Some researchers (e.g., Wang, 2012) identify an opportunity for future research investigating psychological and motivational aspects of participation in online communities. Researchers are encouraged to ask questions such as "Do people participate in these online groups to strengthen and maintain their existing values?" or "Do people participate because

they want to try out new identities that may not be attainable in real life" (Wang, 2012 p. 13). Calls for further research into the behaviour of online community members emerged from an empirical case study of a web-based e-commerce learning community in Brazil (cf. Joia, 2012). In that study, the author recognises a potential for future research to investigate why some students take part more actively than others in the learning community and which issues motivate them to participate. Furthermore, an implication of the study is in the recognition of a need for empirical enquiry into the motivations for actively participating in particular online community contexts (cf. Joia, 2012). Attention is drawn to a need for future research on motivations for online community participation to acknowledge that online and offline experiences are deeply entwined (Boyd and Ellison, 2012).

From a socio-technical systems perspective (cf. Mumford, 1994; Mumford, 2000; Mumford, 2006; Trist, 1981), research about participation in online community aims to bring the social and the technical back together. When examining motivations to participate, an objective is to balance understanding of the technical and the human factors, as demonstrated in the work of McLeod and MacDonell (2011) in their study of factors that affect software systems development project outcomes. This view treats the social and the technological as separate entities, that is, communities of humans and the technology that enables participation so that interactions between these humans can take place digitally are considered individually. However, as proponents of the socio-technical system argue (cf. Emery and Trist, 1960; Mumford, 2000; Trist, 1981), both the social and the technological elements need to be considered when jointly trying to optimise both.

2.6.4 The Value of Participation

Participation in community is generally regarded as having positive outcomes for both community and individuals (Portes, 1998), fostering ties and shared norms (Putnam, 2000), increasing confidence and self-determination (Bandura, 1997), and resulting in a sense of well-being from being connected to other humans (Parker, 2007). Reference is made in existing theory to the collective goods of groups joining together (cf. Dantas and Silveira, 2012; Rheingold, 2000), identifying three types of good: social network capital, knowledge capital, and communication. However, there are also claims that participation can sometimes be exclusionary and divisive (Brodie et al., 2009; Putnam, 2000), not contributing to the social good.

Further to what is claimed about community participation in general, there is the notion that online community participation is a good thing. According to Dantas and Silveira (2012), online communities produce digital resources and the re-use of content available online. This view is supported with claims that new activities are stimulated between people by computer-mediated

communications technology (Rheingold, 2000), recognising that there is something valuable people can gain by gathering together online (Dantas and Silveira, 2012).

Drawing on a review of empirical studies of online community participation to understand the benefits of participating online, benefits are classified into two groups (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012):

- Tangible returns, intangible returns, and community-related benefits
- Visibility, information, social and altruistic benefits

Together, these two classifications mirror an earlier discussion of the motivations to participate online; some of which were found to be at an emotional and intellectual level, and others seek the attainment of tangible outcomes. There is less research about the benefits at emotional and intellectual levels for participation in an online community or activity in a social context. The perceived value from participating in online communities to gratify these types of needs is dealt with in literature (e.g. Alessandrini, 2006; Armstrong and Hagel, 1996; Warburton et al., 2013) as its ability to create access to a rich source of social, emotional, and physical resources.

2.6.5 Social Capital

The role of ICT in building communities and developing social capital has received much attention from international bodies including the World Bank and the OECD (cf. DCITA, 2005; OECD, 2009; OECD, 2013; The World Bank, 2003). A strong connection is made between ICT and social capital development in terms of the access to social resources created through electronic networks of weakly tied relationships (Ellison et al., 2007), highlighting the "increased attention . . . on the contribution of ICT to community development and social capital building as a tool for greater social inclusion and cohesion" (DCITA, 2005 p. 5). Social capital can, it is argued, be used as a measure of the value of group membership (cf. Bargh and McKenna, 2004). There are claims that online social capital is built in the "important aspects of one's identity for which there is no equivalent offline group" (Bargh and McKenna, 2004 p. 12). These claims support application of social capital to analyse the value of being socially included in community in seeking to further understand why individuals participate in online communities and activities.

A socio-technical perspective (cf. Emery and Trist, 1960; Mumford, 2000; Trist, 1981) on research in this area illuminates that in seeking to optimise the value from participating in an online community, technology is a critical enabler. Through its ability to bring people together via electronic forums in online communities, enabling technologies such as blogs, wikis, and social networks (Ransbotham and Kane, 2011) facilitate members in seeking out like-minded individuals to connect and interact with when they are not geographically co-located. Further

supporting this perspective is the view that online communities facilitate connections between community members that would not otherwise be made (Haythornthwaite, 2005). This argument is extended in claims that the connections made are often made between *latent ties* who share some offline connection (Haythornthwaite, 2005).

2.6.5.1 Defining social capital

From my analysis of the work of some scholars (e.g. Fukuyama, 2002; Pruijt, 2002), I find social capital to be a complex, multifaceted and contentious concept, for which it is argued there is no one universally recognised definition. The definitions of social capital vary across disciplines, with literature containing several widely referenced definitions each with a different emphasis. According to different sources, social capital is . . .

> . . . the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. (Bourdieu, 1986 p. 248)

> . . . defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure. (Coleman, 1990 p. 302)

> . . . the features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. (Putnam, 1995 p.67)

> . . . the value that can be derived from social ties created by goodwill, mutual support, shared language, common beliefs, and a sense of mutual obligation. (Huysman and Wulf, 2004)

> . . . refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions . . . Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society—it is the glue that holds them together. (The World Bank, 2003)

The analysis of the definitions of social capital reveals three separate but interrelated views exist. Social capital is an iterative process of (1) a social resource (cf. Alessandrini, 2006; Bourdieu, 1986), (2) performing a capital-building function (cf. Coleman, 1988), resulting (3) in the creation of value (cf. Huysman and Wulf, 2004), which in turn creates potential access to further resources and so the life cycle of social capital building continues, as I have depicted in Figure 3.

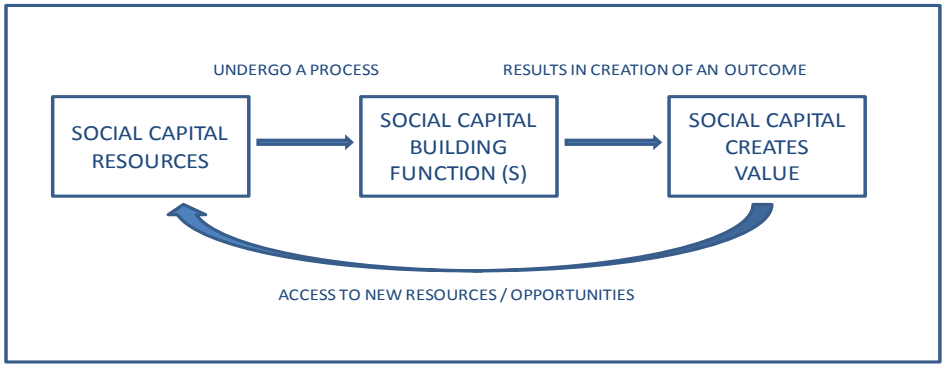

Figure 3. Cycle of Social Capital Building

The Australian Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) provide a rich source of theory on social capital. The DCITA propose four discourses on social capital: (1) economics, (2) political science, (3) sociological, and (4) anthropological (DCITA, 2005). These discourses broadly map onto definitions of social capital, demonstrating the numerous perspectives from which to view the concept. There is a materialistic view of social capital as individual incentives to interact (Bourdieu, 1986; Huysman and Wulf, 2004). A more social perspective emphasises the role of institutions, political and social norms in shaping human behaviour and the nature of trust, reciprocity, and networks in civic engagement, respectively (Putnam, 1993; DCITA, 2005). An even stronger social view exists that the biological basis for social order comes from natural instincts for association, where social capital acts as the "glue" that holds together the institutions within a society (The World Bank, 2003; DCITA, 2005). This illuminates the tacit nature of social capital building, reflecting human instinct and desire for association and inclusion—the catalysts for growth in social networking. These perspectives and the framework above together provide a mechanism by which to examine the relationship between the ICT and the value of participating in community life online according to social capital's role as a resource, function, or result.

2.6.5.2 Social Capital as an Online Community Resource

Social capital is defined as the resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed by purposive actions (Lin et al., 2001). Social capital as a resource is framed as a social asset (Notley and Foth, 2008), in which individuals invest and expect a return (Lin, 1999). This resource view regards social capital as an incentive (DCITA, 2005) for social interaction returning a reciprocal act (Blanchard and Horan, 1998). Existing literature (e.g. Antoci et al., 2013; Kobayashi et al., 2006; Tian et al., 2012) tells us that ICT determines the creation of new social resources for exchange. However, this view is limited in its separatist treatment of the social world and the technology it interacts with. ICT enables the creation of new community assets in the form of

"informal proximity-based social clusters and intangible networks of 'weak-tie' relationships" (Notley and Foth, 2008 p. 14). Access to new media resources facilitates the purposive exchange of information and social support within online communities (Blanchard and Horan, 2000). Individuals interacting within these new networks of ICT resources have privileged access to information and to opportunities (Ginsburg and Weisband, 2002) not available offline, investing in new social assets from which they expect reciprocal exchanges (Lin, 1999; Notley and Foth, 2008). In my analysis, I found many references to the value from the exchange of information and social support resources in new forms via Internet interactions and relationships, for example, in the work of Alessandrini (2006) and Ellison and Boyd (2007). Virtual social capital, in resource terms, is considered the utility of being online accruing from status, recognition, and association (Lundy and Dellow, 2010).

2.6.5.3 The Functions of Social Capital in an Online Community

Social capital performs many functions, situated as a framework upon which successful digital divide policy is built (Notley and Foth, 2008), facilitating positive interactions between individuals in a network (Lesser, 2000), bridging the space between people (Cohen and Prusak, 2001), and affecting the productivity of individuals and groups (Putnam, 2000). It is an important policy instrument for combating social disorders in society (Lesser, 2000; Putnam, 1993), and presented as a framework through which policy can provide "opportunities to collectively build social, cultural and economic capital" (Notley and Foth, 2008 p. 10). A reported function of social capital arises in the extra-familial networks made possible through online community participation (Portes, 1998). Serving as a policy instrument, social capital is claimed to enable governments develop policies for computer-mediated communications to foster community development, to support regional and neighbourhood renewal programs, and to assist with networking (DCITA, 2005).

Existing literature (e.g. Notley and Foth, 2008; Yang et al., 2009) says that participating in online communities has value for the participants. In this context, ICT-enabled community participation creates new community assets in intangible networks of weakly tied relationships (Notley and Foth, 2008). It also facilitates the exchange of information and social support resources in new forms via Internet interactions (Alessandrini, 2006; Ellison et al., 2007). Through ongoing participation it allows community members to "gain experience and insight that can be applied to improve individual and collective collaborations" (Ransbotham and Kane, 2011 p. 614). A theoretical framework has been proposed for analysing the relationship between ICT and social capital, whereby the role of technology in social capital development encompasses four functions:

connecting, changing, influencing, or enabling (Yang et al., 2009). According to this classification,

1. ICT connects people, thus generating social capital through the possibilities of higher social satisfaction and greater opportunities;
2. ICT has the role of changing social capital building in communities through its effect on civic engagement and processes of democracy;
3. Social factors determine technology acceptance, thus influencing social capital; or
4. Social capital that already exists in communities before the introduction of ICT enables technology diffusion.

These contrasting positions demonstrate that social capital development is both affected by the deployment of ICT and, at the same time, affects the deployment of ICT. While providing a useful mechanism for synthesising literature, in the context of studying participation in online communities, this classification is compromised in its assumption that social capital and ICT are separate entities with essential properties defined á priori. A relational perspective of ICT and social capital building as entangled in practice is an emerging theme for which theoretical development is beginning to gain momentum (Barad, 2003; Barad, 2007; Orlikowski, 2000; Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski, 2010; Orlikowski and Scott, 2008a; Scott and Orlikowski, 2009; Scott and Orlikowski, 2012).

2.6.5.4 Social Capital-Building as the Value of Online Community Participation

There is much debate about whether social capital is built or eroded with participation in online communities. Some researchers (e.g. Kraut et al., 1998; Nie et al., 2002) claim that retreating into an artificial world could lead to isolation and erode social capital through a loss of contact with one's social environment. An opposing argument posits that online communities expand the stock of social capital (Lin et al., 2001). Putnam (1995) has a longstanding belief that decreased participation in physical community, for example, by reduced membership of community groups, political parties, volunteer organisations, and church attendance (Notley and Foth, 2008) will erode social capital (Putnam, 1995). This view is challenged by claims that the dispersal of social networks does not decrease social capital (Blanchard and Horan, 2000). In the work of Alessandrini (2006), for example, there are claims that while there are fewer face-to-face interactions occurring, social capital is not in decline. Rather, social capital is built in new forms with Internet interactions and relationships. Online communities, Alessandrini (2006) argues, are not detrimental to social capital. This point is supported in the claim that increased participation in online communities could compensate for the decrease in social capital caused by decreased participation in face-to-face communities (Blanchard and Horan, 2000).

The value of social-capital development manifests at different levels that build upon one another (DCITA, 2005). At an individual (micro) level, the value of social capital is claimed to be the creation of robust personal networks (Cohen and Prusak, 2001), social ties (Huysman and Wulf, 2004), and positive life outcomes (DiMaggio et al., 2001). At the community (meso) and national (macro) levels, social capital is seen as contributing to positive social outcomes through the creation of vibrant communities (Cohen and Prusak, 2001) and civic virtue (Putnam, 1993), benefiting the broader community (Ginsburg and Weisband, 2002) through coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1993). Drawing from the work of DiMaggio et al. (2001), the value of social capital developed through online community participation varies with the type of usage across different people in different contexts. Research "should not isolate the interaction of ICT and social capital from social contexts" (Yang et al., 2009 p. 195).

A goal of social policy is to build social capital by capitalising on ICT's potential to "contribute to positive community and social outcomes . . . aiding social cohesion and the building of regional information economies" (DCITA, 2005 p. 5). In practice, the potential to use ICT to build social capital and how society derives value is "largely untapped and unrecognized in many areas" (DCITA, 2005 p. 4). Use of the Internet to facilitate community participation is reported to have a direct positive effect on social capital, resulting in a positive indirect effect on political participation (DiMaggio et al., 2001). Literature (e.g. Alessandrini, 2006) claims a lack of theoretical understanding of the impact of online community participation on the development and maintenance of social capital. There are calls for further research to understand the relationship between the Internet, social capital, and civic engagement (DCITA, 2005), "particularly from different contexts in Australia" (Farrow et al., 2014 p. 12). This research could "be valuable in explaining the different contexts and ways that ICT are used and describe the pathways that different groups and organisations have taken to building social capital and communities through ICT and Internet use" (Farrow et al., 2014 p. 12). Claims exist of a need for improved theoretical understanding of the social benefits of ICT based on a social capital framework, positioning social capital as a measure of value from group membership (Bargh and McKenna, 2004; Notley and Foth, 2008). A recent conclusion on research about ICT and community is that,

> The increasingly technological nature of society means ICT . . . should now be considered as one of the critical elements of the underlying (supportive) infrastructure necessary for higher-level community development. (Farrow et al., 2014 p. 10)

2.6.5.5 Networks, Norms, and Social Trust in Online Communities

In my analysis of literature, I found some reports of the implications of online social capital building activities for the basic components in developing social capital among the members of a

group—networks of civic engagement, norms of reciprocity, and social trust (Blanchard and Horan, 2000; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Putnam, 1993). Online communities open up participation to groups where "anxiety and uncertainty due to an illness or stigma, social comparison needs, embarrassment or lack of mobility makes participation in traditional group settings problematic" (Bargh and McKenna, 2004 p. 17). A value-adding capacity arises where individuals operate in many communities and networks simultaneously, adding value to each community (DCITA, 2005). A counterargument exists in the potential for social capital to be eroded by participation in online communities formed on the basis of negative anonymity such as extremist groups, racial hate, and terrorism (Bargh and McKenna, 2004). When compared with physical communities, the stability of online communities suffers from participation that is spontaneous and volitional (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997), threatening social capital building efforts that rely on networks of civic engagement.

Reciprocity in the development of social capital online is claimed to manifest at multiple levels (Ridings et al., 2002) in the exchange of information through weak ties that are "indispensable to individuals' opportunities and to their integration into communities" (Granovetter, 1973 p. 1378). This occurs in the exchange of social support through ease of searching, the achievement of a sense of belonging and self-identity. It also occurs in friendship through the value of spending time together and in the provision of new forms of recreation (Ridings and Gefen, 2004). Lurking threatens norms of reciprocity (Bishop, 2012). This passive participation represents a key difference between online and physical community in that physical communities tend not to have silent members (Ridings and Gefen, 2004).

The impact on social trust of ICT's embeddedness in daily life is beginning to receive attention in literature, particularly in the context of trust in online banking and shopping practices (cf. Chang et al., 2013; Hsu et al., 2014). However, theoretical development is in its relative infancy. Trust is seen as "an essential social norm for achieving social and economic outcomes" (Farrow et al., 2014 p. 14). There exists a claim that lack of social cues and anonymity have been beneficial in developing social relationships (Bargh and McKenna, 2004), a claim challenged by lack of empirical evidence (Blanchard and Horan, 2000). Internet use has been associated with greater participation in community activities and more trust (DiMaggio et al., 2001), and it has been noted that "offline interactions in some communities [is] a causal factor in developing trust in the online environment" (Farrow et al., 2014 p. 14). With increasing use of computer-mediated communications, however, threats to trust arise in many ways, including malicious threats (such as worms, viruses, spam, spyware, and phishing), authentication, verification of identity, and privacy issues (DCITA, 2005; Farrow et al., 2014).

Recent perspectives on organisational change have emphasised human agency, more than technology or structure, to explain empirical outcomes resulting from the use of information technologies in organisations. An emergent perspective (Boudreau and Robey, 2005) recognises that both human and material agency is present in any given context of information technology and social capital building. This perspective involves untangling the complex interactions that take place between humans and technology. Understanding networks, norms, and social trust in the context of online community participation requires identification of the human (social) actors—that is, those participating in the community—and the role technology plays in changing and constructing these networks, norms and trust.

2.6.6 Social Inclusion and Social Exclusion

A space where the value of participating in community can be studied is in the impact that participation has on the inclusion in broader society of the participating individuals. This inclusiveness, referred to as social inclusion, is a broad and vague term (Duffy, 1998; Murie and Musterd, 2004) for which literature definitions are inconclusive. It is defined as a feeling that people sense (Hampton and Wellman, 2003) and a characteristic of an idealised society often motivated by political expediency (Kenyon et al., 2002). Social inclusion is defined by the Australian Government (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2010) as the opportunity:

- to participate in society through employment and access to services;
- to connect with family, friends, and the local community;
- to deal with personal crises (e.g., ill health); and
- to be heard.

A socially inclusive society is defined as one where,

> All people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity. (Cappo, 2002 - Excerpt from speech to the Economic Growth Summit)

Social inclusion, it is argued, has developed into an instrument for measuring community cohesiveness (Wang, 2012). At the core of social inclusion definitions is the notion of addressing the needs of specific disadvantaged groups (Notley and Foth, 2008), realising the desire to associate and belong.

Social inclusion changes with the deployment of ICT. Access to ICT can offer wide-ranging benefits to a community, such as enabling potentially excluded groups to participate in education, employment, and leisure; enabling easier delivery of public services; and enabling more people to enter the workforce through flexibility in where to work from (Gilliatt et al., 2000). A feeling

of being socially included comes from communicating information, sharing emotions, and facilitating arrangements (Hampton and Wellman, 2003) in addressing "the online needs of specific disadvantaged groups" (Notley and Foth, 2008 p. 96). Support exists for the claims that online interaction helps overcome social exclusion problems by including otherwise disadvantaged groups in community life (cf. Ellison et al., 2007; Kenyon et al., 2002). Furthermore, the importance of ICT for social inclusion is a prominent agenda item for governments worldwide, becoming the focus of much social policy aimed at greater social cohesion (Warschauer, 2003).

There is a view that the deployment and use of ICT, particularly through access to the Internet, has a powerful role underpinning the digital economy (ACMA, 2009; Maldonado et al., 2006) and in extending social inclusion (Foley, 2004). Social policy development highlights that "addressing barriers to [Internet] participation becomes important for social inclusion . . . [to] garner the benefits of online activities in the digital economy" (ACMA, 2009 p. 35). The Internet, it is claimed, creates possibilities for the inclusion of individuals in activities such as the production of goods and services, consumption, civil engagement, and social interaction (Maldonado et al., 2006). One example of the power of the Internet is contained in the following excerpt,

> During Barack Obama's presidential campaign in 2008, commentators praised him for being able to exploit new "social media" to reach new groups of voters and for mobilizing young and energetic supporters. Using social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter was not only an effective way of exploiting the possibilities of the new media, it also helped to advance the image of Obama as a credible and foresighted politician. (Styhre, 2010 p. 67)

This view, although materialistic in its focus on resources resulting from ICT actions, has been the impetus for the design and development of telecommunications laws and social policies globally. ICT initiatives designed to encourage greater participation are targeted at overcoming digital exclusion, evidenced in an Australian context by significant investment in digital inclusion initiatives (Notley and Foth, 2008). The Australian Department of Broadband, Communication and the Digital Economy (DBCDE) define a range of elements that must be in place to ensure digital inclusion and facilitate online participation:

- *Access:* infrastructure (adequate bandwidth capacity and affordable and reliable Internet connections), computer hardware and software, and publicly provided access.
- *Techno-literacy*: basic ICT information and training to increase user confidence in using both the technology and online content/applications/services (i.e., extract value from their use).

- *Awareness:* increase awareness of the benefits and uses of ICT and identify and promote the value proposition from ICT for all users in relevant and appropriate economic and social terms by focusing on the transformative effects of ICT rather than on ICT themselves.
- *Integration:* Integrate ICT into the social fabric of everyday life (i.e., in the functioning of communities and institutions) and embed technology in people's lifestyles and into the lives of local communities.
- *Support:* provide technical and training support and implement a supportive regulatory regime to engender user confidence and trust and address issues of privacy, security, and consumer rights (DCITA, 2005).

The required elements all focus on the provision of the necessary technology, the know-how to use it in everyday life, and the adequate technical support for everyone who needs it. Inclusion, under these circumstances, is about being digitally equipped and empowered to use technology for participating in society. Investment is in ICT initiatives to support participation and engagement via digital means. The objective of improving participation through ICT is a common theme in literature (e.g. Brodie et al., 2009; Nielson, 2006; Wang et al., 2012). What is less clear, however, is how participation and engagement in society can be improved in ways other than through digital inclusion. Furthermore, there is the issue to consider of what the effect on participation is if the required supports and access are not available.

2.6.7 Understanding of Nonparticipation

Social exclusion, the opposite of social inclusion, is broadly defined as an individual's lack of participation in society (Murie and Musterd, 2004; Scott and Horner, 2004), or the exclusion of individuals from full participation in society (Maldonado et al., 2006). Kenyon (2002) describes social exclusion as a state of experiencing powerlessness, low self-esteem, isolation, and perceptions of choice within society. Exclusion manifests in a variety of forms (Maldonado et al., 2006) as the result of different circumstances. The consequences of being excluded are reduced accessibility to participate in the social and political life of a community (Kenyon et al., 2002). One can experience social exclusion in any or all of "economic, cultural, social and political spheres . . . [and] may be excluded from different things at the same time" (de Haan, 2001 p. 5). Potential exclusionary factors cited include the inability to participate at societal and political levels, the lack of access to resources (economic and social), the lack of representation (societal and political), and the restricted choices (personal, political, and societal) (Kenyon et al., 2002). Social exclusion puts a focus on the underlying processes that cause deprivation and exclusion. It has been defined as "a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation

in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live" (Silver, 2007 p. 15).

Research on the gradations in digital inclusion in the UK (cf. Livingstone and Helsper, 2007) highlights that along with issues of accessibility, concerns over usage and restrictions placed on usage by some external source contribute to social exclusion. Reasons cited for low and/or non-use of the Internet in this research are presented in Table 3, in no particular order.

Table 3. Reasons for Low and/or Non-use of the Internet
I haven't got Internet access.
My parents don't let me access the Internet.
It's too expensive.
I find it difficult/frustrating.
It is too slow/keeps going wrong.
I don't have time.
It's not really safe.
I think people rely on computers too much.

Source: Livingstone and Helsper (2007)

The research by Livingstone and Helsper (2007), however, was aimed at generic Internet use and does not claim to explain inclusion or exclusion through participation (or nonparticipation) in online communities specifically. Little empirical evidence exists in this area, but there is an emerging idea that opting out (and hence being excluded from full participation in society) is, for some, a rationally made decision based on lack of interest (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007) or lack of inclination to go online (Kenyon et al., 2002). Blanchard and Horan (2000) propose the concept of voluntary exclusion from online community participation. In my review of literature, I found self-exclusion described as a process of self-limiting behaviour brought about by exercising the power of choice not to participate due to concerns over privacy, security, or lack of perceived value (Kenyon et al., 2002). Theory on social exclusion as manifested in self-exclusion is investigated largely in the context of specific communities based around addictive behaviour (such as gambling) where an individual uses a technological feature of a website to bar themselves from participating in that online community (Griffiths et al., 2009a; Griffiths et al., 2009b; Smeaton and Griffiths, 2004). This self-limiting behaviour (Rice and Katz, 2003) and suggestion of the power of choice in whether or not to participate online challenges the assumption that people will naturally affiliate when given the opportunity in a social environment (Blanchard and Horan, 2000) and challenges the explanation of social inclusion as an imposed state. What is not known is an understanding of the reasons other than the digital divide that

explain nonparticipation and thus contribute to instances of social exclusion. Evidence shows nonparticipation is significant and highlights a danger in assuming it is because people do not have access, skills, time, or finances to use technology.

Existing literature adopts a predominantly deterministic perspective on technology's role in contributing to exclusion. Theory tells us that ICT imposes restrictions on who can access and engage with it, resulting in the existence of barriers at an individual level to participation in online communities and at a collective level to engagement in society, politics, and economics through these online communities (Rice and Katz, 2003). From my review of literature, I conclude that theory is in its relative infancy and practice far outstripping current knowledge. In practice, much of policy focuses on overcoming accessibility issues due to a digital divide—digital divide widely referenced as the determinant in whether an individual can participate online or not, and thus also a determinant of social inclusion/exclusion, depending which side of the divide you are on. I argue that participation in online communities can be inclusive for some but isolating for others, having the potential to reshape the boundaries of community.

2.7 Conclusions and Research Gap

Finally, section 2.7 concludes by identifying a gap in current scholarly understanding of participation and nonparticipation from a perspective that recognises the inherent intertwinedness of social media in the digital age. Section 2.7.1 develops an argument for further enquiry into the phenomenon of participation in online communities and activities that is grounded in a rich empirical context. In problematising the research into online community participation, I demonstrate how my study can challenge underlying assumptions of participation given access, helping to produce theoretical understanding that is insightful and original. Exploring the reasons for and ways in which participating online manifests is presented as an opportunity to disrupt the accepted research perspectives by challenging limitations in the existing understanding of participation from separatist ontological perspectives.

In section 2.7.2, a framework is depicted with the purpose of contextualising the research problem. In section 2.7.3 the objective of designing an empirical study to investigate participation and nonparticipation in online communities is stated as to better understand both phenomena. Research questions are developed to enquire about how and why people participate in communities, why some groups do not participate in online communities and to uncover insights into the impacts of not participating online.

2.7.1 Argument for the Research

Livingstone and Kelsper (2007) raise an important consideration, that "mere access" to technology is insufficient to ensure equality of opportunity. In their claims, there is a suggestion that researchers move the debate from a concern with material access to the technology to consider social and cultural factors that influence use. It is argued that engagement with technology is determined by a "complex mixture of social, psychological, economic and, above all, pragmatic reasons" (Selwyn, 2004 p. 349). Research calls for further theoretical understanding of technology's role in social inclusion, building on earlier observation of the need for such research that "re-orients the focus from that of gaps to be overcome by provision of equipment to that of social development to be enhanced through the effective integration of ICT into communities and institutions" (Warschauer, 2003 p. 14). Previous thinking about this kind of integrated view of the social and technological aspects identified the need to give attention to the "wide range of physical, digital, human, and social resources that meaningful access to ICT entails" (Warschauer, 2002 p. 14). For researchers, it is advised that "identifying how people use the Internet, and with what consequences, is not as straightforward as determining whether they have access" (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007 p. 674). They also observe that ICT initiatives "pay far more attention to the conditions that encourage or hinder use than to the kinds of uses to which the Internet might, or should, be put" (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007 p. 682). Research calls for the benefits of using and disadvantages of non- use or low use of the Internet to be examined more fully (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007).

Building on these earlier calls for research, a prevailing opportunity exists to "redefine the concept of participation . . . [and to] develop a clear understanding of the motivational forces that affect people's decisions to participate in online communities" (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012 p. 72). I see the potential to further understand participation and nonparticipation in online communities, and by doing so to redefine the debate away from digital inclusion. Although the dominant explanatory perspective on online participation relates to digital equality, existing knowledge of digital inequality and its effect of denying access to technology does not explain why many individuals opt out of participating in online communities. Social capital gives a different explanatory perspective, offering insight into the value of community membership. This view purports that the effect of nonparticipation is in its limiting effects on social capital-building efforts, theorising that community may as a consequence lose out on valuable contributions to collective action. Theory on the potential for participation in online communities to build social capital, however, is in its relative infancy, much based on assumption and lacking empirical support. In practice there exist few substantive recommendations or theoretical inferences of

ICT's role in the derivation of value from social capital developed through online community participation. Support exists for the claims that computer-mediated communication through online community participation builds social capital (cf. Warburton et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2009), and to an extent there is also theoretical support for the claim that such interaction overcomes social exclusion problems by including otherwise disadvantaged groups (e.g. Watling, 2011). Yet literature (e.g. Foley, 2004; Foth, 2003; Hayer and Meyer, 2011; Trauth and Howcroft, 2006) suggests the potential for computer-mediated communications to lead to the exclusion of subgroups not expected to be excluded. A factor of human nature in terms of the different behaviours of individuals, acting in free will in different online contexts, and the impact of this on social inclusion, the building of social capital is not a predictable variable. Literature analysis concludes that the groups experiencing exclusion from online community participation are not necessarily those traditionally at risk from exclusion in physical community.

The argument I put forward based on assessment of current knowledge is that there are unexplored ramifications for social capital in that not participating in online community life denies access to a rich source of resources and potential opportunities both online and offline. Those whose participation is not hindered by accessibility are increasingly being excluded from sharing in the key moments of friends' lives by not being part of their online communities. Furthermore, by not engaging in community or civic life online, these individuals are being denied an opportunity to contribute to the positive social outcomes desired by social inclusion policy. The potential for ICT-enabled participation to upset the balance of society adds a new theoretical dimension to the digital divide debate. We do not fully understand how and why nonparticipation might reshape the social inclusion debate or redefine the boundaries of who is included and excluded beyond issues of digital inequality. The implications of participation inequality require investigation at individual and collective levels, developing theory on the social exclusion dimension of ICT-enabled community participation and the practical implications of ICT deployment in denying social capital to those not participating.

Overall, the different perspectives from which participation in online communities and its resulting effect on social capital-building and social inclusion is researched also challenge some of the fundamental assumptions in literature of ontological separateness. Collectively, they build a case for a different research perspective, or paradigm that considers the social (human) and material (technological) aspects as inseparable. Such a worldview is built on a foundation that "society and technology are not two ontologically distinct entities but more phases of the same essential action" (Latour, 1991 p. 129). As online communities of humans interacting to do everyday things via digital devices illustrates, it therefore "does not make sense to have social 'thing' and technology 'thing' and bring them together" (Doolin and McLeod, 2012). Little

research or empirical investigation of participation in online communities is approached from the perspective that technology is entangled in everyday social life, or examines how the social and technological aspects mutually shape each other in different online contexts. Inquiry into participation, in particular nonparticipation, in online communities requires a different theoretical perspective that recognises that technology and everyday practices are intrinsically linked and cannot be studied separately.

2.7.2 Conceptual Framework

From the review of literature, the opportunity that emerged on one level challenges the assumption of participation with access and in doing so disrupts the accepted ways of theorising participation in online communities by challenging prevalent ontological assumptions of separateness in the social and technological aspects. This form of problematisation has been used to inform the development of a conceptual framework (Figure 4), within which the research problem is represented graphically as explained below. The conceptual framework focuses and bounds the scope of the study. Identified from literature, the central concepts that will guide the information to be collected and analysed include the following: *participation*, *online communities*, *online community participation*, and *digital divide*.

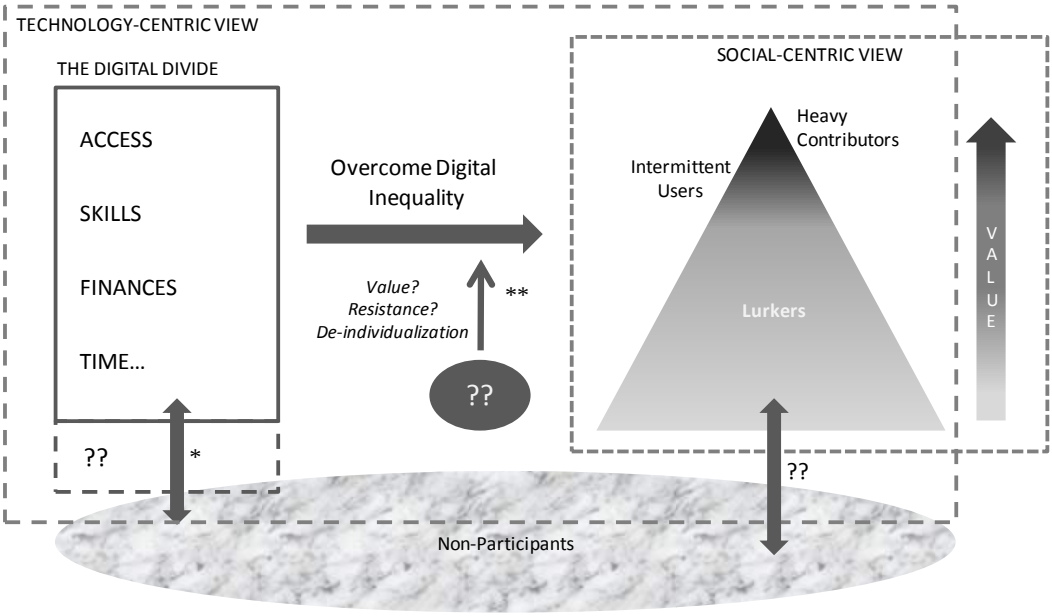

Figure 4. Conceptual Framework for Proposed Research

Source: Harris (2010)

Literature explains nonparticipation largely from the perspective of not having access to the technology needed to participate, not having the skills required to utilise this technology and by having neither the financial means with which to invest in the required technology nor the time

to expend upon participating. This is shown in the model as the relationship between nonparticipation and the digital divide, where digital divide is employed as an umbrella term encapsulating the technology-centric understanding in literature of why nonparticipation manifests. Informed by literature, the model depicts a theoretical assumption that digital equality, and the technological access it brings, will lead to participation in online communities. Literature reveals, however, that even where online participation occurs, it is skewed. A majority of online community members lurk, accessing information but not contributing to the community. This technology-centric view partly explains the relationship between nonparticipation and participation, shown in Figure 4 as the relationship between nonparticipation and the pyramid for participation. However, this view does not explain why some individuals opt to stay outside social networks when they have access.

Social capital literature tells us about the positive outcomes for those who participate in online communities. The use of an upwards arrow–marked "value" shows how literature claims that the greater the level of participation, the more value it has on both individual and collective levels for the creation of social capital. Although this offers some explanation of the motivations for participating in the first place or becoming a more active participant, it does not explain why some still opt out or the implications for social capital-building efforts.

The model illustrates the focus of proposed inquiry into unexplained barriers to participate in online communities where digital inequality does not prohibit participation. In the proposed research, the phenomenon of participation is the primary ontological unit. What is not evident from existing literature and is depicted in the conceptual framework as areas where questions can be asked is why some people opt out of participating online, or the effects this may have. The main areas where there are gaps in understanding have been identified with asterisks. Alternatively, where digital inequality does not create a barrier, there may be other reasons influencing participation. There may be some previously unidentified dimension of the digital divide explaining nonparticipation (marked with * on Figure 4). Or perhaps there are other reasons influencing nonparticipation, such as lack of perceived value, fears of de-individualisation, lack of interest or restrictions imposed by the technologies underlying online communities (marked with ** on Figure 4). Furthermore, the concept of a "lurker," as reported in literature, is not clearly defined or delineated from that of a "nonparticipant." Two research questions and a field research methodology (Chapter 4) have been designed for collecting and analysing data to explore the problem further.

2.7.3 Research Objective and Questions

The objective of the study is to better understand participation and nonparticipation in online communities. I am explicitly interested in observing manifestations of "participation" in order to identify reasons why field study participants participate in their communities, how they participate, why others do not participate, and the impacts of not participating at both an individual and a community level. I seek to understand the dynamics of participatory actions to uncover how and why participation occurs in different contexts at different times based on an individual's perceived fit between the community and their own beliefs and a sense of identity, and the role which technology underpinning online communities plays in shaping participation. The research problem identified can be viewed as inquiry into how the embeddedness of social media in day-to-day social life reconfigures the phenomenon of participation. A research approach is required that will allow attention to the actions of people and of technology, dissolving social and material boundaries and recognising that their interactions will change with different instances and accounts of participation in different contexts. Analysing emerging meanings should not favour human or technological explanations, but instead seek to understand how the social world and enabling technology mutually co-construct one another in answering how and why we participate online.

Informed by the identification of a theoretical gap in understanding of the influences on participation over and above accessibility and understanding that is not from a dualist ontological perspective, the following general research questions represent broad-based inquiry designed to interrogate particular aspects of online communities as an empirical domain. The research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How and why do individuals participate in communities, face-to-face, online, or both?
2. Why do some people not participate in online communities and/or activities, and what are the impacts for those individuals?

The research questions have been constructed in this way to actively encourage me to challenge the assumptions of participation with access that underpins social inclusion theory and policy and to rethink existing knowledge. Problematising this assumption creates an opportunity for critical insights into online community participation and may lead to interesting and significant theories. My aim is to uncover "new and inspiring points of departures for theory development" (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011 p. 33) that can inform a discussion of empirical findings from my study and help theory-building in Chapter 9.

Chapter 3

Research Perspective

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, sociomateriality is presented as an appropriate perspective from which to explain the phenomenon of participation in online communities and activities because of its integrated perspective of treating the human and nonhuman as inseparable. I articulate the unique position that a sociomaterial interpretation of participation in online communities offers for its view of people intersecting with technology to participate in digitally-enabled networks. The research problem derived from literature analysis in the preceding chapter centres upon the need for IS researchers to examine the concept of participation as a fundamental tool for social policy aimed at increasing inclusion in society. As the broad and in-depth literature analysis in Chapter 2 reveals, there is a lack of consensus in scholarly understanding of participation (and, in particular, nonparticipation). It also demonstrates that what *is* known is limited by an ontology of separation between the social and the technological. Given the degree to which social media are embedded in everyday life in today's digital society, it is difficult to understand participation by assuming a user existing separately from social media technology (having a separate existence of their own). The problem domain becomes complex as users and social media become intertwined, acting together in everyday practices of online community participation. Because existing research perspectives treat the user (human) and technology (material) as ontologically separate, I argue that IS research needs a fresh approach to understand the intertwining and mutual co-creation of the human/social and the technological.

In section 3.2, I discuss the rationale for embracing sociomateriality as a perspective from which to research the problem of participation and nonparticipation in online communities. This is achieved with discussion of the ability of sociomaterial research to bring the social and the technological aspects together in a way that considers the human and the nonhuman to be intertwined in the construction of everyday reality. This perspective moves beyond a socio-technical position by decentering the 'human' subject and recognising the agency of the 'nonhuman'. Section 3.3 presents the philosophical assumptions underlying sociomaterial research, positioning sociomateriality as a post-humanist research perspective that aims to decentre the "human" subject and recognise agency of the nonhuman. I introduce the fundamental

relational ontological underpinnings to a sociomaterial worldview and present the core concepts upon which this perspective is developed. Core concepts of entanglement, sociomaterial assemblages, intra-action, and performativity are defined and discussed as put forward by proponents of sociomateriality.

In section 3.4, I draw on existing empirical research to illustrate the application of sociomaterial concepts to understanding organisational phenomena including accountability, workplace collaboration, time management, anonymity, and IS success/failure. I explain, using empirical evidence from actual studies, how researchers have adopted sociomateriality as both a philosophical position and as a methodological approach to their research. I also briefly address some of the contentions raised over sociomateriality as an emerging paradigm for IS research, for instance, the existence of little methodological support to help in the application of sociomaterial concepts to empirical research. Also there is the criticism that few studies actually use sociomateriality, and of those that have adopted it as a philosophy, it is not reflected in their analysis or in their application of a methodological approach.

Section 3.5 introduces how I envisage achieving a sociomaterial understanding of the problem area. I articulate core sociomaterial concepts to be applied in exploring participation (and nonparticipation) in online communities. The potential contribution of sociomateriality in the discovery of practical implications of online community participation/nonparticipation is discussed. I advance some areas of the research domain that hold the potential for a sociomaterial understanding. In particular, I present areas in which the research will demonstrate with empirical evidence the embeddedness of technology in everyday social life. I also put forward that participation may be found to be a sociomaterial accomplishment emerging through the enmeshment of social actors and context with enabling social media technology. Section 3.6 summarises the fundamental aspects of sociomateriality as a research perspective, reiterating the potential for its application to the study of participation in online communities.

3.2 Rationale for a Sociomaterial Approach to IS Research

In recent IS literature, sociomateriality is something of a buzzword, for instance, in the opinion that “sociomateriality is on everyone’s lips these days” (Kautz and Jensen, 2012 p. 89). Within the IS community, there is an increasing body of scholarly contributions and calls for journal papers on this sociomaterial worldview (cf. Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014a; Kautz and Jensen, 2012). Sociomateriality gives a fresh perspective from which to conduct research; adopting a position of the entanglement of the social and the technological subjects when considering a research problem. Unlike the socio-technical systems approach, which treats the human and the

technological subjects as separate, as a post-humanist research perspective, the aims of sociomateriality are different. A sociomaterial approach aims to "decentre the 'human' subject" (Gherardi, 2009 p. 118) and recognise the agency of "nonhuman" (Latour, 2005). Proponents of a sociomaterial research perspective (cf. Barad, 2003; Barad, 2007; Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski, 2009; Orlikowski and Scott, 2008b; Scott and Orlikowski, 2009; Scott and Orlikowski, 2012; Suchman, 2009) claim that the human and nonhuman must be treated as intertwined in the construction of everyday reality. Sociomateriality fulfils theoretical aspirations in management and organisation journals that call for recognition of and more importantly evidence of the social (human) and material (nonhuman/technological) as inextricably linked (Orlikowski, 2000). Sociomateriality fits this specification by providing a set of philosophical assumptions within which to study technology and humans (material and social) as "entangled in practice" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2009 p. 4). IS assumptions of separateness do not exist within a sociomaterial worldview. Although "the key ideas of a sociomaterial perspective are still emerging" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2009 p. 5), as illustrated in empirical studies, the ideas emerging from a sociomaterial worldview are "interesting and provocative" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2009 p. 5).

This view of organisational and social life is "grounded in ontological and epistemological sensibilities that take seriously the sociomateriality" (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1445). Specifically for the IS community, sociomaterial advocates deem that "pursuing alterative perspectives on, and ontologies of, technology may be especially important and valuable for making sense of . . . virtual and distributed phenomena" (Orlikowski, 2009 p. 127). Sociomaterial practices are suited to being applied as a theoretical lens in making sense of data gathered from inquiry into the phenomenon of participation, and as a framework within which to interpret empirical findings in sociomaterial terms.

Sociomateriality is a philosophical position and my research direction because it fits; it reflects me, my thinking, and my view of reality, and I subscribe to the assumptions underpinning this worldview. I adopt a sociomaterial worldview as it resonates with my experiences and opens up new and promising ways for understanding the embedded nature of social media in the context of communities and the phenomenon of community participation.

Criticisms levelled at sociomateriality in the literature on technology in organisations is largely around the methodological issues to be resolved. The Actor Network Theory (ANT) is the only existing well-developed approach for conducting sociomaterial research. ANT is used as one approach to follow the actors—the actors being both human and nonhuman (Latour, 2005; Law, 1992). There is also considered to be a paucity of empirical sociomaterial studies in literature

(Leonardi, 2013). Despite the limitations arising from these challenges, sociomateriality as an emerging research perspective is suitable for this study because of its ability to bring together the social and the technological aspects better than its predecessors. The socio-technical movement—probably the main competitor in research perspective terms—has the potential to study the social and the material (technological) aspects of participation in the digital society; however, this perspective is still limited in its treatment of the social and technical as separable, distinct entities with boundaries defined à priori.

Drawing on the sociomaterial thinking of Barad and Orlikowski predominantly, there are distinctive practices within a relational ontology upon which sociomateriality is premised. In the next section, I describe how these practices distinguish it as a research philosophy from traditional separatist worldviews. I bring attention to the core ontological versus epistemological challenges to existing research approaches, as illuminated in the preceding literature review chapter, discussing the fundamental notion of "material" and how sociomateriality makes sense of the social and the material as inextricably intertwined.

3.3 Philosophical Foundations of Sociomateriality

In this section, I articulate the philosophical underpinnings of sociomateriality. I draw on the work of proponents of sociomateriality to describe the fundamental ontological perspective of relationality, that is, within a sociomaterial view of the world everything is always in relation. I then introduce the core concepts within a sociomaterial worldview, defining and discussing the concepts of entanglement, sociomaterial assemblages, intra-actions, practices, and performativity.

3.3.1 The Philosophy of Sociomateriality

Sociomateriality, as a philosophical position, is founded upon a "posthumanist notion of performativity" (Barad, 2003 p. 808). Research within this paradigm produces a "posthumanist account of discursive practices" (Barad, 2003 p. 821), where "no priority is given to either materiality or discursivity" (Barad, 2003 p. 825). Considered a non-essentialist worldview (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014a), sociomateriality constitutes a materialist reworking of the notion of performativity into a relationality of a doing, or as it is described by some, the "enactment of boundaries" (Barad, 2003 p. 803). The sociomaterial worldview,

> questions . . . essentialist assumptions that humans and nonhumans, the social and the technological, have a set of essential properties that make them what they area and establish a priori the boundary between them. Instead what humans and nonhumans are

> is seen as temporally constituted by discursive-material practices. (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014b p. 566)

In a non-essentialist worldview, technology, for example, as a nonhuman with agency, has the ability to be something else other than the essential properties it is designed with and given. The IS community positions sociomateriality as a "new lens" for research that "questions the givenness of the differential categories of 'human' and 'nonhuman'" (Kautz and Jensen, 2012 p. 808). As expressed in a call for papers on this topic, it is claimed sociomaterial research helps challenge "the supposed ontological separation among the social and the technological" (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2010 p. 1). This perspective of the world "makes evident the importance of taking account of 'human,' 'nonhuman,' and 'cyborgian' forms of agency" (Barad, 2003 p. 826) and "does not fix the boundary between 'human' and 'nonhuman'" (Barad, 2003 p. 821). According to prominent scholars of sociomateriality, for example, Orlikowski and Scott, sociomateriality is "a promising stream of research . . . [where] the focus is on agencies that have so thoroughly saturated each other that previously taken-for-granted boundaries are dissolved" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008b p. 455).

Understanding the philosophy of sociomateriality requires consideration of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings. The key ontological difference from established, competing, research perspectives is a debate over separation versus relationality. Criticised as dualist ontological perspectives, traditional established research approaches based upon a Cartesian worldview assume the separate existence of entities with defined a priori attributes. In a Cartesian worldview, the world is viewed as something external and we make representations of this. Barad (2003) captures this, describing a "Cartesian division between 'internal' and 'external' that breaks along the line of the knowing subject" (Barad, 2003 p. 806). Critiquing this view of the external world, Barad (2003) emphasises the representationalist distinctions, describing this as an epistemological problem,

> Cartesian epistemology and its representationalist triadic structure of words, knowers and things. (Barad, 2003 p. 806)

Drawing on the work of physicist Niels Bohr, Barad (2003) interprets his philosophy-physics as "proposing a protoperformative account of scientific practices" (Barad, 2003 p. 813) and draws attention to his critique of Cartesian representations, saying that he

> Calls into question the related Cartesian belief in the inherent distinction between subject and object, and knower and known. (Barad, 2003 p. 813)

The emphasis of sociomaterial research, it is argued, is on understanding and explaining open-ended practices that are performed to enact a phenomenon. The focus of enquiry shifts away from "things" or "thingification" (Barad, 2003 p. 812). Barad reflects on a consideration raised by Bohr

about the role of the researcher in understanding reality, interpreting his thoughts as a claim that "epistemology must take account of the fact that we are a part of that nature we seek to understand" (Barad 2003, p. 828). Barad further posits that as researchers,

> We are not outside observers of the world . . . we do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because "we" are of the world. We are part of the world. (Barad, 2003 p. 828)

In my approach to investigating the phenomenon of participation in communities online (and face-to-face), I opt to use Barad's philosophy. She proposes a relational ontology as the basis for her "post-humanist performative account of the production of material bodies" (Barad, 2003 p. 814). This account, she claims,

> Refuses the representationalist fixation on "words" and "things" and the problematic of their relationality, advocating instead a causal relationship between specific exclusionary practices embodied as specific material configurations of the world . . . and specific material phenomena. (Barad, 2003 p. 814)

My intention is to investigate participation by following research that is informed by Barad's approach, for example, drawing on exemplar empirical papers that adopt and develop a sociomaterial approach (cf. Orlikowski and Scott, 2012, 2013; Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014b). Founded upon a relational ontology that "transcends Cartesian dualism and representationalism" (Kautz and Jensen, 2012 p. 92), sociomateriality is a nondualist worldview. Within this relational ontology, neither humans nor technologies are privileged (cf. Barad, 2003; Cetina, 1997; Latour, 2005; Orlikowski, 2009; Pickering, 1995; Schatski, 2002). Relationality involves viewing the world as agential intra-actions of practices to enact a phenomenon of interest.

> Distinctions between humans and artefacts are not ontologically given, but are enacted in the performance of everyday practices in particular settings, at particular times and with varying effects. (Doolin and McLeod, 2012 p. 572)

An ontology of relationality assumes a "non-essentialist view of materiality" (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014a p. 7). This view of sociomateriality, which is "founded on such an ontological position,"

> implies that reality is not given but performed through relations in practice. This represents an important shift from understanding people and technologies, each characterized by specific essential properties and boundaries that interact and mutually impact each other in practice, toward understanding the performative nature of practices and the ways in which people and technologies, their properties and boundaries, are enacted and re-enacted in practice. (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014a p. 811)

From a sociomaterial perspective, the social and the technical aspects are "ontologically inseparable from the start" (Introna, 2007 p. 1). Furthermore, it is the "entanglement of social and material forces in the process of materialisation [that] challenges separatist 'disciplinary concerns'" (Barad, 2003 p. 810). Sociomateriality differs in its philosophy that the world is constantly created through relations, agents in dynamic relations all the time. A sociomaterial worldview does not a priori separate the social from the material. Materiality, it is claimed, "plays an active role" (Barad, 2003 p. 808) in the creation of reality, and to this, end researchers must allow "matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming, in its ongoing 'intra-activity'" (Barad, 2003 p. 803). Matter (in the sense of the material) is not passive. Matter, or the material, or the nonhuman if it is viewed in real terms, is not just an outcome of social practices; rather it is an active factor in materialisations of the world (Barad, 2003). It is in the specific intra-actions of apparatuses that the material is given agency, is made to matter (Barad, 2003).

Taking the debate over ontological and epistemological considerations further, Barad proposes what she calls an *onto-epistemological* view to "the study of practices of knowing in being" (Barad, 2003 p. 829). In this sense, sociomaterial research that is underpinned by an onto-epistemological philosophy does not "assume inherent differences between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse" (Barad, 2003 p. 829).

One prominent view of sociomateriality proposed by Barad (2003, 2007) is theoretically founded on *agential realism*. Philosophically, this means that research that is sociomaterial will position materiality as "an active factor in processes of materialization" (Barad, 2003 p. 827). As Barad (2003) writes,

> Agency is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity. Nor does it merely entail resignification or other specific kinds of moves within a social geometry of antihumanism. Agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has. Agency cannot be designated as an attribute of "subjects" or "objects" (as they do not pre-exist as such). Agency is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices through the dynamics of intra-activity . . . Particular possibilities for acting exist at every moment. (Barad, 2003 p. 827)

Further explaining the agential realist philosophy of sociomateriality, Barad (2003) also writes,

> On an agential realist account of technoscientific practices, the "knower" does not stand in a relation of absolute externality to the natural world being investigated—there is no such exterior observational point. It is therefore not absolute exteriority that is the condition of possibility for objectivity but rather agential separability—exteriority within phenomena. (Barad, 2003 p. 828)

As discussed above, the ontological underpinnings of existing research approaches are of Cartesian cuts, positioning a separate existence of both humans and nonhumans wherein each is represented as a separate entity (Barad, 2003). The existence of *agential cuts*, however, underpins a sociomaterial worldview developed from agential realist assumption, whereby nonhumans have productive practices. Research that is sociomaterial is about decentring "the human subject" and giving "agency to the material (nonhuman)" (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1437). The result is research that gives rich accounts of the materialisation of all bodies—"human" and "nonhuman" (Barad, 2003 p. 810). The nonhuman having agency can be understood if one thinks of the nonhuman (the material, e.g., technology) as having productive practices that need to be taken into account in creating a view of reality.

3.3.2 Knowledge Eclipse: Sociomaterial Reconfigurations in the Hospitality Sector

TripAdvisor in this study provides a basis from which to explore how online reviewing, rating, and ranking mechanisms are "overshadowing traditional configurations of knowledge in the hospitality sector by redistributing resources, shifting practices and habitats, and redefining what counts, who counts, and how" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2013 p. 1). This study reveals important insights into the issues associated with the role of social media in knowledge management practices. Conclusions of sociomaterial reconfigurations of hospitality sector practices contribute to an understanding of the supplanting of expert valuation schemes by others grounded in user-generated content. Furthermore, the research reveals that "different valuation schemes entail different kinds of work, producing different valuations of the real, and enacting different realities" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2013 p. 1). Such insight leads the authors to conclude that reconfigurations of valuation such as that demonstrated by TripAdvisor raise questions of both epistemology and ontology in understanding how the practice of travel is performed amid the uncertainty and multiplicity of travel practices offered by TripAdvisor (e.g., guest involvement in the review process). Furthermore, the study reveals that travellers need to develop different skills to allow them engage in online rating and ranking processes, allowing them to "reclaim their status as active, critical travellers instead of having their experiences pre-digested and framed by industry experts" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2013 p. 16).

Framing investigation of the participation of particular individuals in online communities and activities in a similar way to this study of TripAdvisor will allow me to explore the reconfiguration of participation practices when online participation is possible. I anticipate that such a study will create the opportunity for me to examine different instances and accounts of participation in

different online community contexts (e.g., in online communities of known and unknown contacts where members participate either anonymously through an alias or by revealing their true identity). I expect that different skills and interests required to engage in online communities and activities will be revealed. Also desired is an understanding of the shifts being experienced in accountability for communicative actions online and the intricate relationship between online community members, the social media facilitating their online participation, and their wider networks of friends, family, and social contacts in each enactment of online community participation.

In each of the studies presented above, it is possible to identify a phenomenon of interest and see from empirical evidence how it is constituted in sociomaterial practices. As Orlikowski highlights from her empirical work on sociomaterial work practices, the "performativity of [the] sociomaterial assemblage is . . . fleeting, fragile, and fragmented, entailing uncertainty and risk, and producing intended and unintended outcomes" (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1445). If we extend the view that "multiple emergent and shifting assemblages . . . constitute organisations" (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1440), then it may open up possibilities to study other phenomenon (such as participation in online communities) as multiple emergent shifting assemblages that constitute social life.

3.3.3 Sociomaterial Concepts

Theoretical concepts that can be applied in conducting sociomaterial research have been proposed by several scholars. In this section, I identify the core concepts underpinning a sociomaterial worldview based on agential realist philosophical assumptions, and I explain those sociomaterial concepts in terms that are meaningful for the research problem identified.

A sociomaterial reality is constituted by phenomena, and it is these phenomena that make up the unit of analysis—the "primary ontological units" (Barad, 2003 p. 818) of empirical enquiry (Barad, 2003; Kautz and Jensen, 2012). Sociomateriality focuses on understanding and explaining how meanings and materialities are enacted together in everyday practices (Barad, 2007; Introna, 2007; Orlikowski, 2009; Suchman, 2009). Understanding and explaining performativity (i.e., the process of enacting a phenomenon) necessitates a research focus on practices, or as noted by (Orlikowski, 2009 p.135), the "matters of doings/actions that perform particular phenomena." Focussing on practices requires treatment of the inseparability of human and nonhuman in enacting these practices. In this sense, the nonhuman (e.g., technology) is

> Bound up with the specific material-discursive practices that constitute certain phenomena . . . [with] no inherent properties, boundaries or meanings. (Orlikowski, 2009 p. 135)

Several sources of sociomaterial concepts exist, primarily in the works of prominent scholars (e.g., Barad, 2003, 2007; Orlikowski, 2007, 2010; Orlikowski and Scott, 2008; Suchman, 2007; and Leonardi, 2013). Orlikowski, building on Barad's agential realism philosophical position, posits that a sociomaterial view of the world is premised on the notions of *constitutive entanglement*, *sociomaterial assemblages*, *performativity*, *intra-action*, and *temporal emergence*. These can be considered second-order concepts, all founded on a philosophical position of relationality, concepts that can be applied methodologically in conducting sociomaterial research.

In this view, *constitutive entanglement* refers to the enmeshment, or the "intertwinedness" of humans and nonhumans, be that, for example, technologies, configuration, networks, associations, mangles, or assemblages (Barad, 2007; Orlikowski, 2009; Pickering, 1995). Describing more substantively the notion of constitutive entanglement, Orlikowski (2007) writes,

> Constitutive entanglement presumes that there are no independently existing entities with inherent characteristics . . . Humans are constituted through relations of materiality – bodies, clothes, food, devices, tools, which, in turn, are produced through human practices. The distinction of humans and artifacts, on this view, is analytical only; these entities relationally entail or enact each other in practice. (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1438)

The notion of entanglement then is posited to be the "inability to separate things without changing them" (Boell, 2013 p. 167). Understanding of reality comes from recognising and embracing "the recursive intertwining of humans and technology in practice" (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1437).

> The material and the social emergently produce one another, as people, entangled with a variety of technologies, carry out their daily practices. (Wagner et al., 2010 p. 277)

In this view of entanglement, there is no social that is not also material, and no material that is not also social (Scott and Orlikowski, 2009 p. 3). In recent work by Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. (2014a), they take the analogy of driving a car to illustrate the notion of entangled social and material agents.

> If we take the example of driving, our cars increasingly include tracking devices that monitor the person who is driving against information on the road they are driving (and so can detect speeding, (non)wearing of seatbelts, and other simultaneous activities going on like mobile phone use, for example); record the conditions of driving (and so can record what happened in an accident); are able to park themselves, and can automatically brake when coming too close to another object. (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014a p. 820)

Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. (2014a) claim that studying social/material entanglements "will become easier as we actually become, increasingly, materially entangled cyborgs ourselves" (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014a p. 820). Barad proposes that entanglement of the social and the material manifests through intra-actions. She describes the concept of intra-action, writing that,

> The notion of intra-action (in contrast to the usual "interaction," which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata) represents a profound conceptual shift . . . it is through specific intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the "components" of phenomena become determinate and . . . particular embodied concepts become meaningful. (Barad, 2003 p. 815)

It is through intra-action that material-discursive practices reconfigure relations and thus delineate entities and enact their particular properties. When such intra-activity produces local determinations and makes specific identities of human or social actors, of objects and technologies, they become enacted as such and can then be perceived as having given boundaries and properties. According to Barad, it is through intra-actions that phenomena of interest become material, "come to matter" (Barad, 2003 p. 817). In this sense, according to Suchman, for instance, "Subjects and objects emerge through their encounters with one another" (Suchman, 2007 p. 267). Sociomaterial agency emerges from the performance and intra-actions of relations of humans (social) and nonhumans (technical) (Doolin and McLeod, 2012).

