

ONLINE AND OFFLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS: WHO'S IN THEM, WHAT'S NOT?
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The use of social networking sites has become pervasive for college students. This research examines college students' perceptions of their online and offline networks. It studies how social networking sites, such as Facebook, affect college students' opinions of their social networks. One aspect of these growing online networks is that brands have an increasing presence within online networks. This project aims to understand how college-age individuals conceptualize brands within their social networks. To investigate these questions, I conducted 15 in-depth interviews of students who attend various four-year colleges around the country. I found that contrary to the fears of some, college students value their offline networks far more than their online ones and mostly view social networking sites as supplementary to in-person relationships. I also discovered that despite brands' growing presence in online social networks, college students fail to see brands as intimate parts of their social networks because they conceptualize social networks as being composed of humans who can engage in personal interactions and brands cannot achieve this.

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INTRODUCTION

At the onset of this project, I set out to understand if brands can be part of a consumer's network. This is a question that plagues marketers but is also of interest to academics. We live in a world that is increasingly dominated by brands, with the rise of product placement, branded sponsorships, and now the entry of brands into social networking sites (SNS) in the form of Facebook pages and Twitter feeds. Though these brands have a presence in our online social networks, this does not necessarily mean that consumers integrate them into their concept of a social network. On Facebook, brands put great effort into making their pages interactive and exciting for consumers. Many brands include games and contests to keep their fans excited about the brand. On Twitter, brands post short updates about new products, sweepstakes, or media campaigns. Some brands use Twitter to get feedback on products or provide customer service through Twitter conversations. Big brands usually have hundreds of thousands if not millions of followers on these social networking sites. Despite these tremendous efforts by brands to incorporate themselves into the consumer's network, my research suggests that college-age consumers do not view brands as intimate members of their social network.

In order to best analyze how brands are viewed in the context of social media, it was first necessary to gain an in-depth understanding of how college students view their online versus offline social networks. This topic is particularly important to college-age individuals because of their unique position in regards to social media. They lived most of their lives without the idea of an online social network, but around their late teen years Facebook took hold of their lives and now refuses to let go. For many 20-somethings, the idea of not having a Facebook is almost unfathomable. At the same time, however, college Millennials know the world existed before Facebook and some even crave that time, a context that many current teens cannot even imagine.

It is that dual perspective that makes the topic of social networks so fascinating for those in their early twenties.

This project is a response to a perceived dearth of ethnographic studies of how college students conceptualize and compare their online and offline social networks. Without first understanding the interplay between online and offline networks, any analysis of brands' roles in social networks would be meaningless. Though the study of online social networks has become a hot topic in academia in the past five years, very little has been written about the comparison of online and offline networks. Some worry that the younger generation can no longer separate Facebook from their offline lives, yet no one has taken the time to talk to them about how they compare their online and offline worlds. Some scholars have begun to study Facebook usage and the motivation for it, but the focus is generally on quantitative data. This allows for a broader swath of individuals to be studied but lacks the emotional perspective of an ethnographic study. For these reasons, I embarked on a project that studied the social networks of college students using an in-depth methodology.

METHODS

For this project I conducted 15 interviews with college students ranging in age from 20 to 22. They represent the younger end of the Millennial Generation or Generation Y, which includes people born between the late 1970s and early 2000s. For the purposes of this project I refer to them as Millennials or 20-somethings. The interviews were in-depth and typically lasted for about an hour. The interviews were recorded for the sake of accuracy in quoting interviewees, who were all promised anonymity. The interviews followed a specific set of questions that were asked of all interviewees but the course of the interview and order of

questions varied widely depending on the answers of the interviewee. The questions focused on interviewees' perceptions of their social networks, their use of social networking sites, and their comparison of online and offline networks. The end of the interview focused on brands and their brand loyalty, concluding with a question about brands and their role in the interviewee's social network. Much of the focus of online social networks revolved around Facebook because it is the SNS that most interviewees use, however other forms of online social networks were mentioned and discussed.

The interviewees all attend four-year colleges in the United States. There were seven females and eight males interviewed. All interviewees use email and most have Facebook, while only some have Twitter and Linked In. Since all interviewees were given anonymity, all following names are pseudonyms. Below is a table describing their basic information and usage of Facebook and Twitter.

Name	Gender	Age	Usage of SNS
Neil	M	22	Uses Facebook and Twitter. Checks Facebook multiple times a day because he feels it is a good way to find out not only about his friends but also news items that other people post. Gets email notifications about Facebook, so she only goes on Facebook to write or respond to posts from others, not to browse. She checks Twitter daily but only tweets every other week.
Shelly	F	21	Uses Facebook more than once a day, though she would like to cut down on her usage.
Josie	F	21	Uses Facebook every day, mostly as a way to check up on others and procrastinate from her work.
Fiona	F	20	Uses Facebook multiple times a day. She updates her status infrequently and reaches out to others on occasion.
Robyn	F	21	Checks Facebook 20-30 times a day.
Cameron	M	20	Uses Facebook 10 times a day. She often uses her Facebook status to reach her extensive online network in order to get sources for articles she writes for magazines and for travel advice. She does not have a Twitter account of her own but she will occasionally look at other people's Twitter feeds.
Isabel	F	21	Checks Facebook at least once a day and updates his status or shares links with others regularly
Elliot	M	21	
Charlie	M	22	Had a Facebook but gave it up recently. When he used

			Facebook, he checked it 4 or 5 times a week, but decided to stop because he had promised himself to be off Facebook when he graduated from college. He found Facebook interactions slightly immature and very superficial, so he stuck with his promise and removed his profile six months ago.
Trisha	F	21	Uses Facebook and Twitter. She uses Facebook daily, more since she has gotten a smartphone but for shorter periods of time. Most of her time on Facebook is spent checking up on casual acquaintances. She got a Twitter account so as not to be left out but does not tweet very often. She checks it regularly on her phone and mostly follows the people she sees most in-person as well as a few celebrities.
Henry	M	22	Uses Facebook multiple times a day for short periods of time. Checks Facebook and Twitter daily but uses Twitter more because it is his source of news, as well as a place to follow friends.
Braden	M	21	Checks Facebook once a day but only occasionally and uses it to reach out to others.
Derrick	M	21	Uses Facebook less frequently than in the past but still once or twice a day.
Vincent	M	21	Uses Facebook and Twitter. She checks both daily but has become a less avid user of Twitter now that she no longer has a smartphone and has found that there are very few people on it she cares to follow.
Alexis	F	21	

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Before discussing online versus offline social networks, interviewees were asked to define their social network in general. Most included a wide variety of people in their idea of a social network. College friends, high school friends, coworkers, and classmates all consistently were mentioned as part of their social network. The response to the question of family members as part of the network was slightly divided. Though most people consider family part of their network, a few interviewees spoke of the idea that family was in a separate category. “Family is family,” said Fiona and a few others echoed her sentiment, saying that family is on a level above the social network because it is unconditional and the term network sounds too formal. Some interviewees had a fairly narrow view of a social network as only people they see or talk to frequently, leaving acquaintances, for the most part, on the very periphery of the network. One

interviewee took a broad a view of network and included not only college friends and classmates but also all students at her school because she thinks that there is probably only one or two degrees separating her from everyone at her school. In general, however, the concept of a social network as composed of friends, coworkers, and some acquaintances was consistent across interviewees.

