Online social media in everyday life in Ireland: A qualitative exploration of media use among Irish 25 to 30 year olds during a time of crisis.

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Acknowledgments

Abstract

Online social media such as social network sites, online forums and blogs have emerged as spaces where interpersonal connections, discussion and displays of identity take place, and have been adopted extensively on a global scale. While research into the use of these sites in Ireland to date provides insights into subscription levels and the uses made of individual sites, little is known about the use of these media technologies in everyday life, the relationship between online and offline practices and the conceptualisation and use of these sites by individuals in an Irish context. This research conducts a qualitative examination into the use of online social media technologies among Irish 25 to 30 year olds within the context of the economic, political and social crisis which emerged and persisted since 2008.

Drawing on theories of domestication (Silverstone, 1992) and media convergence (Jenkins, 2006) this research explores the incorporation of online social media into everyday life among eleven participants aged 25 to 30. The research highlights the perspectives of these users, utilising a comprehensive qualitative multi-method approach which examines the different sites of use and participants' online practices. The objective is to gain a holistic understanding of what these sites mean to participants and how they are used within this tumultuous period in Ireland.

In addressing the context of economic and political crisis, this research explores the conceptualisation of citizenship by participants and explores how they connect to public life in Ireland. Media are often viewed as the bridge which connects citizen and state. Innovations in online social media are widely said to offer the potential for the democratisation or 'flattening out' of hierarchical structures which have dominated state-citizen relationships, often presented as spaces where the citizen can 'talk back' to those in power. This research set out to explore whether and how online social media may be creating these spaces for increased participation,

examining how they connect to citizenship practices in contemporary Ireland among participants in this study.

The analysis demonstrates that while online social media, and the internet in general, have introduced new modes of media consumption, use and audience activity they are assimilated into the broader media consumption patterns for these participants, where there is a convergence of 'new' and 'old' media technologies.

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List of Acronyms

4OD- Channel Four On-Demand

BBC- British Broadcasting Company

BSkyB- British Sky Broadcasting Group Plc

CSO- Central Statistics Office

ICT- Information and Communication Technology

RTÉ- Raidió Teilifís Éireann

TD- Teachta Dála (member of Dáil Éireann)

TG4- Teilifís na Gaeilge

TV3- Irish commercial television station

UTV- Ulster Television

Chapter One: Introduction to the Thesis

1.1: Introduction

In 2006 *TIME* magazine announced their Person of the Year. With a cover depicting a heavenly image of a personal computer on a brilliant white background, the magazine proclaimed the recipient to be 'You'. This occurred one year after Tim O'Reilly (2005) devised the term 'Web 2.0' to describe a new online space, which introduced greater opportunities for non-experts to participate in the production and distribution of content. The central role of the 'user' in this exciting online space was being lauded. In a position usually reserved for prominent politicians, business leaders, scientists and charitable figures *TIME* magazine writer Lev Grossman (2006) asserted that society had moved away from Thomas Carlyle's 'Great Man Theory' of history declaring:

> Look at 2006 through a different lens and you'll see another story, one that isn't about conflict or great men. It's a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before...It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes.
>
> Lev Grossman, 2006: 38

Web 2.0 has spawned a multitude of spaces where individuals can come together, produce content, and discuss issues ranging from elections and economic crises to local events and popular culture.

This research was conducted between 2008 and 2012 and presents a qualitative study of online social media use in everyday life among Irish 25 to 30 year olds. The research draws insights from the personal perspectives of 11 individuals, who have shared their experiences and opinions on the role

played by these technologies in their lives, during a tumultuous period in Irish society.

1.2: Establishing the Scope of the Thesis:

The research emerges during a period of global political and economic crisis. On a national level, from 2008 to 2012 Ireland's citizens have lived through a recession which has seen the economy collapse, bank bailouts, a general election, political scandal and a presidential election. The past ten years have seen major changes for the generation of Irish citizens now in their late twenties. The highs of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy have given way to a phase of economic meltdown where the confidence and expectations of prosperity and stability have been replaced by mass unemployment and the resurgence of emigration.[1]

1.2.1: Online Social Media:

The first decade of the twenty first century brought many changes to the user experience of the Internet. It is in these years that Web 2.0 emerged, although not without debate as to whether this marks the arrival of a revolutionised version of the internet or the realisation of the original objectives held for it (O'Reilly, 2005; Anderson, N., 2006). Web 2.0 is defined as providing platforms which allow for greater user interaction in terms of content creation and the ability to talk back to more traditional media monoliths, the move from 'one-to-many' to 'many-to-many' media communication structures (Shirky, 2008).

Online social media sites can be seen as part of this development, allowing for the connection of people across time and space. These sites provide an opportunity to broadcast user generated content to the world, and the potential to engage with people from different backgrounds and ideological

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[1] Unemployment figures published by the CSO put the unemployment rate in Ireland at 14.4% for October 2011. This is an increase of 9.6% since January 2008 when this research began when the rate was calculated at 4.8%. This reporting period was deemed of most relevance to this research as it corresponded to the period of empirical research. (CSO, 2011a).
In terms of emigration the CSO released figures in September 2011 which show increases in the level of emigration from Ireland, especially among Irish nationals. In the year from April 2010 to April 2011 76,400 people emigrated from Ireland in total with 40,200 of these being Irish nationals, a rise from 27,700 in the previous year. In terms of age 25 to 44 year olds were the largest cohort to emigrate with 34,400 leaving the country in this period. (CSO, 2011b)

stances to one's own. However it would be overly simplistic to see these sites as the first incarnation of this type of interaction. Newsgroups, a predecessor to current social media sites, provided a space for group or community formation, where users gathered around shared topics of interest (Lister et al, 2008). Online social media sites afford users the ability to connect with friends both past and present, share content such as personal photos, video and online links and to join groups and discussions dealing with wide variety of topics .

In a global context it would appear that online social media have taken on central roles in the communication patterns of many social groups. Globally millions of people are subscribed to these services which have the potential to create shared discussion spaces. According to boyd and Ellison (2008) online social media can be defined as spaces which allow for the formation of personal profiles and a visible network of connections accessible to other users in the system. Under this definition a vast array of sites can be included from forums and blogs to video and photo sharing sites and on to the ubiquitous social network sites such as *Facebook*. Accessibility to these online spaces has increased exponentially with wider internet and broadband roll out, greater consumer confidence in usage of online technology and a vast increase in the capabilities available. Quantitative data is available relating to the adoption of online social media often on a site by site basis, for example as of October 2012 there are over 1 billion registered users of *Facebook* worldwide.[2]

In an Irish context there is a dearth of qualitative studies into the use of online social media sites in everyday life. Quantitative research is more common, often being produced by market research companies[3], and there have been some small scale studies of use. However these tend to focus on

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[2] Facebook Newsroom: http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaId=22
[3] Ipsos Mrbi produce quarterly statistical reports on the use of key online social media sites in Ireland among individuals aged 15+. The most recent published online for the period between May and August 2012 shows that 63% of those surveyed had a profile on any social networking site with Facebook being most common at 56% followed by Twitter at 22%. (Ipsos Mrbi, 2012)

younger users, generally in their teens (Amarach, 2004). Qualitative research relating to the integration of online social media sites and the activities which prevail on them is therefore limited in an Irish context, especially in relation to the 25 to 30 year old age group.

This research addresses some of these gaps in the knowledge base concerning the Irish setting. Indeed, it will examine sites which allow for the creation of a personal profile and the ability to connect with friends and interact online. The predominant focus will be on sites which allow users to engage in discussions whether this is through text, audio or visual modes of communication. The specific sites involved became apparent at the empirical stage of research defined by the membership affiliations of participants. These included *Facebook*, specialist forums, commercial review sites and *Twitter*.

1.2.2: 25 to 30 year olds in Ireland:

The generation of Irish adults born after 1980 and entering adult life in the early 21st century can be classified as 'digital natives', 'generation- D' (digital) or 'generation-N' (net) (Prensky, 2001), having grown up with access to technologies such as mobile phones, personal computers, digital cameras and the internet as well as the increased availability of applications such as software for media production, file sharing sites and online social media. These technologies are now for many intricately woven into the fabric of their everyday lives. The term digital natives can be viewed as problematic not only because it is highly techno-centric, but also, due to inequalities in access to these technologies across various social and demographic factors (Buckingham, 2008).

In an Irish context this is demonstrated in unequal broadband rollout between rural and urban centres as well as across socio-economic divisions which intensified during the 'Celtic Tiger' economic boom. Other everyday factors also come into play here such as access in the place of employment, leisure pursuits and free time available.

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In terms of demographics, figures from the 2011 Irish census available by single year of age indicate that there are 443,736 people in the 25 to 30 age group. This gives an indication of the proportion of society which is encompassed in the age range dealt with in this research.[4] *Facebook* (www.Facebook.com) which has 2,060,740 Irish subscribers is particularly popular among the 25 to 30 age group with 393,320 members in this age group alone. The gender breakdown is 176,160 (45%) males, 209,800 (53%) females and 7360 (2%) members of undeclared gender.[5] These figures are indicative of the level of adoption of online social media among this age group. This is one example of a site to which Irish people subscribe creating profiles and networks between peers. However, statistical figures such as these while presenting a compelling picture of this group's adoption of online social media actually tell us little or nothing about the uses made of these sites in everyday life. Through the contextualisation of online social media use within wider media consumption patterns, this research provides a qualitative examination into the role of these platforms in the lives of participants.

1.2.3: Practices of citizenship

Web 2.0 and social media in particular have come into sharp focus within debates surrounding public engagement and citizenship as possible elixirs to the perceived democratic deficit in contemporary society. As evidenced above, online social media have been embraced by the members of the 25 to 30 year old age group. These sites are often cited as having the potential to engage individuals with democracy, politics and the public sphere. It is all too easy to valorise technology in this way viewing it as a 'magic bullet' which

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[4] Statistics accessed from the Central statistics Statbank for the 2011 Census. Filters applied were: Sex: Both sexes; Age at last birthday: 25 to 30 (inclusive) At each year of age: population; Census year: 2011. Available from:
http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD202&PLanguage=0

[5] Using the *Facebook* advertising feature I created an ad targeted to Location: Ireland/everywhere Age: 25 to 30 inclusive and selected the 'require exact age match' option and then selected three separate readings for gender: all, male and female. Available from: http://www.Facebook.com/ads/create/ [accessed 15/11/11]

will alter greatly the way in which citizens engage with public life. However if we examine only the technical features or the content of such media and eliminate the user from the equation an incomplete picture can be formed. Following research emphasising the need to examine the role of the internet in civic participation which addresses online and offline practices of users (Hirzalla & Van Zoonen 2011; Wellman & Haythornwaite, 2002; Dahlgren, 2000; Dahlgren & Gurevitch, 2005) this study examines how online social media are embedded into everyday life in Ireland and how they are utilised by citizens to engage with the society in which they live. This particular use of online social media is presented as part of a case study in chapter 9.

There is a perceived degradation of traditional citizenship activities in contemporary society (Papacharissi, 2010). Traditional markers such as electoral voting and party membership are seen to be in decline while interest-based campaigning and more supra-national concerns take on a more prominent role. This can be connected to changes in society associated with globalisation and the decline of the nation state. The internet has often been heralded as a site with the potential to renew and reinvigorate citizenship through the provision of a space which could increase accessibility to information and create a deliberative space open to a broader public. With the instant availability of information and a variety of spaces for the expression and discussion of ideas online, the potential for involvement has increased greatly.

This research will take an expansive notion of what can be classified as citizenship practices examining the role of online social media in connecting citizens to public arenas of civic life. Traditional activities such as voting and party membership will be included as will activities surrounding issue-based politics, cultural citizenship, consumption practices, volunteerism, campaigning, protest and discussion of public issues. Primary focus within these areas will be given to information seeking and discursive practices among participants.

1.3 Research Questions:

This research explores the convergence of online and offline media use and modes of connectivity facilitated through online social media for the individual participants who took part in this study. It will examine how online social media are enmeshed into the overall media consumption practices of this age group, 25 to 30 year olds, providing an analysis into the place of online social media in the lives of these individuals.

Table 1.1: Research Questions

Research Q1	**How are online social media embedded into everyday life and utilised by participants in an Irish context?**
Sub Q1	*How do 'new media' formats converge with traditional media in participants' everyday life?*
Sub Q2	*What role do online social media sites play in the lives of 25 to 30 year olds in Ireland?*
Research Q2	**How do participants use online social media to connect with political arenas of Irish life in this time of crisis?**
Sub Q1	*How do 25 to 30 year olds conceptualise and practice citizenship?*
Sub Q2	*How do 25 to 30 year old Irish adults connect to an Irish public sphere?*

1.3.1: How are online social media embedded into everyday life and utilised by participants in an Irish context?

This research will not address the consumption of online social media in isolation but examine its use within the context of media consumption in everyday life. One aspect of the research is to examine the role of traditional media such as television, radio and newspapers generally and online social media particularly in the lives of participants.

Sub question one: How do 'new media' formats converge with traditional media in participants' everyday life?

Discussion surrounding media in contemporary society often proposes a dichotomy between 'old' or analogue media and 'new' or digital media (Preston, 2011). This research will examine how 'new' media coexist with

older media formats and how this shapes media consumption. In doing so this study will examine the convergence of 'new' and traditional media formats in participants' lives (Jenkins, 2006).

Sub question Two: What role do online social media sites play in the lives of 25 to 30 year olds in Ireland?

Online social media are spaces where identity can be expressed, relationships formed and maintained, information gathered and groups can form around shared interests. In answering this question the research traverses the online/offline divide and examines what participants utilise their online social media profiles for.

1.3.2: How do participants use online social media to connect with political arenas of Irish life in this time of crisis?

This research examines how Irish 25 to 30 year olds engage with citizenship in contemporary Irish society. The media are often viewed as having an integral role in connecting the citizen to the imagined community of the nation state (Morley, 1996; Anderson, B. 1991). Drawing on recent debates on the role of new media in civic engagement this thesis will analyse the use of online social media to engage with Irish civic society during this time of crisis.

Sub Question One: How do 25 to 30 year olds conceptualise and practice citizenship?

Taking an expansive definition of citizenship and citizenship practices this research includes a spectrum of ideas and activities which includes the workings of the political system in Ireland as well as a range of other activities which relate to the individual, the local, the national and the global. In addressing this question the aim is to establish the subjective opinions and practices of participants in order to explore the way they see themselves as citizens and how this role is exercised in their everyday lives.

Sub Question 2: How do 25 to 30 year old Irish adults connect to an Irish public sphere?

News media have historically played a central role enabling participation within the public sphere. Recent debates have opened up the possibility of popular culture also playing a role in enabling this participation (VanZoonen, 2005; Hermes, 2005). Participation in the public sphere is most often associated with the consumption of news and current affairs media, therefore a number of questions emerge in relation to this group's media consumption and participation in an Irish public sphere. *In what social contexts do they enter into discussions of politics and more broadly the political? What media are utilised in gaining information on these arenas of life?*

1.4: Introducing the methodology

This thesis draws on original multi-method research to present an in-depth qualitative study into the use of online social media in relation to citizenship practices in Ireland. This in-depth qualitative study is supplemented by a small scale online survey. As mentioned previously in this chapter, few studies to date have conducted qualitative analysis into the use of online social media in an Irish context. Of the qualitative studies which have been conducted in Ireland the focus has been predominantly on younger age cohorts particularly those still in education (Dunne et al, 2010; O'Neill et al, 2011; Fowley, 2011).

In order to make visible the reasons, stories and lived realities of the users of these sites the multi-method approach was developed. This approach leads to a rich description and analysis of the way in which these technologies are embedded into everyday life, information which is absent from quantitative studies which identify large scale evidence of media usage patterns and trends but do not provide an understanding of the underlying individual experiences of media use.

1.5: Chapter Outlines:

Following this introduction to the research, chapters two and three will explore the theoretical framework which forms the basis for this research. Chapter four contextualises this research within the crisis-laden economic, political and cultural situation in Ireland during the period in which this research took place, 2008 to 2012. Chapter five presents the methodology employed during the empirical stage of the research. Chapter six provides introductory pen profiles of each individual participant describing how online social media are embedded into their everyday lives. Chapters seven to nine present analysis of the empirical results and findings. Finally chapter ten will address the findings of this study and suggest the potential for future areas of research.

Chapter two to four review the major sets of the prior research most directly relevant to the concerns of this thesis.

Chapter two examines literature and prior empirical studies of media in everyday life drawing from the fields of audience and reception studies. This chapter addresses the notion of the audience in the digital age and the relevance of audience studies for the analysis of online social media use in contemporary society. The chapter also explores theoretical approaches to the examination of technology in society providing an introduction and critical analysis of key theories and authorities in this field. It examines the development of online social media sites exploring the emergence of Web 2.0 and the proliferation of these sites on the Internet.

Chapter three addresses the practice of citizenship in the digital age bringing together three interconnecting concepts; citizenship, the role of the media in connecting citizens to the state and theories of the public sphere. This chapter will examine the development of theoretical conceptions of citizenship and politics setting out the parameters for this area of the research. The role of the media in connecting citizens to the state and role of the Internet in this relationship will also be explored.

Chapter four presents the particularities of the Irish context during the period in which this research took place.

Chapter five presents and assesses the methodology, data gathering techniques and methods of analysis utilised in this research.

Chapter six contains detailed profiles of each participant describing their everyday lives and the roles which on-line and off-line media take in their daily routines.

Chapter seven addresses the wider media consumption patterns of participants in their everyday life. The aim here is to establish the spaces and occasions in which different media forms are used and the convergence of on-line and off-line media use. While online social media were found to play a major role in communication and media consumption among participants, their use did not exist within a vacuum and this chapter provides analysis of how these sites are embedded into everyday media consumption.

Chapter eight presents an examination of the uses of online social media sites for participants. This chapter explores a number of key areas beginning with participants' attitudes towards the different online social media sites available and leading on to consider the variety of uses participants had for these sites.

Chapter nine presents a case study which explores participants' connection to political arenas of life in Ireland and citizenship practices. This first addresses the areas raised in chapter three relating to citizenship, presenting the opinions of participants with regards to their conception of citizenship and practices which they engage in relating to this. It also examines whether and in what ways online social media provide a space akin to Habermas' public sphere for participants presenting some of the limitations and opportunities of these sites for users.

Chapter ten reflects on the key questions and findings. This chapter presents a summary of the key findings and a review of how these address the key

questions identified for this research. Finally the chapter addresses the limitations of this research and presents potential avenues for further research.

Chapter 2: Technology and everyday life: an audience studies approach

2.1 Introduction

Audience studies have provided insights into the way in which different media technologies and content are consumed by individuals in their everyday life. As Elizabeth Bird states, the aim of audience studies is to 'shed light on how people interact with media to create meaning in their everyday lives' (2003, p: 8). Moving away from a focus on the technology itself, audience studies examine how technology is utilised in everyday life, how it is adopted, assimilated and given meaning by individuals through use. Technology can be viewed as having a transformative effect on society; as an external influence which will change the way humans live, work and communicate with each other. This is apparent in much of the rhetoric which surrounds the development of the internet including descriptions of contemporary society as 'the Internet age' or going through a 'digital revolution'. The emergence of digital media poses questions and challenges for the conceptualisation and examination of audiences. This chapter will review the literature engaging with the status of audiences in contemporary society. The variety of activities opened up to audiences through digital media problematises the singular connotations of the term audience.

This chapter will begin by examining the development of terminology relating to audiences and the different roles taken by audience members today. The history of audience studies presents phases of research which build on conceptions of audience activity in relation to media texts encountered. Digital media mark a shift in the modes of enquiry utilised in the investigation of audience activity. This chapter examines these phases of research, drawing out frameworks for the examination of individuals' use of

online social media and the extent to which audience research into 'old' media technologies such as television can be drawn on. The chapter will then proceed to define and describe online social media examining the role of these technologies in everyday life in relation to identity. It is proposed that in order to examine how online social media are utilised in an Irish context it is both insightful and timely to conduct primary research which examines these technologies within everyday life and everyday media consumption.

2.2: Conceptualising contemporary audiences

Digital media have opened up an array of new modes of consumption, interaction and opportunities for production to audience members. This widening of the scope of audience activity is reflected in some of the terminology which is now invoked when describing audience members; fundamentally the movement away from the singular 'audience' to the plural 'audiences', as well as labels such as 'users' and 'prod-users'. However, the audience as a concept cannot be abandoned completely as society moves further into the digital age. Whilst digital technologies allow for different activities to take place, the adoption of new roles by audiences is far from inevitable. The internet may provide scope for the democratisation of voices in the media, but it is not a prerequisite that this will in fact occur.

There is a continuing need to re-visit the theories and methods utilised by audience studies in examining the use of digital media, as indicated by Livingstone (2002, 2003). Theories developed in the context of studies dealing with a mass broadcast medium are sometimes viewed as inadequate when dealing with the complexities of activities engaged in with digital media Gauntlett, 2000; Gauntlett & Horsley, 2004). However, this is not to say that established audience theory is less useful when approaching the study of 'new media' use.

The phrase 'new media' has taken on an assumed meaning but "the new is no simple matter" (Silverstone, 1999: 10) In the new there is an assumption of progress, a clean break from the past and perhaps strangeness, but many of the characteristics of the current wave of 'new media' are shared with older forms of communication. Therefore while the digital technology, which provides the medium can be seen as new, the actual act of communication spans millennia. In order to examine fully the implications of these technologies in our society it is essential to examine the theories of previous generations of media scholars, in looking forward we must first look back (Silverstone, 1999).

Martin Lister et al (2008) agree that an historical perspective is central to the examination of new media. To assess the, assumed, revolutionary potential of new media technologies we must understand what went before and the role of technology within society. We must also question what it means to be 'new' and Lister et al identify a number of ways to define newness. There is the idea of superficial newness in which a product is merely a new version of something which has come before. This thinking could support the idea of 'new media' as 'old' media in new clothes or as Livingstone puts it 'old wine in new bottles' (Livingstone, 2003: 15). Novelty itself must also be examined. In some instances the novelty value afforded to a product changes during its lifespan, or can indeed be very different to initial expectations. From introduction to the market to proliferation among audiences the novelty value of a product or service can diminish, or an early assumption on its use could be altered. Bolter and Grusin (2000) see a dialectical relationship between old and new media, a relationship of remediation where new media are refashioning the old. New media cannot be viewed as existing apart from older forms as they encompass elements of all their predecessors.

Writers such as Toffler (in Preston, 2001) argue that the new media amount to a 'Third Wave' of technological change for society, the previous two being the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions. In production terms it is seen as the move from a mass to a de-massified economy where customisation becomes the key aim and 'diversity is as cheap as uniformity' (Preston, 2001: 30). Technological developments are imagined to radically change society in all aspects from the products we consume and how we work, to how we are governed and the distribution of power. This idea is radically technologically determinist in that it sees the power for change in society coming from the introduction of digital technology. The Third Wave concept appears to draw a line between new media and all that went before it discounting ideas of remediation or the importance of old media forms which shape the development of new media technology.

We can look at this history in a number of ways. The sweeping simplicity of a teleological account may provide a concise equation for the linear development of technology through time, but, it is deterministic in its outlook and doesn't take into account societal, cultural and economic factors relevant to each period which have an important role to play in the development of any technology. Audience studies, influenced by the social shaping of technologies approach developed by Raymond Williams (1974), examine the ways in which technologies are incorporated, adapted and utilised within everyday life taking into account the various social factors which influence the development and use of a technology (Baym, 2010).

2.3: Audience studies: Perspectives on media consumption

Throughout the twentieth century there has been a distinct move towards viewing audiences as increasingly autonomous in their interaction with media texts and the generation of meaning from these. Audience studies view this interaction between media and audiences as an array of multi-faceted moments of meaning creation, never viewing meaning as passing directly from the media text to the audience member. Instead there is an emphasis on the semiotic characteristics of media texts, which enable audience members to decode media messages in accordance with their individual social context and experience (Hall, 1973/1980). The everyday life of audience members is the focus of research in this field, exploring the spaces in which the use and interpretation of media technologies and texts are consumed (Schrøder et al, 2003).

Much research in audience studies now explores the interaction between 'active audiences' and media texts. The notion of the audience as active implies that audiences have a productive role in their engagement with the media- they 'do' things with media messages as opposed to passively absorbing media. Meaning is viewed as a product of the interaction between media texts and audience members. This implies that the meaning encoded within a text is not actualised until a reader or audience member engages

with it. This differs from the idea that meaning is encoded by the author and remains fixed within a text, or that to draw out the true meaning of a text requires an expert reading. The reader in the case of audience studies is viewed as possessing interpretative abilities developed in accordance with the social and cultural contexts in which they live. This individualisation of the interpretative process is countered by situating the individual within the context of the social groups or communities in their lives for example, class, gender, family and ethnicity. In this section I will examine the trajectory of audience studies tracing the movement from conceptions of the audience as passive consumers of media texts and messages, towards the emergence of reception studies and treatment of audiences as 'users' and active in their engagement with media.