An information system (IS) has been referred to in literature as "a composite and shifting assemblage of the material (IT) and social" (Wagner et al., 2010 p. 279). Such an assemblage "changes over time as those involved draw upon the [IS] to provide meaning, to exercise power, and to legitimate actions" (Wagner et al., 2010 p. 279). The different agents in intra-action are a sociomaterial assemblage (Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski and Scott, 2008b). Assemblages exist in relation to other assemblages; that is, within a field-of-practice, common interest unites agents, while across fields, differences in practices will create boundaries and potential conflict (Wagner et al., 2010). In this view, entangled agents engage in intra-actions within sociomaterial assemblages.

Performativity means conducting empirical enquiry via "knowledge-making practices that are material enactments contributing to and part of the phenomena" (Barad, 2007 p. 247). Accordingly, "a discourse may be said to be performative if it contributes to the constitution of the reality that it describes" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008 p. 461). Relationships between humans and technology are never fixed; agents are always in relation, intra-acting with other agents (Boell, 2013; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Kahrau and Mädche, 2013). The sociomaterial assemblage "emerges from practice and defines how to practice" (Wagner et al., 2010 p. 276). Furthermore, it is claimed that

> It is in the act of practice that the relation (between the material and social) is defined; and each act produces (or performs) a different relationship. (Wagner et al., 2010 p. 279)

Performativity, then, constitutes the "iterative intra-activity within a phenomenon" (Kautz and Jensen, 2012 p. 92).

Within a sociomaterial perspective, there is also the idea that practices are temporally emergent (Pickering, 1995); in other words, researchers must be cognisant that the entanglement of humans and nonhumans is "constantly shifting and evolving" (Doolin and McLeod, 2012 p. 572). Agents are always in relation and constantly mutually co-constructing each other. As Orlikowski explains it from her work on Google information searches,

> Temporally emergent results are not dependent on either materiality or sociality, nor on some interaction between them (to the extent that these are seen as distinct domains). Rather the performance [of a practice] is sociomaterial. (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1440)

A sociomaterial view of the world, interpreted through a theoretical lens that applies the above-discussed concepts, offers possibilities for novel and interesting understanding of everyday phenomena. Application of sociomaterial concepts has the potential to uncover a rich tapestry of relational understanding that does not privilege either the social or the material.

3.4 Application of Sociomateriality in Existing Studies

In this section, I provide examples of empirical research in which sociomaterial concepts have been applied. My aim is to explain sociomaterial concepts more substantively, presenting what particular studies found that is sociomaterial and describing how a sociomaterial worldview helped to understand the phenomena in a different way. Good examples of such research are the sociomaterial understanding of TripAdvisor presented by Orlikowski and Scott (2012, 2013, 2014, Forthcoming), Scott and Orlikowski (2011, 2012, 2013), and the performative account of IS assessment by Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. (2014a). These studies illustrate that "focusing on sociomaterial aspects of everyday practices will open up important avenues for examining and understanding ongoing production of [social] life" (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1445).

I draw on the work of Orlikowski (2009) to illustrate the phenomenon of workplace collaboration to be a sociomaterial practice as found in the Project Wonderland study. Also, I draw on the work of Kahrau and Madche (2013) to illustrate their finding of knowledge workers' time management as a sociomaterial practice. I present the work of Orlikowski (2007) and Orlikowski and Scott (2008a) in the empirical demonstration that Google web searches are a sociomaterial practice. Also, from the work of Orlikowski and Scott (2008), I highlight the key results from their performative account of financial decision-making. Hotel travel practices and accountability online (cf. Scott and Orlikowski, 2009, 2012) constitute a good example of sociomaterial practices that are enacted or performed. I illustrate from the study of mobile communications at Plymouth

organisation (cf. Orlikowski, 2007) how the performativity of BlackBerry devices is found to be engaged in members' everyday practices and is sociomaterial. Again drawing on Scott and Orlikowski's study of TripAdvisor, I present empirical evidence from their sociomaterial account of anonymity. I convey results from the work of Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. (2014b) to show how they frame IS assessment in the Olympia online project as a sociomaterial phenomenon. Further drawing upon their TripAdvisor study (cf. Orlikowski and Scott, 2014), I present an overview of their conclusion that evaluations online is a sociomaterial practice. Also from this study, I present evidence that shows how a sociomaterial perspective helps to analyse specific service materialisations enacted in web-based crowd-sourcing and algorithmic rating and ranking mechanisms (Orlikowski and Scott, Forthcoming). Again, focusing on the TripAdvisor study, I demonstrate how the authors found commensurability within TripAdvisor to be performed through its website's distributed and dynamic materiality (Scott and Orlikowski, 2013). Finally, also drawing on TripAdvisor, I present empirical demonstration of sociomaterial reconfiguration of knowledge in the travel sector, including reviewing, rating, and ranking mechanisms (Orlikowski and Scott, 2013).

Reflecting on the sociomaterial understanding of the phenomena in these studies allows me to present an evidence-based argument for studying participation in online communities and activities. By considering what sociomateriality has achieved for scholarly understanding in existing empirical studies, it adds further justification for approaching enquiry into participation from an understudied sociomaterial perspective.

3.4.1 Analysis of Empirical Examples of Sociomaterial Worldview

In Table 4, I present an overview of twelve individual studies all claiming to contribute empirical evidence of sociomaterial practices in organisational life. For each study, the phenomenon of interest is highlighted, and the agents comprising a sociomaterial assemblage for that study are identified.

Table 4. Analysis of Empirical Examples of Sociomaterial Worldview

	Empirical example (project or study)	Reference:	Phenomenon of interest:	Sociomaterial assemblage/configuration in practice
1	**Project Wonderland**	Orlikowski (2009)	Workplace collaboration	Project Wonderland rooms, offices, screens, documents, and project team
2	**Knowledge workers' time management**	Kahrau and Madche (2013)	Time management	Time management practices, knowledge workers, time management strategies used (e.g., filing, working documents), time management technological artefacts, time management software tools, everyday work practices, external work environment, personal organising and planning (e.g., Microsoft Outlook reminders, tasks, calendar), and operating system
3	**Google web searches**	Orlikowski and Scott (2008)	Web information searches	Computer code, computers, millions of people who use computers to update web pages every day, search criteria, web browsers, and computer designers
4	**Lending advisor financial decision-making**	Orlikowski and Scott (2008)	Financial decision making	Work practices "composed of an array of agencies, including configurations of space, technical heuristics, algorithms, qualitative expert judgement, physical mechanisms, categories and so on" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008 p. 40)
5	**TripAdvisor ratings**	Scott and Orlikowski (2012)	Hotel travel practices: accountability online	Accountability evaluative measure, TripAdvisor site performance indicators, hotels, online verification mechanisms, online verification practices, traveller decision making and behaviour, traveller reviews, government tourist agency, government outreach documents, global positioning systems, rating system, accounts of travel, Web 2.0 technologies, travel websites, participants/members, online content, networks/relationships, and common interests
6	**Mobile communications at Plymouth organisation**	Orlikowski (2007)	Mobile communication	BlackBerry devices, professionals, software, communication practices, people's choices, e-mail messages, wireless networks, e-mail server, BlackBerry service design, and BlackBerry configuration

Table 4. Analysis of Empirical Examples of Sociomaterial Worldview

	Empirical example (project or study)	Reference:	Phenomenon of interest:	Sociomaterial assemblage/configuration in practice
7	**TripAdvisor and the Automobile Association (AA)**	Scott and Orlikowski (2014)	Hotel travel practices: anonymity	AA sociomaterial assemblage: hotel, inspector, inspection activities, inspector training, inspector experience, knowledge of standards, engagement with quality criteria, spreadsheets, observations, recordings, reports, discussions with hotel staff, editors, and other inspectors TripAdvisor sociomaterial assemblage: hotel reviews, TripAdvisor members, TripAdvisor website, computer, the Internet, browser software, sign-in procedure, review writing activities, on-screen feedback, representation of hotels, other reviews, databases, rating and ranking mechanisms, verification protocols, and e-mail communication
8	**Olympia online project IS assessment**	Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. (2014)	IS assessment	Tools, users, contracts, business processes, plans, developer networks, managers, technologies, project documents, and methodologies
9	**TripAdvisor**	Orlikowski and Scott (2014)	Hotel travel practices: evaluations online	Valuation activities, devices, instruments, measures, text, media, valuation apparatus (software code, weighted priorities, filtering processes), hotel reviews, hotel ratings, anonymous posters, Internet, graphic browser interfaces, content management practices, consumer opinion, content aggregation, flexible parameters, and reprogrammable criteria
10	**The algorithm and the crowd—the materiality of service innovation**	(Orlikowski and Scott, Forthcoming)	Hotel travel practices: service innovation	TripAdvisor online forum, travel valuation practices, reviewing, rating and ranking mechanisms, expert valuation schemes, user-generated review content, hoteliers, travellers (guests), social media, and hospitality sector

Table 4. Analysis of Empirical Examples of Sociomaterial Worldview

	Empirical example (project or study)	Reference:	Phenomenon of interest:	Sociomaterial assemblage/configuration in practice
11	**The materiality of commensurability in social media**	(Scott and Orlikowski, 2013)	Hotel travel practices: commensurability	Distributed reviews, user-generated ratings posts, filtering and weighting algorithms, ratings, rankings, guests, hoteliers, TripAdvisor website, social media technology, commensurability mechanisms, and expectations
12	**Producing sociomaterial reconfigurations in the hospitality sector**	(Orlikowski and Scott, 2013)	Hotel travel practices: reviewing, rating, and ranking mechanisms	TripAdvisor website, online reviewing, rating and ranking mechanisms, hospitality sector knowledge, travel resources, social media technology, travel practices, valuation processes, and social media–based travel writing (in the form of anonymous reviews of hotels and locales, travellers, and hoteliers)

3.4.2 Workplace Collaboration in Project Wonderland

Orlikowski's Project Wonderland study aimed to make sense of the phenomenon of workplace collaboration in an organisational context (cf. Orlikowski, 2009). Outcomes from the study present a sociomaterial perspective that synthetic worlds (such as MPK20 in Project Wonderland) are "integrally and materially part of constituting the phenomenon of workplace collaboration" (Orlikowski, 2009 p. 14). As shown in Table 4, in Project Wonderland, as a situated practice, the sociomaterial assemblage relates numerous agents in the enactment of workplace collaboration practices. This sociomaterial configuration constitutes an online 3-D immersive environment within Sun Microsystems, one that shifts over time (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1445). MPK20 is found to be performed at different times and in different contexts, thus configuring communication and information sharing.

Building from this work, the utilisation of sociomateriality as a theoretical lens has the potential for furthering scholarly understanding of online community participation as a sociomaterial practice. This argument is exemplified in the outcomes from Orlikowski's project wonderland study, from which I suggest that the study of different instances of participation in online communities and activities has the potential to reconfigure communication and information sharing and how these make some practices more salient than others.

3.4.3 Knowledge Workers' Time Management Practices

Similarly to the work on workplace collaboration as part of the Project Wonderland study (cf. Orlikowski, 2009), Kahrau and Mädche (2013) studied the time management practices of knowledge workers to understand the sociomaterial practices involved and how these interrelated practices show the importance of both human and material agency in constituting time management practices. Their study provides a sociomaterial and relational understanding of time management, highlighting the performative aspects of knowledge workers' time management practices and the constitution of time management practices. The resulting understanding of processes and relationships linking time management practices to strategies and artefacts illuminates specific sociomaterial practices in meeting three general time management objectives, that is, (1) remembering tasks, (2) deciding what to do next, and (3) maintaining a well-organised workplace.

In studying online participation, this approach would allow the development of a sociomaterial and relational understanding of online community participation, highlighting the performative

aspects of online community members' participation practices and the constitution of online community participation practices.

3.4.4 Google Information Searches

Illustrative of the need for a fresh perspective to IS research, the study of technology in organisational life is Orlikowski's reframing of Google information searches away from a human-centric understanding to one of sociomaterial assemblages (Orlikowski, 2007). This study provides a sociomaterial understanding of web information searches, situated in practices where agents are sociomaterially configured to perform the web searches. Within these sociomaterial assemblages, the phenomenon of searching for web information is found to be "constituted by the performativity of computers, networks, software, algorithms, directories, databases and infrastructure, as these are enacted by the human agencies" (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1445).

Empirical evidence points to the practice of doing a Web search as being "an enacted accomplishment which can and does change" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008a p. 20). Furthermore, a "Web search is . . . always performed" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008a p. 30); hence, the "performance and results of Google-based web searches is sociomaterial" (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1440). In an organisational context, Orlikowski demonstrates that "the performance of Google's search engine and its ranking of millions of web pages are dynamic, relational and contingent" (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1440).

For my research on online community participation, if this same sentiment is extended to a social context, it will open the possibility for valuable insights into social media technology in social life, an understanding that does not privilege the users or relegate the social media technology to a passive role (cf. Orlikowski, 2007).

3.4.5 Lending Advisor Financial Decision Making

Orlikowski and Scott (2008a) also study the phenomenon of financial decision making. They do so in an organisational context in their study of a lending advisor. The outcome of this work is demonstration of the sociomateriality of lending practices, in particular, financial decision making. Loan assessment, as a work practice, is shown to be a blending of the technical and the social/subjective (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008a). Results from this study conclude that "the performance of UK banks' lending decisions is temporally emergent from ongoing practice" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008a p. 37).

For the study of online community participation, adopting a similar performative perspective creates the opportunity to understand online community participation practices as a fusion of the

participants and the enabling social media–based devices, making online participation possible in different contexts, at different times. The opportunity is there to explain online community participation as temporally emergent, from ongoing participatory practices.

3.4.6 Online Hotel Verification Practices (TripAdvisor)

A good illustration of understanding phenomena as sociomaterial practices that are performed and always in relation is the empirical evidence from a study of the online travel website TripAdvisor by Scott and Orlikowski (2007, 2009, 2012). This study of the sociomateriality of online verification practices, in a corporate context, exemplifies the performance of the phenomenon of online ranking or accountability (Scott and Orlikowski, 2012). In this study, the authors found the TripAdvisor website to be integrated into the practices of travellers planning travel arrangements online (Scott and Orlikowski, 2009, 2012) and included specifically into the practices of hotel travel (Scott and Orlikowski, 2012). TripAdvisor reviews, according to results from Orlikowski and Scott's study, "reflect individual users' personalised and situated experiences of a hotel" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2009 p. 17).

In the work of Scott and Orlikowski (2009), sociomateriality helps us to understand how social media is entangled in everyday practices of hoteliers and travellers. This study provides insights into how accountability is performed (enacted) online using social media websites (in this situation the website is TripAdvisor), demonstrating that online accountability is enacted on TripAdvisor in the "multiple entanglements in everyday, on-going practice that collectively perform the TripAdvisor online rankings as experienced by particular hotels" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2012 p. 38). Their study illuminates reconfiguring relations of accountability, wherein "accountability is always and unavoidably an inseparable, sociomaterial entanglement" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2012 p. 36).

If the claim is true that "all materiality shapes and defines the contours and possibilities of organisational life" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2009 p. 3), then extending this may afford an understanding of how it shapes and defines phenomena in social life. Relating the study of participation in online communities and activities to Scott and Orlikowski's TripAdvisor study further provides a basis on which to frame "participation" as a sociomaterial phenomenon with performative consequences (cf. Scott and Orlikowski, 2012). Drawing on the study of TripAdvisor, exploring the practice of participating in online communities and activities requires recognising and understanding the entanglement of online and offline participation in communities, focusing on explaining how meanings and materialities are enacted together in everyday practices (Barad, 2003; Scott and Orlikowski, 2012; Suchman, 2007).

3.4.7 Mobile Communications at Plymouth Organisation

In this study by Orlikowski (2007), BlackBerry usage practices are shown to be sociomaterial communication practices enacted. Results from the study demonstrate that the "performativity of BlackBerry's as engaged in members' everyday practices" (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1444) is sociomaterial. Furthermore, the performativity of BlackBerry is found to be "shaped by the particular contingent way in which the BlackBerry service is designed, configured and engaged in practice" (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1444). Orlikowski reports that the sociomaterial assemblage she observes (from the perspective of its individual but related agents) is intrinsically bound in sociomaterial enactments and shifts over time (Orlikowski, 2007).

Communication in Plymouth organisation is found to be constitutively entangled with BlackBerrys, resulting in a "blurring of employees' work and personal lives" (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1444). Communication practices are being reconfigured in the enactment of communication practices amid expectations of constant availability and access.

In the context of studying online community participation, participatory practices may be examined for constitutive entanglement with social media–based devices, exploring the effect on boundaries between online participant's social and personal lives and relationships. Participatory practices may be found, similarly to the BlackBerry findings, to be reconfigured in the enactment of participatory practices amid expectations of constant availability and access.

3.4.8 Anonymity

In this study of performing anonymity through social media, Scott and Orlikowski (2014) were studying "how anonymous reviewing and rating configure the practices and possibilities of knowledge production and engagement . . . regarding technology as constitutive of the enactment of anonymity" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2014 p. 3). Anonymity is found to be a dynamic material enactment, constituted in practice through ongoing materialisations. Working within a relational and performative ontology, they examined the notion of sociomaterial entanglement in anonymous hotel review practices, highlighting "the different line of inquiry that sociomateriality inspires and how it reframes issues such as anonymity of reviews that would otherwise presume separate entities or prioritize social meanings" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2014 p. 3).

Their study revealed anonymity to be "critical to the hotel evaluation apparatuses of [both] the AA and TripAdvisor" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2014 p. 13). Furthermore, they found that the performance of anonymity in practice "depends crucially on specific material enactments" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2014 p. 14), and that

> Anonymity is an entanglement of meanings and materialities produced through the ongoing material-discursive practices constituting the AA and TripAdvisor hotel evaluation schemes. (Scott and Orlikowski, 2014 p. 14)

In line with Scott and Orlikowski's views, what they call contemporary innovations (such as online participation in the context of my research) "are not without material consequences" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2012 p. 39). The phenomenon of online community participation is not the mirror image of nonparticipation, that is, participation does not have what is discussed by Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. (2014a) a representationalist nature. Although this is the prominent perspective on participation, the research domain needs a performative perspective as a mode of theorising, in order to bring "critical issues to the foreground" raise "ethical questions" and to stimulate "discussions about how materiality makes a difference" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2014 p. 15). By assuming entanglement as a theoretical premise and focusing on materiality in my analysis of participation in online communities, this study has an opportunity to challenge, similarly to how Scott and Orlikowski challenged literature on anonymity, the tendency to view participation as a largely social phenomenon. Research has the potential to demonstrate participation in online communities as "not a fixed and binary state but actively constituted in ongoing material-discursive practices" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2014 p. 15).

3.4.9 IS Assessment in the Olympia Online Project

Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. (2014a) produce a performative account of the phenomenon of IS assessment. In this case study, IS success and failure are found to be "performed and thus determined by sociomaterial practices" (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014a p. 561) in IS–project actor networks. Success or failure is, according to this study's claims, "the enactment of an information system in sociomaterial practices emerging through specific intra-actions among actors" (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014a p. 567).

Similarly to the manner in which IS success and failure is framed in this performative work by Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. (2014a), sociomaterial practices in the phenomenon of online community participation can be defined as configurations of online communities, members, social media technology, technological devices, and other actors, each with different agencies. In this view, the practice of participating in an online community in sociomaterial terms is the enactment of participation in actor networks that shift over time (cf. Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014a).

3.4.10 Hotel Evaluations Online (TripAdvisor and AA)

In this study by Orlikowski and Scott (2014), the focus of their paper is on understanding how and why hotel valuation practices and outcomes change when valuations move online and become entangled with algorithmic apparatuses. Algorithmic valuation processes, such as those performed within TripAdvisor hotel ratings, are material-discursive practices of "open-ended consumer opinion, content aggregations, flexible parameters, and reprogrammable criteria while excluding professional classifications and formal measures" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2014 p. 887). From this material-discursive perspective, Orlikowski and Scott view travel as "performed differently now that algorithmic valuation apparatuses such as TripAdvisor exist" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2014 p. 887). Furthermore, as Orlikowski and Scott report,

> The lens of material-discursive apparatus produced a powerful explanation for what happens when evaluation goes online while also adding new insights to our understanding of traditional valuation processes. We believe that these theoretical moves contribute important research directions for future work. (Orlikowski and Scott, 2014 p. 887)

By adopting a sociomaterial perspective on their research of TripAdvisor and AA hotel ratings, Orlikowski and Scott (2014) have demonstrated an understanding of the phenomenon of online travel hotel evaluation that is a result of considering the performance of online valuations within hotel rating practices situated within a sociomaterial assemblage. Within this worldview, Orlikowski and Scott reveal the "significant reconfiguring of valuation practices being performed by online apparatuses" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2014 p. 889). The sociomaterial conclusions demonstrated by their study are outlined as follows:

- Valuation is constituted in practice, that is, everyday recurrent actions bring particular forms of valuation and their outcomes into being.
- Valuations are produced through material-discursive practices, that is, valuation are materially produced in bodies, things, instruments, texts, times, and places.
- Valuation practices are organised in apparatuses, and these are performative, that is, different valuation practices enact significantly different phenomena in practice. Specific agential cuts exist that enact formulaic and algorithmic apparatuses of valuation, producing different hotels, hoteliers, travellers, and different phenomena of travel.
- The move to online reviews is a reconfiguring of the phenomenon of valuation itself, with significant organisational outcomes. As a consequence, managers and owners have become increasingly attuned to TripAdvisor ratings and reviews (Orlikowski and Scott, 2014 p. 889).

From the perspective of studying participation in online communities, following the work of Orlikowski and Scott in this study on TripAdvisor and AA hotel valuation practices, their findings illuminate an opportunity to frame phenomena (such as online participation in the case of my research) as practices constituted in everyday recurrent actions. Furthermore, drawing upon their work, adopting a lens of material-discursive apparatuses creates the opportunity to improve understanding of what happens when individuals participate in online communities in different ways, at different times, for different purposes.

3.4.11 The Algorithm and the Crowd: Considering the Materiality of Service Innovation

In this study, Orlikowski and Scott adopt a sociomaterial approach to understanding the "dynamics of contemporary service innovations" (Orlikowski and Scott, Forthcoming p. 14). In doing so, service innovations are seen as material-discursive practices performed in emerging crowd-sourced algorithmic transformations. The study emphasises the relationality and materiality entailed in contemporary online service innovation, focusing on understanding how "boundaries are drawn, how phenomena are configured, and what realities are performed" (Orlikowski and Scott, Forthcoming p. 14). The study reveals an in-depth insight into "the interdependencies involving the dynamic relationships of algorithms and crowds . . . [and further insight into] the dynamic tensions and intra-action that make a difference to the kinds of services and organisational realities that are enacted" (Orlikowski and Scott, Forthcoming p. 14). The study demonstrates the central role of the algorithm and the crowd to TripAdvisor's "operational success and power influence within the travel sector" (Orlikowski and Scott, Forthcoming p. 14).

Similarly to this adoption of a sociomaterial approach to understanding service innovations in the travel sector, I will adopt a sociomaterial perspective to researching the phenomenon of participation in online communities. Such a relational view of online participation will require seeing participation as a material-discursive practice performed in emerging communities in an online context. I anticipate that such a perspective will, similarly to the claims made about algorithms and the crowd, uncover interesting and novel insights into the intra-actions among parents, social media, and online communities that make a difference to the ways in which participation in the online activities of these communities is enacted.

3.4.12 Great Expectations: The Materiality of Commensurability in Social Media

Scott and Orlikowski arrive at an understanding of the production of comparisons according to a common metric (i.e., commensuration) on online social media websites in their study of commensurability on travel website TripAdvisor. They reveal the implications of online evaluation mechanisms for the accomplishment of commensurability by examining "the processes of materialization that are entailed in the production of commensurability" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2013 p. 3). Inquiry into the role of rating and ranking mechanisms on TripAdvisor's travel website reveals the process of commensurability to be a material practice. Meaning that through enactments of the commensurability process, ratings and rankings are materialised with differences in who, what, and when things are included in or excluded from the process depending on the context-specific management of guest and hotelier expectations and encounters. The website's distributed and dynamic materiality is found to influence the performance of commensurability on TripAdvisor. In this study, analysing TripAdvisor through a sociomaterial lens provides "a different perspective from conventional approaches that view technology as a stable substance, discrete entity, or passive mediator" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2013 p. 16).

Adopting a sociomaterial lens to my study of participation in online communities creates the possibility of understanding participation as a situated practice, performed in different ways at different types according to the specific online context. Furthermore, an understanding of the entanglement of online communities in the everyday practices of individuals, their friends, families, and wider communities will provide insight into the materialisation of social media, recognising that the meaning of participation is inseparable from its materiality.

3.5 A Sociomaterial Perspective of Online Community Participation

Broad and in-depth literature analysis reveals the limitations, debate, and lack of consensus of both the phenomenon of online community participation and also the perspective from which existing literature on participation has been researched. Current understanding is found largely to be grounded in a human-centric, social explanation of participation/nonparticipation or to emerge from an equally polarised view of participation in online communities as a technology-centric phenomenon. The mobile devices through which online community participation is enacted are increasingly extensions of self, reflecting personal image and identity. However, empirical investigation into participation in online communities from the perspective that enabling

technology is entangled in our everyday social lives is limited. Little empirical research on participation in online communities examines how the social and technological mutually co-construct each other in different online contexts. After looking at the treatment of participation in a wide range of IS research literature, several different views emerged emphasising different aspects of participation, making important contributions to understanding participation. Definitions of participation evoke key conceptual aspects such as participation practices, social actors, technology, and social outcomes. In a sociomaterial sense, these agents are not fully understood, nor have the relationships between them been substantively revealed.

Inquiry into participation, in particular, nonparticipation, in online communities requires a different theoretical perspective which recognises that technology and everyday practices are intrinsically linked. This perspective must recognise that technology and human agency cannot ontologically be studied separately because they are always in relation; therefore, the social (human) and the material (technological) aspects must be treated as inextricably linked, a notion proposed by Barad (2003). Proponents of a sociomaterial research perspective (cf. Barad, 2003; Introna, 2007; Orlikowski, 2009; Scott and Orlikowski, 2009) claim that in order to view the social and material aspects as intertwined in the construction of everyday reality, IS assumptions of separateness need to change. A sociomaterial view has the potential to show that aspects of online community participation are entangled in everyday social practices and cannot be understood in isolation. Research should examine the mutual co-construction of participation to understand how meanings and materialities are enacted together in everyday social and technological practices and contexts (Barad, 2007; Introna, 2007; Suchman, 2009).

Drawing on Orlikowski's work on exploring technology at work through a sociomaterial lens (Orlikowski, 2007), adopting a sociomaterial perspective to the research can similarly challenge assumptions of materiality, improving our understanding of online participation in a way that recognises the constitutive entanglement of the social and the material in everyday social life. Also drawing from this work, applying sociomateriality for its performative perspective provides the conceptual apparatus for an alternative framing of online community participation. Sociomateriality creates the opportunity for new conceptual resources to aid in the understanding of participation in online communities and activities.

There are several aspects of a sociomaterial perspective that make it a suitable way of framing participation research. First, because established, competing perspectives on human-technology research are problematic in privileging either the technological or the human/social factors, sociomateriality gives agency to the nonhuman (social) and treats the human and the social as always in relation, mutually co-constructing each other. Second, because sociomateriality allows

for the contextualisation of participation in a sociomaterial setting, it creates the possibility for perceiving both the technological and social contexts in a more integrated way (Orlikowski, 2009). Third, from a sociomaterial perspective, participation is framed as enacted in material-discursive practices where, as described by Iedema (2007), social media technologies have no inherent boundaries or meaning but are bound up with specific material-discursive practices—in the context of my work, material-discursive practices that constitute online community participation.

Answering the research questions (developed in Chapter 2) will add empirical evidence to a sociomaterial understanding of participation, and expand existing theories by examining operational links between online community participation, digital accessibility, social capital, and social inclusion. Attaining this goal means achieving an understanding of participation that can overcome the separatist limitations of established research perspectives. This will advance existing knowledge and generate "new insights into important IS-related phenomena such as mobile IT usage . . . the impacts of social media" (Kautz and Jensen, 2012 p. 89). In studying social media phenomena from a sociomaterial perspective, consideration will be given to the material—to the "ethical, design and regulatory [aspects] . . . enacted through material reconfigurations" (Scott and Orlikowski, 2012 p. 37).

My aim is to advance understanding of the tensions in emerging communicative practices by adding to empirical evidence of, for instance, compulsion, and the "always on" obligation side of participation in online communities and activities (as illustrated in the work of Orlikowski (2007), on BlackBerry devices in Plymouth organisation). The application of sociomaterial concepts to the problem domain will create the opportunity to interpret findings about participation in online communities and activities through the specific material-discursive practices (Orlikowski, 2009) that help to constitute the phenomenon of participation. Scott and Orlikowski claim that,

> Analyzing social media phenomena through the lens of sociomateriality gives us a different perspective from conventional approaches that view technology as a passive mediator or discrete entity. (Scott and Orlikowski, 2009 p. 19)

By simultaneously examining the technological and the social dimensions of online community participation and how they intra-act with each other in instances of participation in online activities, I can apply concepts of sociomateriality to overcome some of the duality issues in existing understanding in this domain. In Table 5 concepts are defined in the context of the research problem, articulating sociomaterial relations within the research domain in relational language.

Table 5. Research problem domain expressed in sociomaterial terminology	
Practice	**Definition**
Relationality	Online communities exist in relation to other assemblages. That is, within an online community, common interest unites agents, whereas across communities, differences in practices (such as participant needs) will create boundaries and potential conflict.
Performativity	Relationships between community participants and social media technology are never fixed. Instead, the sociomaterial assemblage (online community) emerges from practice and defines how to practice. It is in the act of participating that the relation (between the participant and the social media technology) is defined, and each participatory act produces (or performs) a different relationship.
Entanglement	The material and the social emergently produce one another, as people, entangled with a variety of social media–based technologies, participate in online communities in the carrying out of their daily social practices.
Sociomaterial assemblage	An online community is a composite and shifting assemblage of the material and social, which change over time as those involved participate in online community activities to provide meaning, to exercise power, and to legitimate actions.
Co-constitution	The material (social media technology) and the social (community participants) are mutually constituted and, therefore, inseparable. The structures and processes of an online community are enacted and emergent as participants draw upon the communication features in their situated practices.

A sociomaterial approach has the potential to result in a performative account of online participation that provides novel and surprising insights into why people participate online, how they participate, why others do not participate, and the impacts of not doing so. This performative account would consider the online community and its participants not as given and fixed but performed by agencies. The aim is to show, with empirical evidence, how participation in online communities is entangled in everyday sociomaterial practices and cannot be understood in isolation.

A sociomaterial approach to investigating online community participation allows for the questioning of the taken-for-granted, essentialist nature of entities. In this sense, sociomaterial understanding challenges the idea that social actors and social media technology have set defined properties and boundaries. Instead, it recognises the emergent nature of online community participation and sees participants and the technology as "temporally constituted by discursive-material practices" (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014a p. 566).

Researching the phenomenon of online participation with a sociomaterial agenda builds on the claim that the "perspective of entanglement may be particularly useful for . . . research going

forward" (Orlikowski, 2009 p. 137). In line with Orlikowski's views, a sociomaterial research approach is well equipped to address online participation as a contemporary phenomenon, providing a performative perspective that will aid understanding of the emergence of and reconfiguration of online participation as "intra-actively produced and stabilized" (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2014a p. 7).

3.6 Summary

In this chapter, sociomateriality is positioned as a suitable perspective from which to study the phenomenon of participation because of its treatment of human and nonhuman agents as inextricably linked and mutually co-constructed. I explain the philosophical underpinnings of sociomateriality and introduce the core concepts that can be applied to this unsolved anomaly of nonparticipation in online communities and/or activities. In this chapter, I have demonstrated that participation can be understood as a sociomaterial achievement emerging through the ongoing intra-action of social and material agents. In doing so, I have articulated the merits of this study in advancing scholarly understanding of participation and nonparticipation in online communities.

The problem of poor understanding and little theorising of online community participation has been addressed by adopting an integrated social and technological perspective that provides a solid foundation for discussion of findings and theory-building in later chapters. Findings from the research will be discussed and theorised in Chapter 9 to develop a sociomaterial understanding of participation, interpreting instances and accounts of participation in communities online and face-to-face to understand how and why people participate (or do not) and the effects at both emotional and physical levels on those who do not participate in online communities and activities.

In the next chapter, I will describe how the study will actually be designed to explore (and answer) the research questions and to fulfil the overarching research objective to better understand both participation and nonparticipation in online communities.

Chapter 4

Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed description of the field study approach I adopted to investigating the problem of understanding participation and nonparticipation in online communities. Building on the identification of a need for a fresh perspective from which to approach this enquiry, I present in this chapter my approach to the design of an ethnographic field study conducted over a 12-month period with a field study group consisting of members of a parenting group. In section 4.2 I present in detail my approach to the design of the field study, explaining the role of ethnographic and netnographic research techniques, and describing in detail how this study met the requirements of delivering in depth, qualitative enquiry. Section 4.3 presents a detailed description of the complexities involved in each stage of the field study design. I discuss the selection of participants, my role as the researcher, and my approach to gathering and analysing data. I address ethical considerations and my strategy for presenting the results of the study in a way that ensures quality, integrity and consistency in what is represented from the empirical evidence acquired.

4.2 Research Approach

In this section I present my approach to designing a study with the objective of better understanding participation and nonparticipation in online communities. In section 4.2.1 I explain how this research is designed to discover answers to the questions of how and why individuals participate in communities, both face-to-face and online, and also to identify why people do not participate in communities online and the impacts for them. In section 4.2.2 I discuss the important role of narratives in the research. I argue that designing a field study will allow the discovery and analysis of narratives from members of the field study group and from the communities in which they participate face-to-face and online. Following the actions of both the participants and their communities, I argue, will uncover interesting and novel insights into participation and nonparticipation in communities, both face-to-face and online. In doing so this will reveal an understanding of participation that favours neither a social nor a technological

explanation, rather considers the behaviour of people participating in an online community to be inherently inseparable from the technology that enacts that participation.

4.2.1 Approach to the Design of a Qualitative Study

Grounded in hermeneutics (Klein and Myers, 1999; Myers, 2004; Myers and Avison, 1997) and designed with a discovery-oriented focus (Locke, 2011), I demonstrate that the study contributes to reinterpreting our understanding of participation in a way that has important implications for social life. Based on guidelines for designing qualitative research (e.g. Marshall and Rossmann, 1989; Myers and Avison, 1997), research questions aimed at explaining instances and accounts of participation and examining how these events interact result in this study having significant explanatory potential.

An open-ended and flexible approach was required that would allow for the discovery of rich qualitative content grounded in knowledge of the local and the specific (Kozinets, 2002). Ethnographic techniques involving in-person participant observations by researchers (Kozinets, 2002; Myers, 1997; Myers, 1999) fulfils this requirement, therefore, as fieldwork with an ethnographic approach was considered a suitable research approach. A sub-set of case study research, fieldwork can be descriptive and explorative in nature, giving insights into how social phenomena occur (Goeken and Börner, 2012). Combining the study of distinctive meanings, practices, and artefacts of particular social groups (Kozinets, 2002) together with general case study principles, a field study is useful for pursuing discovery-oriented research objectives. According to the recommendations of Marshall and Rossmann (1989), a field study fits with these objectives for its ability to explore different instances and accounts of community participation to explain patterns and identify plausible relationships between motivations to participate and the ways in which participation occurs. A field study approach allows me to answer research questions with the most in-depth explanations of participation. Adopting a field work and a sociomaterial approach reflects my own research position. At a philosophical level, I seek to understand, and explain sociotechnical phenomena of online participation by observing naturally occurring interactions between people online and face-to-face in the course of their everyday lives, following the concept of participation in action. I am interested in the context(s) in which participation in communities (online and offline) occurs as experienced and described by field study members and derived from observational data. This approach gives me insight into rich evidence from a relatively small number of instances of participation. It is my aim to achieve theoretical generalisability (Lee and Baskerville, 2003; Walsham, 1995b; Walsham, 2006; Yin,

2003), whereby empirical evidence becomes generalisable inductively, grounding upwards from data to concepts and again from concepts to theory.

4.2.2 The Role of Narratives in the Research

Narratives and their analysis constitute a large element of the research. Social life in the context of this study is a narrative, one consisting of actions and events using the vocabulary of Czarniawska (2004). The role of narratives in social life is famously described at length by (Barthes, 1988), who writes,

> The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances—as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting … stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives … Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, trans-historical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (Barthes, 1988 p. 65)

Advocates of a narrative approach to social phenomena (Czarniawska, 2004; Latour, 1992; Law, 2000) recognise that the concept of action need not necessarily be limited to human beings; actants can be both human and nonhuman (Latour, 1992). A field study thus allows the discovery and analysis of narratives from members of the field study group and from the communities in which they participate face-to-face and online, following the actions of both the participants and their communities. Narratives in this study are the rich accounts of participation given by field study members through interviews, and also observational data presented in narrative form. This satisfies the discovery-oriented objectives of the study and provides a platform from which to further explain the concept of participation.

4.3 Field Study

In this section, the field study is described in detail, first addressing my approach to investigating participation and nonparticipation as an empirical problem, and then explaining the design of a field study to investigate these phenomena. As explained in section 4.3.1, the study was designed

to explore the phenomenon of participation in community life of a *parenting group* whose members meet socially and also interact online. The same group provided access to observe their participation in online communities of parents and usage of social media in general. The field study design is outlined in section 4.3.2, including my approach to the selection of members and the nature of data collection and analysis techniques. I emphasize how a field study using netnographic techniques enabled me to answer my research questions and allowed me to analyse and interpret data to create an understanding of the phenomenon of participation. I demonstrate how the principles of netnography were followed. I discuss the suitability of a qualitative field study, as a particular type of case study, in meeting research aims and keeping with my own qualitative, interpretative research style and philosophical position. I discuss in section 4.3.3 my unique researcher role as a cultural insider-outsider and the ethnographic dimension to my fieldwork. In section 4.3.4, the data gathering techniques I employed are explained, along with a description of how each was applied. I provide in section 4.3.5 a description of the approach taken to analysing qualitative data, explaining the hermeneutic perspective that supports the understanding of themes as they emerge from data. I explain how the employment of coding techniques helped me to organise, understand, and explain narrative accounts of everyday participation in community life, both face-to-face and online. I describe how hermeneutics and narrative analysis are integrated with netnography. Section 4.3.7 presents my approach to theory development and discuss how the study design satisfies quality criteria for interpretive research. I specifically address my writing style and approach to presenting empirical data, discussing ethical considerations and the approach taken to minimise bias in interpretations. Finally, in section 4.3.8 I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the steps taken to ensure quality research.

4.3.1 Field Study Selection and Description

The research is conducted as a field study seeking to understand the participation behaviour of a parenting group situated in a suburban area. I am a member of this group, meeting up with the other mothers, children, and fathers regularly. The group is interesting for my research as it also has an online dimension. Group members communicate electronically with each other and with members of other communities. As an empirical unit of analysis, this community allows me to discover insights and develop a theory on the participation behaviour of members who share a similar profile; all consider themselves to be technologically savvy professional couples and parents of preschool-aged children, and the group represents a diverse cultural mix, some with little family support in Australia. The research setting exemplifies several aspects of the research

problem; it allows examination of a community with an online and face-to-face dimension whose members participate of their own free will, perceiving some value from their participation.

Furthermore, selecting parenting as a research context provides a rich setting in which to observe and explore individual experiences with feelings of inclusion or exclusion based on pressure from peers. Observing instances of parenting issues being discussed allows me to discover insights into the value that parents perceive from membership of both communities and to understand the particular agency of technology in co-constructing instances of participation. Field research in this setting has the potential to add significant theoretical value in providing a deep understanding of how social and technological structures are intertwined. It will also develop theoretical conclusions on the motivations for online versus face-to-face community participation and illuminate how technology and participants are inherently intertwined in everyday instances of community participation.

Acting in the dual role of researcher and community participant *in the field* was beneficial as it allowed me to study participation in the field as an insider (a 'native') and made easier interviewing and observing the actions and interactions of the parenting group. We met by sharing our pregnancies and through the births of our children, and after approximately four years together, we know each other very well. The research project was designed as an in situ field study conducted over a 12-month period from 2011 to 2012 and consisted of 26 women and men who are active members of the group. Appendix B contains a profile of each participant, each consisting of the following population characteristics

- Name[8]
- Gender
- Age-group
- Marital status
- Family composition
- Highest level of education attained
- Internet access? Y/N; unlimited? Y/N
- Self-rating of technical ability
- Main online activities
- Number of hours per week spent online

[8] Pseudonyms have been used throughout the study to protect the privacy of field study members and any other persons they referred to in direct quotations.

- Number of hours per week spent in social contact with friends and/or family
- Extent of family support nearby

Members predominantly reside in one suburban location, with the exception of some who have relocated since the group was originally formed. The group was first brought together by the local Early Childhood Health Centre to connect *mothers* through pregnancy and following the births of our first children around the same time in late 2009 / early 2010 in the same locality. It is now broader than just a "mothers' group," with most of the fathers also involved and contributing actively to group meet-ups. We meet regularly, on the third Sunday of each month, for family playdates either at someone's house or at a public playground. Occasionally, the adults spend time in each other's company, socially, without any children.

I selected the group because I had access to all the members given that I myself am a member. We are all feeling our way through the minefield of having preschool-aged children—an intense period of childhood development when many parenting issues arise and, therefore, a time when we, as parents, seek to interact heavily with other parents, carers, support groups, and professional services. I felt that the pressures a parent faces (such as conforming to socially accepted norms of feeding or disciplining) created a rich context in which to observe motivations to participate in communities both online and face-to-face. Some members of the group also participate in online communities of other parents and wider networks of friends, family, and associates. These attributes satisfied the requirements of my research objective to study and explain instances and accounts of participation online and face-to-face.

The study represents an emergent research design in that through engagement with the group in the context of studying their participation behaviour, these individuals themselves brought me to the online communities in which they interact. These online communities are communities in which members of the field study participate for both parenting-related and non-parenting-related reasons as will be explored in the data analysis chapters.

4.3.2 Field Study Design

Fieldwork, by its design, is broad qualitative sociological research in which the researcher directly observes and participates in a social setting (Kaler and Beres, 2010; Neuman, 2006) where the study is not restricted by a priori boundaries. Instead, it responds to calls in literature for research that follows both human and nonhuman actors (Czarniawska, 2004; Latour, 1992; Law, 2000) to determine the study's boundaries. As Bruni writes,

> Borrowing from actor network theory the idea that humans and non-humans are actively involved in the making of social worlds, there are already those who call for a post-social world and an object-centred sociality. (Bruni, 2005 p. 357)

A field study is a sub-set of what (Yin, 2009) defines as a case study. According to Yin's recommendations, when investigating a new phenomenon such as online participation, the researcher should examine real-life cases and, if possible, experience the phenomenon personally (Yin, 2009). As a type of case, the focus of the field study was to spend time with members of the parenting group using a combination of in-depth semi-structured field interviews and ethnographic techniques to collect qualitative data in the form of notes, observations, and online dialogue (Hair et al., 2007).

Observations are both participant observations of behaviour in the physical group and also observations of online activities of field study members. The face-to-face dimension is already described as ethnographic fieldwork. The online dimension follows principles of netnography, which is a type of ethnography adapted to the study of online communities (Kozinets, 1999). These principles of netnography are based upon "the same five elemental principles of cultural understanding" (Kozinets, 2013 p.96) of ethnography. Netnography is employed to conduct research where:

1. A naturalistic approach is taken to the study of unfolding culture in the digital field by interacting with digital consumers through technological interfaces (Kozinets, 2013).
2. The researcher is immersed in the social media research site and accepted by the online community as a "full-blown community member" (Kozinets, 2013 p.97).
3. The netnographer is a skilled architect of social scientific representation, telling stories and painting detailed descriptive portraits that illuminate not only meanings but in a profoundly subjective sense inspire empathy and understanding (Kozinets, 2013 p. 97).
4. The netnographer employs multiple research techniques to understand the culture and the lived social reality of members of the social media community (Kozinets, 2013 p.97)
5. Netnography adapts common participant-observation ethnographic procedures to computer-mediated settings (Kozinets, 2013 p.98).

Hence netnography is appropriate for gaining an understanding of the behaviour of humans interacting through online, electronically-mediated communities, or groups. In this adaptation, netnographic techniques provide a "window into naturally occurring behaviours" (Kozinets, 2002 p. 62) of the online communities I observe, following the actions and interactions of field study members with each other and with other anonymous members of online communities. Netnography fulfils my objective of investigating participation in an online context. Furthermore,

satisfying the university's ethical criteria, netnography is conducted in an unobtrusive manner (Kozinets, 2010a; Kozinets, 2010b) with all the rigor of ethnography. A netnographic approach to online observations respects the flexibility and openness of ethnography. It fits well with the in-person fieldwork element of my work. Together, both approaches allow continuing access to field study members in this particular social situation (parenting group).

My aim was to describe and explain instances and accounts of community participation by analysing the qualitative data collected. I placed a strong emphasis on the trustworthiness of my respondents (Hair et al., 2007). It was the information they would give me that would allow me to uncover a deeper understanding of participation, discovering what might otherwise remain "hidden" motivations and values. My skills as an interviewer were imperative, and I utilised my ability to probe and enquire on certain characteristics during the course of each interview (Hair et al., 2007) and to question observed behaviour.

The process of conducting fieldwork was a series of steps through which I moved linearly to recruit participants, collect data, analyse data, and arrive at theoretical conclusions. A significant effort went into preparation, in planning how to approach participants, identifying data collection and analysis activities, and ensuring the necessary approvals, consents, and sign-offs were in place. The fieldwork process followed two distinct paths: in-person research via ethnographic techniques (interviews and participant observations) and the observation of online interactions (netnographic techniques), as I show in Figure 5. This illustrates the process for both recruitment and collection of data from field study members and also how these individuals brought me to specific online communities in which they participate so I could observe their behaviour there. Field study members also provided examples of dialogue between themselves and other members of general social networking communities outside the context of parenting. Through the combination of these sources, I gathered comprehensive narrative and observational data. Data collection and data analysis activities were carried out iteratively, allowing me to follow interesting leads as they emerged.

4.3.3 Researcher Identity and Field Relationships

Researchers (Kaler and Beres, 2010) note that fieldwork largely concerns the social connections with participants that the researcher develops over the course of their research. According to Kaler and Beres, "These connections are what make data collection possible from the time you get access to a community setting" (Kaler and Beres, 2010 p. 7). It was therefore important that I treat equally the building of relationships with study participants and the design and conduct of the research process. Philosophically, a researcher wishing to understand the social world and the

phenomena that exist in that world must expand their horizons and be willing to see an alternative worldview (Gadamer, 1975; Gadamer, 2008). This can be achieved through fieldwork by deeply immersing oneself in other people's lives to investigate their actions and interactions in social processes. In the study of participation, this has meant that, as the researcher, I have been directly immersed in the lives of fellow parenting community members, seeking to observe and report their behaviour when participating in the group and other communities. I have strived to overcome pre-occupations in understanding by merging different people's horizons.

I conducted the research from my own home. Participants were from my community, the social space in which I have built up ties and connections over the years I have lived here and been a parent. I therefore already had most of the contacts and a sense of how things work in the community. As described in guidelines for the essentials of field relationships, I already "speak the language" (Kaler and Beres, 2010 p. 16). I had the information about when the group met and where these meetings would take place. I understood what was considered acceptable behaviour through time spent together and shared experiences.

According to (Walsham, 2006), in choosing the researcher's style of involvement in their study, it is useful to think of involvement as a "spectrum, and as changing often over time" (Walsham, 2006 p. 321). As prescribed by (Neuman, 2006), a field study approach requires the researcher to directly engage and spend time in a small-scale social setting in the present time. Establishing my identity as a researcher was important in the sense that I needed the participants (my friends) to recognise and *accept* my status as a researcher. As a parent of two young children myself, I am a cultural insider (Bartunek and Louis, 1996) in the context of studying participation in the group since I personally know and can relate to the other parents and their experiences of parenting.

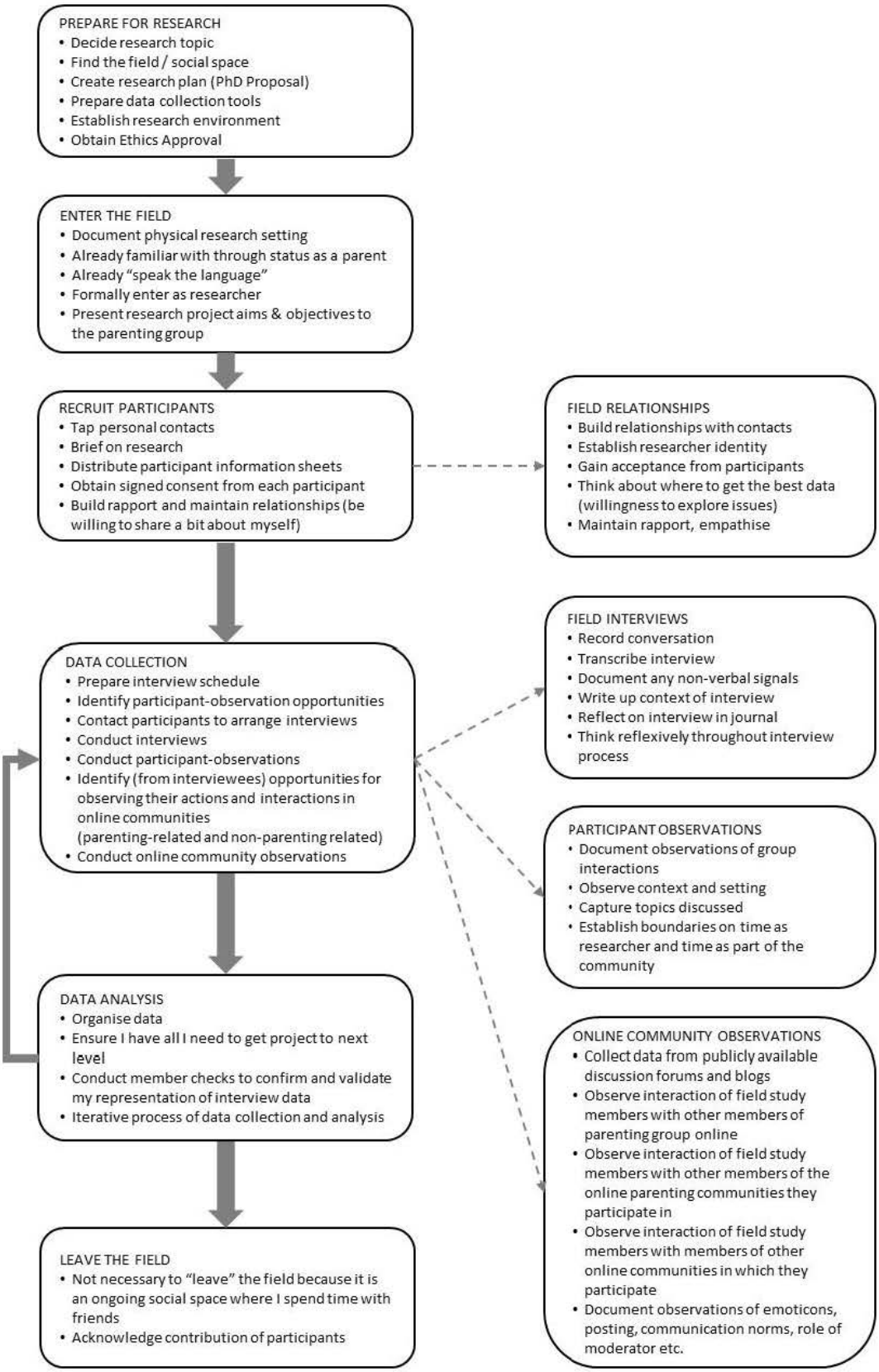

Figure 5. The Fieldwork Process

This gave me more access to information and helped to establish trust in what I was doing. Walsham also views this as the role of the participant observer. He claims that an advantage of close involvement is its "in-depth access to people, issues, and data" (Walsham, 2006 p. 321), which enables "observation or participation in action, rather than merely accessing opinions, as is the case in an interview-only study" (Walsham, 2006 p. 321). I am not a neutral observer since my own "background, knowledge and prejudices" (Walsham, 2006 p. 321) will almost certainly result in me seeing "things in certain ways and not others" (Walsham, 2006 p. 321). Given the context dependency (Walsham, 2006) of fieldwork, this required me to be responsive to the nature of the field situation at any time, retaining the ability to "see the woods for the trees" without losing critical distance.

I am also a cultural *outsider* (Bartunek and Louis, 1996). As previously indicated, I do not participate in communities through the Internet. Therefore, online community participation is a novel social setting for me, one in which I have less understanding of the environment or how it works (Bartunek and Louis, 1996). Being an outsider gave me a perspective I might not have had when interviewing participants. I was able to see things an insider might not see and probe particular assumptions to uncover more data about participation. An insider-outsider perspective has brought balance to my fieldwork and has given me a unique insight into participation behaviour in both face-to-face and online contexts. Playing both roles has brought richness to my understanding of why and how everyone participates in our community and in other communities to which they belong, both offline and online.

4.3.4 Data Collection

The following sections deal with the process of data collection. I present details of data collection activities carried out together with a breakdown of the specific techniques and their application. I report details of how in-depth field interviews and direct observation of participation were each utilised.

4.3.4.1 Data Collected

Immersion in the field spanned a 12-month period (for research purposes). I am still an active member of the group, but my role as researcher has dissolved from the perspective of everyday interactions and relationships. Being in the field collecting data required me to carry out a number of interrelated and iterative activities as outlined below:

- Direct involvement with (human) community members and (non-human) social media to personally experience the process of social life in the parenting field setting

- Acquisition of an insider's point of view whilst maintaining the analytic perspective of an outsider
- Use of a variety of research techniques and social skills
- Production of qualitative research data as extensive written notes and descriptions
- Understanding and empathy for field members, not only coldly recording objective facts
- Observation of instances of online community participation in everyday settings
- Observation of both explicit and tacit aspects of community culture

With the objective of achieving in-depth understanding rather than drawing theoretical conclusions that span a wide range of online community participation instances, I selected 24 individuals to observe and study in detail. Data gathering with these participants was conducted in two broad stages: first, via a short phase of familiarisation with the research setting involving high-level interviewing of individual members of the parenting group and identification of online communities. Subsequently, a longer phase of in-depth field interviewing and observations was conducted. Interviews conducted with each of the participants were on average 60 minutes, yielding qualitative interview data in excess of 35 hours in total. Table 6 summarises the data gathering techniques applied in the field study.

Table 6. Data Gathering Techniques

Technique	Description of how technique was applied
Field research interviews	Open-ended and probing questions Flexible, conducted face-to-face and via Skype at convenient times Unstructured interviews that yielded unexpected and useful insights
Participant observations	Firsthand observation of participation experiences Opportunity to observe behaviour not seen through interviews
Content from online forums, blogs, e-mails	Publicly available online content already written, transcription not needed Electronic content easily captured in NVivo for subsequent data analysis
Extensive personal field notes	Researcher reflexivity in personal journal Records context of observations

Rather than leave the field, my role changed from that of researcher back to fellow parent—interested in sharing parenting experiences and spending time with other families. Deciding the point at which to stop collecting data was about recognising the point of data saturation. I strived to collect data until I reached the point of rapidly diminishing returns (Kaler and Beres, 2010). This happened when I felt each additional interview or observation was adding very little knowledge to what I had already acquired. I could see that no substantial new themes were

emerging and was confident that I had enough data to represent the topic, to facilitate analysis, and to build a theory from.

4.3.4.2 In-Depth Field Interviews

Through extensive in-depth interviewing, I gathered substantive data as accounts and descriptions of participation in communities both face-to-face and online. As my primary data collection technique, field interviews involved speaking directly to respondents in one-to-one discussions. The result was substantive data encapsulating complex and sensitive information (Hair et al., 2007) about the phenomenon of participation in community life. I retained flexibility in when and where interviews were conducted, often to accommodate the respondent working around a child's daily sleep and feeding routines or at times when they could make themselves available without interruptions. The interviews often took place in the homes of field study members, which on several occasions evolved as a working interview in the sense that the individual was also caring for their child at the same time as participating in our interview. In preparation, I had a plan for the general areas of questions I wanted to ask; hence, the field interviews were semi-structured (Hair et al., 2007). Appendix A contains the list of questions I modelled each interview upon. I was concerned with collecting some basic demographic information about each interviewee and their particular needs as parents. I was also aiming to build up a general picture across interviewees of their motivations for seeking a community, the ways in which they fulfil this need for community involvement, and any experiences of inclusion and/or exclusion they encountered on a day-to-day basis with respect to being involved (or not) in a community. This approach allowed me to ask unanticipated related questions that were not originally included, thus yielding unexpected and insightful information and enhancing findings (Hair et al., 2007). It also enabled me to delve deeply into responses to try to uncover possible hidden reasons for particular behaviour, asking the "Why?" question over and over. Field study members were all briefed on the nature of interviews, and as a general observation, I believe that everyone appeared comfortable in one-to-one situations as we talked and I recorded the conversation. Many sensitive issues were discussed in a candid manner, leading me to view my data as representing rich accounts of participation.

Following data gathering guidelines was critical in supporting the type of narrative analysis I sought to undertake. According to (Kohler Riessman, 1993), there are three stages of narrative analysis: (1) telling, (2) transcribing, and (3) analysing. Each stage, they purport, has to be considered at the time of designing the research approach and data gathering techniques. I gave attention to each of the three stages in my field study, as explained in the following sections.

4.3.4.2.1 Telling

In-depth field interviews were the primary mechanism for field study members to "tell" me their stories. Kohler Riessman gives the following advice on the telling of good stories:

> To encourage those we study to attend to and tell about important moments in their lives, it is necessary to provide a facilitating context in the research interview, which implicates the interview schedules we develop. Certain kinds of open-ended questions are more likely than others to encourage narrativization. (Kohler Riessman, 1993 p. 52)

I would often precede a set of questions about a certain topic by recounting my own story relating to an experience with that topic. For example, in seeking to understand the need a parent has to become involved with other parents, I might have begun by sharing details of a time when I was, for example, facing challenges with my child's sleep routine. I would elaborate on the sleep issues I experienced and the sources of help I approached in trying to find some practical suggestions to improve everyone's sleep. Having shared how I reached out to other parents and sometimes professional support groups in dealing with this issue, I might then have asked them an open-ended question like "Tell me about a time when you faced a parenting issue and who you looked to for support or advice."

As Kohler Riessman advises, prescribe "less structure in interview instruments in the interest of providing greater control to the respondents" (Kohler Riessman, 1993 p. 55). Thus, in developing an interview guide, I included broad questions in conjunction with a standard set of questions probing generic demographic-type information. Broad questions were supplemented, if needed, by more probing questions to keep the conversation flowing and to elaborate on an interesting story. Because, in Kohler Riessman's opinion, "narratives often emerge when you least expect them" (Kohler Riessman, 1993 p. 56), I was at any point willing to "give up researcher control and regard interviews more like conversations" (Kohler Riessman, 1993 p. 55). This approach ensured that interviewees, as "tellers," could "make events reportable in any interaction by making a story out of them" (Kohler Riessman, 1993 p. 54), thus supporting the overall aims of data gathering activities.

4.3.4.2.2 Transcribing

Interviews averaged *at least one hour* in duration. Each interview was taped on two separate recording devices—an iPhone and an iPad. Consequently, the transcription process was substantial and time-intensive. I chose to do the transcriptions myself because I was able to capture the words of the conversation and other more striking features of the conversation on paper (Kohler Riessman, 1993)—for example, crying, laughing, and pauses. I endeavoured to

ensure that interviewees' voices would be represented in writing up my research. Following the transcription of interviews, I sent each interviewee a copy of their interview transcript, asking them to confirm the accuracy of their conversation with me.

4.3.4.2.3 Analysing

This stage is covered in detail in section 4.3.5.

4.3.4.3 Observational Data

Interview results were augmented with participant observations and online observations. Observations involved the systematic recording of people and their instances of participation, which were obtained through the use of face-to-face and online observation (Hair et al., 2007). This yielded substantive narrative data in the form of written descriptions from my observations and information obtained from observation of dialogue in publicly available electronic forums (Hair et al., 2007). This required me to observe and analyse the content of text written in online forums as dialogue between community members. I was seeking themes that would describe and explain community participation. A strong advantage of observational data is that this approach is unobtrusive, with no instructions given or questions asked, thus minimising any researcher influence. Such an approach followed ethical principles around the field study member's right to privacy. Observing participation was contained to publicly available online forums that did not require those posting or reading to register as members.

In other instances, I was observing whilst also participating in the community setting. During such observations, the participants did know their behaviour (and my own) was being observed. I spent long periods of time with the field study members in small group settings, noting our individual behaviour with respect to community participation.