Another area of general agreement was the use of the social network. Every interviewee mentioned socializing and connecting as the primary use of his or her social network. It provides entertainment and companionship in the form of spending time with friends or interacting with them via technology. Many interviewees saw their social networks as having a broad array of uses apart from friendship, including advice, connections to get a job, help with schoolwork, or even money in the form of a loan from friends or the financial support of parents. Isabel, in particular, saw her social network as having an occupational use because she is a journalist who often finds sources for stories through her social network. Elliot went so far as to say his social network could be used for any purpose he chooses because each person in his network can serve a different role in his life.

When the topic progressed to online versus offline networks, it became clear that college Millennials do, in fact, draw a line between online and offline. They see them as two separate entities, not one interchangeable network. Though there was a lot of discussion about the intersection of the two networks, it was clear that online and offline do have some qualitative differences. The most striking difference was the distinction between “real life” and online social networks. Almost every interviewee referred to the offline social network as “real” in comparison to the virtual world of SNS. Even though the people on Facebook are real people and the photos displayed depict real events, there is something more tangible about the offline world.

As Neil pointed out, all of his friends would exist even if Facebook did not. Josie explained that Facebook is not authentic on its own but rather is dependent on the offline network for its existence. Because of this dependency, Facebook derives its real meaning from the offline world. None of the interviewees was keen on the idea of interacting only in the online world. Vincent said that he is much more comfortable with the notion of someone disregarding online for offline than the other way around. Despite the amount of time and effort the interviewees invest in their online social network, they still recognize, at least implicitly if not all explicitly, that the real relationships exist offline and Facebook is a virtual version of them.

CHANGING NORMS

A whole set of norms has developed to dictate social etiquette in the online world. Braden was particularly aware of these social norms and how they differ among the different online networks. He explained that Facebook etiquette dictates you should send a private message to someone for personal conversations, whereas to reach a large audience you should post something and tag many people in it. On Facebook he would not “friend” someone who he has not met in real life whereas on Twitter he feels comfortable messaging strangers about their tweets if he follows them. Though the norms are still developing and changing based on users’ input and actions, the boundaries for reaching out to acquaintances are being lowered by Facebook and Twitter. Each form of online communication has a different set of governing rules and imparts a different level of formality or commitment to the conversation. As Derrick explains, email feels more formal because it is often used professionally but Facebook encourages clicking on others’ pages with very little conscious effort involved. In comparison to the ease of online forms of communication, offline communication has been elevated to a higher

meaning. To text a new acquaintance shows a high level of interest and to call someone on the phone is not only rare but also often implies that the conversation is an important one.

These changing norms also apply to the types of conversations had in online versus offline networks. Though some people professed to be a fairly open book and share mostly the same things on Facebook as in person, almost everyone agreed that some things are only shared offline. Personal conversations or longer conversations should be kept to the offline world. One interviewee found that this was not true. Vincent said that he finds that some people are more comfortable talking about emotions online. Though he wishes people would learn to have these conversations in person, he says “it’s a lot easier to say something [emotionally charged] if there’s no eye contact.” This, however, was not true for many other interviewees who felt that emotional and personal conversations occur more in person. Trisha said that her Facebook posts are not deep and she would prefer to have conversations about beliefs and values in an offline setting. Because everyone can so easily view online conversations and the possibility of a conversation being archived and used against you at a later time exists, interviewees think that things you would not share with everyone should not be written online. Neil explained that there is more trust in face-to-face conversations. Online conversations are usually more casual and often based on links to websites or articles, which are much more easily shared in the moment of discovery than later when you actually see the person. As Cameron explained, stories shared online are usually the big picture and the details are shared in person. Robyn described her interactions online as being shallower because they are short and superficial in topic. Josie specifically mentioned that her online conversations center around pop culture, while her offline conversations can be much more intellectual or personal.

The style in which people talk in online versus offline conversations also differs somewhat significantly. For some, the online world affords a chance to improve their style of conversation. Isabel explained that there is more of an opportunity to be clever when you are behind a screen. This is because you have more time to think of a clever response than when you must respond immediately in person. She also explained that there is a dual quality to the self-censorship that happens in online conversations. On the one hand, her texts or online chats are more censored because she has the ability to read what she writes before pressing enter. On the other hand, her online conversations are less censored because the distance felt through the computer allows her to feel as though she can say anything because she do not have to see the other person's reaction. For others, the online conversation creates more problems than benefits. Josie and Fiona both mentioned that online conversations leave much more room for misunderstanding. The lack of intonation and facial movements or body language makes it more difficult to interpret the true meaning of the other person's words. Cameron also explained that his conversations are different because he usually acts happier in online conversations and only shows the darker side of his personality offline. He also thinks that many conversations can fall flat because of the lack of easily expressed emotion or the lack of involvement by one or both participants because of how easily distracted one can become when online.

THE EXPANDING ONLINE NETWORK

Many interviewees acknowledge that their online networks are much larger than their offline networks. Though almost all had met Facebook friends first in person, now some of those acquaintances only exist in the online world because of distance and lack of contact. This use of Facebook to maintain relationships rather than begin them has been documented in other studies.

Lampe, Ellis, and Steinfeld (2008) found that college students consistently reported over a three-year period that they rarely used Facebook to meet new people. Trisha said, "I don't use online networks to make friends" and laughed at the idea that people would start a friendship online. Still, she noted that her online network is larger than offline because there are people on Facebook who she has not talked to in years and would not consider part of her real network or call for any reason. Alexis finds that this expansion of her online network has become extreme in the past year as more people have joined Facebook who were not part of the original demographic. She says that her Facebook network is losing any kind of meaning now that it includes everyone she has ever met.