2.3.1 The Effects Paradigm of Audience Research

In the USA where media studies first became institutionalised, conceptions and analysis of audiences were influenced by the effects paradigm emerging in the early twentieth century.[6] This paradigm emerges in tandem with the increased dissemination of and accessibility to mass media throughout western society, the apparent breakdown of traditional structures of community and family ties in modern industrial societies, and the emergence of fascist and totalitarian regimes in Europe. This concept deals with the concern surrounding the use of mass media by these regimes and its effect on the public. Research within the effects paradigm is often characterised by anxiety surrounding the perceived negative effects of mass media on the public centring on issues such as sexuality, violence, children, politics, gender and race. In addressing audiences two approaches become evident. Firstly an approach which sees audiences as a threat and their consumption of mass media as playing a key role in incitement to challenge elite power and order within society. In opposition to this is an approach which views mass media

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[6] While the predominant research methodologies employed within the effects paradigm were statistical and experimental, there were university departments who practiced more ethnographic, qualitative and socio-centric research such as the Chicago School, Department of sociology at the University of Chicago (Schrøder et al, 2003).

as a tool for the elite to be used in the manipulation of the public due to the emergence of mass media as dominant sources of information.[7] Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) identify a number of problems with this model in terms of applying it to the examination of contemporary media audiences. Audiences are viewed as complex formations of different social groups and individuals who play a more active role in their consumption of media, interacting with mass media messages as opposed to simply adopting them. However, the continued presence of the effects model is evident in public debate, especially in contemporary public discussion of online social media and its impact on society, for example recent coverage of issues such as Cyberbullying (Wayman, 2013). A line of argument which correlates social media use with a loss of social ties, concentration and the degradation of interest in the public world continues to permeate the discussion of these media formats.

Throughout the course of the twentieth century research within the effects paradigm has evolved, moving away from the simplistic hypodermic needle model to encompass the investigation of the effects of media consumption in different contexts and at different levels of society from macro to micro research. Whilst these developments mark a move within the effects paradigm to encompass different conceptions of the audience, the crux of all research in this vein remains within a cause and effect model of the relationship between the audience and mass media, excluding ideas of audience autonomy and activity in media interactions.

2.3.2 Uses and Gratifications paradigm in Audience Research

A second recognisable phase in audience research acknowledges a more active role for audience members. The Uses and Gratifications paradigm sees a move away from the concentration on the potential effects of mass media

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[7] Early phases of this research paradigm centre on the 'effects model' or the 'hypodermic needle model' in theorising the relationship between the public and mass media. This model treats the audience as a singular mass of individuals who in turn react to the messages contained within media in a direct manner adopting and acting in the way intended by the producer. There is no room for individual readings or divergent views here.

on the audience, towards the uses made by audiences of mass media texts. This approach focuses on the psychological relationship between the individual and mass media, examining the personal factors involved in choosing and utilising media texts. Elihu Katz, a central figure in the emergence of this paradigm, established five elements central to this approach (Katz et al, 1974). Firstly, there is a move from viewing the audience's role as passive to active in the consumption of mass media. This activity is centred on the 'goal-orientation' of the audience member, their personal reasoning for the choice and use of a media text. Secondly, the audience member is viewed as using media as opposed to being directly influenced by it. Thirdly, media formats are not the only sources of gratification for the audience member. Mass media texts must compete for attention with other forms of activities in the life of the audience member. Fourthly, in gaining an insight into an audience member's relationship with mass media the uses and gratifications paradigm relies on the individual to report their personal motives for gratification with the researcher. And finally, the paradigm moves away from the attribution of value judgements to individual media texts, instead it focuses on gaining an insight into the individual reasoning of the audience member in choosing texts.

One central aim of this research paradigm was to develop 'typologies of audience gratifications' relating to the functions served by mass media in the lives of audience members (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998; Katz et al, 1974; McQuail et al, 1972). From this endeavour a typology of gratifications was developed to include diversion, to escape from the routine of daily life; personal relationships, for companianship or information on relationships; personal identity, to aid in the exploration of identity and moral values and finally surveillance, to gain information on various aspects of life. These gratifications are viewed as dependent on the social situation of the audience member (McQuail et al, 1972).

This paradigm, whilst providing an insight into the reasoning behind media use, has been criticised for an over emphasis on the psychology of individual

audience members and failing to consider the social factors which influence media consumption (Elliott, 1974). Whilst an important shift in focus from the conceptualisation of the audience as a singular mass passively consuming media messages the uses and gratifications approach tends to be overly behaviouristic in its ontology (Hall, 1982).

2.3.3 Towards an examination of media consumption in everyday life

Influenced by structuralist theory emerging in the mid-twentieth century, Stuart Hall's 1982 critique of both the effects and uses and gratifications paradigms emphasised the lack of an analysis into the influence of social factors, such as 'larger historical shifts, questions of political process and formation before and beyond the ballot box, issues of social and political power, of social structure and economic relation' (Hall, 1982: 59). The influence of Marxist ideologies within the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham is clearly evident in Hall's calling to task of the behaviouristic characteristics of these early audience studies paradigms. He asserts that media forms were utilised to disseminate the ideology of those elites who held power within society through the attribution of value assessments to cultural texts, such as 'high' and 'low' culture (Hall, 1982).

Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model (1973) has become foundational in audience studies, influencing much research within this discipline (for example: Morley, 1980; Radway, 1984) and addressing the more behaviourist tendencies of the Uses and Gratifications approach to media consumption. The encoding/decoding model sees the move towards a semiotic approach to media, where the interpretation of a message relates to a number of instances of encoding and decoding along a circuit of meaning production. Hall's model posits that there are a number of reading positions which an audience member may find themselves in namely dominant, negotiated and oppositional. The dominant reading position is adopted when audiences accept the meaning prescribed in a media text by its producers. A negotiated reading occurs when the audience member reads the message

ambivalently, taking on some of the producer prescribed meanings but also adding their own more oppositional readings of the text. Finally an oppositional reading of a text occurs when the audience member reads the text using a completely different set of reference points to the producer discarding any meaning which may have been prescribed in production.

Hall's model is useful in its acknowledgement of the role of both producers and audience members in the process of meaning creation during media consumption. This model is influenced greatly by Marxist theory and therefore class is viewed as a determining factor in the formation of a reading position by the audience. However, David Morley's *Nationwide* study (1980) found that while class informed audiences readings of a text it was not the sole factor involved in the reception process. Individuals' place of employment, education and political affiliations influenced greatly the reading positions of participants.

The introduction of this model heralded a wave of qualitative reception studies where the audience's reaction to media texts is monitored through the use of interviews and focus groups (Alasuutari, 1999). The entry of such thinking into audience studies paved the way for research examining the everyday consumption and uses of media texts. There was a move towards investigation into the layers of factors pertaining to the production of meaning in a media text by audiences (Alasuutari, 1999; Gillespie, 2005). The present incarnation of audience studies sees the audience not as one mass but as a plurality of groups which actively interpret the information transmitted to them by various media forms (Anderson, J.A, 1996).

2.3.4 Active Audiences
Active audience theory is often invoked in relation to the use of digital media products in contemporary society. Active audience theory looks to the ways in which audience members create meaning through interactions with media texts. This mode of thought tends towards an emphasis on the role of the individual in creating meaning, nullifying messages which the author may

have intended. The focus is placed on how the situation and experiences of the reader construct the meaning contained within a text. Active audience theory is developed by Fiske (1987) from Hall's encoding/decoding model (1973). Fiske (1989) develops the view of audience members as constructing oppositional meanings from popular media texts dependent on their social situation, drawing from Hall's (1973) dominant, negotiated and oppositional reading positions. Through the creation of subversive meaning, audience members are thought to resist hegemonic ideologies which are seen to be imbued in a cultural text in its production. As a theory it can be taken to extremes freeing a media text of any linkages to the production process and any ideologies or objectives which may be inscribed at this stage (Morley, 1993).

The concept can be problematic, attributed mainly to its postmodernist leaning in presenting the possibility for endless interpretations, questioning the existence of concrete meanings and where consensus can occur, if at all. The apparent disregard for the role of production and meanings which may be inscribed at this stage in the communication process has created a contentious area of debate around this theoretical perspective. Corner (1991), for example, questions the way in which meaning is established from a media text, viewing the methodology employed by audience researchers as only reaching partial understandings of the reception process through their emphasis on audience autonomy in meaning creation. Corner sees meaning as created in interactions with the text at three levels. Firstly, at a primary level where the audience member identifies the signifiers within a text. Secondly, at a secondary level where signification is recognised, the meaning created here dependent on the structure of the text in question and to an extent on the experiences of the audience member. Finally the third level where audience members attach a 'generalised significance' to a text relating to their own life experience and worldview. Corner sees this third level as the space where the majority of reception studies have been carried out to the neglect of meanings which may be inscribed into a text. While Corner's view

on audience research can be seen as compelling, I feel that he omits the connections which audience research makes with the conditions of living for audience members. The analysis of media consumption at the level of individual consumption has illuminated the relationship between individuals and the structure of the society they inhabit, for example Morley's *Family Television* (1986) illuminated aspects of gender power relations within the family as witnessed through interactions surrounding television consumption.

2.3.5 The Interactive Audience

The media experiences of audience members are increasingly defined by interactive features of media technology, from the move away from fixed time viewing through the provision of on-demand services to the integration of voting on reality television, in which audiences affect the narrative development of a programme. Media audiences can now be conceived as playing a role in the production of content through the use of consumer technology and the mass distribution platform of the internet. Jensen (2001) identifies four phases of audience interactivity. The *Transmission* mode characterised by broadcast television is where audience members tune into a predetermined flow of media. Here interactivity is deemed limited to turning on the television set. Secondly there is the *Consultation* mode of interactivity, here information is controlled by a central provider but the individual decides on when and where to utilise it. On-demand television content services, such as *Sky Plus* and *RTE Player* (www.rte.ie/player), which allow audience members to decide when and where they watch television programmes, can be seen to encapsulate this mode of interaction. Thirdly is the *Conversation* mode of audience interactivity. Here there is a service provider involved but usually their role is in the provision of technical facilities for the exchange of information. The service provider does not intervene in user or audience interaction thus allowing for connections and discussions between users or audience members. Online social media sites could be viewed as part of this type of interactivity in so far as a space is

created online where individuals can come together to share information and discuss various topics. The final mode of interactivity outlined by Jensen is that of *Registration* where information is provided by the user and stored to enable service providers to monitor and influence future behaviour. In an online context this occurs through the use of cookies tracking user's actions online to be utilised by service providers in tailor-made media experiences for the individual. Jensen's modes of interaction provide a way to examine the interactivity of contemporary audiences. Interactive audience theory can be seen to develop aspects of active audience theory to examine the role of media producers and service providers in the interactions between individuals and media texts.

2.4: Media and Technology in Everyday Life: Domestication and Convergence

Historically studies have isolated audiences from their everyday life and experiences; this is especially the case in behavioural and psychologically based studies. In order to achieve the insight into how online social media sites are embedded into the everyday lives of participants, this research utilises a combination of the theories of domestication (Silverstone& Hirsch, 1992) and convergence (Jenkins, 2006). In setting out to examine the use of online social media formats these theoretical approaches, used in conjunction with each other, provide a balance between examining the role of technology and the relationships between different media formats for participants. This approach enables the examination of both the media technologies utilised in the different settings of everyday life and also the variety of media content consumed by participants.

Domestication emerged as a theory or research methodology in the 1980s and 1990s. It developed from studies within the fields of media and communication studies and science and technology studies as an alternative to research which was content centred and placed a heavy emphasis on technological determinism (Berker et al, 2006: 230). Within the fields of

media and communication studies emphasis had been placed on the content of media messages since the establishment of the disciplines. The emphasis at this point was on semiotic analysis, derived from literary theory of the 1950s and 1960s. The disciplines were lacking empirical studies of actual audience experience of media use and their interpretation of the information presented (Haddon, 2007: 25). In the early 1980s studies began to materialize looking at the actual reaction of audiences to the media they were viewing centring mainly on television viewing. They examined areas such as the role of television in the lives of housewives (Hobson, 1982), asking why people watch certain programmes (Ang, 1985), the way in which people watch television in the home (Bausinger, 1984) and later in the 1990s the use of television by ethnic groups within society (Gillespie, 1995). These studies focused on how audiences used television, how different contexts and experiences affected the interpretation of television and its content as a text.

Running parallel to these developments in media and communication studies was a growth in interest in human consumption. Authors such as Pierre Bourdieu began to publish titles in consumption studies looking into the symbolic meaning and use of goods by the public. It was in this theoretical environment that Roger Silverstone developed the theory of domestication for the examination of the technologies of the home (Haddon, 2007: 26).

Domestication recognises the importance of the home and everyday activities of audiences as the sites where opinions are formed and media is dissected and deciphered (Lister et al, 2003: 220). Providing both a theoretical model for examining this process and a methodology for carrying out research in the area, domestication identifies a number of stages in the adoption of technology in the home and takes its metaphorical reference from that of the taming of wild animals in a domestic setting. Silverstone & Hirsch (1992) describe four stages of incorporation, appropriation, objectification, and conversion. Each step sees technology further enmeshed into the fabric of everyday life, in some cases to the point where it takes on an assumed quality of simply being there for the audience. Since its introduction domestication

has been utilised by researchers to examine the effect of media in the home in relation to gender and power politics within it, as well as looking at the increasing divergence of homes away from the traditional nuclear unit and the different readings of media which may emanate from these (Haddon, 2007: 27). In this area of media research, which began by taking the television as a focus, domestication has had to extend its view to include the vast array of media technologies which now enter the home and are also utilised beyond its confines (Grossberg, 1996: 281; DuGay, 1997;Livingstone, 2002).

In relation to my research domestication plays a role in the mode in which I will examine the use of online social media by Irish 25 to 30 year olds. I wish not to examine these sites of media consumption in isolation but as part of the whole spectrum of media consumed by members of this group. In doing so, it is envisaged that a mapping of media consumption among this group can be developed, enabling the examination of the intersections of media sources and the use of online social media in everyday life.

Media convergence is often looked upon as having an overtly technological outlook. The convergence of media technologies has been expedited in recent years through the development of ever faster and smaller microprocessors. This has resulted in the development of technologies which serve multiple purposes for consumers. A key example of this can be viewed in the mobile phone. Once simply a device for making and receiving calls whilst on the move, the mobile phone now encompasses an array of uses relating to work, leisure and communication. The recent entrance of smartphones to the market have combined the basic functionality of the mobile phone with a multimedia platform which encompasses photography, video, internet access, mp3 music players and a vast range of 'apps' which provide access to a variety of activities from gaming to cookery to news and television viewing. The increased functionality of the mobile phone can be seen as an example of technological convergence.

Hay and Couldry (2011) outline four ways in which convergence has manifested itself in contemporary media environments. Firstly, convergence is utilised as a description for the synergy which now exists between different media companies and industries. Secondly, in the multiplication of platforms available for the consumption of news and information Finally, through the hybridisation of technology and finally in the emergence of a new media aesthetic (Hay & Couldry, 2011: 473).

Jenkins model of convergence (2006) does not focus solely on the technological aspect; instead he examines what he terms 'media convergence' looking at the spaces where different media formats meet within different fan cultures. He examines the ways in which consumers and media audiences utilise different media platforms to create new media experiences with other audience members, as well as audience members' potential role in media production and linkages to media producers. He examines the interaction between 'old' and 'new' media in media consumption and production among audience members.

Jenkins describes media convergence as:

> 'the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. Convergence is a word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes depending on who's speaking and what they are thinking about...In the world of media convergence, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms.'

Jenkins, 2006 p: 2-3

Convergence can then be seen to occur in a number of guises. Technologically it occurs in the melding together of different technologies as in the case of the mobile phone, but also more generally in the use of the variety of media technologies available to individuals in their daily lives, as examined by domestication. Socially it occurs in the use of these technologies by consumers, creating connections between audience members via online tools. In the examples of fan culture explored by Jenkins in his 2006 book, this manifested in a number of areas, from the spoilers shared online by fans of the reality television show *Survivor* to the online discussions which developed in the wake of the release of *The Matrix* movie trilogy. Jenkins also explores the industrial aspect of convergence which occurs between audience members and content producers. The link between audience members and media producers has historically been typified by letters to newspapers, fan letters sent to television and film stars or vox pop interviews for radio and television. The internet has opened up the opportunities for audience participation in media productions and also in content creation.

In this research media convergence theory provides a framework through which to explore the social aspects of convergence for participants. Focusing on the audience member or user of these technologies it enables the examination of the spaces where 'new' and 'old' media formats co-exist in everyday life for participants.

2.5 Online Social Media:

Online social media encompass a number of different genres of online space which allow various levels of communication and interaction between users. Often associated solely with the recent development of social network sites, online social media stretch further into a variety of interactions afforded by online technology. They encompass online communities, peer to peer and media sharing technologies, networked gaming, instant messaging services, blogging, microblogging, forums, email, Virtual worlds, texting and social network sites (boyd and Ellison, 2008). The technologies employed in

accessing and utilising these sites are traditionally based on a computer and an internet connection. However the rise of internet availability on mobile phones and the growth in 'smart phone' ownership have led to the increased use of mobile phone technology in accessing these sites which has implications for users in regard to ubiquitous connectivity.

Online social media in all their different incarnations allow for a variety of interactions among users. From 'one to one' interactions in an instant messaging session, email and private messages on social networking sites; 'one to many' interactions through blogs, social media posts and comments on various media websites through to 'many to many' interactions on forums, group and community web pages. These sites create spaces where people can connect with each other, gather together and discussion can occur (Baym, 1998). boyd and Ellison (2008) identify the power which is held in these interactions for users is the ability to collapse time and space reflecting McLuhan's ideas on the impact of technology on society (McLuhan, 1964). In what can be seen as a technological determinist stance these practices are seen to alter practices of communication, collaboration, information dissemination and social organisation (Benkler, 2006; Castells, 1996; Rheingold, 2000). Nicolas Negroponte described how Internet technology would create a new 'global social fabric' which would replace any technology which went before it (1996: 183).

Online social media became accessible to a wider public with the emergence of what Tim O'Reilly termed Web 2.0 (2005). While online social media had been present in various forms before this significant change in how the internet was used and perceived, the changes which Web 2.0 brought popularised these formats as they became more user friendly.[8] As a phrase Web 2.0 was coined as a marketing term to encourage the re-emergence of the internet as a viable site of business after the dot com crash of 2000 (Lister et al, 2008). A number of features were identified to distinguish Web

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[8] For example the Usenet news groups developed in Duke University by Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis.

2.0 from its predecessor Web 1.0. It was viewed as a space where the voice of the individual would take centre stage, lessening the extensive power of media corporations in the production of content. Facilitated by the development of XML mark up language coupled with the availability of free and open software tools, Web 2.0 enabled users to upload content to sites in a more intuitive and in a less complex mode than that which had been in place previously.[9] Newsgroups which had often required a greater level of technological expertise were supplemented with sites which made it easy for users to add their voice in the form of text, video, sound or image with little or no technical knowledge. This trend is often expressed through arguments which refer to the democratisation of technology, and the era of the 'produser' (Bruns, 2008) emerges. [10]

In economic terms O'Reilly (2005) envisaged this new era of the internet as a 'long tail' (Anderson, C, 2006) market structure which supplanted mass markets with a collection of niche consumer markets which could be accessed via the internet through applications which collected consumer data. Sites where this data could be collected surreptitiously while users traversed the Web 2.0 environment were required to capitalise on this new incarnation. It is out of this economic vista that social networking sites such as *Facebook* and bookmarking sites such as *Del.ic.ious* emerge. These sites provide users with communicative and bookmarking tools respectively and underneath every user interaction on the sites, data is collected that enables companies to gain an insight into their niche market and develop ways in which to connect their product with customers.

Lister et al (2008) identify a number of capabilities which Web 2.0 provide to users which are of interest in various ways to this study. Here, I will highlight a number of these which are of particular relevance to this research including

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[9] Previous incarnations such as Usenet groups and Multi User Domains required more technological prowess and were often the preserve of what Lister et all (2009) term 'geeky subcultures' (p: 207).
[10] Dr Axel Bruns coined the term *produsage* (2008) to describe the trend towards user led production and collaborative production processes facilitated by Web 2.0 technology.

the development of a 'folksonomy'[11], the production and dissemination of user generated content, and finally a look at some of the particularities of social network sites which have come to prominence in the time since O'Reilly's pronouncement of the arrival of Web 2.0.

In 2004 Thomas Vander Wal coined the term 'Folksonomy' to refer to the collection and classification of information by users or the public (Lister et al, 2008). It occurs as users collect and redistribute information through sites such as Wikipedia and Del.ic.ious. The presence of these sites can be seen to break down traditional structures of knowledge creation and dissemination allowing for the participation of members of society who are outside the traditionally defined expert groups (Jenkins et al, 2002). The combination of cheaper consumer technology allied with the development of Web 2.0 as a platform for dissemination sees user generated content becoming a key characteristic of the Web 2.0 landscape. This can be viewed in two ways. Firstly it can be seen as an opportunity for users to challenge media monoliths, to engage in the production of media content and to get their voice heard on a broader platform. Contrary to this view is that which problematises user generated content, viewing it as a source of free labour for Web 2.0 companies.

Online social media incorporates practices such as blogging, contributing to an online forum, sharing content online, bookmarking pages and activity on social network sites. The current incarnations of online social media can be seen as a return to the internet's early functionality when it was established as a space for information exchange among users of the system. Online social media utilise the technological affordances of Web 2.0 that provide a space for the creation and dissemination of user generated content. Social network sites, such as *Facebook*, have become central to most users' experience of the

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[11] The information architect Thomas Vander Wal is credited with creating the term 'folksonomy' in 2004. It is a portmanteau of 'folk' and 'taxonomy' referring to online practices where users created taxonomies of topics of interest using Web 2.0 collaborative tools. Vander Wal provides a narrative on the emergence of the term in the article *Folksonomy* on his personal website: http://vanderwal.net/folksonomy.html

internet in recent years and are one particular genre of online social media. Social network sites differ from earlier forms of online social media, boyd and Ellison (2008) identify the fundamental difference in these sites as emanating from the structure of their network. While earlier discussion forums were constituted around shared areas of interest, topics and fan cultures for instance, social networking sites such as *Facebook* are built around already existing social networks of the individual. These particular sites are predominantly used for maintaining connections with friends and acquaintances already known to the individual rather than to meet new people.

2.6: Online social media and identity

In early studies into the use of online social media these sites were viewed as presenting the user with new opportunities to express themselves through a variety of media forms. Users were considered free from the constraints of the body and society giving them an opportunity to present themselves in any way they wish. Construction of the self in cyberspace can involve as much or as little of the truth as a user desires. Sherry Turkle (1996) and Allucquere Rosanne Stone (1995) describe the flexible nature of identity in these environments as providing 'unparalleled opportunity to play with one's identity and to 'try out' new ones' (Turkle, 1996: 356). Theorists such as Turkle and Stone proposed a shift from traditional concepts of identity bound up in the body and grounded in the social situation or constraints; our identity projected through the clothing we wear, the education we receive, the social class we are part of, the society in which we grow. Stone described a major shift in the fabric of society with the introduction and development of the internet, a move from the mechanical society of the past to a 'virtual age' where these links between body and identity are disintegrating rapidly. She sees the virtual age as one which is changing vast aspects of society; its social structure, the changing nature of social interaction; often through the globalization of consumer electronic goods (Stone, 1995: 17-18). These changes can be seen to facilitate the idea of play in relation to identity in the

same way as Turkle's ideas. Media can be seen to play an important role in identity formation, depending on the television programmes, music, newspapers and magazines we consume and these different influences will be expressed through each individual's identity. In sum, the development of the Internet and the plethora of opportunities for self expression on it open up a Pandora's Box of possibilities to users.

Lines can be drawn between these modes of thought and postmodern ideas of the audience and identity where the media can influence the construction of identity outside traditional class and gender definitions. This was viewed as achieved through the provision of public sites where dialogue can occur between the user and the media. Here media can act in the dissemination of information and also increasingly as a site for expression of identity by the individual (Lister et al, 2003: 249). Technologically determinist influenced ideologies echo here, in suggesting that the rise of new media technology provides the freedom for people to express themselves freely in a networked world.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) proposes that the shaping of identity emanates from the meanings created in a world of symbols. Postmodern scholar Jean Baudrillard (1983) views the postmodern era as a time without meaning where a hyper-reality is created through the overloading of signs on individuals. Frederick Jameson (1991) describes a situation where access to the 'real' is ever more elusive due to the mediated nature of postmodern society. The fluid nature of identity allowed by postmodern ideas of its construction can be seen in a positive light as liberating, however this freedom also brings confusion and bewilderment (Hall et al, 1992). These ideas can be seen to tie in with ideas of consumption in a postmodern world- we consume different media in forming our own identities.