4.3.5 Data Analysis

The data were of an eclectic nature, composed of "descriptions of discrete events" (Langley, 1999 p. 693), narrative accounts of participant observations, and dialogue from online communities. Qualitative information captured, for example, opinions on social media, attitudes towards socialising and communication, and approaches to parenting. Adopting an open-ended inductive approach (Langley, 1999) yielded data that were rich, dynamic, and complex but, at the same time, largely shapeless. Moving from this towards a theoretical understanding required the application of multiple sensemaking strategies. Whilst data were largely narrative in nature, data drawn from online sources did contain some symbols and images (for example, emoticons and

photographs[9]). Hence, analysis of the data required a multimodal strategy to sensemaking that considered non-linguistic elements such as scripts, spatial placing, and imagery (Iedema, 2007).

In the sections that follow, I articulate my approach to the analysis of data and demonstrate how guidelines prescribed for making sense of data (Langley, 1999) enabled me to uncover key themes and central concepts in a way that they could be linked in explaining participation. Consideration is given to ethical issues, the style in which empirical data is presented, and measures taken to satisfy research quality criteria.

4.3.5.1 A Narrative Approach to Data Analysis

Barthes's description of the narrative (in section 4.2) can be interpreted in a way that holds narratives as the basic domain of human existence; in Barthes's worldview, we live our everyday lives through narratives. Extending this notion, in research, we study narratives to examine how changes occur to narratives. A narrative approach has an assumption that through narratives we create the world that we seek to understand and explain through social research. The uses of narratives and its analysis in social science studies vary across fields of practice (Czarniawska, 2004). Czarniawska (2004) presents an approach to social research based on observing and collecting stories in a particular field of social practice, interpreting what these stories say, and deconstructing and analysing the stories before finally putting together the researcher's own stories and setting them against other stories in the field of research. Figure 6 depicts a linear process view of a narrative approach, from data gathered through stories in the field through analysis and interpretation to contribution to theory.

[9] Written consent was obtained from field study members for any photographic content collected.

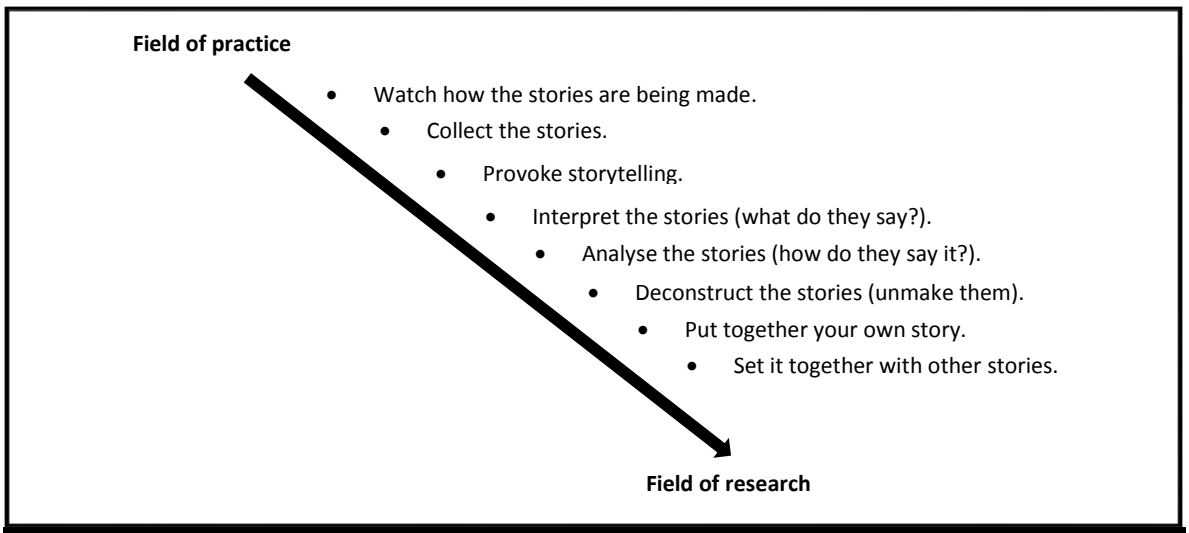

Figure 6. The "Narrative Turn" in Social Studies

Source: (Czarniawska, 2004)

I have largely followed a *narrative strategy* approach in that I gathered substantive data telling of instances and accounts of participation in field study members' everyday lives and the use of in-depth interviewing to provoke storytelling by field study members. Detailed analysis and interpretation of the stories led me to construct several narratives to represent descriptive, detailed accounts of participation. I deconstructed individual stories and essentially put them together as stories of my own. As you will see in subsequent chapters, I have constructed stories that are each aimed at presenting rich data that help to explain a component of the research question about understanding why and how people participate. These narratives provide rich contextual descriptions and cultural details. My aim was to get a handle on data (Langley, 1999), identifying linkages and establishing early analytic themes. I am re-describing the stories narrated to me to tell the story differently, in a way that draws on the experiences and accounts of multiple field study members who each have a credible story of a particular way in which they have participated in a community or an account of their need for community participation. Geertz describes this process as a "distinctive sort of re-description: the sort that startles" (Geertz, 1988 p. 112). "Re-described" stories piece together fragments of many stories, bringing together evidence from multiple sources to illustrate a point as the basis of subsequent theoretical explanations.

As Langley prescribes, what I am doing is to "present as completely as possible the different viewpoints" (Langley, 1999 p. 695) of the field study members and their experiences of participating in community life in both face-to-face and online settings. By including large elements of contextual detail alongside varied, rich accounts and observations of participation,

my analysis aims to convey a high degree of authenticity that cannot be achieved economically with large samples (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Langley, 1999).

4.3.5.2 Thematic Analysis and Coding

I am interested in "stories about what happened and who did what when" (Langley, 1999 p. 692). The analysis was approached via analytic induction (cf. Katz and Emerson, 1983), whereby the focus for analysis emerges and becomes clearer as the researcher reviews transcripts and observational data. Hearing the participants' voices was the primary aim of initial analysis. It was my objective in scrutinising interview transcripts and observational data to look for features of discourse that stand out (Heidegger, 1962; Kohler Riessman, 1993), features stimulated by "prior theoretical interests and 'fore-structures' of interpretation" (Kohler Riessman, 1993 p. 57). I endeavoured to read each transcript and item of observational data "both for content and as evidence for prior theory" (Kohler Riessman, 1993 p. 54), adopting an overarching strategy of being faithful to the interviewee's experience, acknowledging my own interpretation.

Doing qualitative field research in a social setting, I needed a way to analyse data that would allow me to unfold levels of meaning in an iterative way, gradually revealing deeper hidden meanings. Adopting a hermeneutic circle approach (Böll et al., 2014) supported this objective as it facilitated the extension of meaning in concentric circles, moving from parts of a whole to a global understanding of the whole and back to individual parts (Klein and Myers, 1999). In this way, I have read and re-read interview transcripts, participant observation narratives, electronic dialogue, and diary-based reflections to improve my understanding, gradually unfolding levels of meaning and drawing theoretical conclusions.

4.3.5.3 Analysis Stage 1

Analysis was a two-stage process. The first stage involved *describing* instances and accounts of participation in communities; the emphasis was on letting participants' voices be heard. I examined transcripts, participant observations, and online dialogue for meanings encoded in the form of talk (Kohler Riessman, 1993). I was looking for all instances, accounts, and observations of participation. Circularity was important—the circular process of selecting specific features of interviewee accounts and my observations and linking these to the research questions, the theoretical position I value, and my personal biography (Kohler Riessman, 1993). There were three analytical steps in the first stage of analysis, each step organising a different subset of data. Materially, I was interested in (1) describing the needs and motivations for participation in communities (face-to-face and online), (2) describing how people participate, captured as accounts of participating in communities, and (3) describing why people do not participate and the impacts that emerged from analysis of raw data.

Data were classified using a detailed coding approach supported by tables and NVivo[10] software to cluster codes into tree nodes (cf. Bazeley and Richards, 2000). Data subsets were arrived at through a combination of analysis techniques. In the first step, data analysis was driven by theory. The application of preconceived filters that came from literature allowed the identification of data describing individual needs for a community, motivations to participate in communities, and the value (or benefit) accruing to those who participate. Having identified needs, motivations, and values, analysis further classified this subset of data to isolate particular motives. Analysis initially identified, using the filters, 494 data items describing a need, motivation, or perceived value. By looking for relationships and similarities in the data items, 137 groupings of related needs, motivations, and values emerged. These 137 groups of related data were further classified into 29 themes depicting needs for community, motivations to participate, and values from participating. The final pass of analysis on this data subset classified the 29 themes into five core categories describing why people participate. Table 7 contains a description of each of these five core categories derived from the data.

[10] For further information about NVivo software, please visit http://www.qsrinternational.com/.

Table 7. Five Core Categories Of Needs, Definitions, And Core Attributes

Need	Definition(s)	Core Attributes
Well-Being	Maintaining good emotional health and positive self-esteem by having the ability to obtain support however sensitive the issue; a concern for the safety and happiness of self and others	Emotional health, physical well-being, self-esteem
Information Sharing	Broadcasting details of everyday life; externalising thoughts/emotions; an outlet to voice concerns/opinions; an environment to share experiences, obtain practical information relating to parenting issues, or consult the wisdom of the masses; the capability for fast and widespread dissemination of news/events	Dissemination, externalisation and disclosure of information, self-expression, acquisition of information
Autonomy	Escapism from everyday life and role as a stay-at-home carer; freedom from cultural restrictions; freedom of speech; a sense of connectivity to the world outside your day-to-day routine as a parent	Independence, freedom
Social Contact	A need to be always on, always connected, always available; a fear of missing out on news or events in other people's lives; the need to be perceived as having a lot of friends; a sense of solidarity from being connected to others in the same life situation	Company, friendship, solidarity, camaraderie, commonality, participation, involvement, belonging
Entertainment	A source of social stimulation outside the everyday role as a parent; a way to feel connected to social events in the lives of friends/contacts; a way to overcome being physically confined to responsibilities for a child by getting involved in online dialogue, posting comments, and joining in debates, discussions, and gossip	Fun, enjoyment, social interaction, adult conversation, dinners, social nights out

The second step in this first descriptive stage of analysis involved reviewing all data (after the extraction of data about needs, values, and motivations) and identifying everything to do with the mechanisms by which participation occurs. Or in research question terms, isolating data about how people participate in communities, face-to-face and/or online. This data set was openly coded as a first pass, yielding several hundred codes. Subsequently, in the manner of grounded theory development (cf. Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1992; Strauss and Corbin, 1998), the set of open codes was reviewed for relationships and themes emerging. Following this process enabled the classification of categories to which all data about how people participate in communities and activities online related. These categories were grounded up, representing core constructs to which all the data about how participation occurs related to. The categories, together with a description of each and some examples, are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Description And Examples Of Categories Representing How Participation Occurs

Need	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
COMMUNICATING DIFFERENTLY	Empirical evidence of changes in the nature of what is communicated via online communications, changes to when it is communicated, and changes in where communication occurs	Minutae Always on Networks of known and unknown contacts
SOCIALISING DIFFERENTLY	Instances and accounts from field study members of the changing nature of socialising when interacting in online communities and activities	Anytime, anywhere contact New norms and values Asynchronous communication in synchronous settings
BEING SOMEONE DIFFERENT ONLINE	Emerging theme of how anonymity and the use of aliases and avatars in online communication enable some people to be someone else online compared to who they are in face-to-face settings	Anonymity-enabled venting Harsher comments protected by hidden identity Online persona different from “real” persona
E-COMMUNICATION AS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO FACE-TO-FACE	Data illustrating instances of electronic communication and interaction in online community activities becoming a viable and preferred mode of interacting over direct conversation	En masse posting of an announcement online rather than contacting people individually Technology available when face-to-face contact not possible
SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AS THE MIDDLEMAN	Accounts of social networking sites becoming the medium of choice for individuals in reconnecting with former friends or colleagues, highlighting the perceived advantage of electronic interactions to remove any awkwardness from these re-introductions since contact is made through a technological medium	Easier than finding people face-to-face Quicker to send a message than interact in person Overcomes awkwardness of time lag since last contact with someone

Table 8. Description And Examples Of Categories Representing How Participation Occurs

Need	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
WISDOM OF THE MASSES	Using social networking sites to unearth wisdom about a particular topic or issue by posting comments to and receiving replies from an online network of friends and contacts	Seeking opinions on the advice given by a medical specialist for treating a childhood ailment Holiday activity recommendations
POSTERITY	Instances of the use of online blogging functionalities to capture and create a record of life events	Printing out of 12-month blog capturing early development of newborn baby compiled by mother whilst at home on maternity leave
PERCEPTION OF FRIENDSHIP	The ability to connect to wide networks of known and unknown contacts, identifying all as "friends" creating an illusion of friendship and popularity	Field study member with 1,000 friends online, received 80 birthday messages online, only contact from 76 of those in whole year since last birthday greeting
sOCIAL nETWORKING sITES FOR SELF-VALIDATION	Reaching out to friends and contacts in online forums to seek reassurance, empathy, solidarity, or consensus	Knowledge that you are "not alone" in a particular situation or with a specific issue A source of reassurance for a course of action you plan to take
EXTERNALISATION	Voicing thoughts or opinions in an electronic arena that would generally remain unspoken without this medium	Broadcasting random details of everyday life and activities Externalising thoughts and feelings about oneself or a particular topic
ADDICTION	Accounts of the encroachment of online communications into everyday offline life where the communicator feels compelled to constantly check in, update, or respond immediately	Mother who checks in on overnight posts to her favourite online community before attending to her child's needs in the morning

In Figure 7, I illustrate an example of the mind map I created from data building up the theme of living differently (which became the category Communicating Differently).

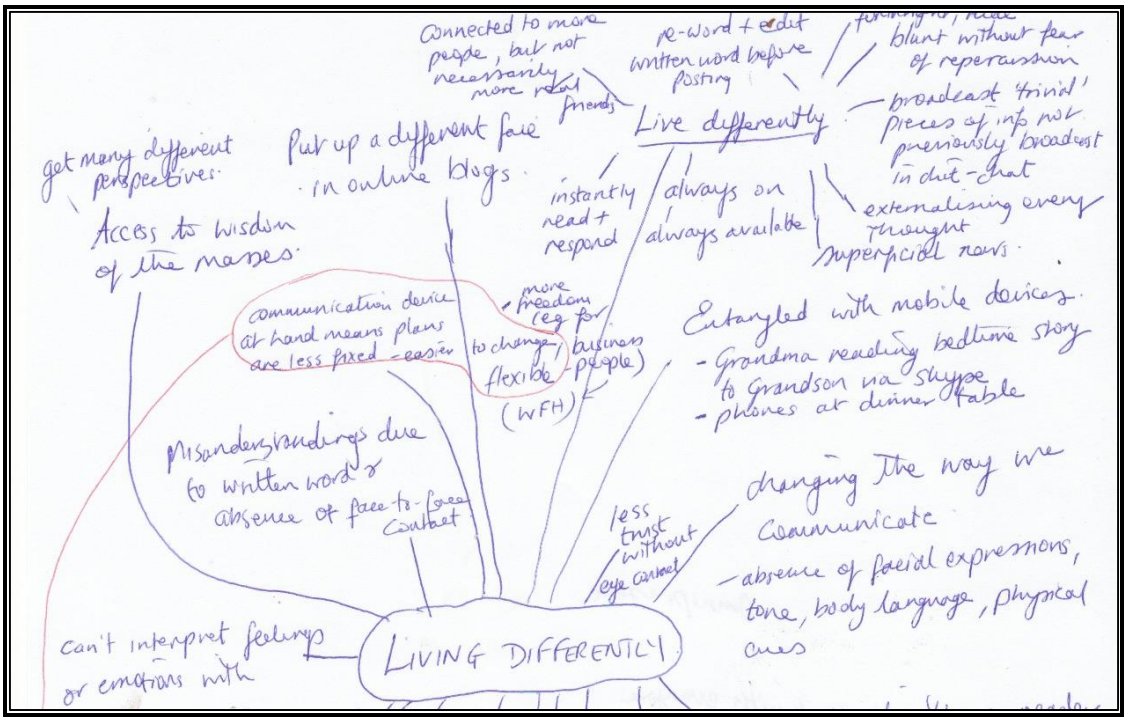

Figure 7. Sample Mind Map Developing Theme of Living Differently

The third and final step in this first stage of analysis involved identifying data to describe why people do not participate in communities, either face-to-face or online, and the perceived impacts from not doing so. Emerging from data were three reasons why individuals do not participate in online communities and three resulting impacts from not doing so, as summarised in Table 9. Similar to the data for how participation occurs, data were openly coded and classified into core concepts.

Table 9. Reasons for and Impacts of Not Participating Online

Reasons for not participating online	Impacts of not participating online
Lack of perceived value or time	Affects relationships with friends, family, and wider community
Discouraged by a particular feature of online communication	Limits full participation in the life events of community members
Fear of repercussions of participating online	Inability to take advantage of community opportunities

4.3.5.4 Analysis Stage 2

The second stage of data analysis was the phase of interpreting empirical data based on inductive theorising, not constraining interpretation by any known theory. This stage involved two main steps in the explanation of findings. The first step was to take the codes developed during steps 1

and 2 in the first phase of analysis and interpret these to explain participation. This was done by cross-referencing the themes in how field study members participate with the categories of needs driving their participation. This enabled explanation of how participation occurs using empirical descriptions of why people participate. Having done this, the second step in this explanation phase was to take the codes developed from step 3 in the first phase of analysis and interpret these in a way that makes sense of empirical data about exclusion. The outcome from this step is an explanation of why field study members do not participate in either their online and/or offline communities together with interpretation of the impacts.

Keeping the research questions at the forefront, I aimed to end up with a small number of categories representing (1) needs and motivations for participating, (2) ways in which people participate, and (3) impacts for those who do not participate online. The results are summarised in Table 10 and are fully explored in subsequent chapters.

Table 10. Summary of Core Categories Resulting from Analysis

Needs and motivations for participating in communities	Well-being	Information sharing	Autonomy	Social contact	Entertainment
Ways in which people participate in communities	By communicating differently	By socialising in multiple places at the same time	By using electronic communication instead of face-to-face communication	By living different lives (being someone else) in different communities	
Reasons for not participating in online communities	Perceived lack of time or value	Discouraged by some feature of online community interaction	Fear of repercussions of communicating online		
Impacts for those who do not participate	Effect on relationships with friends, family, and community	Limits participation in the life events of community members	Inability to take advantage of community opportunities		

As the categories developed, I sought out data that would enable "verification of the properties of emerging category systems" (Langley, 1999 p. 700). The resulting core categories serve to "tightly integrate all the theoretical concepts into a coherent whole firmly rooted (grounded) in the original evidence" (Langley, 1999 p. 700), staying close to original data and demonstrating high accuracy.

4.3.6 Ethical Considerations

In all aspects of the study, I followed guidelines for ethical research as stipulated by the university's Human Research Ethics Committee. Official ethical approval was granted for data gathering activities to include interviews and observations—both in face-to-face and online settings. In an online context, I had approval to access publicly available data. Following general ethical principles means that I fully and correctly acknowledge sources of data and academic work, ensure integrity in my work by reporting accurate and convincing empirical evidence, and write in a way that is understandable to the reader (Booth et al., 1995).

This is a social research project undertaken to understand and explain the everyday reality of a particular group of people as they create their social world. The resulting data are substantive and complex; they are contextually rich and filled with unique and interesting accounts and instances of participation. Gathering the data did raise some unique and novel ethical considerations. Some of the issues discussed with field study members were of a sensitive nature. I had to be conscious of not imposing my own beliefs on these topics whilst, at the same time, remaining open enough to share my opinions in a way that encouraged participants to open up. Approaching other people's intimate aspects of their lives required tact, diplomacy, and assurance of anonymity. It was of paramount concern to me that I protect my friends when interviewing them, being careful in the wording of personal questions. I sought formal permission from each of the field study members and carried out the research on the basis of guaranteed anonymity. Separate written consent was obtained for any photographic material collected. In reporting results, I wanted at all times to accurately represent what I observed or was told and to discuss the context of responses where possible to enhance the quality of results (Driscoll and Brizee 2012).

4.3.7 Presenting the Results

In this section, I outline the approach taken to presenting the research results. I describe my first-person writing style, discussing the merits of making descriptions of data and analysis into a coherent and interesting story for the reader. My writing style allows me to present the research in a way that is novel and imaginative. Following recommendations for reliable and valid qualitative, interpretive work, I state the principles of consistency and accuracy I seek to ensure in both the reporting of data and the interpretation of results. In ensuring these quality measures, I explain how my work presents research that is high in trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability. Furthermore, I specifically address how I satisfy research quality considerations.

4.3.7.1 Writing Style

Proponents of interpretative, qualitative research (e.g. Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013; Van Maanen, 1989; Walsham, 1995a) purport that convincing writing "is part of the art of persuasion, and is as much a matter of rhetorical style and flair as it is of accuracy and care in matters of theory and method" (Walsham, 1995b p. 79). Alvesson and Sandberg claim there is a need to "cultivate a more critical and path-(up)setting scholarly attitude amongst management researchers" (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013 p. 143). Responding to calls in literature for a "boost in innovative and high-impact" research (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013 p. 128), the style in which I have approached the research may challenge academic norms and researcher identity—moves that, it is claimed, are necessary to "encourage and facilitate more innovative and imaginative research and revisions of academic norms" (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013 p. 128). Drawing from Lincoln and Guba (1990), my work is presented using the first person. Whilst it may not be a common style in IS research to write in the first person and to present rich accounts of researcher experiences, there are excellent examples that I follow—for example, Walsham (1995b) and Schultze (2000). My style of writing follows good standards in IS and organisation studies that promote *interesting* writing styles and presenting research in ways that are *novel* and *imaginative* (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013). Further emphasising the need for a fresh approach to reporting conclusions from qualitative empirical material, Walsham writes,

> In describing the empirical data and analysis, try to make it a coherent and interesting story for the reader. For a case study for example, it is often helpful to provide an overview before going into details. Use plenty of quotes from respondents, as they can often make a point really sharply and vividly, however, make sure that you have introduced the point you are trying to make first, rather than making the quote "do the work". Tables and figures can sometimes be useful to summarize key arguments and models in the text. (Walsham, 2006 p. 327)

The use of narratives has been an integral part of presenting results, providing the foundation for analysis and interpretation of empirical data. In piecing together individual accounts of participation in communities, I have presented stories in an interesting way, foregrounded with rich contextual details and followed by thorough and substantive analysis. In presenting details of the field study, I have, where relevant and useful for understanding, given an overview of the context of data gathering and introduced the "characters" in the stories. I include numerous verbatim quotes as directly recorded from the interviewees. These quotes are both the source from which evidence is drawn, supporting emerging themes during analysis, and also the basis for subsequent theoretical development. Where appropriate, and again when useful for explanation and emphasis, I include descriptions pertaining to the context of interviews and participant

observations. I elaborate on the setting, articulate my impression of the individual(s) being interviewed or observed, and reflect on anything in particular that may have contributed to the style of interview or observation that transpired or the quality of data that resulted that day.

Tables were the primary means through which I organised, analysed, and cross-referenced raw data in the form of narratives quotes. A combination of scaled-down versions of these tables along with diagrammatic figures has been used to summarise key points and to bring the audience's attention to separate items—for instance, in the development of categories of motivations and needs for participating in communities (in Chapter 5). Mind mapping techniques proved to be an excellent aid in grouping related data and creating a structure within which to develop the stories reported in the data analysis section.

4.3.7.2 Research Quality Considerations

As per recommendations for reliable and valid qualitative, interpretive work (cf. Neuman, 2006; Walsham, 2006), I take measures to ensure consistency and accuracy in both the reporting and interpretation of empirical data. I present research that is high in *trustworthiness*, *credibility*, and *dependability* (Marshall and Rossman, 2010). Key mechanisms for achieving these standards include member checking of interview transcripts and observations to confirm accuracy, peer debriefing following the study, and my prolonged engagement in the field (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Quality criteria in qualitative research proposed by (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993) and further developed by Walsham (2006) are authenticity, plausibility, and criticality. According to Walsham (2006 p. 326),

> Authenticity concerns the ability of the text to show that the authors have "been there", by conveying the vitality of life in the field.
>
> Plausibility focuses on how well the text connects to the personal and professional experience of the reader.
>
> Criticality concerns the way in which the text probes readers to consider their taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs.

4.3.7.2.1 Authenticity

Authenticity (cf. Blaikie, 1991; Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993) is about appealing to readers "to accept that the researcher was indeed present in the field and grasped how the members understood their world" (Sidney et al., 2010 p. 32). My primary focus has been to convey enough contextual, descriptive data to convince the reader that I have really *been there* with the interviewees and subjects of observation. Authenticity also comes from the duality of my role as both researcher and active community member. Duality means that I have a unique insider-

outsider perspective on the phenomenon of participation based on real-life experiences. Communicating biographical profiles of the "leading" and "supporting" characters involved in the study is a strategy by which I can portray a rich understanding of those providing the data to the study and my awareness of both physical and environmental factors influencing the quality of individual data gathering events. All of these elements work together towards presenting an authentic account of participation drawn from real-life experiences. Further contributing to an authentic explanation of participation, all stages of the research project have been rigorously executed as per guidelines for field research and ethnographic techniques (cf. Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Klein and Myers, 1999; Myers, 1999; Silverman, 2010).

4.3.7.2.2 Plausibility

Convincing the reader of plausibility is my opportunity to communicate real-life issues, thoughts, and experiences of real people involved in parenting and community life. The subject matter is one that a lot of readers will be able to relate to through their own personal experiences. In dealing with the everyday practices of communication and participation in day-to-day situations, at all times I report empirical evidence in a way that is consistent with currently accepted knowledge whilst, at the same time, retaining the possibility for unique or novel findings that challenge the status quo. Golden-Biddle and Locke prescribe that to be plausible, ethnographic research must "make claims on readers to accept that the findings make a distinctive contribution to issues of common concern" (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993 p. 595). I present work that is plausible in that it recruits the reader, builds anticipation, and presents empirical evidence that differentiates the study from other work conducted in the discipline (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993).

Social media as a research context is a topical subject surrounded by much hype. Statistics show that most people are online now and have had exposure to social media technology, once again reinforcing the fact that this is a topic many people can relate to and therefore warrants careful attention to plausibility in the write-up of findings. Plausibility, in this sense, concerns the reporting of valid and credible research—interpreting instances and accounts of participation in face-to-face and online communities by gathering input from a diverse range of sources (Blaikie, 1991).

4.3.7.2.3 Criticality

According to Golden-Biddle and Locke, through criticality,

> ethnographic texts endeavour to probe readers to re-examine the taken-for-granted assumptions that underlay their work. Strategies to achieve criticality include: carving

> out room to reflect, provoking the recognition and examination of differences, and enabling readers to imagine new possibilities. (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993 p. 595)

I achieve criticality by first approaching existing literature from a critical review stance, analysing and critiquing the state of the art in knowledge about community participation, online communities, social inclusion, and social capital. Furthermore, I re-examine taken-for-granted assumptions and accepted views on participation. I convey to the reader the vitality and uniqueness of the field study context and also build a strong case for the particular contribution of the findings to research on community participation and social media.

4.3.7.2.4 Researcher Reflexivity

Alvesson and Sandberg recommend that the interpretive researcher

> carefully consider the assumptions underlying existing literature, and how those assumptions shape the understanding and conceptualisation of the subject matter in question, thus demonstrating reflexivity as a key quality of rigorous thinking. (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013 p. 143)

Most importantly, I was aware that I was a participant observant in the research. I do not pretend to be neutral, presenting who I am and the personal "bias" and preconceptions I bring with me. Reflecting on my own views, ethical norms, and values enabled me to be open and non-judgemental about other people's views and opinions. Deliberately moving from participant observer to participant and back in a circular fashion has given me the scope to reflect on both roles, examining my own participation in the parenting group from a more revealing perspective. Capitalising on this unique role as insider-outsider (as discussed in section 4.3.3), I have been in a privileged position—from a research perspective—of understanding the internal workings and "politics" of our parenting group and, at the same time, respected and trusted in my ability to challenge accepted norms and beliefs.

As a cultural outsider to online parenting communities and online communities in general, I have little understanding from my own experiences of how online communities work—how people interact, what is "allowed," or how participation is managed or monitored. Field study members who do have this knowledge have articulated their experiences to me, and I have also had the opportunity to observe some specific instances of online communication. The advantage, in this sense, is that I have no preconceptions about what online communication "should" look like; therefore, I have based my interpretation of participation purely upon what I have been told and what I have observed.

4.3.8 Limitations of Research Design

Limitations in both face-to-face and online research settings meant being heavily reliant upon other people for interviews and observations, often resulting in changes to plans at short notice due to events outside my control. For instance, access to participants at the times I needed them was sometimes met by a roadblock due to unexpected events such as a child being sick. This required me to be flexible about when and where interviews were conducted, remaining prepared to change as circumstances dictated.

There were also some challenges for me in determining the boundaries of "the field." I had to be clear to myself when I was officially "in the field" and when was I out of researcher mode. These are my friends, and I value their friendship; therefore, I would not want my role as researcher to jeopardise the relationships we have. I was particularly insistent upon ensuring that each person fully understood the nature of my work and was assured of the privacy of any information shared with me after the research was completed (cf. Walsham, 2006).

As (Walsham, 2006) draws attention to, a danger for me lay in the possibility of becoming "socialized to the views of the people in the field … [therefore losing] the benefit of a fresh outlook on the situation" (Walsham, 2006 p. 322). To mitigate this, I made a conscious effort to present myself as a neutral interviewer and observer. When conducting interviews, I followed my intuition as to what questions were appropriate to ask in conjunction with those in my interview guide, at all times avoiding judging answers. I tried to let the interviewee control the direction of the interview unless it was deviating off the topic, in which case I would have prompted one of my interview questions to refocus the discussion. In conjunction, I asked each interviewee to review their interview transcript (i.e., the process of member checking) to confirm that what I had captured accurately represented their views. I also proactively arranged meetings with both supervisors, giving us the opportunity to discuss my interpretation of the data in the context of what the field study members were saying.

A risk of me losing critical distance from the value of my own contribution could have become apparent during interviews. However, recognising the potential for this helped ensure that it did not impact data gathering. I was conscious of being open about my own opinions without enforcing my beliefs. Where someone did raise a point that conflicts with my own views, I endeavoured to probe their story as neutrally as possible and report their opinion in an honest fashion. This was not always easy, particularly where I strongly disagreed with an interviewee's account of participating in a community, for example; however, I quickly established a routine of "disengaging" from the content of the interview whilst doing the transcription, retaining interpretation and personal opinions for the subsequent review and analysis of the transcript. The

majority of interviewees were satisfied the first time that their transcripts were accurate, and only a small number of people requested minor amendments.

During the study, online observations tended to evolve as a result of information shared in the interviews pertaining to various online communities to which that interviewee belonged. I would then go directly to that online community and access publicly available content. Participant observations tended to arise in an ad hoc manner, often through a spontaneous meet-up for coffee and a playdate with other families. With the participant observations in particular, I really had to carefully balance the multiple forms of my identity—participating in the conversation as one parent to another and discussing personal information about myself and my relationship with my partner and children whilst simultaneously retaining an independent research perspective in observing the overall interchange.

My personal beliefs about social media, combined with my individual attitude towards parenting and community togetherness, fundamentally make me the person I am and shape how I behave and relate to others. As any interpretive field researcher, my research reflects personal accounts and interpretations of people and events whilst at all times remaining neutral when reporting findings to ensure I represent the data as my interviewees intended it to be heard. Where there is scope for personal bias to enter into how I report or interpret data, I acknowledge this and minimise any impact on results.

Having explained and justified the design of a field study to research participation in communities, the chapters that follow present rich empirical data from the field, together with in-depth analysis, interpretation and theorising.

Chapter 5

Why Participate in Community

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents insights into community participation from the perspective of field study members, as they themselves explain, by providing a broad tapestry of evidence as to *why* they participate. Empirical evidence presented in this chapter supports the argument that understanding of why people participate online is advanced by treating accounts of participating as inseparable from the technology through which this participation is enacted. In section 5.2, narrative accounts from observations of participation in both face-to-face and online communities and from dialogue of interactions in electronic forums are analysed. Empirical evidence reveals important insights into answering the first part of research question 1: why do people participate in communities face-to-face, online, or both? As expressed by field study members, I report the individual needs of parents and their related personal motivations to participate in communities of other parents. In section 5.3 I describe in detail five reasons emerging from data explaining why field study members participate in their communities. The reasons uncovered are categorised as needs for (1) well-being, (2) information sharing, (3) autonomy, (4) social contact, and (5) entertainment.

In section 5.4 I present evidence of the value perceived by field study members from their participation in communities, both face-to-face and online. In section 5.5 I summarise the reasons for participating in community and reinforce the findings from the field study of differing benefits arising at different times from participation in different community contexts. Overall, this chapter provides rich evidence classified according to emerging themes and inputs to later explanation and theorization in sociomaterial terms of the reasons motivating online community participation.

5.2 Needs and Motivations

In this section I present empirical evidence emerging from the field study group explaining their individual and collective needs for seeking community and the motivations for participating in communities, as expressed by field study participants. Needs and motivations, as I will demonstrate from data, are subtly different for the field study group. Section 5.2.1 presents findings explaining field study members' needs as parents and why they seek to connect with

other parents as part of a community. In section 5.2.2 I present findings explaining the motivations field study members provided for their decision to participate in a community.

5.2.1 Needs for Seeking Community

Needs, according to field accounts, represent an individual's requirements as well as their inherent wants or desires for connection to and participation in community (not differentiating between face-to-face or online contexts). Table 11 presents some *needs*, organised into high-level groupings.

Table 11. Quotes from Field Study Members about Their Needs as Parents
A need to **have interaction**
• [I need] to have physical contact with people outside the home and kids.
• [I like to have] friends and family to come over and hang out with you and have dinner and some drinks at home.
• [In my childhood,] we'd all be running around together in someone's front yard or with all your cousins … it's good if you can get that. I grew up in the suburbs, and it's good if you can get that suburbs lifestyle, whereas I find the city a bit like "This is my house, and I don't talk to you!"
• [I arrange playdates where] parents having kids meet either outside the house or at someone's place, spend time, let the children interact … the parents can interact as well.
A need to create a **positive sense of self**
• [We try] to alleviate our stress as parents by asking other parents about their experiences with, for example, [a] baby having high fevers all the time.
• [I liked] knowing other people were in the same situation as me.
• [I need] someone to talk to about what we're doing and how things are going at home and have kind of a bit of—how can I say—a whinge about things?
• [I need] to detox and have a beer with friends.
A need to **obtain information**
• [I want] to know other people's opinions on a particular parenting topic.
• [I like to get] ideas for healthy food.
• [I need] company because my husband travels a lot.
• [I needed] information about falling pregnant.

This data illustrates there are different levels at which needs manifest: some having to do with having social interaction, others involving creating a positive feeling of self, and still others relating to obtaining information or opinions about specific topics. Needs are individual but not unique, as data shows there are similarities in the types of needs held by field study members.

5.2.2 Motivations for Participating in Community

Field study members also provided rich data on their personal motivations to seek and participate in community, answering questions such as the following:

- Why do you connect with other parents?
- Why do you meet other families for playdates?

Motivation, field study participants describe, is the impetus an individual has to act towards the fulfilment of their needs for community. Table 12 contains some of the *motivations* for seeking community (face-to-face, online, or both), displayed as direct quotes from field study members and grouped into related themes.

Table 12. Quotes from Field Study Members about Motivations to Seek Community
Seeking **interaction**
• [I try] to build or form friendships outside the children in order to do more things socially.
• [I wanted] to provide [my] son with an opportunity to interact and play with other children of a similar age to him.
• [I] wanted to connect with other people … at home during the day the same as me.
• [It is] nice to get back to that village lifestyle where you're all in a community and you've all got kids together.
Motivated as a way to **feel better about oneself**
• [Interacting with others online is] useful as it makes you feel good you're not the only one with that problem, so you feel "Okay, there's someone else that experiences the same."
• [On the rock music fan site,] you're all just there to appreciate the same band or whatever and have all your little subconversations.
Motivated to obtain **support and information**
• I wanted that community 'cause I was worried about being a first-time mum and being in an area where I couldn't call someone in five minutes to come over and help or if I had an emergency. That, for me, was probably the biggest reason for joining.
• [I was the] first of friends to get pregnant, [and I] needed information and advice.

- [I am a member in order] to find answers [in blogs] to specific questions related to medical issues with kids.

A need to have **fun /be entertained**

- [Halo] was just a game that I played, and I liked playing what was called the online multiplayer version, which was 16 people in every game. It was just more exciting and different than the actual computer game because you could comment and talk and write messages and the whole bit … it was just a bit of fun.
- It's all about enjoying myself, for myself, and it's not going to affect anyone else whether I participate [in an online community] or not or how heavily I participate.

For the purpose of this research, I have adopted the approach that to fully explain why people participate in communities (as research question 1 asks), it is appropriate to consider the accounts of both the needs and motivations of field study members for analysis.

5.3 Why Seek to Be Part of a Community

With the objective of answering the research question of *why* people participate, combined empirical evidence about needs and motivations provides a comprehensive picture of why people participate face-to-face and online. In the sections that follow, I present the results from my analysis of needs and motivations. This analysis uncovers insights into what community participation means for research participants and helps understand their drivers for participating in a way that is firmly grounded in empirical data.

As exemplified in the quotes in Tables 11 and 12, participants explained why they seek to be involved in parenting communities. Accounts of involvement in community life in a wider sense (i.e., not related to parenting) are also important in order to understand why individuals seek to be part of these communities. The following sections (5.3.1 to 5.3.5) present evidence of the core reasons that emerged from analysis: needs for (1) well-being, (2) information sharing, (3) autonomy, (4) social contact, and (5) entertainment. The coding process used to derive these categories of needs and motivations from field study data is described in detail in the previous chapter (Chapter 4, "Research Methodology"). This section explains the five reasons for participating in communities using empirical evidence.

5.3.1 Well-Being

Data reveals that as parents, field study members want to safeguard and enhance their life quality on both physical and emotional levels by connecting with and interacting with other parents in

the same situation. Their needs for happiness and satisfaction with life centre upon having people that can provide support, help, and encouragement. Collectively, life satisfaction, happiness, and health constitute, for field study members, what can be regarded cognitively as a state of general well-being. Table 13 contains some of the more illustrative stories conveying individual needs to protect personal well-being at both emotional and physical levels through community participation. Needs for well-being are expressed at many different levels. The classification of needs illuminates four primary drivers underlying people's motivations to participate in communities, indicated as subheadings in Table 13.

Table 13. Instances and Accounts of Needs for Well-Being
EVIDENCE OF NEEDS FOR **WELL-BEING**
Well-being relates to maintaining good emotional health and positive self-esteem, having the ability to obtain support however sensitive the issue, looking after practical needs, and being concerned for the safety and happiness of self and others.
Need to maintain good **emotional health and positive self-esteem** • You're really using that time [interacting in an online forum] to lean on each other and get a bit of support and to feel like, you know, you're doing a good job and not just struggling on. • [Posting a comment gives me] the ability to vent and to rant without feeling like somebody's going to find out who you are … I remember when Marko [husband] got done for DUI for the third time when I was pregnant. I remember going on there [online parenting forum], and I was just, like, this massive long vent about what an idiot he was. Need to look after **practical issues** • Poppy [my daughter] had an issue with wind, and I went onto the blog to see what other people had done to help remedy that or any tips for home remedies or stuff like that. • [Online parenting forum allows me] to find information from local mums, for example, about speech pathologist, paediatrician, GP, hairdresser, schools, etc.. Need to **obtain support** • You do often see a lot of people rallying together on the [parenting] forums, and I've read things before about women meeting up and, you know, helping each other through and whatever else, especially on, sort of, particular [parenting] forums or particular parts of those forums that deal with miscarriages and dealing with kids with special needs and solo fathers. • Anonymity [online] reduces the significance of judgement—it's not your real friends judging you. You don't have to deal with reactions, facial expressions, so you can say what you like, talk about anything [in the forum] (e.g., private, or controversial issues). Concern for the **safety and happiness** of self and others

- In some cases where someone has said something [in an online forum] that gives cause for alarm, other members (who know that member) will post comments to the wider [online] community, saying "not to worry" and that they will ensure the person gets help.
- Being with a child, that's the best thing, and you can be happy about it. But then I wasn't feeling happy, and I was, like, down. But when I saw [in online parenting communities] the other mums were pretty relaxed, I was okay.

Well-being is an established concept in literature, particularly prevalent in the context of mental health, and it reflects a state of being happy, free of illness, content, and satisfied with one's life (cf. Andrews and Withey, 1976; Frey and Stutzer, 2002; Ryff and Keyes, 1995). While it is thought that there is no consensus on a singular definition of *well-being*, it includes "the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfilment and positive functioning" (CDC, 2013 p. 1). Decomposing well-being into its constituent elements provides a basis upon which to analyse data in a way that reveals which dimensions are being targeted by particular accounts of needs for community participation.[11]

- Example of a state of being or doing well in life:
  - Connecting to another mother who is also constrained by a child's daily sleep routine, which keeps her at home more than she would like, makes one field study member feel that she is not alone, is doing okay, and is doing the same as her peers.

- Example of happiness, health, and prosperity:
  - Reaching out to friends via an online update about having made pancakes was cited as a way to improve one field study member's state of happiness at a time she felt lonely.
  - Partaking in day-to-day gossip and sharing words of encouragement constitute happy interactions with friends and family for two field study members.

- Example of moral or physical welfare (of a person or community):
  - The father who needs information about his son's fever reaches out to another parent online for advice on how to help treat his son.
  - Locating loved ones in the aftermath of a natural disaster when other communication channels were not working allowed one field study member to secure information about the safety and welfare of those she cared about.

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[11] The field study members from whom these accounts originated are introduced later in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, when their experiences with participating are analysed.

- Example of a satisfactory condition (of a thing):
  - One field study member's cleaning chores seem to pass more quickly when she immerses herself in online chats at the same time. Connecting to or participating in community creates the perception that her chore was completed more swiftly.

Key authors (e.g. Andrews and Withey, 1976; Frey and Stutzer, 2002; Ryff and Keyes, 1995) define *well-being* along several different dimensions. Translating field study members' accounts of their reasons for seeking community involvement using these definitions contributes to a holistic understanding of why they participate. For instance, illustrating the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment and happiness), mother of one Madhu wants to share "not just the bad things. It could be the good things, sharing the joys of being a parent and them listening … that's a good feeling." The absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression and anxiety) is a desired state for Olivia, a sufferer of postnatal depression who often copes alone with two preschoolers whilst running her own home-based business. Olivia likes to know there is "someone making sure I am okay." Similarly, hands-on father of two Neil seeks to connect with other parents "to alleviate our stress as parents by asking other parents about their experiences with, for example, a baby having high fevers all the time." Satisfaction with life matters greatly for Fiona, a stay-at-home mother of two with a successful corporate background and a rich social life prior to children, who describes a need "to be included by other mums." Positive functioning is an important element of well-being for Anya: "[I need] a wider circle of friends to meet up with for adult company. It's important for my mental health!"

Analysis illuminates different levels at which needs for well-being are achieved, based on empirical evidence from the accounts of field study members. This evidence helps to explain why the pursuit of involvement in a community is also the pursuit of happiness and health for some people. Community participation is motivated by a desire for well-being. Data, thus, offers important insights into emotional and physical drivers for participation.

5.3.2 Sharing Information

Data reveals that the sharing of information is a large part of the reason why people seek to connect with communities of other parents. Field study members describe their experiences of sharing different types of information in face-to-face and online community settings. Generally, they seek to connect with other parents either to externalise details about their children (e.g., developmental milestones or health conditions), to talk about their partners and/or themselves, or to obtain information or advice about a particular parenting issue. Table 14 presents findings revealing the information-sharing motivations driving field study members to find community.

Table 14. Instances and Accounts of Needs for Information Sharing
EVIDENCE OF NEEDS FOR **INFORMATION SHARING**
Information sharing relates to the broadcasting of details of everyday life; externalising thoughts/emotions; an outlet to voice concerns/opinions; an environment to share experiences, obtain practical information relating to parenting issues, or consult the wisdom of the masses; and the capability for fast and widespread dissemination of news/events.
Broadcast details of everyday life • I want to know what people are doing. • [I joined Facebook] to post photos and updates of what we are doing. • I think the posting things [on social media] is a status thing: "I'm out, and I'm enjoying myself." • Facebook is purely just to communicate and to see what people are doing … a lot of it is their everyday lives. **Externalise thoughts or emotions** • [I post comments online such as] "Oh, what to do today … ?" • Because I found it very interesting to know your friends' opinions or situation by seeing their pictures or their statuses, and I thought it quite interesting for them to share my feelings or status. • [Bub Hub][12] has vent threads, where people come and express their emotions and feelings, happiness, sorrow, everything they have from day to day, and to complain about children. **Voice concerns or opinions** • [You can] say what you like, spit it all out, be inflammatory [when posting anonymous comments]. • Anonymity [online] helps me to be able to say exactly what I want without being known. • [In online parenting communities, you see] more extreme and opinionated views. [People are] ripping each other to shreds … [I] can't believe people have those views.

[12] The Bub Hub is an Australian website on pregnancy, baby, and parenting. (http://www.bubhub.com.au/index.php).

Table 14. Instances and Accounts of Needs for Information Sharing
EVIDENCE OF NEEDS FOR **INFORMATION SHARING**
Share experiences and obtain practical information • [Quote from online dialogue] "Hi Guys, Adam[13] has really bad conjunctivitis. Anyone got any tips for giving him eye drops (other than putting him in a head-lock and prising his eye-lids open, cos that aint really working) Thx Norma" • [Response posted] Poor Adam! No tips sorry. I hope it clears away soon. Maybe 5 mins after you try to do the drops, after he's calmed down, saturate a cotton bud with drops and just wipe if over his eyes so that by the second go with the cotton bud, he gets a full dose??? Good luck X • [I participate in online community forums] to read what others have said, to help others by answering their questions (for example, I have a lot of expertise with children's eye care, so I will answer people's questions on eye issues). **Fast and widespread dissemination of news and/or events** • People who are on Facebook get information faster, quicker. So when I found out Kiara [my daughter] was a girl at my 20-week scan, I went on Facebook and said "Oh, it's a girl." I've got all my family on Facebook. That's my way of telling them. 'Cause there's too many people … to call. • When he [son] was in hospital, I didn't have time to ring everyone and say, "By the way, I'm in hospital," and you don't want to do that at 9:00 a.m. and say "I'm in hospital" … I put it on Facebook! But then, in some ways, that is good because people know what's going on. experiences and obtain practical information

Empirical evidence has been grouped to show four themes in the reasons why field study members seek to connect with other parents for information-sharing purposes. Opinions are varied, some perceiving information sharing via social media to be a positive thing for reasons such as speed, breadth of audience that can be reached, and access to wide and varied opinions on parenting and other topics. Others believe that information shared online is of questionable trust, without the ability to identify the source of information because of online anonymity. Both sides of the argument come to an agreement on certain characteristics of sharing information online, such as the benefit of wisdom of the masses and input from many different sources.

[13] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of field study members, their children, and any references they have made to specifically named persons.

Information shared is widely varied, everything from everyday chit-chat to significant life events. In one instance, I heard how a mother posted online a text comment and an image of her daughter suffering from a variety of skin-related ailments. In our interview, mother of two Norma explained to me that it was not done with the intention of prompting concern or pity, although this was the sentiment most of her contacts, including her own mother overseas, commented with. Norma's real intention was to ensure her employer, who is her Facebook friend, would see the image and understand that it was better for her not to be in the office if there was a chance of spreading her daughter's condition to colleagues. Figure 8 shows an extract taken from the dialogue following from Norma's Facebook post.

Norma: My poor little girl has hand, foot and mouth, impetigo and thrush all at once. She is just one big infected scab!

From Granny Pat: seen the pic, poor wee sausage, didn't realise it was that bad :-((xxxx

Figure 8. Information Sharing on Facebook

Norma explained,

> The reason I did that [posted a photograph of daughter with skin condition] … I'm off work, and I'm connected to my bosses through Facebook, and I wanted them to see how bad she [my daughter] was because they were like "Do you think you'll be back at work?" and all the rest of it. So it was kind of for that reason that I did it …
>
> I was supposed to go back to work on the Friday, and they said, "Don't come in because if you've been around her, you might be contagious, and we don't want it!" Without Facebook, that wouldn't have happened because they wouldn't have seen the picture. I would have had to have gone into work with my phone and said "Look how bad she [my daughter] is" for them to go "Oh my god, you shouldn't be here." But by then, it's too late—you're already there.

The four underlying drivers explaining motivations to share information are useful for understanding participation in online communities. All instances refer to the sharing of information between an individual and other individuals within their community, either face-to-face or online. The information is largely related to either a parenting topic or to the social life of the individuals interacting. Empirical evidence demonstrates that the need for parenting information is largely fulfilled by participating in online communities of other parents, whilst the needs for externalising thoughts or broadcasting information about where an individual is at any given moment tend to be met by memberships in social networking sites such as Facebook. To illustrate, consider the following examples:

- In broadcasting the details of everyday life, for instance, Leonie, a mother of two in her late twenties, likes to "share photos and stories of what the kids are doing."
- Externalising thoughts or emotions is exemplified through the story of an iPhone being used to photograph and broadcast a social occasion via social media and also through the account of a couple on a romantic date revealing where they are and what they are doing via social media.
- Having an outlet to voice concerns or opinions is important for some individuals who believe that you can "say what you like," "spit it all out," and be "inflammatory" when voicing your opinions in online forums (protected by anonymity).
- An environment to share experiences, obtain practical information relating to parenting issues, or consult the wisdom of the masses is a motivation for Neil, a hands-on father of two in his early forties introduced earlier, in connecting with other parents. He describes this is so he can "chat about my kid's development compared to other kids of a similar age."
- Having the capability for fast and widespread dissemination of news and events was illustrated well in Fiona's account of announcing her son's cancelled christening ceremony on Facebook.

5.3.3 Autonomy

The need for autonomy encapsulates what interviewees reflected upon in terms of their motivations to regain their (former) sense of independence and freedom after becoming a parent. Themes uncovered from data analysis that have been grouped together under the umbrella term of *autonomy* relate largely to a perceived freedom from one's role as a stay-at-home mother, independence outside one's day-to-day family routine, and freedom of speech—protected largely from repercussion by anonymity. Table 15 presents findings from the analysis revealing the needs for autonomy to drive field study members to seek community.

Table 15. Instances and Accounts of Needs for Autonomy
EVIDENCE OF NEEDS FOR **AUTONOMY**
Autonomy relates to escapism from everyday life and the role as a stay-at-home carer, freedom of speech, and a sense of connectivity to the world outside your day-to-day routine as a parent.
Escapism from everyday life • [I want] to overcome the isolation of being a stay-at-home mum with no Sydney-based friends with kids. • Before we [had children,] we went out a lot … we had an amazing single life. I studied part-time, and he worked mostly from home, and so we just had that real social butterfly type of life … oh, it was fabulous! I miss it. • It's [online community is] a bit of a fake world, isn't it? You can really be anybody, and you can post [to an online forum], or you could put a photo of a model and say, "Oh look, this is me." **Freedom of speech** • [Social media] is a useful environment for me to have when I need to get something off my chest. • [I participate online] to vent and to rant without feeling like somebody's going to find out who you are … you can walk past someone in the street, and they won't know it's you. • In person, of course, you will complain. But you have to know the limits. You cannot come and complain for hours and hours. In a vent thread on a forum, you can keep going on and on, complaining, and people will respond to you … Even if it's close friends, no one wants someone who complains for days and hours—it's a bit different face-to-face. • There's lots of things that I would write about—if it was anonymous. But it's not 'cause she's there [sister-in-law joined the same online community]. Look, I haven't posted that I'm pregnant. I would have by now, but I haven't because there's a member of my family there. A sense of **connectivity** to the world **outside your day-to-day routine** as a parent • Part of me wants to be, like, I was in a group with a lot of mates, like, a lot of people, and part of me still wants to be there. But I can see what they do, and I can understand why they do it. But I can't understand. They've got families, and I'd far rather be with my family than using that time and money doing what they're doing. I'd rather be with my kids than possibly wasting money. Like I see it as a waste what they're doing, but I'm still intrigued to know what I could be doing!

Autonomy, in the context of this research, relates to three main areas, as illustrated in the themes emerging from data in Table 15. These core themes are the following:

- Escapism from everyday life and role as a stay-at-home carer

- Freedom from cultural restrictions
- A sense of connectivity to the world outside your day-to-day routine as a parent.

Data contains rich accounts of seeking community that can be located in one of these three main areas. For example, Sophie, a busy mother of two and full-time charity volunteer, describes how, whilst in the physical company of another mum and with the children playing, her "mum" friend was using social media to chat with "real" friends, much to Sophie's disappointment and frustration. However, as she explained to me, Sophie felt that it allowed the other mother to escape from a mother and baby situation that she would rather not be in at that moment. Another field study member told me that she demonstrates her need for autonomy by seeking to escape from her everyday life and to reconnect to a world outside her family unit. She describes wanting to connect with others "to do things for myself which aren't child related." Similarly, schoolteacher and mother of one Natalie described the importance of her seeing "friends I had before having my son." In terms of freedom of speech, several accounts were given of field study members seeking the safety of an online community in which to vent about sensitive issues such as relationship difficulties or private matters protected by the anonymity of using an alias. Hannah, a mother of two whose husband travels interstate regularly for work, referred to needing to have some "space to rant and vent without repercussion." Other field study members commented on the power that comes with exercising the right to autonomy through freedom of speech, particularly where freedom of speech is facilitated by anonymous participation in an online community.

An emerging theme is that the ways in which the need for autonomy are expressed through individual instances of seeking community are numerous and diverse. Social media is appropriated to a large degree in achieving community participation. According to data, this is because of the ability to participate anonymously, a position less achievable in a face-to-face community. Understanding the need for autonomy and how this drives members of online parenting communities in particular is important because it reveals another dimension of the overall pursuit of explanation as to why people seek to participate.

5.3.4 Social Contact

Social contact emerged as a driver for seeking to connect with other new parents. Accounts from field study members described experiencing needs for solidarity and camaraderie with other parents and a desire simply to know that they are not alone in the pursuit of raising children. These needs for interaction in a social context are achieved in the pursuit of community involvement both in face-to-face community settings and in online community settings where these individuals

can meet and interact with other parents. Table 16 contains a sample of the data relating to these needs.

Table 16. Instances and Accounts of Needs for Social Contact
EVIDENCE OF NEEDS FOR **SOCIAL CONTACT**
Social contact relates to a need to be always on, always connected, and always available; to a fear of missing out on news or events in other people's lives; to a need to be perceived as having a lot of friends; and to a sense of solidarity from being connected to others in the same life situation.
A need to be always on, always connected, and always available • You want to. It's always you can't escape it. It's just always there, and people want to be [online]. • I go to dinner, and I keep things in my pocket. The first thing everyone does now is put their phone on the table … and one beeps. "Oh, it's mine!" and everybody checks. A fear of missing out, a need to know what is happening in general in the world and amongst contacts • I can understand why people use it all the time. It's like an addiction. You have to know, you want to be part of everybody's business, and that's what Facebook's like. If you're friends with people and they post "Oh, I had a wild weekend. Check my pics out" and you're friends with them, you can check out their photos and see what kind of life are they living. A need to be connected to the world outside in terms of news or events in other people's lives • It's like you may be a bit conservative and sitting at home and drinking a cup of tea while they're out partying, but you still feel young, and you can look back at the days and think, "Oh, I used to do that when I was young." • At the start, we used it a fair bit when we were communicating with others when we went travelling. It was a good tool to communicate with others. A sense of solidarity from being connected to others in the same life situation • It [use of Facebook] increased initially after [my son] was born, during the first year, because I think the whole idea of being connected to people mattered more. • [Within the maternal online forums,] there were names that I recognized from Wedding Central, so there were people that "I knew" [hands gesture air quotes], people who I had been having online conversations with for my wedding lead-up, and they were all there too. So it's almost like names that you recognize.

Seeking to participate in community in order to fulfil needs for social contact emerges from data as being driven by a number of factors. For example, grouping data into related needs reveals the following:

- A need to be always on, always connected, and always available (e.g., as illustrated in accounts from Neil and Andrew of friends bringing their BlackBerrys or iPhones to the dinner table or one of the mothers who describes her need to always have someone accessible to "talk to about what we're doing and how things are going at home and have kind of a bit of—how can I say—a whinge about things?")
- A fear of missing out, needing to know what is happening in general in the world and amongst contacts (e.g., Andrew's friends sharing a social occasion in the pub with him but demonstrating their need to be connected to somewhere else through their use of technology to communicate at the same time while chatting with friends gathered together)
- A need to be connected to the world outside in terms of news or events in other people's lives (e.g., in the case of stay-at-home mother of two Fiona, who spoke of her need "to interact outside home and the kids")
- The need to be perceived as having a lot of friends. A field study member spoke of the ability to locate and reconnect with old friends, former colleagues that you would not otherwise be able to find. She referred to the power of electronic communication channels to remove the awkwardness of making initial contact with someone from your past.
- A sense of solidarity from being connected to others in the same life situation. Full-time working mother of one Christina revealed how important it is for her "to build a community rather than be in the house by myself." Single mother of one daughter Heidi seeks "child-related social contact." Similarly, musician and mother of one daughter Theresa looks for ways to provide "socialisation for my child."

Outgoing mother of two Isabel reflected that social contact is difficult when you live "an insular day where it's difficult to get out of the house in the small window of time between the kids' sleeps." She described her own experiences of feeling disconnected from the lives of some of the friends and work colleagues she had prior to having children. She explains a feeling of being "out of the loop" and removed from a work situation where she could converse and interact during the day with colleagues, contributing to her serious need now for social contact.

The significance of understanding this need for social contact is that it identifies a group for whom the forced sense of isolation and being cut off from friends and peers when one's life changes to becoming a stay-at-home parent is a strong motivator to seek community involvement. Social media has afforded this group new possibilities for social contact.

5.3.5 Entertainment

Finally, a theme emerged from seeking to have fun both inside and outside one's role as a parent. Individuals described wanting to spend time with other like-minded people (other parents, friends without children, family), doing social activities like dining out, going to the movies, exercising, and shopping. Table 17 contains a sample of the data illustrating this.

Table 17. Instances and Accounts of Needs for Entertainment
EVIDENCE OF NEEDS FOR **ENTERTAINMENT**
Entertainment encapsulates having a source of social stimulation outside everyday roles as a parent, a way to feel connected to social events in the lives of friends/contacts, and a way to overcome being physically confined to responsibilities for care of a child by getting involved in online dialogue, posting comments, and joining in debates, discussions, and gossip.
Provide **amusement or enjoyment** • The mother's group do that too. Someone'll post "Oh, we're meeting at the park this morning if anyone wants to come along." • I find the dialogues I get on Facebook are more about like when it's a funny comment that's been posted, like when one of my mates says something, and someone bites back, and you throw in another comment. • I've started going on Twitter to see what other people are saying. People like Ellen DeGeneres … ! Activity to **entertain** • I post messages within my own group online in a very confined way. It's nothing about anything you're doing or anything like that. It's all purely about your team. It's nothing personal about having a coffee or something stupid. It's pretty narrow, as far as the range of topics goes. • [I participate to] arrange playdates for kids and mums to mix. A source of **social stimulation** outside one's everyday role as a parent • [Receiving a] new message from a group excites you. • [Following updates on social networking sites,] you felt good knowing what was happening with other people's life. You're not just you. You know what's up … someone's travelling, someone's going home … I think it breaks you from that being a parent mode. A way to feel **connected to** social events in the **lives of friends** and other contacts • The girls I train with, somebody'll maybe post, "We're having an extra training session at the … stairs, if anyone wants to join us."

Empirical data demonstrates that field study members seek community in order to gain amusement or enjoyment. For example, Charlotte and Hannah, both Facebook fanatics and active members of online parenting communities spoke of enjoying the to-and-fro of responding to comments and receiving yet more comments in response to their responses. Both women admitted that these dialogues are often simply "gossip" or "chitchat" with no substantive content. Equally, however, this dialogue provides a source of entertainment in the sense that it makes them both "feel good" when they can, for instance, "share words of encouragement" or "have a laugh" at the exchanges made.

To a lesser extent, there was also evidence of participation in community constituting an activity to entertain others. For example, stay-at-home mother of two Hannah's accounts of occasions when she had deliberately posted inflammatory comments pertaining to topical issues in online chat forums. Hannah, in her mid-twenties, recalled posting some provocative comments about the assessment of eligibility for the Australian government's former baby bonus. She explained that she made these comments whilst signed into the forum using her anonymous alias. Hannah explained that she felt "safe" using the alias in that her words would incite some heated debate without fear of repercussion to her anywhere other than within that online community. Entertainment, for Hannah, comes in the form of stimulating debate, challenging other people's opinions, and feeling a sense of empowerment to express her feelings and make her points openly for others to agree or disagree on.