This expansion of the online network in part originates from a differing set of criteria for friendships online than friendships offline. Online networks include many more acquaintances because it is so simple to accept someone as a friend. Even though two people don't actually hang out in real life or talk on a semi-regular basis, they can be friends online with the click of a button. Shelly said that she is more generous with the people she will be a friend with on Facebook but a lot more careful with the people she lets into her house. Fiona phrased it as being tougher in her criteria for offline friendships. Since Facebook does not require any active participation to be friends, friendship can include a much wider swath of people. Braden says he only considers someone a friend if he knows him or her in "real life." Cameron even went so far as to describe Facebook friendships as superficial because they do not require much effort to maintain and do not necessarily imply any actual affection on the part of either party. Isabel explained that it is possible to be "friends" with an enemy on Facebook and thinks the term "Facebook friend" is misleading because it often does not mean friendship but rather a social

connection. Many consider their online network to be primarily acquaintances; when asked the percentage of Facebook friends who are close friends, the answer was typically 20% or less.

Almost every interviewee agreed that online is more important for maintaining casual acquaintances rather than close contacts. As previously mentioned, social etiquette dictates that you can contact someone on Facebook that you do not know very well, but calling that person on the phone might be overstepping your boundaries. It takes less effort to use Facebook and therefore is more acceptable as a means of communication with acquaintances. As Shelly explains, Facebook is low risk and more forgiving because if someone does not write back on Facebook or takes a long time to respond, it is not perceived to be as rude as not responding to a call or text. Facebook also removes the awkwardness of having to talk to someone you are not very close to in person. Fiona explains that good friends do not need to be Facebook friends because they have other means of communication. Especially for those who see each other on a regular basis, Facebook becomes completely supplemental because anything that needs to be said can be said offline. Robyn explained that while online networks can enhance close relationships by adding another way to interact and share connections, it is more important for casual relationships because it causes them to last in situations where they otherwise might not. If it were not for Facebook many casual contacts would lose touch entirely.

Cameron delved into one particular reason why Facebook is so good at prolonging casual relationships: it captures the essence of random encounters. On Facebook it is possible for someone to randomly come up in your browsing, in the same way that walking through a college campus you may randomly run into a friend from two years ago that you had not seen in a while. In that somewhat randomized way, you are reminded of a person online and can quickly and

simply contact them. It is easier to be connected when you have a higher possibility of randomly happening upon an online profile and therefore remembering to stay in touch.

Still, some have mixed feelings as to the ultimate significance of these casual acquaintances. Trisha explained that a friend who had moved away in middle school added her on Facebook and Trisha wondered why this acquaintance would bother to do so. "It's interesting but I'm not any better or worse for it. I don't feel like I've gained another friend or connection," she said. Though this person is now considered to be part of her network, she will probably never actually interact with her again in the offline world. Braden and Vincent both stated that they try to only be friends with people on Facebook who they expect to see again in person. Without this possibility, the connection feels pointless to them because interactions online are superficial. Vincent said that virtual interactions as an end are "stupid" because there's not really anything there; there's always something missing on the Internet. Alexis says that she is kind of disillusioned with Facebook because it has become impersonal with all of the random acquaintances that exist only online.

Online networks are not only expanding because of their inclusion of many more casual acquaintances but also because they allow for close friends separated by long distances to stay in touch. The idea of distance having a direct relationship to which network was used for communication came up a lot in interviews. Vincent stated that online networks' main advantage is that they are not constrained by distance. Offline networks are used to communicate with those in close proximity while online networks are used for those who live far away. Though it is possible to call someone on the phone, most people choose to interact over long distances via Facebook and email. These close contacts seem to contradict the idea that SNS are casual and offline networks are intimate. This is because the physical distance of the relationship forces a

good friend into the online sphere. These close contacts that exist in the online world are exceptions, however, and most interviewees consider online to be predominantly casual and shallow.

Though we are in no danger of going completely virtual in our social interactions, online social networks are changing the nature of some of those interactions. In terms of new acquaintances, becoming friends on Facebook is now the first level of exchanging contact information, before phone numbers. This, however, allows a very new acquaintance to find out much more about you than would ever have been possible before. Even the most guarded among us share more on Facebook than we do in the first few interactions with a new person. This can either lead to forming a connection faster or being judged more harshly by a new contact. If the new acquaintances find many similar interests or friends in their online profiles, they may be able to bond over this common ground and become friends faster than if they had to discover this information organically in conversation. If, however, one person sees something undesirable in the other's profile, it can lead to an incorrect judgment before the two get the chance to get to know each other. In this way, this added layer early in a social relationship could be somewhat dangerous because it is possible that it can hurt the interaction. The potential for miscommunication is also higher with new contacts online because, as many interviewees mentioned, conversations can fall flat in the virtual world. Tone can be hard to decipher in text. Without the presence of body language, misinterpretation is very possible. Kruger et al. (2005) found that people overestimate how much the recipient of an email would understand their sarcasm, humor, or other emotions because the sender focuses on his own perspective rather than the recipient's. When you do not already know someone's personality, meaning can often be

confused. Also, because self-presentation is more calculated online, new contacts can often form opinions of each other based on a biased persona.

Online social networks are also changing the nature of interactions with distant contacts. There is an expectation that people will stay in contact longer. Whereas before Facebook if, for example, you met someone at a summer program, you would not expect to stay in contact with that person for years after the program ended unless you were able to see each other or worked very hard to remain in contact. Now, if you are friends on Facebook with that person, you can check in on them periodically and still feel connected though you may not have seen each other for years. SNS allow people to ask more of others with whom their relationship ties are relatively weak. Since people have such a large number of friends on Facebook, they feel they can ask their entire network for help because it is likely that at least one or two people will respond. Though it is more likely the respondent will be someone they know fairly well, it could potentially be a more distant contact. For example, one of the interviewees found a bed for her new house by posting a Facebook status asking for a bed and getting a response from an acquaintance who had one. Without Facebook, she would not have asked that person directly because they were not particularly friendly, but since the question was posed broadly it enabled communication with people who were not close to the interviewee. The ability to reach out to multiple people indirectly online makes the potential usefulness of weak contacts much more readily apparent.

BROADCASTING

Broadcasting was one of the main benefits that people mentioned when discussing online networks. The possibility of telling many people at once about a birthday party or a trip to

another city or a request for advice is extremely appealing and useful. It allows you to connect with a much larger group at once than would be easily possible to achieve with in-person conversations or even phones. As Derrick explained, you can say something to one person that you want everyone to hear. It gives the benefit of including more people in the conversation. Trisha sees the event planning and group organizing functions of Facebook as the primary use of her online network. She finds it very helpful that the online world allows her to not have to spend all her time offline trying to hand out fliers for events or groups.