John B. Thompson argues that while all media forms play an important role in identity formation they are just one part of the story. 'Real life' and the

everyday continue in spite of the postmodern idea that all interaction occurs through mass media (Thompson, 1995). A practical manifestation of this can be seen in the results of a study carried out by Caroline Bassett (1997) into the Lambda Multi User Dungeon2. Being a virtual environment, *LambdaMOO* allows users the freedom to present themselves in any way imaginable. However Bassett's study showed that many users confined themselves to the socially accepted norms for their gender. Bassett found that while some anomalies existed gender stereotyping was the norm in this virtual world. Studies such as this would tend to reinforce Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' where there is an internalised set of characteristics established within an individual in early life often through the family unit relating to gender, class, morality and outlook. These are seen to be reproduced through generations of a family and influence decisions made by an individual throughout life (Moores, 1993: 122). This shift towards the conception that offline identity plays a profound role in the creation of an online identity has become more pronounced with the development of social network sites where users create profiles and interact with friends lists which often closely reflect offline relationships and networks. In the move from the content centric structures of online news groups towards the egocentricity of social network sites the focus becomes the individual and not shared topics of interest (boyd and Ellison, 2008). These sites tend to be used primarily to support offline social networks, to connect and maintain relationships with friends as opposed to meeting new people and therefore they become closely linked with life and identity offline. In his ethnographic research of *Facebook* use in Trinidad Daniel Miller discovered that use of this site provided a space where established friendships could be maintained and often enhanced. He viewed the site as providing scope for efficiencies in interpersonal relationships where intimacy could be created through online interactions using private messaging as effectively as face to face communication in certain situations.

2.7: Theoretical Approaches to technology

This section will address two paradigms of thought concerning the relationship between technology and society and its treatment in the research literature. Firstly I will explore technological determinism and secondly the social shaping of technology approaches.

2.7.1 Technological Determinism:

The first paradigm, technological determinism, is a theoretical approach to the relationship between technology and society which sets up a direct causal relationship between the two. Technological determinist perspectives view technologies as external to society, causing often significant change within society. Looking to history proponents of technological determinism emphasise how technological change played a major role in shaping or driving the various stages of history which society has moved through. Categorisation based on different ages of technology are often utilised as historical markers. In these conceptions of society, technologies are fore-grounded as that which defines an historical phase. The technological determinist view places technology at the central point of social change, the 'prime mover' of this change (McLuhan, 1964). In this paradigm technologies are viewed as the primary impetus in society while human factors and societal structures are viewed as secondary. The former are viewed as autonomous force acting outside society and human intervention.

In analyses of the relationship between technology and society two dominant trains of thought within the technological determinist framework are evident, namely utopian and dystopian perspectives. Utopian perspectives view technologies as changing society to the benefit of users, creating more close knit communities or greater access to information. Dystopian perspectives see technologies as having a negative effect, often viewing the permeation of technologies in society as effecting isolation, ignorance and surveillance societies. Both of these perspectives are present in debates surrounding the role of the Internet in society and of particular concern to

this thesis, the role of online social media. Technological determinism is a frequently encountered approach to the relationship between technology and society. Often featuring in mass media reports of technology and society, it also has a lineage in academic approaches to this relationship with influential contributions from McLuhan (1964), Toffler (1970), Negroponte (1995) and Kelly (1999).

Marshall McLuhan's 1960's work dealt with the then 'new' medium of television and satellites. He argued that print culture was becoming 'obsolescent' in the face of the rise of this electronic media. While dealing with what would now be described as the 'old' media of television McLuhan's techno-centric writing has found new application and popularity in addressing the impact of the internet and contemporary 'new' media formats in recent times. Wired magazine (US) proclaimed McLuhan their 'patron saint' when they began publication in the early 1990s and contemporary theorists such as Manuel Castells (1996, 2001) are influenced by his key ideas developed in the 1960s.

McLuhan saw technologies as 'extensions of ourselves' (McLuhan 1964: 7). Looking to history he saw that mechanical inventions extended human bodies spatially while technological innovations in the mid-20th Century extended the 'central nervous system' conflating 'space and time' (*ibid*). McLuhan's assertion here is that technologies have a profound impact on the way in which humans interact with and make sense of the world around them. This idea of conflation of time and space through technology (television at McLuhan's time of writing) is an example of the theoretical relevance of McLuhan's theory regarding more recent technological innovations relating to the internet and demonstrates why McLuhan is revered among internet theorists.

Another concept which McLuhan posits in *Understanding Media* (1964) is the idea of the 'global village'. This follows on from the assertion that electronic technologies conflate time and space. In global terms he sees contraction in

the scale of human relations wrought from the introduction of these technologies. Practices which once occurred at vast removes from each other now occur simultaneously across the globe. It is easy to see why this type of thinking would be adopted by theorists in relation to the internet.

Technologically determinist perspectives have particular resonance in accounts and analysis of the interaction between internet and society. There has been a renewal in technological determinist discourse around the role of technology in society (Morley, 2007). Morley views that in theorising new media, focus has often been on the technology, examining its characteristics and the changes it would affect in society. Phrases utilised in describing contemporary society reflect this thinking, for example The Digital Revolution, The Internet Age, The Digital Age. Commentators have argued that the arrival of digital media, and the internet in particular, will have profound effects on society, viewing the introduction of these technologies as sounding a death knell for older technologies such as television and radio and industries such as the news media (Negroponte, 1995).

In relation to this thesis, a technological determinist framework is problematic. This research is concerned with people and the everyday uses of technology rather than an analysis of the effects of technology on people. This research demands a more holistic framework which focuses on the everyday and how technology is enmeshed into everyday life. Therefore the privileging of technology in technologically deterministic accounts is incompatible with the aims of the current study.

2.7.2 Social Shaping of Technology:

As a challenge to technologically determinist perspectives, Social Shaping of Technology perspectives foreground the social, cultural or economic factors in shaping the origins, forms and applications of new technologies as well as the active role of users. Such critics of technocentric accounts assert that one must consider the societal factors which influence the development, release and usage of technologies in society (Williams, 1974; MacKenzie and

Wajcman, 1999; Kline and Pinch in MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999; Baym, 2010). Raymond Williams focuses on contextualising technology within historical, political and cultural factors. Social Shaping of Technology focuses on users, their perspectives on technology, the uses made of it and the social contexts in which it is embedded. Where Technological Determinism is techno-centric, social shaping of technology perspectives are socio-centric, privileging the user experience and social context over the technological.

Williams, a culturalist and viewed as one of the founding fathers of the cultural studies tradition, rebutted McLuhan's technological determinism in his monograph *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974). Here he problematised the causal relationship assumed by technological determinism, asserting that the forms and use of technologies is not just intrinsic to the technology itself, but dependent on social contexts of production and use. Human agency is the dominant concern in social shaping of technology perspectives and this concern is applied at all stages of a technology's life cycle from conception and design through to launch and use. In contrast to technological determinist perspectives which often view technological innovation as coming from an individual 'eureka' moment, social shaping of technology approaches see technology emerging from the interplay between a social need or interest and historical and cultural context. William's concerns centre on the reasons for technological development, the social, cultural and economic factors which influence them, and the ways in which technologies are utilised which may be at odds with the intended use or what technological determinists would see as the intrinsic use-value of a technology. An example of this can be seen in the rise in popularity of short messaging systems (SMS) in mobile telephony. What was included by manufacturers as an auxiliary application has since outstripped the use of mobile phones for voice calls among certain sectors of society.

One theory within the social shaping of technology approach developed by Wiebe Bijker and Trevor Pinch is the Social Construction of Technology

(Kline and Pinch in MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1999). This theory focuses on different social groups and how they can develop very different understandings and uses for the same technological artefact. The concept of 'interpretive flexibility' is central here and these variances in interpretation of the artefact can have profound influence on the developmental paths of the technology itself. Bijker and Pinch identify groups such as engineers, advertisers and consumers as influencers but also suggest that other groups can also have an influence over the development process. Interpretive flexibility is not entirely infinite and end points of closure and stabilisation do occur where one technology or use of a technology will take precedence. However there is scope for technologies to be revisited where the process of interpretive flexibility can start again after stabilisation. In this theory the social group is central to the interpretation, use and adoption of a technology. The success or failure of a technology among the public is not intrinsic to the technology itself but, in line with Social Shaping of Technology perspectives, it is dependent on the social context into which it is released.

The social shaping of technology approach is most relevant to this research. The focus of the research is on users of online social media and is concerned with the context of use. It does not take the examination of these technologies in isolation but as part of broader media consumption practices. The interest here lies in how people use, conceptualise and appropriate these technologies in their everyday lives and therefore a social shaping of technologies approach underpins the theoretical and empirical elements of the thesis.

2.8 Conclusion

Audience studies provide an insight into how media are introduced, utilised, ascribed meaning and assimilated into people's everyday lives. While digital media such as online social networks provide a space where audience members can communicate in new ways, share media content and become active in the creation of media texts there continues to be scope for audience studies researchers to examine how members of the public interact with media and create meaning from it. Utilising the theories and methodologies of the discipline can provide us with an insightful picture of the ways in which individuals utilise online social media in everyday life, especially in relation to the need for empirical research into the relationship between 'old' and 'new' media.

Studies of the consumption and contextualisation of technology in everyday life while growing in number are pursued with less frequency than studies into the production or content of technology. This is especially apparent in an Irish context. By placing this research within the social shaping of technology paradigm a much more sensitive or nuanced view of how individuals utilise technology in their everyday lives will be developed. The next chapter will explore theories of the public sphere.

Chapter Three: Theories of Citizenship and the Public Sphere

3.1: Introduction

This chapter will engage with debates surrounding the role of the internet and online social media in citizenship practices. Addressing three interconnecting concepts of citizenship, politics and the public sphere the aim of this chapter is to develop parameters through which to view the role of the media in citizenship practices.

Firstly the will examine literature surrounding citizenship, identifying changes which have occurred in the conceptions of what activities and relationships are encompassed within citizenship. This section will examine a number of theories which set out to define citizenship, from established definitions developed in the mid-twentieth century through to concepts which explore modes of citizenship in the digital age. Next the chapter will examine the role of media in enabling citizenship examining both traditional media and the internet. Finally the chapter will address Jurgen Habermas' conception of the public sphere looking at the historical development, criticisms and the potential for a renewed public sphere in an online environment. Throughout each section there will be a focus on the role of media in the facilitation of citizenship practices in the digital age.

3.2: Defining Citizenship

3.2.1: Citizenship as a set of rights

T.H. Marshall (1992) defined citizenship as a 'body of rights and duties, the status, which goes with full membership of a community or society'. Marshall presents three elements through which people articulate and engage with citizenship. The first element being the 'civil'; this encompasses the rights to individual freedoms which were established in law through the democratic

revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries. The second element is the political which includes the rights and duties of citizens to participate in the formation and decisions of governments. This manifests itself in emancipation movements of the late eighteenth century which sought the right to vote for the working classes, those who did not own land, and women.[12] Finally there is the social element which guaranteed economic security for people to become fully fledged citizens. This last phase developed during Marshall's time of writing, mid twentieth century Britain, and is articulated in the rise of the welfare state.

Marshall's description of citizenship is a teleological account of developments, from the drafting of laws which govern society in the revolutions of the eighteenth century, to the inclusion of disparate people through emancipation from the late 18th century to the early 20th century and finally to the provision of an economic minimum by the state allowing for the engagement of all people in citizenship activities from the mid-twentieth century. Developed in post-war Britain during the emergence of the welfare state, the model presents the three conceptions of citizenship as complete, each advancing from the previous. Liesbet Van Zoonen (2005) points to Marshall's conception as deficient in dealing with contemporary social formations. In the period since it was written, she argues that mass social movements dealing with issues such as civil rights, gender inequality and sexuality demonstrate that vast tracts of society continued to be denied elements of these civic, political and social elements of citizenship. It became apparent that within the British context which Marshall wrote citizenship was conceived along the hegemonic lines of what she refers to as 'male, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant'. These movements highlighted elements of citizenship which encompass the cultural.

3.2.2: Cultural Citizenship
Hermes (2005) views cultural citizenship as enacted at two levels; firstly in the high profile movements which demand cultural rights for disparate

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[12] For example the Chartist movement in Britain. In an Irish context Catholic Emancipation.

groups within society such as the gay community, religious rights and migrant communities. Secondly, in the more mundane practices of everyday life, Hermes sees another enactment of cultural citizenship through the consumption of popular culture. She sees the consumption of popular cultural texts as bound up in the way in which people make sense of the world they inhabit. Therefore in an academic context these texts become sites of exploration of 'social power relations, the role of governments, and regulation on the one hand, and cultural representation and meaning making on the other' (Hermes, 2005: 4).

Hermes points to the degradation of the nation state in the era of globalisation and the rise of individuality in a postmodern world, questioning what it is that binds us together as communities in this situation (see also Scannel, 1996; Scannell and Katz, 2009). Popular culture is viewed by Hermes (2005) as potentially playing a moralistic role in society, highlighting the norms and regulations by which 'good' citizens should lead their lives. This is evident in some of the moral dilemmas portrayed in formats such as soap operas and reality television, or in celebrity culture through the attachment of famous faces to political campaigns. Popular cultural forms such as these have been identified as providing a route to citizenship practices for the public.

Participation in discussions surrounding soap plotlines or issues raised by reality television are viewed as aiding in the development of discursive skills associated with citizenship whether this happens in an online or offline context (VanZoonen 2005; Coleman, 2006; Baym, 2000; Hill, 2005). In terms of reality television the act of voting for contestants on a programme such as Big Brother or X Factor can be argued to prepare individuals for the act of voting in a civic context. Conversely it is argued that this line of thought is highly idealistic, ascribing implications to the actions of viewers to these programmes which simply are not there (Postman, 1985; Corner, 1991).

3.2.3: Citizenship and Consumption

Consumption is another activity put forward as a form of citizenship; Janelle Ward (2010) develops a typology of citizen consumers which includes the 'Socially Conscious Consumer', 'The Critical Citizen-Consumer' and The 'Anti-Consumer'. Modes of consumption are thought of here as an expression of particular civic ideals held by citizens. In the first instance the 'Socially Conscious Consumer' is seen to utilise the consumption of various products as an expression of support for social campaigns such as Fair Trade, environmental and anti-animal testing. The purchase of products which support the ideologies of these movements is viewed as an expression of citizenship and a way to instigate social change through consumption. However it is argued that by limiting civic action to the purchase of goods the citizen in this case 'restricts social consciousness to her wallet, and her education to corporate messages' (Ward, 2010: 41). These types of citizenship practices are criticised, as big business adopts these societal trends, utilising them for marketing purposes and the ultimate goal of increasing sales. The 'Critical Citizen-Consumer' goes one step further than the 'Socially Conscious Consumer'. While purchasing is still utilised as a tool to express support for various issues here the individual will gather more information from a variety of sources to ensure they are not playing into the lure of a slickly constructed marketing campaign. The individual here may be involved in organisations which actively pursue corporations to be held accountable for claims they make about their products. This is viewed as a key area of engagement for younger generations which are often viewed as moving away en masse from traditional politics (Bennett, 2008). Through the use of the Internet and online social media national and trans-national groups can emerge with issues of corporate responsibility as their core focus. Finally there is The Anti-Consumer type which rejects consumer culture outright. Action here comes in the form of purchase abstinence and protesting against large corporations. The Anti-Consumer is viewed as highly critical of the presence and control of corporate advertising in cultural spaces (Ward, 2010). In examining orientation towards national government this

type of citizen-consumer sees governments as having negligible control over the actions of corporations. The potential role of online social media in this instance can provide a means to meet like-minded people online with a view to organising both street action in terms of protest but also coordinated efforts such as the 'Buy Nothing Day' or the development of a 'Freeconomy'.

3.3: Defining Politics

Central to any notion of politics is power, the power held by one group of people in a society over another. Bourdieu (1991) proposes an analysis of politics which posits that politics is constructed as a closed field with entry requirements which include education, training and social standing. He argues that through these entry requirements politics becomes a closed field producing 'an effect of censorship by limiting the universe of political discourse, and thereby the universe of what is politically thinkable' (Bourdieu, 1991: 172). This analysis illuminates the constructed character of the political, a quality which has been challenged by social movements throughout the 20th century introducing everyday life into the realm of the political, for example feminism and civil rights movements in the 1960s and more recently the gay rights movement. These social movements broaden the scope of what constitutes the political.

In terms of a definition of what can constitute a matter of public concern a distinction is drawn between 'politics' and 'the political' as outlined by Peter Dahlgren (2009). He views politics as an 'institutionalized arena where organized conflict takes place' (*ibid*: 90)namely within the party political system. The 'political' implies a broader scope for talk which can occur within the public realm, referring to 'civic talk' (*ibid*: 89). This conception of the political allows scope for the inclusion of the everyday discussions of individuals. Dahlgren sees the potential within this everyday talk to develop into a discussion of more public or politically tinged issues,

> From non-political conversation, the introduction of a topic
> that takes a proto-political turn, gains momentum and

becomes political, entering a public sphere. From there it might enter into the formal arena of full-fledged institutionalised politics.

Dahlgren, 2009: 100

Dahlgren's explication of the political in this sense allows for the inclusion of a variety of discussion topics which on the surface may not appear to deal with politics. He views everyday talk among citizens as having the potential to address the political, the challenge being to examine how this can be translated to the realm of politics. Dahlgren (2003) argues for an expansion of the definition of what is 'political' in order to expose new forms of civic participation previously perceived as outside the political realm.

In their book *Media Consumption and Public Engagement* (2007) Nick Couldry, Sonia Livingstone and Tim Markham put forward the idea of 'public connection' to frame their investigation into the role of media consumption in citizen's participation or 'orientation' towards public aspects of contemporary life. Public connection is defined as 'an orientation to *any* of those issues affecting how we live together that require common resolution' (Couldry et al, 2007: 6). The authors attempt to develop a theoretical frame which is inclusive of different definitions of the highly disputed terms 'politics' and 'public'. Their deliberate use of 'public' as opposed to 'political' connection in this work allows for a broader definition of politics outside traditional ideas which centre on electoral politics, permitting the authors to focus on respondents' activities and viewpoints at the empirical stage. In Couldry et al's (2007) view, the media is a key pathway to engagement for citizens in public arenas of contemporary life.

In dealing with the idea of the 'public' the authors retain the notion of the distinction between public and private areas and issues in contemporary life. However they do not discount movements which have challenged the 'naturalness' of the division between public and private. They cite the success of the feminist movement in particular in addressing this division with the

rally cry of "the personal is political". By dealing with this division in such a manner the authors subscribe to a view that while the location of this division is contestable it is a valid and useful division to maintain. They assert that 'matters for common decision could come from any space, whether normally accessible to public entry or not' (Couldry et al, 2007: 7). Therefore issues which require public discussion can emanate from either the public or private realms of life, allowing for the contest of the division between public and private. Couldry et al see that media institutions have been implicated in the delineation of the distinction between public and private in daily life. The authors' view that public connection defined as such requires more than 'social belonging or expressions of identity' (*ibid*: 6). In their view for democracy to function it needs a space, or at the very least an idea, that those individuals affected by the decisions of those in power can in some way participate in the discussion and the formation of those decisions. Therefore the retention of the division between public and private is necessary in the process of defining what issues can be deemed public and importantly those which cannot. The authors view public connection as encapsulating an orientation towards a public space of deliberation but not '*any* collective space whatsoever' (*ibid*: 7)

This definition is of relevance to this research in so far as it allows for the discovery of those public issues which are followed by participants in the empirical stage of this research. Utilising the notion of 'public connection' asserts the role played by the media in connecting citizens to public areas of contemporary society. This definition allows for the examination of a variety of issues of public concern which may exist outside of the traditional definitions of politics centring on the electoral, while at the same time maintaining a distinction between public and private issues.

3.4: Citizenship and the media

The internet is often characterised within debates surrounding politics and citizenship by its potential to affect change in relation to political apathy.

There are two predominant trains of thought with regards to this. Firstly, the internet is viewed as a potential site to reinvigorate participation in traditional forms of politics such as voting and party membership and secondly, as a site for the development of new forms of citizenship (Ward, 2010). The adoption of the technology by various political parties in the form of party websites, social media accounts and *Twitter* updates attests to the former. In relation to the latter the internet can be viewed as reflective of changes which have occurred in society such as globalisation, individualisation and the erosion of traditional boundaries of the nation state.

3.4.1: News Media

Joke Hermes (2006) paper *Citizenship in the Age of the Internet* is an interrogation of the historical origins of the idea of citizenship, its implications and the challenges it faces with the emergence of the participative potential presented by the internet. The historical centrality of news media, in particular the newspaper, to the idea of citizenship is examined. The decline in readership of newspapers in certain advanced industrial societies is viewed as a cause for alarm in relation to the existence, and perhaps persistence, of actual measures of citizenship and democracy (Hermes, 2006). Central to notions of an informed citizenry, the newspaper was from the mid-eighteenth century seen as central to the establishment of a well informed citizenry and the functioning of democracy; the "fate and quality of democracy is in the hands of the reading public" (Hermes, 2006: 296). The notion of a 'reading public' can be seen, in the context of the eighteenth century especially, to promote the educated upper middle and higher classes as citizens thus excluding the uneducated. With declining readership and viewership of news media the limited notion of the citizen as solely informed of important public events by the news media, is seen by Hermes to be in need of interrogation and revision. Coupled with this is the apparent democratisation of media technologies and an increase in possibilities for citizen's participation in the production of news. Hermes sees

this as occurring with the increase in involvement of citizens or ordinary people in news media for example through the use of vox pop, letters to the editor and the inclusion of content produced by viewers, for example video footage of news events (*ibid*).

In examining the involvement of citizens in the news media Hermes sees, from a cultural studies perspective, that rather than creating an empowered citizenry, news media often frame participants as victims, bystanders or witnesses. Their role is descriptive and often portrays the emotions attached to an event; they are not engaged in giving political opinions relating to events or in connecting singular events to the wider structures of society (Hermes, 2006). This leads to what could be seen as an illusion of participation, something which Sara O'Sullivan (1997) viewed as a predominant feature of talk radio shows, a space where personal opinions can and are aired and discussed but, ultimately have no influence over the functions and actions of the political elite. These instances of inclusion can be seen as a cathartic public forum devised by those in power to give a false sense of involvement in the discussion and in subsequent government actions to the citizen.

Hermes describes the ideal relationship between governments and their citizens as one of 'responsibility and trust'. In the context of post-industrial capitalist society Hermes considers this type of relationship as near impossible, viewing one of the main aims of government as promoting its own hegemony. This is aided by the permeation of individualistic neo-liberal rhetoric in society, which in turn allows a space for political disengagement. The citizen is viewed as a social construct which maintains power relations between the political elites and the masses. Hermes refers here to 'media citizenship' a concept developed by John Hartley (1996: 62) whereby new forms of media technology and popular culture can be seen as enabling citizenship, as valid sites of knowledge production and consumption. The internet can be seen as a key site where this division can be bridged, here many disparate groups are formed around a plethora of interests.

Hermes notes that whether communities are established around fictional television texts, gaming or political beliefs many participate in discussions revolving around major events of public importance (Hermes, 2006). Of importance in this instance is the emergence of groups which defy locality, groups of people who have shared interests in particular popular cultural texts, but may have highly disparate views on politics, and are engaging in these discussions, facilitating new practices of citizenship. These online platforms for discussion are significant in that they exist outside of the traditional fora of political discussion or as Hermes puts it 'outside the in-crowd domain that politics still is' (Hermes, 2006: 306). There is an apparent disconnect between these technologies and the actions of those in power, however Hermes sees this as the challenge for both democracy and citizens. Advances must be made within elites to broaden their perspective of an informed citizen out from traditional views which hold the newspaper as central, to one which includes these new expressions of citizenship in contexts which can be seen as at a remove from traditional politics.

I see Hermes' work as useful in the context of this research as she includes notions of popular culture as sites of political engagement, which can generate debate among citizens in the digital domain. Again there is the idea of bridging the divide between traditional definitions of politics and the actions of citizens in the digital domain. There is a sense that citizenship is being expressed in a variety of ways through different media forms and there is a need to be inclusive of these.

3.4.2: Popular Culture and Entertainment Media

Liesbet Van Zoonen (2005) describes contemporary popular culture as epitomised by entertainment formats and posits that for politics to maintain relevance to citizens it must embrace the popular media formats of the age. Examples abound of political/entertainment crossovers within contemporary society; from fictional portrayals of politics in series such as *The West Wing* and *Spin City*, to the use of celebrity figureheads to raise awareness for various social movements and on to the use of popular media

in political campaigns, for example coverage of the Obama family in tabloid magazines in the United States of America both during and after the 2008 election campaign. Online social networking sites being a major element of popular media consumption in contemporary society cannot be ignored as sites of political/popular crossover. Political parties now utilise these sites to connect with voters, citizens can establish and join groups centring on a variety of public issues and space is provided for discussion. These attributes demonstrate the potential to provide a space for public discussion. Van Zoonen (2004) posits that entertainment media can also play a role in the development of skills associated with participation in the public sphere as well as providing an entry point to discussion. Her work rests within a culturalist approach examining different practices and subjectivities within cultural texts which enable civic participation among audience members. In this research Van Zoonen's work serves to expand the conceptions of citizenship and the sites or media texts which can be sources for citizenship practices.