On the basis of grouping related data, the act of seeking entertainment from participating in a community can be defined as an occasion of seeking the following:

- A source of social stimulation outside one's everyday role as a parent and to overcome being physically confined to one's responsibilities for a young child by getting involved in online dialogue, posting comments, and joining in debates, discussions, and gossip
- A way to feel connected to social events in the lives of friends and other contacts

The need for enjoyment and entertainment was evident across the field, expressed at different levels, and articulated in different ways. For some, the need to have fun was described as a desire to create social settings in which "the adults can have a coffee and a chat whilst the kids play." For others, the need for entertainment had more depth, members describing to me their desires for quality social time spent in the company of long-term friends in intimate gatherings. Schoolteacher Natalie says that she likes to share a "walk and chat with friends" and to have a "shopping buddy."

The context in which entertainment is sought also varies across the group, some seeking entertainment for themselves and their children in family-oriented activities. For these people, the

appropriation of social media technology enables the making and managing of social arrangements. For others, the need for entertainment is more at the individual level. Some members of the field study expressed their need to "escape" from their day-to-day situation as a parent into an online world of gossip, celebrity news, or random information exchange with a broad-reaching group of contacts—some known, many unknown.

5.4 The Value of Community Membership

The preceding sections presented empirical data illustrating the specific reasons given by interviewees as to *why they seek to be part of a community*. This section builds the argument that, based on empirical data, needs go beyond being just desires and are actually realised in the finding of community. Presented are different accounts of the outcome(s) of community involvement in terms of the perceived benefits accruing to a participant when he/she finds community and fulfils the needs for well-being, information sharing, autonomy, social contact, or entertainment. Understanding the value creation from community participation is an important part of making sense of why people participate. It further answers the research question of why participation occurs and thus contributes towards a more fully developed explanation from a dual perspective based on both reasons for and benefits of participating in communities. As demonstrated in section 5.4.1, benefits are found to be realised from participation in face-to-face parenting communities in the form of personal value from an improved sense of belonging, an increased feeling of self-worth, and socialisation for both parent and child. Benefits also accrue from participation in online parenting communities in the forms of enhanced ability to connect with like-minded people, giving access to a specific group of people because of a defined shared characteristic (e.g., pregnancy). These benefits are presented and discuss in section 5.4.2. In addition, there are benefits of online community participation in general, that are not related to parenting. These are presented in section 5.4.3 and relate, predominantly to the creation of opportunities to obtain information, seek advice, have social contact, and build new friendships.

5.4.1 The Benefits of Face-to-Face Parenting Communities

Data reveals widely varied benefits for field study members resulting from their involvement with a face-to-face parenting group.[14] In general, the group reported that participating holds significant personal value in their social lives. Amongst the positive outcomes cited was the belief that it is an opportunity to have "coffee and adult chat for me," and it is also a reassurance that "there is

[14] Remember that the participants in the field study are all part of an actual parenting group.

someone available to talk or listen on the end of the phone." On a deeper level, it creates for some a "sense of worth" to interact with other parents as it provides an environment in which to "enjoy the companionship and camaraderie." Other comments such as "I really like it. I felt more positive. It was a very positive environment … you look forward to it because you want to have adult talk, I guess" reflect the intrinsic value of membership on an emotional level. Some accounts spoke of the close friendships that have been formed within other parenting groups they are also part of. One field study member described how through her child's day care she has "met five other mums with kids who I meet up with weekly for coffee and a playdate"[15] and how she has "formed friendships with couples who we socialise with—girls only, couples, and families." This sentiment was echoed in the comment that for one of the girls, the "deep friendships which have formed are important."

Not only do parents see the benefits for themselves, but several of the mothers described seeing value for their children too. One field study member described the importance of "socialisation for my daughter" and spoke of the "fulfilment seeing my daughter play with other kids." Another said,

> The kids love it [having playdates] 'cause they run wild and play with each other. So they get that interaction from different children, and they're all the same age. So it's nice 'cause some of them aren't in day care. Some of them are. So it's nice, different.

It is not just mothers or children who benefit from face-to-face interaction within parenting groups. The fathers in the group felt they obtain value from meeting other fathers and spending time with other families also. Neil spoke of the opportunity for social contact with other parents, allowing him to "chat with other blokes." He felt it had created "opportunities to entertain" for birthdays and scheduled group catch-ups. Ali spoke of the opportunities that being part of a parenting community has created for doing "social activities together." He has been on "trips around Australia" with some of the other families in the group and feels that the increased sociability has had good effects for both him and his wife, along with their son. He said, "[My] wife is more satisfied having a wider network of friends—she is a very social person. We are more happy than before."

[15] *Playdate* is a term used to describe an occasion when one or both parents meet up with at least one other parent to provide their children with an opportunity to play together whilst the parents spend some time socially interacting, often over coffee in a playground.

5.4.2 The Benefits of Online Parenting Communities

In online communities where people are connected through a shared interest, the primary value perceived is the ability to connect with like-minded people, giving access to a specific group of people because of a defined shared characteristic (e.g., pregnancy). For instance, one field study member explained,

> [Participation] online gives you access to a community of people who share a common interest with you that your immediate face-to-face contacts do not share (for example, only a handful of friends had babies around the same time as us, so I would go online to read forums, etc., to see what others were experiencing when I was pregnant).

Also reported is the ability to transform online contacts into actual physical meetings, resulting in, for some field study members, extending their circle of friends and connecting them to other people simultaneously going through the same experience of pregnancy and parenthood. Hannah, social media fanatic and stay-at-home mother of two, explained,

> I've met probably about ten of them [members from the online community]. [For example, one member] sent me a private message and said, "I know you went to this obstetrician." And we just started talking and realized we lived near each other. And she'd had her son, and he was walking. So two years later, we caught up and had a coffee, and we see each other semi regularly.

People seek community for many reasons, as discussed earlier in this chapter. There are specific reasons for seeking community online *over* face-to-face community. Interestingly, field study members explain that their involvement in online parenting forums is initially largely for information-gathering purposes, and over time, social interaction starts to build. For instance, one mother uses online parenting blogs "to get answers to pregnancy and baby issues and problems and worries and all sorts of things." She said it made her feel good that "I wasn't the only one with issues or worries." Considering Hannah's viewpoint as a social media and online community advocate, she further supported this opinion with her comment that online parenting forums provide an "outlet to go and talk to people about what's a normal symptom, what's a normal sign, what's a normal scan."

5.4.3 The Benefits of Online Communities (Nonparenting Related)

Hannah spoke effusively of the value of online community involvement for the opportunities it gives her to obtain information, seek advice, have social contact, and build new friendships. She spoke of her participation in a wedding-related online community, saying,

> I loved it. I was a really active member, and I liked the—I loved the wedding forum in particular … I asked about photographers … there's a lot of talk about photographers on the forum … but all sorts of things, wedding rings, shoes … I asked a lot of questions, gave a lot of answers, and just the general chitchat as well, and talking about totally unrelated things as well.

Neil, who dismisses the value of participating in an online community for him personally, did talk in general terms about social networking sites, explaining,

> I do see the value in them [social networking sites] for specific reasons, and I can understand why people use them if they're in certain situations, like if they're working in a foreign country and they want to keep tabs on people or just keep communicating. It's an easy way of doing that type of thing.

Further supporting this, another field study member felt that the benefit is in the ability for online community involvement to give her "more friends and networking. It gives you more contacts." I also heard how one mother's personal life has benefited from her and her husband's participation in an online community that matches potential "friends" in a similar way to how online dating works.

> I did meet quite a few people actually who I'm still in touch with. Some of our closest friends we actually met through there [online "friend" introduction site].

An interesting point was also raised that it is not necessarily an either-or situation. There is potential value from both face-to-face and online communities, as illustrated in this data excerpt:

> I definitely see social media as an extra form of communication rather than a replacement. I certainly still need my face-to-face catch-ups with friends/family, but I find that our conversations are no longer a download of what have I been doing (because they already know from Facebook), and we tend to talk about more things we have in common or things happening in media or deeper topics like relationships, etc.

A majority of field study members spoke about Facebook when asked about their participation in any online communities that were not specifically related to parenting. To mention one of the benefits from participation in the Facebook community that stands out, Sophie explained that interaction within the Facebook community "provides a mechanism to connect with others when you are isolated at home with a young child … I know I am not alone."

5.5 Summary of Reasons for and Benefits of Participating

In summary, the reasons for participating in communities face-to-face, online, or both are varied in different contexts and at different times. The value of participating in either or both of these community settings is widely mixed, ranging from access to specific information about an issue or condition to actually meeting new people and forming new friendships. Broadly speaking, participating in *parenting* communities online is at the information end of the spectrum, often for reasons such as enquiring from other parents about their experience(s) with a particular childhood development topic. Information is a supplement to what can be obtained from support networks such as health professionals, family members, or friends. At the other end of the spectrum are those who describe how contacts initially introduced through an online community have become close friends, people with whom they have a relationship or friendship in a face-to-face context, not just online. A diverse range of other scenarios between these two poles was captured, including the creation of relationships that only ever exist through online interaction: in Hannah's case, for example, where this relationship exists between parties who never truly reveal their identities to each other or to anyone else in the online community. This is a point of differentiation for field study members in how they participate with other parents face-to-face versus online, often using an alias. There is also evidence of relationships formed in face-to-face community settings that have adopted a dual sphere of interaction, some face-to-face contact and some online contact simultaneously. An example is the case of Olivia, who describes online interactions as another form of communication, not a replacement for face-to-face interaction (and by this, I also refer to voice contact made by telephone).

Understanding the reasons why field study members seek community is important for explaining the different mechanisms by which these same individuals achieve participation and fulfil their needs. It is also important from the perspective of identifying the role of technology in the fulfilment of needs for community. Furthermore, it is only by understanding participation that we can begin to understand and explain the reasons why individuals *do not participate* in communities, as addressed in later chapters.

This chapter has been concerned primarily with understanding *why* field study members participate in communities. Having an understanding of the perceived value of community participation further explains why people participate, alongside empirical evidence revealing individual needs and motivations for participating. Insights into why people participate contribute towards answering the first research question of *how and why people participate*. A second part of the question involves interpreting from field study members' accounts themes that explain the ways in which they actually participate online, which is *how* they participate. This is addressed

in an upcoming analysis in Chapters 6 and 7. The objective of subsequent analysis is to understand how each need identified is fulfilled in different ways through different modes of participating or different dimensions of what it means to participate in community.

Chapter 6

Communicating Differently in the Digital Age

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explains what is revealed about *how* individuals participate in communities by communicating differently. Particularly evident from the analysis of accounts from and observations of field study members is the finding that participation manifests in specific ways. In this chapter, I present data revealing insights into how people communicate in a relationship mediated by social media compared with how they interact with friends, family, or other contacts in face-to-face contexts. Analysis of data shows that electronic communication alters the way in which people communicate, what they communicate, and when they communicate it. Communication becomes less of an observable and separatist exchange between two or more parties mediated by some electronic mechanism, and more about ongoing and entangled relationships between people, the devices they use to communicate and the behaviour of these people in enacting communicative actions within a technology-enabled assemblage.

First, in section 6.2, an integrated view of data and analysis is presented. Section 6.3 presents conclusions drawn from empirical data that create a platform from which to explain changes enabled by digital technology in *what* is communicated, *when* it is communicated, and *where* it is communicated in the context of participation in online communities. Conclusions are drawn about how communicating in a different way, in all three of its dimensions (changes in *what*, *when*, and *where* you communicate), fulfils (or does not fulfil) the needs of an individual participating in a community. Developed in Chapter 5, a reminder here of these needs (i.e., well-being, information sharing, social contact, autonomy, and entertainment). Section 6.4 depicts graphically a hierarchical view of the changes found in what is communicated, when and where. This shows 26 categories into which findings about communicating differently are organised. Sections 6.5 to 6.7 present an in depth analysis of the changes in communication evident in the digital age. Section 6.5 articulates what is communicated differently, concentrating explanation on three categories of changes: sharing random pieces of information, sharing innermost thoughts and feelings, and posting forthright and blunt comments in online forums. Section 6.6 addresses the changes described by field study members in relation to when they communicate, and how this differs in a technology-mediated era. This section focuses on three changes to when people participate in a digital age: people describe feeling always on and being always available, people

communicate at times that suit them, and communication becomes instantaneous. Section 6.7 articulates findings relating to where communication occurs when it is enacted through social media, presenting differences in the sense of communicating in a public forum of unknown contacts and also in communicating to a broad audience of known contacts.

6.2 Integrative Perspective on Why/How People Participate

The integration of reasons driving community participation and the specific ways in which participation is achieved (as told by field study participants) is important to understand before progressing to a subsequent analysis. During an analysis of how individuals participate in community, I was looking for the most important or interesting themes to report by asking the same set of questions about each topic (e.g., why it is important, why I selected it, what it means, or what field study members might be feeling). I arrived upon two major themes representing how people participate in communities. I present an integrated view of findings and analyses of these themes in this chapter and subsequent chapter. This chapter focuses on empirical evidence of a phenomenon where members feel they are living their daily lives differently through online communications, resulting in alterations to their communicative practices in terms of what is communicated, when it is communicated, and where it is communicated. Chapter 7 discusses the phenomenon of socialising and how it changes in a digital age, where people can engage in more than one place at the same time (physically and mentally) via social media technology. Common to each of these themes in how people participate online is the appropriation of a social media–enabling technology.

Cross-referencing the five reasons for participating (from Chapter 5) with the two emerging themes explaining *how* people participate in communities facilitates the creation of a matrix with needs across the top and ways in which people participate down the left-hand side. See Table 18. All the relevant stories contained within the data have been assigned to one cell of the matrix, the cell that best encapsulates the field study member's reason for seeking community and the physical way in which they fulfil that desire to participate. Having the stories assigned to cells in this way allows the presentation of empirical accounts to report how particular relationships with technology allow the specific needs of individual members of the field to be met. The matrix and relation of needs to ways of participating are used to structure analysis and present results in this chapter and subsequently in Chapter 7.

Table 18. Matrix of Needs and Technology Appropriation

			NEEDS				
		WHY / HOW	[A] WELL-BEING	[B] INFORMATION SHARING	[C] AUTONOMY	[D] SOCIAL CONTACT	[E] ENTERTAINMENT
TECHNOLOGY APPROPRIATION	Theme 1	COMMUNICATING DIFFERENTLY[16] (Communicate in a different way)	• Words of encouragement (Hannah) • Day-to-day gossip (Fiona) • Externalising thoughts and feelings (Anya) • Venting (Fiona and Hannah) • Always available—mobile under pillow (Heidi); at dinner (Christina) • Compulsiveness and obsession (Andrew, Lizzy, Anya, and Hannah) • Venting to unknown contacts in public forums (Fiona and Anya) • Access to like-minded people in the same situation (Hannah)	• What's happening in other people's lives (Fiona) • People putting random minutae online (Hannah) • Editing written messages distorts communication (Hannah) • Always on (Sophie and Isabel) • Fear of missing out (Andrew) • Different perspectives from a wide network of friends (Norma)	• Put up a different face online (i.e., online persona) (Anya) • Connect to the world outside when kids are asleep (Sophie, Natalie, and Hannah)	• Making social arrangements (Fiona and Frances) • Otherwise wouldn't hear from certain people (Lisa) • Contributing to online debates (Hannah) • Looser arrangements because social media is easy to access at the last minute (Frances) • Always on—can't survive without it (Leonie) • Social pressure to respond to messages (Andrew and Christina) • Chat with other pregnant women (Julie) • Illusion of friendship (Fiona)	• Dip in and out of online communities (Andrew) • Deliberately inflammatory comments given anonymously (Hannah) • Always available—a new message from group excites you (Norma)

[16] Analysis of findings contained in this chapter: "Communicating Differently in the Digital Age"

Table 18. Matrix of Needs and Technology Appropriation

			NEEDS				
		WHY / HOW	[A] WELL-BEING	[B] INFORMATION SHARING	[C] AUTONOMY	[D] SOCIAL CONTACT	[E] ENTERTAINMENT
TECHNOLOGY APPROPRIATION	Theme 2	SOCIALISING DIFFERENTLY [17] (Engage in more than one place at the same time)	• Need for adult interaction when tied to the home with kids (Fiona) • Using time when attending to the child's activities to take care of physical needs (e.g., ordering groceries, keeping books for business, etc.) • Pass the time whilst cleaning (e.g., chat with friends) (Christina)	• Laptop at dinner table (Neil) • iPhones to take pics and post on FB—broadcasting where you are • Couple on a date night revealing where they are and what they are doing	• In physical company of another mother, with the children playing; using social media to chat "real" friends whilst "stuck" in mother and baby situation (Sophie)	• BlackBerrys at dinner table— (Neil) – "always available • iPhone on dinner table—fear of missing out, need to know (Andrew) • At a pub with mates all on phones—not "being in the present," mentally somewhere else, "always on" (Andrew) • Niece not only content to be in one conversation; needs phone to be in other conversations too (Isabel) • Need to connect outside the home (Fiona)	• Hannah texting during interview • Pass the time whilst on public transport—chat when there's no one you know sitting beside you ("escapism") • Mum at magic show party—need for adult conversation, but responsible for child, so has to be in the room ("escapism" via phone) • Other activities parents do on phones whilst accompanying the child to an activity (e.g., gym class ["escapism"])

[17] Analysis of findings contained in upcoming chapter: "Socialising Differently in the Digital Age"

6.3 Key Findings on How Individuals Communicate Online

Empirical evidence reveals that people are living in a different way because of technology's role in their everyday communications. Technology changes the social world by redefining established social concepts. For instance, data illustrates how the norms of communication are changing, with social arrangements becoming much more fluid and flexible. Similarly, data contains evidence of an expectation and assumption that the social world is always contactable, or "always on," because of the intimate relationship shared with one's mobile devices. Within this claim of living differently because of the role of technology in society, it becomes apparent from data that communication is an area of much change. Data clearly demonstrates that communicating online enables a person to live their life in a way that is different from how they would live / are living their life within their physical communities. Making sense of the data has required several iterations of in-depth analysis into narrative accounts of people doing something differently or doing a different thing via online communication.

Based on the diversity of themes arising from data, answering the question of *how* the changing nature of communications manifests in the context of participation in online communities requires looking at participation from three distinct perspectives. First, we can ascertain from data that the communication online is different from face-to-face communication. But *what* different things are being done through online communications that are not typically done face-to-face? Data also reveals how existing activities are done differently via online communications. The difference is subtle yet significant. One explains the changes in *what we do* in terms of additional or new activities online that we do not participate in through engagement in face-to-face communities. The other explains the changes to things we already do. Both seek to answer the question of how people perceive their different manner of communicating in a digital age. Second, also emerging from data is evidence of changes to *when* communication occurs online. Analysis reveals that in a digital age, the ability exists to communicate online at times that suit the user and at times that are different from when he/she could or would communicate in person or via a phone call per se. Analysis reveals a third dimension in that there is a change in the places where communication occurs online. Accounts of participation in online communications tell of the ability to select *where* you wish to communicate in terms of engaging in electronic dialogue with communities of unknown contacts, with communities of known friends, or directly to one particular friend's

online portal. Each of these three dimensions provides part of the answer to how participation online occurs.

6.4 Hierarchical Representation of Communication Changes

In Figure 9 I illustrate areas of changes in communication. Communicating in a different way means that field study members experience one or more of three distinct changes to how they communicate in their everyday lives. The right-hand side of the diagram (boxes in grey) shows how each of the three areas of changes to the way we communicate is decomposed into lower-level areas. Each lower-level area represents a change in communication providing detailed insights into the field study participants' experiences. To illustrate, consider the following examples:

1. The change in *what* you communicate online is evidenced by field study members' accounts of sharing random/superficial details.
2. The change in *when* you communicate online is evidenced by field study members' reports of being "always on" or responding "at a time that suits you."
3. The change in *where* you communicate is evidenced by field study members' identification of posting comments to "public forums of unknown contacts" or to "groups of contacts that you have defined."

In the sections that follow, empirical evidence is presented in more depth, based around this hierarchical view.

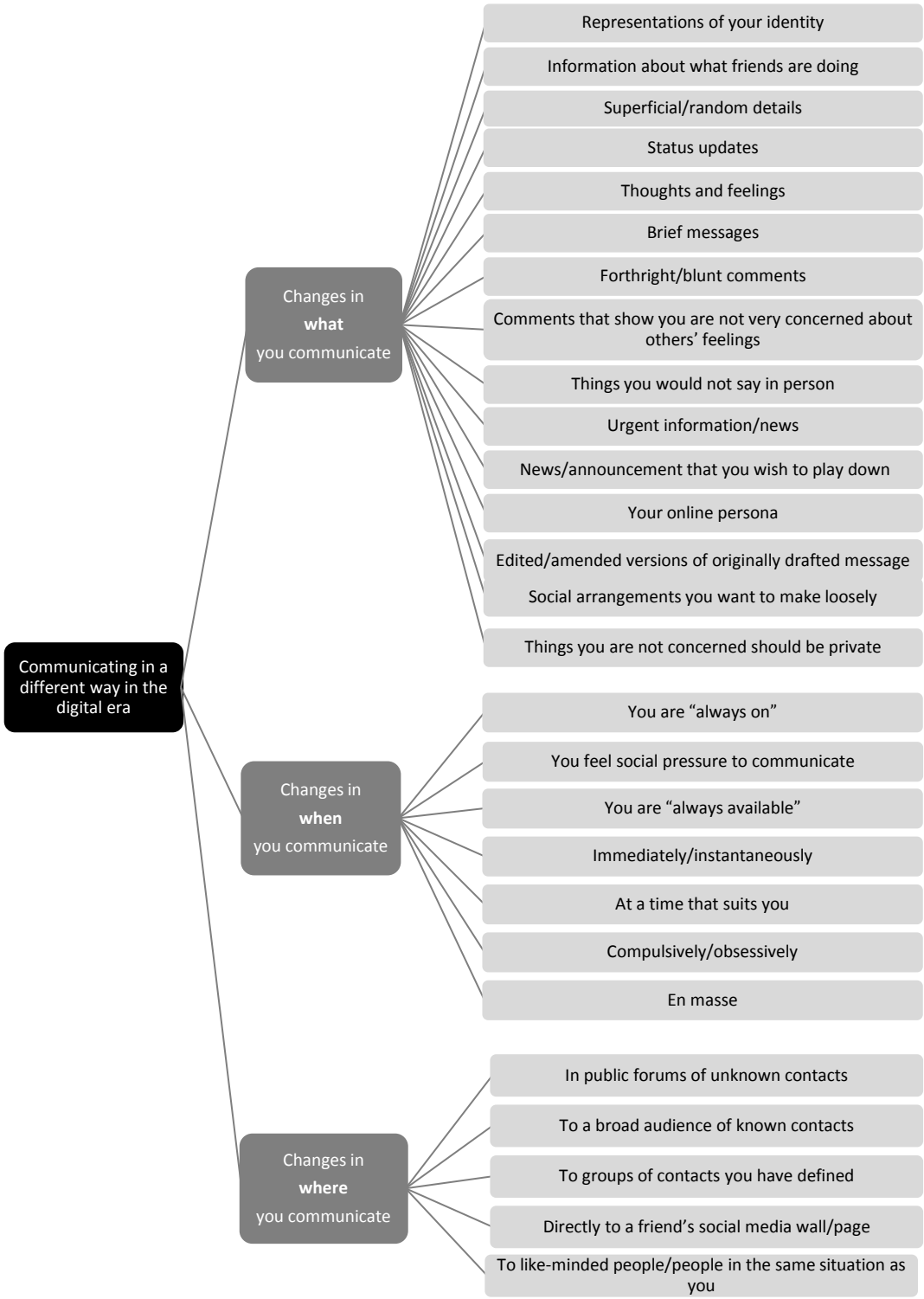

Figure 9. Areas of Changes in Communication (What, When, and Where)

6.5 What Is Communicated Differently?

Data reveals patterns in people's experiences of *what* is communicated online. Consider the following quote from a field study member:

> It makes you realize that—maybe it's part of my moving away from the forum—it's … people don't need to read it, you know? Do I think that the fact that you've watered your child's formula down on 1 bottle is important? No, don't be ridiculous. Why do I need to write that? I don't know, it just seems silly. Some things, once you've written about it, it just seems silly, makes you realize how redundant it is.

Thinking about *what* is communicated, this data points to a change in the nature of what is shared when communicating online, referring to the sharing of "minutae" and "superficial" information that is not shared in face-to-face settings. Figure 9 contains this and other themes representing changes in what is communicated. In Table 19, these themes are recaptured.

Table 19. What Is Communicated Online	
a	Representations of your identity
b	Information about what friends are doing
c	Superficial details/minutae
d	Status updates
e	Thoughts and feelings
f	Brief messages
g	Forthright/blunt comments
h	Comments that show you are not very concerned about others' feelings
i	Things you would not say in person
j	Urgent information/news
k	Information (e.g., news or an announcement) that you wish to play down /trivialise
l	Your online persona
m	Edited/amended versions of originally drafted message (by person posting or moderator)
n	Social arrangements you want to make loosely
o	Things you are not concerned should be private

Further analysis categorised accounts and observations into one or more of the groupings in Table 19. The result was the development of 15 additional tables, each with a heading representing themes A to O in Table 19 and a full set of the related data. (Refer to Appendix C). Tables 20 and 23 contain the data for three areas of changes in what is shared via online communication: superficial details/minutae, thoughts and feelings, and forthrightness of comments. These three themes are the most significant emerging from data and therefore form the basis of primary analysis. The other themes, which are each important in their own right, are briefly mentioned at the end of this section.

6.5.1 Sharing Minutiae / Random Information Online

There is strong evidence supporting the idea that one of the changes to what is communicated online is that the nature of the information shared becomes more superficial and somewhat trivial compared with what is exchanged in a face-to-face interaction. Table 20 contains data relating to the sharing of superficial information online.

Table 20. Data in Category C: Superficial Details/Minutae
References to superficial details/minutae shared online:
"the babies are doing something different" or they're really happy that their kids are at school today because they get a break … (Hannah)
people do put their everyday crap up there (Hannah)
just the general chit-chat … talking about totally unrelated things (Charlotte)
thingy just slept (Heidi)
catch up on the day-to-day gossip … [which] leaves face-to-face meetings for deeper contact (Fiona)
an easy quick way to catch up on superficial news (Neil)
get the what you've been doing out of the way on Facebook, then face to face meetings can get to deeper level (Fiona)

This data creates a picture of a tendency to broadcast random pieces of information via status updates to profiles in online communities. The type of information shared is thought to be different from what would typically have been shared between friends, family, or colleagues as part of everyday conversation. People report the use of electronic media to communicate details about themselves that previously might not have been told outside of close friends. Fiona—a

strong, independent woman who's in control of her life, handling motherhood just like she would any professional assignment from her former corporate life—considers these to be the "trivial comments" or "chitchat comments" or "stream of consciousness." Hannah, introduced briefly in Chapter 5, is a self-confessed social media "addict," communicating with friends and family online and also interacting in communities of unknown but like-minded individuals, who spoke positively about the "chitchat." The sort of dialogue she has in the past valued and liked to respond to would have been something like the following:

> "The babies are doing something different" or they're really happy that their kids are at school today because they get a break.

Vignette 1. Hannah

Hannah is in her midtwenties,
married with two preschool-aged children and pregnant with her third baby. She is an active member of a wedding-coordination portal, two online parenting forums, Facebook, a rock music fan site, and several online communities of sports fans.
Her husband regularly works interstate, leaving Hannah alone with their children.
She struggles with loneliness, particularly
in the evenings, and this is the time she most heavily seeks the company of her online communities of "friends." She posts status updates about herself and her children several times a day, also reading other people's comments and commenting back to them. She feels compelled to constantly check for updates to see if there is anything interesting happening in her friends' lives and keep her finger on the social media button.
It has become an obsession for Hannah to the extent that her smartphone is constantly in her possession—
even on her lap whilst driving.

For Hannah, this gave her a sense of belonging and made her feel connected to the "club" of other mothers at a time when she was feeling quite alone amongst her friends who were yet to share the experience of motherhood.

Vignette 2. Charlotte

Charlotte is in her early thirties,
married, and the mother of one preschool-aged son. Charlotte and her family have relocated from Sydney since our Mother's Group was first formed, but we still maintain regular contact and share family holidays.
Charlotte is an independent, outgoing woman, with a quirky sense of humor and strong opinions on just about everything. She is well liked and a loyal and trusting friend.
She is an extremely private person, perceived by some as a "closed book" until she feels comfortable with a social group or situation.
Ironically, Charlotte is a Facebook fanatic, posting updates of her family and engaging in online interactions with friends and family throughout the world. She also frequents several other online communities, related to, for example, parenting and travel.
From observation,
Charlotte is more open through her online interactions than she is in most face-to-face settings.

Charlotte, who constantly badgers me to "get on Facebook"[18] to avoid her having to e-mail photos to me separately from what she posts to her Facebook friends, was of the opinion that information posted via comments in social media forums contains little substance. She suspects much of it is written just to connect to someone outside your daily life, an adult to interact with. Most posts in online communities of parents are made, she reckons, in the hope that responses will be posted and thus some dialogue initiated, hence creating a distraction or providing a way to temporarily escape the isolation of being at home with a young child. In both Hannah's and Charlotte's opinions, "people do put their everyday crap up there," "just the general chitchat … talking about totally unrelated things." Hannah supports this type of electronic dialogue, recounting the time when a friend posted a comment on her social network profile announcing she had reached a personal weight loss goal. Hannah reports that she was happy she could respond to "post words of encouragement." For Hannah and Charlotte, participating in online communities gives them a sense of belonging, a feeling of being connected to a network of friends outside their daily lives. It is a positive pursuit that bolsters their self-esteem.

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18 In a recent e-mail to me, Charlotte wrote, "We are also on Facebook so you will have to join so you can follow us. ;-) You don't have to share your life, just see what others are doing!"

Vignette 3. Fiona
Fiona is a stay-at-home mother of two little boys. She has had a successful corporate career, something that gave her a lot of opportunities for social contact through work functions and professional networking events. She describes having a small number of very close friends whom she spent a great deal of time socialising with prior to having children. Fiona is a confident and extroverted woman, open with her opinions, some of which are very strongly against the encroachment of digital technology into her life. Yet she finds herself compelled to stay online, motivated through what she describes as a fear of missing out if she were to stop.

Fiona, like me, is less receptive to the idea of broadcasting details online of every movement during the day. Fiona spoke with incredulity in her voice about reading comments in online parenting forums, such as "It's 3am; am posting about …" She questioned why someone would be online, hoping to converse with other parents at three o'clock in the morning. She said she could "think of a hundred better things to do if I [she] couldn't sleep at 3am in the morning!" Fiona and I discussed why someone might feel the need to connect to a community of other parents at 3am. We contemplated whether the person posting may have been unable to sleep or their baby might be having an unsettled night, leading that mother to write to her online community as a way to reach out to others and feel she is not alone in her late-night waking. It is reasonable to construe that the person who posted online was seeking social contact at 3am., perhaps hoping to find solidarity in another mother who was also awake and online.

Natalie, schoolteacher and mother of one little boy, has firsthand experience of the isolation and loneliness of being at home with a young child. In Natalie's case, her son was a very poor sleeper from birth, later diagnosed with respiratory problems that caused him discomfort when asleep. A mix of sleep deprivation and anxiety meant she often felt disconnected from the world outside her home and struggles with a miserable baby. She spoke of how she reached out to friends for support and advice when she could not settle her baby son. Natalie dislikes social media yet finds herself drawn to communicating this way because of the social contact it gives her to the world outside her home. She is dismissive of comments posted online, without knowing the context in

which the post is made or whether there is a subtext she is missing. Natalie sees trivial posts and says, "I just think, 'Get a life!'" Similarly, Heidi, also a mother of one and a former sufferer of postnatal depression (PND), speaks of online posts such as "thingy just slept" or "did a pooh" in scathing terms. In her opinion, it makes her ask, "What the f**k are they doing?" Her way to feel connected and to get that sense of belonging when she was at her lowest ebb was to lean heavily on her mother's support, often spending the entire day in her mother's company, availing of a helping hand and shoulder to cry on. Heidi could not see how this need for adult interaction and support could be fulfilled by interacting with someone online.

Reflecting on her relationship with social media and, in particular, the role that interaction in parenting forums has played in her life as a mother, Hannah has changed her beliefs on the value of online dialogue. Posting comments to an online community of parents no longer holds appeal nor seems like the positive activity she used to regard it as. She told me,

> It makes you realize that—maybe it's part of my moving away from the forum—is, it's … people don't need to read it, you know? Do I think that the fact that you've watered your child's formula down on 1 bottle is important? No, don't be ridiculous. Why do I need to write that? I don't know, it just seems silly. Some things, once you've written about it, it just seems silly, makes you realize how redundant it is.

On a related subject, Norma—quick-witted and vociferous working mother of two—explained her thoughts on status update–type posts.

Vignette 4. Norma

Norma, in her midthirties,
is extroverted, jovial, and fun-loving. She lives overseas with her husband (also from overseas), away from her family and friends, but with several family members close by.
A fitness fanatic and working mother
to a three-year-old son and two-year-old daughter, Norma admits she feels increasingly drawn into the world of social media. This is particularly to stay in contact with her wide community of family and friends spread worldwide and to keep apace with social arrangements with other families.
She protests that she would never interact online the way some of her "serial Facebooker" friends do.

Norma considers that the type of random information shared is not something that her online contacts would be interested in hearing even if she had a need to externalise it. She told me,

> Everybody's got Facebook and it's like … I don't know how you keep up with it, that's my issue, I see people posting all the time on Facebook, I'm like, first I don't have a lot of stuff that I would post—I could have posted Oliver's[19] biscuits today … ! But who cares?!

There is a sense that the norm is to externalise every thought to the masses by sharing "superficial" and "trivial" information via social media. Anya has a theory on this. Anya, full-time stay-at-home mother, spoke openly about her addiction to communicating with an online community of mothers from her home country as a way to connect to her friends, some who are currently located in Sydney and others overseas. For Anya, connecting with someone in an online community satisfies her hunger for adult interaction and social contact outside the home and her role as primary caregiver. It gives her an arena in which to voice thoughts and opinions, engaging in dialogue with other mothers whose identities are not disclosed to the community. Anya explained,

> Social media is changing the way we communicate. Younger generations share everything, their thoughts and feelings. You can easily write or type everything you want to someone you don't know in person. If you knew the person in real life, probably you wouldn't write that same thing because the person could be, say, your boss's father.

Vignette 5. Anya

Anya is in her late twenties.

Of European descent and married to a compatriot, she has lived in Sydney for a number of years. Anya has a three-year-old boy called Aaron. She speaks candidly about life in a country without close family and not speaking English as her first language. Aaron requires intensive speech therapy, something that Anya spends a lot of time supporting the therapist with by working with Aaron at home.

By the evening,

she describes feeling lonely and isolated. With Aaron in bed and a husband tired after a day's work, this is when Anya seeks refuge in her compatriots through an online community of women from her home country. Some live in Sydney, others abroad.

Anya lives and breathes through this community. It is her primary outlet for social contact and a place she spends inordinate time interacting in.

She feels she has an addiction.

[19] The child's name in this quote has been changed to protect the interviewee's identity.

An online community like Facebook provides members with a new way to interact, satisfying the needs of many parents with young children to connect, to communicate, and to be entertained. Norma's husband feels it is not always a good thing to externalise everything we think, regardless of the need it may fulfil. He reveals,

> People communicating their thoughts … that can be bloody dangerous too—just keep your mouth shut!

Providing another perspective on this, I heard from Fiona how she has found the style of communication possible with social media useful. She described a time when her youngest son was admitted to the hospital unexpectedly. His christening ceremony was planned for the upcoming weekend, and Fiona wished to inform the christening party that her son was ill and that, therefore, the ceremony would need to be cancelled. Rather than contact each person individually via telephone or text message, Fiona posted one announcement on her Facebook profile, directed to all those invited to the christening, informing them of her son's illness and the cancellation of the ceremony. (Luckily all the invitees were also Facebook friends). Fiona felt that the benefits of sharing information this way were twofold: First, she could successfully convey her message to all those planning to attend the christening with a single post when she was time poor to contact everyone personally. Second, Fiona felt that by announcing the situation via a comment posted on her Facebook profile, she would cause less alarm with the recipients than to call them on the telephone and commence the conversation with "Jamie[20] is in hospital …" She wanted to avoid making this "a big deal" or eliciting reactions of sympathy from recipients of personal phone calls. For Fiona, the online forum fulfilled her need to get information out en masse and fast to minimise inconvenience for any of the invitees.

Data reveals that the nature of what is communicated, the subject matter, and the intimacy of the communication are different from what individuals have experienced being shared in face-to-face dialogue with close friends. This is interesting from the perspective of why some information that once would have been kept private or just not externalised is now shared. To understand this phenomenon, I have considered how sharing such details of one's everyday life satisfies the needs of either the person posting it or the person receiving and reading the posted message. Revisiting the five categories of needs developed in Chapter 5 (see Table 21), it can be conceived from

[20] The child's name in this quote has been changed to protect the identity of the interviewee.

preceding analysis how participation in an online community satisfies (or does not satisfy) emotional and physical needs.

Table 21. The Needs of Those Participating in a Community

Need	Description of Category
Well-Being	Emotional health, physical well-being, self-esteem
Information Sharing	Dissemination, externalisation, and disclosure of information; self-expression; acquisition of information
Autonomy	Independence, freedom
Social Contact	Company, friendship, solidarity, camaraderie, commonality, participation, involvement, belonging
Entertainment	Fun, enjoyment, social interaction, adult conversation, dinners, nights out socially

Analysis reveals the significance of social media in the ability it creates for the everyday individual to participate in community life and society outside their day-to-day environment. Creating a sense of belonging and satisfying a need to feel socially connected to a network of friends, as illustrated by Charlotte's and Hannah's experiences of online community participation, both contribute positively to self-esteem. Furthermore, communicating online has a role to play in satisfying the needs for information sharing in a way that is not possible with conventional modes of communicating, as in Fiona's case with the cancellation of her son's christening.

However, evidence exists of an unhealthy consequence of participation online—the addiction and obsession it becomes for some participants. Anya openly spoke about the damage that excessive time spent communicating online inflicted upon both her physical health and relationship with her family. Anya began to suffer postural discomfort, which she attributed to lengthy periods spent "slumped over" her laptop. She realised she was neglecting her husband and spending more time catching up on the news in her favourite online forums first thing in the morning before even tending to her young son's breakfast requirements.

6.5.2 Sharing Innermost Thoughts and Feelings Online

Sharing innermost thoughts and feelings in a public arena is a marked contrast to how these individuals interact in face-to-face situations. Data reveals the nature of messages posted in an online community forum is often an externalisation of the poster's internal monologue—a "Hey,

I've just made pancakes" comment mentioned by schoolteacher Natalie, for example. Or take Olivia, mother of two little girls, whose husband works interstate a large proportion of the time. On one occasion, she externalised her feelings about having finished reading a particular book as illustrated in her online comment:

> Oh so very sad, I have just finished reading Bryce Courtney's final words, his words have been so much of my life for the past 25yrs, how I will miss you.

These quotes demonstrate a tendency to verbalise what you might have kept to yourself prior to the advent of an electronic mechanism for posting it to a broad audience of friends and contacts. Consider that for Natalie, reading a friend's post announcing the friend had just made pancakes made Natalie react with a "great, so who cares?" attitude, telling me she did not need to know that someone had made pancakes. If a friend was having a bad day and wished Natalie could give her some support, Natalie would much prefer that friend to call to her house for a visit or invite Natalie to that friend's house for company and to share the pancakes over a cup of coffee. Natalie's friend announcing online that she has just made pancakes may, in Natalie's opinion, satisfy her friend's need to externalise her thoughts and feelings. But it was Natalie's belief that getting a response online would hardly fill the void of her friend's loneliness.

Olivia's example, on the other hand, is illustrative of a common finding that online forums and chat rooms provide an outlet for broadcasting thoughts in a way that connects you to other friends or contacts who may share the same sentiment or who may identify with your feelings at that moment. Via this medium, connected "friends" can show their support for comments by "liking" the comment on their friend's social media page. Or they can respond to the initially posted thought or feeling with a comment that lends support to the poster's situation, creating a sense of solidarity in that the poster feels they are not alone in their thinking at that moment. Table 22 contains data specifically illustrating the sharing of thoughts and feelings in an online community.

Table 22. Data in Category E: Thoughts and Feelings
References to the sharing of thoughts/feelings online:
just the general chitchat … talking about totally unrelated things (Charlotte)
it's 3am; am posting about … (Fiona)
Social media is changing the way we communicate. Younger generations share everything, their thoughts and feelings. You can easily write or type everything you want to someone you don't know in person (Anya)
oh so very sad, I have just finished reading Bryce Courtney's final words, his words have been so much of my life for the past 25yrs, how I will miss you (Olivia)

I heard from and observed in online comments how people perceive others to be sharing their innermost thoughts and feelings online. Leonie, for instance, spoke of her personal online blog where she posts anonymously about anything and everything on her mind, from battles with her children to arguments with her husband. She explained how venting anonymously in this blog is important for her emotional well-being as it creates an outlet for her to get these thoughts off her chest and to externalise her feelings, but in a way that she feels is "safe" in the sense that no one will know it is written by her, even if they do stumble across the blog online.

Contrast this with another field study member who requested our interview recording be paused and her comments made off the record when she shared intimate details of a personal situation. She used this to explain how she would never even consider verbalising the same feelings in an online blog, regardless of it being done anonymously. Both Leonie and this other field study member have the same need to vent their feelings. However, they enact their desires quite differently. For Leonie, anonymity protects her when she vents about her personal family life online. For the other field study member, the fear of being identified deters her from posting to any sort of online community.

Vignette 6. Leonie

Leonie is in her early thirties,
born and raised in Sydney, and still living in the area where she grew up, close to her parents, grandparents, extended family, and wide circle of friends. Leonie is quite the calm and relaxed mum,
who seems to have everything under control all of the time despite having two lively children.
She is always organised with snacks and entertainment for the children (hers and other peoples), and she is instrumental in arranging our Mother's Group meet-ups yet manages to also work part-time as a financial planner and run her own home-based catering business.
Leonie was a regular in the Facebook community
during a previous time in her life when she and her partner travelled overseas, firmly convinced of the benefits from sharing travel memoirs to family and friends en masse.
Since having children, Leonie and her husband tend not to post updates of their children to Facebook and do not participate in online parenting communities. Leonie, however, does maintain her own personal (and anonymous) online blog.

Paradoxically, Leonie explained how a story that she vented online disagreeing with her husband's handling of their daughter's persistent tantrum one particular morning by having her take a cold shower resulted in a situation she was not expecting. The story was found by one of her husband's work colleagues when he was searching for advice about dealing with toddler tantrums online. The colleague thought the story was amusing and decided to share it with his workmates over a tea break one day—not having any idea that the story was about Leonie's husband. However, when Leonie's husband heard it, he recognised the details as being about him, which, as Leonie tactfully put it, created an uneasy tension at home whilst she tried to explain she thought she was safe venting online about personal situations so long as she did it anonymously.

Whilst, theoretically, one might conclude from data that anonymity facilitates the externalisation of innermost thoughts and feelings online, evidence to the contrary demonstrates anonymity is not a guarantee of identity protection. This is significant because the posting of sensitive details online is happening more and more. Questions remain for which further evidence would be required in order to better understand this phenomenon.

6.5.3 Posting Forthright and Blunt Comments Online

A third area where individuals have experienced a change in the nature of what is communicated online is in the posting of comments that are felt to be much more "forthright" and "blunt" than in a face-to-face setting. A large contributor to this change is *anonymity*. Table 23 contains quotes supporting this theme.

Table 23. Data in Category G: Forthright Comments
References to the posting of forthright/blunt comments online:
people are more forthright, rude … you don't know who you're speaking to … don't care what you say … [there is] less fear of offending (Fiona)
people vent on forums where they don't have to modify their behaviour (Fiona)
when you have that anonymity, people don't have the stop button, they just keep going and keep at it and keep at it (Hannah)

Electronically based communications seem to engender a more forthright style of communication, one that, at times, may be delivered in a way that field study members consider to be rude. Bluntness becomes a defining characteristic online, where the parties involved hold little concern over repercussion from their comments or style of commenting. Anonymity and the use of aliases to disguise true identity facilitate this, a situation described by Leonie as "hiding behind your computer." I heard the following account of the impact of anonymity online:

> You don't have to be worried about what people think of you, or how people are feeling, you can be very blunt, but when you have face-to-face, you know how someone is feeling and you know if you hurt yourself and you just write a message on Facebook saying "I've hurt myself"—if you have a face-to-face conversation you can see how a person is hurting and you can say something that you mightn't normally say, or you could comfort them or you could give them a cuddle.

Others spoke of the same issue. Fiona said,

> People are more forthright, rude … you don't know who you're speaking to … don't care what you say … [there is] less fear of offending

She feels the people that she communicates with in online communities are *"not people you need to get acceptance from."*

Hannah and I spoke about her appreciation for anonymity online. She gave an example of a time when she used anonymity to vent on a forum about low-income families benefiting from the New South Wales (NSW) baby bonus scheme, yet higher-income families lost out on what she felt should have been a standard help-out from the government to all families, regardless of means testing. Hannah recounted how she was deliberately inflammatory in her comments, but unafraid of reprisal because she was posting using an alias. This gave her an arena to verbalise thoughts and opinions she told me she otherwise would have kept quiet about in face-to-face conversations. Hannah's experience is that online community participation supports freedom of speech and thus satisfies the participant's need for autonomy and independent thinking.

6.5.4 Final Thoughts about Changes in What Is Communicated Online

In sections 6.5.1 to 6.5.3, I analysed data on three areas of changes to the nature of what is communicated online: the sharing of minutiae/superficial information, the externalisation of innermost thoughts and feelings, and the trend towards posting comments that are much harsher or forthright than comments considered acceptable in face-to-face interactions. Evidence supporting each of these themes is strong, with opinion divided on the relative merits and dangers of communicating in the digital era. In conclusion, I draw attention to the other areas of changes in what is communicated online as contained in Table 20. Field study members see a trend towards communicating online in a way that represents or promotes identity differently than how this might be communicated in a face-to-face setting. An example is in the personalisation of one's social media device and their online space to reflect their personality through colour, decoration, use of images, design of personal wall, and so forth.

It is believed that informing oneself of what is happening in the lives of family and friends requires a proactive and deliberate effort on the part of the person who wants to know to actually visit their friend's online space and read their status updates. This is considered to be shifting the balance of friendships, from an equal sharing and receiving of news about both parties' lives through direct interaction to a situation where people post what is happening to a public online space with an expectation that friends who might be interested in their lives will make a deliberate effort to read the posts.

Amongst other themes emerging is a brevity in messages posted online. Another is the perception that these messages are often made in a way that shows little concern for the feelings of others or

indeed little concern on the part of the poster for certain details to remain private. Things are said online that would not be said in face-to-face situations and may not even represent the original sentiment of the message after editing by a moderator, for instance. Online communities are regarded as a good place to post urgent information or news that you may wish to disseminate to a broad audience briefly and expediently.

6.6 When Is It Communicated Differently?

Field study members related their experiences with a change in the timing of when online communication occurs. Table 24 contains a high-level list of the reported changes.

Table 24. When You Communicate Online	
a	You are always on.
b	You feel social pressure to communicate
c	You are always available
d	Immediately/instantaneously
e	At a time that suits you
f	Compulsively/obsessively

6.6.1 Always On and Always Available

The sense that if you are online, then you are automatically and always available was a strong sentiment emerging from the field. This is intrinsically intertwined with the state of being always on, which I heard from field study members of their relationship with social media. Tables 25 and 26 contain data evidencing this point.

Table 25. Data in Category C: You Are Always Available
References to responding to online communications because you are "always available":
There is a thing in my head that the phone's always on … you have to have your phone on you all the time (Christina)
Sometimes I feel that I'm connected all the time, especially if there's nothing happening, but if there is there's constantly something popping up saying so and so needs to ask you this … can you respond to this … (Sophie)
I hate it, that's my opinion. Employers will give you a smartphone and then expect you to be always on (Andrew)
I think it's taking over, sometimes you're just bombarded with all this stuff coming in (personal emails, work emails, email bookings for our investment property) and you just think "God you don't have a minute" cos you're getting so much at you. Cos I'm in the groups I feel obliged sometimes, cos it comes as a message—you've got to read it … Whereas you don't have to go in and read that side of things. But when you're in a group it excites you, a new message (Norma)

Analysis uncovers what some describe as a new norm, a rule establishing that applies pressure to mobile device holders to constantly check their devices and to instantly respond. Hardworking family man Andrew, with outspoken views on the negatives of social media, stated,

> That's the problem … your phone beeps when e-mails come through … what if you get into the habit of just checking every time?

Sophie too experiences a compulsion to respond to messages received electronically. This full-time mother of two little girls and also a dedicated volunteer in a demanding role as leader of a children's charity told me,

> I feel obliged to answer … I try to respond to things immediately.

It seems reasonable to deduce from these comments that being unfailingly available is a state connected with pressure and a sense of expectation. Why we continue to be always available is not well explained in the current knowledge of social media. Data points towards the needs to belong, to be involved, to be wanted, and to feel important—needs that were articulated to me as common, everyday occurrences for many mothers isolated at home with a young child. Charlotte reflects how engaging in "chitchat" online is a source of entertainment for her and an escape from the mundaneness of her everyday life. Sharing photographs and posting updates on what she has been doing or what her son has been up to is Charlotte's way of fulfilling a need for social interaction. It is how she connects to friends outside her day-to-day world. Charlotte, like Hannah, likes to be included in posts, likes to receive messages, and enjoys engaging in text-based online dialogue with another friend who may also be at home with a young child on that particular day.

Fulfilling needs for both belonging and entertainment creates value in the access it affords to a wide network of contacts all the time. This is important because it contributes to a general state of well-being from the perspective of the participant's emotional good health. Empirical evidence provides insight into how these needs for belonging are fulfilled electronically, for instance, as Sophie describes it:

> I think a lot of people just think it's part of everyday life now to be in touch with everybody every minute of the day.

I heard how the quest for immediate responses and instantaneous communication that encourages brevity in the body of message text and the abbreviation of any word possible is transgressing into the mainstream educational system. Schoolteacher Natalie reports how teenagers, in particular, are not differentiating the way in which it is acceptable to write in an electronic communication from how they are expected to write formally in the school system.

> Sometimes I think people are very clever in how they abbreviate things to get their message across in a quick text, but I just wish they wouldn't think that's the norm when you're writing something handwritten. They should understand the difference. And I'm not sure that the generation coming through are aware of the distinctions between formal handwriting communication styles to text-based communication.

It appears from the data, transcending what technology *enables* us to do, that we are now seeing fundamental changes to the time plane on which we live life through Internet-based communications. Data illuminates several parts of our daily life that are performed at times different from when they might happen without technology. Table 26 contains quotes that demonstrate a phenomenon of a digital age in which the mobile device user is "always on," where an individual is perpetually connected, inseparable from technology.

Table 26. Data in Category A: You Are Always On
References to being always on:
I was going to say, people just have … it's just another part of their body now, it's like it's been surgically implanted!! (Sophie)
You can roll over in bed and it's just there (like a partner!!) it's always there (Heidi)
Everyone's got their mobile phones with them these days—you're asleep with them on the bed, so you can send a message any time and they'll reply to it straight away (Andrew)
[My] mobile phone is never switched off, but it's on silent at night, it's either under the pillow or on the bedside locker (Isabel)
they say that it's really bad for you [to sleep with phone] but it's also the norm (Andrew)
[my wife is] more likely to leave the kids in a supermarket than leave home without her phone (Scott)
You can't be in your own mind anymore, you can't just think and you can't just stop and be just a person, you need to have constant communication with something else, whether it's a phone, or iPad, or an iPod or whatever, you need to have stimulation, and if you don't have like technology stimulation you think you're not normal (Andrew)
I'm very prone, I think this is a consequence of portable technology, to stopping at a red traffic light or being anywhere, and on my iPhone an email comes in and I look at it (Hannah)
if you told a teenager to put their phone in a drawer it would feel to them like they were cutting off their hand at the wrist and putting that in the drawer! (Sophie)
People can't survive without it [technology] (Leonie)
when I didn't have a—I had a normal phone that didn't have email—I had Internet time, I would log onto the email and I would read and respond to my emails. But now … [the iPhone] it's always on. Things are always coming in and for whatever reason—a reason I don't know—I always, if I can, stop and look at it, whatever it is, an email, a text message (Hannah)

A commonly recurring theme is the notion of electronic communication devices leading to the state of being "always on." Christina is the career-oriented mother of one daughter who successfully manages to work to a high professional level and, at the same time, raise her daughter with as much parent-child time as possible by organising her work with a careful balance towards home and family life. She experiences feeling like she cannot escape from being connected all the time. She revealed,

> There is a thing in my head that the phone's always on … you have to have your phone on you all the time.

She continued her thoughts by reiterating this sentiment, saying,

> Even in my head, even though I get annoyed in dinner situations where phones are on the table, there is a thing in my head that the phone's always on.

These comments illustrate what to Christina is regarded as an annoying development of the digital era, especially considering how it violates her right to personal space and time to enjoy a social meal with friends. Sophie echoed Christina's sentiment with the following comment:

> Sometimes I feel that I'm connected all the time, especially if there's nothing happening, but if there is there's constantly something popping up saying so and so needs to ask you this … can you respond to this …

Fiona spoke of the encroachment of technology into her life, leading her son on occasion to plead with her to "put down the phone" so she can give him her attention. Anya too spoke of her misplaced prioritisation of social media over her young son's needs as she caught up on all the news from overnight in her online community of overseas friends. The concern for society is that this state is becoming "the norm." Delivery receipts and read indicators give the sender of messages valuable information that equips them to put pressure on the recipient for a response.

Changes in *when* we communicate online can be seen in the phenomena of being "always on" and "always available." Being "always on" and "always available" is a phenomenon of a digital era where it is impossible to separate humans from the technology in understanding this perpetual state of connectivity. Field study members feel that they are perpetually connected, endlessly and unceasingly connected, eternally and forevermore (Thesaurus.com).[21]

6.6.2 At a Time That Suits You

A second strong theme emerging is that of shifts in control over when communication occurs. I heard how field study members feel they can choose to respond to messages and online posts "at a time that suits." In contrast to a face-to-face setting, where communication requires the reciprocation of equal and two-way dialogue, field study members tell of their tendency to read messages and consciously "park" the act of responding in a mental list of things to do later. In this way, control shifts to the message recipient. He/she chooses whether to respond instantly or whether the message is of a particular level of unimportance that the sender can effectively wait until the recipient deems it a more suitable time for them to craft a response.

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[21] Synonyms for *perpetually*

On the corollary, it was conveyed that the initial sending of a message or posting of a comment in an online forum becomes a more deliberate and intentional act on the part of the sender. Field study members spoke of how they wait until evening when their children are settled and asleep before they sit down to catch up on the events of the day on social media. Only at this time, when the chores of the day are out of the way, do a number of field study members feel they have the space to think about chatting with friends and family online or attending to other social matters via electronic means. Table 27 presents a range of quotes covering both these aspects of communication occurring at times that suit the message sender or recipient.

Table 27. Data in Category E: At a Time That Suits You
References to responding to online communications at a time that suits you:
I don't mind 'cos I can always put it down or leave it and go out. I think what I'm finding an issue is, after the girls go to bed at night I get on and do a lot of correspondence (Sophie)
We chat online now because it's convenient, so the kids can be asleep and you can still be texting to have a conversation without waking them (Natalie)
If I make an appointment with my little brother, it's so flexible, he'll like text me and say "I'll be there in 2 hours," not in 10 minutes, that sort of thing, I don't really mind, but I just feel that with his generation, they're constantly on their phones, texting and stuff, I get the impression that arrangements are much more flexible, much more up in the air … I operate differently, I wouldn't assume that he'd be on time! (Frances)
[It is] at the other person's discretion if they will respond or not to electronic contact (Fiona)

Consider Frances's experience with her brother and how the dynamic between them when making social arrangements unfolds. Frances, in her midthirties and is married with one son, has old-school beliefs about norms of communication. When an arrangement is made, she honours it, and expects the same courtesy extended in return. Commitments are firm commitments. Frances has a younger brother whom she treats differently when it comes to making plans for a get-together. Her younger brother operates in a world of flexibility and fluidity in arrangements for social activities, one in which he is likely to change plans at any time, expecting for the change not to be "a big deal." Frances attributes this fluidity to "his generation," remarking on her brother's tendency to change arrangements to suit him, often contacting her via text message on short notice to inform her of a big delay in their meeting-up time. Whilst this deviates slightly from participation in an online community, the conclusion is representative of a polar separation in control over social arrangements, giving one or the other party the power to change plans at short notice, knowing that the message will get through to the other party, who, it is assumed, will have

their mobile device on their person. Somehow it seems that this creates an expectation that the changed plan will be acceptable to the affected party because at least they have been informed. This sort of last-minute change in plans may not be new, but the ability to communicate it so easily with digital technology can be argued as fostering a culture of loosely made arrangements driven by the ease of communication through social media–based technology.

6.6.3 Instantaneousness

Data reveals that we now live in a world of instantaneousness that was not possible prior to technology advances in the area of Internet-based communications. Communication can be immediate or instantaneous, supported by always on, always available capabilities, as exemplified by the accounts in Table 28.

Table 28. Data in Category D: Immediately/Instantaneously

References to communicating online immediately/instantaneously:
I'm very prone, I think this is a consequence of portable technology, to stopping at a red traffic light or being anywhere, and on my iPhone an email comes in and I look at it (Hannah)
it's becoming a rule [that people do respond to their texts immediately], but it should not be, I think that's becoming a pressure [that we've got to keep checking our e-mails, checking our texts], I think so, yeah (Bella)
mobile phones … conditioning us to respond to alert tones, check-in constantly, answer immediately, keep up-to-date—making us busier, you have to go and find out what is happening in people's lives, rather than them calling you or meeting with you for a 2-way communication (Fiona)
it's changing the immediacy of a conversation … you're leaving it to the other person's discretion whether they want to respond to your text … (Natalie)
If I text someone and don't get an immediate reply it annoys me, cos I need an answer then and there and it's probably followed up by a phone-call if I don't get a reply then and there. (Christina)

People spoke of a sense of obligation to instantly read incoming communications and pressure to respond immediately. For instance, Hannah explained,

> When I didn't have a—I had a normal phone that didn't have email—I had Internet time, I would log onto the email and I would read and respond to my emails. But now … [the iPhone] it's always on. Things are always coming in and for whatever reason—a reason I don't know—I always, if I can, stop and look at it, whatever it is, an email, a text message.

When it comes to online contacts, opinion is divided on what these connections represent. For some, being connected to more people and having a wider network of contacts is what matters, regardless of the depth or quality of friendship within that network. For others, like Charlotte, more contacts does not necessarily equate to having more "real" friends. I heard from Fiona how in her opinion one's tally of "friends" connected via social media creates "the illusion of many friendships."

Created by advances in electronic communication devices, the pressure to respond to electronic communications is a common experience amongst interviewees. Individuals like Fiona believe themselves to have been conditioned to respond to message alert tones instantaneously, departing temporarily (albeit mentally rather than physically) from whatever other activity she may be involved in—even when that activity is caring for a young child. Some spoke of the growing addiction they feel towards "checking in" on everyone else through the ability to consult personal online profiles and follow status updates on the lives of their friends and family and society at a broader level. For example, the following quote illustrates this obsession with constantly checking in:

> So yeah, I think it's being a little bit curious about what's happening in everybody else's life, I think we've become so absorbed, people are obsessed with knowing what everybody is doing all the time and not being able to comment or put their opinion forward … if they put a question out there. People have become like busy-bodies you might even call it, or nosey-parkers—that's how I see it!

Participating online is, as claimed in empirical data, perceived by some to negatively affect one's well-being by creating pressure and obligation to respond, even resulting in feelings of guilt over not responding quickly enough. Sophie told me that she has to place her phone in a drawer overnight and lock it away to resist the temptation to check and respond immediately.

Evidence points to immediacy enabling quick answers and expediency of information dissemination. Immediate solutions to problems can be found by asking a question in an online technical support forum, for instance, where you receive the answer instantaneously from an online technician. Thus, there are practical benefits to instantaneousness, but, by the same token, questionable impacts on the well-being of those who consider it to be a pressure and source of guilt to give immediate responses. There are no current social protocols for the time frame of responses. This is a locally negotiated agreement between the parties involved, perhaps with different expectations for communications with close friends versus colleagues or lesser-known

acquaintances. It remains to be seen how these norms will develop as the digital era progresses apace.

