

## Social Network Sites in National Context

*Panel proposal for Internet Research 9.0: Rethinking community, rethinking place, International Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Copenhagen, Denmark, Oct. 16-18, 2008.*

With reflection of the conference theme *Rethinking community, rethinking place*, this panel introduces research concentrating on Social Network Sites (SNSs) in national contexts that explores how different societies utilize online forums to create communities inside and outside of geographic boundaries. User participation in SNSs has been intensively studied in recent years, but considering the dynamic nature of those communities a lot of work still remains to be done. Expanding the research arena beyond English speaking communities and drawing from the experiences of international users will allow us to better understand the interrelations between online and offline social networks.

Papers presented in this panel explore various aspects of social network sites in several different countries around the world, uncovering how different nationalities use those sites to preserve and expand their social networks and how those networks are sculptured to reflect cultural characteristics of their participants. The studied communities consist of Italians, Brazilians, Poles, Americans and Koreans as well as representative nations without borders. The papers vary from discussions covering domestic SNSs, to participation of national groups in global networks, and using global networks for the exchange of ideas, when such an interaction is made difficult in a country of origin.

The opening paper evokes the concept of national identity in light of the new opportunities created by on-line fora. Studying stateless nations such as the Basques, the Kurds, the Palestinians and the Hawaii'ans, the author examines the role Facebook plays in the nation building process. This research specifically takes up how online media are used to create an image of states and nations and the problems associated with such images of virtual states.

The second paper in this panel presents comparative analysis of Italian communities on two global SNSs, studying differences in interaction, behaviours and preferences between *high* (Facebook) and *low-* (Badoo) content oriented sites. Using content analysis of user profiles and wall posts, researchers study different types of semantics that shape the networks of interpersonal communication. The research hypothesizes that the preferences for *low-* content SNS (Badoo) among Italians is in direct relation to the relatively novel nature of the SNS in Italy.

The preferences for a low- content oriented SNS has also been observed in the third study. In this paper, the author explores the unexpected success of *nasza-klasa*, a Polish SNS that in recent months connected millions of Poles around the world, who are linking to their old high school and college friends and recreate real life networks of family and friends. Since the network attracted a lot of media attention and is heavily commented on in various on-line forums, this paper, among other aspects, explores reasons for self-exclusion, researching the reasons why people decide not to participate in a SNS.

The adoption of a global network orkut by Brazilian users is the subject of the fourth paper in the panel. Through structured interviews this study explores differences in orkut adoption practices among different social classes and the paths of utilization of the alternative networking platforms with relation to the orkut networks. The observed interaction practices suggest that among Brazilians the use of orkut experienced continuous transfer from a communication tool into a truly social networking medium.

With its comparative approach, the fifth paper contrasts the communication behaviors of American and Korean SNS users, exploring different types of relationships. Using communication theories of Hofstede, Hall and Triandis, the author presents an explanation for different behaviors between the studied groups with an emphasis on bridging versus bonding social capital.

The closing paper adds yet another dimension to the complexity of the research on SNSs in national/international contexts, presenting an interesting case study, in which global SNSs are utilized by South Koreans to foster an exchange of ideas restricted in their own country. In the eve of a political scandal, when election regulations prohibited display of video clips of the potential candidates in the country, Koreans moved the video clips and the ensuing discussions into the international domain, creating networks of proponents and opponents. The interaction network analysis of user discussions enabled the authors of the paper to identify semantic patterns emerging from this rather intense online discussion.

This panel combines experiences from these countries, each with different economies and different internet penetration rates, which not only provide a unique opportunity to compare and contrast the relation between web adaptation, preferences and solutions in constructing social networks in online environment, but also raise novel questions that have not yet been asked. The researched communities provide a rich data about networks that cross social and national boundaries. The theme of the conference is reflected not only in the research presented, but also in panel participation that connects seven researchers from all around the world - a collaboration, that would not be possible without extensive social networks facilitated by the Internet.

## **Stateless Places in Facebook: Representations of Aspirations**

*Darren Purcell, University of Oklahoma, US*

### ABSTRACT

The Wilsonian ideal of self-determination, or each nation having a state of its own, has been a powerful idea driving the reconfiguration of borders and states for the past century. This paper examines one form of discourse vital to the formation of national identities and the forms it takes on the common platform of Facebook. As Facebook has been used to articulate the activities of various interest groups, it stands to reason that national aspirations are also articulated as part of the nation-building process. The paper engages the literature of several disciplines to determine the role of electronic media, specifically the Internet, as to what forms of media identity are relevant to nation-building in stateless situations. Furthermore, the research will concentrate on how various media are used to create an image of states and nations, and the problems associated with such images of virtual states, not limited to their creation and consumption. The data gathered will be used to compare and contrast the sites on across several variables, including use of images and maps to articulate borders and homelands, the types of discourse, the date of Facebook group establishment, number of members and the various networks that the members are a part of in order to establish a location of the member. For the case study, the research focuses upon nations that actively seek a state of their own carved from the space of extant states, such as the Basques, the Kurds, the Palestinians, and the Hawaii'ans. Outlines for future work combining communication, internet studies and geography will be discussed.