In looking at the similarities in the experience of consuming popular culture and politics John Street points towards the emotional aspects which are common to both seemingly disparate genres. He sees that popular culture elicits highly emotive responses from its audience, we become involved in the trials and tribulations of dramatic characters, songs can give us the reference points for certain emotions and above all interaction with popular texts has an identity-forming possibility which can lead to the development of political interest and action (Street, 1997). Liesbet Van Zoonen shares this hypothesis identifying a number of areas in which similarities have been noted between fan communities and political party membership. Focusing on reality television Van Zoonen (2001) poses the argument that skills learned through engagement with popular cultural texts such as discussion around events and voting practices on reality television shows could be transferable to the political sphere (see also Coleman, 2006). Structurally both are based around performance, whether this is that of a politician or an on-screen contestant.

The activities involved in each genre, which Van Zoonen identifies as concerned with knowledge, participation and the imagination of alternatives are also seen as common to both. Finally she identifies the emotional investment of the audience or community member in each case, punctuated with moments of anxiety, excitement and habitation as central to the experience of both reality television and politics (VanZoonen, 2001). Van Zoonen sees the entertainment industry and its coverage of politics as vital to keeping the democratic process alive for the citizens of the 'entertainment age'. It is a pervasive medium which can aid in the promotion of the skills associated with political engagement. Stephen Coleman (2006) also identified the practices involved in participating in a reality television show such as weekly voting and participation in discussion as relevant to the political system in so far as they familiarise the audience with practices associated with and vital to politics.

In dealing with the question of whether or not entertainment and celebrity media can lead to meaningful engagement with politics Nick Couldry and Tim Markham in their paper "Celebrity culture and public connection: Bridge or chasm?" (2007) focus on a group of people identified in their study *Media Consumption and Public Connection* (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007) who followed celebrity news predominantly. The authors explore the debate within cultural studies which sees entertainment in the form of celebrity culture as a new path towards engagement with public issues on one hand and the idea that this cannot lead to meaningful engagement with politics on the other. In the course of their investigation into the links between media consumption practices and connection to public issues the authors examined the connection between celebrity and public connection. They asked respondents whether they felt that celebrity culture had an impact on their connection with politics and public issues. Respondents aligned themselves with the more traditional view that sees celebrity as trivial and having little to do with the weighty issues of the political realm. The authors are left to wonder whether there is a case of 'academic illusion'

at play in the idea that media genres such as celebrity, soap operas and entertainment can play a role in the development of public engagement (Couldry and Markham, 2007: 410).

I would posit the argument that this thinking could relate to the belief among participants that political information cannot be gained through entertainment sources, emanating from their position within the modernist political system, especially the dominant liberal perspective which privileges the traditional definition of politics as that of the party, and more 'serious' media genres such as newspapers and news programming as an exclusive entrance into political engagement. This research intends to examine this question in further depth focusing on the uses of social networking sites in Ireland questioning the types of content discussed online with the view to establishing the role of this media format in the development of participation in the public sphere.

3.5: Building a classification of citizenship practices for the purposes of this research

Turning to this research it is important to set up the parameters for the types of citizenship practices that will be included. Following on from recent studies carried out by Ofcom in the UK (2009) and the Taskforce for Active Citizenship in Ireland (2007) a set of activities associated with citizenship have been established for the purposes of this study. Firstly connection with citizenship in the realm of traditional conceptions of politics will be included. This will encompass a range of activities from voting and political party membership to establishment of an informed citizenry through knowledge of party policies and actions traditionally associated with news consumption. Secondly will be modes of citizenship involving discussion and engagement with social issues. Thirdly the participation in community based activities for example volunteerism, community campaigning, signing petitions, protesting and boycotting of certain products. For the purposes of this research the

focus will be placed on the extent to which media, particularly online social media, facilitate these types of activity.

Utilising these conceptions and critiques of citizenship I take an expansive notion of what can be classified as citizenship practices. This covers a spectrum from what could be described as electoral or party politics to non-electoral.

Table 3.1: Classification of citizenship practices

Party/electoral Politics	*Issue based politics*	*Consumption*	*Cultural Citizenship*
Voting	Membership of campaign group	Boycotts of certain products	Displaying membership to cultural groups
Member of political party	Membership of supranational campaign group e.g. Greenpeace, WWF, Amnesty	Buying products associated with particular movements e.g. organic, fair trade etc	Displaying ideological stances through popular culture-online posts, music preferences etc
Lobbying political parties and government	Participation in campaigning on specific issues	Buy Local	Campaigning for identity/cultural equality e.g. gender, sexuality etc
Keeping up to date with current affairs	Participating in public protests relating to specific issues		Sharing ceremonial media events
Knowledge of electoral system	Signing petitions		Taking part in local community groups (providing a sense of the collective in society)

(Source: Present author)

Table 3.4 above outlines the set of activities associated with citizenship established for the purposes of this study. This table is utilised in the

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empirical stages of the research to identify participants' conceptions and practices of citizenship in their everyday life.

Within this set of citizenship practices there are two activities which are of particular interest in this research associated with the use of online social media. These are information-seeking and discursive practices. The following table outlines the types of activity which will be examined in relation to the citizenship practices put forward in the previous section.

Table 3.2: Information-seeking and discursive practices

Information Seeking	*Discursive Practices*
News consumption	Discussions on/offline with friends and family
Seeking information on specific issues on/offline	Participation in public discussion on/offline
'Lurking' or 'listening' behaviours online: forums, blogs, OSM discussions	Dahlgren's Civic Talk where discussions develop from popular culture or personal experience into discussions of the political
Following actions of particular campaigns and organisations	Sharing information online e.g. news reports, actions, event invitations, music, satire etc.

(Source: Present author)

In relation to these information seeking and discursive practices this research seeks to examine where these activities occur both online and offline and what the role of online social media for participants is in these areas.

3.6: The Public Sphere

The internet has been heralded as a space where Habermas' ultimate vision of the public sphere can be realised, offering citizens greater opportunity to

engage in discussions and action, relating to issues of public concern. Within this research the conception of the public sphere emerges from Habermasian theory as a space where a collective of private individuals can gather to share information and ideas and engage in debate surrounding matters of public concern. This research examines the extent to which online social media are utilised by members of the public to engage in public discussion.

Habermas saw the bourgeois society of the late 17th and 18th centuries as providing a model for the ideal public sphere where issues relating to the state and public policies could be discussed in accordance with Kantian ideals of procedural rationality.[13] Utopian perspectives view the Internet as having the potential for the enhanced provision of such a space where people can construct their identity independently of their demographic profile, providing a potential for debate to take place irrespective of the social situations of the individuals involved (Benkler, 2006; Negroponte, 1995; Turkle, 1996). A key question here is how and if the Internet and online social media in particular are utilised for participation in public life. In this section I will explore conceptions of the public sphere with the aim of establishing a working definition for this study which will encapsulate the mediation of the public sphere in contemporary Irish society.

3.6.1 Habermas and conceptions of the public sphere

The idea of the public sphere originates in the era of the Enlightenment and its project to promote the use of reason and critical debate in the pursuit of understanding the world. Writers in this period such as Kant promoted a mode of scientific examination and critical discourse which moved away from older traditions such as belief in a higher being or superstitions. Kant is credited with the origins of the idea of 'procedural rationality' (Calhoun

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[13] Immanuel Kant was an eighteenth century philosopher of the Enlightenment era, an era that is associated with the development of radical ideas relating to humans and their interaction with the world around them. At a time in Europe where feudalism and tyranny were the norm Enlightenment thinkers presented the seeds of modern day democracy, capitalism and indeed Liberalism. (Hall et al 1996, p4). Procedural rationality refers to the idea that where discussions take place the emphasis would be on the strength of an argument as opposed to a person's social status and background.

1992: 2) where discussions of issues would take place with the emphasis being on the strength of an argument as opposed to a person's status or background. This idea can be seen as influential to Habermas's construction of the public sphere as a space where discussion could flourish freely. In his book *Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere* (1962; 1989 translation) Jurgen Habermas performs an historical investigation into the changes which have occurred within the public sphere in the centuries since the seeds of democracy were sown. Translated into English in 1989 Habermas' seminal work gained momentum, and was utilised as a central source for many studies which examine the role of the media in connecting private citizens to the public arenas of life.

Fig: 3.1 Structure of Habermas' public sphere. Adapted from Habermas, 1962/1989 p: 30
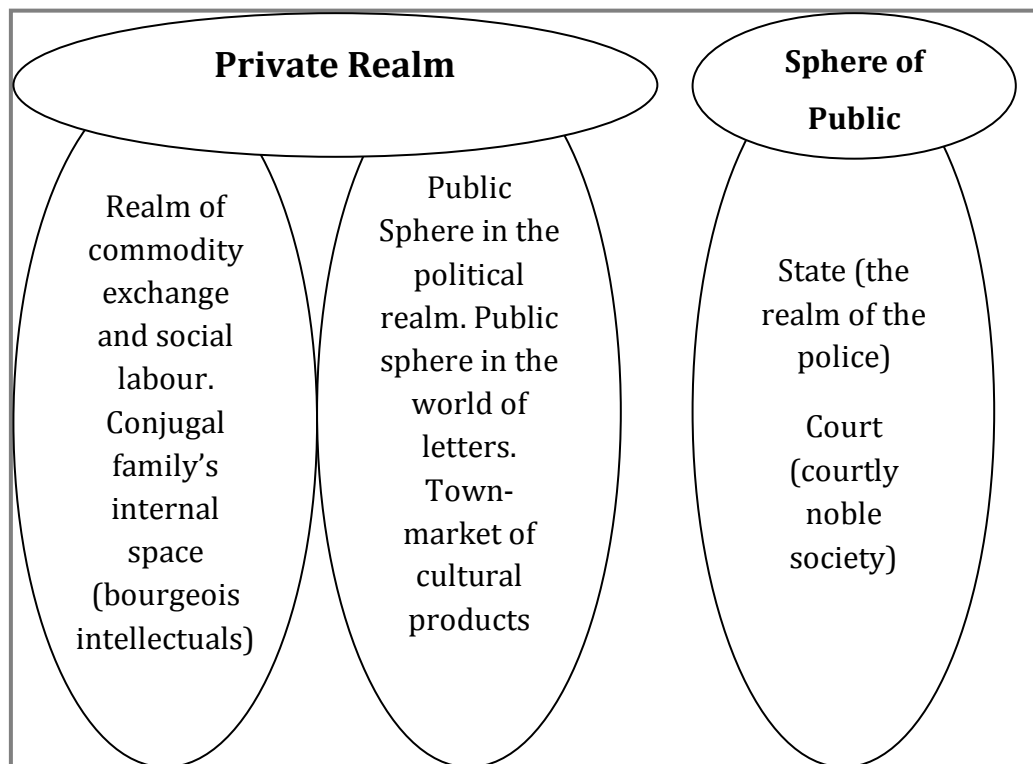
Habermas tends to idealise the public sphere of the 17th and 18th centuries in his work, but what were the characteristics of this sphere and what attracted Habermas to it? He defines the public sphere as "the public of *private* individuals who join in debate of issues bearing on state authority" (Calhoun, 1992: 7). The origins of this idea can be seen to stretch back as far as Classical

Greece. [14] The Grecian model of a public sphere coupled with Immanuel Kant's idea of 'procedural rationality' can be seen as the foundations of Habermas's formulation of the public sphere. This ancient model of the public sphere resurfaced during the Renaissance period and Habermas sees this template for society as surviving in some form through the Enlightenment to the emergence of contemporary democratic society. [15]

That democracy and citizenship requires the provision of a space where citizens could gather and discuss public issues continues to be drawn on in much of the literature concerning the potential for the Internet to play a role in the strengthening of citizenship and democracy (VanZoonen and Hirzalla, 2011; Dahlgren, 2009; Couldry et al, 2007; Rheingold, 2000). In the Internet age the potential to establish a forum of this type of public sphere may well be more possible than ever before.

In relation to this research Habermas' concept of the public sphere becomes an ideal reference point within which to examine the use of online social media in an Irish context. These sites provide spaces where discussion can take place. They are spaces which have the potential for groups of private individuals to come together and examine the actions of public figures. However it would be naive to posit that this type of discussion is taking place. There is the potential for social networks to become spaces of debate and discussion but in the use of social networking sites does discussion of the political go beyond the membership of the variety of public issue groups that can be joined on *Facebook*? In this research I investigate the types of discussion being engaged in online by participants aged 25 to 30 years old to

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[14] In the Greek instance society was demarcated along lines of the state (*polis*) and the private realms of free citizens (*idia*) and also public life (*bios politicos*) and home life (Habermas, 1962 (1989 translation): 3). The public sphere in the Greek sense was formed on the basis of discussion where heads of households could engage in discussions of all aspects of public life. Their status as the head of a household was the criterion for gaining entry to the public sphere, there were elitist barriers however, with wealth being a major factor. A person having wealth but no status as a master of a household would not gain entry to the public sphere (*ibid*).

[15] See addemndum one for further description and historical contextualisation of Habermas' conception of the public sphere.

examine how, and indeed if, these sites can be viewed as a contemporary form of public sphere.

3.6.2: Fragmentation of the public sphere

The media, and new media in recent times, have been charged with contributing to the fragmentation of the public sphere. The dissemination of vast amounts of information in a variety of genres and of questionable quality is often viewed as acting as a distraction to citizens and corrosive to the public sphere. The structure of the home as a private space can be seen to have become increasingly permeable through the use of media technologies; the public sphere has infiltrated this once perceived private space as its inhabitants have gained power to influence events within the public sphere through the use of ICTs.

In his studies of television and its audiences in the 1970s and 1980s Morley saw the manifestation of this change in the geography of social life and relations between citizen and state. He sees television's functions as twofold both structuring domestic life through the ritual of viewing and also linking the private realm of the viewer or family unit with a wider national community. For example Morley identified the role of shared media experiences such as football finals and royal weddings, in a British context, as contributing to the project of nation building through the creation of the imagined community of British citizens (Morley, 1996). In an Irish context a manifestation of this could be seen in the daily Angelus broadcasts on RTÉ, giving structure to the day and also recalling or reinforcing historical religious aspects of nation building.

In terms of more recent ICT development, new forms of social reality emerge where national, regional and cultural boundaries are breaking down and the technology is the only boundary remaining, the impact of this being that technology allows for new forms of social reality whereby shared experience is permitted across thousands of kilometres (Morley, 1996). With the advent of more globalised media distribution this can be seen on a larger scale

across countries and continents. In a globalised context do people disregard the national and focus on the international? In terms of this research it will be imperative to examine how online social media sites are utilised for discursive activities linked with citizenship at both national and supra-national levels.

The united public sphere envisaged by Habermas (1962, 1989 English translation) may have given way in the 'information age' to arenas of public debate which are based on the discussion of shared interests and the sharing of information. Todd Gitlin hypothesises on the fragmentation of the public sphere into a collection of 'public sphericules' made up of a variety of interest groups (Gitlin, 1998). He sees the development of computer technology and in particular the personal computer and the internet as contributing to the emergence of these atomised interests. Public discussion can be seen to take on local and personal issues and display them to the world. These developments can be seen as creating a sense of a 'globally interconnected world' relating Marshall McLuhan's conception of the 'global village' (McLuhan, 1964). The structure of this online mediascape is problematic, here niche audiences are defined quite rigidly and content tailored and directed accordingly. Within this type of environment the chances for the development of a unified arena of discussion are slim. While online social media often enable the easy development of distinct interest groups it is unclear whether the emergence of a multitude of publics can lead to the creation of a singular public defined by Gitlin as:

> "an active democratic encounter of citizens who reach across their social and ideological differences to establish a common agenda of concern and to debate rival approaches"

> (Gitlin, 1998: 173)

In terms of the media consumed in contemporary society and its relation to the public sphere there is a perceived danger that in the creation of highly distinct niches of interest there can be a cocooning effect, wrapping oneself in

areas of one's own passions and interest with little exposure to alternative viewpoints and debate, which could eventually manifest in the loss of a sense of the 'imagined community' (Anderson, B, 1991) of the nation.

3.6.3: Dahlgren's conception of the online public sphere

Dahlgren (2005, 2009) conceptualises a public sphere constituted of three elements: structures, representation and interaction.

Structures

This element of the public sphere for Dahlgren includes the institutional elements contained within it. Primarily he views media institutions as forming this element and cites the importance of aspects relating to these institutions, their 'political economy, ownership, control, regulation, financing and as well as the legal frameworks defining the freedoms of – and constraints on – communication' (Dahlgren, 2005, p:149). These factors affect the mode of operation of the media within the public sphere in a particular state. For example, the presence of public service broadcasters or a prevalence of commercial media companies would provide different types of media coverage to the public sphere. At a broader level the mode of operation of the state and its political institutions in relation to freedom of speech provide the context within which the media operate, influencing communication formats as well as the information transmitted. In relation to the internet this structural element of the public sphere has an impact on the configuration of public communication spaces online relating to 'legal, social, economic, cultural, technical and even Web-architectural features' (Dahlgren, 2005, p: 149). The configuration of these factors has an impact on the levels of accessibility of the online environment for civic uses.

Representation

The representational element of the public sphere encompasses media output. Here Dahlgren includes the output of mass media and that of, what he refers to as, the 'minimedia'. The former encompasses the output across media platforms aimed at the mass of the population while the latter includes the production of content aimed at specific groups such as newsletters and

promotional material. In an online context the representational element of the public sphere is viewed by Dahlgren as important especially as online communication has become increasingly prevalent as part of the media environments inhabited by citizens. He sees the need to address questions of 'fairness, accuracy, completeness, pluralism of views, agenda setting, ideological tendencies [and] modes of address' (Dahlgren 2005, p:149) in relation to representation in online output.

Interaction

Finally the third element of the public sphere presented by Dahlgren is that of interaction. Referring to the work of Habermas (1962) and Dewey (1927) who viewed publics as constituted through the act of discussion and talk and should not constituted solely as media audiences. Interaction in discursive environments is where publics are viewed as created, fostered and maintained. Dahlgren states:

> It is imperative not to lose sight of the classic idea that democracy resides, ultimately, with citizens who engage in talk with each other. This is certainly the basic premise of those versions of democratic theory that see deliberation as fundamental.
> (Dahlgren, 2005, p: 149)

Interaction is seen by Dahlgren to occur in two ways; firstly in citizens' consumption, processes of meaning making and use of media texts and secondly through interpersonal communication, from a two way conversation to a more formalised group meeting. The interaction element of the public sphere addresses the actions of citizens in their everyday life, it is expansive including small informal and larger scale organised interaction.

In relation to the online public sphere Dahlgren identifies five online sectors which take on this role for members of the public presented in figure 3.3 below.

Table 3.3: Dahlgren's classification of the online public sphere

Domain	Characteristics	Examples
Pre - or proto - political domain	The focus of this domain can be on any topic or theme. It gives expression to common interests, social relations and identities.	Personal websites Organisational websites Blogs Webcasting Discussion/chat forums
Journalism Domain	Includes editorial and opinion pieces as well as mainstream news reporting.	Online presence of major news organisations Net – based news organisations Alternative news organisations Online opinion magazines Current – affairs oriented blogs
Advocacy Domain	Populated by well established organisations and groups who generate political communication whose aim is to shape public opinion and influence decision makers within society.	Traditional parliamentary political parties Interest groups (corporate and otherwise)
Alternative Activist domain	Includes less well established civic networks and grassroots movements with less hierarchical structures. Interventionist and more militant political expression.	New social movements Single – issue activist groups
Manifestations of e-government	Online spaces where government at any level interact with citizens	Civic discussion sites e-voting sites Information sites

(Source: this author adapted from Dahlgren, 2009 p: 166-169)

This research focuses on this interactive element of the public sphere, specifically the interaction of participants as citizens in online contexts. Dahlgren notes a move within public sphere theory towards an idea of a 'network model'. Highlighting Habermas' updates to his public sphere perspective (1996, 2006) which, while not solely dealing with the internet,

present a more complex public sphere including 'over-lapping spaces, and cris-crossing media and interaction' (Dahlgren, 2009: 158). This research examines these areas in the case study presented in Chapter 9 which explores the use of online social media for information seeking and discursive practices by participants.

3.7: Conclusion

The examination of literature surrounding citizenship identifies changes which have occurred in conceptions of what activities and relationships can be encompassed by the term.

Habermas' ideal public sphere provides an overarching frame and a set of ideals with which to examine the use of online social media in an Irish context. These sites provide spaces where discussion can take place which have the potential for groups of private individuals to come together and examine the actions of public figures. As stated earlier it would be naive to presume that this is the type of discussion taking place, there is potential for online social media to become spaces of debate and discussion but the locations and participants in such online debate warrant investigation. This research brings together a number of fields of enquiry which address the role of media in participants' understandings and practice of citizenship. It calls to question and examines the role of online social media in these practices, especially in relation to the Irish context, a setting to whose specificities we now turn.

Chapter Four: Contextualising this Research: Ireland 2008-2012

4.1: Introduction

This chapter provides contextual information for this research which took place in Ireland between 2008 and 2011, a tumultuous period for the country both socially and economically. The following sections focus on six areas areas relating to Irish society pertinent to this research; 20th Century modernising policies, citizenship and community, education, the 'Celtic Tiger' economy, Irish 25 to 30 year olds and ICT adoption

It is pertinent at this point to define the Ireland to which this research refers. As a country with a colonial past it is important to note the definitions which circulate regarding the classification of Ireland, the Island of Ireland, The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to name three. In this research the Ireland to which I refer to is the Republic of Ireland, the 26 counties presided over politically by the Oireachtas[16] in Dublin. In setting out the parameters for this study I chose to examine experiences of online social media use within this period of turmoil in the Republic of Ireland referred to throughout this thesis as Ireland.

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[16] The Oireachtas is the national parliament of Ireland. It consists of the President of Ireland or Uachtarán na hÉireann and the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Houses of the Oireachtas are the upper and lower houses of parliament in Ireland, Seannad Éireann and Dáil Éireann respectively.

4.2: Historical Precedence: Mid 20th Century modernising policies in Ireland

As is the case with many countries emerging out of colonisation, when independence was achieved in Ireland in 1922 the government strove to reconstruct the country's identity and history from those imposed by a long standing colonial power, Britain (Barry, 1995). This manifested itself in the development of an identity which was distinctly un-British[17]. Early governments made use of the Gaelic language, agriculture, religion, sport, protectionist economic policies and neutrality to differentiate the country from Britain, often in the long run to the detriment of its citizens. By the 1950s the majority of Irish people were uneducated and living in poverty under the illusion that their situation reflected the true Irish identity (Watson, 2003). Many of these ideas of a traditional Ireland were dated and Victorian in relation to developments in the rest of the world. The protectionist economic policies, which saw Ireland through World War Two, did not encourage growth. Unemployment and emigration continued to be huge problems; between 1945 and 1961 500,000 people emigrated from a stunted agricultural economy (Ferriter, 2005). The economy had not developed industrially unlike its global counterparts who now operated under free trade conditions. Specific versions of traditional views were encouraged by the State and Catholic Church, for example equating womanhood with motherhood and sex with sin (Lee, 1979). Ireland was living in a Victorian time warp, right up to the 1950s, as the rest of the world became more liberal and advanced industrially. There was a mass rejection of rural life arising from economic necessity and many emigrated abroad or migrated to urban areas (Brown, 2004). People rejected the Irish language seeing it as old fashioned and a liability for those who were emigrating mainly to English speaking areas (Brown, 2004). External influences, which had been so doggedly rejected by church and state, became accessible to the

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[17] An earlier manifestation of this can be seen in the Gaelic Revival movement of the 19th Century when culture was used to establish a distinctly Irish identity.

public through the mass media. The people were becoming disillusioned with a state which could not provide for them, the dream of a rural populace happy with their 'frugal comforts'[18] (Coogan, 2004) was deteriorating.

A number of events, which occurred at the end of the 1950s, had great influence on what is often viewed as the progressive era of the 1960s. These included developments in economics with the publication of TK Whitaker's *White Paper on Economic Development* in 1958 and the retirement of Eamon DeValera as Fianna Fáil party leader in 1959. Whitaker's paper signalled a major redirection in the state's economic policy. It acknowledged the need to implement changes to rectify problems of emigration and the undeveloped economy (Coogan, 2004). The report identified free trade as a means to build an economy that could sustain the country. Industry would be encouraged with an emphasis on attracting foreign companies to Ireland. This reversed the ideas of previous governments who had espoused the importance of self-sufficiency and independence from British markets. It was now realised that these policies had created an Ireland which was isolated and gripped by poverty.

In 1959 Eamon DeValera retired as Fianna Fáil party leader. His influence on Irish society had been astounding, having spent much of the previous two decades in office. His retirement led to the rise of what were viewed as younger, more liberal and internationally orientated politicians such as Séan Lemass and T.K. Whitaker. As Taoiseach, Lemass implemented T.K. Whitaker's Programmes for Economic Development and promoted self examination of the State. Information became of vital importance; the role of the Central Statistics Office (CSO) became crucial to a society who now had to look to themselves for answers to their problems, as they could no longer blame an imperial power or global economy for setbacks (Keogh, 1994).