6.7 Where Is It Communicated Differently?

A third key finding is that communication occurs in different *spaces* online. Unlike face-to-face interaction, direct interaction that requires all parties to be physically present, communicating online makes it possible to interact with just about anyone, anywhere—with a known contact or a complete stranger. Table 29 contains a list of the main spaces in which, according to field study members, online communication occurs.

Table 29. Where Online Communication Occurs

a	In public forums of unknown contacts
b	To a broad audience of known contacts
c	To groups of contacts you have defined
d	Directly to a friend's online portal (wall or page)
e	To like-minded people/people in the same situation as you

6.7.1 Communicating in Public Forums of Unknown Contacts

Data reveals that when interacting in online forums of other parents or children-related forums (such as baby product advice forums), individuals tend to use aliases instead of disclosing their real identities. In these communities, members will consult the advice of other members about, for example, an issue with feeding or settling a baby. Advice from another party, unknown to the enquiring party, is accepted for what it is and to all accounts completely subjective based on the advising party's own experiences. The enquirer typically melds any advice received with advice from other sources to arrive at an opinion or course of action that seems to best fit their current situation. Often, it is to vent about a frustrating situation that people frequent such online communities, seeking a place to externalise their feelings in a way that cannot be linked back to their true identities. Not being able to identify community members by their aliases facilitates communication between members in an anonymous community forum. Table 30 contains some references made to participation in public forums of unknown contacts.

Table 30. Data in Category A: In Public Forums of Unknown Contacts
References to communicating in public online forums of unknown contacts:
not people you need to get acceptance from (Fiona)
people vent on forums where they don't have to modify their behaviour (Fiona)
You can easily write or type everything you want to someone you don't know in person. If you knew the person in real life probably you wouldn't write that same thing because the person could be, say, your boss's father (Anya)
it was a mixed community of people who knew each other and people who didn't, so it was a mix of people talking about real things in their lives in contrast to people talking about hypothetical ideas and hypothetical discussions (Anya)
I could chat with other pregnant woman when none of my own friends had gone through it (Julie)

Fiona's comments are interesting in that she illuminates the need some individuals have for somewhere to vent about issues in their everyday life. At the same time, she observes that fulfilling this need can be satisfied by writing anonymously in forums of unknown members (other parents per se), where she considers gaining acceptance from these other members as not high on one's priority list. You seek to get things off your chest in a "safe" environment where no one knows you, and if they judge you, then you place little significance on the judgement since it comes from someone you do not "need to get acceptance from."

Also interesting is the idea that the content of what is communicated in online chat forums is somehow different in nature from what might be discussed in a face-to-face interaction setting. Anya has witnessed occasions where she believes the nature of what is communicated is different from what the same person would disclose to offline friends. Communicating in this way, a community member can fulfil, for example, a need to externalise frustrations or opinions that they would not feel comfortable discussing with friends or family.

6.7.2 Communicating to a Broad Audience of Known Contacts

The final set of findings of interest from this analysis involves the accounts illustrating how community members interact online with a network of contacts and acquaintances whom they have identified and accepted as "friends" (in online community terminology). Table 31 contains quotes from field study members illustrating how they interact online with a network of contacts and acquaintances.

Table 31. Data in Category B: To a Broad Audience of Known Contacts
References to communicating to a broad online audience of known contacts:
You get so many different perspectives when you post something on Facebook cos there's so many people on it, rather than when you have a chat with someone. People kinda go into detail and say 'oh this is what I did' a bit more than face-to-face (Norma)
I know some people in real life … and when I talk to them on the phone or meet them in person, they are different to how they talk to people on Facebook. They behave as if they are different on Facebook, put up a face. The person that I know face to face has a Facebook profile, they portray a different side of them via Facebook. When they were talking to their virtual friends (people whom they only know by communicating online, haven't met in person) and their real friends they are different, i.e. with people they've never met (Anya)
I've got like 100 "friends," but I don't really have 100 friends (Charlotte)

An advantage that interacting within an online community brings is the access it creates to a wider network of friends, family members, and acquaintances, like Norma observed (see Table 31). From Norma's perspective, it is valuable for her to get "many different perspectives" on whatever topic she is discussing online. Norma discusses a lot of her parenting-related questions/issues with her existing friends linked to her Facebook profile as "friends." She spoke of how she has set up groups within her contacts so that she may direct certain conversation topics to one group and not another (e.g., when she has a parenting-related issue, she will post comments only to those grouped together in her mother's group contacts). In this way, she is seeking the input of those she considers to be the subject experts. Having a wide network of contacts connected via Facebook provides Norma with the ability to discuss her particular issue or concern with a broader network than she would have available to her at any particular time in a face-to-face setting.

However, Charlotte highlights that friend tally in an online community is not reflective of the number of close personal friends one has in their everyday social world. Charlotte feels friend tallies are misrepresentative of genuine friendships. In furthering this point, Fiona suggests that friend tally in an online community creates "the illusion of friendships." Anya is critical of the type of communication that occurs in an online forum, particularly where members of the forum are unknown to one another. She told me,

> I get annoyed with the mix of real and virtual and how different people were in real life compared to in virtual.

It seems reasonable to conclude from analysis that the ability to connect to a wider circle of contacts, not just those who are your close friends in everyday life (I am careful not to call one "real life" because both the online and offline worlds are very real for those interacting within them), affords community members with greater access to people who can relate to the particular issue they are facing at that time. In this sense, the online community fulfils practical needs for information, creating solidarity and giving the participating member a feeling of not being alone.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the other arenas in which communication online occurs. Data reveals how a member of a social networking site can define groups specifying members to be part of those groups based on a common interest. For example, interviewees spoke of groups based on physical membership of a geographically co-located mother's group. Another example was a group based on members of a team who volunteer for a particular children's charity. In this case, the field study member spoke about how valuable it was to be able to issue announcements and get dialogue started with that group of volunteers through online chat forum functionality. Everyone knows and spends time with one another physically carrying out the charity work. However, they are not what my field study member considers to be a group of close friends.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has primarily been concerned with presenting empirical data demonstrating *how* field study members participate in online communities, with an emphasis on the analysis of changes to how communication occurs online. Results reveal that communicating online differs from communicating face-to-face in three main areas: differences in what is communicated, differences in when it is communicated, and differences in where it is communicated. Empirical evidence highlights that field study members participate in online communications and activities by sharing random pieces of information, by sharing innermost thoughts and feelings, and by posting forthright and blunt comments. In addition, the time when people communicate online changes compared with face-to-face communication. Communicating online fosters a sense of being always on and always available, a tendency to respond to online communications at a time that suits the recipient, and a perceived necessity to communicate instantaneously. Furthermore, field study members report that participating in online communities and activities means changes in where communication occurs, tending to happen more often within public forums of unknown contacts and broader audiences of known contacts than with face-to-face communication.

Similar to the findings from Chapter 5, the explanation of how people communicate differently in fulfilling the needs for community participation partially contributes to answering research question 2 (designed to enquire into *how* people participate in communities online). Analysis also reveals that through the appropriation of technology, people engage in multiple communities simultaneously (face-to-face and online). In Chapter 7, this separate but related insight into how people participate is presented through empirical accounts of socialising differently in the digital age.

Chapter 7

Socialising Differently in the Digital Age

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents additional findings that build on Chapter 6 in answering research question 1, which asks about *how* and *why* people participate in communities online and face-to-face. Chapter 5 explored *why* participation occurs, revealing people are motivated to seek interaction, which leads them to participate in communities face-to-face and online. Data reveals that over time, participation online leads to socialising online as online community members begin to establish friendships, some of which eventually become offline contacts. In this context, I will demonstrate empirically that technology is redefining the possibilities for communication and socialisation activities that have traditionally been carried out face-to-face, or in person. Building on the discovery that individuals communicate in a different way online, this chapter further explains *how* people socialise differently when offline and online modes of participation are available. Findings reveal a perspective of participation which recognises the inseparability of understanding the person participating in an online community from understanding of the technology via which that participation online is constructed in everyday relations.

The chapter is organised as follows: First, I report in section 7.2, multiple instances of social media enabling field study members to socialise anytime, anywhere. Data reveals that even during times when people are socialising in a face-to-face setting, they can be concomitantly present physically and mentally, with temporal mental absences when they are connected elsewhere via technology. Using empirical evidence, this phenomenon of being physically present in one place and, at the same time, mentally engaged elsewhere, distracted by technology, is explained in terms of what it means for socialising in a digital age. Empirical evidence presented in section 7.3 demonstrates that socialising in face-to-face settings takes on the characteristics of online interactions, asynchronous communication being the main one. Evidence shows that the online and offline contexts blend, illuminating that individuals are socialising and communicating

asynchronously in online interactions which encroach into offline contexts. The result, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, is asynchronicity in a synchronous offline environment. Data further uncovers how the ability to be connected physically whilst, at the same time, being less than fully engaged in that physical environment changes the norms of communication. Norms of asynchronous communication that are completely acceptable online are found to cause problems for offline behaviour. The chapter subsequently examines, in section 7.4, the changing nature of socialisation, revealing how *socialisation* practices are changing. I present empirical evidence demonstrating the reconfiguring of and resulting challenges for social norms and communication values. In section 7.5 I summarise the main findings about socialising differently in the digital age. These findings are integral to better explaining how field study members participate in online communities and thus contribute to the answering of research question 1.

7.2 Physically Present and Simultaneously Absent

The purpose of this section is to present and analyse empirical evidence relating to a theme that emerges around engaging in more than one social interaction at the same time through social media. I present stories from four field study participants: Hannah, Neil, Andrew and Isabel. Each story represents an empirical account of either the participant themselves or the social companions in whose company they are, being engaged in more than one social activity at the same time. In section 7.2.1 I present observational data of Hannah attending to her mobile phone while conducting our research interview. In section 7.2.2 I report a vivid account from Neil describing a social occasion when his dinner companions were engaged in more than the dinner table conversation when they paid attention to their BlackBerry's during the meal. I analyse both these stories in section 7.2.3, revealing a picture of social interactions disrupted by technology. Andrew is introduced in section 7.2.4 to illustrate further instances of interacting in more than one social space simultaneously. This leads to analysis of findings in section 7.2.5 revealing the role of multiple modes of communicating in this emerging theme. Finally, in section 7.2.6 I draw on Isabel's story to even further illustrate the possibilities for being physically present and simultaneously absent that are created by having access to multiple modes of communicating at the same time.

7.2.1 Hannah's Story

Hannah, mother of two (introduced in Vignette 1), illustrates the concept of being engaged in more than one place at the same time—physically present in our field interview, but temporarily mentally disengaged. Hannah and I meet in a café by the beach. We face each other across a small table, relaxed in each other's company and happily chatting through our interview whilst eating some lunch. On the table, amongst the food and drinks, are my iPhone and iPad (both recording the interview) and Hannah's iPhone. It beeps once during the interview, at which point she immediately reads her screen, then places the phone back on the table. With our interview still continuing, Hannah seems distracted, asks me to repeat a question, then picks up her iPhone. She types briefly whilst still articulating to me an answer to the question I have just asked her. For those moments, I lost eye contact with her. Her answer to my question became repeated words she had said momentarily before, and she seemed to have lost her train of thought. Hannah disengaged during those moments, albeit leaving the table mentally rather than physically. She told me later in the interview that the text exchange had been to confirm arrangements for a movie that evening.

7.2.2 Neil's Story

A similar experience was described by Neil. He describes a time when he felt he was sharing a face-to-face social occasion with something on the other end of the phone contact his friends were also engaged in whilst in that physical setting. Neil explained,

> Prior to having children, when I was living in the UK at a time when smartphone technology was still in its infancy, my partner and I shared a holiday with seven other adults all in a similar life situation to us. We were all in long-term relationships, with established professional careers, having disposable income to enjoy a skiing holiday together in a French resort. We shared a villa, and at the end of each day, we congregated around a large dinner table to feast on the delights of outrageously rich cuisine prepared by our resident French chef (all part of the ski package). Each evening, we sat together, ate together, drank together, shared stories of the slopes that day, reminisced about old times, and had a good laugh. However, each evening, I noticed how the same six people came to the table with their BlackBerrys in hand (and I don't mean the fruit!). During the meal, I would hear frequent beeps or feel the table vibrating as notifications came through on the phones of those who were at least mannerly enough to switch their device to a

silent mode. These guys were all successful lawyers in top London law firms. My partner was in IT, I was in construction, and my other friend was in the health club industry. Initially, I was bemused at how the lawyers were "always on," constantly beeping or vibrating phones requiring their attention. Bemusement turned to irritation over the days as this became the ritual … Dinnertime conversation interspersed with moments of frantic typing of messages on BlackBerrys, the typists drifting in and out of conversation. Irritation, in turn, became annoyance—maybe even mild outrage when one evening one of the couples actually brought their laptop to the table too! So whilst we are eating, drinking, and chatting, they are also consumed in whatever is on their screen. I had to ask them what they were doing. I needed to know what was so important that they needed to do it during dinner. They explained they were watching a particular property they were interested in buying to ensure they wouldn't miss anything until they were back at home and able to communicate with the realtor. Incredible.

[Excerpt from interview with Neil]

Vignette 7. Neil

Neil is in his late thirties, married and father of two. He works full-time yet manages to be a very hands-on father to his three-year-old son and baby daughter. He spent most of his thirties living overseas, establishing close friendships with people now spread all over the world. Over time, he feels he is losing touch with his overseas friends yet is not inclined to join any of the social media communities that might allow him to make connections with these people and rekindle fading friendships.

He gets involved in all the social get-togethers with his wife's mother's group. When he has a parenting question, he asks a friend for advice or one of the parenting group mothers or fathers or a work colleague for their opinion. The idea of connecting with other parents or communities of support online is not something he feels he would ever be inclined to do.

7.2.3 Analysis of Hannah and Neil's Stories

Present in the café or at the dinner table might be where Hannah or Neil's friends were physically located in these examples—Hannah chatting with me and Neil sharing a meal with friends. In stark contrast, however, Hannah and also Neil's friends were anything *but present* mentally, with connectivity affecting their offline socialising in that moment. Hannah was distracted from our

conversation; she was mentally disengaged with me and instead was attentive to her phone. An interesting observation about Hannah is that she acted in a way that suggested to me that she feels it is acceptable and perfectly normal to be mentally disengaged, *however temporarily*, at a moment when she is expected (by me) to be fully engaged in our interview. The situation was similar with Neil's friends on the ski trip—physically present at the dinner table and contemporaneously mentally present at the table and in electronic interactions. Being mentally absent from the social setting and disengaged from moments of the dinner table conversation seemed, from Neil's perspective, to raise no concern for his friends about how this behaviour might be perceived across the group. In this instance, it was unacceptable (to Neil) that communication became asynchronous, fragmented between states of mental presence and mental absence in the dinner situation. Asynchronous communication is "the exchange of messages … by reading and responding as schedules permit rather than according to some clock that is synchronized for both the sender and receiver or in real time" (LINFO 2014).[22]

[22] http://www.linfo.org/asynchronous.html (accessed April 4, 2014)

7.2.4 Andrew's Story

Other field study members shared analogous observations from various social occasions during which they felt there were more than just the dinner guests present at the table.

Vignette 8. Andrew
Andrew is married and is a father to a three-year-old girl and a one-year-old boy. He is employed in the logistics industry full-time. He presents himself as a hardworking, devoted family man, concerned with providing for his children and socialising as a family with other families. His attitude is conscientious, and his values of family and friendship are refreshingly old-fashioned. He is a sociable character—animated, extroverted, opinionated, forthright, direct, yet sensitive not to offend. Andrew spends roughly six hours per week on the Internet, primarily reading news and doing some shopping. He is an active and well-liked member of the parenting group to which both he and I belong. He does not participate in any online parenting communities and considers himself to be a "lurker" on Facebook. He likes to inconspicuously look through the posts and status updates of those people who are connected to him through the Facebook community. He does this discreetly and voicelessly, simply wanting to know what other people are up to without he himself needing to reciprocate what is happening in his own life.

Andrew told me about one such experience:

> I went out for dinner, and the first thing everybody does, you go to dinner, and, like, I don't know—maybe I'm old-fashioned—but I go to dinner, and I keep things in my pocket. The first thing everyone does now is put their phone on the table: "I've got an iPhone," "I've got an iPhone5," "I've got this … ," and the whole table's full of technology, and one beeps. "Oh, it's mine!" and everybody checks.

The iPhones are present at the table, acting alongside the dinner guests, influencing their behaviour and the overall synchronicity of communication within the group. Andrew recounts other similar events, incredulous at what he considers rude and antisocial behaviour when the physical company he is in becomes fragmented with temporal mental absences and attention to mobile technology devices. Like Neil, the impact for Andrew is that friends engaged elsewhere whilst, at the same time, remaining physically present in their company results in asynchronous

communication, causing them frustration and annoyance. Andrew considers his views of what constitutes a social dinner gathering to be "old-fashioned": everyone together without technology at the table. However, the behaviours of Hannah, Neil's friends, and Andrew's dinner companions demonstrate that a reality of the digital era is that technology plays a role in socialising at the table just like the diners. I witnessed Hannah's absence during our interview at the time she stopped talking to answer a text message and have observed the same behaviour in several other social settings.

7.2.5 Multiple Modes of Communicating

A common theme emerges that advances the understanding of the implications for socialising in a digital society. Mobile communication devices, coupled with smartphone functionality, create, for field study members, multiple modes of online communication, including real-time video calling and instant messaging. This connectivity impacts on the synchronicity of offline communication, as illustrated in the evidence presented so far. In face-to-face settings, Neil and Andrew want people to communicate synchronously. They have difficulty with people interacting asynchronously—behaviour learned through online communications. This evidence points to a change in the nature of face-to-face socialising. Generally familiar with the norms of offline communication, people begin to interact online in an asynchronous fashion. The result is that offline communication becomes asynchronous. In this context, socialising offline takes on the characteristics of online communication.

Evidence illuminates a blurred distinction between online and offline socialising, with people reacting differently to the changing norms and values of communication. Some people reveal an inability to disguise their disengagement from face-to-face settings—whilst they are mentally absent attending to a phone contact, others interact asynchronously perfectly successfully.

7.2.6 Isabel's Story

Consider the example given by Isabel of an occasion when she noted the behaviour of her niece in a face-to-face conversation when her niece was also using her mobile phone. Talking about the interaction between herself and her niece, Isabel explained,

> My niece is sitting there, and she *is* chatting [with me}, but she also isn't looking at me!

Vignette 9. Isabel

Isabel is an outgoing mother of two, living overseas away from her family and long-time friends. She has no family support in Australia but has built up a large network of new friends—some through the Mother's Group, some through her part-time work, even neighbours. She is very close to her family overseas and communicates with them regularly via FaceTime and Skype calls.

Maintaining relationships is important for Isabel, and she tells me she is disappointed and frustrated that many of her friendships seem to be drifting away because Isabel does not participate in the online communities (primarily Facebook) in which most of her friends manage their friendships on a day-to-day basis.

Isabel refuses to succumb to the peer pressure of joining Facebook, strongly opposed to its "impersonality." She does not participate in parenting communities online but is an active and vibrant member of our (face-to-face) mother's group.

Isabel reflected,

> I think she [niece] was fully participating in the conversation with me. She never once went, "Sorry, what was that?" She never missed something I'd said. But she gave me little eye contact, and I found it off-putting to watch her smiles as she read something from the dialogue she has got going on her phone at the same time.

She continued,

> There are people, like my nieces and nephews, they are fully in the conversation with me and still texting, so they're also fully in the conversation with whoever's on their phone.

The result is that Isabel's niece, in that physical setting, opts in and out of her current situation through mental presences and absences—seeking to be mentally, if not physically, in more than one place at the same time.

7.3 Socialising in the Digital Age

Data analysis has revealed the ability to physically be present in a social setting and, at the same time, engaged mentally elsewhere through relationships with technology. Stories describe the social nature of both types of interaction and how face-to-face and online contact each fulfil an

individual's need for sociability. One useful course in understanding these empirical accounts is to consider what asynchronous communication means for field study members socialising in the digital age. In the following sections, I analyse the impacts of asynchronous communication on the ability of field study members to be sociable and on their acceptance or rejection of changing communication norms. I begin, in section 7.3.1 by considering the definition of the term 'socialise', revealing that it can be taken to mean several things, two of which stand out as particularly interesting in the context of empirical findings. These are around defining to 'socialise' as to be sociable by participating in social activities, and to 'socialise' as to instil the values and norms of a society or group. Section 7.3.2 presents evidence of socialising in the digital age from the perspective of field study members. Using the five core motivations developed in Chapter 5 as a framework, in section 7.3.3 I present accounts of what it means for field study members to socialise when their participation is motivated by each of these individual needs. Evidence demonstrates that socialising has changed, with a growing reality that technology in everyday life is now the source of much social contact, satisfying needs at different levels. For some field study members, having multiple modes of socialising satisfies their needs for well-being. For others, it provides a sense of autonomy in the ability to temporarily escape from everyday responsibilities. Still, for others, the ability to interact via technology whilst in a physical setting with a friend, for example, is a mechanism to obtain or share information. I also use findings to demonstrate the propensity for electronic contact to provide a source of entertainment outside what field study members describe as their current physical settings. Finally in section 7.3.4 I report the impacts of being connected to more than one place at the same time in terms of the fragmentation of interrelations and the resulting impact on the synchronicity of communication.

7.3.1 Defining Socialise

Field study members often referred to socialising assuming a range of meanings. To *socialise*, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Socialise [Def], 2013), means,

i. To court or desire (a state or quality);

ii. To civilize, to make suitable for society—to instil in (a person) the values and norms of his or her society or group;

iii. To be sociable, participate in social activities; to mix socially *with;*

iv. To make socialist in nature; to establish or develop according to the principles of socialism; to bring under state ownership or public control, to finance with public funds.

Data reveals instances of socialising from the perspective of field study members' contact with others in social settings and their participation in social activities. Hence, the part of the definition of *socialise* that is particularly pertinent is the ability "to be sociable, participate in social activities; to mix socially *with*." Empirical evidence also spans the acceptance or rejection of changing norms (of communication), what it means to "civilize, to make suitable for society—to instil in (a person) the values and norms of his or her society or group". Ensuing discussion separately addresses both dimensions of socialising in developing an understanding of what it means to field study members when they say they *socialise* online. First, I present data demonstrating what it means to socialise in the digital age and then examine reactions to changing communication norms.

7.3.2 Socialising in the Digital Age

The social media practices reported by and observed amongst field study members demonstrate increased instances of socialising in heterogeneous online and offline spaces. For these individuals, what it means to socialise is being redefined. Their social world and the technologies they communicate via are inextricably intertwined, making it possible for field study members, as they describe it, to "be sociable, participate in social activities" and "to mix socially *with"* people via multiple mechanisms simultaneously. Empirical evidence demonstrates that people are socialising by simultaneously participating in multiple contacts face-to-face and electronically through their entanglement with communications technology. It is considered by some of the field study participants as normal to engage in electronic communications whilst, at the same time, being physically present in a face-to-face setting. Others consider it unacceptable when they sense the disengagement of another party from a current face-to-face setting being described or observed.

Interview and observational data reveal that field study participants appropriate social media in all sorts of settings: during casual coffee meet-ups, whilst dining out, when at home caring for young children, whilst escaping the "mundaneness" of everyday chores, and even whilst driving. Enabled by technology, these individuals are constantly in relations with the world outside where they are physically in any given moment, mentally (if not physically) allowing them to engage in

more than one place at the same time. Participation becomes social contact, as illustrated in Hannah's example when she explained how she seeks out the same community members each time she engages in a particular online forum. Over time, this interaction leads to a reconceptualisation of socialising that results from participation in online communities.

7.3.3 Motivations to Participate Online

A useful basis from which to analyse what it means to socialise when field study members report being able to connect to multiple places at the same time is to consider their motivations for seeking community that this interaction fulfils. The five needs articulated in field study member accounts of seeking community participation in Chapter 5 are as follows:

1. To maintain a sense of emotional and physical *well-being*
2. For the purposes of sharing and accessing *information*
3. To achieve some level of *autonomy* in the role as parent (i.e., independence or freedom)
4. To feel connected to the world outside parenting responsibilities by having *social contact* with other people in the same situation and knowing what is happening in the lives of friends/family
5. For entertainment and to have fun by enjoying social activities, such as exercising, going to movies, dining out, playing games, and shopping

In the upcoming sections, I present accounts of what it means for field study members to socialise when their participation is motivated by each of these individual needs.

7.3.3.1 Well-Being

Consider Fiona, a stay-at-home mother of two (introduced in Vignette 3). Technology in her everyday life is now the source of much social contact, and it is this contact outside her role as a stay-at-home mother that, she claims, keeps her "sane." For a time, Fiona has been at home looking after her two young boys. She describes that engaging online during this time is her way to

> fulfil a need for adult interaction in a situation where I am tied to the house because of the kids' ages and sleep routines.

Fiona further reveals communicating online is her way to

> connect with others when I am isolated at home with young children. I know I'm not alone—I can be at home with my boys and connected to friends electronically at the same time.

Contrast this to Christina's situation. Similar to Fiona, she had a successful corporate career prior to having children. She remains in a full-time paid employment, utilising child care facilities for her daughter. Christina explains that when she was on maternity leave from work and on days when she is at home currently, she also communicates electronically, using this as a way to

> get rid of those mundane tasks by talking, gossiping, or catching up with friends … I will talk and clean the house at the same time.

Christina's escapism from domestic responsibilities by interacting online whilst, for example, cleaning the house illustrates the role that simultaneously engaging in electronic communications plays in her well-being. Christina, her cleaning equipment, and her mobile Internet device are inherently intertwined in that moment, resulting in Christina's distraction from cleaning activities and perception that this mundane task passed more quickly. Christina describes her appropriation of social media as a means "to keep stimulated when at home with a young baby." She spoke of the isolation she experienced during maternity leave, describing how socialising via social media filled a gap in her life and fulfilled emotional needs.

> I probably used it more when I was at home, more than anything, just out of boredom and trying to connect to society again because you're in the house and you kind of need that stimulation.

This supports Fiona's position of seeking out online friends as a way to have time-out (albeit mentally) from her everyday life at home with young children. This is achievable for the reason one field study member describes in her advocacy of social media technology: its ability to allow connection to more than one place at the same time. She stated,

> I personally believe that social media is good as it has no time or place boundaries, and we can be connected at a click.

Observational data illustrates another more practical dimension of well-being. I regularly witness instances of a parent bringing their mobile device along whilst they attend a preschool activity with their child (e.g., sport or a music lesson) and spend the duration of the session engaged with the device to complete tasks such as shopping or bookkeeping. Utilising the time whilst attending

a child's activity to place an online grocery shopping order or to do the accounts for a home business are both examples of a parent simultaneously "supervising" their child and, through Internet connectivity, attending to the family's physical and practical needs (for groceries or business management).

7.3.3.2 Information Sharing

Contributing to a reconceptualisation of what it means to socialise are accounts from field study members of information sharing when connected outside their present social setting. Individuals explain times when they have been in the company of other adults without immediate parental responsibilities in that moment. They describe how these physical gatherings became obscured when others engaged with their smartphone devices to share and/or acquire information. Neil (introduced in Vignette 7) spoke of the electronic communication via BlackBerrys during a group dinner whilst on holiday abroad. Several field study members recounted occasions of being joined at dinner in a public restaurant not only by the human guests in their party but also by each guest's smartphone. Phones are in hand regularly throughout the meal, photographing the food and posting comments on social media, broadcasting where you are, whom you are with, and what you are eating. In this context, social media externalises details of field study members' social worlds outside of any given physical gathering. One field study member declared, "This is just something else I do." In such accounts, the intertwining of the person and the technology becomes apparent. Both make it possible to connect in such a way that information can be shared with multiple people in multiple places beyond a given physical setting.

7.3.3.3 Autonomy

Sophie, in her early thirties and a proactive member of our Mother's Group when it comes to organising playdates and catch-ups, recalls an occasion of being in the physical company of another mother whilst both women's children played. During this time, the other mother disengaged from their "mother and child" situation by interacting with her phone. She explained,

> I can't stand it when I'm catching up with friends for coffee, and they're just sitting there scrolling through their Facebook. I make a very conscious effort to not let it interrupt when I'm with people.

Sophie's perception is that her friend had a need for connectivity to someone or something external to her company. Sophie felt her friend was distracted from their conversation. This is

illustrative of what I have discussed as the impact of asynchronous communication in synchronous offline settings. Sophie's friend temporarily opts in and out of their interaction whilst simultaneously interacting in another activity. Escaping from parent mode, this behaviour may be understood as a desire in Sophie's friend to seek *autonomy* via electronic communication. Sophie's account reveals that though both women were present in their roles as mothers, in that moment, her friend also had another need—a need she sought to fulfil by using her smartphone device to escape her physical setting and connect to someone outside Sophie's kitchen, where they met. In that moment, the other mother was partly present in Sophie's kitchen and simultaneously partly engaged elsewhere.

7.3.3.4 Social Contact

Data reveals numerous accounts of the appropriation of social media technology to engage outside a physical setting. Neil (ski holiday maker whose friends use their BlackBerrys whilst dining), in his observations of his friends' behaviour, reveals his companions' seeming needs to connect elsewhere whilst in a face-to-face setting. Their constant engagement with their BlackBerrys may be illustrative of a desire to be "always available" to someone or something not physically present in that moment.

Andrew, (introduced in Vignette 8), gave several examples of social media enabling connectivity external to a physical setting. He has experienced feeling that other people around him are only partly engaged in the physical setting whilst also, in his opinion, partly engaged in electronic contact elsewhere. He referred to a time he shared with his friends:

> When I went out to the pub, they're all—instead of sitting talking together—they're all sitting around, drinking together, but they're not talking to each other. They're not interacting … there's not, say, eight of you out. There's, like, a thousand … connected through social media.

In Andrew's observations, social contact is pursued outside his physical company and the company of other friends. He talked about people's need to know a "society of obsessed nosey parkers." He speculated on a negative effect of mental absences on the quality of interactions amongst a group of friends gathered together.

Data reveals two contrasting accounts of the same phenomenon. On one level is the *ability* to hold a conversation face-to-face with one person whilst, at the same time, maintaining ongoing interaction with an electronic device (as in the case of Isabel's niece). On another level is the

inability to successfully do both of these activities simultaneously, as in the case of my interview with Hannah when an interruption from her iPhone caused her temporary distraction from the conversation. Data illuminates instances where contact with an electronic device by an individual in your company offends or displeases the people who are physically present. For instance, describing a time when she was having coffee with a girlfriend, I heard again from Sophie how the lack of eye contact from her friend during the times she attended to her smartphone made her think, "Am I not important enough for you to give your full attention to?" I enquired about this phenomenon in a wider context to determine if it occurs in settings other than social dining or drinks with friends. A common theme arose in the accounts from parents of the use of social media technology at the same time as having their young children in their care. Anya (introduced in Vignette 5) described her time at home with baby son Aaron:[23]

> I was at home, solely responsible for my young child's needs, who is fully dependent on me. But the first thing I do in the morning is spend an hour catching up on the overnight dialogue in my favourite forums—I did this even before feeding him!

Being connected in online spaces is simultaneously enacted by field study members and the friends and family they talk about as mental absences (however short) in face-to-face spaces. In the situations described, engagement in online activities coincides with absences in the physical world in which the field study members are present (e.g., Anya not responding to her child's needs whilst catching up on the news from friends in her "favourite forums"). By connecting online and being mentally present there, Anya, like others described, at the same time enacts her temporal absence in a situation in which she is physically present. Such absences create in-between moments for Anya and her son, moments in which the duality of Anya being present/absent is obscured, morphing into her fragmented attention to multiple spaces simultaneously.

Norma (introduced in Vignette 4) described how her "good friends," whom she describes as "serial Facebookers," invited (albeit electronically) their online community of friends to share in a dinner date they won as part of an all-expenses-paid overnight city hotel break. She told me about this couple who went on a date night. This couple[24] have two young children, and like most

[23] The names of all field study members (including references to their children in quotes) have been changed to protect their identities.

[24] I have written and informed consent from both parties to use their story.

other parents with young children, they tend not to get much quality time alone with each other. On this occasion, with the children sleeping at a friend's house, the couple dressed up and had dinner at an exclusive city restaurant. Enter social media. Norma paraphrased what the couple may have been saying to each other but explained that she (Norma) was at home receiving Facebook updates about her friends' night out and looking at photos of their meal—incredulous her friends could engage in this online activity whilst on a date. In her opinion, Norma questioned how her friends could

> waste their special date by spending time on their phones updating Facebook, not to mention wondering why the hell anyone even cared what they were doing!

The couple illustrate the appropriation of social media to externalise details about what they are doing. They photograph their meal and broadcast to online contacts where they are dining, emphasising that they are out socially without their children, as if to incite jealousy. I spoke with the couple, who told me how great the role of social media is in their lives. Connecting online whilst physically in each other's company is normal for them.

Some field study members explain that over time, communication online becomes social contact. Participating in online communities initially to share or seek information, for instance, develops into the formation of relationships with those online contacts. For example, Hannah seeks out the same community members when she visits a particular online parenting forum:

> I think there's people on there that you do find yourself looking out for, umm, because there's one in particular. I just like the way she writes. She's a social worker, and she's got an amazing ability to rationalize situations and rationalize things, so her responses are always really interesting.

7.3.3.5 Entertainment

The appropriation of social media when in the company of others in a face-to-face social setting raises a question over one's physical company if someone seeks to interact online at the same time. Hannah, from Vignette 1, confessed she was having an electronic exchange with a girlfriend to make social arrangements during the time she and I were in the café conducting our interview. In that instance, Hannah's absence from our interview, however temporary, points to her acceptance of behaviour that disengages her from our face-to-face interview because it fulfils another need she has.

Other examples illustrate this need to be entertained elsewhere (online) whilst constrained by one's physical presence in one place at that particular time. During a birthday party for one of the children in our parenting group, I observed an instance of connecting to more than one space at the same time. One of the mothers attending the party with her daughter sat across the room from me. At that time, all the children were seated to watch a magic show with a magician hired for the event. Other parents stood watching the show, interacting with the magician by singing the songs he ushered and chanting "abracadabra" prior to him revealing his magic powers! This particular mother sat on the chaise longue, nearest the children on the mat and the magician. She interacted with her child, who kept getting up to sit on her mother's knee briefly before returning to the mat (incidentally, the only child doing this; all the others kept their eyes fixed on the magician). This lady laughed at the magician's jokes and shared in his clever display of sleight of hand. However, she also had her phone in her hand, with her eyes looking down, then up, then down, then up again. She smiled and laughed at her phone at times when there was nothing happening in the room to elicit a humorous response (interludes between magic tricks or the creation of a balloon animal). She was engaged in the room, physically and at least partly mentally. But to my observation, she was also disengaged at times. She was connected to an activity other than watching the show, driven by a need other than what the magic show was satisfying for her. Online connectivity provided a distraction, which entertained her during that time, although this distraction did not disengage this lady. She remained simultaneously present in both activities.

Data reveals other instances of technology satisfying the needs for social contact and entertainment: in some cases, whilst caring for children; in other cases, parents are off duty, freed from the "everyday mundaneness" (not my words) of looking after a baby. Social contact is contact with and connection to other social beings. The contact, I am told, does not need to have depth beyond an electronic link to another "voice" at the end of a mobile phone connection. This need for social contact is one that centres on a state of being "always on" or "always available." Both states of electronic connection make it possible to connect to just about anyone, anywhere, anytime, and in any situation. It fosters a need to be entertained by knowing what is happening all the time, which was not possible to fulfil prior to Wi-Fi and smartphones. Not only this, but it fuels a fear in field study members of missing out. Fiona explained how her smartphone allows her to connect "outside the home and kids," allowing her to escape her parental responsibilities. The affordance of this mode of escapism is that Fiona can read about her friends and family rather

than read, say, celebrity gossip. Fiona can see who has posted recent comments and can respond to interesting or funny comments. Similarly, Charlotte (introduced in Vignette 2), said,

> I like it when people share funny stories or stuff that you can comment on.

Speaking of the comments people post on social media and how dialogue in these contexts constitutes entertainment, Charlotte said she wasn't interested in hearing that someone "went and had a really yummy lunch, had chicken and then we took the dog for a walk." Rather, she said, "I'm more interested in you've bought a new house or having a new baby or whatever it may be. That's kind of my reason for being on there." Charlotte says she too will "put statuses up" that externalise events in her life, photos of her child, and funny stories. But as highlighted in Chapter 6, in person, Charlotte is very private, keeping details to herself.

Social contact, according to the data, requires connectivity that is "always on," or "always available." Interacting with a wide network of people worldwide to share information and transcending the simple need to communicate and to know what is happening with other people are the aims of parents who told of their specific need to socialise, to be entertained, and to have fun. This was spoken about both in the context of a parent whilst responsible for their child and also of the parent who has personal time in which to partake in a fun activity with other adults. My observation of the mother attending the magic show illustrates how the need to have fun is permeated by ongoing technology-enabled interchanges. She was at a social gathering of children and parents, where the magician captivated the children and had enough intrigue to keep the adults' interest. I laughed at his jokes and enjoyed his "magic." This was a fun occasion. It was entertaining for children and adults alike. This other mother laughed at his jokes too. She watched his tricks and shook her head with disbelief a few times, just like many of the other adults. But the difference was that she also had her phone in her hand, and when she was not looking at the magician, she had her head down, busy, on her smartphone screen. Whether it is escapism and a need to be constantly entertained or it is knowing that they are "always on," it is the ongoing engagement with electronic devices in everyday life that field study members describe themselves or others as having that enables the fulfilment of these needs.

7.3.3.6 Impacts of Connection to More Than One Place at the Same Time

Connectivity to more than one space at the same time is an everyday phenomenon encountered by field study members, becoming increasingly prominent and occurring in many different contexts. The common enabling factor is the involvement of an electronic device with Internet

connectivity. Social settings described and observed are congregations of a Mother's Group, of close friends, of colleagues, and of family—congregations of people who seemingly wish to spend time in one another's company. Yet other activities elsewhere encroach into these physical get-togethers, distracting the mobile phone holder from their face-to-face conversation, diverting attention to an event elsewhere, or fragmenting the interrelations of the group gathered together.

This fragmentation of interrelations and the resulting impact on the synchronicity of communication was largely spoken about as a distracting, invasive erosion of quality face-to-face time. For Hannah, who became distracted by an alert on her phone, the state of engaging in a space is a binary state. Whilst she attended to the social matter with her online contact, she briefly left our interview mentally. She remained in her seat but disengaged from our interview for those few moments. Hannah also revealed that she actually drives with her phone on her knee so that she can view messages immediately when the alert tone sounds. She often has her children in the car whilst doing this. It is perhaps a confronting reality for the digital society that in seeking to interact online or to socialise, the result is a distracted driver (or a distracted parent)—both with their own dangers.

In contrast, Isabel introduces a different perspective with her story of her niece maintaining a conversation with her whilst also engaged with her online audience. This story exemplifies the ability to engage in more than one space at the same time successfully, without disturbing the synchronicity of communication with either one's face-to-face company or electronic contacts (assuming that a lack of eye contact is acceptable to face-to-face parties). Whatever the exact nature of this phenomenon, digital omnipresence is happening more and more often in the opinion of field study members.

In summary, I have presented evidence for instances of socialising in more than one space at the same time by simultaneously communicating in both a face-to-face setting and an online setting. Furthermore, analysis has explored the individual physical, emotional, and practical needs that participating in more than one place at the same time fulfils. Together, both analyses improve understanding in answering the research question of how and why people seek to participate in online communities. There is evidence about what values and norms of behaviour are acceptable and unacceptable, particularly in relation to communication that becomes asynchronous in a synchronous environment. A problem arises in that evidence illuminates inconsistencies in the values and norms that are accepted and those that are rejected as rude or antisocial. Data reveals

the impact of connecting outside a face-to-face setting via the use of a social media device, with some field study members regarding this communicative behaviour as "normal," whilst others consider any absence or disengagement from full attention to be less than acceptable. Empirical conclusions, thus, warrant a closer examination of the process by which norms and values become accepted by society, like in the case of asynchronous communication in offline settings.

7.4 The Changing Nature of Socialisation

The second part of this chapter addresses what it means, according to field study members, to be social and civilised in online communications and activities. Understanding the changes experienced by these individuals in what is "acceptable" and "expected" in terms of social rules, values, and norms of communication is important for answering the question of *how* people participate in communities. In the sections that follow, analysis of empirical data reveals insight into the ways in which socialisation or the process through which norms and values are either accepted or rejected is being altered by the ability to engage in more than one place at the same time.

To begin, in section 7.4.1 I decompose socialisation into its constituent dimensions of values and norms, analysing each individually. I deal briefly with the reasons participants have given for their willingness to socialise amidst changing norms and values of communication. Examining the reactions of field study members to redefinitions of communicative behaviour reveals valuable insights into the perceived acceptability of changed norms. I briefly address the question of who decides what behaviour is acceptable, considering whether communication norms are defined and agreed on at a global or local level, apply to all of society, or are relevant and applicable to locally defined groups. In section 7.4.2 I examine the role technology is reported to play in socialisation processes, as described by field study members. In section 7.4.3 I explore the implications of changing norms and values of communication emerging from data, revealing divided opinion ranging from positive improvements in communication possibilities to negative opinion on the detrimental impacts of technology in everyday life.

7.4.1 Decomposition of Socialisation

To *socialise* is defined as "to civilize, to make suitable for society—to instil in (a person) the values and norms of his or her society or group" (Socialise [Def], 2013). To socialise is a process

of introducing to society certain "rules" about what is acceptable and teaching community members to behave and act in a way that is deemed suitable for that society. Breaking this definition of *socialise* into its constitutive elements yields three discrete concepts for which research data contains rich empirical accounts. These are (1) the values (of a society or group), (2) the norms (of a society or group), and (3) the instillation of values and norms in members of a society or group (or community). An understanding of what the process of socialisation means for field study members living in a digital society is important for explaining their participation online.

7.4.1.1 Values (of Society or Group)

The values referred to by field study members relate to truth, honesty, attitudes towards friendship, and right to privacy, trust, and security. Anya (introduced in Vignette 5) spoke about her uncertainty of the level to which online community members value trust when they post comments for public availability, saying,

> It makes a difference to me if I am getting information directly from a person. You can see their face, their emotion. They look at you in the eyes. I trust it more … People can put anything on the Internet, and you don't know if that is true or not. Maybe I'm just too suspicious.

Data reveals that technology-enabled displacement is changing the nature of communication, altering how some individuals relate to one another and reconfiguring what it means for them to socialise. Some field study members consider it rude not to give someone full attention when in their company, raising a question about what it means to do other things external to the social setting one is physically in.

Analysis uncovers that values of communication are challenged by technology. New modes of establishing friendship emerge. For instance, Charlotte and her husband became members of an online community of other couples living in the same locality and seeking new friends. Introductions made online transformed into face-to-face and valued friends in "real" life for Charlotte and her husband. Socialising for Charlotte and her husband witnessed a redefinition to encompass mixing socially *with* other people in settings beyond the traditional face-to-face setting. One field study member, Madhu, expressed a concern that when she posts something online for the purposes of communicating with a friend, that interaction is neither private nor secure between just her and her friend: "Somebody's got it. You lose control of it."

Vignette 10. Madhu

Madhu immigrated to Australia a number of years ago. She has one son and no family support nearby. Madhu has a moderately big circle of friends—some of whom she knew prior to her son's birth; others, like us in the Mother's Group, Madhu has met since.

Madhu gives the impression that she has a low opinion of social media, yet when probed, she reveals she is an active member of the Facebook community, a regular Tweeter, has a family blog she keeps up-to-date, and has participated in several online parenting communities to read information and to seek advice on mainly childhood health or developmental concerns.

She is initially shy in a group setting, only opening up in one-to-one interactions.

Madhu fears that her right to privacy risks being undermined through electronic communications, explaining,

> I usually use VoIP services, and I call my mom, for instance, because it's easier for me to contact them using a phone … I have some difficulties with technologies such as Skype or ooVoo and using these technologies at home because they have some contradictions with your home privacy. If your computer is on and you are available all the time, then everybody can call you at any time.

In the context of Internet-based communication, values drawing on Anya's situation transmute to become highly subjective beliefs and ideals. Evidence illuminates challenges to established ideals for security, privacy, personal contact, friendship, and attention to the present moment when communication is via digital means. Characteristics of interactions in a digital society, including

the ability to be connected to more than one space at the same time, challenge long-held values for field study members. Technology is forcing those who communicate online to moderate their belief system, coercing these individuals into a position of conflicting personal ideals compared with those they value in face-to-face interaction.

7.4.1.2 Norms (of Society or Group)

Norms relate to the "rules" of online communications, norms or rules that are shown to moderate the online interactions described in the study (e.g., norms of speed of responses to communications, "rules" or expectations of being always contactable, or what is acceptable online behaviour). One evident change in norms is that reported by field study members about what is an acceptable online interaction (e.g., the norm of forthrightness). The nature of what is communicated online changes when compared with what a message would convey face-to-face, as Andrew explained:

> I'm the type of person to just say it as it is. It doesn't matter who you are. I would exercise more caution if I was in a mother's group or if I … 'cause I just wouldn't want to have that—it's pretty silly to say this. But I wouldn't want to have people to think anything less of me just 'cause I've had my opinion, so I would be more reserved if I was face-to-face.

For Fiona, "people are more forthright, rude" in online interchanges. She believes that because you "don't know who you're speaking to … [you] don't care what you say … [you have] less fear of offending." Anonymity plays a role in supporting this changing communication norm, allowing community members online to offer, according to Fiona, "more extreme and opinionated views." In her experience of participating in online communities of other parents, she has witnessed what she describes as incidents of people "ripping each other to shreds" in discussion forums and blogs.

Schoolteacher Natalie reflected upon the changing norm regarding the abbreviation of words in online communications and how this infiltrates the mainstream education system as a way of writing. Written documents such as assignments or exam scripts have, as she has witnessed, been the subject of reviews and changes to the norms of expected standards.

> In the HSC [High School Certificate] now, they allow certain ways of writing things because it wasn't mainstream, but unfortunately, now it is … words, language, abbreviations … it's becoming more and more accepted.

Vignette 11. Natalie

Natalie is an outgoing mother of one little boy. Loud and vivacious, Natalie is the centre of any social gathering. She has an opinion on everything and likes her opinions to be heard! She is quick with a story and enjoys cajoling her friends into animated debates about topical issues, including parenting …

She takes friendship seriously, loyal and committed to the circle of close friends she has from childhood and those relationships formed since our mother's group first met. Natalie struggles with the lack of predictability that comes with raising a young child—she does not like change. She does participate online but has strong opinions on the nature of what people communicate about in this forum.

Data reveals that socialising anytime anywhere via social media reconfigures interpersonal communication, rendering it acceptable to be connected online at the same time as being in face-to-face company. Fiona's story is illustrative of many others. She maintains strong online connectivity as her way to fulfil a need for social contact outside the home. Fiona (introduced in Vignette 3) recognises that "being always online is time-consuming." She describes how it "erodes" her time and means that her "kids can't get my attention because I am constantly checking e-mail, replying to texts or looking at Facebook updates." Fiona told me her "three-year-old son begs me to 'put the phone down, Mummy' and not look at it." This raises an issue in the sense of competing with technology to retain face-to-face contact. Both Fiona and Sophie (charity volunteer and mother of two girls) felt that witnessing someone in their company interact elsewhere via their mobile phone makes them question who or what is more important than being in the moment with them physically. Thus, illustrating how the norms of how one socialises are radically changing and rapidly evolving through electronic communication.

Data demonstrates how electronic communication loses the quality of message interpretation that comes from responding to visual cues, tones, and expressions. It is common for field study members to reread a message and modify it several times before transmitting it. At the same time, messages are being transmitted without any attempt to convey tone or emotion, thus resulting in

misinterpretation by the recipient(s). Frances (presented in Chapter 6 regarding her brother's fluid sense of arrangements) talked about this impact on the norm of message format, saying,

> I'll see the expression, and like I'll read a lot into something. So I think if something gets written down and you can't hear the tone of voice that person would use and you can't see their face, then you don't know exactly how it's meant.

Also illuminated were changes in the norms of speed of responses. Andrew, Sophie, and Norma had opinions about new norms of when and how quickly messages are read and responded to. Andrew believes the evolution of a culture that is always connected is a negative change in the norms of communication. He observes, "That's the problem … your phone beeps when e-mails come through … what if you get into the habit of just checking every time?" On this point, Sophie explained she feels "obliged to answer … I try to respond to things immediately." For Norma, the expectation that messages will be dealt with immediately is becoming the norm. Within this expectation of immediacy in responses, there are those who admit to fostering this change in norms of communication.

7.4.1.3 Reaction to Changing Norms and Values

Field study members expressed their opinions that people now exist in a society conditioned to respond to alert tones, to "check in" with online communities constantly, to answer text-based messages immediately, and to keep up-to-date with the events in the lives of family, friends, even celebrities. This, according to field accounts, is creating a society of people who are

> busier … because you have to go and find out what is happening in people's lives rather than them calling you or meeting with you for a two-way communication.

Evidence illustrates a constantly emergent reality in which field study members, their friends, and families and the technology "used" are increasingly interdependent. Emerging from a perception that teenagers in particular are in a constant relationship with their phones, I heard the opinion that to take a smartphone from a teenager would be akin to "cutting off their hand!" I questioned others on their views of changing norms, particularly how they feel about the acceptability of being in someone's company yet feeling that person's attention is elsewhere. Sophie told me this is not acceptable for her:

> I don't think it's socially acceptable to do that. I think it's rude! It's some of my best friends that do it. I think I'm going to have to say something! I think a lot of people

> just think it's part of everyday life now to be in touch with everybody every minute of the day.

The general picture emerging from data is that operating in a dual world of offline and online connectivity is second nature. To check for electronic messages is part of what people do in their everyday lives. Most of the data suggests this is not acceptable to field study members, thus creating a tension between what people do and what is acceptable. Field study members report feeling a sense of obligation to uphold changing norms and expectations, saying, "Oh, I have to respond … I wouldn't want to be left waiting." This is important because it highlights the issue of an increasing expectation that online communities are where people will interact to live life, to socialise, or to engage in business and politics, as highlighted in the introduction to this study in Chapter 1. If you are not participating online, then you risk being excluded from fully participating in the lives of friends and family and from fully participating in society.

7.4.1.4 Instilling (of Values and Norms)

Field study members talk about witnessing changes to long-established values and norms of "appropriate" communication behaviour, values and norms that are acceptable to these individuals (e.g., referring to the demands of a digital society in which they feel forced to accept the use of multiple modes of communication, face-to-face and online, in order to carry out everyday tasks). Evidence clearly reveals changes in values and norms to accommodate demands for *instantaneousness* and *immediacy* in electronic communications.

It is important to understand changes to the ways in which the values and norms of a particular online community become instilled since field study members describe an increasing expectation to interact and engage online. Accounts have been given that indicate norms of online community participation tend to be agreed on at a local rather than collective level (as in Hannah's example of agreeing to terms and conditions of the usage at time of registering and abiding by these every time she posts a comment). The repercussions of not adhering to such standards arise in the banning of a member, the blocking of messages, or the deletion of comments considered inappropriate.

The stories and experiences shared by field study members largely situate the "user," that is, the person choosing to interact in an online community in the role of decision maker. This person freely acts and interacts within that community, deciding their level of involvement, perhaps based on the type of membership they register for. Posting is optional, the freedom to browse

through other members' dialogues quite readily achievable. There is agreement amongst field study members that the moderator of a specific online community has influence over the nature of what is posted, reserving the right to ban members or delete or block specific comments considered to be unacceptable for some reason of language or connotation, for instance. In Hannah's words, "They say, 'You're not allowed to say that.'"

The definition and realisation of norms occurs, according to data, at a local online community level. This relates to norms of communication and of friendship in the making of social arrangements, to norms of social etiquette in dialogue with community members, and to norms of message format, response speeds, and what constitutes acceptable behaviour when interacting within an online community of known or unknown contacts.

The acceptability of online content may be locally defined and monitored between members of the online community and a site's moderator. Speaking of the responsibilities the moderator is tasked with, Hannah explained what she felt about engaging in controversial or derogatory online exchanges:

> Generally, [they] don't allow that much. They shut it down after a while. If there's a moderator online, they shut it down pretty quickly. And some topics, basically as soon as it starts, they shut it down 'cause they know it's going to end badly.

Certain rules of usage must be adhered to. For instance, you are not allowed to abuse other members. These rules are stipulated in terms and conditions, as Hannah highlighted:

> Interviewer: Do you have to sign up to terms and conditions of usage?
>
> Hannah: You do. Every time you log in, you have to say you'll obey the rules.

From my limited knowledge of online communities and informed by data from this study, any one governing body that decides on acceptable online communication or activities does not exist. Norms and values are locally negotiated at the community level.

7.4.2 The Role of Technology in Socialisation

Analysis of accounts from field study members of their interactions in online communities reveals that technology is leading to a redefinition of what is acceptable to society. Anya (introduced in Vignette 5) claims that "social media is changing the way we communicate," a sentiment echoed by Andrew (Vignette 8), who made the following reflection: "When I was young, I can't think of the world as it is today, and it's really scary to think 'How are these kids going to be?' and 'How

are they going to live?'" From his experience of technology-enabled interaction, Andrew believes "you don't have to be worried about what people think of you or how people are feeling. You can be very blunt."

Online community members can behave in a different way when communicating online, protected by the anonymity afforded by technology. This manifests in the expression of more controversial opinions and harsher judgements than in face-to-face settings. When probed on why she feels a change in communication behaviour is occurring, Fiona explained that the people she communicates with in online communities (of other parents) are "not people you need to get acceptance from."

Central to the changes in norms of communication is the role of technology—in particular, portable Internet-based communication devices. The ability to be connected to more than one space contemporaneously is, according to data, changing the social arena in which people participate. Members of the field study group explained they have the redefined capability to socialise outside their role as stay-at-home mothers, for instance, by simultaneously interacting with online communities of friends and contacts. Appropriations of technology to enable socialising in more than one place at the same time result in a society whose members feel like they are "always on" or "always available." This state of perpetual connectivity, as data demonstrates, is redefining the boundaries of personal space. According to Christina, "You have to have your phone on you all the time."

However, data also reveals that the inherent values and norms of communicating online have not caught up with the technology. Much of the sentiment from interviewees was that there exists an unwritten code of practice, a set of unspoken "rules" about what is an acceptable norm or value for communicating electronically. Technology is challenging established ideals of communicating and redefining what it means to socialise or civilise or make suitable for society the values and norms of one's society or group. Empirical evidence illustrates the disruption to parenting that occurs when parents engage in online dialogue whilst, at the same time, assuming responsibility for the welfare of young children. A picture of a "distracted parent" emerges from some field study members who admit that their intimate relationship with technology impacts on their ability to stay in the moment and to ensure the welfare and safety of their children.

Data also tells of a detrimental impact on friendship when friends in a social gathering divide their attention between face-to-face interaction and online activities at the same time. This, as

illustrated, leads to the exclusion of some groups because those people are not adopting the norms and values of communicating electronically. Thus, this results in a situation where, as field study members describe it, some people are not interacting socially with others to the same extent as they did prior to social media because of their unwillingness to adopt electronic modes of socialising.

7.4.3 Implications of Changing Norms and Values of Communication

Equipped with an understanding of the role technology-enabled communication plays in the digital society and in instilling into community members what it means to conduct their interactions in a manner that is civilised, socialised, and acceptable allows us to further explore the nuances of socialisation. Realities have different interpersonal meanings for different field study members. For some, to mentally engage elsewhere whilst in the physical company of a friend, for instance, is unacceptable. For others, this *is* what it means to socialise.

The implications of altered norms and values when communicating online is an area in which field study members shared a range of opinions. Many consider that the capabilities offered by technology will have a detrimental impact upon society that has operated with long-established values and norms. When new norms or values emerge, participants share an unsettled feeling about the future of communication. Lizzy has the following perception:

> I guess people now are just being more introverted and more into themselves than getting out there and being amongst it … I don't think it will be like it was when I was growing up, which was all just social, social, social. It'll be just all online!

Reflecting on changing values and norms emerging with the progress of technology-based communication, Andrew strongly exclaimed,

> Technology, I believe, will—I'm Andrew Thompson, and I think technology is going to ruin us! And I truly believe that everybody hides behind it and there's the addiction side of it.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented empirical evidence of the fulfilment of the needs of field study members for well-being, information sharing, autonomy, social contact, and entertainment by participating in online communities (either of other parents or of friends and family). Analysis

revealed that participation manifests as the simultaneous physical presence in a social setting and mental disengagement from that setting whilst interacting with social media. The changing norms and values of communicating in this way reconfigure what it means to socialise in a digital age. Opinions from field study members were varied, with some describing this as the way they socialise. It is just something else that they do or that it's another way to keep in contact or to maintain relationships. These people claim to have the ability to successfully operate in both the physical setting and the setting in which they are (to some extent) mentally engaged outside the physical setting. Others claim that being mentally disengaged is akin to not physically being present in that person's company at all. Such is the definite dislike for interacting with a digital device whilst in a person's physical company that some field study members consider it rude and even feel like they are not important enough for their companion to stay in the moment in their face-to-face interaction. Being digitally omnipresent is a desired and acceptable state for some. For others, it is rude and an expression of disinterest in your face-to-face companions. Thus, whilst opinion on the social acceptability of engaging in more than one place at the same time is divided, evidence reveals it to be a growing phenomenon of socialising in today's digital society. Considered together, both the conclusions about communicating differently (Chapter 6) and those about socialising differently (Chapter 7), reveal that people are living differently in today's digital society.

Chapter 8

Not Participating Online and the Impacts

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the primary reasons, as derived from empirical evidence, driving low or no participation (nonparticipation) in online communities and activities and also demonstrates the impacts for field study members and their wider communities from not participating online. The first half of the chapter (section 8.2) articulates the *reasons* uncovered explaining nonparticipation in online communities. The field study members introduced demonstrate nonparticipation at different levels. Some give accounts of complete absence from online communities, others of low-level presence (lurking) without contributing to the community. Three primary reasons emerge explaining nonparticipation. Section 8.2.1 addresses nonparticipation due to a perceived lack of time and/or value. Section 8.2.2 addresses instances of not participating because of feeling discouraged by a particular feature of online communication. Section 8.2.3 addresses nonparticipation arising out of a fear of repercussions. The second part of the chapter (section 8.3) presents three main *impacts* of not participating (or participating fully). Section 8.3.1 demonstrates that relationships suffer when one party chooses not to participate in community life online. Section 8.3.2 illuminates the limitations that nonparticipation online imposes on the sharing of everyday life events of community members. Finally, section 8.3.3 presents evidence of an inability for community members to take advantage of opportunities in their communities because they do not participate online. The chapter demonstrates a redefinition of the groups who experience exclusion in an online community context. Empirical evidence reveals that exclusion is experienced by those who reject the new norms of communicating online, not because they do not have the technology or skills to use that technology to communicate. Findings are presented in such a way that subsequent theorising can treat as equal and entangled the nuances of participating and not participating as phenomena independent of whether the community is enacted face-to-face or online.

8.2 Reasons for Not Participating in Online Communities

Empirical evidence is presented in support of three primary reasons for not participating in online communities of peers, considering the online communities of both known and unknown contacts and analysing from both a parenting perspective and a nonparenting perspective. First, section 8.2.1 reports a perceived lack of value from participating or an associated lack of time accounts for the nonactivity of some in the online communications side of their existing face-to-face communities. Second, in section 8.2.2 I report accounts from field study members describing feeling discouraged to participate online because of a dislike for a particular feature of online communication. My analysis considers both the underlying technological context within which communication online would take place and also the field study members' attitudes to altered communication norms online. Third, in section 8.2.3, nonparticipation arising out of an individual's fear(s) of repercussion from participating is demonstrated. Field study members illuminate undesirable repercussions from both a mental health and physical perspective. Evidence demonstrates the risks posed from an addiction to online communications, the potential consequences for employment security, and the threats to physical well-being (in terms of postural issues from computer usage or impairment of face-to-face relationships).

8.2.1 Perceived Lack of Value or Time (Reason 1)

Nonparticipation is found to arise from one of two sources: (1) evidence pointing to a dismissive attitude to online interactions based on a perception of the random nature of such online exchanges and (2) a blank refusal to acknowledge any value from participating in community life online. There is a questioning undertone to this participation barrier, one where field study members make statements such as they "do not need" to participate electronically and have a particular attitude to the technology enabling online community participation that results in a lack of fit between their social interaction needs and social media technology. The following paragraphs present accounts from field study members identifying instances of perceived lack of value or time from participating online. Different dimensions of lack of value are described and explained, drawing on specific accounts of lack of participation online. In all, five separate but related dimensions converge to define the category of no perceived value and/or time to participate online.