Keywords: nationalism, Facebook, national discourse.

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## **The Italian way to social network sites - Visual or Textual? A comparison between Facebook and Badoo users behaviours**

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### ABSTRACT

The main aim of this paper is to examine the domestication of SNSs in Italy by comparing Facebook and Badoo users behaviours. While the first is a well know and widely used SNSs, the second deserves probably a short introduction.

Badoo is a dating oriented and deeply visually focused social network site. With close to 2 million users in a country where less than 250.000 have a Facebook profile, Badoo is by far the most used SNSs as well as one of the top Google searched terms during 2007 in Italy.

In order to analyze the case a qualitative methodology based on the content analysis of user profiles has been adopted.

From the theoretical point of view this kind of methodology drawn on the concept of social semantics developed by Niklas Luhmann within his theory of social systems. Social semantics, once crystallized in books and widely used both by Luhmann and his scholars in a number of thematic essays (Luhmann 1986; Esposito 2001), is today also available in computer mediated networks of interpersonal communications such as blogs or SNSs.

This data share four characteristics that tend to increase even more the sociological value of this conversations. As a matter of fact, the online network of communications is in fact persistent, searchable, replicable and addressed to an invisible audiences (Boyd 2004).

Due to these properties online conversations, as well as social network profiles, may be analyzed with standard content analysis qualitative or quantitative techniques.

A sample of public user profiles has been retrieved both from Badoo and Facebook and standard techniques of qualitative content analysis will applied in order to analyze comments (or wall posts) and shared contents. Participant observation and two focus groups with users of both SNSs will be also carried on.

All the data gathered will be analyzed using the so called *symbolically generalized communication media* (love, money, power, values, art, true) (Luhmann 1997) as the main analytical grid nodes in order to understand what kind of semantics is shaping the interactions taking place in SNSs.

SNSs are still relatively new in Italy and any quantitative or qualitative data on SNSs in the Italian context is lacking. At the same time we expect to find very different user behaviours as well as very different users in Facebook and Badoo. The main hypothesis is that Badoo can be considered a somewhat incomplete form of SNSs. It's simple structure is however perceived as a value, if compared to Facebook complexities, in a country with a relatively new Internet penetration.

### KEYWORDS

Social network sites, Badoo, Facebook, Italy

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### **Virtual Class Reunion – the success of Nasza-Klasa (our class)**

*Ewa Callahan, Quinnipiac University, US*

#### ABSTRACT

What contributes to the success of a social network site (SNS)? What are the motivations of the users and self-excluders? Does user's physical location matter in how they manage their online and of-line individual networks? What characteristics of a particular society are influential in SNS lifecycle on a national scale?

This study attempts to answer those questions, while examining an unexpected success of nasza-klasa (our class), a Polish social network site that in a year since its creation connected over 7 million Polish residents and expatriates. Although Poles participate already in a number of SNSs like Facebook (74, 386 users) or domestic Grono (1,4 mln users), the skyrocketing popularity of the site under question in last two months was unpredictable, although can be partially explained by a low-content structure of the site that is more suitable for high-context oriented Polish society (Hall, 1976). The initial purpose of the site was to allow people to find their high school/college friends by connecting their profile to class based forums, but the users quickly started to establish new, non-school related networks linking to their friends and acquaintances and creating new groups. Different social capital of each of those three types of connections (former classmates, friends, forum members), will serve as the basis of analysis of this research (Ellison, Stenfield & Lampe 2007).

Exploring the interactions in n-k, three major activities have been identified: (1) recreating the old pre-existing social networks, (2) creating new networks, (3) using the site as a springboard for out of site communication. To study those activities in detail, two research methods have been adopted. The first methodology consists of an online survey that explores user motivations for participation, their personal networks, and their on- and off-line communication with other users. Secondly, a content analysis of existing independent discussion forums that gather n-k enthusiasts and critics provides valuable information, especially uncovering motives for self-exclusion (no desire to connect with old acquaintances, no need to expand personal network, perceived lack of personal achievements, privacy concerns, impatience with site loading time).

The most interesting aspect of n-k deals with the transition of the connections started and recreated using n-k to the off line world. Classmates reconnecting thorough n-k are organizing

impromptu class reunions and n-k creators organize massive events that allow people connected on the forum to meet in person. Such activities are possible due to relatively limited internal mobility of the Polish population which facilitates maintaining lifelong connections or easy recreation of the ones that have been broken. On the other hand, the recent wave of emigration created a new need for the maintenance of ties with the motherland among expatriates.