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[18] Quotation from Taoiseach DeValera's St Patrick's Day radio speech in 1943 commonly referred to as '*The Ireland That We Dreamed Of*'.

Another important social institution to experience change was the Catholic Church. From the days of the emancipation struggle to their influence over the government of the Free State, it has been difficult to distinguish Church from State. Indeed even written into the 1937 constitution was the 'special' role of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The church had influence over many areas of government policy including censorship and family legislation. We need only look to the rejection of Dr. Noel Browne's Mother and Child Scheme in the 1950's to see the influence of the Catholic Hierarchy (Ferriter, 2005).

For the first fifty years of independence, Ireland was characterised by the censorship enforced by successive governments. Groups such as the Vigilance Association and the Christian Brothers saw the establishment of the Free State government as an opportunity to realise their aims to stem the 'tide of foreign newspapers, magazines and motion pictures' that were entering the country (Horgan, 2001: 12). Following on from their requests the Minister for Justice Kevin O'Higgins set up the Committee on Evil Literature which led to the enactment of the 1929 Censorship of Publications Act (Horgan, 2001). This act had tremendous repercussions for literature, film, theatre and media in Ireland. Any publications with reference to contraception were banned further isolating Irish people from the outside world. Indeed as plans to liberalise the censorship laws in the 1960s emerged Archbishop John McQuaid told the National Film Institute that the people of Ireland needed to be "protected from the public activities of those who neither accept nor practice the natural and the Christian moral law" (Whyte, 1980: 345). The act remained unaltered until 1967 when Brian Lenihan enacted changes which saw the use of film certification by the Censorship Appeal Board and the removal of a ban on a book after twenty years (Whyte, 1980). These changes were only possible because of changes in both government and church which saw the emergence of many younger politicians and clerics with more liberal outlooks.

With increased freedom of speech and greater access to information people began to question the church's teachings, and the changes introduced by the Vatican II council left many people confused about these teachings. Modern ideas of the family differed from the church's, marriage rates increased but many families had fewer children, indicating the 'unholy' use of contraception (Keogh, 1994). The role of women also began to change, and with increased access to education women would begin to look for careers outside the home. There were also calls for equal wages for men and women in the workplace (Ferriter, 2005). Lemass tried to distance the State from the church (Keogh, 1994), indeed the government's revised focus on advancement through material gain contravened the church's teachings of advancement though worldly deeds.

4.3: The rise and fall of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy

One influential and enduring image of Ireland is that of a rural idyll, green fields undulate towards settlements of close knit communities where back doors remain unlocked, neighbours are friends and children are free to play outside without fear. The development of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy and its subsequent fall brought seismic changes to the way life is lived in Ireland. From modes of work and interpersonal relationships, there is a sense that the everyday life of Ireland's citizenry has changed utterly (Inglis, 2008).

The Irish economy expanded rapidly between 1990s and early years of the 21st Century. It was held up globally as a model of neo-liberal open market success. The development of an open economy and the subsequent globalisation here were viewed to erode characteristics intrinsic to Irish identity and traditional ways of living. The years between the late 1990s and early 2000s were a period of rapid economic change in this peripheral European state where the outward looking economic plans of governments in the 1960s and 1970s manifested in a reality beyond their wildest dreams. Once described by *The Economist* in a special issue on Ireland as the 'poorest of rich nations' (1988), Ireland was later described by the same publication

as 'Europe's shining light' (1996). There were also figures to back this up, measuring levels of GDP in 2004, Ireland was in third position with a GDP per person of $48,250, beaten only by Norway and Luxembourg to the top position on the *Economic Intelligence Unit's* ranking of global economies (Ferriter, 2005). This figure represents the seismic shift that had occurred in Ireland's financial fortunes. From the doldrums of recession in the 1980s when the population were told they were living beyond their means in a televised address to the nation by then Taoiseach Charles Haughey[19], the Celtic Tiger economy brought with it wealth which the country had not experienced before. However, this extraordinary GDP ranking was hiding the realities of the economic situation, which were better illustrated through the GNP figure for the same period. The GNP measured the income for people living in Ireland in 2004 at $39, 565, consequentially the ranking drops to 17th on the richest country charts (Inglis, 2008). This difference is attributed to the status of Ireland as a tax haven for multinational corporations and their channelling of profits through the country.

Growth was initially driven by foreign direct investment (FDI) in the pharmaceutical and information technology industries with multinational companies setting up light manufacturing plants in various locations around the country. Attracted by low corporation tax rates and relatively light regulation corporations from these industries set up European headquarters in Ireland. Other pull factors often associated with this investment by successive Irish governments were the availability of an educated workforce, an English speaking population and access to EU markets. There was gradual move from light manufacturing towards a 'knowledge economy' with employment opportunities in information and communication technologies increasing. There was a move towards more specialised positions within IT

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[19] In a televised speech two weeks before the budget delivered on the 28th February 1980 The then Taoiseach Charles Haughey addressed the public in reference to the economy and the recession. He declared that "as a community we are living a way beyond our means". (A videoof the speech is available at: http://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1333-memorable-budgets/1337-budget-1980/336279-a-ministerial-broadcast-by-an-taoiseach/)

such as programming, software engineering, sales and customer support roles as well as the international financial sector (Share et al, 2007).

With the rise of Web 2.0 multinational companies such as *Google*, *Facebook* and *LinkedIn* established international and European headquarters in Ireland, again the government attributed these acquisitions to the education system and English speaking population, however it has become increasingly apparent that the low corporation tax rate remains a key incentive to foreign investors here as multinational corporations funnel international pre tax profits through the Irish system from bases around the world. The 'Celtic Tiger' economy was based on a development policy implemented by the government to attract multinational corporations to these shores through the provision of a low corporation tax. High tech companies in industries such as electronics, computing and pharmaceuticals set up bases in Ireland attracted by the low corporation tax rate, an English speaking population, an educated workforce and an entry point into European markets through Ireland's EU membership, our status as a Eurozone country from 2001 cemented further the advantages of an Irish base (Ferriter, 2005). The buoyancy in the economy was accompanied by the development of commercial spaces for consumerism, investment in infrastructural projects (most often funded by the EU or public private partnerships) and investment in the arts and culture.

In September 2008 Lehman Brothers Bank collapsed, it was the first bank to fall in what was to be described as the worst global financial crash since the Wall Street crash of 1929, which had plunged the USA into the Great Depression. The expanding scale and globalisation of the financial sector meant that ramifications of the weakening American economy and complex credit structures, in particular the sub-prime mortgage market, would be felt globally (Stiglitz, 2010). Ireland's open economy was hit hard by the global crisis and the particularities of the Irish situation meant that the downturn in the economy here would be dramatic. In the years since the country first entered recession in October 2008, revelations regarding the banking sector, the construction industry and relationships between politicians and key

personnel in these sectors have led to a questioning in some quarters of the entire Irish independence project. The country has moved from one colonial power to the next, through British rule to globalisation through to the emergence of a super-elite in the recent past who have amassed great wealth through gambling on property and money markets and paying little tax (O'Toole, 2009).

Fig 4.1: Timeline of Political Events in Ireland 2007 to 2011

2007

Feb	Irish bank shares hit a record high, trebling in value since 2000
Mar	Irish house prices fall for the first time in five years
June	Coalition formed (FF, PD, GP, Ind)* Taoiseach Bertie Ahern's 3rd term
Dec	(05/12/2012) Budget Day

2008

Feb	(06/02/2008)sharp falls in Irish banking stocks described as a 'huge over-reaction'
May	(21/05/2011) Bank of Ireland hint that profits may fall due to the worsening domestic economic slowdown and the deepening global credit crisis Bertie Ahern resigns as Taoiseach after controversy surrounding his financial affairs, Brian Cowen succeeds him
June	The EU Lisbon Treaty is rejected in a referendum
Sept	(15/09/2008) Lehman Brothers bank files for bankruptcy in New York. (25/09/2008) Ireland is the first euro zone country to slide into recession (28/09/2012) The Irish cabinet approves the Credit Institutions (Financial Support) also known as 'the bank guarantee'
Oct	(14/10/2008) Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan presents an early budget for the 2010 fiscal year to the Dáil, (22/10/2008) 25,000 people protest in Dublin against the cuts contained in the budget.
Nov	(29/11/2008) Brian Lenihan concludes talks with banks saying state involvement in banks would be dealt with on a case by case basis and that the government has not proposed consolidation in the Irish banking sector
Dec	(14/12/2008) The Irish government announces that it will invest up to €10 Billion to recapitalise the banks as a response to further steep decline in the value of Irish bank shares (18-19/12/2008) Resignation of Anglo Irish Bank's Chairman Sean Fitzpatrick and Chief Executive David Drumm (21/12/2008) Irish government announces that it will inject €5.5 Billion into Ireland's three main banks- AIB, Bank of Ireland and Anglo Irish Bank,

2009

Feb
The unemployment rate reaches 11% (highest since 1996)
27th February estimated 100,000 people protest against government's reaction to the crisis in Dublin

Mar
Ireland looses AAA debt rating from Moody's

April
(07/04/2009) Minister gor Finance Brian Lenihan presents an emergency budget to the Dáil this is the second budget in 6 months

Oct
The EU Lisbon Treaty is passed in a second referendum vote in Ireland (Lisbon II)

Nov
Murphy report examining responses to child abuse within the Catholic Church is published

Dec
(09/12/2009) Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan presents the budget for the fiscal year 2010 to the Dáil.
(09/12/2009) The Irish Government introduces the Credit Institutions (Eligible Liabilities Guarantee)

2010

Sept
Cost of bailing out Irish banks rises to €45 Billion, Ireland's budget deficit rises to a third of GDP

Nov
Irish Government signs up to an €85 Billion rescue package with the EU, ECB and the IMF. The government draws up a four year programme which includes a series of tax increases and spending cuts.

Dec
Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan (FF) presents the budget for the 2011 fiscal year to the Dáil.

2011

Jan
The Dáil approves the finance bill required by the EU/IMF

Feb
Brian Cowen dissolves the Dáil and an early election is called for the 25th February 2011. Fine Gael win 76 seats but fall short of an overall majority, they form a coalition with the Labour party (36 seats).

Mar
The new government takes office with Enda Kenny as Taoiseach and Eamonn Gilmore leader of the Labour party as Taniste. They pledge to renegotiate the terms of the EU/IMF bailout.

July
Moody's downgrade Ireland debt rating to 'junk status'. The Vatican recalls its ambassador to Ireland due to tensions surrounding the issue of clerical child abuse in Ireland.

Oct
Michael D Higgins of Labour Party is elected as the thirteenth President of Ireland in an election on the 27th October 2011.
In a referendum on the same day voters reject proposed constitutional changes relating to parliamentary enquiries and judges pay.

Dec
(05-06/12/2011) Minister for Finance presents the Budget for 2012 fiscal year to the Dáil.

While the original Celtic Tiger economy is said to have finished in the early years of the 21st century, the Irish economic boom continued apace buoyed by growth in construction industry. Many titles have been published since the crash by prominent Irish journalists and economists pointing to the links between the construction boom, the government, the financial industry, developers and the recession (O'Toole, 2009, 2010; Cooper, 2009; McWilliams, 2007, 2009). Country wide the evidence of these links can be seen in the presence of 'ghost estates' in both urban centres and rural villages developed under Section 23 tax incentives. The inflation in house prices in Ireland is clearly visible through the comparison of house prices to average industrial wage. In 1995 the purchase of an average second hand house cost €74,423, 4.1 times the average industrial wage of €18,152. By 2007 this price had risen to 11.9 times the increased average industrial wage of €32,616 to €388,130 (Kitchin et al, 2012). There was throughout these 'boom' years a lack of spending and investment in areas such as health and education. Successive governments maintained a strategy of low income tax and greater public spending.

Throughout the construction boom, development took a linear spatial model spreading out from Dublin to create a vast commuter belt to the city. Unfortunately the infrastructure needed to sustain these communities did not follow development and many areas are now without adequate education facilities, commercial and in some cases paving, lighting and basic services. This type of development is not without historical precedence. In the 1960s in order to alleviate housing problems in Dublin city where the majority of the city's poor lived in tenement flats in Georgian buildings people were moved en masse to greenfield developments on the city's outer boundaries, without adequate planning for the provision of services (Brown, 2004).

For Irish people the boom years are also marked by the relentless move to buy property and the emergence of an elite of property developers who drove the prices of housing up throughout these years (O'Toole, 2009). The government introduced tax incentives for property development where tax

liabilities could be offset through development and the purchase of, the now infamous, Section 23 housing[20]. Property development was rampant throughout these years with housing estates developed throughout the country, with massive developments attached to rural villages. Vast commuter belts emerged as the house prices in urban centres rose to inaccessible levels especially for first time buyers (Kitchen et al, 2012). With employment opportunities concentrated in urban centres, specifically Dublin and the industrial estates and business parks in its environs, there emerged a daily transient population who travelled to the city centre from newly built housing, along EU funded motorways to the offices of multinational corporations. Ireland adopted an American sprawl pattern of settlement and the greater Dublin area and its commuter belt grew to cover the eastern seaboard and inland as far as the centre of the country (O'Toole, 2009). The influence of globalisation and the emergence of the boom in the Irish economy fragmented Irish society. Settlement patterns such as these led to individuals living in areas to which they had no historical connection and little free time after commuting to develop these links (Inglis, 2008; Share, et al 2007).

4.4: Citizenship and Community in Ireland

Citizenship in Ireland is often closely linked with community and there exists a vibrant volunteering culture within the country (Taskforce for Active Citizenship, 2007). Community and the local area have tended to remain as key fulcrums in Irish society historically. Share et al (2007) describe how community and the local take the place of class in conceptualisations of citizenship and society among Irish people. Where class would be viewed as a defining feature in British society, community takes on this role in an Irish context. Ireland is viewed as a 'classless' society, although this view tends to mask the actual reality that class continues to play an important role in the

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[20] Section 23 Relief was a tax relief incentive for property investment. The relief was available to individuals who purchased, built or renovated properties in designated areas for rental purposes. (www.revenue.ie)

shaping of Irish society (*ibid*). Taking an historical view of this a number of strains can be drawn out. As a postcolonial country Irish society has striven to define itself in opposition to the norms of British society through the assertion of a number of binary oppositions- one of these is monarcy versus republic.

Community is rooted in the local in Ireland historically, for example, through affiliations to local sports clubs such as the GAA and their role in the struggle for independence. Class can also be seen as anathema to the ideals of a republic built on meritocracy rather than inheritance and a monarchic system (Inglis, 2008). Community for many people is where citizenship is played out, from traditional ties to the parish, local GAA club and voluntary activities within the locality to participation in electoral politics through the proportional representative system.

Irish party politics is concentrated around the centre. Since the foundation of the state there has been an absence of extreme right or left wing political parties or individuals with prominent seats in the Daíl. Indeed, since the foundation of the Free State in 1922 political power has been dominated by the two centre right parties which emerged from the civil war, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael (Ferriter, 2005). The 2010 election, which took place during the course of this research, witnessed the most dramatic upheaval of party politics in Ireland since the foundation of the state, and for Fianna Fail in particular. Historically the Irish public can be seen to take a somewhat deferential role in dealings with institutions of power within the state, for example the historical dominance of the Catholic Church in familial, education and moral aspects of life for Irish citizens.

4.5: Education in Ireland

The education system in Ireland has been historically dominated by the patronage of the Catholic church. Mainstream education was up to the 1960s provided for predominantly by various religious orders, with different denominations such as Church of Ireland setting up their own schools. This

situation can be seen as beneficial to an emergent state which had few resources to fund educational provision for its citizens. The changes seen in the sphere of education throughout the 1960s were of great importance. Prior to this the majority of people left school after primary education, with post primary and third level education the reserve of the wealthy (Keogh, 1994). In the 1960s the importance of an educated population for progress was recognised by the government and a number of steps were taken to open up post primary education to broader sectors of society. In 1968 the then Minister for Education Donogh O'Malley brought in legislation to provide free secondary education for all citizens up to the new Intermediate Certificate level, introduced state run schools in VECs and established the first Regional Technical Colleges, opening up secondary and third level education to broader sectors of society (Ferriter, 2005). These measures did achieve increased availability of education, however, it has been found that social disparities prevailed. The children of lower income families were still trapped in a spiral of poverty, which forced them to get a job quickly, and so many did not have the opportunity take advantage of higher education (Keogh, 1994).

In 1995 the 'free fees' initiative was introduced to provide free third level education by the Fianna Fail-Labour Party coalition. These legislative acts were aimed at increasing the educational attainment for Irish citizens and also to attract foreign investment and the creation of employment opportunities. Both educational policies are often cited as reasons for two separate waves of economic growth in Ireland the first associated with the industrialisation of Ireland during the 1960s and the Sean Lemass led Fianna Fail administration, the second with the 'Celtic Tiger' economy and often associated with the Bertie Ahern led Fianna Fail administration.

4.6: Profiling Irish 25-30 year olds

The latest available census figures from the 2011 census place 443,736 people within the 25 to 30 age range. The members of this age group born

between 1981 and 1986 are often attributed a number of labels, they are labelled the 'Celtic Tiger Cubs'. This is in reference to their growing up through a period of unprecedented economic growth in Irish society where many of the the monolithic institutions, such as the Catholic church and social norms embedded within Irish society and, were challenged. This group are often characterised as having the best opportunities for education, employment and high levels of discretionary income. At times the characterisation of this group in the Irish press is of a cosseted group of perpetual teens whose interest lies in money and consumerism with a concurrent lack of moral grounding or the frugal tendencies which had been defining characteristics of the Irish people since the foundation of the state.

The impact of the recession and fall of the Celtic Tiger economy has brought the sceptres of high unemployment and emigration back to Irish society. With the wealth which was generated during the Tiger era there was a presumption in Irish society that emigration was a thing of the past, that it was how Ireland dealt with crises of history. However between 2008 and 2012 the unemployment rate rose from 6.7% in October 2008 to 14.8% in September 2012 (CSO, 2008; 2012). In this same period 149,700 Irish citizens emigrated from the country, many to the traditional hubs in London, the USA and Australia and others to further afield.

4.7: Overview of ICT adoption in Ireland

A number of sources provide statistical data relating to the adoption of information and communications technology in Ireland. Two key data sets are the *Eurobarometer Ecommunications Survey* and the *CSO Quarterly Household Survey*. The Eurobarometer survey is carried out on a yearly basis and measures levels of technology adoption, use, accessibility and public opinion relating to technology across EU member states. The CSO conducts a quarterly national household survey which includes questions relating to ICT adoption and use. As the empirical research for this thesis took place between October 2010 and August 2011 the figures referred to here are

garnered from the 2011 Eurobarometer ecommunications survey and the 2011 National quarterly household survey.

The levels of ICT adoption among Irish people are at or above EU averages. The 2011 Eurobarometer survey found that 69% of Irish households owned a personal computer and 66% of households also have an internet connection (Eurobarometer, 2011). This compares to EU average rates of 68% and 62% respectively. In relation to internet access 58% of Irish households have broadband internet access compared with the EU average of 55%. Overall internet access was at 66% indicating the continued use of narrowband or dial up connections here, 5% of Irish internet subscribers had narrowband access according to the survey.

Irish people have historically been enthusiastic adopters and users of mobile telephony technology and this enthusiasm is reflected in the statistical data relating to mobile phone ownership. Comreg data from the fourth quarter of 2011 reveals that the mobile penetration in Ireland stood at 120.1% as of December 2011. This figure is inclusive of mobile broadband services, and when these are excluded the mobile penetration rate is 107.1% (Comreg, 2012 p: 50). This figure indicates the level of mobile subscription in Ireland however it does not mean that every member of the population has a mobile subscription. There may be cases where individuals have more than one account and others who have none. In recent years the level of smartphone adoption in Ireland, and globally, has increased rapidly. Smartphones can be viewed as an excellent technological example of convergence. They provide the user with many of the affordances and capabilities of a personal computer or laptop in the form of a mobile phone, thus combining these two key pieces of communications technologies. The recent wave of smartphone adoption has been led by Apple with their iPhone range, and has seen these types of phones become a popular consumer product as opposed to their forerunners which were reserved mainly for business customers. Consumer mobile phones have included access to the internet via GSM networks

however access was slow and unreliable with handsets and interfaces which were obtuse and not user friendly.

John Naughton identifies the iPhone as transforming the usability of smartphones and contributing to the radical transformation which occurred in the mobile industry (Naughton, 2012). He identifies two key features of the iPhone, computing power and mobile internet connectivity (*ibid* p: 278-280). The processing power of the iPhone provided scope for the emergence of the 'app' marketplace where programmers could create applications for the phone to be sold or downloaded for free from the Apple iTunes store. Other phone manufacturers would follow suit creating their own high powered handsets which would bring the capabilities of the desktop computer into the palm of consumers' hands. Mobile internet connectivity has been vastly improved with the introduction of smartphones to the marketplace. Combining the physical affordances of smartphone's large touchscreens with software which allows users to browse the internet more intuitively and through familiar web browsers has led to greater use of the internet through mobile devices. Naughton views that the majority of internet use is 'computationally speaking, relatively trivial' (Naughton, 2012 p:281) from checking emails to reading news headlines and posting status updates on our social network accounts. He posits that:

> "For these kinds of tasks, a powerful computer with a fixed Internet connection is not really necessary. In the absence of a convenient mobile device we had no alternative but to use our computers for these purposes. But once a capable Internet-enabled phone arrived, that position changed."

> Naughton, 2012, p: 281

This move can be seen in the adoption of smartphones in an Irish context. Comreg statistics from December 2011 show that 42.7% of all mobile subscriptions in Ireland are 3G accounts indicating the use of a smartphone

or tablet an increase of 10.9% from the previous quarter. In relation to this research these figures indicate a turning point in the way in which Irish people access the internet and therefore their online social media accounts.

4.8: Conclusion

At the time that this research took place Irish society had undergone major economic and political upheaval. The global recession, a national recession and the collapse of the over-inflated construction sector have brought increases in unemployment rates as well as a return to high levels of emigration. Parallel to these developments, online social media and internet use more generally, have become embedded into many aspects of everyday life from the home to the workplace and the areas in between through mobile connectivity. It is timely therefore to examine how these technologies are utilised by the participants in their everyday lives and whether they are utilised to connect to and discuss civic and political aspects of life in contemporary Ireland.

Chapter Five: Methodology

5.1: Introduction to the Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodological choices made and specific methods utilised in the empirical element of this study. As noted in relation to the Irish context, there is a dearth of qualitative studies into the role of online social media in the lives of Irish people today. This study aims to bridge this gap in the research with particular attention to 25 to 30 year olds.

Following in the audience studies tradition, this research examines the everyday use of online social media. Audience studies have given an in depth insight into the uses made of different media forms by various publics. In placing this research within this paradigm it is hoped to develop a picture of the way in which these media are in fact being used by consumers. This study follows a history of research in audience and reception studies which utilise qualitative methods to examine how media technology are utilised, conceptualised and embedded into everyday life.

Research into online social media use often focus solely on the media in question without taking into consideration the wider mediascape of the individual (Markham, 1998; Baym, 2002; Goode et al, 2011). It is the aim here to examine online social media use in the context of general media use, enabling the establishment of a detailed mapping of how the use of both 'old' and 'new' media converge for participants in relation to their engagement in citizenship practices, specifically information seeking and discursive practices.

5.2: Qualitative research techniques

In his book *Researching Culture: Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies* (1995) Pertti Alasuutari provides succinct justification for the partnership between cultural studies and qualitative analysis where qualitative analysis 'always deals with the concept of culture and with explaining meaningful action' (Alasuutari, 1995: 2). This implies that the use of qualitative methods in a piece of research provides a more in-depth analysis into the meanings, motivations and reasons behind cultural activities, the 'thick description' to which Geertz subscribed. Geertz promoted a more qualitative or in his own words 'semiotic' approach, an approach which was interpretative and allowed for the unravelling of the significance of both the symbols and activities of culture (Geertz, 1973). There is a clear link between this type of enquiry and the aims of research in cultural and audience studies; to look beyond the surface representation of various cultural texts, their consumption and use and explore the tensions and meanings which underlie them, such as power in terms of gender, politics and age for example (Alasuutari, 1995: 2).

As explored by Ruddock (2007), the use of qualitative methods in communications, cultural and media studies allow the researcher to move away from conceptions of the audience as a passive mass towards a conception of the audience which examines audience practices, motivations and pleasures. Research within media, cultural and reception studies often utilise qualitative methodologies in the study of the relations between the public and the cultural forms and activities available to them. Overall qualitative methods can be seen to complement the aims of these fields of enquiry in their objective to gain an understanding of the workings of power in society and how this is played out in the consumption of culture.