8.2.1.1 A perceived lack of value from participating in online communities

Interviews and observations capture a sense that participation would bring no value nor fulfil any current need either in terms of the individual's participation in fellow parenting-related communities or in online communities in a more general (non-parenting-related) sense. Field study members report a perception of the lack of value likely to accrue to themselves through participating in an online parenting community—in particular, in the case of Neil. This hands-on father of two (whose comments about his ski companions' inclusion of their BlackBerrys in their dinner routine were discussed in Chapter 7)[25] declared,

> I don't see the value in them [online communities] on a day-to-day proposition for me.

Further supporting this viewpoint was a comment from Isabel.[26] This part-time working mother of two with no family support in Australia would seem like a likely candidate for communicating online with her overseas family and friends. However, when asked about why she does not participate in online communities or activities, she simply stated,

> I get nothing from sitting at a computer writing to people.

Elaborating on this opinion, Isabel explained that even though technological access does not prohibit her from communicating online, she still does not interact this way. For Isabel, the idea of maintaining friendships online is not one that attracts her. This is an important point because it relates back to the deduction of an assumption in literature that given the access to technology and the time and skills to use it, participation in online communities will follow. Isabel revealed,

> I do have time, but I just don't get any value out of friendships online.

Similarly, Fiona,[27] who is a stay-at-home mother of two boys with a successful corporate background within which she enjoyed a vibrant social life, could not explain specifically *why* she does not participate in online communities other than to do so would simply not bring her any benefit or fulfilment. Her words echoed Isabel's:

> [I] didn't see any value for me in posting [online].

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[25] Neil is introduced in Vignette 7.

[26] Isabel is introduced in Vignette 9.

[27] Fiona is introduced in Vignette 3.

Accounts illustrating this reason for nonparticipation convey that they place more value on face-to-face interactions as a source of parenting information, and in general, these individuals perceive that there is no value arising from the anonymous participation in online activities.

8.2.1.2 A feeling for these individuals that they have no need to engage online

Field study members claim that they perceive themselves to have neither the need nor the desire to participate in the online activities of their face-to-face communities, as illustrated in the account from Theresa. Theresa, in her late thirties, is a successful working musician and mother to one daughter. Despite the fact that her band is promoted and followed through social media (and she admits that many of her bookings indeed come through her online business), Theresa does not participate in online parenting communities or online communities of friends/contacts. She feels,

> [I have] no perceived need to.

An interesting insight into why she does not participate in online communities came from Heidi, who views that online communication would be about trivial things. This conclusion is based on Heidi's comments about other people dealing with major life events and sharing these with their online contacts. Heidi perceives that what is happening in her daily life is somehow less important than what others have to share, saying,

> It's like other people—they are dying or something. So I don't really have a need to go on and say, "What about me?"

Vignette 12. Heidi

Heidi is a

single mother of one daughter. She and her daughter live close to Heidi's mother and also to her immediate family. Heidi grew up in Sydney and still maintains friendships that were formed in school days. She describes her preference for spending time with close family, however, rather than socializing with a group of friends.

Heidi is direct and confrontational, on several occasions

challenging the opinions or actions of other mothers in our mother's group, albeit in a nonthreatening way. However, her manner is such that not everyone would understand her intentions are well-meaning.

If Heidi has an opinion,

she puts it out there. She is very open about her personal life and expects the same in return from family and friends.

She appears confident and self-assured.

However, she admits struggling with depression during her pregnancy and has had an emotionally difficult separation from her daughter's father.

She added that in her opinion, "the Internet is just this sort of blank thing of—think I'm very 'facey' when it comes to things like that." Other field study members do not feel inclined to broadcast details of their everyday life or to "put themselves out there." Hannah,[28] once a self-confessed addict to online parenting forum participation, said, for instance,

> I've suddenly reached that point, maybe two years ago, where I just thought, "I don't need to write all this down in this context. I don't need to ask that [parenting-related] question. I don't need to complain about my husband if I'm … I just need to." It's just life, you know, and if I do, I just ring one of my friends.

What has changed for Hannah is that she is now older and has the experience of her oldest child to guide her through many of the issues she encounters with her second child. I also detected from her a sense that the novelty and excitement of always being online and actively maintaining online friendships was simply wearing off over time. Hannah revealed,

> I'm not very active on Bub Hub[29] [an online parenting community]. I think actually I don't need it [parenting-related advice].

Hannah further reflected,

> I don't need it like I used to, so I don't … most of the things that I would want to write about are actually … it's something that you learn. I don't know if it's as my kids have got older, as I've got older, but you change.

Other field study members (who are all parents) report having no need to seek parenting advice or information about parenting topics, thus explaining their nonparticipation in parenting-related online communication. For example, Bella said,

> I'm not interested in asking questions. I'm just interested in seeing what's out there.

Bella seeks to consume information but is not willing to share her experiences in order to help other people in a similar situation. I could not say there was something specific about her personality that explains why she does not participate online. She seems to be confident in her parenting abilities and says she has quite a wide network of friends and family she can turn to for support rather than engaging in online communications.

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[28] Hannah is introduced in Vignette 1.
[29] Online community names remain unchanged from original data.

8.2.1.3 A perception of not having the time to participate in online communities

Field study members in some cases reported feeling that they are already too busy in life, thus not having enough time to participate in online communities. For instance, Peita, in her early thirties and a working mother of three, is the proprietor of a busy beauty salon. She observes that the unique nature of her industry in servicing mainly female clients creates a readily accessible source of information and advice about parenting. She feels that she has no need to seek community with other parents online when her face-to-face network is already satisfying her needs for support. Peita explained,

> I don't have time for the Internet. And no, honestly, I just, it's the last thing I want to do.

Lack of time is a consistent factor in nonparticipation for many. Similarly to Peita, Lizzy, in her midthirties, is a part-time working mother of two boys who has flexible work arrangements that allow her to work from home for an agreed portion of her working week. Yet she feels time constraints preclude her from participating online. Lizzy revealed,

> [I] don't have time to post in online forums. [Re other people who do post …] I think "How do those people have time to do that?"

In the same sense, field study members claim that participating in community activities online is an *additional daily activity* that requires too much time—time they say they do not have. For instance, Anya,[30] a stay-at-home mother of a boy who requires additional support to overcome learning difficulties, spoke about her actions to stop participating in online communities that she was once an active member of when she became aware of how her time spent online was encroaching into her family life. Anya described,

> I realised that it [communicating online] takes a lot of time. I only read my e-mails these days and use Skype to talk to my mom and very occasionally to chat to someone else.

Similarly, Bella, who described her wide and varied network of close friends and casual acquaintances, observed the following:

> It's really hard to decide who can see what because you could spend all of your time changing your security settings, and I don't have this time.

[30] Anya is introduced in Vignette 5.

For Bella, it is easy to understand that keeping pace with the differing levels of access she would like all her contacts of differing closeness to have would be time-consuming and messy. Just as she has close friends and acquaintances in "real" life (i.e., offline), if she were to try to mirror this boundary in friendship in an online context, she would have to carefully monitor and keep updating the level of access that each different contact has to her online profile just as her offline contacts each have a differing access to her personal life by being close friends or casual acquaintances.

8.2.1.4 The topic of communication is perceived to be of particular importance

The low and high importance of the topic in question both result in a low likelihood of that individual participating online in relation to that topic. The perceived importance of the topic may be that it is of a *trivial nature.* Therefore, the field study member would not engage online to discuss it. Take, for instance, Heidi's account of why she does not share in the posting of everyday life online, saying,

> Just their stupid stuff going on. All their comments are stupid, pretty ridiculous on the wall—I find, and I just, I don't know … I don't understand … like Twitter, I don't understand why anyone would go, like—no offense—"I'm here having coffee with Geri."[31] I mean, who gives a shit? [Laughs] I don't understand that at all.

Heidi cannot see why a community member would want to share this sort of information about their day-to-day lives in an online forum. On the corollary, the topic to be discussed (e.g., a parenting issue for which advice is being sought) is considered important and warranting personal or face-to-face contact with the intended recipient(s). In this sense, the perceived importance of the topic to which information or advice is sought is deemed as warranting a faster or more direct answer than an online community could provide. Both Ali and Theresa had opinions on this. Ali, a full-time working father of one son and an immigrant to Australia with no family support nearby, spoke of his reservations about seeking online advice on a "serious situation" in relation to his son's health, for example. He said,

> I can rely on this [online] information if I, for example, want to book a hotel because it's not a very serious situation. But for more serious kinds of concerns, I need a more reliable source of data and information.

[31] Researcher's real name is used.

Frances made a similar point about being prepared to seek information and advice about something in her daily, such as "planning a trip," but deeming parenting-related concerns as something she would not seek advice about from an online community. Frances commented,

> I don't use the Internet … as much for baby-related things as I would for, say, planning a trip or a holiday or something.

8.2.1.5 A preference for face-to-face interaction and satisfaction with existing (face-to-face) social network means these individuals are unlikely to participate online

Some field study members are satisfied with their current offline network of parenting support and thus do not need to participate online. For example, Natalie[32] feels satisfied with her offline support network, so she does not participate in online parenting forums to ask child-related advice. Natalie, introduced in Chapter 7, does confirm that she participates online but only in communities where existing friends have an online presence also. In other words, she will participate online as part of her ongoing relationships but does not seek online advice about parenting, for example, from forums of unknown contacts. In her words,

> [I] have enough friends and supports face-to-face that you can ask all the [parenting-related] questions and get all the advice that you want with face-to-face people, and you don't have a need that brings you to looking up that information or discussing it in an online community.

Further reflecting on her reduced engagement with online parenting forums, Hannah feels that, again, because of the experience of having an older child when her second child was born that she does not need as much advice from unknown contacts in the "baby blogs." Hannah said,

> A lot of the kiddie-related things, I've [now] got people that I can talk to face-to-face.

Furthermore, these field study members claim they are satisfied with their existing social networks of face-to-face contacts in general and are not interested in forming or maintaining relationships online. Lizzy, a part-time working mother of two boys and pregnant with her third child, described her nonparticipation:

> It was because I thought—you know, a few years ago—"I've got enough friends. I don't need to dig up the past with all the people I did grade 1 with." I don't know where they are now. So, you know, why should I care?

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[32] Natalie is introduced in Vignette 11.

Refer to Table 32 for further examples of this reason for not participating in online communities out of a personal perception that to do so would create no value for that individual or that individual perceives themselves to have no time to participate.

Table 32. Reason 1: Perceived Lack of Value or Time

Perceived lack of value/time	Description of theme	Empirical examples from field study members
No value	Participation would bring no value nor fulfil any current need, perception of no value accruing through participating in an online parenting community, do not see the value from online friendships, place more value on face-to-face interactions as a source of parenting information, perception of no value from anonymous participation or online activities generally	• I don't see the value in them on a day-to-day proposition for me. • I get nothing from sitting at a computer writing to people. • Didn't see any value for me in posting. • I do have time, but I just don't get any value out of friendships online.
No need to	Perception of neither the need nor the desire to participate in these communities, no inclination to broadcast details of everyday life or to "put themselves out there," no need for parenting advice or information about parenting topics	• [I have] no perceived need to. • It [being on computer] wouldn't soothe me. • I just want to understand where I stand, but I'm not interested in asking questions. I'm just interested in seeing what's out there. • I'm not very active on Bub Hub. I think actually I don't need it. • I don't need it like I used to, so I don't …
No time	Perception of being already too busy, thus not having the time to participate and also that participating is an additional activity that requires too much time—time that is not available	• Already too busy. • It's really hard to decide who can see what because you could spend all of your time changing your security settings, and I don't have this time. • I didn't have time—I was working. • Too busy, don't have the time to register and to write comments on blogs. • I just don't think to look at jobs in Sydney, like, and respond to other people's questions … I just don't have time. • Like I just don't have time to go to read through people's updates and things. • I realised that it takes a lot of time. I only read my e-mails these days and Skype.

Perceived lack of value/time	Description of theme	Empirical examples from field study members
Perceived importance of topic being communicated	The perceived importance of the topic being communicated is that it is of a trivial nature. Therefore, the field study member would not engage online to discuss, or alternatively, the topic is considered important and warranting personal or face-to-face contact with the intended recipient(s). The perceived importance of the parenting topic to which information or advice is sought is deemed as warranting a faster or more direct answer than an online parenting community could provide.	• Just their stupid stuff going on. All their comments are stupid, pretty ridiculous on the wall—I find, and I just, I don't know … I don't understand … like Twitter, I don't understand why anyone would go like—no offense—"I'm here having coffee with Geri." I mean, who gives a shit?! [Laughs] I don't understand that at all. • I can rely on this information if I, for example, want to book a hotel because it's not a very serious situation. But for more serious kinds of concerns, I need a more reliable source of data and information. • I don't use the Internet … as much for baby-related things as I would for, say, planning a trip or a holiday or something.
Satisfaction with existing social network	Satisfied with current offline network of parenting support, possess a need for physical comfort in one's role as a parent and have a need for face-to-face interaction because of its honesty Satisfied with existing social network of face-to-face contacts in general and are not interested in forming or maintaining relationships online	• Have enough friends and supports face-to-face that you can ask all the questions and get all the advice that you want with face-to-face people, and you don't have a need that brings you to looking up that information or discussing it in an online community. • Because I live in a local community, my son goes to child care in a local community. I know the other mums in my local community, so there's less need for me to go on Facebook to find community. • It was because I thought—you know, a few years ago—I've got enough. • A lot of the kiddie-related things, I've [now] got people that I can talk to face-to-face with. • I tend to ask my husband's mum or Kerry, who's got her son who's slightly older than mine and who's got the same nasal issue.

8.2.2 Discouraged by Some Feature of Online Community Interaction (Reason 2)

Generally speaking, a subset of field study members shared a particular opinion: they would not be averse to participating online. However, there is something about the current manifestation of online communities that discourages them from doing so. There is something about a particular online community that deters the field study member from participating in it, something about the norms of communicating within it, about the manner in which interactions with other members are executed, about the trustworthiness of information found in that online community, or about a general mistrust of unknown (and unidentified) community members. Three core aspects emerge from analysis, each of which is explored in further detail in the remainder of this section: (1) the calling into question of validity, reliability, and consistency of information found in online community forums; (2) a level of mistrust found in the contributions of anonymous community members to the information posted on the community's forums; and (3) nonparticipation out of a general dislike for and an unwillingness to accept altered norms of communication when communicating online as compared with face-to-face. In order to try to explain nonparticipation at a more granular level, a definition of each dimension is presented and described, grounded on the explanation of not participating in empirical examples.

8.2.2.1 Concerns for validity, reliability, and consistency of online information

Questions were raised over the perceived validity, reliability, and consistency of information posted in online community forums. Field study members report having doubts about the credibility and quality of the information, its relevance to the topic upon which they seek advice, and the overall correctness or reliability of that information. For example, working father of two Neil, who dislikes sharing his friends' attention with social media devices,[33] articulated the following opinion:

> I'm reluctant to take advice from people when I don't know what their means and motives are. So when you put something on the Internet, you just don't know who's going to respond. It might be really well-meaning, but again, it's just an opinion and a point of

[33] Refer to Chapter 7 for Neil's account of his ski holiday friends using their BlackBerry devices during dinner parties.

> view, and it might not be a very good point of view. It might not help the situation. It might make it worse, like I find reading some of the blogs clouds what was a reasonably set judgement because of all the differences of opinion.

Sharing a similar concern, Peita, the busy beauty therapist and mum of three, explained,

> When I'm going through a medical—and, you know, when I went through that stuff this year [referring to a specific surgical procedure], I didn't look up at all 'cause I thought, "You know what, you get the worst-case scenarios on the Internet." And I just think it's the scariest thing … you hear all the scare stories, and it can be nothing to do with that … Go to the doctor, go to the specialist, and get the information, and then once you've got it, go to the Internet and search if you want—but just so's you're not freaking yourself out!

A lack of trust in unknown information sources emerges as a discouragement to participate. For Ali and Fiona, this raises questions over whether information is authoritative. For example, in their opinions towards the reliability of online information, they stated the following:

> They [information] are provided by nonprofessional people on the Internet. Most of the information is in blogs or forums … I usually read the stories on the Internet, but relying on them in hard situations is very, very hard. [Ali]
>
> [I] wouldn't get my advice from blogs and forums. [Fiona]

Empirical data reveals a perception of too much information online and of field study members feeling suspicious of the currency of that information, like Leonie put it when she said, "Lots of the things that I'm reading, if you look at the dates on them, they're years back." Hannah too shared this perception, reflecting on the difficulty in selecting from a variety of sources of the same information:

> If I go on there [an online parenting forum] and say this is the issue I've got, you know, like "My daughter's got a 40-degree temperature," and there'll be like 40% who'll say, "Quick, rush to hospital. Whatever you do, get her to hospital." There'll be 40% who'll say, "Oh, give her lots of Panadol and leave her for the night." Well, that's not helpful at all 'cause you're all disagreeing with each other.

Equally important are the concerns for the permanence of information posted online, particularly in the context of what is considered to be an impersonal way of exchanging information. Asking parenting-related questions in Internet forums or blogs is something field study members are unlikely to do because of the fact that the community members they would be asking advice from

do not know their child/children in person. Hence, any opinion offered could only ever be at best general in nature.

8.2.2.2 Mistrust of information contributed by anonymous community members

Information posted in the discussion forums of Internet-based parenting communities is considered to be subject to doubt when posted by community members using aliases to remain unidentified. Field study members report a dislike for the behaviour of online parenting community members when they remain anonymous and a reluctance to engage with anonymous community members. Natalie explains, "I think that you can write anything down. I don't *know* that they're a parent. I don't *know* that their information is based on truth. I don't know anything about them." Similarly, Fiona told me, "I don't feel like I'm connecting to anyone."

Mistrust of unknown information sources is a concern, suspicions arising about the authority of anonymous online parenting community members in giving advice on particular topics. The overall result for field study members like Ali and Sophie is the perception of a low value placed on anonymous interactions. Ali commented that his lack of participation online is,

> because I don't know the person who wrote this in the blog. Therefore, I don't trust it.

Sophie added to this point, saying,

> Anonymity … that's probably why I haven't been too active in that [participating online] because you read some of the things, and I just think that people I've seen … you wouldn't say things to your friends that you would say anonymously.

8.2.2.3 Online communication norms and values

In this regard, evidence emerged of a dislike for and an unwillingness to accept altered norms of communication when communicating online. This sentiment arose in the context of online interactions as compared with face-to-face interactions. Field study members described being deterred from participating in online communities because of particular norms such as the brevity of answers given via "posted" comments, the perceived formality that written correspondence takes on, and because without expression of feelings and emotions, they consider that intended meanings of information posted are easily misinterpreted. The following are some examples from field study members:

> You find a lot of the responses a bit stilted on the Internet, and they don't cover the breadth of the question that you would probably be asking face-to-face. [Neil]

> Virtual friendship is not real. I guess it is mostly because you can't see feelings and emotions behind the words written. [Anya]
>
> It's a bit of a fake world, isn't it? You can really be anybody, and you can post [to an online forum], or you could put a photo of a model and say, "Oh look, this is me." [Andrew]

In general, field study members perceive online interactions with unknown contacts to be *critical* in nature, *superficial* and *artificial* when judged against the traits they believe to exist within face-to-face information exchanges. Illustrating this point, Sophie, charity worker and mother of two, stated,

> In the more public domains where people don't know each other, they can be a bit more critical with what is said, and I don't agree with that.

Similarly, stay-at-home mother of one, Frances, who likes to spend quality time with her small circle of close friends, said,

> It's a very superficial kind of contact, which I don't really like. Like I don't like getting just "Oh, this person just had a baby" and you think "Oh …" It's a bit superficial for me. I don't really like that kind of connection.

Refer to Table 33 for further examples of not participating in online communities because of feeling discouraged due to some particular feature of online communication.

Table 33. Reason 2: Discouraged by Some Feature of Online Community Interaction

Discouraged	Description of theme	Empirical examples from field study members
Validity, reliability, and consistency of online information	In regard to the information in such forums, doubt its credibility, quality, relevance, correctness, and reliability; do not trust unknown information sources; question if the information about a topic is comprehensive; find that there is too much information online; suspect the currency of information; struggle to select from a variety of sources of the same information. Concerned over the permanence of information online and consider this is an impersonal way to exchange information, suspicious of the authority or credentials that an online information source has to give information and advice about parenting topics, because online parenting community members have no relationship with or knowledge of the field study member's child	• I have read stuff and totally disagreed with it and have been tempted to comment on it, but I've never posted … lots of the things that I'm reading, if you look at the dates on them, they're years back. And for me, to pipe in and say something, they wouldn't even know that I'd said it. • I don't feel like I've got much to offer … ! I'm a good mum, and my daughter's a very happy daughter. But in regards to knowing what to do when there's a temperature or knowing how to get rid of symptoms, I don't know those things. • And that's the other issue, of course. If I go on there and say this is the issue I've got, you know, like "My daughter's got a 40-degree temperature," and there'll be like 40% who'll say, "Quick, rush to hospital. Whatever you do, get her to hospital." There'll be 40% who'll say, "Oh, give her lots of Panadol and leave her for the night." Well, that's not helpful at all 'cause you're all disagreeing.
Anonymity causes mistrust	A dislike for the behaviour of online parenting community members when they remain anonymous, a reluctance to engage with an anonymous community member, mistrust of unknown information sources.	• I just don't care enough about sharing my opinion [in online forum] 'cause I just don't know who they are. • I don't know the person who wrote this in the blog. Therefore, I don't trust it.
Online communication norms	Deterred by norms of online communication; the brevity of answers given via "posted" comments; the perceived formality that written correspondence takes on; without expression of feelings and emotions, meanings are easily misinterpreted; online interactions with unknown contacts to be overly critical in nature, superficial, and artificial	• Since then, I also met (in real life) some of my good old "virtual" friends. And I must say that real-world friendship is quite different to a virtual one. I will never be able to be friends to these good "virtual" friends that I met. (I'm sure some of them were disappointed in me the same way I was disappointed in them) Virtual friendship is not real. I guess it is mostly because you can't see feelings and emotions.

8.2.3 Fear of Repercussions from Participating Online (Reason 3)

A fear of the repercussions of participating in online communities and, in general, a wish to avoid falling victim to an undesired compulsion for or an addiction to engaging in online interactions emerge. Field study members spoke candidly about their fears and concerns for personal safety and well-being. They described three aspects of this issue: (1) the individuals themselves have some personality traits or attributes that predispose them to avoid participating online (e.g., an addictive personality or a need for privacy in their personal lives), (2) the individual wishes to avoid negative outcomes from participating, and (3) that individual's particular attitude to social media deters them from engaging in community life this way. These core issues are discussed in the following paragraphs.

8.2.3.1 Personality trait/attribute

Field study members spoke of believing they have certain personality traits that make it unlikely that they will ever have a desire to participate via online communications. For instance, some consider themselves to be private people or simply have no interest in communicating this way, instead having a preference for face-to-face interaction. Some have a personal aversion to the Internet and social media in general, citing reasons such as a concern for the safety of self and others. For instance, Neil, who was amongst only a few at a social dinner gathering fully engaged in the table conversation when most of the other guests were also interacting with their BlackBerrys, does not participate in online communities, describing his reasons as those of privacy. He stated,

> I'm too private a person to broadcast those things [personal information].

Field study members made several references to general apathy towards social media. Peita, Bella, and Isabel felt this was the reason behind their nonparticipation. Peita (a beautician and a mother of three from Sydney) feels she is "not really an Internet person." Similarly, Bella (an immigrant to Australia and a mother of two) stated, "I have no interest in meeting people through Facebook." Coming from Isabel (also an immigrant to Australia and a mother of two), I heard an expectation of communication with friends face-to-face rather than via social media. Isabel revealed, "I expect my friends to tell me personally when they have news."

On a more intrinsic level, one field study member raised an interesting concern about her sense of self-worth. She described that she felt her opinions (about child-related issues) are such that others would not be interested in her experience of parenthood nor could she make contributions to an online community of parents that she thinks others would consider to be of value. Christina, a working mother of one, has a successful corporate career that she balances with home life through flexible working arrangements. Christina described having a wide social circle of friends from school and her university days and also having a fulfilling social life through her work colleagues. She says she is not the stereotypical "earth mother," that some of her peers seem to be, still gravitating more towards adult-based social activities rather than family get-togethers when she has a choice! Confident, independent, and respected in her workplace, Christina's self-doubt when it comes to her parenting expertise was surprising. She explained why she would not participate in an online parenting community, saying,

> I don't feel like I've got much to offer … ! I'm a good mum, and my daughter's a very happy daughter. But in regards to knowing what to do when there's a temperature or knowing how to get rid of symptoms, I don't know those things.

This sentiment was further supported by an observation from Norma, who in face-to-face parent-and-child settings always has something to say, always has an opinion, is quick to share that opinion, and is always ready with a witty comment. However, when asked about why she does not participate in parenting communities online, she stated, "I don't really have that much to say," which I observed to be an unexpected feeling for Norma. Others hold personal *opposition* to participating in community life online, projecting an unwillingness to share information or to register. Some have formed a negative perception of the type of person who participates in online parenting communities, deterring them from participating themselves, as I heard from Heidi (a single mother of one daughter): "There's some idiots writing stuff on there too, so I don't!" This sentiment was further supported in the comments of Norma, who explained that what she shares is censored and that her opinion of those sharing random/superficial details of their everyday lives is one of confusion:

> I don't really get it. I've got a friend who posts her dinners some nights, stuff like that … "Oh, look at this." I wouldn't do it when we go to the Shangri-La. That'd be the only time Rowan and I would be enjoying a meal, and the last thing I'd be doing is taking pictures for Facebook, but that would probably be the only time I would see it as worthwhile doing that 'cause I'm having this fancy meal.

8.2.3.2 Fear or avoidance of a negative outcome

Evidence emerged of nonparticipation online arising out of a wish to avoid some negative outcome. Such concerns were expressed at multiple levels: some explicitly referring to protecting the integrity of their personal information, others fearing a more implicit repercussion in the sense of addiction or compulsion to continue participating if they do make that initial online engagement. Materialistically, the fact that personal information posted online is deemed to be permanently accessible is of great concern to some, like Neil and Christina. Both work in corporate institutions, both are at management level, and both realise the potential implications for their professional lives from the sharing of details about their private lives in a public online community. They revealed the following:

> There's a lot of stories in the press about people losing jobs and being fired and having issues with CVs because of pictures on their Facebook profile or comments that they've made [online]. [Neil]
>
> I don't still actively use Facebook. I've probably gone off Facebook probably for fear of what is written on there can come back. I don't like that there's a record of what's been written on Facebook. And maybe that's my fear of the Internet as well, what's being recorded somewhere. [Christina]

Fear of negative outcomes, coupled with concerns over the openness of information access, results in a fear over the loss of control over personal details and an unease about personal safety if information is in the public domain. Neil further explained where his reticence to online participation comes from:

> Things do go viral if they titillate people, and it's instant as well. There's no taking it back, and everyone in the world knows.

Others, like Anya, for example, seek to avoid becoming addicted to interacting online, anxious that any thread of dependency upon this online domain would be a bad thing for them. She does not participate online currently, having come from a position of being online "night and day." Speaking about her cessation of online activities much akin to withdrawal from a drug, Anya revealed,

> It took me a while to "wean off" this type of communication. I felt like a drug addict, I guess. I felt emptiness that I tried hard to fill.

For Anya, not participating is a deliberate attempt to avoid experiencing personal feelings of guilt—guilt, she says, that comes from neglecting her face-to-face relationships with her family and friends. She said,

> I guess I felt guilty that I was spending too much time online rather than playing with my son, so I decided to stop [participating online].

There were also accounts of not participating online for reasons of self-limiting behaviour. For these people, there is evidence that they intentionally self-exclude from participating in online communities or selectively engage in some online interactions but not others to minimise any negative outcome. Anya explained more about her reasons for "banning" herself from participating in online communities. She said, "I don't go to any forums at all now. I banned myself from all communities … I just 'banned' myself from each and every website/community, organised a '10-minute e-mail,' changed my e-mail at forum settings to that '10-minute e-mail,' then changed my forum password to a randomly generated password (which I destroyed later)"—intentional actions to cease her participation in online communication. Less deliberate, but nonetheless also self-limiting behaviour, are the accounts from Isabel and Rowan, who claim that nonparticipation is "[out of a] point of principle … testing friendships to see which will survive" and "I've become more picky now in who I accept [to connect with online]," respectively.

8.2.3.3 Attitude to technology

Some people perceive there to be a technological consideration preventing them from participating in online communities. They perceive a lack of fit between themselves and the technology that enables online communication. For instance, the novelty of a new technology wearing off was cited as a reason, along with a mistrust of electronically mediated interactions and technological restrictions posed for access to online communities, restrictions being both at a general level to certain social networking sites or at an individual level to communities that are closed to nonmembers. For instance, regarding her reduced usage of Facebook in the context of her lack of trust following the hacking of her account, Madhu explained,

> I think it [participating online] got boring after a period of time. More and more people, like many of my schoolmates, they started adding me. Like one finds another and finds another, and then that's how they keep sending friend requests, and then you add them. But then, other than a usual "Hi," "Oh, you haven't changed," "You still look the same," you don't have anything to talk about because you haven't been in touch.

For different reasons, Ali's participation in Facebook is also limited by technology. But in his case, there are technological constraints imposed upon him. He explains,

> In my home country, it was very hard for me to get access to Facebook … even as a software engineer … the ISPs restrict access to these kinds of social media because these media have been used for different political gatherings etcetera in my country.

Others expressed feeling that using the required technology is too difficult or causes a negative effect on their physical well-being. As discussed in section 8.2.2, anonymity deters some from participating online. Anonymity is offered via the use of aliases and the creation of online profiles that do not identify you as you are identified in person. It emerged that smartphone applications allowing the free exchange of text messages directly to recipients' phones replace the need for some to communicate via an online community, as I heard in the following account from Andrew. He revealed that he formerly participated online, but not currently:

> I've still got an account [on Facebook]. Before I got a smartphone, I was using Facebook to keep in touch with Leonie's cousin in England, but now we just use our phones using free messages—WhatsApp, for example.

At a more macro level, the absence of personal (eye) contact when interacting electronically is enough of a deterrent for some to refrain from participating in online communities. Lizzy, a working mother of two, reported having a general dislike for interacting with technology to address parenting issues, saying, "For me, I just never got into it, and now I'm kind of anti it." Refer to Table 34 for further examples of this reason for not participating in online communities and/or activities out of a fear of the potential repercussions for that particular individual if they were to participate online.

Table 34. Reason 3: Fear of Repercussions from Participating Online

Fear of repercussions	Description of theme	Empirical examples from field study members
Personality trait	Because certain personality traits make it unlikely to have a desire to participate via online communications, too private a person, simply have no interest in communicating this way, have a preference for face-to-face interaction, have a personal aversion to the Internet and social media in general, opinion of self-worth is such that others would not be interested in their lives nor could they make contributions to the community that they think others would consider to be of value, have a personally held unwillingness to participate, an unwillingness to share information or an unwillingness to register as a community member, hold a personal concern for the safety of others, the negative perception of the type of person who participates in online parenting communities	• I'm not really an Internet person. • I have no interest in meeting people through Facebook—I am registered, but not with my name. They know who I am, but I don't use my name. • I don't really have that much to say. People post "at such and such a café," and I just don't care! I've no idea why they're doing that. • I don't really get it. I've got a friend who posts her dinners some nights, stuff like that … "Oh, look at this." I wouldn't do it when we go to the Shangri-La. That'd be the only time Rowan and I would be enjoying a meal, and the last thing I'd be doing is taking pictures for Facebook, but that would probably be the only time I would see it as worthwhile doing that 'cause I'm having this fancy meal. • There's some idiots writing stuff on there too, so I don't.
Fear/avoidance of some negative outcome	A wish to avoid some negative outcome from participating; repercussions because information is deemed to be permanently accessible; avoiding addiction, dependency, or further isolation from retreating into an online world; not wishing to encourage the sharing of random information; a fear of the loss of control over personal information; fear for personal safety; avoidance of intrusion of ICT into everyday life; avoidance of unwanted contact; concerns over the openness of information access; a wish to avoid any confrontation with other parents over controversial parenting issues; a personal feeling of guilt from neglecting face-to-face relationships	• There is nothing about my situation that would make me join Facebook … I don't think I'd be getting rid of the loneliness. I'd be creating more because I'd be sitting looking at this little device, writing on it, and I'd be even more aware of how isolated I was! • I started to have a lot of people asking for friendship. I never knew them. We had friends in common, but I don't know who they were, so I just thought maybe it was time to be just a bit anonymous here and just get out of there.

Fear of repercussions	Description of theme	Empirical examples from field study members
Self-limiting behaviour	For reasons of self-limiting behaviour, intentionally self-excluding or selectively engaging in some interactions but not others	• [Out of a] point of principle … [I am] testing friendships to see which will survive. • I just "banned" myself from each and every website/community. • I don't go to any forums at all now. • I changed [my] router's settings so that websites that I was using were unavailable for me.
Technological reasons	Because there is something technologically preventing them from participating, the novelty of a new technology has worn off, no sense of trust communicating in an online world, access is restricted either at a general level to certain social networking sites or at an individual level where communities are closed to nonmembers, using the required technology is too difficult or causes a negative effect on their physical well-being, anonymity functionality deters them, smartphone applications allowing free exchange of text messages directly to recipients' phones replace the need to communicate via an online community, general resistance to the adoption of a new technology, the absence of personal (eye) contact, a dislike for interacting with technology to address parenting issues	• I attempted to join one of the groups a couple of times, and for some reason, my request wasn't granted. I don't know if maybe it wasn't received, but the permission was never granted, and I tried at least twice to be added to the discussion thread. Maybe I did it wrong, but in the end, I just said, "Forget it."

8.3 Impacts of Not Participating in Online Communities and/or Activities

In this section, I present empirical evidence of the impacts of not participating in online communities. Impacts are experienced in three broad areas. These three areas help explain how nonparticipation affects individuals and the communities they are members of. First, in section 8.3.1, evidence illustrates that the relationships between members of the field study group and their peers suffer when the field study member or another member of the community with whom they have a relationship does not participate in community life online. In addition, findings presented in section 8.3.2 illuminate the impacts of nonparticipation in online communities as experienced in the limitations this imposes upon the ability to share in the everyday life events of community members who are sharing this information in their online communities. Finally, in section 8.3.3, analysis reveals an inability for community members to take advantage of opportunities in their communities because they do not participate online and therefore limit the community-based opportunities that they can capitalise upon.

8.3.1 Effect on Relationships with Friends, Family, and Community (Impact 1)

The first impact demonstrates how an individual not participating in the online activities of the communities to which they belong affects the maintenance of relationships with other members of their community who *do interact online* to share their day-to-day chitchat online. Those not participating online miss out on daily banter. Hence, according to field study members, relationships with family and friends suffer. Conclusions are grounded in examples of not participating as reported by field study members. There are two main aspects, each explaining a separate effect of not participating for the maintenance of relationships.

8.3.1.1 Sharing in news of everyday lives of friends, family, community members

Field study members describe the inability of the *non*participating individual to share in news of the everyday lives of their friends, family, and community members. Missing this news reportedly impacts on the ability to maintain existing friendships and family connections as strongly as if all parties were up-to-date on the daily banter of friends and family, both by checking what has been

posted online and by contributing their own updates for friends and family to read. Speaking about this, Charlotte, who *does* participate in online community life, said the following of her participation:

> If you don't go on[line] often enough, you actually do miss out on seeing certain things [that are happening] … there could potentially be things that I've missed on a weekend where I haven't checked [an online community that I am a member of].

In a broader sense, reports from field study members refer to an inability to keep abreast of random items of news or "chitchat" about recent events in the lives of family and friends because of not participating online. For instance, the following dialogue occurred in an interview with Hannah (a full-time mother of two and pregnant with her third baby, who admits to the central role that online community participation plays in her daily life in her interactions with friends, family, and also unknown community members).

> Interviewer: If you weren't on Facebook, would you have known that your friend hit her 20-kilo weight loss milestone?
>
> Hannah: If I weren't on Facebook? Probably not or probably eventually in a long time. Not now, she wouldn't sort of think to ring or text me to tell me.

Both these impacts have effects for the nonparticipating individual(s) and also for the dissemination of everyday news and events through one's community. Participating in face-to-face interactions but not reading or sharing regular updates about your daily life or the lives of friends and family has the potential to damage relationships because of one or both parties missing out on the news posted online. It is challenging to feel fully connected to a close friend if you have not been aware of his/her chitchat about everyday events. When face-to-face or personal dialogue occurs, it is sometimes stilted, with the online participant frequently saying things like "Oh, you wouldn't have heard, of course … 'cause you're not on Facebook." A sense of feeling excluded or left out was the sentiment I detected from field study members when we discussed this issue of how to maintain relationships that are enacted both offline and simultaneously online.

8.3.1.2 Maintaining relationships with friends/family overseas

This has a lot of similarity to the maintaining of relationships with friends and family in general. However, it was specifically in relation to those friends and family who live in a different country to the field study member. Some described how their own nonuse (or the nonuse by their friends

or families) of online communication greatly impacts on the ability to maintain existing relationships with friends and family overseas. As Lisa described her experience with keeping in contact with friends abroad, she commented on the increasing lack of contact with a particular friend because the field study member herself does not participate in the online community that her friend uses for posting updates of her life. Her friend does not keep in contact with the field study member by another means. Lisa claims,

> If you're not on[line], then you don't hear from them. For example, one friend [I've had] no contact for two years now.

There were also occasions described of missing out on hearing about events in the lives of friends and family overseas because of not participating in their online communities to share this information. To protect his relationships and avoid missing out on important news, because some of his friends and family overseas do not share their news online, Ali engages in alternative modes of communicating, saying, "I use phone calls to connect with friends or family in my home country." Refer to Table 35 for further examples of this impact on the relationships between field study members and their peers when one or the other party does not participate in the activities of their community enacted online.

Table 35. Impact 1: Impacts Relationships with Friends, Family, and Wider Community

Things missed out on by not participating online	Description of theme	Empirical examples from field study members
Sharing in news of everyday lives of friends, family, and community members	The feeling of being "in the loop" about the day-to-day happenings in the lives of friends and family by missing out on chitchat and updates posted online.	• Through the charity, they have a website, and they also have a Facebook page, and they are a lot more active on Facebook. Like their newsletter only goes out once per month, so there are people who want to be involved, but they miss out on a month's worth of chitchat on Facebook and, they only get the newsletter. And there's a lot of stuff not in the newsletter that they put up on Facebook, so there are a lot of volunteers and a lot of supporters that we don't tap into as much because they're not on Facebook, and that's our main avenue of connecting with people who want to support the charity.
Maintaining relationships and missing opportunities to participate in life events of friends/family overseas	The impacts described were deeper than just missing out on daily chitchat. The emphasis was on the detrimental long-term effect on relationships, when one party relies on social media–based communication to broadcast events in their life, either with an assumption that all important contacts will access their news this way or without considering that significant friendships may suffer if those people do not participate online.	• Some existing friends only communicate by Facebook now, so if you're not on, then you don't hear from them. For example, one friend [I've had] no contact for two years now. • I use phone calls to connect with friends or family in my home country who are not allowed to access the Internet or Facebook. • We ask our families to tell us about events that are happening, news about friends or family because we cannot connect with them via Facebook or the Internet. • [I] have to rely on news and information being passed on my some close contacts, and at the same time, it's somehow unreliable because they are trying to transfer the information, and they are not sure.

8.3.2 Limits Participation in Life Events of Community Members (Impact 2)

In this section, evidence explaining a second impact of not participating in one's online community is presented. Data reveals that nonparticipation in online activities also limits participation in the life events of community members. Evidence is presented of experiences with missing news of a death in the family or a birth amongst one's circle of friends. In this context, reports also contain instances of regularly missing news and photos of events and occasions posted online, resulting in that person feeling they are unable to participate fully in the lives of their family, friends, and the wider community. Field study members also described their frustration when their friends and family do not participate online, therefore missing out on life events that the field study members are communicating about in their online interactions with other friends and family members. I will explore three aspects of missing out in participating fully in the life events of friends and family that emerged from analysis.

8.3.2.1 Missing photos from occasions in the lives of family, friends, and community members

From observations, sharing photographs is an important means of communicating online. An activity well supported by social media, there are, according to accounts from field study members, significant effects of not sharing photos online in that it limits a nonparticipating individual's ability to feel included in the life events of their friends and family. Isabel recounted instances of receiving notifications of photos her friends have posted online, saying, "I get messages every so often saying, 'Go to Facebook to check out my photos,' but I'm not on Facebook, so I can't." Lizzy further supported this sentiment, describing conversations with some of her friends who actively participate in Facebook for the sharing of photos. She recounted, "They say to me, 'You're my only friend that I talk to on the phone,' or they say, 'Oh, didn't you see that photo? You better get on Facebook!'" For both Isabel and Lizzy, I sensed a feeling of disgruntlement that their friends somehow "complain" about Isabel and Lizzy not participating online. Neither field study member said that such comments from their friends will change their perception of online communication or persuade them to start participating.

Data highlights a fundamental issue—that of the *assumption* of many online community members that the friends and family with whom they wish to maintain a relationship will be able to share

in their photos because they are assumed to be participating online. A regular participant in both online communities of known contacts and online communities of unknown contacts (such as parenting forums), Charlotte captured this perspective, declaring,

> I kinda just assume there's enough people on Facebook to see [my photo updates].

Even when this assumption of participation is not present, awareness that a friend or family member will not be able to share in your photos because you know they do not participate online is not adequate incentive to lead them to consider an alternative way of sharing the photos and, in turn, protecting their relationship. Ali described,

> I can send separate e-mails to those not on Facebook, attaching photos, etc. But it is hard for me. I'd have to have a list of all those not on Facebook and have their e-mail addresses, etc. Sending an e-mail is harder than posting something on Facebook!

8.3.2.2 **Missing sharing news of own life events or hearing news from friends, family, or community members** (e.g., news of the death of a friend's family member or the birth of a friend or family member's baby or a change of address)

Examples from the field study demonstrate that not sharing in news from others or reciprocating with the sharing of the person's own news is limiting the extent to which that person can feel part of their friend's or family member's life. Leonie described not hearing the news of a family member's change of address because it was communicated via a post to an online community in which she was not participating.

> It was … hot that day, and that exact same day, he'd [brother-in-law] written a message [on Facebook] about something like "Oh, it's days like this I wish I was still living at home in Bundeena with a swimming pool." And then how many people responded? "Oh, you're not living in Bundeena anymore? And you haven't been for about six months?" and "Yeah, or you're not living in Bundeena anymore." And he'd reply, "Oh, I moved out to Blacktown in July." And then another person … "I didn't realise you …" So nobody knew he'd moved. His real location didn't matter—and we wouldn't have known that if we hadn't been looking at photos.

Field study members also report that either through their own or through a friend's or family member's nonparticipation in their online community, people are missing out on hearing important news, such as that of the death of someone close to a community member or news of a

baby's birth. Others spoke about this. For example, Ali recounted receiving news of his grandfather's death, saying,

> My grandpa died last year. My family told me after one week. I tried to know about him, and I asked about him frequently [online]. Finally, after one week, they told me he had passed away!

Similarly, Leonie recounted the receiving of news from her husband's brother, saying,

> So my brother-in-law … his girlfriend going into labour. It was all over Facebook, and we didn't know until after she'd had the baby!

8.3.2.3 Forgone opportunities to attend a celebration

Christina raised a point about her exclusion from a friend's birthday party because she simply did not know the event was happening. This happened because Christina and her friend who had the birthday were not connected online. The party was announced online. Friends of the birthday girl *assumed* to consider themselves invited. Christina, who does participate in the particular online community where the event was announced, just had not seen or been aware of the party invitation. Therefore, she missed out on the opportunity to attend the party, which she told me should would have gone to if she had known about it.

> [I didn't know about] a friend's birthday, where they've put out a Facebook invitation and invited you that way. But because you don't log on and see it … so I missed it.

Further examples of these three impacts are presented in Table 36.

Table 36. Impact 2: Limiting Participation in the Life Events of Community Members

Things missed out on	Description of theme	Empirical examples from field study members
Missing sharing photos from own occasions or seeing photos from occasions in the lives of family, friends, and community members	This relates to the impact of not participating online in the limiting effect it places upon the nonparticipant's ability to share their own photos and/or receive photos from friends and family through social media.	• Interviewer: Have you ever had poor friends like in other countries complain to you about not seeing photographs? Respondent: Actually, I have … ! • [Re friends posting photos on Facebook, knowing person isn't a member] Interviewer: Do they [friends] ever share them with you by another means? Respondent: No, what they say is "Get on Facebook"! • There've been times when people have sent me messages saying, "Check out my photos on Facebook," and they're the times that we've been able to see them by using Andrew's Facebook.
Missing sharing news of own life events or hearing news from friends, family, or community members	Relates to instances of actually missing out on hearing important news from close circle of friends, family, or community to which an individual belongs because that individual does not participate in the online interactions of the community to hear/read their social media updates.	• Interviewer: Because she's [sister-in-law] on your favourite parenting forum now, you feel you can't share the same as you would … ? Respondent: Yeah, absolutely, like I'm three weeks pregnant, and I definitely would have posted that by now! • And it's so funny 'cause we'll be talking about something in a group, and if there's somebody that doesn't have Facebook, they'll say "How did you know that?" And before you answer, they'll say "Oh, let me guess … Facebook?" And that happens with Adam's mum. I'll find out things about the family, and they live in another state, and I'll be talking to her on the phone about stuff the grandchildren have done at school, and she'll be like, "How do you know that? Have you been speaking to them? Oh … you saw it on Facebook." And she doesn't even know, and she lives around the corner from them.
Opportunity to attend a friend's celebration	This relates to the forgoing of an opportunity to attend an event because of not knowing about it (through not participating in the online community where it was announced).	• [I didn't know about] a friend's birthday, where they've put out a Facebook invitation and invited you that way. But because you don't log on and see it … so I missed it.

8.3.3 Inability to Take Advantage of Community Opportunities (Impact 3)

In this section, a third impact of not participating online is presented. This is the resulting inability of a nonparticipating individual to take advantage of their community (offline and online) because of not participating fully in the online interactions. Specific instances are presented of field study members missing opportunities, for example, to enter competitions, avail of free offers, or obtain free products. The effects of this are in the limitations it puts upon the ability of that individual and their wider community to leverage social capital assets accessible through online communities and activities (e.g., charity, products, and competitions).

Data reveals that by not participating in the online activities of the communities of friends, family, and the wider community to which an individual belongs, the individual and the wider community cannot leverage social capital of social assets accessible through the community's online activities (e.g., opportunities to support a charity, receive products [sometimes free], or enter competitions). The implications of not being able to leverage social capital are experienced at both the nonparticipating individual's level and at the wider community level, which suffers from an inability to fully access or capitalise upon a member's social assets due to that member's nonparticipation online.

Leveraging social capital accessible through your community for an individual's own benefit is a basic premise of social capital theory as covered in Chapter 2's literature review of social capital theory.[34] Extending social networks, it was argued, creates access to additional assets (social, financial, physical), thus enabling the socially positive condition of social capital development. Accounts from field study members report instances of social capital building potential being diminished through an individual's lack of participation in the online activities of the communities to which they belong. By not participating, the impact is an inability to fully leverage opportunities, relationships, and life events to contribute to social capital building efforts within the community. The five dimensions of missing opportunities to fully capitalise on a community's available social, financial, or physical capital are presented in the following paragraphs.

[34] For the review of the literature on social capital theory, see section 2.5.5.

8.3.3.1 Forgone opportunity to contribute to a charitable cause

In this instance, Neil recounted an occasion in which he missed an opportunity to contribute to a charity that he felt was a worthy cause because of the fact that Neil was not a registered member of the online community through which financial arrangements had been established for making donations. He told me,

> At the Taronga Zoo seal show recently, there was a speech towards the end of the performance asking people to support MSC [a charity] … The presenter asked the audience, "Put your hand up if you are on Facebook" … Some of the audience put their hands up. Then the presenter said, "Great, all you need to do then is go onto Facebook and support this initiative." No other method of connection was discussed or presented apart from a social media platform that I am not a member of.

8.3.3.2 Missing the opportunity to reconnect with former friends/colleagues

Examples in this area relate to the forgoing of opportunities to extend one's existing social network by establishing online connections with the friends and family who are already in your social circle. Evidence also relates to the missed opportunity to expand one's social network by not being connected to a global online community that could assist in locating former friends or colleagues. For instance, Julie explained that if they participated in the Facebook community, there were former friends she might reconnect with. Julie is the self-professed Facebook addict whose husband described her relationship with her smartphone to be such that it was more likely she would leave their children in a supermarket than leave home without her phone in her possession. She explained,

> There are people I might like to stay connected with, but who I may not ever catch up with in person either due to geography or simply they are old-school friends who I might not catch up with one-on-one.

8.3.3.3 Missing out on product promotion offers / receiving free products

Field study members reported occasions of missing out on availing of product/service offers and actual goods because of not actively participating in the online community in which they are promoted. Schoolteacher Natalie explained,

> [I have] missed out on promotions and freebies from products or stores that I like because I wasn't on Facebook, and that was the only avenue provided to avail of the offers or enter the competitions.

Evidence also demonstrates a missed opportunity to purchase a product because it required the field study member to be a member of a specific online community (to which they could no longer physically access due to technological issues).

8.3.3.4 Forgone opportunity to enter a competition

Leonie describes how she missed out on an opportunity to enter a competition because she was not an active member of the online community hosting the competition.

> I just got the kids identity tags [on the Internet] that you stick on containers and whatever else, and Identity Direct had a competition to win $600 worth of tags, and I wanted to enter that. It didn't say anything about Facebook until you clicked the link, and then it went through to this Facebook thing, and it said, you know, "Join Facebook, or like this."

8.3.3.5 Missing out on participating in/attending a social event

A number of field study members described occasions when they felt that they had missed out on the opportunity to join a social gathering amongst friends and/or family because the event was publicised and organised via an online community to which they were either not a member or a member but not actively participating. Christina recalls such an instance, saying,

> Another social thing [I missed], you know, like a catch-up down the pub or something like that that's been written on Facebook and organised that way.

Fiona recounted another such instance, saying,

> There was a concert by a former music teacher of mine … the invite was posted on Facebook. I hadn't checked that day … but would have gone.

Evidence also related to missing out on participating in a wider social event by not being a member of the online community in which the event is advertised and organised. Again, this was something Christina had experienced. She told me,

> On Facebook, people now invite people to parties and social occasions and do it online, invite them. And if you don't look on there, you don't know. So I have missed out on events because of that.

In most of these cases, the *nonparticipating* party has been the one experiencing feelings of missing out or being excluded from news, events, and opportunities. Further examples are provided in Table 37.

Table 37. Impact 3: Inability to Take Advantage of Community because of Not Participating Fully in the Online Interactions of Community Members

Things missed out on	Description of theme	Empirical examples from field study members
Forgone opportunity to contribute to a charitable cause	An instance of being unable to donate to a charity because the donation page and financial arrangements are housed by a closed-access online community in which you are not a member	• At the Taronga Zoo seal show recently, there was a speech towards the end of the performance asking people to support MSC (www.msc.org) to enable fish stocks to be kept at sustainable levels for all aquatic life, especially seals. Sounded like a worthwhile cause and one which I'd like to know a bit more about. The presenter asked the audience, "Put your hand up if you are on Facebook" … Some of the audience put their hands up. Then the presenter said, "Great, all you need to do then is go onto Facebook and support this initiative." No other method of connection was discussed or presented apart from a social media platform that I am not a member of.
Missing opportunity to reconnect with former friends/colleagues	Occasions when, because of not participating online, that individual has been unable to capitalise on the opportunity to extend their social network by reconnecting with former contacts who do participate in community online	• Respondent: My friend who's an optometrist in the next suburb to us, she sends me e-mails, and it's all "Join us on Facebook" or "Send your tweet to me." But no, I've never done either of those things. Interviewee: Because … ? Respondent: I'm not on Facebook, and I don't—I don't know!"
Missing out on product promotion offers/receiving free products	Accounts of occasions when an individual who does not participate in online activities has been unable to gain access to a product/service they would like to purchase	• I tried to buy James a Ben 10 watch—he doesn't even watch Ben 10, but he wants one—on eBay. And I have an eBay account, but then, I tried, and I couldn't remember my password. So I put in my e-mail address, and they said, "Yes, you've already got an account. We'll send you your password." And I never got the e-mail, so I can't buy this bloody watch on eBay. 'Cause I'm a member, and I don't know my password, and they say they sent me the e-mail. I don't know if maybe [work] blocks it or what, and so I can't buy, and I don't have another e-mail address."

Things missed out on	Description of theme	Empirical examples from field study members
Forgone opportunity to enter a competition	Similarly, accounts of occasions when an individual who does not participate in online activities has been unable to enter a competition they would like to have entered	• Even down to competitions now, everyone wants you to join them on Facebook or "like" them on Facebook in order to enter the competition.
Missing out on participating in /attending a social event	Accounts of occasions when an individual who does not participate in online activities has been unable to participate in or attend a physical social gathering that they would have liked to have been included in	• Carlingford High School reunion was organised a year or so ago, and I was e-mailed to say that the event was on a particular date. If I wanted to attend, I could get further information and also pay for my ticket on Facebook. • Twenty-year school reunion was [being organised] online, via Facebook, and you had to register and pay for the whole thing via that. I'm not on Facebook. The only reason why I actually got the knowledge about Facebook is because my friend Aidan e-mailed me the Facebook link that he's a member of, and he's a member of my high school page or group or whatever they call them on Facebook. I don't know the terminology. He got the e-mail from that, and it just said, "Do you know of anyone that's not on Facebook? Can you pass this on to them?" So that's how I got to know. • I do know one friend who said, who's vehemently against actually being on Facebook, and she said that she refused to go to a party of a friend of hers until she got an actual invite [Laughs] instead of just through her partner through Facebook. • There's sometimes messages saying, "Oh, I wish I'd seen this sooner," but never anything bad. It's just a case of "If I'd known this … I was at Miranda too," or something like that.

8.4 Conclusion

As presented in section 8.2, there are a core set of reasons behind low or no participation (nonparticipation) in online communities. Empirical evidence has been presented and analysed to uncover that (1) nonparticipation is influenced by a perceived lack of value or time, (2) nonparticipation is because the individual becomes discouraged from participating because of their dislike for some particular attribute or feature of online communication, and (3) nonparticipation is when potential community members refrain from engaging in online activities out of a fear of repercussion or avoidance of a negative outcome. Each of these reasons has a number of aspects that are discussed and analysed using empirical evidence to explain why nonparticipation is a reality amongst the field study group.

Emerging as a reported result of not participating are impacts experienced by field study members at both an emotional and a physical level in the effects on their interpersonal relationships and access to community resources. Evidence of having missed out on something because an individual does not participate in their online communities is presented and analysed to show three core areas representing high-level impacts on the nonparticipating members and the community in a wider sense. Evidence reveals these reasons to be (1) negative effects on interpersonal relationships with friends/family who also interact with one another through online activities, (2) limitations imposed on the extent to which nonparticipating individuals can fully share in the life events of their friends/family who share this news in their online communities, and (3) an inability to capitalise on opportunities for social capital building caused by the limiting of access to online community resources.

Collectively, the discovery of *reasons* for not participating in online communities and activities and the *impacts* of not doing so contribute to answering research question 2—designed to investigate precisely these two understudied areas. In drawing the conclusion of the three core reasons for not participating and the three primary impacts of not participating, analysis reveals a redefinition of the groups that experience exclusion in an online context. Empirical evidence reveals that exclusion is a state perceived by those who explain their refusal to accept new norms of communicating online, not because they do not have the technology or skills to use that technology to communicate. This is important in understanding the assumption highlighted in Chapter 1 that participation online will necessarily follow from having access to the required technology and the skills and time to use that technology.

It is now possible to collate the answers to both research questions 1 and 2 in constructing a theoretical explanation of participation and nonparticipation. Using a sociomaterial lens, the phenomenon of participation online needs to be positioned as a sociomaterial practice where the participating individual and the social media–based online community in which they participate are intrinsically entangled. This inseparability of the social actor (participant or nonparticipant) and the technology (social media site) with which they are entangled is key to understanding the impacts of nonparticipation online from both an individual and a community perspective.

Chapter 9

Discussion and Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter I demonstrate the achievement of my overall aims for this study of community participation. Designed with the objective of better understanding participation and non-participation in online communities, where digital equality is not a prohibitive issue, a field study was conducted to investigate an empirical problem relevant for the IS research community and beyond. You may recall the problem identified in Chapter 1 and thus motivating the entire study, is one of a contradictory situation in today's increasingly digital society. That is, observations of the exclusion of members of society from full and satisfying participation in the lives of friends and family and from engaging in social, economic or political activities because these individuals (myself included) do not participate in online communities. Yet, those who do not participate are not subject to prohibiting factors like access to the required technology or skills to appropriate that technology to achieve personal social goals. The rationale for posing this as an empirical problem requiring scholarly attention is twofold. First, it provides an opportunity to advance understanding of participation and non-participation in online communities and/or activities in a way that recognises these communities as an intertwining of people and technology. Second, it will challenge an assumption underpinning the development of ICT initiatives and social policies aimed at improving social inclusion that are currently focused on bridging an equality divide between members of society who have access to technology and those who do not.

The chapter communicates a rich sociomaterial understanding of participation and non-participation that recognises the embeddedness of social media in everyday social life and the necessity for evolution, design and emergence in understanding complex assemblages of social and technological. The behaviour of field study members in specific instances and accounts of their participation (or not) online is revealed to emerge together with attitudes towards online communication and the perceived value to them from participating in the lives of friends and family through online activities. Implications for research and practice are articulated in terms of expanding current understanding and reconceptualising the phenomenon of socialising. The study reveals a need to challenge existing assumptions about society's willingness to engage via

electronic communication, radically reconceptualising how individuals intra-act with technology. Furthermore, the impacts of not participating are positioned for further investigation from a social policy perspective in terms of recognising that non-participating online is not necessarily causally linked to digital inequality. Rather, ICT initiatives designed to engage with members of society who are not participating online need to acknowledge that online non-participation as well as participation are dynamically produced in the assemblages of people, their work and private lives and social media, and that access or a lack of access to the required media are not determinants of online participation and non-participation.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 9.2 reminds us of the rationale for the study and the specific research questions I set out to explore. Section 9.3 answers research questions 1 and 2. First, in 9.3.1, I discuss empirical evidence explaining why people participate in communities face-to-face, online or both in the context of what is currently known in literature about participation. Reflecting on literature I draw attention to areas in which the study provides a sociomaterial perspective on participation, expanding and reconceptualising current knowledge of participation particularly in light of current scholarly treatment of online communities as assemblages of people and technology. Second, in 9.3.2, the reasons found from the study explaining instances of not participating in online communities and activities are discussed with reference to existing knowledge of reasons for not participating. Reasons emerging from empirical data add to the current understanding of non-participation which is generally attributed to inequality in access to the required technology and skills to use it. The impacts of not participating online are also discussed. This is done so in the context of current understanding that appears limited by an emphasis on the exclusion of these individuals from participating in economic and political aspects of society, with little theorising of the social impacts for them. Third, in 9.3.3, I discuss and theorise how people socialise and communicate differently in the digital age. Reflecting on what literature tells us about the impacts of information and communications technology in changing the spaces for social interaction I discuss the importance of viewing such participation and socialising for both the technology that supports the act of interacting and for the people and their behaviour constituting the online spaces in which they interact. Two specific empirical cases are presented that illustrate particular areas where a deeper understanding of participation can be achieved. Theorisation adopts a relational perspective that treats as entangled the assemblages of people, social media and communities at different times and in different contexts.

Section 9.4 concludes and articulates original and novel sociomaterial contributions from this study about participation and non-participation in online communities. Finally in section 9.5

some important implications are identified for both the IS research community and for social, economic and political practices at a community level. Opportunities are proposed for continued future empirical investigation.