Not everyone finds broadcasting to be a beneficial aspect of Facebook. Vincent thinks the online world gives people quantity at the expense of quality. He said, “[Online] you can have one message that 100 people see but it will be much less meaningful for each one than if you told them in person.” This is not only because the message is less personalized but also you miss out on the receiver’s immediate reaction. Many interviewees felt that their information was overly exposed because there are so many people in their Facebook network that they would not consider friends offline and with whom they would not normally share personal information. Josie cited this as a reason for her to consider leaving Facebook. Charlie explained that this was part of the reason he disliked Facebook and did not miss it. He said that people could get the sense that they are in the room with him when they really are not. He does not want casual acquaintances to think they know him better than they really do because of Facebook. Alexis has a strong dislike for the idea that her personal life has become public property. She gave the example that she cannot express her true feelings about her job on Facebook anymore because she is “friends” with past and current employers. Shelly also cited her dislike of parents and adults seeing a side of the younger generation that is usually not seen by adults in offline conversations. Alexis also feels that the public nature of Facebook has changed college students’

expectations of friends because “people expect more access to people’s lives and the right to know what you’re doing at any time.” She thinks this has led people to stop making plans because they think they can just call someone at the last minute and find out what they are doing and possibly join in.

For some people, this dislike of Facebook’s broadcasting potential has led them to seek an alternative for their online network. Some have found Twitter a useful option because they can start over in choosing who is allowed into their online social network and be more selective this time around. Alexis says, “my Facebook friend group has become so large and unwieldy that I don’t necessarily go to it to connect with people” and that she is turning to other options, such as small email chains for close groups of friends as a way to find a smaller, more manageable online network. Even Charlie, whose dislike of being exposed on Facebook contributed to him getting rid of his profile, has joined an email group. He admits that the interactions in the group, such as sharing articles or videos, are similar to how he used to interact on Facebook. The important distinction, however, is that everyone in the email group already knows him well and so the conversation is not fake. He feels the way people talk in the email chains is very similar to how they talk in face-to-face conversations because they are comfortable with everyone in the group and therefore do not have to be as censored. Shelly agrees that email chains mimic offline conversations. She says, “The way we bounce back and forth on [my friends’ email chain] is very similar to some of the ways we sit around talking.” As a result, this online network does not feel as superficial.

The feeling of being exposed in your online social network was very prevalent among interviewees and is one of the most significant distinctions between online and offline social networks. The public nature of online social networks has put people’s personal lives on display

in a way that has never happened before. One particular change this exposure has caused is the lack of trust in one's online social network. While people generally place a lot of trust in their offline social networks, sharing their personal stories and emotions with their friends, they do not trust their online network. Even close friends, among whom one would think there exists a lot of trust, will not always share the same information online as offline because they simply do not believe that it can stay private online.

SELF-PRESENTATION

Self-presentation has become more evident and important because of SNS and their focus on true identity. Facebook requires you to use your real name, which means that you must own up to everything on your profile. Most Facebook users recognize that people will judge them based on their online profile and so pick and choose what they put online. Though some are much more careful than others, college students especially are mindful of their self-presentation for several reasons. When students first arrive at school, they want to maintain a certain image on their online profile because they are making many new Facebook friends and do not want to be judged unfairly. As college progresses and many people change their identity slightly or radically, they are cognizant of these changes on Facebook as well. For students who are friends with adults or younger people, such as former teachers or young cousins, they are very aware of what profile information they will share with members of other generations. DiMicco and Millen (2007) found that former college students' Facebook profiles differed based on how many friends they had on Facebook from their job. As the number of company friends increased, most users altered their profiles to be more professional and less revealing of personal information. Facebook users tailor their profile based on perceived audience and their own self-perception.

When applying for jobs, many college students try to make their profiles unable to be found because they do not want employers to judge them based on the “Facebook version” of themselves.

Some of the interviewees were more conscious of this self-presentation than others. While Elliot initially claimed not to pick and choose what goes on his Facebook profile, he admitted that he has taken down many of his interests lately because he does not want to share those details with his expansive online network. Isabel said she is a bit guarded but not too cautious about her profile. She admits, however, that many of her photos show her when she is going out, which could give the false impression that she goes out a lot when in fact it is just because that is when her friends tend to take the most pictures. Braden says that because he is friends on Facebook with people he sees all the time offline, the incentive is to be honest with his profile. He admits that he curates his profile, but does not intentionally deceive. Robyn says that she thinks online “it is much easier to make judgments. Somebody can see something on Facebook and extrapolate something about them as a person.” She recognizes, however, that people pick and choose, which means, “It’s hard to know whether what you’re seeing is the truth.”

Some spoke more specifically of the ways in which their self-presentation is calculated. Josie said Facebook is not a well-rounded view of who she is because theoretically her profile does not show her faults. She does not argue with people on Facebook or show all of her emotions. As Cameron said about his online conversations, Facebook profiles tend to look happier and less dark because of the way people want to present themselves to others. Derrick said his profile is basic because he figures that the people with whom he would be comfortable seeing more information about him already know it. Trisha said that she puts almost no

information about herself on Facebook because “it’s high pressure. If you say anything, I think it seems like you’re saying a lot.” She chooses to avoid this problem by putting nothing up. She also says, “I have very strong social views that I have no problem being vocal about to anybody but I would rather do it face-to-face in an arena where it would be meaningful, not just clicking a button.” It is also easier to discuss nuanced issues in person because online discussions can often be too simplified to properly address a complex issue. Vincent says he recognizes that everything on Facebook is conspicuously viewable and therefore he tries to be more witty online. “My Facebook persona is not how I would naturally interact with someone,” he says. Knowing that he is being observed and judged by so many others changes his personality online.

SUPPLEMENT OR SUBSTITUTE

The idea of Facebook as a supplement rather than a substitute to the offline network was repeatedly discussed. All interviewees agreed that the online network in some way facilitates the offline. Most saw it as a supplement because once a relationship is made offline, it can be furthered through online contact. Neil went so far as to say that Facebook was not, in fact, a network but rather a tool to help his social network maintain itself and grow. Though he expressed the sentiment that Facebook is just a virtual tool and not an actual network, most others saw Facebook as a network, albeit a supplemental one. Everyone said that they had met all of their online friends in the real world first (with a few exceptions of friends connecting other friends online before they meet in person or people who friended other students before arriving at college because they were in the same college network). Henry said, “your online network needs to be fed by your offline network.” Facebook makes it easier to just meet a person once and then stay in contact because you have such a low-involvement way of staying in touch. It

strengthens in-person relationships by helping to plan events, draw connections through something on a Facebook profile that may not have come up in person, and maintain contact over distances.

