

RESEARCH PROPOSAL
FOR
DISSATATION

“Does social networking affect real life
social gatherings?”

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Research proposal on the social impact of social networking (working title)

In this proposal the main sections will be; outlining the aims, research and initial proposal for my Dissertation.

Project Outline

The subject for my dissertation is on the impact social networking sites have on people's social aspects and how that shapes communities physical and virtual.

My reasons for choosing this subject are two-fold, that in my own life I know people who are, to coin a phrase "addicted" to facebook and that my own personal thoughts on how social networking sites impact us individually and communally.

The subject also conforms to relationships with my BA (hons) Web Design Degree making this ideal to keep me enthusiastic and dedicated once my dissertation work starts.

As a case study, my wife, Ally Wrigley will be used as a typical current user of social networking, typically using the most popular at the time of writing, Facebook. Facebook is a 2nd generation social networking site, following on from the origins of Myspace, another social networking site generating years before Facebook. The main principal to Facebook is that it creates communities within itself, you see your friends, your friends see you and in turn you can see the friends of your friends and they see the friends of your friends, so massive branches are drawn out across the site.

The type of questions posed will be all, in-depth and varied, thus to give a broad analysis of the different aspects that this subject touches upon. Examples of that are

- Does social networking aid or hinder socially awkward people?
- Does social networking strip boundaries and/or morals commonly accepted in real life?
- Does social networking negate real life commitments in a social environment?
- Is trading your privacy for a free service and ease of communication worthy?
- Can social networking improve your social interaction or abilities?
- Have social communities suffered of late due to social sites, how does this differ from 20 years ago? And does this now suit the modern way of living?
- What is the future of social networking?

A related article that underpins the ideals of my subject topic and questions posed is one such article printed in the Guardian newspaper on Monday 14th January 2008. As the text doesn't conform to specific details on certain technologies as a year old piece it works perfectly for me.

You can find the full text at www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2008/jan/14/facebook

The article talks about how social networking; particularly focusing on Facebook, builds walls between us socially and instead of the slogan made by Facebook "a social utility that connects you with the people around you" the article speaks.

"And does Facebook really connect people? Doesn't it rather disconnect us, since instead of doing something enjoyable such as talking and eating and dancing and drinking with my friends, I am merely sending them little ungrammatical notes and amusing photos in cyberspace, while chained to my desk?"

Of course this article airs on the negative side; Positive articles will also be browsed in an effort to formulate a fair and honest insight into this new media technology. Taking into account that the subject title asks if social networking does inflict negative aspects into real life and my own opinions side with this topics example we can predict that it will take a lot of proof to sway me otherwise.

Methods

Planning how I am to attain the information and resources came as a quandary, but after some tutorials and advice I found a wealth of information in the Hull College Library, online articles i.e. Guardian, Telegraph and Athens a verified online resource site giving access to sites and online books.

As I have varying questions for the dissertation, many different topics for research will have to be used and processed to give a fairer objective to the sources I quote.

Of course I simply will not have the time at my disposal to read; cover to cover, all the books, articles and resources I find. Employing specific practices that will allow me to “skim through” these resources shall speed up the process, yet also cover the chance of losing important and key material, that would help aide my arguments and produce a fair and un-biased final piece of work.

To support a debate in my dissertation having a plethora of balanced resources for and against will be to my advantage, although in my conclusion I can air my own opinions, for the latter part the reasoning will be justified from the strength of the arguments posed in the resources I use.

Literature Review

Structure to the dissertation; firstly an introduction shall be formed to the basic question of the title, then I want to outline what social networking is, furthering into the most famous of products like Facebook and Myspace and then the lesser known Twitter and Bebo et al.

Following on from that; posing the question of “Does social networking aide or hinder socially awkward people?” helps me to delve into the core of the dissertation matter to get a pro or con answer to push the topic onto the next question.

“Does social networking strip boundaries and/or morals commonly accepted in real life?”

What I am keen to know, is social networking effecting a change in what is accepted in real life social meetings, as taboo conventions are so commonly used and being accepted on social networks, they are leaking into society more and more.

The next question will be “Does social networking negate real life commitments in a social environment?” recession or no recession, people are increasingly having nights in using these social networking sites for entertainment. Are people forgoing nights down the pub or dinner parties etcetera and staying in? Negating the “real life” aspect of a social meeting and is this effecting how, we as a social community, are losing our perspective of the benefits that real camaraderie and social interaction bring, is my main objective to answer.

Is trading your privacy for a free and easy to use communication format worthy? This question intrigued me when watching a TV show, The Agenda, online from Canada, http://www.tvo.org/cfmx/tvoorg/tvoutils/globalfiles/VideoPop.cfm?spot_id=3344&sitefolder=theagenda, (accessed, 6/04/2009) when asked this question the panel had varying answers, some believed that as long as you were smart about which information you placed on the social networking sites then there wasn't a problem to begin with, others argued that not everyone

was “net savvy” meaning that, to not know of a problem to begin, then it is superfluous for the user to be unawares to potential problems such private information to lead too.

My initial belief is that, for most internet applications or services these days’ users should always be cautious of private information leaking out and that these services and applications should make unaware users of this potential.

Have social communities suffered of late due to social sites, how does this differ from 20 years ago? And does this now suit the modern way of living? At this time of writing this is my final posed question I shall be looking into and researching.