9.2 Rationale for the study and research questions

If you recall from Chapter 2, for the purpose of this study participation is defined as *social participation* – "the collective activities that individuals may be involved in as part of their everyday lives" (Brodie et al., 2009 p. 5). This definition is aligned with the research objective of understanding participation of individuals in online communities for its emphasis on "the associations people form between and for themselves" (Brodie et al., 2009 p. 7). An online community member or participant has been described as "anyone who participates in a community by either posting or reading messages regardless of frequency" (Ridings and Gefen, 2004 p. 3). A community member participates by contributing (posting) online content (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012) or reading (consuming) that content (Butler et al., 2008). Whilst competing theories use differently labelled hierarchies for participation in online communities and activities, (cf. Li, 2004; Nielson, 2006), definitions cover both the positive and negative degrees of participation, broadly falling along a continuum as follows:

- Those who have *never used* the Internet, covered mainly in the literature from the perspective of not having access or skills - *non-use* (Eastin and Larose, 2006; Selwyn, 2003), *non-adoption* (Katz and Rice, 2002), *inactives* (Li and Bernoff, 2008);
- *Active* online community members, decomposed based on the distinction between:
  - reading (*lurker* (Nonnecke and Preece, 2000); *joiners* or *spectators* (Li and Bernoff, 2008); *peripheral users* (Katz and Rice, 2002); and
  - posting (which is further decomposed into frequency of postings; *intermittent user* (Nielson, 2006); *regular*, *leader*, *elder* (Kim, 2000); *creators* (Li and Bernoff, 2008)
- Someone who *ceases* their online community membership - *dis-adoption* (Boase, 2010), *Internet drop-out* (Rice and Katz, 2003).
- Control, encouragement, infrastructure administration and external promotion (Butler et al., 2007) – activities required to sustain online communities (Gonzalez et al. 2012)

There is the notion in literature that opting out (and hence being excluded from full participation in society) is, for some, a rationally-made decision based on lack of interest (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007) or lack of inclination to go online (Kenyon et al., 2002). Not participating is equated in literature to being socially excluded. Social exclusion, the opposite of social inclusion,

is broadly defined as an individual's lack of participation in society (Murie and Musterd, 2004; Scott and Horner, 2004), or the exclusion of individuals from full participation in society (Maldonado et al., 2006).

Locating the problem of social exclusion from not participating online in existing literature frames the problem as an unsolved anomaly for theoretical development. Explanation is needed about why certain members of society do not participate in online communities and activities and the implications of opting out. Literature review reveals weaknesses in IS and social theories to adequately explain the non-participation online of individuals who *do have* the required access to technology to enable their online participation, who *do possess* the skills to use this technology, and who, all things being equal, *do have* a desire to interact socially. Specifically, literature reveals a lack of understanding of non-participation in communities online, amidst an assumption, and the expectation, that people will participate in society through electronic media. Additionally, review of literature illuminates that what *is* currently understood about participation is limited by essentialist ontologies privileging either a social-centric or a technology-centric explanation. These perspectives limit understanding to either social theory about the behaviour of community members or to a theory about the role of technology in determining participation. Furthermore, existing theory is limited in the view that participation is a linear and binary state, representing it as a state of participating, or not, and if participating then doing so at a distinct level based on the participant's extent of posting activity.

An important consideration arises in that access to technology is insufficient to ensure equality of opportunity. ICT initiatives, it is claimed, "pay far more attention to the conditions that encourage or hinder use than to the kinds of uses to which the Internet might, or should, be put" (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007 p. 682). In that particular research Livingstone and Helsper call for the benefits of using and disadvantages of non- or low use of the Internet to be examined more fully (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007). Thus, there emerges an opportunity to further understand and clarify aspects of participation and non-participation in online communities. While the dominant explanatory perspective on online participation relates to digital equality, existing knowledge of digital inequality and its effect of denying access to technology does not explain why many individuals opt out of participating in online communities. Social capital gives a different explanatory perspective, offering insight into the value of community membership. This view purports that an impact of non-participation is in its limiting effects on social capital-building efforts, theorizing that community may as a consequence lose out on valuable contributions to collective action. I have shown, however, that theory on the potential for participation in online

communities to build social capital is in its relative infancy, much based on assumption and lacking empirical support.

The IS research community will benefit from a richer understanding of how and why non-participation has the potential to re-shape the social inclusion debate and redefine the boundaries of who is included and excluded beyond issues of digital inequality. The implications of participation inequality require investigation at individual and collective levels, developing theory on the social exclusion dimension of ICT-enabled community participation and the practical implications of ICT deployment in denying social capital to those not participating.

Informed by the identification of a theoretical gap in understanding of the influences on participation over and above accessibility, the following general research questions motivate broad-based inquiry designed to interrogate particular aspects of online communities as an empirical domain. The proposed research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How and why do people participate in communities, face-to-face, online or both?
2. Why do some people not participate in online communities and/or activities, and what are the impacts?

The research questions have been constructed in this way to actively encourage a rethink of existing knowledge by challenging the assumptions of participation with access that underpin social inclusion theory and policy. Problematising this assumption creates an opportunity for critical insights into online community participation and opens a path to innovative and significant theories.

The different perspectives from which community participation and its effect on social capital-building and social inclusion is researched challenges some of the fundamental assumptions in literature of ontological separateness. Collectively, they build a case for a different research perspective, or paradigm that considers the social (human) and material (technological) aspects as inseparable. Little research or empirical investigation of participation in online communities is approached from the perspective that technology is entangled in everyday social life, or examines how the social and technological co-construct each other in enactments of participation practices in different online contexts. Inquiry into participation and in particular non-participation in online communities has required a different theoretical perspective, as demonstrated in this study. Adopting a sociomaterial perspective has allowed conclusions to emerge in a way that recognizes technology and everyday practices as intrinsically linked and not to be studied separately. The upcoming discussion identifies areas in which empirical evidence adds further explanation to current scholarly understanding of participation and non-participation, developing

theory that is grounded in rich accounts from field study members of their participation (or not) in communities.

9.3 Discussion

This section discusses and answers the study's research questions by drawing on the arguments built in the preceding four chapters (5 to 8) and reflecting on current scholarly understanding in the research area. In chapters 5 to 8, I presented empirical evidence from in-depth field interviews, participant-observations, and observations of participation in face-to-face and online communities. Iterative thematic and narrative analysis of this empirical data revealed important insights for explaining participation and non-participation. Evidence revealed (1) accounts of why and how people participate in communities face-to-face, online or both, and (2) insights into the reasons for not participating online and the impacts. **Error! Reference source not found.** ontains a summary of the key themes emerging from empirical data further explaining participation from a sociomaterial perspective and creating interesting and provocative insights into both research questions. In sections 9.3.1 to 9.3.3, each element of the research questions is discussed and theorised from empirical data and with reference to existing knowledge in the problem domain.

Table 38. Key Contributions to a Sociomaterial Understanding of Online Community Participation and Nonparticipation		
	Key findings from the research:	Contributions to a sociomaterial understanding of participation and nonparticipation:
Empirical evidence that shows something relevant for answering **research question 1**:		
1	Chapter 5 presents the individual needs of those who participate in community online as being for: ▪ Well-being ▪ Information sharing ▪ Autonomy ▪ Social contact ▪ Entertainment	The analysis of field study members' behaviour in specific instances and their personal narratives of well-being, information sharing, autonomy, social contact and entertainment through participation online reveals why online participation is enacted and also that it is enacted together with attitudes towards online communication and the value associated with participating in the lives of friends and family through online activities. Findings expand current understanding and reconceptualise socialising as a sociomaterial phenomenon where human and nonhuman are inextricably link, producing a new sense of belonging to community, a sense of sharing and participating in the lives of others, and self-expression.
2	Chapters 6 and 7 present how people participate online (versus face-to-face) in a number of ways: ▪ By socialising differently ▪ By communicating different things ▪ By communicating at different times ▪ By communicating in different spaces (private/public)	This set of findings raises a need to challenge existing assumptions about society's willingness to engage via electronic communication, and radically reconceptualises how individuals intra-act with technology from a perspective of the inherent inseparability of the human and nonhuman. Communicating online can be seen as an enactment that (compared to face-to-face) produces socializing differently, by altering what it means to socialize and how to socialize (that is norms). Findings add to existing understanding of the changing spaces for social interaction that arise from the possibility of participating in online communities and activities.
3	By participating in their communities, individuals in any given instance of socialising, enact their presence in one or more settings physically and mentally. Socialising transmogrifies to become a practice that is performed simultaneously through individual relationships with social media technology.	This finding helps me to radically reconceptualise what it means to socialise in a world dominated by constant connectivity and ubiquitous access to online communities.
4	Multicommunicating is entangled in the practice of socialising.	Technology is embedded in everyday life. By extending the setting to include, for instance, mobile phones and social media, friends (and their postings)

		connected via social media, practice multicommunication that seamlessly extends sociability. At the same time multicommunicating clashes with '*mono*communicating' practiced by those who do not participate online. This has important consequences for understanding how participatory practices are enacted in communities where members interact in face-to-face and online interaction spaces.
5	The concept of participation is altered when the practice of socialising is enacted as digital omnipresence in more than one community at the same time	Theorising the material role of social media in enacting different communication practices, norms and expectations is equally as important and holds the potential for deeper understanding of participation in online communities and activities. In this sense, achieving an understanding of the ways in which communicating different things, communicating at different times and communicating in different spaces online reconceptualises the concept of participation.
6	The concept of participation is altered when communication norms change in a digital age where communicative practices are enacted differently online. That is, what, where, and when communicative practices are performed differs online as opposed to face-to-face.	A theoretical understanding of the specific online participation phenomena (in the two themes identified) provides in-depth and novel insights and explanation. Exploring the two themes more deeply creates the opportunity for a richer understanding of participation recognising the intertwined nature of communicative actions and social practices when participating in online communications. This creates a different and richer understanding of phenomena than epistemological paradigms traditionally used in IS research.
7	Technology disrupts face-to-face socialising.	Evidence of the disruption of social interactions when technology enacts online community participation reconceptualises the phenomenon of participation through changes to socialising practices, thus adding further insight into the question of how people participate in communities.
Empirical evidence that shows something relevant for answering **research question 2**:		
8	In chapter 8 empirical evidence is presented explaining why individuals are deterred from participating online. The reasons are because: ▪ Of a lack of perceived value or time to do so ▪ They are discouraged by some feature of online communication ▪ They fear the personal repercussions of participating online	The impacts of not participating are positioned for further investigation from a social policy perspective in terms of recognising that the groups not participating online are not those necessarily expected for reasons of digital inequality.

9	Also in chapter 8 I present the impacts of not participating as found in empirical examples of individuals who do not participate online. Nonparticipation: ▪ Impacts upon relationships with friends, family & community ▪ Limits their participation in the life events of community members ▪ Creates an inability to take advantage of community opportunities	ICT initiatives designed to engage with members of society who are not participating online need to acknowledge that these groups act out of personal preferences for other means of communicating and not because they are prohibited from participating online due to a lack of access to the required media.

9.3.1 Participating in communities face-to-face, online or both

My analysis of empirical evidence from this study reveals five primary needs that motivate field study members to seek community interactions. These empirically discovered needs are:

(i) A desire to ensure personal *well-being*, by maintaining good emotional health and positive self-esteem, having the ability to obtain support however sensitive the issue, looking after practical needs, and being concerned for the safety and happiness of self and others.

(ii) A requirement to *share information*, for example, the broadcasting of details of everyday life, externalizing thoughts/emotions, an outlet to voice concerns/opinions, an environment to share experiences, obtain practical information relating to parenting issues or consult the wisdom of the masses, and the capability for fast and widespread dissemination of news/events.

(iii) A need to attain *autonomy*, in the sense of escapism from everyday life and role as stay-at-home-carer, freedom of speech and a sense of connectivity to the world outside one's day-to-day routine as a parent.

(iv) A desire for *social contact*, in the sense of a need to be always-on, always connected, always-available, having a fear of missing out on news or events in other people's lives, needing to be perceived as having a lot of friends and needing a sense of solidarity from being connected to others in the same life situation.

(v) A wish to be *entertained*, by having a source of social stimulation outside of one's everyday role as a parent, a way to feel connected to social events in the lives of friends/contacts, and a way to overcome being physically confined to responsibilities for care of a child by getting involved in online dialogue, posting comments, joining in debates, discussions, and gossip.

The analysis of field study members' behaviour in specific instances and their personal narratives of well-being, information sharing, autonomy, social contact and entertainment through participation online, summarized here, reveals how these have been achieved through online participation. Particular entanglements with social media narrated by different study members illustrate instances of online participation and the ways participation was enacted enacted together with attitudes towards online communication and the value associated with participating in the lives of friends and family. Findings expand current understanding and reconceptualise socialising as a sociomaterial phenomenon where humans and technology are inextricably linked, producing for instance a particular sense of social contact and belonging to community, a sense

of sharing and participating in the lives of others when physical contact is not possible, sharing and obtaining information relevant for everyday issues, and attainment of autonomy and ability for self-expression.

These needs motivate members of the field study to enact their participation in communities in face-to-face and online contexts at different times and during particular instances of participation. Empirical data supports the claims in literature that needs for community are sometimes shared across face-to-face and online contexts of community participation. For instance, needs for belonging, support, information (Cothrel, 2000) are motivating factors for both face-to-face and online community participation. Data importantly supports the existence of some motivations for participating online that are different to motivations for face-to-face communication. These unique needs for community are expressed by field study members as commodity or transactional-based motivations, captured in literature as needs for access and contribution to community via Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2007), transforming knowledge sharing (Wang et al., 2012), access to resources and contribution to social capital building (Brodie et al., 2009).

Empirically, the study responds to calls for clearer understanding of the motivating forces behind participation in online communities (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012). Specifically, findings represent an opportunity to further explain the reasons that motivate individuals to participate in communities, achieving an understanding of participation that is firmly grounded in rich empirical evidence from the field study conducted.

To participate online in order to share information or to be entertained have been referred to in literature as the motivations to participate in online communities, for example in the work of Wang (2012) who cites reasons of "information acquisition and exchange, relational development and maintenance, social and emotional support, and entertainment" (Wang et al., 2012 p. 787).

Emerging from literature analysis (in Chapter 2) were 19 reasons currently claimed to motivate individuals to seek community (e.g. information, relationships, support, entertainment, worth, environment). These reasons come from multiple scholarly sources (cf. Bandura, 1997; Bargh and McKenna, 2004; Brodie et al., 2009; Gonzalez and Cox, 2012; Joia, 2012; Kenyon et al., 2002; Li, 2012b; Ridings and Gefen, 2004; Wang et al., 2012), and represent attempts to categorise individual motivations (such as participatory democracy and localism, voice and choice in service delivery, individualism, consumerism, self-expression, global consciousness, world views) into meaningful overall reasons for participating in communities. Table 2 (in Chapter 2) presented these motives to participate and identified the source of knowledge for each motive. However, as concluded from my analysis of literature, there lacks universal agreement

on what categories capture all dimensions of why an individual might seek to participate in a community. Furthermore, my critique of literature revealed a paucity of existing theory to capture the embedded nature of social media-based devices in people's everyday lives, or to explain the entangled nature of the relationship(s) between online community participants and social media.

Whilst some motivations are well theorised, such as well-being in the sense of staying safe, helping oneself, overcoming isolation and fostering a sense of belonging and self-worth, other areas are less well explained. Research highlights achieving autonomy as an area in which little is currently known about why people participate in search of this. Defined, based on empirical accounts from field study members, as the attainment of freedom of speech and a sense of connectivity to the world outside one's day-to-day routine, the need for autonomy is an important reason cited for seeking to participate in online communities and activities.

Thus, in answering the part of research question 1 which asks about why people participate in communities face-to-face, online or both, this study provides a sociomaterial understanding that does not take a causal relationship between motivation and participation: in other words it does not assume motivations existing prior and separately from the doing that is communicating online, face-to-face or both. What is discussed in the literature as motivations (ensuring well-being, fostering a sense of belonging and self-worth and others mentioned above) in sociomaterial theorizing are seen as accomplishments of intra-acting in different assemblages of human actors and technologies. These accomplishments (called motivations in the literature) are not predictable and result from specific emerging entanglements of people, their circumstances in online and face-to-face spaces, different technologies, and other things. Instances of such entanglements presented in findings sections (for example see Table 13 in section 5.3.1[35]) illustrate how for

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- [35] Excerpt from section 5.3.1:

Example of a state of being or doing well in life:

  - Connecting to another mother who is also constrained by a child's daily sleep routine, which keeps her at home more than she would like, makes one field study member feel that she is not alone, is doing okay, and is doing the same as her peers.

Example of happiness, health, and prosperity:

  - Reaching out to friends via an online update about having made pancakes was cited as a way to improve one field study member's state of happiness at a time she felt lonely.

instance personal well-being, a sense of sharing and participating in a community are accomplished.

9.3.2 Not participating online and the impacts

Participation receives attention in existing theoretical accounts of community and online community, however explanation for non-participation in communities (face-to-face or online) is less well developed. Little is known about the reasons for not participating in online communities and/or activities other than what is already theoretically positioned as a result of digital inequality between participants and would-be participants due to either having (or not having) access to the necessary technology. Furthermore, existing theory does not offer any account of why digital equality fails to overcome the social exclusion experienced by what emerges from this field study to be a new sub-group of people who choose not to participate in online communities and/or activities.

Similarly to participation, theoretical development of the phenomenon of non-participation in literature is predominantly done from an ontological perspective of separateness. As a result of the non-participation of some individuals in online communities or activities, it is argued (cf. Kenyon et al., 2002; Silver, 2007) that feelings of exclusion and isolation from the everyday lives of friends, family and other community members are experienced. Existing theory defines non-participation as 'non-use' (Eastin and Larose, 2006; Selwyn, 2003) or 'Internet drop-outs' (Rice and Katz, 2003) – people who do not use the Internet to interact and people who did use it but have since opted out. This classification and explanation is limited in that it does not reflect the gradation in levels of participation online, or recognise participation at low levels as valid participation – just at a different level from heavy usage and regular content contributions to an online community.

The very dichotomy of participation/non-participation and the assumption that a particular set of factors (personal, social, technological) can be associated with non-participation (and others with participation) are problematic. Similar to participation (or degrees of participation), non-participation emerges and is accomplished by actors' intra-acting in specific sociomaterial assemblages. From analysis of field study member[36] accounts and observations of not

[36] The data contributing to these answers comes from a field study group of individuals who share a similar demographic, a similar social background and setting, and who are similar in age, life situation, access to technology, and possession of skills to use technological devices.

participating online I uncovered that non-participation *cannot* be explained by inadequate access to or skills to use social media technology. As empirical evidence revealed non-participation in online communities and activities is reported due to (1) a perceived lack of value or time to participate, (2) discouraged to participate due to some particular feature of online communication, and (3) out of a fear of repercussion from participating online. These are post-factum rational explanations of non-participation that imply a logical causation: because of (1), (2) and (3) some individuals in the observed group did not participate online. However non-participation and participation (and anything in between) are part of an emergent holistic phenomenon of living a life entangled in complex social and technological environments. The intra-actions going on among the entangled actors produce diverse effects - from highly valuing to not valuing online participation; from enjoying to disliking online participation; from being online all the time to avoiding online communication. Apart from these effects, the intra-actions are also (re)producing the community, what it means to belong to a community and what it means to be a parent. All actors are in a continuous process of change suggesting that intensity of online participation (including non-participation) is also changing. It therefore does not seem fruitful to seek explanation by identifying factors that determine non-participation. Rather, it looks more promising to increase understanding of the phenomenon of participation as a holistic phenomenon emerging in complex social and technological environment.

Understanding the personal and societal influences upon individuals' decisions to participate (or not) in an online community further supports the notion of participation being a continuous process of change, within which intra-actions intensify along a continuum depending upon the specific influences at any given time. This further contributes to scholarly understanding of how non-participants are viewed, responding to claims from researchers of unexplored opportunities to better understand online participatory behaviour (Merry and Simon, 2012; Schneider et al., 2013a).

An opportunity also arises to add to theoretical explanation from the perspective of understanding the potential impacts for non-participating individuals and their engagement in society in a broader sense. What is currently known about the impacts focuses on social exclusion, as discussed in Chapter 2's critique of literature. I argue that based on empirical evidence emerging from my time in the research field, it is possible to identify and categorise significant impacts, extending beyond digital exclusion.

The impacts experienced by field study members who do not participate in online communities and/or activities have material implications, manifested in three primary ways. First, through negative effects on the relationships with their friends, family and other community members. Second, by limiting the fullness of their participation in the life events of online community members. Third, in the ensuing inability for them to take advantage of online community opportunities. These impacts are evident from data as accounts of lost opportunities to sustain or create social capital. Social capital building opportunities are lost, according to field study members, by not having access to community resources in wider networks of loosely-tied links, and also the inability for individuals or communities to capitalise upon social capital building opportunities created online but foregone by the non-participating community members.

Thus, in answering research question 2, I contribute to an understanding of online participation and non-participation as part of an emergent holistic phenomenon of living a life entangled in complex social and technological environments. I demonstrate with empirical evidence that participation is a holistic phenomenon emerging in complex social and technological environment. Furthermore, I illuminate an opportunity for further enquiry and theorising of non-participation by conducting similar empirical studies with different community groups, in different face-to-face and online contexts, at different times.

9.3.3 The enactment of participation online

Literature (scholarly and practitioner-based) tells us that ICT changes the spaces for social interaction (cf. Bargh and McKenna, 2004; Boyd and Ellison, 2012; DCITA, 2005; Hampton and Wellman, 2003; Li, 2012a)[37]. Changes have been well-theorised as manifesting in different communication norms (cf. Hampton and Wellman, 2003), new forms of social interaction, and changes to the ways people engage in society (DCITA, 2005; Wellman et al., 2001). Technological advances driving current social changes, such as Web 2.0, have also received extensive scholarly attention. Sources claim that Web 2.0 technologies empower the user, offer access to individual networks unrestricted by time (O'Reilly, 2007), and consolidate the Web in a more collaborative and interactive manner (Dantas and Silveira, 2012). Literature contains much insight into the ways in which the Internet provides another space in which to socialise that

[37] The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) is an Australian Government department that has published a significant body of practitioner papers and government reports on the role of ICT in social life

lets the user interact outside the home or the workplace (cf. Wang, 2012). Marketing research reports that Social Networking Sites (SNSs) are growing in popularity worldwide (comScore Inc, 2011). According to this global Internet usage report provider in 2011, social networking is the most popular online activity worldwide. Multicommunicating is a thought-provoking communication practice receiving recent attention in organisational literature (Reinsch et al., 2008; Zouhair and Cameron, 2014). Multicommunicating emerges as the practice of work colleagues "engaging in two or more overlapping, synchronous conversations" (Reinsch et al., 2008 p. 391) or "the managing of multiple conversations at the same time" (Cameron and Webster, 2011 p. 754). Little research has extended the concept of multicommunicating to a social context, which is an area that holds significant potential based on the findings emerging from this study.

In-depth theory exists on the role of ICT, from the perspective of understanding and explaining the role of highly portable, user-friendly interactive devices (DCITA, 2005). However, this understanding is limited in its interpretation of the technology and its users as separate entities. Furthermore, although well-theorised, there is a significant focus of IS literature on overcoming digital inequality, enabling virtual mobility and accessibility (Kenyon et al., 2002).

Investigating research question 1 provided empirical evidence that participation in online communities and activities takes place through altered norms of socialising and changed communication practices. Data demonstrate these changing norms and standards of communication, revealing that field study members use ICT to change how they organise their daily lives, do business, and engage politically (Wang, 2012). In literature, attention is drawn to the "ubiquitous nature and pervasiveness of ICTs" (Trauth and Howcroft, 2006 p. 4). I argue that findings from this study add to existing understanding of the changing spaces for social interaction by explaining the intra-actions that occur in everyday instances of people participating seamlessly in community life face-to-face and online.

Critique of literature also reveals that existing scholarly knowledge is weak in recognising the materialisation of social media in reconfiguring community participation. What this study does is to provide a deeper understanding of online community participation, recognising the intertwined nature of the social and the technological. A promising avenue for a deeper understanding of participation is opened up by recognising the agency of social media intertwined with individuals in enacting the practice of participating in community online. To understand what it means to socialise in a digital age is to understand what it means when an individual participates in the life and activities of their community by engaging in face-to-face interactions,

online interactions or both simultaneously by being present in one physical setting and mentally engaged with something external to this physical setting.

As identified, existing scholarly understanding of the phenomenon of participation online is useful but limited in that research adopts a dualist perspective, treating the human 'users' of online communities as ontologically separate from the social media technology that enables their participation online. In order to better explain participation, an understanding of the temporal and emergent nature of participation needs to be theoretically better developed, alongside theorising of the role of technology in everyday community activities, where technology is materialised beyond a question of adoption versus non-adoption. This creates an opportunity to further understand participation and answer the research question by adopting a relational perspective to interpret findings. In order to seek a deeper understanding of participation and nonparticipation, and thus provide a theoretical answer to the research question of how people participate, I will focus my interpretation and theorising on two interesting themes that were particularly notable.

The first theme refers to the ways in which the concept of participation is altered when the practice of socialising is enacted as digital omnipresence in more than one community at the same time. Answering this requires attaining an understanding of how socialising differently when participating in an online community reconfigures the concept of participation. One mechanism by which to do so is to examine a particular case from data that is not fully captured or explained by existing theoretical accounts of participation online. In achieving this I will revisit the empirical findings and extend the concept of multicommunication[38] as a theoretical lens to interpret them. I examine in section 9.3.3.1, from a relational perspective, the case where field study member Andrew described situations in which he has been part of digitally omnipresent socialising practices.

Understanding how socialising differently alters the phenomenon of participation provides further insight yet is only part of the broader picture needed to achieve deeper understanding and reconceptualise participation. Theorising the material role of social media in enacting different communication practices, norms and expectations is equally as important and holds the potential for deeper understanding of participation in online communities and activities. In this sense, achieving an understanding of the ways in which communicating different things, communicating at different times and communicating in different spaces online reconceptualises the concept of participation.

[38] Multicommunication is presented and explained in detail in the analysis of literature in Chapter 2

This leads to the second theme – the ways in which the concept of participation is altered when communication norms change in a digital age where communicative practices are enacted differently online. That is, what, where, and when communicative practices are performed differs online as opposed to face-to-face. To explore this theme, in section 9.3.3.2, I revisit data about Olivia relating to her participatory practices and communicative actions when she interacts in online activities.

By seeking a theoretical understanding of the specific online participation phenomena (in the two themes identified) allows me to provide in-depth and novel insights and explanation that expands my answers to research question 1. In other words, exploring the two themes more deeply creates the opportunity for a much richer understanding of participation and achievement of the overall research objective, recognising the intertwined nature of communicative actions and social practices when participating in online communications.

9.3.3.1 Technology disrupting face-to-face socialising

In the case that follows I interpret through a sociomaterial lens Andrew's experiences with attention being divided between face-to-face dialogue and social media. I theorise how this behaviour disrupts the social interaction he is participating in and use empirical examples to demonstrate a reconceptualisation of the phenomenon of participation through changes to socialising practices, thus adding further insight into the question of how people participate in communities and contributing towards a full achievement of my research objective. To do so, I highlight a specific example of a time when Andrew chats face-to-face with a friend in a social group whilst at the same time that friend attends to someone or something outside the social situation using his mobile phone. I discuss the extent to which multicommunicating captures the communicative behaviour demonstrated in this scenario, highlighting where this theoretical concept can be enhanced to more fully explain Andrew's experiences of disrupted interactions.

ANDREW

Andrew is married to Leonie; they have a 3-year-old girl and 1-year-old boy. I was only supposed to interview his wife, Leonie, however during our interview Andrew was continually reacting with scoffs and tuts to what Leonie and I were discussing, so when he started to make some comments of his own I asked if I could interview him. He agreed and so the care for their 3-year old and 1-year old transferred to Leonie, whilst Andrew and I got straight into our interview. Throughout, he stood up, using hand gestures to emphasise his points, animated, strongly opinionated, and seemingly very happy to have a listening ear for what turned out to be a campaign against social media – and the effect it is having on his life through changes to his friends' behaviour and the norms of communication.

Andrew is in his late 20's, he has studied to tertiary level, and works in the Logistics industry. Like most of the men in our parenting group, he is a hands-on father, never shying away from the grittiest of parenting tasks. I have observed him saving the guests in a hotel we were all dining in from a rather nasty experience when his daughter had an accident during toilet-training. He knows (or implies he does!) a bit about everything, from parenting issues to affairs of the world, he can talk about it all!

Andrew and Leonie's home is like many others in today's digital society; both of them own smartphones, they have a home computer and an iPad, Andrew has a laptop, he has a personal Smartphone and also a mobile phone for work. He describes his comfort with technology usage as 'medium', and tells me that of the approximately 6 hours he spends online per week, this is primarily directed towards online shopping and following the media. He does not participate in any online parenting communities and in the one online community he has registered for – Facebook – he considers himself to be a 'lurker'. He likes to inconspicuously look through the posts and status updates of those people who are connected to him through the Facebook community. He does this discreetly and voicelessly, simply wanting to know what other people are up to without he himself needing to reciprocate what is happening in his own life.

Andrew is an active and well-liked member of the parenting group to which both he and I belong. From my observations of him, he is always keen to chat, always has a story, likes to be heard and does not hold his opinions back. He is, in colloquial terms, a 'cheeky-chappy'; he will make comments and at the same time wink or give a wry smile to indicate that he knows what he is saying may be considered controversial, or that it may be taken personally by the company he addresses it to. Yet I have never been aware that his comments have caused offense, and everyone is very fond of him.

His parents live nearby and provide a lot of support to his young family. Andrew tells me he has a good social circle, however nowadays prefers to socialise as a family, with other families. In our interview he spoke candidly about his concerns for the future of his children growing up as natives of an increasingly digital world. We discussed in detail situations where he has been in a social setting and found that his interactions with the company he is in become disrupted by the use of technology.

Figure 10. Profile of Andrew

Andrew's experience with social media is that it enables his friend to connect to a network of his online contacts. However, when this electronic interaction happens at the same time as trying to have a face-to-face interaction with his friend, Andrew finds that the same social media technology disrupts the face-to-face interaction. This tells us that the practice of socialising is altered when online and offline interaction spaces are available and lived in simultaneously. Socialising in more than one place at the same time reconceptualises the phenomenon of

participation in the sense that existing understanding of participation is limited to communicating in one place in any given moment – communicating synchronously (Canal and Salaün, 2014; Giesbers et al., 2014; Reinsch et al., 2008).

What Andrew describes as happening with his friend is a phenomenon akin to a digital form of omnipresence[39]. I suggest the use of 'digital omnipresence' to describe the phenomenon of being connected to multiple spaces contemporaneously, opting in and out of engagement at any time, enabled by technology that facilitates anytime, anywhere connectivity. A phenomenon of a digital era in which "the global circulation of humans and things is taking place at high speed" (M'charek, 2010 p. 309), this manifestation of omnipresence is enabled by our extended presence through digital technologies, computers, smart phones and other smart gadgets. Such an existence is becoming ever more intense with the increasing speed and scale of message generation, responses to messages, and further responses. Interaction with more than one actor (a person or a device) at the same time, albeit mentally as opposed to physically, is enacted through the intra-actions (Barad, 2003) of people and social media technology in everyday life.

A sociomaterial worldview does not a priori separate the social from the material, or conceptualise one as interacting with the other. Materiality, it is claimed, "plays an active role" (Barad, 2003 p. 808) in the creation of reality. To this end researchers must allow "matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming, in its ongoing 'intra-activity'" (Barad, 2003 p. 803). Matter (in the sense of the material) is not passive. Matter, or the material, or the nonhuman if it is viewed in real terms, is not just an outcome of social practices; rather it is an active factor in materializations of the world (Barad, 2003). It is in the specific intra-actions of apparatuses that the material is given agency, is made to matter (Barad, 2003).

Multicommunicating is useful for explaining what arose in Andrew's description of occasions during which social contact has been disrupted due to his companions engaging in more than one place at the same time. Andrew recalls some of these occasions in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1 – Andrew describes recent social occasions

> I went out for dinner, and the first thing everybody does, you go to dinner, and like, I don't know, maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I go to dinner and I keep things in my pocket, the first thing everyone does now is put their phone on the table - I've got an iPhone, I've got an iPhone5, I've got this and the whole table's full of technology, and 1 beeps, 'oh it's mine!' and everybody checks…and like when I went out to the pub, they're all, instead of

[39] Defined in the Old English Dictionary as "present everywhere at the same time"

> sitting talking together, they're all sitting around drinking together but they're not talking to each other, they're not interacting…there's not, say eight of you out, there's like a thousand … connected through social media…like, I went out for a Christmas party and I was with this lady, and she said it was getting boring so I'll find out what people are doing and she got her phone out and she went to Facebook or somewhere, wherever she goes through and 'ok let's go here' and we all went to another location where there was a bigger party. You want to, it's always, you can't escape it, it's just always there…I went into a course in October on the train, in North Sydney, so I finished up working in the city in July the year before, so it'd only been what's that, 14, 15 months since I'd caught the train, and when I was catching the train then everyone was reading books and people were sending text messages but that was it. 15 months later I hopped on the train and everyone was reading things on their phone or on their iPads or whatever else…You don't notice people on the train on their phones any more, cos that's normal, but when you see someone take out a book you do notice, cos that's so rare now!

Andrew elaborates on a specific occasion of being in a face-to-face conversation with one of his friends in a public bar (see excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2 – Andrew and his friend are interrupted by multicommunication

> I'm sitting there with me mate, and he's like 'yeah yeah' and not lookin' me in the eye, and I'm like 'yeah, whatever, man. Are you out with me or your phone?' And then, like, he shoves this thing in my face and says 'hey, have you seen this?' And he's showing me something on so-and-so's Facebook page, and I just thought 'whatever' and got myself another beer or something. Like, why would I care, we're supposed to be all out together for the night.

Andrew and his friend in the bar begin interacting synchronously, with the flow of dialogue typical of a face-to-face conversation between two people. Gradually, momentary glances at his mobile phone begin to upset the rhythm of flowing dialogue each time Andrew's friend gives his attention to his mobile phone. As something begins to attract the friend's attention on his phone, the interruption to his dialogue with Andrew builds, culminating with the friend's attention switching from his conversation with Andrew to the event he has now engaged with through his phone. Andrew and his friend are now communicating asynchronously, his friend's responses to Andrew's cues are no longer instant and focused; instead, the dialogue is fragmented and has momentary lapses. Ultimately, dialogue breaks down, and Andrew physically disengages. Andrew describes feeling annoyed that his monogamous relationship with his friend, was in that moment, violated by his detection of the presence (via media) of another party.

Andrew's friend is physically present in Andrew's company, and at the same time he is also distracted by technology, engaged in the online dialogue unfolding with a Facebook friend. The definition of multicommunicating captures this to an extent, however it becomes problematic when the attention of Andrew's friend to his mobile phone causes the social interaction between he and Andrew to become fragmented, to become asynchronous. Finding their dialogue to be too disrupted, for Andrew it was not acceptable to be engaged in more than one place at the same time. Fragmented conversation did not fulfil his need for social contact, hence he moved elsewhere to seek what he needed. The friend, however, was trying to multicommunicate, but as explained by Andrew, the result of engaging with his mobile phone was that the friend disengaged from face-to-face dialogue, hence he could not perform both the online and face-to-face communicating activities effectively at the same time. In this instance, simultaneous attention to more than one social space is destructive for the conversation between Andrew and his friend. Andrew could not successfully maintain synchronicity in his interaction with his friend. His friend was unable to effectively attend to two social interactions contemporaneously. He was also seemingly unaware that he was perceived to be performing one of the interactions inadequately.

Andrew's friend is digitally omnipresent in his physical presence in the public bar with Andrew, and simultaneously in his mental presence via his mobile phone. He is seeking to multicommunicate, that is engage in two or more dialogues simultaneously, however as demonstrated, the effect is the disruption of his interaction with Andrew. Being connected to more than one space at the same time or being digitally omnipresent challenges the very notion of being present or more precisely the duality of present/absent. While Andrew and his friend are physically in a public bar together, Andrew's friend is also engaged in some other activity via a digital device and/or interacting with another party somewhere external to the room. Andrew's friend enacts his presence in the bar by facing Andrew and engaging in a conversation. He also enacts his presence in an online community by engaging with other people's comments. Tension is produced when presence-absence fluidity gets confronted with the stark physical presence of people, events and things that require full attention and heedful relating. For example, in Andrew's case when he became annoyed by the occasional absence of his friend's face-to-face conversation with him. The value of face-to-face socialising is thus questioned if people do not fully participate and engage here and now in their conversations. One might justifiably ask why Andrew's friends who met together in the pub really came there when they spent their time texting on their phones rather than interacting with the group. At least from Andrew's perspective being present-absent is detrimental for the sense of socialising and belonging by the group of friends who have a rare opportunity to spend some time together away from family responsibilities.

Andrew is offended and feels not valued or betrayed by his friends who at the same time participate in online conversations.

This phenomenon could be viewed from the perspective that Andrew's friend alters his behaviour in a social context in the moments when he attends to technology. Thus, a social media-based interaction that Andrew's friend engages in gets in the way of the overall interaction between Andrew and his friend, causing disruptions in the flow of their dialogue. The emerging changes in their interaction lead to disrupted conversation flow between the two men, and ultimately to Andrew's disappointment and withdrawal.

Alternatively it could be interpreted that technology influences the social interaction between Andrew and his friend thus producing a negative outcome on the flow of a face-to-face conversation between two people and creating disruptions in their dialogue. The social interaction becomes asynchronous in a synchronous environment.

Both perspectives are limited in that they privilege either a technologically-based or a human-behaviour-centric explanation of multicommunicating and digital omnipresence. In this instance, it is not a full explanation of what is happening to say that Andrew's friend changes his behaviour through a conscious decision to engage with his mobile phone, neither is it reflective of the full scenario to say that Andrew's friend intentionally engages with his mobile phone at the expense of the face-to-face dialogue with Andrew. What Andrew's friend is doing appears to be subconscious. In those instances, Andrew's friend, his mobile phone, Andrew, their other friends in the bar, the friends who are connected to Andrew's friend online are all so entangled that it is difficult, and indeed makes little sense, to try to separate them in providing a theoretical account of what is happening. Perhaps the ultimate social setting for Andrew, a rare opportunity to socialise with his friends, yet Andrew reflects on the mangle of interactions that occur: friends talking face-to-face amongst each other, and one-to-one with him, friends engaged with their social media-based devices, friends present, yet also disengaged. People and technology intra-acting in specific instances to socialise in more than one place at the same time; to multicommunicate. As a particular agency of technology is enacted, enabling its users to perform their presence in a situation electronically apart from Andrew's physical company, existing conceptualisations of participation are radically altered.

In that moment in the bar, for instance, the practice of socialising is transformed so that, for Andrew's friend, presence-absence fluidity becomes 'normal'. This is how Andrew's friend socialises. Empirical evidence points in this situation to an attempt to socialise in multiple places simultaneously through the appropriation of smartphone technology. To socialise, for Andrew's

friend, is to be omnipresent; not physically everywhere at the same time, but certainly in multiple places simultaneously mentally, interacting with people in both the physical and virtual world to satisfy personal needs. Even the needs of Andrew's friend are changing from moment to moment. At one point he is satisfied by the face-to-face conversation with Andrew, whilst at other points he also needs to engage with his online friends outside the bar setting. In parallel, at one point the mobile phone is just a device in Andrew's friend's hand, at another point it takes on agency and enables Andrew's friend to multicommunicate, to engage somewhere outside the bar setting.

Neither Andrew, nor his friend, nor the mobile phone, nor the social network to whom Andrew's friend connects digitally have essential properties that make them constant or set. Each has agency, and it is an assemblage of these agents that perform the practice of social intra-action. No set of given properties can determine participation of individual agencies (of Andrew, his friend, mobile phone, and the social network) or what they become in the enfolding intra-action. The intra-action in that social setting is fluid, constantly changing and adapting as Andrew's friend's relationships with him and his mobile phone are enacted in any given moment. There is no predictability about when the face-to-face conversation with Andrew will switch from synchronous to asynchronous. What is evident is a misalignment of Andrew's needs for social interaction and his friend's needs for social interaction; furthermore a misalignment between the norms of what is expected of and acceptable for communication exists between Andrew and his friend. While his friend takes them for granted, the disruptions to conversation become a threat for Andrew. In the observed situation Andrew and his friend have differing needs for social contact and differing expectations of face-to-face social interaction. For his friend, fulfilling his needs for social contact is not limited to face-to-face interaction, allowing an entanglement with technology and eye-contact interaction, blurring the distinction between presence that is physical or that is mental. Multicommunicating was performed as a series of switching between the engagement in synchronous face-to-face communication and the engagement in on-line communication while physically staying present in the former. Multicommunicating breaks with the norms that Andrew assumes underpin social interaction and creates a different sociomaterial practice that reconfigures communication and socialising.

Technology is embedded in the everyday lives of Andrew and his friend. For Andrew's friend, multicommunicating is entangled in the practice of socialising; his mobile phone has agency, it connects him to someone or something outside the sociomaterial setting he and Andrew share – the bar, the table where they sit, their physical presence and body language. By extending the setting to include his mobile phone and social media, his friends (and their postings) connected via social media, Andrew's friend practices multicommunication that for him seamlessly extends

sociability. At the same time multicommunicating clashes with '*mono*communicating' practiced by Andrew.

Digital omnipresence is an important feature of what it means to socialise in a digital age. This has important consequences for understanding how participatory practices are enacted in communities where members interact in face-to-face and online interaction spaces. Andrew's case has demonstrated that the notion of socialising is altered when the practice of social interaction is enacted heterogeneously in face-to-face and online spaces. An intra-activity that is taking place in face-to-face socialising is transformed in a way that reconfigures not only face-to-face socialising, but socialising as such. In face-to-face socialising physical presence and surroundings, eye contact, body language, heedful interrelating and exchange of utterances, all get entangled in a continuous flow of conversation. This is what Andrew expected and hoped for when meeting his friend. This is not something Andrew invented. The norms of socialising in face-to-face situations especially among friends have been shared by and assumed in social circles to which Andrew belongs. Such socialising reproduces a sense of friendship and camaraderie. It sometimes also re-creates the physical surrounding (a bar or a restaurant) as something special and memorable. When socialising is enacted simultaneously face-to-face and online, the intra-activity that is taking place reconfigures socialising and its effects. Andrew's and his friend's physical presence, their body language, utterances, and eye contact become entangled with technology and social media as well as other places and participants. Such entanglement keeps alive both the face-to-face conversation and the online interactions that intermingle and affect each other. The effects on face-to-face conversation are material as it literally gets interrupted and halted by Andrew's friend attending to messages or posts his mobile phone brings to his attention. As the face-to-face conversation and online interactions are competing for attention, tension arises, felt differentially by Andrew and his friend. Socialising is reconfigured and reconstructed, but it is also questioned. For Andrew's friend, socialising is extended through technology – mobile phone and social media – by assisting and enabling him to multicommunicate, to socialise in more than one place at the same time. For Andrew the technology is materially interfering in the face-to-face conversation he expected to have with his friend. It is reconfiguring their face-to-face monocommunication and disrupting the flow of their conversation. As a result socialising is reconstructed and the effects of socialising are changed. Andrew feels abandoned and betrayed and the relationship with his friend is questioned.

Both men are part of an intra-activity that involves a multitude of physical, bodily and technological agencies that enact and reconfigure and entangle face-to-face conversations and online interactions. As a result socialising is differentially performed and has different effects on

actors. For Andrew's friend online, technology-enabled multicommunication is expanding the limits of socialising while for Andrew it is at the same time limiting their socialising.

Extending the concept of multicommunicating from an organisational context to a social context reconceptualises multicommunicating to explain Andrew and his friend socialising together. Andrew's friend enacts his participation in social settings in a way that affords him the capability of being digitally omnipresent. His social practices are beneficial for him, but detrimental to the interaction with Andrew since Andrew perceives the attempts at multicommunicating to be disruptive. Social practices are at the same time positive and divisive for Andrew and his friend, illuminating an opportunity to reconfigure understanding of participation as a social practice that may be enacted contemporaneously in more than one place (face-to-face or online) at the same time.

9.3.3.2 Reconceptualising participation when communication norms change

In order to understand how the concept of participation is altered when communication norms change it is necessary to understand how communicative practices are enacted online. The second case uncovers more about Olivia's communication practices, highlighting changes in the nature of what she communicates, when and where she communicates online. Olivia's case allows the exploration of altered communication practices and norms in relation to the enactment of Olivia's participation in her communities through online interactions. Revisiting results from the analysis of Olivia's accounts of participating online suggests that their explanation requires theorising communicative practices. A reminder of who Olivia is…

OLIVIA

Olivia, in her early forties, is married with a two and a half year old daughter. At the time of our interview Olivia's husband had been working interstate for the prior 22 months, leaving Olivia and her daughter home alone for extended periods of time. Olivia has her own bookkeeping business which she runs from home. She has her 82-year-old father living locally, and says their relationship is more about her supporting him than him being able to provide her with any practical support.

Olivia describes having a "small number of close friends, plenty of acquaintances and a few deep friendships" and values "honesty, integrity, [and a] caring nature" in her friendships. Her circle of friends have "some similar interests but not all the same," Olivia saying "I do like variety." She complains, however, that the time she spends in social contact with her friends on a weekly basis is "not enough!" From her perspective, "with work, Ciara and looking after the home, [we] never seem to connect enough."

When she does spend time with friends she gets "a real sense of [her] worth … [and she] enjoys the companionship/comradery." Olivia says that social contact "brings me out of my cocoon and [helps me] to realize there is more to life than work etc." Olivia has suffered from Post Natal Depression (PND) since her daughter's birth. She explained to me how debilitating this emotional condition has been at various stages, causing her to retreat into her world at home with her daughter and her home-run business and how this made her feel even more isolated and lonely. As a consequence of feeling tied to home due to her daughter's young age and her own health issues, Olivia feels that her social contact has been frustratingly limited at times, further contributing to her sense of loneliness and episodes of experiencing PND symptoms.

She owns a desktop computer, a laptop, an iPad and a Smartphone; each device creating possibilities for her to connect with her close circle of friends who are also online, at times that suit her, like in the evenings when her daughter has gone to bed, or at times when she has felt desperately lonely and needed instantaneous words of support, comfort and encouragement to help her cope. She describes her social networking habits as obsessive, saying that she spends at least 21 hours per week online to look up "online shopping, holiday places, banking, places to rent, [and] chatting." Olivia tells me she connects to her friends via "Wastebook a.k.a. Facebook obsessively, sometimes hourly if at home and nothing else happening."

Figure 11. Profile of Olivia

9.3.3.2.1 Core concepts of the Theory of Communicative Action (TCA)

A useful framework within which to make sense of online communication is to think about an actor's behaviour when communicating online in terms of *communicative actions* (Habermas, 1984; Habermas, 1987). In this sense, the actor's speech acts enacted in particular contexts become communicative acts. The theory of communicative action (TCA) developed by Jurgen Habermas (see Habermas, 1984, 1987) holds potential for understanding the role of social media as enablers of communicative actions. I propose that Habermas' TCA can be reinterpreted and expanded to account for social actions performed through technology, like those performed when an individual interacts via social media with friends, family and a wider community of online contacts. Supporting this proposition is the claim that the usefulness of TCA is in its ability to

uncover latent assumptions and expectations, like those that might be applicable in a context of social media-based interactions where rules and norms are not globally governed, instead locally negotiated within an online community.

Communicative action is "individual action designed to promote common understanding in a group and to promote cooperation" (Bolton, 2005 p. 2). It is one form of social action defined within Habermas' TCA. To understand communicative action and how this concept can help describe an actor's social world in theoretical terms, it is important to understand the concepts from TCA that are of primary interest to explaining participatory behaviour.

Habermas' TCA dates back to the 1980's, written in two volumes; the first volume in 1984, titled *Reason and the rationalization of society*, establishes a concept of communicative rationality; the second volume in 1987, titled *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, creates the 2-level concept of society and introduces critical theory for modernity. Drawing on Habermas' original works and interpretation of TCA by Cecez-Kemanovic and Janson, (1999), I present in what follows a brief overview of TCA and define the key concepts.

TCA is founded upon a 'three-world' concept of (1) the objective world, (2) the social world, and (3) the subjective world (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson, 1999; Habermas, 1984). The objective and social worlds are external to the social actor; the subjective world is internal to the social actor. The objective world refers to what is the case in the world, or what way the world is, that can be assessed as true or false. When taking social actions actors always refer to the objective world and in case of communicative action to all three worlds, the objective, social and subjective. The social world refers to the norms, values and rules shared by social actors; social actors refer to social world by assuming or claiming that their actions accord with norms and rules. Social actions are judged by their accordance with norms and rules that is "normative rightness" (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson, 1999 p. 3). Norms and rules defining the social world are legitimate if they embody the values of the social group (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson, 1999). The subjective world refers to what is internal to the social actor; their "subjective experiences" (Habermas, 1984 p. 100), to which only the social actor has private knowledge of. Within this three-world concept, reference is made to one or more of the three worlds by social actors engaging in social interactions. Social actors relate to the world in taking social actions. (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson, 1999) write,

> The three worlds and the rational relations of actors to these worlds determine a framework with which the classes of social actions are defined (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson, 1999 p. 3)

Communicative action is founded upon the development of shared lifeworld, common understandings and values. 'Lifeworld' in Habermas' theory is contrasted with 'systems'. While systems refer to the objective world, especially economic and administrative systems that are governed by money and institutional power, lifeworld refers to symbolically structured background resources – cultural systems of meanings, norms and values – based on which actors interpret a situation and take actions (Habermas, 1987). Shared lifeworld enables cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation of an individual.

This shared, common lifeworld develops over time through social interactions in various social groups, families and communities. The lifeworld resources enable us to understand who we are as people, what we value about ourselves and others, what we believe, aspire to, or desire. These things are taken-for-granted, or as TCA describes them, belong to latent assumptions ('background knowledge'). Participants of a social group take actions to achieve something typically in relation to the objective world. Depending on a type of action they may also refer to the shared lifeworld.

TCA classifies social actions into one of two categories of orientation; either a social action is oriented solely towards success (e.g. achievement of a goal), or alternatively, a social action is oriented towards reaching an understanding (Habermas, 1984). TCA proposes a typology of social actions by individuals in society (Bolton, 2005; Habermas, 1984). These actions are classified as one of four types of action,

1. *Teleological action, with strategic action as a subset.* Actions oriented to success where the actor refers to the objective world; the action is called instrumental in that by using technical rules, actors calculate alternative means and select the one that maximises their chances of achieving the desired goal. A teleological action is called strategic action when the actor influences the behaviour of other actors (opponents) in order to pursue their own goal (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson, 1999).
2. *Normatively regulated action*. "Action by which actors interact as members of a group, in their social roles, where they refer to the objective and social worlds. These actions are assessed based on their normative rightness and legitimacy" (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson, 1999 p. 4).
3. *Dramaturgical action*. Social interaction between two or more actors, where the participating actors are visible to one another and perform something. An actor refers to his/her subjective world in seeking to be noticed and make an impression on the other actors (Habermas, 1984; Müller, 2014)

4. *Communicative action*. "Interaction of social actors oriented to reaching understanding, in which they relate simultaneously to the objective, social and subjective worlds. They come to an understanding with one another by negotiating definitions of a situation, argumentation and cooperative interpretation of events, goals, values and norms, and by sharing their subjective experiences, desires and feelings. Communicative action exemplifies the concept of communicative rationality inherent in human speech" (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson, 1999 p. 4).

Going forward I focus on understanding *communicative action* because it is my belief from time in the research field that the speech acts I have observed and been told about that take place between social actors interacting face-to-face and online, are actions oriented towards reaching understanding through sharing subjective experiences of parenting and life situation. Actions are not just social, field study participants demonstrate communicative rationality, performing communicative actions through a technological medium. To further understand communicative action, I draw from the work of Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson (1999), who interpret Habermas' TCA, defining communicative action as,

> the iraction of social actors pursuing goals by achieving shared understanding and coordinating their plans of action. Shared understanding implies inter-subjective interpretation of aspects of social reality and it occurs when the actors agree on a common understanding of what exists (the objective world of facts, events, and states of affairs), what is right and legitimate (the social world of norms), and what they prefer or desire (the internal worlds of personal experiences and emotions). Truth of facts, rightness of norms and sincerity of expressions are the validity claims assumed by communicative action. Social actors achieve understanding through cooperative interpersonal interpretation of the situation at hand and seek to achieve consensus through rational argumentation. (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson, 1999 p. 7)

The practical usefulness of TCA concepts for understanding organisational and social environments and how information systems transform the environment has been demonstrated empirically in studies such as (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Webb, 2000b; Janson and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2005) whereby communicative action concepts were applied to make sense of e-commerce as social action and to develop a communicative model of collaborative web-mediated learning. The ideas of TCA are "essential for IS practice because implementing ISs…has social and political consequences" (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson, 1999 p. 2).

TCA may provide some new insights into communicative practices within social media. In this sense, social media can be seen as supporting "information sharing, building mutual

understanding, and enabling open public discourse…[where social media] are instruments which improve communicative rationality and enhance the degree to which ideal speech situations can be achieved" (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson, 1999 p. 9). Similar to the studies of the communicative action of e-commerce and web-mediated learning, the practice of interacting via social media can be described as "participants engaged in communicative action…in a process of continuously disputing and resolving validity claims while temporarily agreeing on something" (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson, 1999 p. 9).

TCA, and in particular the concept of communicative action are helpful in explaining changes to the concept of communication and participation in online interactions. Actors seek to participate online and thereby take actions to achieve goals (by referring to the objective, social and subjective worlds). Achieving this understanding has the potential to further explain altered communication and its role in reconceptualising the phenomenon of participation.

9.3.3.2.2 Application of TCA concepts to Olivia's participatory behaviour

Olivia's case is an example of a social actor participating in communicative action, driven by communicative rationality (cf. Habermas, 1984). Olivia's social needs are different from Andrew or his friend's needs. Olivia seeks social contact in any shape or form available. She neither discriminates between nor judges as better or lesser her interactions with friends and family face-to-face and those that she enacts via social media. Olivia's case is illustrative of ways in which the concept of communication is altered when the practice of communicating is enacted in online spaces. This provides further empirical evidence of what socialising looks like in a digital age where Olivia's social media device is embedded in her everyday communicative practices. Furthermore, Olivia's case offers insight into experiences of inclusion in or exclusion from the life events of community members when online communication opportunities become possible. We may consider in Olivia's case the circumstances in which participating in online communities and/or activities manifests as positive social outcomes, bringing tangible and intangible benefits for Olivia.

Habermas' TCA does not account for technologically mediated communications so it needs to be reinterpreted and extended with sociomaterial concepts of entanglement, relationality and intra-action in order to be useful for understanding Olivia's social actions and their ramifications. A number of factors contribute to Olivia living a life centred upon being at home, the sole-carer for her daughter, with limited social opportunities. In Olivia's accounts and observations of her participating in online communities she reveals how social media-based communication enables her to make social contact with her friends and family. She uses a particular medium that becomes

involved in performing her participation in communicative actions; actions assisting and enabling her to interact in online communities and/or activities. Applying TCA concepts to Olivia's communication behaviour allows us to ask questions about her online communication practices such as:

- What is Olivia aiming to achieve through her online communication actions?
- Is her orientation towards success or towards reaching understanding?
- Is she pursuing a particular goal or successful outcome by participating in her online communities?
- Is she being sincere and truthful in how she communicates her subjective world and internal thoughts/feelings?
- Is Olivia communicating according to the norms, values and rules of the communities in which she participates?

Olivia describes the role of social media in her life, in particular in enabling her access to her friends,

> If it wasn't for my close friends I wouldn't be who I am today. I had post natal depression after having Ciara and it was my network of friends that helped get me through it all…I love that I have been able to keep in contact with friends easily, during times that suit me, late at night when I have my time. Having a baby made it initially harder to maintain face-to-face contact, but by being able to keep in touch via Facebook, email, texts means I didn't feel cut off from social interaction

As discussed in Chapter 6, participation in online communities and the interaction that takes place between electronically linked contacts has implications for several dimensions of the phenomenon of communication. The changes evident from data analysis demonstrate differences in *what* is communicated, *when* it is communicated, and *where* it is communicated. Specifically, evidence reveals a tendency of field study participants to post different comments online than they would verbalise in a face-to-face exchange and to engage in online interactions at different times than they would engage in face-to-face communications. The latter generally require prior planning and occur at a pre-defined time that suits both parties. Additionally, evidence reveals that field study members tend to communicate in different spaces than they would if they were meeting a specific group of friends in an agreed venue. Evidence illustrates that people communicate online both in communities of known friends and also in public communities of unknown contacts. Olivia's accounts of her participation in online communities is illustrative of these changing dimensions of communication. Examining her accounts more closely provides insight into Olivia's online communication behaviour.

At a generic level, Olivia perceives that social media is changing the actions people take (including herself) when communicating. She believes,

> [Social media is] definitely changing the way we communicate. For example, go to a restaurant [or] pub and see how many people in a group all have their phones in their hands or near to hand on the table checking it and not interacting with the people around them…I know I have seen a difference since having a mobile phone and Internet. I take the easy road and message or email rather than speaking to someone in person or on the telephone

In the following paragraphs I present two excerpts from interviews with Olivia and an observation of her participation in online communities, all providing insights into Olivia's communicative actions. Drawing on the work in the area of TCA by (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson, 1999), I use these excerpts to show Olivia using linguistic acts to express her desires and feelings about being lonely and seeking support, making her subjective (internal) world known to her friends and family via social media. In developing a sociomaterial account of Olivia's communication practices online, I examine the personal goals Olivia has when she communicates online, often to do with obtaining practical help or emotional support/encouragement.

Excerpt 3 – Olivia describes how she presents herself online and what she discusses

> [I use] Facebook, [giving] the usual things you need to tell them I guess…[my] real name, rough locations and lots of photos…[my] name and photo is the only thing that comes up. I have locked down everything else so that only friends who are on my list can see them and if they comment their friends can't see it though. As long as the security isn't changed too often, it is pretty locked down…I use emails [or] telephone and texts to keep in touch…contacting friends and family overseas [or] interstate and locally, making plans for local friends, asking mummy [or] toddler advice…It's a great way to ask for advice from mum's group, chat with them to see how they are going, plan for our catch-ups in person, and for others not nearby it gives them updates on how Ciara is growing and we get to chat about things…others are updating family [or] friends on what's been happening with us, or asking questions say about friends' experiences with potty training and getting advice…[a] friend puts up photo of a hairstyle they like, then I will comment on whether or not it would suit them etc. Or if something bad is happening in their lives give them support, of if good, praise etc… Otherwise it's updates on what's happening with us, or what we are thinking of doing and asking for suggestions, for example recommendations for a holiday resort in Bali or things to do…It's an easy tool to get the message out there to people you want to share things with. Whether it be

> recommendations, advice, opinions or something newsworthy. I think face-to-face will be [to a] lesser extent as you won't tell all trivial information, but more to the point etc.

Excerpt 3 presents evidence of how Olivia communicates and participates in community. By engaging with social media Olivia and her friends create a mode of connectivity that allows an ongoing dialogue about things that matter in their everyday lives. From this excerpt we can see that Olivia's actions have elements of communicative action as she is attempting to achieve mutual understanding with her friends and family regarding some aspects of their lives (e.g. related parenting). Such actions do not only have a concrete purpose (for instance acquiring information) but also fulfil the needs for social integration (that is, inclusion in a community) and socialization of the individual. This is evident in Olivia' story that she participates online to share with her friends via the Facebook community items of news about herself and her family, activities or events that have occurred in their lives, and general chit-chat.

The notion of communicative action needs to be broadened to take account of purpose, content and forms of actions conducted via social media. Olivia finds that she communicates *different things* online than she would face-to-face, as demonstrated when she talks about Facebook. She communicates via social media to keep in touch, to contact friends and family overseas, interstate and locally, to make plans, to ask advice, to chat, to give updates on her family, to offer support and praise, and to get support for herself. Further evidence of communicating different things online is exhibited in the statement she makes about the nature of information she shares online versus in a face-to-face context,

> When physically with friends, no, I wouldn't give them verbal updates as to what we are doing as they are right there with you experiencing it first-hand

Olivia reveals in the comments at the start of this section that she communicates at a *different time* than she would if she only had face-to-face options. Her communication happens at times that suit her, sometimes "late at night" and in general, when she has time. Because of feeling tied to home, for example, while Ciara sleeps, Olivia experiences the convenience of social-media in connecting her to a friend electronically. In doing so she satisfies her needs which are often for immediate, instantaneous communication, support or encouragement. In this case we can see that her reference to her subjective world and her personal needs are very pronounced. So communicative actions may have the whole purpose related to her emotional needs, support and encouragement, and not necessarily to something related to the objective world (a state of affairs about something we claim exists).

In terms of the third area of change in communication found in empirical analysis, Olivia also communicates in *different places* via social media. She communicates some things to her closed online community of close friends; she communicates other things via en-masse posts to all her connected friends, family and contacts; she sometimes posts generically, other times she compartmentalises her friends into particular groups, e.g. her "mummy's group friends," and it is directly to this sub-group that she will post a specific message or item of news. Hence, Olivia's case demonstrates empirically how communication, for Olivia, is changing in terms of what she communicates, when she communicates it, and where she communicates it.