Despite the generally positive analysis of Facebook as a way to strengthen offline relationships, some saw the negative impact of Facebook on relationships as well. Elliot feels as though Facebook can facilitate friendships but can also sometimes hurt the offline ones because instead of actually talking to someone, you can just Facebook chat them. People can become lazy and see Facebook as a substitute for offline interaction instead of a supplement. For Braden this is not necessarily true because he sees the value of the relationship on Facebook as deriving from the fact that he will meet the friend again in person. Alexis described how some people's concern with their online persona leads them to constantly think about how their lives will appear on Facebook instead of focusing on what they are doing at the moment. She feels that "people are so preoccupied with creating a meta-commentary on their life and this meta-world that they're not present enough." For example, many people have become concerned about taking pictures so that they can post them on Facebook. Instead of just enjoying an event, they have to constantly stop and take pictures even if they are in the middle of something because they care about other people in their network knowing how they spend their time. Josie echoed those thoughts and said that sometimes the Facebook version of an event can become more important than the event itself. People become so concerned with how their lives will look in the public sphere of Facebook that they do not focus on the present. Instead they think up names for photo albums or memorize quotes that were just said that can be posted on a friend's wall the next day.

Trisha said that she thinks if Facebook did not exist, she would call her friends from home more, but now she just looks at their profile and feels up to date on their lives. Though this

is not necessarily a negative for her, she admits it is a “false sense of intimacy.” Alexis seconds this notion by saying that online networks often give the illusion that there is close contact between people. Henry felt strongly that Facebook could hurt personal relationships because it takes away from in-person interactions. He says he agrees with the argument that “before we had Internet and cell phones everyone actually saw each other and it was much better.”

Various interviewees echoed this high level of significance that Henry placed on in-person interactions. Many interviewees used the word “meaningful” to describe their face-to-face interactions with others in comparison to online interactions. Because of the personal nature of many of these conversations, interviewees view them as more significant. Since the sharing of private information and conversations about more emotional topics often strengthens friendships, and since these conversations are more likely to happen in person, offline relationships are prized above online. Fiona says she takes her offline networks more seriously because being in person is more meaningful than talking online. Elliot says that nothing can replace the connections forged through interacting in person with friends. Isabel repeated this sentiment by saying “you can’t match actual interaction.” She qualifies in-person interactions as “actual” versus the virtual nature of online interactions, reiterating the distinction between online and offline worlds.

The worries that the younger generation will lose all social skills and only be able to interact virtually are completely unfounded. All interviewees saw a clear distinction between online and offline worlds and referred to offline as “real life.” They recognize the importance of in-person interactions for forming a true relationship and still consider the idea of making friends in the online forum a strange concept. They view their online networks as another way to interact with their friends from the offline world, not as a substitute for actual interaction. Many

interviewees are actually moving in the direction of using their online networks less because they want to avoid procrastination and spend more time with friends in person.

In fact, this notion of an online social network as a waste of time is a new way of thinking about one's social network. Usually interacting with your social network is the most productive way to spend time, but now it can be seen as a waste of time when done online. The description of Facebook as a time-suck came up multiple times in interviews. This is probably because most of the time spent on Facebook is passively consuming others' social interactions rather than actively engaging another person, and this passiveness provides little satisfaction. Pempek et al. (2009) studied the interactions of college students on Facebook and found that most of the time students were "lurking" on others' profiles rather than actively posting. As mentioned by many interviewees, in-person interactions are much more meaningful because they allow for a back and forth conversation. For this reason, a lot of people prefer online chat functions to other forms of online networks since chatting feels much more similar to in-person interactions due to its real-time nature. Simply posting on a friend's profile on Facebook or commenting on a status update can be an isolated event, a one-time interaction that does not continue. This provides very little of the emotional fulfillment that people gain from engaging with another person. In fact, it can lead to feelings of competition and not wanting to be left out because one can see so many others interacting constantly online and want to join in.

The need to feel connected is certainly increased by the presence of Facebook in college students' lives. Some interviewees stated that they felt pressure to stay in touch while others said they only stayed in touch because they enjoyed it. The feeling of pressure to stay in touch with other individuals seems to be related to personality and varies from individual to individual. The pressure to stay connected to what is going on around them, however, is less symptomatic of

personality and more generally felt by 20-somethings. People want to feel as though they are in the loop with what their friends are doing and always involved in plans. Facebook is contributing to this feeling for many people, especially college students who often hang out in big groups. Because it is so easy to see what friends are up to via Facebook and so many events are planned on Facebook, many people feel pressure to check in on their friends and make sure they are not missing out on a big event. In an article entitled “Feel Like a Wallflower? Maybe It’s Your Facebook Wall,” Jenna Wortham (2011) describes the “fear of missing out” that is being exacerbated by Facebook. We can see everything that our friends are doing in real time, and sometimes that means that we feel as though we are missing out on an opportunity to have fun. Though SNS can help people stay connected and get more involved in events, they also remind us of those events we are not participating in. Because personal lives are now so public, people feel as though they should know about every social event in which their friends participate. Online social networks are thus contributing to the fear of being disconnected.

VALUING ONLINE AND OFFLINE NETWORKS

When asked whether they value either the online or offline network more, interviewees varied in their answers. For some, it was a simple choice; the offline network is more valuable. Cameron, Elliot, and Henry all value offline a lot more because they do not think they would be as close to their friends if they only talked online. They feel that personal relationships are best formed in person and online conversations should be brief. For them, there is no question that time spent with others in the same physical space can never be replaced by online interactions. Braden summarized these same feelings by saying he values “offline for sure. I feel like relationships are a core part of my happiness and I find real life interactions with people much

more fulfilling.” Alexis values offline more because “as much time as I’ve wasted on Facebook, I’m not going to tell stories to my grandchildren of things that happened on Facebook. I’ll tell stories to my grandchildren of things that I did in the real world.” Josie and Derrick agreed that they far value offline over online because though giving up Facebook may shrink their networks, the important people would still remain. Vincent says that he values offline more because it is “more natural. Because we have been social creatures for so long I think there are emotional buttons that are pressed by social interaction that are pressed a lot less comprehensibly by online interaction because it’s not actually interacting with a person, it’s interacting with a screen.”

For others, the answer was not as easy to give. Neil found it a hard question to answer and had to think before finally deciding that he values offline more because if computers disappeared, all the people in his offline world would still be around. Trisha said that the amount of time she spends on online networks would make it seem as though she values them equally as much as her offline one yet this is not accurate. “In my heart I value what I get out of my offline networks much more than what I get out of my online networks.” She says that if she did not have Facebook to learn about acquaintances’ lives, “my life would not be missing anything but because I can and it’s so easy to, I spend so much time just learning all this information about people who have been in my life at one point.” Robyn agreed that she values the personal relationships of offline networks but thinks online is necessary to maintain them. Fiona also acknowledged that while offline networks are more important, there are some people with whom it’s very important to communicate online. For those who are far away physically, online is the easiest and most practical way to stay in touch. Isabel said that while you cannot match an in-person chat, her network grew significantly with Facebook and she has found sources for journalistic pieces that she never would have found without it, which is invaluable to her. Shelly

had the hardest time deciding between the two. She said “I wouldn’t value the online network more but I couldn’t live without either at this point.” Again, there is something qualitatively more real and genuine that makes offline networks more significant, but for many interviewees, the online network has grown to the point where it is very valuable.