I would firstly like to point out that finding resource materials and literature on most of my posed questions is becoming a slight tasking, most information relevant and specific to this are largely populated with on the Internet, books are far too general and don’t actually target key parts, this and the fact that most of the issues/questions posed are “of the moment” and too soon to be published yet.

Moving back onto the final question; to know if social networking is actually having some sort of effect on the standards of real-life social gatherings, do we find it increasingly harder in some cases to talk one on one? Do we feel vulnerable in such close proximity to another person? The comfort of our own home and no-one but a computer screen in-front of us to throw away all inhibitions? All very important questions, that amount to the larger question.

The Guardian article cited above speaks out about this and also asks similar questions and is a primary resource that inspired me to include this question in my proposal, an important issue that will only become more and more relevant as social networking and its effects grow in popularity; as they seem to be doing day by day.

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Writing Analysis - The Hull Ice Arena

It started as something to do in the summer, like most teenagers the summertime brought a convenient break to the constant chore of School and as the weeks rolled on we would find it harder and harder to entertain ourselves, so on to nagging our parents to help us get into Hull and onwards to the Hull Ice Arena, there we would try our hand at teaching ourselves how to ice skate.

Before entering the building I stopped to take a step back and look, a building unusual at first but functional at heart, colossal foil pipes extruding from the side, later known to handle the temperature. Upon entering the building there was an unique feeling, very stark and hollow with low ceilings slightly suffocating the light inside.

After gaining entry and equipping our skates it was time to get on the rink, nervously and tepidly walking to the entrances you could see the seating concertinaed away; wooden benches used to hold thousands of people, chanting and cheering when the Hull Ice Hockey team played on an evening, you could almost imagine what that would be like.

Very cool inside the air biting at your fingers and cheeks, it was like winter but inside. The rink seemed eternal, nerves and fear now setting in as we all stepped out onto the surface. The solid wood boarding around the edges topped off with plastic glass screens reflected the image of the ice back at you making everything seem even larger, some people whizzing round, some just like us hanging onto the edge. I remember as we made our way round the edge the café at one end with an elevated windowed section for watching the people on the rink, and to one side was the DJ/Stage area. We were to find out later in our visits; on a weekend, that the rink turned from a calm and hollow venue into somewhat of a disco arena; it was immense.

As my friends and I continued in our efforts to ice skate we grew in our aptitude and some of us started to learn to play Ice Hockey, the Ice Arena had now become a part of our lives, a solace and communal venue to give us exercise, entertainment and a place to meet new friends.

The Hull Ice Arena will always be a special place to me, it played a significant part of my teenage life and I owe it for some great friendships and life experiences that have helped me in my life.

Sadly my skating days are well and truly over, slightly envious of that fact but hopefully one day, my chance to go back might arise; in teaching my children to skate if they ever do wish so. Now I simply pass the building with great fondness and longing to re-capture my childhood once again.

Imagery Analysis – Sally Mann

Photography, it can stir emotions and feelings that no other media can, to purloin a moment of the present, forever encapsulated in history. Photography can shock, can enthrall and cause debates and that is what Sally Mann's set of photos revolving around her children and the life that they have.

Firstly I must say; how to me, shocking the photos are, we see pre-pubescent children being thrown into a mature and adult scenes, dressing up in adult clothing wearing heavy make-up and posing in some suggestive positions involving fake cigarettes in some stills.

Least not to draw too much attention to the main image, which causes the greatest of shock and awe, that image being a full frontal and naked image of her eldest child, in a room full of adults who seem to be engaged in conversation with each other. The Girl has her hand bound and rose above her head, hanging from a meat hook, fully exposed and vulnerable.

I cannot write this critical piece without showing my disgust for the image and how inappropriate it is and how it also; to me, breaks many rules of decency in modern times.

Moving on to try and break down the rhymes and reasons that Sally Mann had for creating this set. You could argue that, for the most, she wanted to simply show her children and their life travelling around the world with their mum and the adult world of art and photography they would see everyday. That is a fascinating insight and one I and many would be keen to see, when the photos become challenging in a moral way is when opinions differ, Not only is that above mentioned image one but in the set there are others, one being an image of her oldest daughter dressed in an adult way posing very provocatively and looking sultry. This image for me is on the edge of taste but still is an image on the side of art with a modicum of style, the fact that an underage girl is posing in such an adult way is certainly something that worries me.

It is apparent that Sally Mann's point for this set was too cause controversy, what I don't understand is how so called "Art" can use pre-pubescent children, place them in adult scenes and still remain legal when, if that happened in a naked pornography setting it would be wholeheartedly illegal and up roar would be known with the creator usually sent to jail. To me Art is not a license to simply throw laws out of the window in an effort to shock and cause controversy to further a person's notoriety in the communities that it ventures into.

I would be intrigued to know, how as an adult Sally Mann's oldest daughter things and feels about those photos? Does she see them in a way no other person could? Are they a stain on her life? Do they bring unwanted fame and unwanted questions? Without knowing for sure all we can do is guess until answered.

Looking her up on Google present day shows how she has walked the path of her mother and is also now herself a photographer, will/would she embark on a similar path as her mother? Would she also subject her own children to the kind of controversy her mother did to them? All I say is we hope not, life these days are all about rules and regulations gone mad, political correctness overload. Sally Mann's photos maybe got away with its content due to the age they came from. I am glad that in this situation these crazy rules would prevent so called Art like Sally Mann's from rearing its head into our community again.