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## **The Orkut Phenomenon in Brazil**

*Raquel Recuero, Catholic University of Pelotas, Brazil*

### ABSTRACT

Social network sites have become increasingly popular all over the world and thus also the subject of many studies (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Orkut is a social network site created by Orkut Buyukkokten and launched by Google in 2004. Although originally an English-only platform, orkut was quickly adopted by Brazilian users and became a major phenomenon in the system (by 2005, over 75% of orkut users were Brazilians). According to comScore data, over 12 million Brazilian visitors accessed orkut in December 2007, which represents more than 68% of the total number of internet users in the country. Given that Brazil is a developing country with only 20% of the population having Internet access, orkut's adoption was unprecedented. Because of that, it has been the object of attention for several researchers. Previous work investigated many specific aspects of the system: Fragoso (2006) explored the cultural differences between Brazil's and America's appropriation of the system. Spertus, Sahamen and Buyukkokten (2005) focused on user's appropriation of orkut's "communities". Spence (2007) also discussed Brazilian appropriation of the system, focusing on the digital divide. However, there is a paucity of systematic studies about orkut's history and growth in Brazil. How and why did Brazilians adopt orkut? How has orkut expanded in the country? Is there any difference between initial adoption and recent adoption? How is orkut used today by Brazilians? These are some of the questions that guided this research.

In order to address these questions, we will discuss the results gathered through an ethnographic research that took place between 2004 and 2007. During this period, data was collected through daily field incursions, participant observation and interviews with a total of 250 users. Interviews were conducted both in person and through computer mediated communication tools such as Instant Messengers. Observation was done and registered in field notes.

Five goals guided the collection and analysis of data: (a) changes in user's cultural appropriations and behavior through time, exploring how Brazilians adopted the system and how motivations changed during the years; (b) the history of orkut usage in Brazil - how the system grew and usage patterns changed through time; (c) the network effect and its implications to the system; (d) early and late adopters, their motivations and differences; and (e) aspects of orkut's usage today.

Some results are as follow. Brazilians appropriated orkut initially as a communication tool and later as a social network display; competition between users and the popularity of some communities may have played an important role in orkut's growth; communities are mostly used as "badges" for profile identity rather than as interaction spaces; although upper classes appropriated the system first, there is a growing lower class user base which is also creating new forms of usage; network effect plays a crucial role in locking the user base, reducing the incentive for users to quit; users utilize several alternative applications in parallel with orkut to interact.

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**A Cross-Cultural Comparison of  
Korean and American Social Network Sites:  
Exploring Cultural Differences in Goals and Self-Disclosure when Using SNSs**

*Seong Eun Cho, Rutgers University, US*

ABSTRACT

This study explores cultural differences regarding the purpose and usage of social network sites (SNSs). Hofstede's (2001) individualism-collectivism and Hall's (1976) high-and low-context cultural dimensions (HCC-LCC) present useful distinctions when addressing such communication behaviors. Korean and American SNS users served as representatives of the two different cultures used in this investigation.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 Korean and 12 American students. All Korean participants used Cyworld, which is a widely used representative Korean SNS. American users were eight Facebook and seven MySpace users (five had both). Interviews took 20-30 minutes at Rutgers University and at Korea University. Quotations were about the number and type of relationships on *friend lists* and self-disclosure.

This study demonstrated that American users had more friends on friend lists than Korean users, while being associated with users' different cultural attitudes. Although both user groups agreed not to accept *friend requests* from strangers, Americans defined "friend" more broadly than Koreans. Korean users preferred community-based small group relationships. It suggests that members of collectivist cultures are more likely to maintain closed and narrow in-group relationships than members of individualistic cultures who more easily create new relationships (Triandis, 1989).

In addition, American users were more interested in *staying connected* with their friends and acquaintances, whereas Korean users expected more *intensive interactions* with SNS friends. This finding correspond to those of other studies conducted within a single national culture: Ellison et al. (2007) demonstrated that Facebook users were more interested in bridging social capital, which were associated with maintaining existing relationships broadly and economically, rather than bonding social capital which referred to intensifying established relationships. Kim and Yun (2007) found that Korean users tended to strengthen their current social bonds through Cyworld. By comparing two cultures, this current study verified that such distinct emphases of American and Korean users on using SNSs were based on their national cultures.

Also, this study showed that Korean and American users had different communication styles. American users verbally posted basic and minimum information of their identity, while excluding personal emotion/opinions. Korean users preferred nonverbal information to express the self; e.g. unique-but-non-identifiable pictures on profiles. This finding can be seen as an indicator of Hall's HCC/LCC. HCC is characterized as implicit communication styles relying on nonverbal cues and internalized context, whereas LCC as verbally explicit communication styles and external information. This study verified that Korean users employed high-context communication styles more, while American users rely more on low-context communication styles.