When asked whether they would give up their online network and what it would take, only one interviewee who still uses Facebook said he would gladly do so. Henry said, “I would love to leave Facebook.” He finds it annoying to have to hear about other people’s lives in such detail. He still keeps his Facebook, however, because he does not want to be out of the loop and does like to have people in his network for when he needs them. Many people mentioned their frustrations or mixed feelings about Facebook. Some said they would like to use it less. Josie even called it “intoxicating” and explained that it can be addicting to know about others’ lives. She was one of the most willing to consider leaving because she dislikes that her life feels so exposed on the site. She does not like the targeted ads and feeling manipulated by marketers. Still, she concluded that it’s nice to have photographic and textual reminders of a great time and it would be hard to give all of that up. Elliot and Fiona echoed the sentiments that they would like to use it less but could not sacrifice all the connections on Facebook and its usefulness in organizing events. Alexis says she does want to have a friend purge at the end of college so that she can narrow down her online network. Still, she feels she cannot give it up because she would feel left out and lose touch with certain people. Derrick said he would not leave it actively but would like to use it less in the future since he usually uses it for procrastination and feels relationships are shallow if primarily on Facebook. Braden feels that Facebook is often a waste of time because he is passively consuming information about others’ lives but not actually

contributing. Still he feels reluctant to leave because he appreciates the archival nature of the site, especially for photographs.

Others saw no need to give up Facebook unless something extreme changed in their lives or in Facebook's structure that made it unusable. Neil said that he does not feel like losing Facebook would be losing his social network in any way but he would only give up Facebook if something drastic happened. Because he values its ability to connect him to friends, he sees no reason to leave. Robyn also feels no ill will toward Facebook and appreciates the connections she has forged there. Cameron feels it would be hard to leave Facebook because no other social network captures the essence of random encounters and once he leaves college there will be so many people he will not see regularly. He says if necessary he would find other ways to communicate but he would rather keep Facebook. Trisha says she would only give up Facebook if something better came along that everyone else was using. "The thing I value most about it is the people who I consider part of my offline network who I happen to interact with most on Facebook." Vincent echoed the idea that it is hard to give up this network that everyone uses and even called it "socially implausible" to give up Facebook because he would miss out on events.

For Shelly and Isabel, the thought of leaving Facebook evoked a visceral reaction. Shelly winced at the mention of leaving Facebook and said she would not want to consider it. She said, "it's a sad reality -- you can't live without it." Even though she does not necessarily like the idea of being so dependent on this virtual world, she feels very attached to it. She has spent so much time establishing connections and chronicling her life that she considers her Facebook profile almost a "work of art." She said she would only leave if everyone she knew left because losing the ability to communicate via Facebook would be very detrimental. Isabel responded to the

question of leaving Facebook by saying, “the thought makes me cringe.” She uses it so much for her journalism that she would only leave if someone convinced her that she could get in touch with all of her sources in another way. She mentioned that once when she logged into Facebook and some temporary mistake had caused all of her conversations to be lost, “my heart dropped and I panicked.” She felt like she had created something through those conversations that was meaningful. It was like a time capsule of her life. As she explained, “If someone took away all of your family photos, you would be sad too.”

Though the fact that some interviewees could not give up online networks may suggest to some that online interactions are as valuable as offline ones, for the most part it is specific functions of online networks that are so valuable. It would be impossible to broadcast the details of an event to so many people without Facebook. This is very important to college students, in particular, because student groups often have events that they want a range of people to attend so they encourage their members to invite all of their Facebook friends. The ability to source a large number of acquaintances in an online network for help has become especially important to certain professions, such as journalism, and certain types of advice, such as travel recommendations. To live without access to that kind of help and resources seems almost impossible once one has lived with it. The other “indispensable” function that online networks provide is the ability to stay in contact over distances with people with whom one would otherwise probably fall out of touch completely. It is not the online interactions that people would miss if Facebook did not exist, but rather the possibility of keeping and reaching contacts for various needs.

MARKETING SKEPTICISM

One way the increasing use of SNS is changing life for Millennials is the increased interactions with brands on a daily basis through Facebook pages and Twitter feeds. Despite the increasing presence of brands in their social lives, most interviewees expressed skepticism or displeasure at the thought of being associated with brands. "I'm not a brand person," was an oft-expressed phrase. None of the interviewees wanted to think of themselves as manipulated by marketing or associated with something so commercial. This is a natural human tendency to not want to be a marketing drone. Still, when pressed to think of brands that they use frequently or consider themselves loyal to, many interviewees came up with long lists of brands and products. Though not necessarily top of mind, brands do hold sway in their lives. Only a few had taken the time to follow a brand on Facebook or Twitter but in the offline world, they encountered many brands to which they show some loyalty. While some could easily name brands to which they are loyal, other interviewees hesitated at the word loyal even though they use the same brand frequently. They claim they would easily switch if they found a better product. They do not feel they are brand champions though they use a brand consistently. Charlie said, "I just use whatever I most prefer, I don't have an emotional pledge to use any certain brand." Some interviewees said they prefer branded items to generic items because the brand connotes quality and experience with the product that a generic brand does not. Still, they were not loyal to any particular brand, only branded products in general. Other interviewees claimed they are not loyal to any brands. Cameron says, "I get bored pretty easily so I usually don't stick with one thing too long. The idea of brand loyalty is a very foreign idea to me." Trisha, however, is very loyal to certain brands and even went so far as to say her quality of life improved when she had a car and could finally have access to her favorite grocery store again.

When asked whether any brands align well with their values, some interviewees gave slightly contradictory answers. They listed brands that they do not actually buy. Even though they consider these brands to be aligned with their values, this alignment does not encourage purchase or loyalty. Robyn, for example, said she thinks Whole Foods aligns with her values because they place importance on health but she does not shop there because it is too expensive. For other interviewees, the brand's values do influence loyalty. Josie said that she likes supporting local business as much as possible because "they're not feeding into a hierarchy of things." She does not think big corporations are aligned with her values because they are not invested at the local level. She chooses a local coffee shop over Starbucks because it fosters a sense of place. Isabel says that she seeks out eco-friendly or fair-trade brands when buying certain categories of products, such as chocolate. Trisha said that big companies do not align with her values just because they do something charitable because they are still not great companies overall. Some said they do not think of brands in terms of values. Derrick said that although he recognizes that some brands are more socially conscious, he does not think of them in those terms. Elliot also said he does not take the time to find out about company practices so he does not know many brands that align with his values. Other interviewees said there were no brands that align with their values.