There are a number of approaches which researchers can take to qualitative studies of internet use (Baym and Markham, 2009). Research can be situated in the online setting examining the interactions of users and content created

by them online (Markham, 1998; Baym, 2000; Turkle, 1996; Goode et al, 2011). Research can be situated offline engaging with users and examining how online media fit into their lives generally or relate to specific aspects of it (Olsson, 2006; boyd, 2007, 2008; Livingstone, 2002, 2008; Couldry et al, 2007). Another possibility spans these two approaches examining both online and offline spaces, examining users' activities online and connecting with them offline, exploring how these activities fit into their lives (Bakardjieva, 2005).[22] The approach taken in this research takes the third approach examining the use of online social media by situating these sites within the everyday lives of participants with the aim to provide a holistic account of the experiences of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The approach taken by this research was to recruit online social media users offline, through workplaces and different social groups they were members of, and examine how they utilised online social media in everyday life. Like any approach, this has an impact on the data gathered and the conclusions which can be drawn. A multi-method approach was taken encompassing a number of qualitative methods which would provide different insights into the role and use of online social media in the lives of these individuals. The methods employed included a week long media diary, semi-structured interview, a recorded online session, a period of online observation and an online survey.

5.3 Exploring online social media

Throughout the course of this research I explored the online social media space available to users, most often as a silent observer or what some would call a 'lurker'. This term often carries decidedly negative connotations, those who 'lurk' are viewed as voyeurs, remaining silent on the perimiter of online

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[22] This is by no means an exhaustive list of approaches to a qualitative study of internet use, it illustrates some of the decisions made over the course of this research project. This research project situates itself within the audience studies paradigm of research and draws on the ethnographically inspired empirical research carried out by authors such as Morley (1986), Livingstone (2002), Couldry et al (2007), Wellman (2002), Baym (2000, 2010), Markham (1998), boyd (2007, 2008).

activities without contributing. I remained a silent observer online for the purposes of this study as this was in keeping with the aims of the research to explore how online social media are used in everyday life, the focus being the contextualisation of online social media use in both broader media consumption patterns and the everyday lives of individuals in Ireland. I maintained this silence as I wanted to see how the online space was used in an Irish context.

This exploration took place apart from the participants in my study and did not include them. Often following developments in political and economic affairs in Irish public life at the time. I visited political forums such as *politics.ie* following somewhat divisive and at times uncomfortable exchanges on its forums. I read through comments sections on news websites such as *The Irish Times* (www.irishtimes.com), *The Irish Independent* (www.independent.ie) and *The Daily Mail* (www.dailymail.co.uk) noting the different modes of expression and stances which emanated from each. On budget day 2009 I watched Brian Lenihan address the Dáil on the *RTÉ* website (www.rte.ie/news) as I followed the discussion of the budget on *Twitter* (www.twitter.com) following the hashtag *#budget09*. Again on *Twitter* I watched on as my feed crashed due to the amount of traffic relating to the British royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton hashtag *#royalwedding* and the discussions relating to the visits of the Queen of England hashtags *#queen*, *#bettyie* and American President Barak Obama hashtag *#obama* in the summer of 2011.

As a silent observer I explored these online spaces which provided the potential for citizens to engage in discussions about what was happening in the country. These were my personal online experiences through the course of the study. The observation in this stage allowing me to gain an understanding of the types of sites which were available and the breadth of conversations which took place on them.

5.4: Participant Selection

This research begins offline dealing with the everyday lives of the participants who volunteered to take part in the study. The delineation of my field of research in the offline world of users shaped the way in which the research developed and progressed during the 2008 to 2012 period. The wider social, political and economic context for the study cannot be ignored and chapter four provided a deeper understanding of the specifities of Irish social, political and economic realms of life.

This research follows the traditions of audience studies which utilise a range of qualitative methods to make the familiar strange, and this is especially the case for this reseacher. I am similar to the participants in my study in many ways. I am in the same age group as my participants, of a similar socio-economic background to many of them and have gone on to third level education like the majority of these individuals. Therefore we may have many shared experiences of growing up in Ireland and share some of the same online spaces. This apparent 'closeness' in experience to participants brings with it a number of issues which I have had to grapple with as a researcher. There was a danger that I could become too involved in the similarities of our situations which could limit my ability to analyse the data gathered in a robust and scientific way. What emerged was a careful balancing act whereby I used my insight and experiences in developing the researcher/participant relationship, while also establishing structures of data analysis which were robust and could be applied in a systematic way to the data I gathered.

From the outset I structured this research to engage with the users of online social media. I made the decision to recruit my participants offline first as I sought to examine how online social media fitted into their everyday lives and their general media consumption. I wanted to follow in the footsteps of David Morley, Roger Silverstone and Sonia Livingstone, researchers who had utilised qualitative methods to examine media use by individuals in society. I

wanted, with my participants' permission and cooperation, to see how online social media had become enmeshed in their daily life, how the use of these technologies related to more traditional media, how they negotiated the ever more complex media environment of the early 21st century. I also wanted to explore how they connected with an Irish public sphere, how they saw themselves as citizens and if they utilised online social media to discuss public issues or as a source of information.

I decided to recruit participants with a number of factors in mind. I recruited people who had completed their education and were either in employment or currently looking for work. I decided to narrow the age range for participants to the 25 to 30 age range as this is a stage of life where people are expected to have left some of the uncertainties and flexibilities of teenage years, their early twenties and in some cases college life behind and tend to be focusing on careers, settling down and starting families. Of course these ideas of what the late twenties encompass can be attributed to a partiularly middle class view of this stage of life and this socioeconomic factor was also a consideration.

The recruitment of individuals sought to engage people with varying levels of interest in political and public issues, from those who are members of political parties to those who express no interest in formal politics at all. To recruit participants I utilised contacts in a number of different workplaces in the public, private and non-profit sectors as well as community groups and political parties. In total I recruited eleven individuals to take part in the first four stages of the research which are described in detail in the next section. While eleven is a small number of participants and therefore results from this study cannot be generalised to the population at large, the combination of methods utilised in this research leads to a rich set of descriptive data which sheds light on the ways in which online social media are embedded into everyday life. In terms of gender breakdown the study included four female participants and seven male participants. All participants were aged between

25 and 30. Table 5.1 provides a summary view of the demographics of the participants (See Appendix B for further details on each individual).

In order to recruit participants I decided to focus my search on a number of different workplaces and used a snowballing technique to recruit participants. Through personal contacts in each workplace I created connections with people who were willing to participate in the study. I had naively thought that I would be innundated with responses to my requests for participants however recruitment of participants for this type of study is often one of the most arduous parts of the empirical research phase and my study was not to be an exception. I ended up with a core group of eleven participants. In total 24 individuals had expressed an interest in taking part in the research but ultimately decided not to, in some cases giving the reason that it would be too time consuming, that they had other priorities at the time and in other cases simply not responding to contact made via email or phone.

When I received an expression of interest from a participant I sent them an email providing further details on the project and asked if they would be available for a phone call to discuss their role in the project and arrange a time to meet with them to begin the first phase of the research. I then met with participants and talked about how the research project would progress, discussed their privacy in the study, got them to sign consent forms and if they were still interested in taking part talked them through the media diary element of the study. I would then leave them with a copy of the media diary template to complete with a stamped addressed envelope to return the diary to me at the end of the week long diary phase. After receiving their diary in the post I sent an email to the participant saying that their diary had been received and thanking them for taking the time to complete it. I also asked the participant to let me know when would suit them to meet for the second phase of the research, the online session and interview. I followed this up with a phone call to confirm the time and directions to their home. Where possible I endeavoured to carry out this second phase of the research in participants' homes in order to see how and where they usually access online

social media as well as to gain a further insight into the lives of the individuals who were taking part in the study.

In order to preserve the privacy of each participant I have used pseudonyms throughout this thesis and changed any information relating to their location to more generic terms which describe the type of place as opposed to particular place names.

Table: 5.1 Summary table of Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Location	Education	Occupation
James	M	25	Rural	3rd Level Degree	Unemployed
Eoghan	M	26	City	Masters Degree	Project Manager
David	M	27	City	Post Graduate Diploma	Researcher Non Profit
Kevin	M	27	City	3rd Level Diploma	Public Sector Administration
Michael	M	27	City	3rd Level Degree	Marketing
Patrick	M	28	Rural	3rd Level Degree	Senior Air Steward
Adam	M	29	Provincial Town	Apprenticeship	Motor Mechanic
Joan	F	28	City	3rd Level Diploma	Retail Manager
Cathy	F	28	City	3rd Level Degree	IT Analyst
Anne	F	29	Provincial Town	3rd Level Degree	Carer/Town Councillor
Joanne	F	29	Provincial Town	3rd Level Degree	Insurance underwriter

5.4.1: Socio Economic Class

As a focus for this research was to examine citizenship practices among participants the decision to include participants who had a characteristically middle class life experience was based on evidence which repeatedly demonstrates that this socioeconomic group is the one most likey to engage with public life in western democratic societies (Buckingham, 1999). The reasons given for this situation include, higher levels of education, greater sense that they can affect change at a governmental level, greater levels of involvement in community based activies and voluntary organisations. I also wanted to examine how this group, who were most likely to have greater access to the internet than other age ranges and socioeconomic groups, adopted and utilised online social media in their everyday lives and how they were used in conjunction with other media formats.

5.4.2 Living Situations

Participants were drawn from three distinct areas, city, provincial towns and rural areas. Six participants were living in a city at the time that the empirical research was carried out. David (27), Eoghan (26), Kevin (27), Cathy (28), Michael(27) and Joan (28) were living in shared rented apartments in the city centre, Eoghan, Kevin and Cathy sharing with their partners. Three participants were living in provincial towns, Joanne and Adam are a newly married couple and were living in their own four bedroom house. Anne is a single mother living in a rented house with her son. Finally two participants were living in rural areas. James (25) was living with his parents in the family home and Patrick (27) lived in an apartment in a small rural village which he had purchased with his sister. The participants present different living situations typical of the circumstances in which members of this age group find themselves.

5.4.3 Occupation

Of the eleven participants nine were in full time employment. Kevin was the only participant working in the public sector and had recently moved to the city due to an office transfer. David worked with a not for profit charitable

agency which campaigned for the built heritage. Cathy worked as an analyst in the IT sector for a multinational company. Joan worked as a manager in a city centre retail outlet. Eoghan worked in a telecommunications company. Joanne worked in an insurance firm. Adam worked as a motor mechanic in a local garage. Patrick worked as a steward in the aviation industry. Finally Michael worked in the marketing department of a private company. Anne had been appointed as councillor on her local urban district council, prior to this she had been a full time caregiver in the home. At the time of the research James was unemployed and seeking employment, he had previously taken part in an internship scheme.

5.4.4 Education

As noted above all of the participants had completed some form of post-second level education. Six participants James, Anne, Cathy, Joanne, Patrick and Michael had completed third level degrees in a number of disciplines; James, Anne and Michael in Arts and Humanities, Cathy in IT, Joanne in Science and Patrick in business. Two participants had gone onto post graduate education, David had completed a post graduate diploma in the field of conservation studies and Eoghan had completed a Masters Degree in business. Joan and Kevin had completed third level diplomas in hospitality and auctioneering. Finally Adam had completed an apprenticeship in motor mechanics.

Prior to commencement of the empirical investigations for this study I talked to each participant discussing their potential involvement in this research project. This was after initial contact had been made and occurred either in person or over the phone. At this point I explained to the potential participants that they were under no obligation to participate in the project and could withdraw from the study at any time and none of the data I had gathered would be used. I discussed the different methods which would be utilised in the study, the modes in which this data could be presented and the potential for it to enter into the public domain. Each participant was required to sign two consent forms one general participation form and a consent form

for the online observation and the recording of the online session (See appendix A for copies of the consent forms).

5.5: Methods

In order to gain an in-depth insight into the way online social media is embedded into the everyday lives of participants this research takes a multi-method approach. The following sections introduce the different methods utilised in the empirical stage of the research, in combination they provide a holistic account of media use among participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

5.5.1: The Media Diary (conducted at participants' convenience between October 2010 and June 2011)

Participants in this research completed a media diary logging all media consumption over a period of one week (See Appendix C for media diary template). This length of time provided enough scope to see patterns forming in media use, a variety of media activities as well as a range of occasions of use. Participants logged all media consumed throughout each day detailing what media text was being consumed as well the medium or technology being used, what activities the participant was engaged with at the time, whether they discussed the text with others and the length of time spent consuming or using this media. Coupled with the media log was a reflexive diary entry to be completed at the end of the week where participants reflected on aspects of the diary relating to their media use and issues which are felt to be pertinent to their situation. While the media diary element was structured this element of the diary was left unstructured, open to the participant to discuss areas of media use which they deemed important through the course of the week. Completing the diary element first allowed participants to reflect on their media consumption outside the pressures of an interview situation and also provided a springboard for discussion at the interview stage.

Analysis of the media diaries involved the following three stages:

- Processing data using Microsoft Excel

- Categorisation of media use

- Extracting patterns of media use from the data

There were a number of key measurements which I drew out of the diary entries gathered firstly a measurement of the time spent by participants with different media formats, a breakdown of programme genres consumed via television, radio and the internet, and finally analysis of media use as individual or collective experience over the course of the week.

5.5.2: Online session (January to July 2011)

The online session consisted of participants logging onto the Internet and showing me what their usual online social media routine would be. This session took place in the first fifteen to twenty minutes of the interviews. Positioning the online session at the start of the interaction had a twofold purpose. Firstly I felt that giving the participants something to physically do which they were familiar with framed the interview in a way which put their experiences and knowledge to the fore. Secondly using this as a starting point for the interview showed me what kind of spaces the participant regularly visited and the levels of interactions and activity which they had online, thereby allowing me to reflect on the areas which I wanted to cover and approach them in a way which was relevant to the participants use and experience of online social media.

In order to capture these online interactions I utilised the *My Screen Recorder* software package[23]. This software captured all of the web pages visited by participants as well as all interactions on these sites. At the beginning of the session I asked each participant to 'think aloud' as they navigated their way through their online social media profiles and recorded this digitally. After the interviews I combined the audio and visual files together using *Windows Media Maker*. Participants used my laptop and in some instances this caused

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[23] After researching and testing a number of open source screen recorders I decided to purchase this software as it was most compatible with my operating system and allowed footage to be edited together with the audio files from the online sessions.

issues as it was different to the laptops or personal computers they routinely utilised. In some instances participants had trouble remembering passwords as these would be stored on their own devices.

During these sessions I asked participants to guide me through their online social media profile pages and asked them a number of questions relating what they were doing as they moved through their online spaces. All participants started by showing me their *Facebook* profiles and then moved onto more specialised sites. This exercise proved fruitful for this research as the participants often revelled in demonstrating their use of online social media sites as well as reminding them of instances of use which may have been forgotten if the interview began with the more conventional structure.

Analysis of Online Sessions

- Editing data collected
- Transcription of audio from sessions
- Applying coding structure in TAMS
- Drawing out themes/patterns in data

5.5.3: Semi-Structured interview (October 2010 to July 2011)

The interview is a longstanding core of qualitative research in the field of audience studies (Schrøder et al, 2003) and is central to the methodology of this research. I used a semi-structured interview format preparing in advance an overview of the topics which I wished to address which allowed interviews to flow in a more natural discursive style (see Appendix D for list of interview questions and areas to be addressed and Appendix F for a sample interview transcript). As Hammersley and Atkinson point out, in an interview situation, researchers generally do not stick rigidly to a set of questions with each interviewee but develop a flexible framework to ensure interviews flow in a conversational style (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Each interview whilst covering the same general topics will have a different structure depending on the interviewee. This type of flexible approach allows scope to examine the area of interest with the focus being on the

interviewee's experience and opinions of the topic rather than them having to fit in with strict delineations set out by the interviewer. As this research examines the everyday use of online social media this type of structure corresponds with the research objectives. In the context of this research, semi-structured interviewing was particularly useful as I had a set of broad issues to be covered but participants' experiences and thoughts on these topics varied. Therefore the flexible characteristics of this interviewing style allowed me to adapt lines of questioning to the individual and the conversational style allowed participants to relax in many cases.[24]

Where possible I endeavoured to interview participants in their homes, this was achieved in all but one interview. Michael's interview took place in a city centre bar as scheduling was a problem for him due to work commitments. For the other ten participants interviews took place in the living rooms and kitchens of their homes. For many of the participants this was the space where they would usually use the internet in their homes in conjunction with other media such as the television in most cases. All of the participants lived in shared accommodation and interviews were arranged at their convenience. In some instances this meant that other housemates were present at the time of the interview but often participants had arranged interviews at times which would have as little impact as possible on housemates' schedules. In instances where housemates were present they often went into other rooms, some watching television or playing computer games, coming into the living room space a number of times throughout the interview. On some occasions this did disturb the flow of the interview momentarily but this was negotiated as and when it occurred. The majority of interviews took place in the evening time when participants had returned home from work. These factors often reflected the situations in which participants would ordinarily go online.

Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews

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[24] After the interviews were completed a number of the participants talked about how the interviews had been more relaxed and more like a conversation than expected.

- Transcription of interviews

- Applying coding structure using TAMS

- Extracting themes and patterns from data

5.5.4: Observation of Facebook Profiles (January 2011 to May 2011)

Following the interviews I received permission from participants to follow their *Facebook* profiles for a period of five months. I decided to analyse their use of *Facebook* solely as this is an online social media site on which all participants had profiles. In order to carry out this online observation I became 'friends' with the participants on *Facebook* through my own personal profile page. In order to protect the anonymity of participants I decided to use my own personal profile as otherwise their identity would have been accessible to all participants. In order to ensure that their information would not be accessible to others I set up a group on my profile for participants specifically with settings adjusted to ensure their privacy. Throughout the course of the online observation I did not interact directly with participants, instead observing their use of *Facebook*.

In order to document and analyse participants' use of *Facebook* I routinely took screen shots of their profile pages focusing on their wall, photos and personal information which they posted. With their permission I constructed a timeline of their wall over the course of the five months. In the same way I also documented the profile pictures which they used and the types of photographs which they posted. After gathering this information I analysed a number of elements pertaining to this study. I counted and coded the number and types of posts which they created during this period. I coded the types of profile pictures which they had posted from the profile picture folder on their profiles and also the types of albums they posted. I also examined the personal information which they provided on their profile page such as name, date of birth, political views, religious views, activities and interests and contact information. This analysis of their use of this particular online social media site provides an insight into their online identity and is presented in sections 8.4 and 8.5.

Analysis of Facebook Observation

- Constructing 5 month time lines in Photoshop
- Categorising posts in Excel
- Categorising visual elements of profile

5.5.5: Online Survey (April 2011 to September 2011)

In order to broaden out the scope of the research and to test whether sentiments expressed among the core eleven participants extended to a wider group of Irish 25 to 30 year olds. I constructed and distributed a qualitative online survey[25]. The survey focused on the use of online social media and respondents attitudes towards citizenship (See Appendix E for survey questions and structure). The survey was constructed and distributed through www.surveymonkey.com.

Fig 5.1 Online Survey Respondents Age Profile (Source: online survey N=106)

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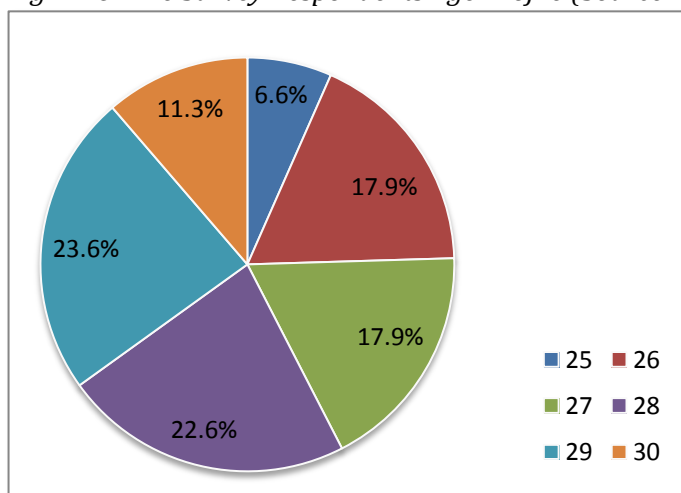
[25] Qualitative Survey: The survey results are deemed qualitative as they cannot be generalised to the population at large. Distribution of the survey online means that the sample is self selecting.

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Fig 5.2: Online Survey Respondents Gender Profile (Source: online survey N=106)
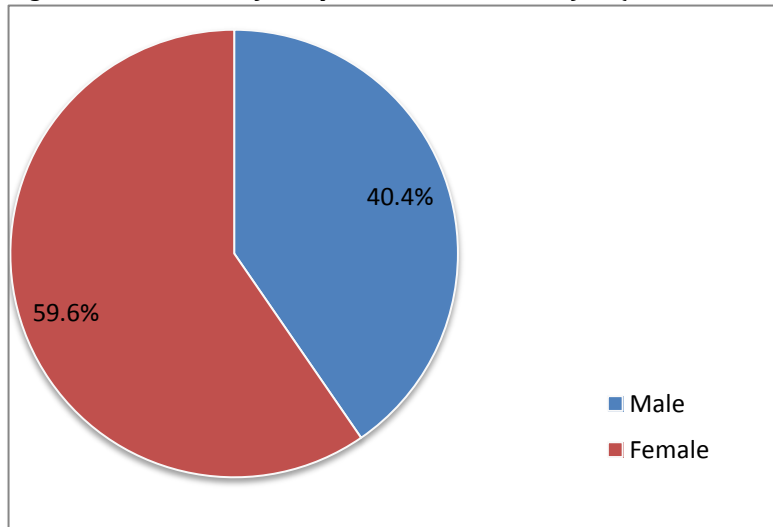
I distributed the survey through a number of different channels. I identified a number of national and local civic associations that 25 to 30 year olds would make up a proportion of the membership. I contacted youth sections of political parties through contact email accounts available on their websites. Using a number of personal contacts in workplaces I distributed the survey via email to a number of businesses. I also used *Facebook* to distribute the survey targeting pages which this age group would visit as well as using my own friend list.

Fig 5.3: Online Survey respondents Education (Source: online survey N=106)
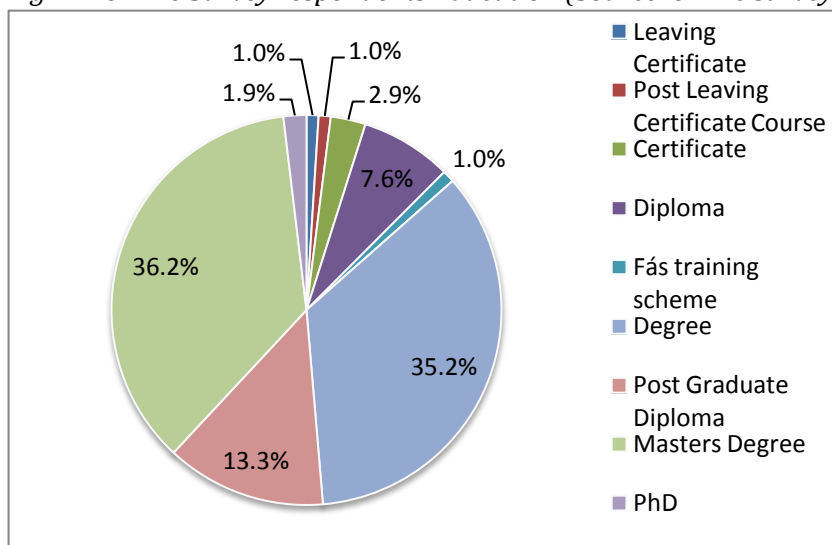
Fig 5.4: Online Survey Respondents Employment Status (Source: online survey N=106)
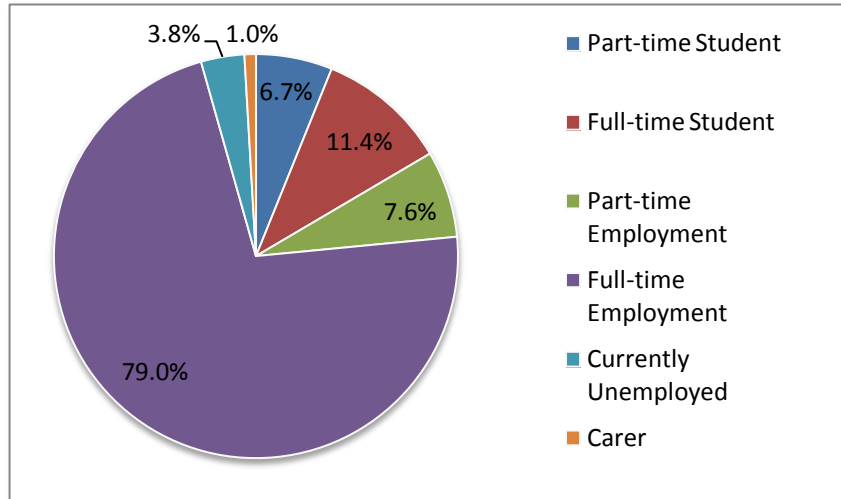
In total there were one hundred and six responses which could be counted and analysed for the purposes of the study. Twenty three responses had to be omitted as they either did not match the demographic criteria for this research or they were not completed sufficiently.