This study indicated that SNS users were associated with their own national cultures, despite worldwide communication technology and a symptom of acculturation these days. These cross-cultural comparative findings have not been found in previous SNS research. Most of it has been conducted within a single national culture. It is postulated that these findings may offer a constructive avenue for further research where behaviors within online social networks can be compared across cultures.

**Keywords:**

Cyworld, Facebook, MySpace, Self-disclosure, Friend list, High-and Low-context, Individualism-Collectivism.

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**When YouTube Meets Local Politics:  
The BBK Scandal in the 2007 Presidential Election of South Korea**

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ABSTRACT

The effect of Internet-mediated activities on a given society is inextricably entwined with pre-existing social and cultural conditions. Such unique dominance of domestic models in Korea therefore deserves scholarly attention, as Korean cases could provide useful data for global comparison central to the development of theoretical frameworks and context-sensitive research methods.

The present paper aims to contribute to this discussion based on a case study of an intriguing online incident that occurred during the 2007 Korean presidential election. When a video footage related to the so-called 'BBK scandal' was disclosed, bringing up the 2007 Korean presidential election front-runner Lee's possible link to a financial scam, the electoral regulations of the country did not allow voters to post the clip on the Web in the 180 days prior to the election. Supporters of Lee's opponents therefore abandoned domestic social networking sites and moved into the international domain to further the debate. Posted on YouTube on 5 December 2007, the clip attracted more than 900,000 views within a week. In order to identify broader implications of this case, the present study looks at it from three different fronts of network analysis: (i) hyperlink analysis, (ii) interaction network analysis and (iii) semantic network analysis. First, the hyperlink analysis is conducted based on the dataset of the URLs of the webpages that either send a hyperlink to the YouTube clip or quote its address in-text, gathered intermittently for a total of 4 times since it was posted till the Election Day. Second, the interaction network analysis is conducted based on the collection of user responses made on the site at the bottom of the clip (436 items). This textual dataset is coded at two levels, in terms of the contributors' IDs and in terms of the political opinions conveyed in the messages, which enables the authors to explore the ways in which online users appropriate the comment box and converse among themselves. Third, a keyword-in-context (KWIC) analysis of the comments is conducted in order to identify semantic patterns emerging from this rather intense online discussion.

The analytical outcomes identify that despite the rise of 'supraterritoriality' on the Internet, language demarcates Korean cyberspace from the international domain, which partially explains Korean users' preference to local services over ones for global audiences. In the chosen case, the original contributor who posted the footage on YouTube explained the context of the video clip and his rationale for posting it in Korean with no subtitles, clearly indicating that his targeted audience were Korean voters but that Korean law forced him to appropriate the global social networking space for this domestic political issue. More interestingly, the diffusion of the information and the political discussion further to this clip among Koreans principally stayed within the Korean cyberspace bounded by the invisible line of language, while conversations within the comment facility on YouTube, by both Korean and seemingly non-Korean users, were often irrelevant to the actual content of the clip and in some instances took on a racially motivated note. The YouTube platform in this case boiled down to a medium to circumvent electoral regulations as it afforded a higher level of anonymity to its users unlike on Korean sites.

**Keywords**

South Korea, Election, YouTube, BBK, Network Analysis, National Politics, Global Social Networking, Context Sensitivity

## Bios

**Darren Purcell** is an Assistant Professor and Undergraduate Advisor for the Department of Geography at the University of Oklahoma. His research and teaching interests focus upon the reworking of space and place through communication technologies, particularly in the forms of new political and economic geographies. Darren has published on state use of the Internet in outlets such as *Information, Communication and Society* and the *Geographical Review*, and contributed a chapter to the edited collection, [\*E-Government in Europe: Rebooting the state\*](#). Current research projects include the use of the Facebook as banal nationalist discourse and as a tool for stateless nations.

**Fabio Giglietto** holds PhD in Communication Studies from the University “Carlo Bo” of Urbino where he also teaches Theory of Information in the Faculty of Social Science. Since 1997 he is a member of LaRiCA (Research Laboratory on Advanced Communication). His main research interests is theory of information, communication and social systems with a specific focus on the relationship between social systems and new technologies. Since 2005 he is also member of [RC51 on Sociocybernetics](#), a special interest group within International Sociological Association.

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**Raquel Recuero** is a PhD and a professor in the Communication Department at Catholic University of Pelotas (UCPel), Brazil. Her current research has focused on Brazilian's appropriations of social network sites (orkut and Fotolog); relations between virtual communities and social networks; and the influence of social capital on information flow in weblogs and fotologs.

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