Some interviewees thought of brands and values in terms of practical consequences. They believe that by buying a product, you are showing support for a brand and therefore it must align with your values. Fiona said, "whether they're doing something you like or don't like, you're supporting [the brand] if you buy their product." Trisha felt differently and said that she still buys Gap jeans because they are the best for her even though she does not feel that Gap aligns with her values. Alexis, however, said that she thinks the brands she uses a lot have to align with

her values by dint of the fact that she uses them frequently. She says, “Your values lie in your actions, not what you say.” She can identify certain brands that she buys specifically because of their good business practices, but whether she likes it or not, she feels that all brands she buys must be consistent with her core beliefs. She does not necessarily trust a lot of the companies that project good images. As with Trisha and Elliot, she is cynical about big corporations’ championing of social causes. She points out that the companies that do good only tell you about the good things they do, never the bad, so it is difficult to know whether they are really doing good overall.

How brands relate to an individual’s identity is a complex subject. Most interviewees did not want to see brands as part of their identity because they want to separate themselves from commercialism. Josie said while some brands play a large role in her life because she uses them a lot, she does not actively think about the image. Vincent felt very strongly that brands do not influence his identity. Others were more open to the idea that brand and identity are interrelated. Fiona could think of one brand, a clothing brand, which fit into her identity because it helped her create the look she wanted. Braden also said that some brands are a part of his identity because they represent things he values, such as high quality information or helping people through technology. Shelly feels she has a relationship with Diet Coke because it provides her with the enjoyment of drinking it and much needed caffeine, so she saw it as having a small role in her identity. Henry found it easy to come up with certain small brands that reflect his identity because they stand for good quality at low prices, something he feels is important to him. These responses validate Holt’s theory (2004) that some consumers buy brands because they help them resolve identity issues. Though Holt discusses what he deems “iconic” brands that are very well known and large, his overall thesis that brands create identity myths that consumers

subconsciously or consciously want to adopt is corroborated by the answers of some interviewees.

Others did not feel that brands were tied to their identity. Even though Alexis was one of the few interviewees to follow brands on Facebook for reasons other than to support a friend or employer, she did not see brands relating to her identity. She said, "I would really hope my identity is deeper than the products I buy." She explained that she does not consider the brands she follows on Facebook to be brands in a commercial sense because they are radio shows or other specific goods. Again, it is the strong commercial connotation of the word brand that is so off-putting. In truth there are brands that she feels are closely connected to her self-image, but she does not see them as brands. Shelly sums up the attitude of many interviewees towards brands and identity by saying "I like to think I'm not brand oriented, but I definitely am."

BRANDS AS PART OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Fitting brands into their network was generally not an easy connection for interviewees. For some, brands do not fit into their network at all. FF said brands are "not even remotely [part of my network.] It's not something I pay attention to. If you ask me about brands, I'll really have no idea what brands you're talking about." Many cannot see brands as part of their network because they equate a social network with the people in the network. Fiona says she cannot see brands as part of her network because they do not provide support, which is something she greatly values about her social network. She sees her social networks as comprised of humans and she says, "I can't view a brand and a person on the same level." Braden says brands do not fit into his social network because it "is composed of people and brands are a layer on top of people." Robyn said, "I think of my network as interactive so that's a point against brands being

part of my network.” Though she conceded that picking one brand over another is an interaction, she did not feel that there was a two-way street with brands. She said that she takes from the brand by buying the product but does not give back to it. Trisha also feels as though brands do not fit into her network. She tries to keep them out of Facebook and Twitter by not following them and says, “for me, Facebook is about the people that are on Facebook... and I try to keep it as free from [brands] as I can.”

Derrick said that brands do not fit into his network because they do not further his social interactions. “I haven’t really made any friends based off a brand – I’ve never ordered a beer and become friends with a person because we like that same thing.” He admitted that sports teams are a good way to make some casual acquaintances but they are not the basis of friendships. Elliot said he can use brands to relate to others in his social network, such as fans of his football team, but the team itself is not part of his social network. Josie agreed that brands are part of her network in that she talks about them at times, but she says, “it doesn’t have an impact on the real thing.” For her, brands are just another topic of conversation, not an active participant in her life.

Isabel thinks brands fit into her network because there are certain brands that most people in her friend group use. In that way, brands are a common thread between them and impart meaning to their group identity. Henry also saw how brands could fit into one’s network through their connection with image. He said, “You want the sum of your brands to reflect about you.” He recognized that while he does not necessarily think about the image a brand projects when he buys it, this aspect of branding might subconsciously affect his purchase decision. He also thought that brands reflect interests, and people in networks tend to cluster around the same interests, so they would cluster around the same brands as well. Charlie saw brands as being part of his network also in relation to image. He was more concerned about not wanting to be

associated with certain brands. Using clothing as one example, he explained that “it’s inevitable that people are going to make assumptions based on what you wear” so he would not want to wear certain types of clothes that have negative connotations. Because this projected image matters to those in your social network, he sees brands as fitting into his network.

None of the interviewees, however, saw brands as fitting into their social network as connecting nodes in the web of the network. They do not believe brands can be a member of their social network. In the eyes of college-age Millennials, brands are not humans. This goes against the theory of the corporation as an individual discussed by John Davis in Corporations. Davis explains the theory of “artificial personality,” which regards the corporation as “vested by the policy of the law with the capacity of acting in several respects as an individual” (Davis 25). If the corporation is an individual, then the brand is its face and its personality. Pettit (2007) also views brands as autonomous individuals. He argues that corporations should be held responsible for their actions and they are fit for this because they are autonomous agents that act as a unit. However, the interviewees do not see brands as individuals in the way that they view humans as individuals. Humans can have a conversation with a person and can be relied upon in many different situations. Brands do not have that interactivity.