It must be noted that online surveys while used increasingly in academic research do not provide a representative sample due to self selection and a lack of data relating to non response rates (Hirzalla & Van Zoonen, 2011). The use of an online survey in this research served to explore whether patterns in the use of online social media among the core 11 participants were evident in a broader group of 25 to 30 year olds. Both quantitative and qualitative questions were included in the survey. The Survey Monkey package which I used provided basic analysis of the quantitative elements of the survey providing results for each question which could be cross referenced. Answers to the qualitative questions were coded and analysed using Microsoft Excel.

For the purposes of this research I decided to use a qualitative software package to code transcripts from the online sessions and interviews. I used the *TAMS Analyser* an open source software package for Apple Macintosh operating systems. I decided on this particular software as it was straightforward to use and would allow me to easily create coding structures

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and apply these to the transcripts. A sample of the coding structure utilised in this research and a screenshot of the project file is included in Appendix F.

5.6: Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide an insight into the way in which the empirical research in this study was carried out. It has outlined the recruitment of participants and methods used to gather data. Qualitative methods were chosen in order to build an in-depth description of the use of online social media in everyday life among Irish 25 to 30 year olds.

The multi-method approach taken in this study was utilised to gain an insight into how online and offline media consumption relate to each other and how they converge in participants' daily media consumption. In this instance quantitative methods alone would not have been sufficient to gain the depth of insight which this study sought to explore. The inclusion of an online survey allowed for testing of some of the patterns which emerged in the qualitative research around online social media use and citizenship. This inclusion gives an insight into a broader sample of 25 to 30 year olds.

This qualitative approach to the use of online social media within the context of everyday life combines the online activities of users with the socio-cultural context in which they live their lives. It allows for the exploration of the actual uses of these technologies in relation to the everyday lived experiences of these young Irish adults.

Chapter 6: Participant Profiles

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents individual profiles of each of the eleven participants who took part in this research project. Each profile draws on data gathered from each of the methods outlined in Chapter 5. The aim here is to provide an insight into the lives of participants; their home life, work, education and interests as well as providing an overview of their general media consumption and their use of online social media.

This chapter is descriptive, providing an insight into participants' lives and their use of media in general. In chapters seven to nine I will examine in more depth particular aspects of media consumption, uses of online social media and how these participants relate to civic life in Ireland. This chapter presents these descriptive vignettes of these participants in order to introduce them to the reader and the role played by online social media in their lives, which is the core focus of this research.

6.2: James, 25, rural village

I met James in his partners' house for the interview on the 10th of February 2011. The interview took place in the living room and started with the online session. James sat on the sofa where he would usually access the internet while in the house and guided me through the different websites he visited daily. At the time of the interview James was living in his family home with his parents in a rural village. His time was divided between the family home and his partners' house in a nearby town. James completed his studies in 2008 for a Bachelor of Arts Degree. Since then he had worked on a work placement scheme in Dublin, commuting from his home town to the city daily for nine months. Since the placement ended he had been unemployed and searching for work on a daily basis. He described how a large portion of his time online is spent looking up recruitment websites and the FÁS website, searching for employment. James became a member of a political party while at college. He joined the party as a result of seeing the practical action which they took in his local community and within the college community. The interview took place during the height of the 2011 election campaign and at this time James's daily routine included door to door canvassing, leaflet distribution and political party meetings.

James's daily media use revolved around current affairs, news and political content. Going online in the morning he visited *politics.ie* on a daily basis to keep informed of developments in the Houses of the Oireachtas. He felt that this site, which provides a forum for the discussion of local, national and international politics, was more relevant and up to date than other more established news services such as the *RTÉ News* website. He viewed discussion forum sites as 'democratic' allowing people to express their opinions on a variety of topics. James listened to a current affairs talk show on local radio in the morning three days per week and had over the past few months utilised his *Facebook* account to join online discussions with other listeners on the show's *Facebook* page. He watches the *Vincent Browne* current affairs panel show on *TV3* most nights and described that it would be

on in the background while he was reading. Evening news bulletins on *TV3* and *RTÉ* were a fixture of his media consumption and James regularly compared the differences in the coverage of events by the commercial and state broadcasters. In relation to entertainment and factual programming his viewing moved online where he utilised broadcasters' television-on-demand services to watch documentaries and sometimes dramas. He described as 'bizarre' the on-demand service where he could dictate the media schedule to fit in with his life. On the whole James's discussion of his screen media consumption in the interview presents a vista dominated by factual formats, news and current affairs programming, documentaries, political websites and historical books. James's media diary completed in October 2010 reveals a picture of his media consumption at a time outside the election campaign. This provides an image of his media consumption in which television plays a dominant role with both factual and fictional programming being consumed. The diary reflects the interview in so far as current affairs, news and documentaries make up the largest proportion of his time spent watching television. Entertainment programming such as comedy, satirical panel discussions, crime dramas and finally movies are also present.

James did not buy a newspaper daily at the time that the interview took place. He sporadically bought print editions when he didn't get to see the news or when he was travelling by bus. He described how he used to buy a newspaper daily when he was working in Dublin and also read the free commuter newspaper *The Metro* handed out on the street when walking to work. He described how he would read the headlines in this publication and then 'just bin it'. The internet was the predominant source of news for James at the time that the interview took place. He used a number of different sites to get news from both established media companies and more alternative sources which utilise the features of web 2.0 in crowd sourcing content. He guided me through the websites he visited for news content daily starting with *politics.ie* where he skimmed through the latest news and discussion threads highlighted on the homepage.

He then moved onto *RTÉ.ie/news* but said that he didn't tend to spend too long on this site, 'I would just scan down through the headlines and just leave' (James, 25, internet session 10th February 2011). At the time of the interview *RTÉ* had a *Live Elections Feed* on their website and James would also scan through this, however he felt that it was not as up to date as *politics.ie* which would have updates from people working in the Houses of the Oireachtas. There was an emphasis for James on having the most up to date political information and his use of *politics.ie* enabled this. He did however assert that this level of interest was not for everyone "who wants to sit and look at politics unless you've an interest in it, or you're a journalist or you work in it so it's fairly anoraky in that respect" (James, 25, internet session 10th February 2011) James's news consumption centred on national and local news sources both offline and online. Occasionally he visited international news websites such as the *New York Times* searching their website for content relating to Ireland, reading them to gain further perspective on the way in which the country is depicted abroad. James used to use the *indymedia.ie* website quite a lot, but found that it had become less well maintained recently and information was not updated frequently. In the past he had used the site in relation to protests. The website had a calendar of protest events around Ireland and abroad and he used this when involved in the *Shell to Sea* protests in particular. He acknowledged the 'left leaning' tone of the site saying 'it's fairly for political activists really but you do get all walks of life on it' (James, 25, internet session 10th February 2011).

James has a profile on *Facebook* which he uses predominantly to contact people he does not see frequently; friends from different stages of life, and friends and family who are living abroad. He also uses the site to connect with his partner, tell friends about what is happening in his life, comment on everyday occurrences, politics, current affairs and various campaigns.

Fig 6.1: James Facebook Profile

James logs onto *Facebook* multiple times daily and described in the interview that he would log on for around five minutes at a time. He uses a laptop to log on and at the time this research took place did not have a mobile phone which allowed him access to the site. After logging onto his profile he clicks on home and scrolls down through the news feed to see if anything catches his eye. James displays his political affiliations on his profile and at the time of the interview he referred to his page as being in 'election mode' a number of times. His profile picture at the time was the election campaign poster for his party's local representative. As he scrolled through his profile page he described that

> "In election mode including the last local election you tend to go a bit overboard on *Facebook*. As you can see people who have commented, like-minded people, we all have the same profile picture. Fairly blatant propaganda"

> (James, 25, online session 10th February 2011)

As the interview took place during the election there was an emphasis on content relating to this on James's profile, ordinarily he described that he would have different groups of friends from different aspects of his life and conversations of different topics would emerge from interactions with each group.

6.3: Adam, 29, provincial town

I visited Adam 4th June 2011 in the four bedroom house which he bought with his wife Joanne[26] located on the outskirts of a provincial town. We sat in the living room which had a large flat screen television connected to a Sky Digital set top box and a DVD player. Adam is a car mechanic and works in a local garage five or six days a week. He also works on his own cars and motorbikes in the garage attached to his house. In the evening after coming home from work at 6:00pm he often has his dinner and goes out to the garage for a few hours to work. He has completed an apprenticeship which involved working in a garage and a number of six month college placements in a nearby town. Adam's passion in life is motorbikes and mechanics and this came across throughout our meetings and the online observation of Adam's *Facebook* profile. In his spare time, especially at weekends, he likes to meet up with other local bikers and go on a 'spin' through the country roads for a few hours. He has been renovating a car for the past few years and often posts updates about his progress on his *Facebook* profile, attracting many comments and 'likes' from friends.

At the beginning of our interview Adam revealed that he didn't see himself as a big media user as his daily routine didn't leave time for extended media use. In examining Adam's media consumption it became apparent that radio is a constant presence in his everyday routine. The local radio station is on throughout the day from breakfast at home, on the floor in the garage where he works throughout the day and in his home garage as he works in the evening. Most of the time the radio provides a soundtrack to his work and is a constant presence in the background, however occasionally he will listen out for competitions to enter and for local events to attend. Television viewing most often reflects his passion for motors and motorsports. On the evenings when he is not doing extra work and at the weekend, he can be found in the living room watching factual programmes relating to these areas, the *Men*

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[26] Joanne also took part in this research.

and Motors station on *BSkyB* is a favourite. Adam watches programmes which provide information and accounts of car modification, histories of various motorsports, vehicles and racing. Adam shares his love for motorsports with his wife Joanne and they often watch these programmes together as well as travelling around the country and further afield to attend motorbike racing events.

Adam had recently purchased a smartphone which he used to access the internet during breaks at work, increasing his access to social network site *Facebook*. His *Facebook* profile is quite sparse and Adam described in the interview that he didn't tend to post comments to *Facebook* instead he generally reacted to comments which his friends had posted up.

Fig 6.2: Adam's Facebook Profile
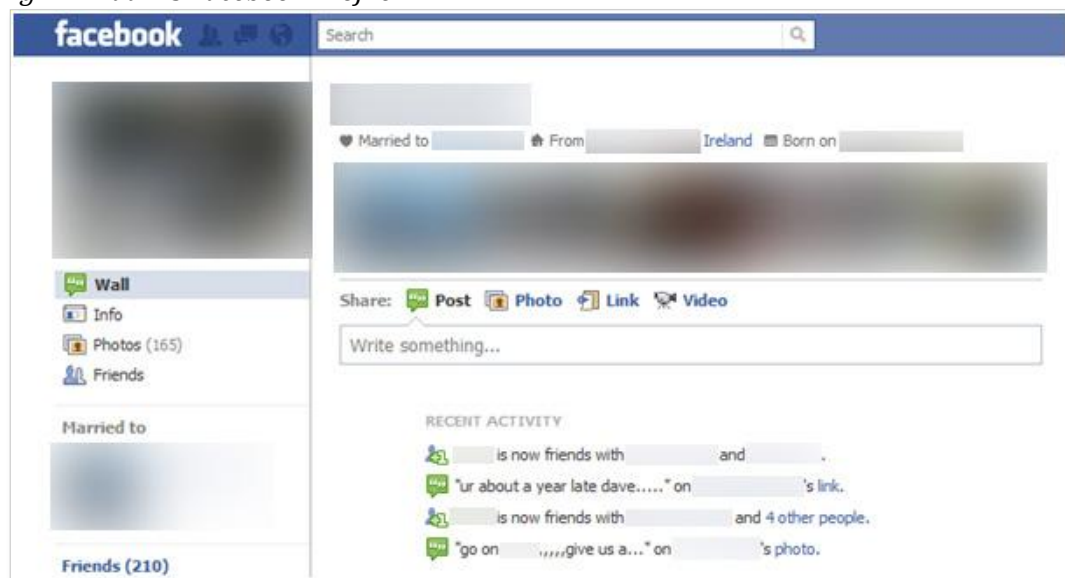
His profile reflected his interests with most of his photo albums containing pictures relating to these areas of his life. He can be seen in photos with his motorbikes, at races as well as photos of his refurbishment project. He used his *Facebook* profile to connect with people who had the same interests, joining the group *Starlet Owners Club* where he connected with Toyota Starlet owners from around the world, *The Ace Cafe London Ltd* page and following several of his sporting heroes online. There were also pictures of travel with

his wife and comical pictures of Adam in different situations. He liked to use the site to keep up to date with his friends and also to keep informed about events which were happening in the local area.

Another site which Adam visits regularly is the forum *bikers.ie*. This website is dedicated to motorbike enthusiasts and contains a series of forums where a variety of topics are discussed from international Moto GP racing to local races, bike maintenance and reviews of new equipment. The site is also used to organise 'runs' where a group of bikers will arrange a location to meet up, usually on Sundays, and go motorbike riding for a few hours. In the interview Adam was keen to describe his use of this site. He was active in the maintenance forums where he offered advice to other members on best methods, equipment to buy and where to buy it. He used the forums on a regular basis to find out about 'runs' which were happening nearby, meeting up with people he met on the website and also with bikers he knew from home. There was a sense from Adam that this site was where his online community lay, in a space which specifically and solely dealt with his interests. When asked did they ever discuss topics outside of bikes, Adam's reply was that they didn't even talk about cars on the site.

> "If anyone brings [anything] up even about cars, they say no cage talk, they call cars cages, so no cage talk here!"
>
> (Adam, 29, 4th June 2011, Online Session)

6.4: Eoghan, 26, city centre

I met Eoghan in the rented apartment he shares with his partner in the city centre on the 7th of April 2011. We sat on the couch in the living area and I placed my laptop in front of Eoghan on the coffee table. The apartment had numerous book shelves filled with titles which reflected Eoghan's interests in history and politics and English literature. In the living area there was a flat screen television, stereo, DVD player, a *UPC* cable television receiver and a broadband wifi modem. During the course of the interview Eoghan's mobile phone rang a number of times, the ringtone was *Love will tear us apart* by Joy Division.

Eoghan works as a project manager in the city centre offices of an Irish PLC working 9am to 5:00 pm most days which he sometimes divides between the office and his home. After secondary school Eoghan studied for a Bachelor of Arts Degree and then went onto complete a Masters Degree in Business Management. He hopes to return to college at some point in the future to continue his studies in history.

Eoghan is a member of a political party and much of his leisure time is spent carrying out activities relating to the party. One night a week he attends a party meeting which lasts two hours in the city centre. Another evening is spent conducting party related work which most often involves going door to door in a particular area distributing the party's newspaper and talking to residents about the party's ideology and activities. At the weekend Eoghan can most often be found at the party's weekly stand in the city centre where they publicise one particular issue, such as the bank bailout. Protesting is also a frequent feature of Eoghan's leisure time and he uses his *Facebook* account in tandem with these activities to invite friends to events and publicise the campaigns and protests which he is involved in. Throughout the interview Eoghan talked about wider society, the impact of the capitalist system on people's everyday life and the need for change from this system.

At work Eoghan has access to the internet. There is a firewall preventing access to *YouTube* but he has access to other social media sites. He visits a number of websites throughout the day mainly while on breaks but also if he has a few minutes to spare between tasks. The main core of his personal online activity during the working day revolves around news websites and sports pages in particular. He is a sports fanatic, an Aston Villa supporter who has a passion for a variety of sports. Eoghan's described how his interest in sports, in part, relates to fascination with statistics. He enjoyed pouring over the English Premier League tables to establish where teams were headed, what points were needed by teams both at the top and bottom of the table and how they could accumulate them from the potential points available to them in the remainder of the season. Eoghan's interest in sports extended to tennis, snooker, motorsports and beyond:

> "Sport is just something that I really enjoy, and I think a lot of it comes down to statistics. I think I just like statistics, I like knowing where people are in the league, how many people…I mean I'd watch anything except boules."
>
> (Eoghan, 26, 7th April 2011, Interview)

Sport provided Eoghan with the pleasure of viewing, analysing and also a ready topic to create links in social situations especially with other men, a universal topic of discussion which could break the ice at any social event.

> "You're in a situation where the easiest way to interact with other males is through sport but it's a comfortable entrance. I mean if you're at a party or something it's an easy way of engaging and feeling comfortable in the situation that you're in. And then a relationship can develop from there."
>
> (Eoghan, 26, 7th April 2011, Interview)

After work Eoghan liked to call into a bookshop on his way home to scour the shelves for titles which dealt with history, politics, autobiography and sports.

He is an avid reader and at the time of the interview was reading two history books, one on Northern Ireland and another on Italian political culture. After returning home he usually spent some time on his laptop and when his partner arrived home they would talk together, cook dinner and sit down to watch a couple of episodes of whichever television series they were currently watching. At the time of the interview they were watching *V* which they downloaded and watched on evenings when they were both home.

> "I'd spend time on the computer then [partner] would come home and we'd have a chat. Then we'd turn on the TV at some stage or we'd watch a film or a DVD or we'd watch a programme online or download a series."

> (Eoghan, 26, 7th April 2011, Interview)

Eoghan had a profile on *Facebook* which he used daily to keep in contact with friends both at home and abroad, keep up to date with campaigns which his party were participating in, to publicise political events and protests, post news articles and comment on his daily life.

Fig 6.3: Eoghan's Facebook Profile

His profile provides a great insight into his interests and outlooks on life with an information page which provides extensive lists of his favourite bands, authors and books. Eoghan's photo albums include photographs of travel, social events and political events.

He has an extensive friends list, he asserted that he doesn't like to refuse a friendship request even if he has not been in contact with someone for years. He sees a connection between what happens on *Facebook* and his offline life and does not want to offend anyone. He makes sure to wish each friend happy birthday once he is notified of their birthday on the site:

> "The other thing I use facebook for is to say happy birthday to the millions of people who seem to have birthdays every day of the week."
>
> (Eoghan, 26, 7th April 2011, Online Session)

He enters into discussions about politics on the site but feels that the textual format of the conversation as well as the absence of physical co-presence leaves interactions lacking and the discussion often going nowhere.

Other sites used by Eoghan include *Linkedin*, *Twitter* and *boards.ie*. He set up his *Linkedin* account a number of years ago and rarely uses it. He described his profile picture on the site as one from a night out which isn't very professional and overall did not really see the value in this site for him. He did use *Twitter* and *politics.ie* when watching the *Vincent Browne* current affairs show on *TV3* during the 2011 election campaign to follow discussions which were happening around the show.

6.5: David, 28, city centre

I met David in the rented city centre apartment he shares with a flatmate. David's interview took place on the 2nd of February 2011. We sat in the living room area of the open plan kitchen, dining and living space. In the room there is a large CRT television set, a *UPC* cable television receiver, a wifi router and a compact stereo with radio and dual tape deck. David has a laptop and keeps this in his bedroom along with a printer and study area where he accesses the internet in the evening; he also has a television set in his bedroom. For the interview we sat on the couch in the living room area, my laptop was placed on a small coffee table in front of David as he navigated his way through the sites he visited online. David has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in media and a Postgraduate Diploma in conservation studies. He has worked previously as a guide in some of the key historical sites in the city. Currently he is employed by a not for profit charitable organisation in the city centre which focuses on the conservation of the city's built environment. He walks to and from work most days, a journey which takes roughly 25 minutes to complete. His work involves research, producing publications and conducting lectures on the built environment. He works 9:30-5pm most days but overtime is often part of his job. It is clear from the interview that David is very passionate about the area of his work and aspects of it permeate his time outside the office. Both during and after the interview he talked at length about the planning processes in Ireland, the place of historical buildings in a modern city and the need to develop a living city.

In the interview David stated that he felt he would spend roughly three hours a day using media. Combining the insights gained in the interview and the media diary it emerges that media, both online and offline permeate David's day. David has unrestricted internet access at work and visits a number of websites throughout the day often for a few minutes at a time checking updates. The online edition of *The Irish Times* newspaper (irishtimes.com), *Facebook*, *politico.ie* and *archiseek* are the three core websites he visits. The Irish Times is David's newspaper of choice both in print format and online via

their news site. As David guides me through his internet session he goes to google.ie and types in a single 'i' and hits enter, irishtimes.com is the first website to populate on the search results page.

Fig 6.4: Google search David's Internet Session

David sees this as increasing the accessibility to the site

> "Actually one of the really good things I think *Irish Times* becomes so accessible to use is because I just do that and straight away you're on there and that's a real benefit to them you just key in i and it comes straight up and it's so easy to use."

> (David, 27, 2nd February 2011, Online session)

When he goes onto the site he scrolls firstly through the main stories and goes to the 'Ireland' tab looking through the stories from Ireland and then moving onto the 'Comment' section. David admits that he has gotten into such a routine when using the site that he often misses sections of the site which he would be interested in such as 'Society and Culture'.

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Fig 6.5: Irish Times home page David's online session

He had taken part in a survey on the site the previous week to our interview and it had highlighted for him the vast tracts of the site which he never visited. David also called my attention to the 'Most Popular' stories table on the home page of the website. Here the *irishtimes.com* ranks the most read and most shared stories from one to five. David described how he found this fascinating and often revealed the parochial characteristics of Irish society. He noted that at the weekends rugby stories tended to populate the top spot while at other times what he described as 'sob stories' which mainly dealt with individual tragedies, occupied the top positions on this scale, at the expense of stories which deal with 'major political issues and the turmoil and the election' (David, 27, Online session, 2nd February 2011).

During lunchtime at work he listens to the radio or reads the paper in a cafe. On returning home in the evening usually at around 7pm David watches the *Channel 4 News*, he watches the British news at this point as he will be watching the Irish news later on. He then watches the *9 O'Clock News* on *RTÉ1* and current affairs programming on various nights of the week.

David uses online on demand services like the *RTÉ player* and *4OD* to follow dramas. He described how the nature and structure of his working life meant that he couldn't set aside time every week to watch these shows as aired and therefore used these services to watch episodes of programmes such as

Shameless and *Masterchef* at a time that suited him. He found that this had become common practice among his friends as well.

David visits his *Facebook* account once or twice a day and splits access evenly between work and home. On both his work computer and his laptop he is constantly logged onto *Facebook*.

Fig 6.6: David's Facebook Profile Page

After accessing the website his visits focus on the news feed looking at the 'current, interactive' content on the site and rarely going onto peoples' individual profile pages. He often clicks into the content that people post up, most often watching videos that are posted.

Most evenings while watching television David logs onto *MSN Messenger* or *Facebook* and enters into a conversation with friends about the programme he is watching, in effect watching the programme with someone else online. This happens most often with people who have similar interests and who are watching the programme at the scheduled time on television at the same time as David.

Fig 6.7: Commentary on RTÉ News Coverage of Japanese tsunami on David's Facebook profile

An entire day to edit footage, yet RTÉ's tsunami coverage for Nine is abysmal. Lazy, rushed and crass, with a cringingly self-absorbed Irish focus.
11 March at 21:25 · Like · Comment

👍 2 people like this.

What did you expect?!
11 March at 21:30 · Like

True, true _____. When you observe the slow, observant, silent commentary on every other news station versus the hideously crass chucking together of footage off the wires in RTÉ, it'd make you weep at the ineptitude of the national broadcaster. They have zero subtlety.
11 March at 21:34 · Like

Lol, I didn't see it, but it doesn't surprise me one iota. I was watching footage online, it was remarkable. I'm more amazed by the behaviour of their nuclear plants, to be able to withstand that sort of event.
11 March at 21:37 · Like

Yep. Wasn't the rural aerial footage just incredible? Seeing moving cars and dots of people evading and succumbing to the water was worse than any disaster movie!
11 March at 21:41 · Like

RTé is a subsidiary of FOX
12 March at 12:44 · Like

Write a comment...

While David's media diary revealed that a large proportion of his media use occurred alone this use of social networking sites to connect with friends and watch television together created a more communal and interactive media consumption environment.

Archiseek is a specialist discussion forum website dealing with architectural topics which David visits and contributes to regularly. He has been using this site since he was 19. The website offers a space to engage in robust discussion about planning, architecture, historical buildings and specific areas around Ireland. He sees the specialist nature of this site as providing a space where people's comments don't get lost in contrast to more generalist sites such as *boards.ie* where comments and discussions are lost and fragmented due to the scale and variety of topics on the site.

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6.6: Anne, 29, provincial town

I conducted an interview with Anne on the 15th of October 2010. Anne is a member a political party and had recently taken a position on the local council. Prior to taking up this position Anne had studied for a Bachelor of Arts Degree and was a full time stay at home mother. The interview took place in her home in a provincial town, which she shares with her son. We sat in the kitchen which is adorned with her son's artwork and she described her daily life and media consumption. We discussed her daily routine, her work and her activity in the local community. Her son was on mid-term break from school at the time and came in and out of the kitchen as the interview progressed.

In relation to her role as councillor her workday varied depending on the number of phone calls she received throughout the day. Constituents would call her with issues which they needed assistance with and she would call out to meet them in person and see what she and her party could do to help. It was this 'hands on' role which attracted Anne to her party, their involvement in local issues and provision of practical assistance to their constituents. She emphasised that since the recession had emerged the impact of government policy on everyday life had become much more pointed and she relayed stories of the impact of this on a number of people in her life and in the wider community who had lost jobs and had to consider leaving the Ireland.