In TCA terms, Olivia reveals more of her subjective world when she communicates online than she does in face-to-face interactions with friends and family. She makes known to her online network her intimate thoughts, feelings and emotions, aiming to achieve the understanding and empathy of friends and family for whatever her social situation happens to be at the time of posting a status update to an online community. In other words, while aiming to achieve mutual understanding with her friends and family Olivia's communicative actions have a range of different purposes from discussing hers and their situations, to finding solutions to some parenting problem, to arguing and cooperatively interpreting events, goals, values and norms. Communicative rationality becomes evident in Olivia's actions via social media as she clearly engages in mutual sharing whatever is relevant in her worlds with those of her friends and family.

Such notion of communicative rationality is a broader than what is assumed by Habermas' concept of communicative rationality (Habermas 1884; Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson 1999). Furthermore, while Olivia's intentions and communicative behaviour can be explained by Habermas' concept of communicative action, the differences between communicating face-to-face and communicating via social media cannot be explained by this theory. Habermas' concept of communicative action is limited in explaining how the materiality of communicating through social media enabled Olivia and her friends and family to practice communicative actions and seek social integration and socialization. This is further illustrated by excerpt 4 from Olivia's interview.

Excerpt 4 – Olivia talks about reaching out for support through online communications

> [I posted] 'I've just made pancakes.' Yes, I am guilty of that…I have written [on Facebook] something like 'some days are just so bloody hard'…friends wrote about support and encouragement and making sure I was ok. [I] just needed reassurance that I wasn't alone…sometimes it's a self-confidence [or] esteem thing…that particular time I was feeling a bit needy but unable to outright verbalise it to friends so I was roundabout

> saying I needed some company anyone want to come over for pancakes and coffee [and] chat…
>
> Once I put a call out on Facebook for someone to help, as I was violently ill with food poisoning, James was working in Melbourne, I could barely get Ciara out of her cot, couldn't feed her and couldn't change nappy either. I needed help from whoever could get here the fastest and it was the quickest way to ask and be able to get help. A close mummy group friend was here within 20 minutes and took Ciara with her, no supplies nothing and looked after her for the day whilst I had the doctor out and rested, doing this even though it was my friend's birthday. Doing it that way I was able to get a response straight away by someone that was able to help immediately, rather than ringing around, which I wasn't even capable of talking coherently.

Excerpt 4 provides another example of Olivia's communicative actions. In her post "I've just made pancakes," Olivia expresses a personal desire for company and to obtain emotional support at a time she feels lonely and vulnerable. She aims to get some understanding and empathy from her friends and family. She posts this comment to her online community of friends and family, inferring, if you read between the lines, her vulnerability. She does not express in words that she is desperately lonely and isolated (that would express her subjective world), nevertheless her cry for companionship could be heard in this seemingly trivial post. She is in some way seeking attention, support and action by other actors (her friends and family to whom she is connected online), telling me she hoped that one of them would respond to her comment by saying they will visit to share in the pancakes and have a chat. While she has a goal (all actions do) she is trying to achieve it through shared understanding albeit in a somewhat covert way. Rather than saying she needs company and is inviting friends to her home, she disguises this invitation as an offer to share in some freshly-made pancakes. What she communicates is temporal, and contingent upon Olivia's specific situation at the time she makes the post; she is lonely, she has fresh pancakes that she would like to share with a friend over a cup of coffee and a chat.

This is an instance of social action performed via social media that can be misunderstood and distorted (Cecez-Kecmanovic and Janson (1999) refer to the "danger of distorted communication" (p. 10)). Olivia's intentions of seeking support and company were indeed misunderstood by some. One friend in particular (Natalie, who I interviewed), read Olivia's comment (as a close and trusted friend) and thought "great, so who cares?!" Had Natalie 'read' what Olivia really needed she may have responded differently. Natalie, however, interpreted the pancakes post literally as Olivia's expression of an activity she had just undertaken. Nothing more. Olivia was in this moment judged according to the factual claim "I've just made pancakes" referring to what

Habermas calls 'objective world'. So it may be true that somebody made pancakes, so what? To Natalie, this comment did not communicate an expression of Olivia's subjective world - loneliness and a need for support. As a claim about the objective world it did not matter to Natalie, even though she is her friend, therefore she dismissed it as insignificant. Olivia, however, was expressing a cry for help, oriented towards achieving support, but failing to communicate this in a way that justified any response from Natalie by way of help or encouragement. Olivia's enactment of the communicative act that she had made pancakes via social media implied an invitation to her friends and family, for company and socialising. However, the way the communicative act was performed via social media (in this case primarily as linguistic expression) was somewhat deceiving and thus could be unintentionally distorted.

What Olivia intended to communicate is loneliness and isolation; this, as she referred to, was at a time when she felt too vulnerable to openly express her feelings directly to a friend or family member. She posted the pancake comment at a time she needed to, hoping it would reach someone in her community of online friends and family who would interpret it in her intended way. This episode illustrates that communicative actions via social media can be more sensitive to misinterpretation that those in face-to-face situations. This is due to the often cryptic nature of short message exchanges in social media and the absence of non-verbal clues (except emoticons). While ease of posting messages, instantaneous transmission and the reach (as wide as desired) are highly appealing for enacting communicative actions, the intentions of senders may be clearly expressed and can thus be misunderstood.

Olivia reveals how her communicative actions using social media enable her to initiate social contact in other instances too, for example when she talks about her illness with food-poisoning she describes putting a call out on Facebook seeking practical help with her daughter. In this case someone within her online community did respond to achieve Olivia's goal, by coordinating her own plans to collect Olivia's daughter and care for her whilst Olivia sought medical attention. In this situation, similarly to earlier discussion, the intertwined nature of Olivia's communicative actions, social media and her Facebook friends cannot be adequately explained by TCA as it is not intended to deal with communicating via technological media. Olivia, her friends and family to whom she is connected electronically, the social media each actor uses, the communicative acts they enact, all exist in a sociomaterial assemblage that cannot be disentangled from communicative practices. The sociomaterial assemblage examined (Olivia, her Facebook wall, her friends and family connected via Facebook) gives rise to communicative practices that, on the surface, may look like quick and not so thoughtful or serious exchange of simple linguistic acts, without considerable implications. However, as Olivia's examples demonstrate, the seemingly

simple, innocent or even trivial posts may actually reflect a more fundamental need for understanding within and belonging to a community, with serious implications for individuals and the community. A particular style of communicative acts exchanged through social media may deceive and hide communicative actions and the underpinning communicative rationality.

TCA needs to be extended to explain sociomaterial communicative practices and their implications. The appropriation of social media for social interaction and emergence of sociomaterial communicative practices change the conditions for communicative actions. Olivia and anyone to whom she is electronically connected, can make a comment and form a temporal network in an attempt to reach understanding (e.g. of the sadness of an author's passing – see Figure 12), achieve consensus (e.g. on what to do on a particular day) or provide affirmation (e.g. that making pancakes was a great idea). In those instances, the comments being made online and the social network members participating in the online interaction were communicated to all via social media. Other members of the online community who were not initially included in Olivia's post can join in her discussion about the book she has just read, or her wonderment about what to do to pass a day. The group of online contacts is self-managed (within the boundaries of who has accepted mutual invitations to be electronically connected), and can all contribute to discussions that Olivia initiates. The role of social media in this context is integral to Olivia's communicative actions, allowing her to represent her concerns, desires, and values in written words and symbols such as emoticons. The norms and rules of electronic communication are locally negotiated between the participating members of Facebook (the particular social media site being used), in addition to the terms and conditions of usage specified by Facebook's administrative standards.

The customary simple linguistic expressions and fast exchange of posts via social media do not invite participants "to read between the lines", and reveal irony, metaphors, and subtle and non-obvious meanings, thus impacting on the comprehensibility of communicative acts. Olivia's example illustrates how communicative action is materially transformed when performed via social media (i.e. Facebook). First, it is possible to exchange communicative acts with a large number of participants, that opens a nontrivial possibility for them to achieve shared understanding of their situations, personal needs and desires, and to coordinate their action plans to attain these goals. Second, the conditions for achieving understanding are not easily met, as validity claims (to truth, normative rightness and sincerity referring to the objective, social and subjective worlds respectively) implied in linguistic acts are not necessarily clear due to the absence of non-linguistic clues. Given the emerging sociomaterial constellation of communicative action via social media it is conceivable that additional norms may be negotiated to help communicative intentions of participants become more comprehensible.

Olivia

27 January

oh so very sad, I have just finished reading Bryce Courtney's final words, his words have been so much of my life for the past 25yrs, how I will miss you

Like · · Promote

- Giselle, Genevieve, Paula and 5 others like this.

  Lisa Was it his last book that you read? I might try to get it tomorrow

  27 January at 18:29 via mobile · Like

  Karen Good weather for book reading

  27 January at 18:53 via mobile · Like

  Olivia Yes last one Lisa, hard to believe he was still writing when terminally ill.

  27 January at 20:23 via mobile · Like

  Olivia Grabbed opportunity whilst Ciara was having her nap

  27 January at 20:23 via mobile · Like

Figure 12. A Facebook post when Olivia wrote about a book she had finished reading

Figure 12 provides an example of a post Olivia made to her group of close friends who are also connected online via Facebook. As shown, some contacts did read the post and respond to it in the form of an action to 'like' Olivia's comment, or by writing something in response to Olivia's comments on finishing a book she has been reading. The book is significant to her in that it is the last book by an author, written when the author was terminally ill. The circumstances in which the book was written struck a chord with Olivia. She used this feeling of sadness at the author's passing to post a comment to her entire network of friends, family and contacts. It is not

startlingly obvious that Olivia had any particular needs or motivations at this time, however knowing about Olivia's desires for social interaction, and judging from the dialogue she engages in with those who respond to her post, this post may have been her opening for that social interaction and connection to other people she desires; her communicative action referring to her objective, social and subjective worlds. In the receiving of responses from friends to her comment about finishing the book, Olivia's comment was the catalyst for a short dialogue to ensue, similarly to how a face-to-face interaction might unfold about a particular topic in a fragment of an overall conversation. She expresses her sadness in the author's passing through her actions of posting a comment on social media; from amongst her network of electronically connected friends/family comes some affirmation of a good book choice ("I might try to get it tomorrow") and comment on the weather that day being perfect for book-reading. Online contacts come to an understanding with Olivia of the book she has just read, sharing her sadness at the author's passing. She has achieved shared understanding, and successfully engaged in social interaction.

TCA concepts in this context help us to understand the outcomes of Olivia's communicative action. Similarly to the earlier discussed examples, there is much that can be explained about the role of social media in enabling Olivia to practice her communicative actions. I have discussed some empirical examples of changes to what, when and where Olivia communicates; but in order to understand these changes in theoretical terms I need to consider Olivia's communicative behaviour, her life circumstances, her needs (as a parent, as an adult, and as a sufferer of an emotional health issue), the nature of her relationship with her friends, her relationship with technology, and the role of technology in her life. There may be unintended consequences for her relationships with friends and family if she is broadcasting details of her day-to-day life online more so than she does in face-to-face meet-ups. (If like in the case of another field study participant, Olivia assumes that in a face-to-face meet-up the other person knows what has been happening in Olivia's life from what she has posted on her online profile. For this other field study participant, there is an expectation that her friends and family will have proactively gone online to 'follow' her, hence she does not need to repeat the chit-chat when she meets friends and family face-to-face).

Social media technology is intrinsically embedded in the everyday lifeworld that Olivia shares with her community of electronically connected friends and family. Their shared lifeworld is reproduced by communicative actions: communicative actions regenerate Olivia's and her friends' values, norms and commitments (cultural reproduction); they help social integration in the community and also Olivia's socializing in the community. As the analysis shows Olivia is

concerned with questions relating to parenthood, everyday life events and situations; she is also expressing loneliness and a desire for support and affirmation from a community she feels she belongs to (her friends and family) and seeks to share in their lifeworld. In understanding her (and others') communicative rationality, it is difficult, and makes little sense, to separate Olivia's communicative actions from the social media that she appropriates (and for instance consider how the latter impacts on the former). They are entangled and inseparable in creating sociomaterial conditions for communicative rationality. It is the entanglement of social media with Olivia and her connected friends and family that produces agency of communicative rationality. In other words it is not only the orientation of social actors towards understanding that characterizes and motivates communicative rationality as defined by TCA. It is the intertwining of social media technology, shared social worlds (norms and values), shared concerns with things in the objective world and sharing of intimate thoughts, feelings and emotions by Olivia and her friends and family (their personal worlds), that is creating and recreating the agency of communicative rationality.

I propose that we cannot fully understand or explain Olivia' actions, her participation in online communities of friends and family, or her relationships in face-to-face social interactions by viewing social media-based technology as an independent device that Olivia consciously uses to fulfil her needs. While Habermas' TCA is helpful in understanding Olivia's communicative behaviour, it is not sufficient to explain the emerging changes in communicative practices when interacting online. By extending TCA's concept of communicative action and communicative rationality to account for the entangled nature of human actors and social media I provide a plausible explanation of Olivia's actions and her participation in the community. Olivia and her friends, in any instance of communicating online, are all in relations, temporally and emergently creating their objective, social and subjective worlds. At any given point in time during their online interactions it is difficult to separate human actions from the technology appropriated to communicate.

Olivia's examples of communicative actions within an online community of her friends and family demonstrate that communicative actions online are different from communicative actions face-to-face. Furthermore, as Olivia exemplifies, what is communicated online is different to what is communicated in face-to-face dialogue. The time(s) at which online interactions occur differ to when dialogue ensues in a face-to-face setting, and indeed the setting for dialogue itself changes, no longer restricted to physical face-to-face in-person interactions when an online alternative is available and accessible. In theoretical terms, the nature of the phenomenon of communication is altered when enacted online compared to face-to-face. Communicating becomes a

sociomaterial practice, enacted in any given moment in an assemblage of people and social media. Communicative practices are performed by the assemblage of community members, social media, and of the online community's norms of interacting – themselves emergent and uncertain.

9.4 Conclusion and contributions to theory

Given the empirical evidence presented in Chapters 5-8 and the interpretation of participation, socialising and communication through the theoretical questions previously expressed, I will now articulate how this study further contributes to scholarly understanding of participation and non-participation. In doing so, I will demonstrate 5 specific contributions to knowledge in achieving the overall research objective.

9.4.1 Expands understanding of online community participation

This study raises challenges for current perspectives on participation online that are related to the digital divide - defined in existing literature as "the gap between those who do and do not have access to computers and the Internet" (Warschauer, 2003 p.1). Specifically, findings illuminate the intertwined nature of communicative actions and social practices when participating in online communications. The study provides a broader perspective on social participation, defined as "collective activities that individuals may be involved in as part of their everyday lives" (Brodie et al., 2009 p. 5) and a deeper understanding of how individuals participate in communities face-to-face or online, and why they do so.

There are two central tenets to the expanded understanding of online community participation. Firstly, a reconfiguration of participation when the practice of socialising is enacted as digital omnipresence in more than one community at the same time. Secondly, the concept of participation is altered when communication norms change in a digital age where communicative practices are enacted differently online. That is, what, where, and when communicative practices are performed differs online as opposed to face-to-face.

A deeper understanding of participatory practices is important from the perspective of increasing awareness that participation online is not guaranteed by having access to the required technology, skills, finance and time to use that technology (cf. ABS, 2004; ACMA, 2009; Maldonado et al., 2006; Schienstock et al., 1999). Participation in a community (cf. Brodie et al., 2009; Jochum, 2003; Pattie et al., 2004) is driven by needs for well-being, information sharing, autonomy, social contact and entertainment. An individual may choose to enact these needs through participation in face-to-face and/or online interactions that is determined by a unique set of social dimensions

(e.g., persuasion towards face-to-face or electronically-mediated contact, life circumstances such that feelings of loneliness or isolation are experienced, perceptions of how fulfilling the interactions are when face-to-face versus online). Current understanding of participation in online communities is expanded beyond possession (or not) of technological access. It becomes entangled with an individual's disposition for a particular enactment of social and communicative practices.

9.4.2 Reconceptualises the phenomenon of socialising

An outcome of the study is in the posing of a radical reconceptualisation of what it means to socialise in a world dominated by constant connectivity and ubiquitous access to online communities. By adopting a relational perspective to interpret findings, the study provides an explanation of what it means to socialise in a digital age when an individual participates in the life and activities of their community by engaging in face-to-face interactions, online interactions or both simultaneously by being present in one physical setting and mentally engaged with something external to this physical setting. The temporal and emergent nature of participation is theoretically better developed, alongside theorising of the role of technology in everyday community activities, where technology is materialised beyond a question of adoption versus non-adoption.

Socialising, defined in existing literature as "to be sociable, participate in social activities; to mix socially *with"* (OED, 2013), is not limited to being performed in one physical setting to the exclusion of other possible social interactions in any given moment. Individuals intra-acting in assemblages of other individuals, social media, face-to-face communities, and communities that are connected electronically are constantly in relation. By participating in their communities, an individual, in any given instance of socialising, enacts their presence in one or more settings physically and mentally. Socialising transmogrifies to become a practice that is performed simultaneously through individual relationships with social media technology.

Findings from the study reconfigure existing understanding of participation as a social practice that may be enacted contemporaneously in more than one place (face-to-face or online) at the same time. In this sense, the concept of participation is altered when socialising happens differently when participating in an online community. I propose the term 'digital omnipresence' to describe the phenomenon of being connected to multiple spaces contemporaneously, opting in and out of engagement at any time, enabled by technology that facilitates anytime, anywhere connectivity. In this context, omnipresence is enabled by our extended presence through digital technologies, computers, smart phones and other smart gadgets. Such an existence is becoming

ever more intense with the increasing speed and scale of message generation, responses to messages, and further responses. Interaction with more than one actor (a person or a device) at the same time, albeit mentally as opposed to physically, is enacted through the intra-actions (Barad, 2003) of people and social media technology in everyday life.

I theorise from empirical findings that being connected to more than one space at the same time or being digitally omnipresent challenges the very notion of being present, and thus the value of face-to-face socialising is questioned if people do not fully participate and engage here and now in their conversations. Multicommunicating breaks with the norms that one assumes underpin social interaction and creates a different sociomaterial practice that reconfigures communication and socialising. socialising is differentially performed and has different effects on actors. It is reconfiguring their face-to-face monocommunication and disrupting the flow of their conversation. As a result socialising is reconstructed and the effects of socialising are changed.

9.4.3 Challenges assumptions about electronic communication

Findings challenge long-held assumptions about the nature of communication between humans, particularly communication that is enacted through relations with technology. Existing knowledge of participation in online communities and activities largely considers participation to be for *information sharing purposes* (Ardichvili, 2008). Literature posits that the participation of online community members in their associated communities is held to be the key resource and at the same time the biggest challenge for the survival of online communities (Gonzalez and Cox, 2012).

In this study, participating online is found to reconfigure communicative practices, exposing new norms within which it is accepted (even expected) that individuals participating in online interactions will communicate differently (in the sense of communicating different things than they would face-to-face). The concept of participation is altered when communication norms change in a digital age where communicative practices are enacted differently online. That is, what, where, and when communicative practices are performed differs online as opposed to face-to-face. I theorise the material role of social media in enacting different communication practices, norms and expectations, demonstrating that communicating different things, communicating at different times and communicating in different spaces online reconceptualises the concept of participation. What socialising looks like in a digital age where social media devices are embedded in everyday communicative practices offers insight into experiences of inclusion in or exclusion from the life events of community members when online communication opportunities become possible.

Societal norms of online communication render it 'normal' communicative behaviour to control and influence the time at which communications between electronically-connected friends/family occur. The power over timing of online communications shifts so that any one of the communicating parties can decide if and when they interact to join an electronic conversation, to respond to a comment or to participate in their online communities. Examples of this are seen in the intentionality of parents with young children to compartmentalise their electronic communications to times when their child is asleep, or at least not requiring undivided attention. Examples also emerged of a growing trend towards communicating in different spaces by enacting one's presence in multiple communities face-to-face and online, channelling participation towards groups of contacts filtered by whether they are known to the individual participating, or whether participants are strangers, connected in public online communities performing anonymous electronically-connected interactions.

9.4.4 Reconceptualises how humans intra-act with technology

The study radically reconfigures relations of participation in electronically connected communities. In order to explain the appropriation of social media for social interaction and theorise how the emergence of sociomaterial communicative practices change the conditions for communicative actions I extended Habermas' TCA (1984), specifically the notion of communicative rationality and communicative action. The role of social media is shown to be fundamental to communicative actions, allowing the representation of concerns, desires, and values in written words and symbols such as emoticons. I have drawn on empirical evidence to demonstrate that the norms and rules of electronic communication are locally negotiated between the participating members of any particular social media site, in addition to the terms and conditions of usage specified by the online community's administrative standards.

Communicative action is materially transformed when performed via social media. First, it is possible to exchange communicative acts with a large number of participants, that opens a nontrivial possibility for them to achieve shared understanding of their situations, personal needs and desires, and to coordinate their action plans to attain these goals. Second, the conditions for achieving understanding are not easily met, as validity claims implied in linguistic acts are not necessarily clear due to the absence of non-linguistic clues.

It is the entanglement of social media with the social actors and their worlds that produces agency of communicative rationality. In other words it is not only the orientation of social actors towards understanding that characterizes and motivates communicative rationality as defined by TCA. It is the intertwining of social media technology, shared social worlds (norms and values), shared

concerns with things in the objective world and sharing of intimate thoughts, feelings and emotions that is creating and recreating the agency of communicative rationality.

Extending TCA's concept of communicative action and communicative rationality to account for the entangled nature of human actors and social media I provide a plausible explanation of actions and participation in a community. At any given point in time during an online intra-actions it is difficult to separate human actions from the technology appropriated to communicate.

Evidence demonstrates how the intra-actions of humans and social media in sociomaterial assemblages reproduce their shared lifeworld, including creation of meanings and norms, social integration and socialisation of individuals. It is shown that the agency of humans and social media co-emerge in online community participation. The witnessed inseparability of humans from social media that co-construct their presence in community life online further demonstrates the mutual co-construction of agency of technology and human participants.

9.4.5 Articulates the impacts of not participating online

A further contribution from this study is in articulating the challenges for individual members of society that arise from their non-participation in online communities and exposing the impact of such challenges on their participation in other forms of community (for example, offline). This represents a significant departure from current understanding of participation which focuses on the practice of participating in communities face-to-face and/or online without robust theoretical development of the reasons for not participating, other than because of an individual being digitally disadvantaged (cf. Maldonado et al., 2006; Schienstock et al., 1999; Social Exclusion Unit, 2000; Warschauer, 2003). Digital equality, which is defined in existing literature as whether an individual "without effort can have access to a networked computer and is able to use … [it] to find material or to communicate with others" (Katz and Rice, 2002 p. 4), is the primary reason cited for ensuring participation online. This study challenges the digital divide debate as representing only one form of digital *in*equality, and only one explanation for *not* participating in online communities. Reasons for not participating online unrelated to digital equality are highlighted, raising awareness of the detrimental effects at individual, community and societal level of the non-participation of certain cohorts of society in the online activities of their communities. In raising these impacts, the study also serves as a catalyst for further empirical enquiry and theoretical development of aspects of online communication that discourage individuals (who are equipped with technology access, skills, time and finance to use it) from participating in online community activities.

9.4.6 Exemplifies a sociomaterial account of established phenomena

In addition to the above contributions, the study provides an example of how a sociomaterial research perspective can assist in creating a different and richer understanding of phenomena than epistemological paradigms traditionally used in IS research. This perspective challenges established, competing perspectives that privilege either a technological or a human-centric understanding of social phenomena such as online participation and non-participation. It helps explain and theoretically develops the temporal and emergent nature of participation, alongside theorising the role of technology in everyday community activities, where technology is materialised beyond a question of adoption versus non-adoption. Such a richer understanding of participation recognizes the intertwined nature of communicative actions and social media when participating in online communications.

A sociomaterial approach to empirical enquiry has in the case of this study created the possibility to conduct research that is innovative, freeing IS research from the limitations of dualist ontological perspectives on emerging phenomena such as social media.

9.5 Implications for research and practice

Having concluded in section 9.4 by articulating important contributions to scholarly understanding of participation and non-participation, I now put forward theoretical and practical implications for IS researchers and practitioners in the field of social media. The fundamental tenet of these recommendations is an overarching principle of adopting a sociomaterial perspective of online communities and participation. In doing so, IS research needs to address the problematic assumption of participation online given access to technology, in order to solve a problem of the exclusion of unexpected groups of society from fully participating in the social, economic and political activities of their community. Technology-enabled interaction is fast outstripping theory about the parallel shifts in online communication: fast changing social media enabled communities and changing norms and values of socializing. These fast changing social practices provide new opportunities for social interaction, community engagement, creation and mobilization of new communities, and far reaching and more effective social actions. While being of key interest to the IS discipline the role of social media in these changing practices has not attracted sufficient attention by IS researchers. This PhD research has begun to answer some of the most critical questions of online participation and socializing. Similar research can be done to explore other types of communities, development of professional and private relations in these communities, as well as the implications felt by participating members. Further research is also

needed to examine other phenomena of online participation, including how and where norms and values are defined and negotiated as part of community emergence and continuing transformation and how members of online communities become socialized into these norms within which they are expected by society to interact.

Another opportunity for further research is opened with the proposed extension of the notions of communicative rationality and communicative action defined by Habermas' theory of communicative action (1984). TCA as defined by Habermas provides conceptual apparatus and a general theory of social action that is highly relevant for explaining online communication and social media enabled communities. The extensions of this theory proposed in the thesis take into account social media technologies as enablers of social action and redefine some key TCA concepts as sociomaterial concepts. These extensions provide an example of how TCA can be developed further and reconstructed as a sociomaterial theory.

This study has demonstrated that there are particular features of social media usage that contribute to individual decisions *not to participate* online. Constant disclosure, of particular note, is revealed as significantly affecting people's willingness to use social media (for example, people do not want their personal details to be publicly and permanently available). Furthermore, IS research that recognises the encroachment of technology into everyday social practices, such as dining, or sharing social occasions with close friends and family, holds the potential for ICT developments that meet with less resistance. Research is needed into technologies that are less obtrusive, for example innovations in the field of ubiquitous computing (Greenfield, 2010; Kaye and Dourish, 2014; Weiser et al., 1999) could remove the obtrusiveness of multicommunicating, creating possibilities for seamless participation in more than one place at the same time.

An important implication for the IS research community is the demonstration in this study of sociomateriality as a metatheoretical approach to empirical IS research. Sociomateriality is shown to constitute more than just a perspective or philosophical approach for IS research. Specific sociomaterial concepts (such as intra-action, performativity and entanglement) can be developed further through empirical work to help illuminate findings and achieve broader and deeper understanding of the emerging phenomena of social media enabled communities and online participation. New sociomaterial studies and development of innovative concepts are called for to further explain social media intertwinement with community life and the emerging social practices and their implications.

This study uncovers an opportunity for IS researchers to investigate use-practices and technological affordances that would give users greater control over themselves or what others

see about them. Understanding the implications of or the ways that things can be implemented where users can have much more control over their social lives and personal details could address an important societal objective of preventing the alienation of sub-groups of our communities.

Further enquiry into the impacts for social capital building practices when individual members of a community/society do not participate in the online activities of their community holds the potential for a deeper understanding of what this type of behaviour means for social inclusion/exclusion and engagement with broader economic, political aspects of society. There is an opportunity to extend the notion of social capital in sociomaterial constellations in which participation in a community is performed via social media and face-to-face.

From a practical perspective, conclusions from this study can firmly be targeted at a government level in raising awareness of the dangers pursuant to increased emphasis on online modes of engagement at the expense of offline media. Continued promotion of social-media based initiatives as inclusionary for those groups of society who *do* participate online should not disaffect cohorts that *do not* participate online.

It is important for policy makers to ensure that there are equal modes of participation for online and offline engagement in social, economic and political aspects of society. For instance, the introduction of new forms of e-Government and practices aimed at social cohesion should not assume that participation performed offline can or will be implemented purely through social media initiatives.

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Appendix A. Interview Guide

- ✓ Check consent form filled in
- ✓ Check 2 sound recording devices – iPhone and iPad

"Interview with XXX, on XXXX 2011 in location. Thank-you for agreeing to participate NAME, can I just confirm that you have been briefed on the objectives of this study and have given informed consent for your interview to be recorded?"

Generic questions:

1. Do you have Internet access at home?
2. What is your highest level of education?
3. How would you rate your technical literacy skills?
4. What devices do you own which allow you to access the Internet?
5. Do you have unlimited access to the Internet?
6. On average, how much time per week do you spend online? (in hours)
7. Roughly, how much time per week do you spend with friends? (in hours)
8. What would you describe as your primary reason(s) to log onto the Internet?

Background info:

9. Tell me about your current situation…are you married? How many children? Tell me about them, what age they are etc…
10. Are you Australian?
11. Or, how long you've been in Australia / Sydney
12. What family and friends you have here

Sociability:

13. Before your child/children was born how would you describe your social life? Wide social network? A few close friends?
14. Do you have a lot of friends in Sydney, do you see them as regularly?
15. What values do you place in friendships / supports etc?
16. Would you consider your closest friendships to be deep or superficial?
17. Through what means do you connect with family and friends
18. Do you have a preference for face-to-face or electronic communication in general?
19. Does this preference extend to how you like to connect with friends / family?

Connecting since becoming a parent:

20. Tell me about your experiences with connecting to other parents in the local area where you live
21. Have you made new contacts / friends since becoming a parent?
22. How have you made these new connections?
23. Do you know the term "play date"? Do you meet other parents & kids for play-dates?
24. What do you gain from the time spent on a play-date?
25. Can you think of occasions when you felt more comfortable sharing information with or asking certain questions of parents outside your local community? Can you describe how you connected with these sources?
26. Can you tell me about occasions when you have needed help, advice or support in your role as a new parent, and where you sought this?
27. What would you say are the benefits you have obtained from being connected to other parents in your area?

Online communities

28. Can you tell me about occasions when you may have connected with a parenting community online? Explain how you accessed these online communities and how you feel about the experience.
29. Are you prepared to share with me the names of any online communities you have participated in or considered using, and describe the things that attracted you to those sites, or deterred you from using them?
30. I am interested to understand your reasons for participating in different communities at different times. Can you tell me about your experiences with online communities in general, for example, in what ways and for what reasons have you participated in online communities since becoming a parent?
31. How would you describe your level of engagement with the online communities?
32. Has your use of social networking sites changed since you became a parent? lf so, can you describe why you think that is the case?
33. Can you tell me about any occasions when you think it might have been advantageous for you to participate in an online community in your role as a parent?
34. Can you describe how you feel when you check out an online community site and decide that it is the right forum for you to participate in?

Online communities ctd.

35. Have there been occasions when you have decided that an online community is not the right forum for you to participate in? Can you describe how you made this decision?
36. I have seen online communities being used to help find resolutions to parenting issues, have you ever considered that you could ask questions within the online community when you want to know more about a topic that is being discussed in a blog or forum?
37. Do you think that by not asking questions online or posting answers to other people's questions about parenting issues that you are missing out in any way?

Appendix B. Field Study Participant Profiles

General and Demographic Information about each Field Study Member

	Age-Group	Family Status	Ages of Children	Education	Internet Access	Un-limited Access?	Internet Devices	Technical Ability	Primary Online Activities	Hours Per Week Online	Hours Per Week Socially	Family Support Nearby
Fiona	35-40	Married	3 yr. boy 6 mth. boy	Graduate Diploma & Postgrad Accounting	Yes	Yes	Laptop i-Phone	High	Email Grocery shop Banking Google searches Facebook	7 hours	4-7 hours	3 sisters in Sydney, no parents nearby
Neil	35-40	Married	3 yr. boy 1 yr. girl	Bachelor Degree	Yes	Yes	Laptop Desktop PC 2 i-Pads	High	Banking News Researching products	6 hours	1 hour	Mother helps
Isabel	35-40	Married	4 yr. boy 2 yr. girl	Masters Degree	Yes	Yes	i-Phone Laptop i-Pad i-Mac PC	High	Email Google searches Online shopping Skype Reading articles Checking the weather	7 hours	2 hours	Mother-in-law
Lisa	35-40	Married	---	---	Yes	Yes	i-Phone i-Pad Desktop PC Laptop	High	Work Email Facebook Skype Google searches Job hunting	---	---	None
Theresa	35-40	Married	3 yr .girl	Graduate Diploma	Yes	Yes	Laptop i-Phone	Medium	Business	35 hours	5 hours	Parents 2 siblings

	Age-Group	Family Status	Ages of Children	Education	Internet Access	Un-limited Access?	Internet Devices	Technical Ability	Primary Online Activities	Hours Per Week Online	Hours Per Week Socially	Family Support Nearby
Olivia	40-45	Married	2.5 yr. girl	---			Desktop PC Laptop i-Pad Smartphone	-----	Online shopping Holiday places Banking Places to rent Chatting	Too many! 21 hours	Not enough! 6 hours	Elderly father Friends
Julie	30-35	Married	3.5 yr. girl 18 mth. girl	---	---	---	---	---	Social networking Information	14 hours	---	---
Heidi	35-40	Single parent	2.5 yr. girl	TAFE	Yes	Yes	i-Phone Laptop	Comfort-able	Email TV episodes Sales survey Information Online shopping Google searches	4 hours	2 hours per week with friends 42 + hours 6 hours a day with mum, weekend with brothers	Mother, brothers, nephews
Peita	25-30	Married	3 children	TAFE	Yes	Yes	i-Phone Laptop	Medium	---	---	---	---

	Age-Group	Family Status	Ages of Children	Education	Internet Access	Un-limited Access?	Internet Devices	Technical Ability	Primary Online Activities	Hours Per Week Online	Hours Per Week Socially	Family Support Nearby
Charlotte		Married	4 yr. boy 2 wk. boy	High School Certificate	Yes	Yes	Computer i-Phone	Pretty good	Email Google search Facebook Banking MSN Skype	5 hours	5 hours	Close family Lots of friends
Bella	35-40	Married	4 yr. girl 2 yr. girl	Masters Degree	Yes	Yes	Laptop Mobile	Comfort-able	Skype Email	4 hours	20 hours	None
Hannah	25-30	Married	4 yr. boy 2 yr. girl	Masters Degree	Yes	Yes	Laptop i-Phone i-Pad	Pretty good	Facebook YouTube P'interest Internet forums "Wasting time"	15 hours	20 hours	Aunt and Uncle In-laws A lot of friends
Natalie	40-45	Married	3yr. boy	Tertiary-level	Yes	Yes	i-Pad i-Phone Home PC Work PC	Quite comfort-able	Shopping Email Research	4 hours	3 hours	Parents-in-law babysit regularly, help practically Sister-in-law regularly Parents occasionally Siblings occasionally

	Age-Group	Family Status	Ages of Children	Education	Internet Access	Un-limited Access?	Internet Devices	Technical Ability	Primary Online Activities	Hours Per Week Online	Hours Per Week Socially	Family Support Nearby
Madhu	30-35	Married	2 yr. boy	Bachelor Degree	Yes	Yes	i-Phone Laptop	9 out of 10	Skype Email communication Facebook Online chatting Reading newspaper Google searches Social networking Blogging	40 hours	5 hours	None Lots of friends
Lizzy	30-35	Married	3.5 yr. boy 16 mth. boy	Bachelor Degree	Yes	Yes	Blackberry i-Pad PC Laptop	High	Paying bills Skype Net Banking Google searching Shopping Reading online articles (child-related)	10 hours	10-20 hours	None
Ali	30-35	Married	2.5 yr. boy	Masters Degree	Yes	Yes	Laptop Cell phone i-Pad Work PC	High	News Political discussions Facebook Banking Shopping	15 hours	7-8 hours	No family Lots of long-term friends from back home are in Sydney
Christina	30-35	Married	16 mth. girl	High School Certificate	Yes		Laptops (3) Blackberry	Average	Searches Facebook	2 hours	7 hours	A lot of family

	Age-Group	Family Status	Ages of Children	Education	Internet Access	Un-limited Access?	Internet Devices	Technical Ability	Primary Online Activities	Hours Per Week Online	Hours Per Week Socially	Family Support Nearby
							i-Phone Work PC		Information			Sydney friends School friends Work friends
Frances	30-35	In a relation-ship	2 yr. boy	Masters Degree	Yes	Yes	Laptop	Medium	Email Researching (e.g. trips) Shopping Banking	4 hours	4 hours	Family on outskirts of Sydney Good circle of friends in Sydney
Anya	25-30	Married	2 yr. boy	Bachelor Degree	Yes	Yes	i-Phone Laptop Desktop PC	High	To find information To find out how friends are doing Online communities Banking Email	10 hours	7 hours	No family Close friends from home country
Sophie	30-35	Married	3 yr. girl 1 yr. girl	Diploma	Yes	Yes	Android phone Laptop	Medium	Looking up info Finance things Shopping Volunteer work co-ordination Social media	5 hours	2 hours	Mother Grandparents Sister (Babysitting @ once per week)
Norma	30-35	Married	3 yr. boy 2 yr. girl	Tertiary	Yes	Yes	Smartphone Laptop	High	Shopping Emails Facebook	20 hours	4 hours	2 sister-in-laws

	Age-Group	Family Status	Ages of Children	Education	Internet Access	Un-limited Access?	Internet Devices	Technical Ability	Primary Online Activities	Hours Per Week Online	Hours Per Week Socially	Family Support Nearby
									Banking Property Management			
Rowan	35-40	Married	3.5 yr. boy 2 yr. girl	Tertiary	Yes	Yes	i-Phone Laptop	Medium	News Google searches	5 hours	0 hours	Sisters
Leonie	25-30	Married	3 yr. girl 1 yr. boy	Tertiary	Yes	Yes	Laptop Computer i-Pad Phone	Medium	Shopping Banking Email Blogging	4 hours	6 -12 hours	Parents give a lot of support
Andrew	25-30	Married	3 yr. girl 1 yr. boy	Tertiary	Yes	Yes	Laptop Computer i-Pad Phone Work PC	Medium	Shopping News	6 hours		Parents

Appendix C. Communicating Differently Data

i.	Categories of changes to *what* is communicated
a	Representations of your identity
b	Information about what friends are doing
c	Superficial / random details
d	Status updates
e	Thoughts and feelings
f	Brief messages
g	Forthright / blunt comments
h	Comments which show you are not very concerned about others feelings
i	Things you would not say in person
j	Urgent information / news
k	Information (e.g. News or an announcement) that you wish to play down / trivialise
l	Your online persona
m	Edited / amended versions of originally drafted message (by poster or moderator)
n	Social arrangements you want to make loosely
o	Things you are not concerned should be private

Data in Category 'a' – Representations of your identity

References to representations of your identity communicated online:
"make your iPhone as unique as you are" (Isabel)

Data in Category 'b' – Information about what friends are doing

References to finding out online information about what friends are doing:
"so yeah, I think it's being a little bit curious about what's happening in everybody else's life, I think we've become so absorbed, people are obsessed with knowing what everybody is doing all the time and not being able to comment or put their opinion forward...if they put a question out there. People have become like busy-bodies you might even call it, or nosey-parkers - that's how I see it!" (Leonie)
"mobile phones…conditioning us to respond to alert tones, check-in constantly, answer immediately, keep up-to-date – making us busier, you have to go and find out what is happening in people's lives, rather than them calling you or meeting with you for a 2-way communication" (Fiona)
"*post words of encouragement"* (Hannah)

"catch up on the day-to-day gossip…[which] leaves face-to-face meetings for deeper contact" (Fiona)
"an easy quick way to catch up on superficial news" (Neil)
Otherwise wouldn't hear from certain people (Lisa)
"obsessed nosey-parkers" (Andrew)

Data in Category 'c' – Superficial / random details

References to superficial / random details shared online:
"chit-chat comments" (Fiona)
"stream of consciousness" (Fiona)
"'the babies are doing something different' or they're really happy that their kids are at school today because they get a break…" (Hannah)
"people do put their everyday crap up there" (Hannah)
"just the general chit-chat…talking about totally unrelated things" (Charlotte)
"thingy just slept" (Heidi)
"thingy just did a poo" (Heidi)
"it makes you realize that – maybe its part of my moving away from the forum – is, it's…people don't need to read it, you know? Do I think that the fact that you've watered your child's formula down on 1 bottle is important? No, don't be ridiculous. Why do I need to write that? I don't know, it just seems silly. Some things, once you've written about it, it just seems silly, makes you realize how redundant it is." (Hannah)
"everybody's got Facebook and it's like...I don't know how you keep up with it, that's my issue, I see people posting all the time on Facebook, I'm like, first I don't have a lot of stuff that I would post - I could have posted Oliver's biscuits today...! But, who cares?! " (Norma)
"catch up on the day-to-day gossip…[which] leaves face-to-face meetings for deeper contact" (Fiona)
"an easy quick way to catch up on superficial news" (Neil)
"get the what you've been doing out of the way on Facebook, then face to face meetings can get to deeper level." (Fiona)

Data in Category 'd' – Status Updates

References to status updates made online:
"mobile phones…conditioning us to respond to alert tones, check-in constantly, answer immediately, keep up-to-date – making us busier, you have to go and find out what is happening in people's lives, rather than them calling you or meeting with you for a 2-way communication" (Fiona)

"post words of encouragement" (Hannah)
"I see people posting all the time on Facebook, I'm like, first I don't have a lot of stuff that I would post - I could have posted Oliver's biscuits today...! But, who cares?! " (Norma)
"catch up on the day-to-day gossip…[which] leaves face-to-face meetings for deeper contact" (Fiona)
"an easy quick way to catch up on superficial news" (Neil)
"get the what you've been doing out of the way on Facebook, then face to face meetings can get to deeper level" (Fiona)
"people just want to follow it, people are like sheep - that's what I think they are"" (Andrew)
"the media has a huge influence on results and outcomes of bits and pieces, day-to-day things, it doesn't matter if it's the police, or it doesn't matter who it is…if the media get wind of it...they just run with it, corrupt it...they do everything - they want you to follow them...'Like us on Facebook', 'Tweet us your comments'...everyone has their opinion and then suddenly it all becomes something from nothing" (Andrew)

Data in Category 'e' – Thoughts and Feelings

References to the sharing of Thoughts / Feelings online:
"just the general chit-chat…talking about totally unrelated things" (Charlotte)
"it's 3am; am posting about…" (Fiona)
"Social media is changing the way we communicate. Younger generations share everything, their thoughts and feelings. You can easily write or type everything you want to someone you don't know in person. If you knew the person in real life probably you wouldn't write that same thing because the person could be, say, your boss's father." (Anya)
"oh so very sad, I have just finished reading Bryce Courtney's final words, his words have been so much of my life for the past 25yrs, how I will miss you" (Olivia)

Data in Category 'f' – Brief Messages

References to brief messages communicated online:
"Sometimes I think people are very clever in how they abbreviate things to get their message across in a quick text, but I just wish they wouldn't think that's the norm when you're writing something handwritten. They should understand the difference" (Natalie)
"you get so many different perspectives when you post something on Facebook cos there's so many people on it, rather than when you have a chat with someone. People say 'oh this is what I did' a bit more than face-to-face" (Norma)

Data in Category 'g' – Forthright Comments

References to the posting of forthright / blunt comments online:
"hiding behind your computer" (Andrew, Leonie)
"people are more forthright, rude…you don't know who you're speaking to…don't care what you say…[there is] less fear of offending" (Fiona)
"people vent on forums where they don't have to modify their behavior" (Fiona)
"when you have that anonymity, people don't have the stop button, they just keep going and keep at it and keep at it" (Hannah)

Data in Category 'h' – Comments which show you are not very concerned about others' feelings

References to comments posted online which show the poster is not very concerned about others' feelings:
"you don't have to be worried about what people think of you, or how people are feeling, you can be very blunt, but when you have face-to-face, you know how someone is feeling and you know if you hurt yourself and you just write a message on Facebook saying 'I've hurt myself' - if you have a face-to-face conversation you can see how a person is hurting and you can say something that you mightn't normally say, or you could comfort them or you could give them a cuddle, you're always hiding behind things I reckon" (Andrew)
"people are more forthright, rude…you don't know who you're speaking to…don't care what you say…[there is] less fear of offending" (Fiona)
"dip in and out of online communities" (Isabel)
"not seeking acceptance from other members" (Hannah)

Data in Category 'i' – Things you would not say in person

References to things communicated online that you would not say in person "
"Social media is changing the way we communicate. Younger generations share everything, their thoughts and feelings. You can easily write or type everything you want to someone you don't know in person. If you knew the person in real life probably you wouldn't write that same thing because the person could be, say, your boss's father" (Anya)

Data in Category 'j' – Urgent information / news

References to urgent information / news posted online:
"to cancel my son's Christening on the Sunday because he was in hospital" (Fiona)

Data in Category 'k' – Information (e.g. News or an announcement) that you wish to play down / trivialise

References to information communicated online (e.g. News or an announcement) that you wish to play down / trivialize:

Fiona's story about wanting to avoid making Jamie's stay in hospital "a big deal" thus she posted a message online cancelling his Christening which she felt would be less likely to illicit reactions of sympathy (Fiona)

Data in Category 'l' – Your online persona

References to communicating an online persona:
"put up a different face online" (Anya)
"it was a mixed community of people who knew each other and people who didn't, so it was a mix of people talking about real things in their lives in contrast to people talking about hypothetical ideas and hypothetical discussions - I got annoyed with the mix of real and virtual and how different people were in real live compared to in virtual. For example, I know some people in real life they now live in Melbourne and Adelaide and when I talk to them on the phone or meet them in person, they are different to how they talk to people on Facebook. They behave as if they are different on Facebook, put up a face. The person that I know face to face has a Facebook profile, they portray a different side of them via Facebook. When they were talking to their virtual friends (people whom they only know by communicating online, haven't met in person) and their real friends they are different, i.e. with people they've never met" (Anya)
"They behave in a way that is different when they communicate through Facebook as opposed to when I talk to them face-to-face or on the phone. They put up a face" (Anya)

Data in Category 'm' – Edited / amended versions of originally drafted message

References to communicating edited / amended versions of originally drafted message online:
"I always have to write everything and then re-read it to make sure that I've said things the way I want them to be read. I think that's the thing with written word, you can re-read and edit everything that you say" (Hannah)
"Moderators restrict what they consider to be unacceptable language or comments - they say 'you're not allowed to say that'" (Hannah)

Data in Category 'n' – Social arrangements you want to make loosely

References to communicating online for social arrangements you want to make loosely:
"If I make an appointment with my little brother, it's so flexible, he'll like text me and say 'I'll be there in 2 hours', not in 10 minutes, that sort of thing, I don't really mind, but I just feel that with his generation, they're constantly on their phones, texting and stuff, I get the impression that arrangements are much more flexible, much more up in the air... I operate differently, I wouldn't assume that he'd be on time!" (Frances)
[Plans made are] "less fixed" and "easier to change" (Frances)

Data in Category 'o' – Things you are not concerned should be private

References to posting online things you are not concerned should be private:
"lessening concern for privacy" (Madhu)

ii. Categories of Changes in *when* communication occurs

a	You are always-on
b	You feel social pressure to communicate
c	You are always-available
d	Immediately / instantaneously
e	At a time that suits you
f	Compulsively / obsessively

Data in Category 'a' – You are always-on

References to You are always-on
"I was going to say, people just have...it's just another part of their body now, it's like it's been surgically implanted!!" (Sophie)
"You can roll over in bed and it's just there (like a partner!!) it's always there" (Heidi)
"Everyone's got their mobile phones with them these days - you're asleep with them on the bed, so you can send a message any time and they'll reply to it straight away" (Andrew)
"mobile phone is never switched off, but it's on silent at night, it's either under the pillow or on the bedside locker" (Isabel)
"they say that it's really bad for you [to sleep with phone] but it's also the norm" (Andrew)
"[my wife is] more likely to leave the kids in a supermarket than leave home without her phone" (Scott)
"[people are] texting or Facebooking ALL the time" (Fiona)
"You can't be in your own mind anymore, you can't just think and you can't just stop and be just a person, you need to have constant communication with something else, whether it's a phone, or iPad, or an iPod or whatever, you need to have stimulation, and if you don't have like technology stimulation you think you're not normal, it's normal now that...'Oh what are you doing on the train?! He's reading the paper?! We don't read the paper these days, we have a paper application on our mobile to read the paper. It's like you can't be in your own body, you need to be stimulated by technology, by something connected to you" (Andrew)
"I'm very prone, I think this is a consequence of portable technology, to stopping at a red traffic light or being anywhere, and on my iPhone an email comes in and I look at it" (Hannah)

"people are a bit lost without it. I don't have an iPhone and I think once people get iPhones they're very connected to them and everything is around that one little search engine, it's like their counterpart or something, their alias" (Christina)
"if you told a teenager to put their phone in a drawer it would feel to them like they were cutting off their hand at the wrist and putting that in the drawer!" (Sophie)
"People can't survive without it [technology]" (Leonie)
"that's the problem…your phone beeps when emails come through…what if you get into the habit of just checking every time?" (Andrew)
"I think a lot of people just think it's part of everyday life now to be in touch with everybody every minute of the day" (Sophie)
"technology is going to ruin us" (Andrew)
"it's 3am; am posting about…" (Fiona)
"there is a thing in my head that the phone's always on…you have to have your phone on you all the time" (Christina)
"Even in my head, even though I get annoyed in dinner situations where phones are on the table, there is a thing in my head that the phone's always on" (Christina)
"when I didn't have a – I had a normal phone that didn't have email – I had Internet time, I would log onto the email and I would read and respond to my emails. But now…[the iPhone] it's always on. Things are always coming in and for whatever reason – a reason I don't know – I always, if I can, stop and look at it, whatever it is, an email, a text message" (Hannah)
"If I make an appointment with my little brother, it's so flexible, he'll like text me and say 'I'll be there in 2 hours', not in 10 minutes, that sort of thing, I don't really mind, but I just feel that with his generation, they're constantly on their phones, texting and stuff, I get the impression that arrangements are much more flexible, much more up in the air... I operate differently, I wouldn't assume that he'd be on time!" (Frances)
"I think it's taking over, sometimes you're just bombarded with all this stuff coming in (personal emails, work emails, email bookings for our investment property) and you just think "God you don't have a minute' cos you're getting so much at you. Cos I'm in the groups I feel obliged sometimes, cos it comes as a message - you've got to read it.. Whereas you don't have to go in and read that side of things. But when you're in a group it excites you, a new message" (Norma)

Data in Category 'b' – You feel social pressure to communicate

References to You feel social pressure to communicate
"I feel obliged to answer…I try to respond to things immediately" (Sophie)
"I think because the message is always there, it's sitting there waiting, whereas if you miss a phone-call unless they leave a voicemail you don't know and there's not that expectation about a reply or anything like there is with a message" (Norma)

"I hate it, that's my opinion. Employers will give you a smartphone and then expect you to be always-on" (Andrew)
"when I didn't have a – I had a normal phone that didn't have email – I had Internet time, I would log onto the email and I would read and respond to my emails. But now…[the iPhone] it's always on. Things are always coming in and for whatever reason – a reason I don't know – I always, if I can, stop and look at it, whatever it is, an email, a text message" (Hannah)
"If I text someone and don't get an immediate reply it annoys me, cos I need an answer then and there and it's probably followed up by a phone-call if I don't get a reply then and there" (Christina)
"I think it's taking over, sometimes you're just bombarded with all this stuff coming in (personal emails, work emails, email bookings for our investment property) and you just think "God you don't have a minute' cos you're getting so much at you. Cos I'm in the groups I feel obliged sometimes, cos it comes as a message - you've got to read it.. Whereas you don't have to go in and read that side of things. But when you're in a group it excites you, a new message" (Norma)

Data in Category 'c' – You are Always-Available

References to responding to online communications because you are 'always-available':
"you have to have your phone on you all the time" (Christina)
"I get annoyed in dinner situations where phones are on the table" (Christina)
"I feel obliged to answer…I try to respond to things immediately" (Sophie)
"I think because the message is always there, it's sitting there waiting, whereas if you miss a phone-call unless they leave a voicemail you don't know and there's not that expectation about a reply or anything like there is with a message" (Norma)
"there is a thing in my head that the phone's always on…you have to have your phone on you all the time" (Christina)
"Sometimes I feel that I'm connected all the time, especially if there's nothing happening, but if there is there's constantly something popping up saying so and so needs to ask you this...can you respond to this..." (Sophie)
"I hate it, that's my opinion. Employers will give you a smartphone and then expect you to be always-on" (Andrew)
"I think it's taking over, sometimes you're just bombarded with all this stuff coming in (personal emails, work emails, email bookings for our investment property) and you just think "God you don't have a minute' cos you're getting so much at you. Cos I'm in the groups I feel obliged sometimes, cos it comes as a message - you've got to read it.. Whereas you don't have to go in and read that side of things. But when you're in a group it excites you, a new message" (Norma)

Data in Category 'd' – Immediately / Instantaneously

References to communicating online immediately / instantaneously:
"I'm very prone, I think this is a consequence of portable technology, to stopping at a red traffic light or being anywhere, and on my iPhone an email comes in and I look at it" (Hannah)
"it's becoming a rule [that people do respond to their texts immediately], but it should not be, I think that's becoming a pressure [that we've got to keep checking our emails, checking our texts], I think so, yeah" (Bella)
"mobile phones…conditioning us to respond to alert tones, check-in constantly, answer immediately, keep up-to-date – making us busier, you have to go and find out what is happening in people's lives, rather than them calling you or meeting with you for a 2-way communication" (Fiona)
"Sometimes I feel that I'm connected all the time, especially if there's nothing happening, but if there is there's constantly something popping up saying so and so needs to ask you this...can you respond to this..." (Sophie)
"when I didn't have a – I had a normal phone that didn't have email – I had Internet time, I would log onto the email and I would read and respond to my emails. But now…[the iPhone] it's always on. Things are always coming in and for whatever reason – a reason I don't know – I always, if I can, stop and look at it, whatever it is" (Hannah)
"it's changing the immediacy of a conversation…you're leaving it to the other person's discretion whether they want to respond to your text…" (Natalie)
"If I text someone and don't get an immediate reply it annoys me, cos I need an answer then and there and it's probably followed up by a phone-call if I don't get a reply then and there." (Christina)

Data in Category 'e' – At a Time that Suits You

References to responding to online communications at a time that suits you:
"I don't mind 'cos I can always put it down or leave it and go out. I think what I'm finding an issue is, after the girls go to bed at night I get on and do a lot of correspondence. It gets my mind so active that come bed time I just can't relax, so I think I'm going to have to set myself a limit, that I switch it off at a certain time, just to give me half an hour or an hour not to think about. Last night I had to write a public post and send it to the administrator about a boy with a disability, you know, emotional stuff, and thinking about that just before you go to bed really was playing on my mind" (Sophie)
"text-based contact [with other mothers] to suit the kids' sleep times" (Hannah)
"We chat online now because it's convenient, so the kids can be asleep and you can still be texting to have a conversation without waking them" (Natalie)
"If I make an appointment with my little brother, it's so flexible, he'll like text me and say 'I'll be there in 2 hours', not in 10 minutes, that sort of thing, I don't really mind, but I just feel that with his generation, they're constantly on their phones, texting and stuff, I get the impression that arrangements are much more flexible, much more up in the air... I operate differently, I wouldn't assume that he'd be on time!" (Frances)

"you could completely live your whole life without leaving home with the Internet and work and everything…but…I just think that's unhealthy" (Frances)
"using Facebook messages is convenient, you can reply or not reply…" (Norma)
"at the other person's discretion if they will respond or not" to any given electronic contact (Fiona)

Data in Category 'f' – Compulsively / obsessively

References to communicating online compulsively / obsessively:
"that's the problem…your phone beeps when emails come through…what if you get into the habit of just checking every time?" (Andrew)
"a lot of people become quite obsessed and so they're not actually getting out they're just staying within their own confinements and doing all their communication" (Lizzy)
fostering a society of "obsessed nosey-parkers" (Andrew)
"Technology, I believe, will - I'm Andrew Thompson and I THINK TECHNOLOGY IS GOING TO RUIN US! And I truly believe that, everybody hides behind it and there's the addiction side of it" (Andrew)

iii. Categories of Changes to *where* communication occurs

a	In public forums of unknown contacts
b	To a broad audience of known contacts
c	To groups of contacts you have defined
d	Directly to a friend's online portal (wall or page)
e	To like-minded people / people in same situation as you

Data in Category 'a' – In Public Forums of Unknown Contacts

References to communicating in public online forums of unknown contacts:
"not people you need to get acceptance from" (Fiona)
"people vent on forums where they don't have to modify their behavior" (Fiona)
"Social media is changing the way we communicate. Younger generations share everything, their thoughts and feelings. You can easily write or type everything you want to someone you don't know in person. If you knew the person in real life probably you wouldn't write that same thing because the person could be, say, your boss's father" (Anya)
"it was a mixed community of people who knew each other and people who didn't, so it was a mix of people talking about real things in their lives in contrast to people talking about hypothetical ideas and hypothetical discussions - I got annoyed with the mix of real and virtual and how different people were in real live compared to in virtual. For example, I know some people in real life they now live in Melbourne and Adelaide and when I talk to

them on the phone or meet them in person, they are different to how they talk to people on Facebook. They behave as if they are different on Facebook, put up a face. The person that I know face to face has a Facebook profile, they portray a different side of them via Facebook. When they were talking to their virtual friends (people whom they only know by communicating online, haven't met in person) and their real friends they are different, i.e. with people they've never met" (Anya)
"I could chat with other pregnant woman when none of my own friends had gone through it" (Julie)
"access to more contacts" (Charlotte)
"do not know the other members personally" (Hannah)
"other members might not even be using real names" (Hannah)

Data in Category 'b' – To a Broad Audience of Known Contacts

References to communicating to a broad online audience of known contacts:
"you get so many different perspectives when you post something on Facebook cos there's so many people on it, rather than when you have a chat with someone. People kinda go into detail and say 'oh this is what I did' a bit more than face-to-face" (Norma)
"it was a mixed community of people who knew each other and people who didn't, so it was a mix of people talking about real things in their lives in contrast to people talking about hypothetical ideas and hypothetical discussions - I got annoyed with the mix of real and virtual and how different people were in real live compared to in virtual. For example, I know some people in real life they now live in Melbourne and Adelaide and when I talk to them on the phone or meet them in person, they are different to how they talk to people on Facebook. They behave as if they are different on Facebook, put up a face. The person that I know face to face has a Facebook profile, they portray a different side of them via Facebook. When they were talking to their virtual friends (people whom they only know by communicating online, haven't met in person) and their real friends they are different, i.e. with people they've never met" (Anya)
"I've got like 100 'friends', but I don't really have 100 friends" (Charlotte)
"the illusion of many friendships" (Fiona)

Data in Category 'c' – To groups of contacts you have defined

References to communicating online to groups of contacts you have defined:
(Fiona): "for example, when he [Conor] was in hospital, I didn't have time to ring everyone and say "by the way I'm in hospital" and you don't want to do that at 9am and say "I'm in hospital..." *(Interviewer): "did you put it on Facebook?" [asks half jokingly]*

(Fiona): "yes! I put it on Facebook! But then, in some ways that is good because people know what's going on"
"I think it's taking over, sometimes you're just bombarded with all this stuff coming in (personal emails, work emails, email bookings for our investment property) and you just think "God you don't have a minute' cos you're getting so much at you. Cos I'm in the groups I feel obliged sometimes, cos it comes as a message - you've got to read it.. Whereas you don't have to go in and read that side of things. But when you're in a group it excites you, a new message" (Norma)

Data in Category 'd' – Directly to a friend's online portal (wall or page)

References to communicating online directly to a friend's online portal (wall or page):
"it's changing the immediacy of a conversation…you're leaving it to the other person's discretion whether they want to respond to your text…" (Natalie)
"post words of encouragement" (Hannah)

Data in Category 'e' – To like-minded people / people in same situation as you

References to communicating online to communities of like-minded people / people in same situation as you:
"First of friends to get pregnant, needed information and advice from other mums" (Hannah)
"When I was trying to fall pregnant I read the forums on bubhub a lot" (Julie)
"Sometimes online gives you access to a community of people who share a common interest with you that your immediate face-to-face contacts do not share. E.g. Only a handful of friends had babies around the same time of us so I would go online to read forums etc to see what others were experiencing when I was pregnant" (Julie)
"when I was pregnant with Aden I was the only one of my friends to be pregnant, first one to be pregnant and I just didn't have anyone to talk to about it except my sister-in-law and I just didn't have that sort of relationship with her" (Hannah)
"helped me when I was planning my wedding, cos I got married in Tasmania but I was living in Sydney, so it just helped me find recommendations for businesses and services cos I was the first of my friends to get married, I didn't know anything about weddings" (Hannah)
"I asked about photographers on the wedding forum…[LAUGHS] there's a lot of talk about photographers on the forum…but all sorts of things, wedding rings, shoes…" (Hannah)
"maybe its just that there's so much stuff on the Internet it's more like a lucky dip to me in order to find out about something particular that only some people will know" (Heidi)