Fournier (1998) argues that consumers can form real relationships with brands because they are engaged in a two-way exchange. She believes that brands impart meaning to consumers’ lives by contributing to identity construction and therefore the consumer and brand are engaged in an interdependent relationship. Though it is true that some Millennials view brands as tied to their identity, interviewees do not corroborate Fournier’s theory that brands and consumers have meaningful relationships. Identity formation through brands is not enough to make college students view brands as social network partners because their relationships to

brands feel flat in comparison to those with humans. For college students, a brand is more of a dead-end than a connection. Even though brands are trying to engage consumers more and more, especially on SNS, they cannot hold a conversation with an individual in the same way as a real person. A brand is not there just to hang out because a brand always has an agenda. What many value most from their social networks is companionship and brands cannot provide that. The importance of in-person interactions was repeatedly mentioned throughout interviews. No matter how hard it tries, a brand cannot participate in in-person interactions in the same way a human can. As Braden explained, “Unless the person is the brand, it doesn’t fit into my social network. Say I knew Louis Vuitton, then maybe I could see the brand as being part of my social network.” Most interviewees made a point to mention that they had met all or almost all of the people in their social networks in person first, something that cannot be accomplished with a brand. College students conceptualize their networks as systems based on emotional, caring, human relationships and brands do not fit into this concept.

This does not, however, mean that brands do not have any importance in the realm of social networks for 20-somethings. As previously mentioned, brands still hold much sway in affecting interviewees’ identities. Despite reticence by some interviewees to admit to brands being tied to their identity, most college-age Millennials do in fact make purchases based on a brand’s identity whether they are willing to admit to it or not. Amongst groups of friends in college, many brands are used more frequently than in the general population. Usually unconsciously, members of the group follow the style choices of others. Whether that means all buying the same type of beer or the same brand of boots, these consistent brand choices show that in spite of skepticism toward marketing, college students’ social networks are still affected by brands.

The feeling of exposure on SNS also has a major impact for brands in the realm of social networks. It forces consumers to think more carefully about what images their profiles project. For some brands, this can be beneficial because people want to be associated with them. If they have an aura of cool or they are involved in many publicized charitable projects, consumers will want to show their support to help improve their own image. On the other hand, many 20-somethings are particularly wary of commercialism and brands. They will be less likely to show support for a brand on Facebook because they do not want to make themselves look like they are sellouts or manipulated by marketing. This means that brands must think about the identity that they project in social media and make sure that their image is authentic, consistent, and something Millennials would be proud to associate with.

CONCLUSION

Though brands play an important role in social networks through their ability to shape a group's identity or signal a particular image from an individual to other group members, brands do not fit into college students' stated conceptualization of their social networks. This is due, in part, to a natural hesitancy on the part of individuals (especially college-educated) to admit that brands are anything more than commercial enterprises. It is also due, in part, to a genuine belief that only other human beings can be part of social networks.

In contrast to Davis's theory of corporations as an individual, interviewees see brands as corporate entities rather than similar to an individual human. This helps to answer the question of how we conceptualize the characteristics that make up a human. A brand cannot fit into one's social network because it is not human, yet what human quality does a brand lack? Brands often have distinct personalities, likes, and dislikes, they have the ability to engage in a conversation to

a degree; they can provide advice; and they can provide fulfillment to some in their ability to fill a desire for a product or particular identity marker. Yet brands cannot provide companionship in the form of in-person interactions in the way that humans can. This in-person relationship, which allows for conversation and emotional connection, is highly prized by college-age Millennials and is the key stumbling block in a brand's quest to become integral to their social networks.

When discussing online and offline social networks with college students, some clear differences in the networks became apparent. Despite an increasing amount of time dedicated to online social networks, interviewees still see an unambiguous divide between the networks because they define online as virtual and offline as real. Through language alone, they make it clear that the offline world is more important because it is considered to be the "real world." Though some college-age Millennials have become attached to SNS to the point of not being able to live without them, they still recognize the importance of in-person interactions and connections forged offline. The virtual world fails to capture nuances of personality and body language. For all its benefits, online can never fully replicate the offline world.

Though they may play a supplementary role in college students' social lives, online networks are significantly changing our interactions with and expectations of our peers. The act of broadcasting to many people at once makes it much easier to organize groups or get advice from a crowd. The barriers to contacting a casual acquaintance are lowered because status updates reach many without targeting any specific individual and because social etiquette allows for very new contacts to reach out to each other via SNS when they, most likely, would not do so in an offline form. Online networks' ability to keep casual acquaintances or distant friends in one's social network with little effort means that weak ties last longer. Though some place a lot

of value on these acquaintances and fear losing them through the loss of SNS, others question whether they actually have a meaningful impact on their social lives. With the positive effects of broadcasting come the negative, however, and feeling exposed online is prevalent amongst interviewees. Their personal lives are now visible to a much larger group of people, which means that they must question their trust in acquaintances and be more careful about what they put online. Self-presentation is more obvious and thus more calculated in the online world. This ability to constantly view others' personal lives also contributes to a fear of missing out and an increasing pressure to stay connected to what is going on with one's friends at all times. While online networks allow us to connect to our friends more and broaden our social networks, they also contribute to more worries about our social networks and staying connected to those in them.

The main limitation of this study is the small sample size. Because the interviews were in-depth, it was difficult to obtain a large sample. Though many themes were repeated across interviews and in casual conversations with others not interviewed for the project, it is impossible to unequivocally conclude anything about a population more broad than college students. Because the interviewees all attend four-year private universities in the United States, the findings cannot be applied to the general population. It is reasonable to generalize these results to most college students in the United States, but they do not necessarily apply to other age groups, other education levels, or international populations.

One area that would be interesting for future research is to investigate how people see celebrities or other high-profile individuals fitting into their social networks. Actors, writers, singers, bands, athletes, and other celebrities, as well as politicians, are all examples of individuals who could possibly fit into one's conceptualization of social network but are not

known personally. Celebrities and politicians are clearly individual humans yet most people have not met them in person, so would they fit into their network? On the one hand, they have more human elements than a brand, but on the other they still lack the in-person emotional interactions that are so valued by college students. In addition, many bands and actors have become branded themselves, with their own lines of clothing or a brand sponsorship in their music videos. Yet there is the potential, however small, of getting to know a singer or athlete in person that does not exist with brands, so it is possible that they may be considered part of people's social networks. With further research, this question could be answered and could help further define what brands need to be an intimate part of an individual's social network.

Another area of further research would be to study different age populations. It would be worthwhile to talk to younger teens who have not lived without the concept of Facebook as part of a social network. Is the line between offline and online networks more blurred because they do not know life without SNS or do they still draw a clear distinction between online and offline? Are they more or less skeptical of marketing and does this factor change their ability to see brands as part of their social networks? An answer to this question would give a better sense of how generations are changing in their attitude toward online worlds and also how our attitudes develop, as we get older. It would also be valuable to study the same cohort examined in this project as they graduate from college and move away from their close friends to see if this impacts their usage of SNS or their attitudes toward such sites. These answers would help us to understand how new technology is affecting our attitudes towards and expectations of our friends, acquaintances, brands, celebrities, and all other components of our social world.

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