There was a television and radio in the kitchen, the radio being on at a low level throughout the interview. Radio was a constant presence throughout the day for Anne, beginning with her 45 minute morning walk after leaving her son to school. Throughout the day if she was in her house the radio accompanied both councillor tasks and housework. She admitted with a sense of guilt, that while she felt she had a responsibility to listen to the local radio stations she did prefer the mix of talk radio and popular music on the national station *2FM*. She described herself as more of a radio than a TV person and this was reflected in her media diary.

In relation to her media consumption, radio was dominant with television viewing often focusing on news, current affairs and factual programming. Anne also watched a number of *RTÉ* produced comedy programmes such as *Hardy Bucks* and *The Republic of Telly*. At the time of the interview Anne did not subscribe to a digital or cable television service. She had the four national stations, *RTÉ 1*, *RTÉ 2*, *TV3* and Irish language station *TG4*. Other British stations such as *UTV* and *Channel Four* were also available most of the time with *BBC1* and *BBC2* being available intermittently but often with poor quality signal. Anne often watched television with her son and therefore a her television viewing was dominated by children's programming.

Anne did not buy a newspaper daily but purchased the local newspapers weekly and her political party's newspaper.

In relation to internet use Anne owned a laptop which she often used while sitting on the couch in the living room while the television was on in the background. She visited a range of sites including news, shopping and property. In terms of online social media she was an avid *Facebook* user, had tried *Twitter* but didn't like it, enjoyed reading threads on *politics.ie* and other special interest forums. She described how her *Facebook* use had changed since taking on her public role. Early in her political career she had received some upsetting abusive messages on her *Facebook* profile, after this happened she decided it was necessary to set up two separate profiles, one for her personal life and another for her public life as a councillor.

Fig 6.8: Anne's councillor Facebook profile

Fig 6.9: Anne's personal Facebook profile

She described the personal profile as a space to chat with friends and her public councillor profile as a professional space which housed 'PC' (politically correct) content such as photos and comments. This was a way to separate these two areas of her life and maintain some control over the interactions which she had online.

Her personal profile uses her real name and includes details of her education, date of birth, relationship, hometown, college, political views, favourite music, books, television, and activities and interests. Photo albums show her life with her son, family, partner, and friends and albums display activities which she has enjoyed such as holidays, hiking and visiting historical sites. Posts to her profile include a mix of everyday conversations with friends which often begin with a thought or observation. Anne described her use of this site as allowing her to contact friends in an easy and cost effective way. It also allowed her to reconnect with friends from different phases of her life. Often conversations were sparked by a comment on her wall then moving into the private chat feature where they could catch up in a private space and could chat for an hour or more at a time. She also mentioned the events

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feature in *Facebook* which reminded her of birthdays, social events and political campaigns. Often Anne commented on national events or the economic situation on her personal profile page but found in these instances that it was those people who were already members of her political party who were most likely to enter into a discussion or to respond at all.

6.7: Cathy, 28, city suburb

I met Cathy in the apartment which she rents with her partner close to the city centre on the 26th of February 2011. The interview was conducted in the living room area of the open plan apartment. There were a number of media technologies on display, a flat screen television, *UPC* cable television receiver and DVD player and Cathy's laptop on the kitchen table. My laptop was placed on the coffee table and we sat on the sofa facing it. Cathy guided me through the sites she would normally visit online beginning with her *Hotmail* email account, moving to *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *breakingnews*.ie, *RTÉ*.ie and *boards.ie*. At the time of the interview Cathy did not have an internet connection in her home. She conducted most of her internet use while at work on her office laptop, using her recently acquired *HTC* smart phone or on the occasions when she was provided with an internet dongle to work at home in the evenings or at weekends. Cathy graduated from Bachelor of Science Degree in Information Technology and went on to gain employment in the IT department of a large Irish retail company. She had recently moved to a multinational company taking on a role as an IT analyst commuting to work daily by car. She worked a core set of 40 hours per week beginning at either, 8:30am, 9am or 10am. In addition to this there was overtime; every third week she works a late shift which involves working in the evenings for two extra hours and one Saturday every three weeks.

Cathy's media use begins on her daily morning commute into work where she listens to the radio. Depending on the shift which she is on she chooses between a number of breakfast and morning radio shows including *Jim Jim Nugent's The Strawberry Alarm Clock* on *FM104*, *Breakfast with Hector* on *2FM* or *The Ray D'Arcy Show* on *Today FM*. Cathy revealed that her reasons for choosing particular shows were not only dictated by her time of travel. She found that Hector could be overbearing and 'too much to handle in the morning he's too...a bit too much in your face' (Cathy, 28, interview, 26th January 2011) so she chooses to listen to Jim Jim Nugent if she is working on the 8:30 am shift. On her commute home Cathy also listens to the radio, here

she moves between *The Will Leahy Show* on *2FM* and *The Right Hook* on *Newstalk*. She commented that listening to George Hook was more likely if so there had been a political event or sports story during the day and at the time of the interview when the election was rumoured to be called this was a more frequent choice for Cathy. If she is travelling by car at the weekend Cathy likes to listen to cds or a mix of cds and the radio. This is the only time she noted that she would sit and listen to music.

Usually at 11:30am in work Cathy goes online visiting a number of different websites depending on how busy she is in the office. Firstly she logs onto her *Hotmail* email account checking emails and any updates from her *Facebook* profile.

Fig 6.10: Screen shot of Cathy's Hotmail email account
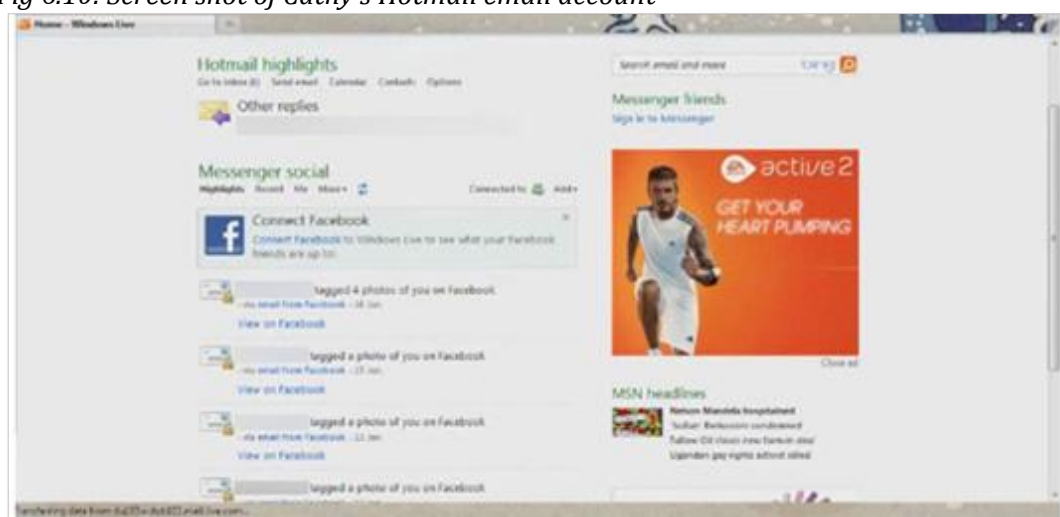
If there are updates from *Facebook* and she has time, she uses the link in the email to open the site and log in. She rarely, if ever, types the *Facebook* URL into her browsers' address bar to access the site. She usually would not have time to visit *Facebook* separately at this point of the day and makes do with a quick scan of the updates in her email account. Typically she will visit the *Facebook* website later on in the day when it is quieter at work but this does not happen every day.

After work television becomes the main media format for Cathy beginning with the *RTÉ 6.1 News* when she comes in from work, if she misses the 6

o'clock news she will watch the 9 o'clock news, but never both. Very occasionally she will watch *Sky News* but only if she 'flicks to it and there's an interesting headline' (Cathy, 28, Interview, 26th January 2011). Cathy's attitude towards watching the news has changed since her teens and early twenties. She described how she used not to watch any news, that she hated it and 'used to give out if people were watching it' (*ibid*) when she was a teenager. Her attitude towards the news had changed and she recognised that she tuned in more since getting older and beginning to pay taxes.

Turning entertainment media Cathy watches a mixture of soap operas, dramas, and reality television series. One of her favourite programmes is the US medical drama *Grey's Anatomy* which she watches on *RTÉ2* weekly and has joined a group on Facebook to receive updates on air dates and plotlines. She also watches the US drama *Desperate Housewives* again on *RTÉ2*. She is an infrequent viewer of the British soap operas, *Coronation Street* and *Eastenders* dipping in and out of these shows on a week by week basis depending on her work schedule and evening activities. On the weeks where she has to work from home in the evening she may have these soap operas on in the background while she works on her laptop at the kitchen table. Soap operas provide topics of conversation in the office and this is one of Cathy's motivations for watching these programmes and reality television shows such as *Big Brother*, *XFactor* and *Dancing on Ice*. In the canteen at work different soap storylines are discussed which are of particular relevance to people in the office. Weekend reality television programming was also discussed in the office canteen early in the week. *XFactor* and *Dancing on Ice* were broadcast at the time that the interview took place these were core features of conversation. Cathy's liked to watch mainstream reality television programmes which were reported on in other media formats such as online news websites and newspapers. She had been an avid follower of reality television format since her teens when the US *Survivor* programme was first shown in Ireland followed by *Big Brother* in her early 20s.

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Cathy's online social media use revolved around her profiles on *Facebook* and *Twitter*. She uses her *Facebook* profile to keep in touch with friends she wouldn't see every day, reconnect with people from school, college and work and keep up to date with news and her favourite television shows.

Fig 6.11: Cathy's Facebook profile page

On her profile she provides information on her birthday, third level education, relationship status, her hometown and current location. Cathy also includes a list of her favourite musicians, movies and television programmes. Her use of the site is often curtailed by how busy she is at work, both in the office and at home. For these reasons Cathy does not spend long periods of time on the site during the week, her use revolves around the news feed and if she sees something of interest she may follow a link, but she does not have the time to look through friends photo albums and profiles in detail. At the weekend if she has internet access and more free time she is more likely to spend longer periods of time on the site. Cathy's use of *Facebook* is predominantly reactive, she does not post status updates or content often and prefers to comment on or like content posted by her friends.

> "I would respond to things rather than leaving up comments and things like that...some people leave up messages four or five times a day and I'm not like that, I do it maybe once every two or three weeks."

> (Cathy, 28, 26th January 2011, Online Session)

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Cathy uses her *Twitter* account to following celebrities and sportspeople solely and does not connect with people she knows on Twitter. She uses this online space as a place to escape everyday life and tap into the world of fame and celebrity,

> "I'd browse through [*Twitter*] during the day. I enjoy it, it's funny, it makes me laugh. Facebook is comments that people I know put up but I just love reading celebrities; I just get a kick out of it. I just think it's really funny the stuff that they say and they get away with as well."
>
> (Cathy, 28, 26th January 2011, Online Session)

6.8: Patrick, 27, rural village

I met Patrick in the apartment he bought and shares with a flatmate in a rural village. We sat at the kitchen table and Patrick used my laptop which was placed on the table in front of him. In the living room area there was a flat screen television connected to a DVD player and a sky digital box, on the worktop in the kitchen was a radio and Patrick also had a television and DVD player in his bedroom. Patrick graduated with a Degree in Marketing and on finishing his studies worked in a number of office jobs before taking up a position as cabin crew with an international airline. He commutes to work each day by car listening to the radio. His job is shift based and depending on the routes he is flying could involve early shifts which start at 5am or late shifts beginning at lunchtime as well as overnight or multiple night stays in his destination. During work Patrick does not have any access to the internet or online social media sites. There is a shared computer in the staff area but this is solely used for checking rosters and requesting annual leave.

Depending on Patrick's work schedule his day may begin with the radio in his car on his way to work or with the television in his apartment. When he is working Patrick listens to *BBC Radio 1* in his car on his commute to work. This commute takes place either in the early morning at 4.30am or in the afternoon at 3pm if he is on a late shift. When he returns home he likes to go online to find the playlist for particular shows, if the DJ played a song he liked. He then adds songs to his *YouTube* account's playlist or downloads tracks to his laptop to create playlists and burn CDs which he shares with friends.

On the days when Patrick is on the late shift or is off work he likes to watch a mix of magazine programmes in the morning and early afternoon. If he is in his apartment he sometimes watches *This Morning* on *ITV*. Sometimes he will sit down to watch the show but most often it will be on in the background while he completes work around the house or prepares food for work. Patrick will then go to the gym and while on the treadmill he likes to watch

episodes of soap operas, the news or listen to music while he works out. If he is in his apartment in the afternoon he watches *ITV*'s *Loose Women* while eating his lunch or relaxing. He enjoys the guests on the show and the personal insights and advice it gives relating different issues in society. In the evening time Patrick watched the British soap opera *Coronation Street*, but this would not be a regular occurrence. At the time of the interview he described watching a number of programmes which dealt with the impact of the recession in Ireland on the farming community and peoples' everyday lives.[27] Patrick described how these had influenced his weekly shopping habits, alerting him to the added values of shopping locally. As a result of viewing these programmes he revealed that he had moved away from doing all of his shopping in large multinational supermarket chains.

Patrick did not have any access to the internet at work but did in his apartment and when he visited his parents' home. Online he liked to look up music videos, information on health and wellbeing and information about topical issues which were in the news. Patrick's use of online social media was quite infrequent he had a Facebook profile but rarely updated it or even logged onto it. His profile did not contain many personal details on his information page and he had only uploaded a handful of photographs.

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[27] These were produced by *RTÉ* and were part of the *Heartland[27]* series of programmes which ran from 8th to 16th of May 2011.

Fig 6.12: Patrick Facebook profile page
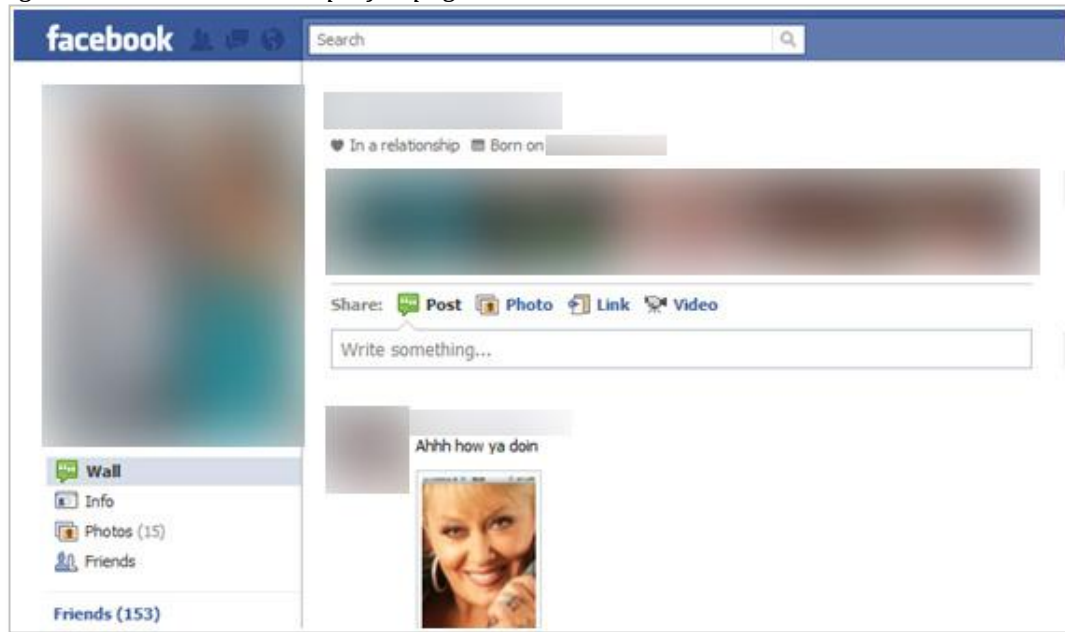
He was wary of using the site and expressed concern about disclosing personal information online citing the impact this could have on his professional life as a primary concern.

> "It can be dangerous for employers, they can go in and see all this stuff and that's why I would hold back more from putting stuff on the internet, because I prefer to be more anonymous."

> (Patrick, 28, 8th June 2011, Interview)

He relayed a number of anecdotes about problems which had arisen for people in work situations, where tension had been created around comments which were made on *Facebook*. He also talked about experiences of friends whose personal lives had been affected by the image people had built up of them through their posts to the site. The main use he had for the site related to his work. There was a page set up for employees to set up shift swaps which he visited regularly and another page dedicated to discounts which were available to staff in his workplace which was updated regularly. He also used sites such as *Trip Advisor* and *boards.ie* when searching for information on travel, health and fitness.

6.9: Michael, 27, city suburb

I met Michael in a city centre pub for his interview after a number of meetings had to be cancelled due to his busy work schedule. Michael worked in the marketing department of a large Irish company which has offices around the globe. He commutes to work by public transport each day listening to his mp3 player on the journey. Michael had recently moved into an apartment shared with two flatmates on the outskirts of the city. In his previous apartment he did not have a television or internet connection and spent his leisure time reading and listening to music. In his new apartment there was a large television and a full *BSkyB* package, which included subscription to all sports and movie channels. He found that for the first few weeks in his new home he watched hours of television in the evening and more at the weekends but had settled into a pattern of less viewing in the evenings and watching a few hours of TV at the weekend. After completing a Bachelor of Arts Degree he moved abroad to work for a year before returning to Ireland and taking up his current position. Online social media constitute a large part of Michael's work as the company make extensive use of online social media in their advertising campaigns. This work related knowledge of online social media left Michael sceptical and cautious about these websites, especially in relation to the amount of personal data that companies such as *Facebook* and *Google* store about individual users.

Michael's daily media consumption revolved around his use of the internet. Each morning the first thing he does online is check his email accounts both personal and professional. In the morning he checks world news on websites such as *RTÉ*, *The Guardian* and *BBC* news sites. He also used the sites *mashable* and *current* to keep up to date with breaking news.

At lunchtime Michael spent half an hour checking sports news on these websites and other more specialised sites. He has one site bookmarked *newsnow.co.uk* which has a dedicated football section. This site amalgamates

all football news and allows Michael to search for news specifically about the team he supports, Liverpool Football Club.

> "it's a news amalgamation system just for football teams so you log on and it gives all the news from *BBC*, *Guardian* all the top football sites and it puts them into a news feed for you."

> (Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Online Session)

Outside football Michael reads various blogs for other sports such as boxing. He had discovered these through his work and found the quality of writing and information provided excellent, and he repeatedly returned to these sites. Michael also used the internet to look at websites such as *reddit*, *dig-it* and *contraband* which provided what entertainment and comedy content in the afternoon at work and the evening time at home. In the evening Michael tended to use the internet for downloading content such as music and studying, reading through articles and books which interested him.

Offline Michael's media consumption was primarily composed of listening to music, watching movies and sporadic television watching. He liked to watch what he described as

> "a mix of information shows so like *National Geographic*, *Discovery Channel* and then a lot of stupid stuff like *Top Gear* and *Two and a Half* men, stuff like that TV series and cartoons."

> (Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Interview)

There were no television shows that Michael followed routinely but if there was a series that he was interested in he would record them on *Sky Digital* or download episodes online watching them when it suited him.

Michael had profiles on a number of online social media sites including *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Yammer*, *Myspace* and *YouTube*. Of these sites he used *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Twitter* most regularly.

Fig 6.13: Michael's Facebook profile page

He continued to have profiles on *MySpace* and *Bebo*, even though he had not used either site in years. He uses *YouTube* regularly to create playlists and *Twitter* to follow particular news stories and sports events. He described his *Facebook* use:

> "I use it mostly as a stalker, well you know, checking up with people I haven't seen in ages or people who are travelling and I might drop them a message. I never really use it to comment on what I'm doing anymore."

> (Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Online Session)

Probing this use of the site Michael revealed that since looking into the site's privacy policy he had become concerned about posting too much personal information on his profile as he was concerned about how this information could be used in the future

> "I'm always very wary that it will be used against me at some point"

> (Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Interview)

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These concerns could be seen to be contributed to in some part by his work which included creating and monitoring online marketing campaigns often with an online social media element. Michael spent a lot of his working day online and on online social media sites in particular where he ensures that ads and campaigns are targeted correctly towards particular demographic profiles and tailored to users' specific interests. He also spends a lot of time examining competitor's profiles and the campaigns which they are engaged in. This work revealed to him how corporations made use of the personal information provided by users on their profiles. He saw the information provided by users being used in a number of ways which he felt could be harmful; for advertising purposes, the development of products such as facial recognition on *Facebook*, having a permanent online record, issues of serious identity theft and 'fraping'[29].

> "Just the amount of data that they have about you like if somebody wanted to try to screw you over it doesn't take that much digging to get you fired or something. You know that phrase 'fraping'? That kind of thing, it sounds really childish and fearful, but that's just the way I feel, I don't know I'm pretty dystopian about the internet future."

> (Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Interview)

He was concerned about the professional image people would have of him if they looked solely at his *Facebook* account. For these reasons he talked about 'winding down' his *Facebook* profile and eventually cancelling it. He did use *Linkedin* and found it very useful for professional purposes. He wanted to make this his main profile online and move away from using *Facebook*.

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[29] 'Fraping' is a practice where a third party gains access to an individuals' online social media account and changes information on their profile or writes posts on their behalf.

6.10: Joan, 28, city centre

I met with Joan on the 28th of January 2011 in the city centre apartment she shares with one flatmate. The interview was conducted in the living room area of the apartment where there was a television, *UPC* cable television receiver and a wifi router. We sat on the couch with my laptop in front of Joan on the coffee table. As we started the online session Joan placed the laptop on her knee. This is the way she would usually sit when using the internet, on the couch with the television on in the background. Joan owned a *HP Netbook* and had received an *Apple iPad* as a Christmas present which she was still learning how to use. Joan guided me through the websites which she usually visited online starting with *Facebook* where she admitted she tended to go on tangents looking at friends' profiles, photo albums and links to content that they posted. From *Facebook* she moved through other sites; *TheSun.co.uk*, *dailymail.co.uk*, *menupages.ie*, *tripadvisor.com* and *YouTube*.

Joan had studied for a diploma in hospitality and at the time of the interview she was working as a manager in a city centre retail outlet of a British chainstore. She worked over 40 hours a week and her shifts varied from 7am to 12pm starts. In the morning while getting ready Joan listened to the radio in her bedroom and then on her commute to work by public transport she listened to music on her mp3 player. Throughout her working day she does not have access to the internet. At work she spends most of her day on the shop floor. Depending on the levels of administrative work she has to complete, she may have to spend a number of hours in the office above the shop. While in the office she uses a PC and may have some time to go online but this time would be extremely limited and rare. Throughout the day there is music piped to the shop floor which plays a looped compilation of current chart music. There is also a radio in the stock room which Joan listens to if she is working in this area of the store. In the staff room there is often a selection of newspapers, fashion and gossip magazines which are brought in by employees, Joan often flicks through these on her morning and lunch breaks.

It is in the evening that the majority of Joan's media consumption takes place. She estimated that she has roughly three hours of leisure time in the evening after she has finished dinner and this time is most often spent watching television and going online.

> "To be honest a lot of my leisure time I do watch TV when I come home because I would be on my own most evenings so I would be in front of the telly!"

> (Joan, 28, 28th January 2011, Interview)

Joan's work schedule changes throughout the week and depending on her shift she returns home between 5:30pm and 9pm.When she gets home early she turns on the RTÉ 6:01 News and prepares her dinner. She then likes to watch the British soap operas *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street* which were fixtures of her television viewing each week. At the time the interview took place Joan was also watching *Mary Queen of Shops* on *Channel 4* and *Cocaine Wars* on *TV3*. She liked to watch the former as it related to her work and provided a further insight into the retail industry. The latter gave her an increased understanding of crime in Ireland.

Joan also went online most evenings, the internet was for 'leisure and chilling out in the evening time' (Joan, 28, Interview, 28th January 2011). She firstly visits a news website, *RTÉ News* or *The Sun*, checking the news stories from throughout the day. She also has a number of websites bookmarked and then visits these, *menupages*, *YouTube* and *Facebook*. She also checks her emails and often searches employment websites, as she had subscribed to a number of mailing lists. Joan's time online is often unstructured and, unless she has a specific task to do, she likes to follow different paths and tangents exploring the online space. For example while on *YouTube* she moves between videos via those recommended at to her on this website:

"If you go onto YouTube and you start following a chain and you just end up somewhere completely random."

(Joan, 28, 28th January 2011, Online Session)

This type of exploration can be found in Joan's use of other websites such as news sites where she follows recommended links to articles and on *Facebook* where she follows links posted by friends.

The main online social media site used by Joan is *Facebook* and she visits it around three times per week. In the interview she described how she hadn't accessed the site in four or five days. She usually spends up to 20 minutes on the site at a time, but this fluctuates between a few minutes if she has something else to do and longer periods of time where she looks through friends' posts and photo albums.

Fig 6.14: Joan's Facebook profile page

The first thing Joan does when she logs onto *Facebook* is to look through the updates on the news feed scrolling through posts to see 'if there is anything exciting' (Joan, 28, Online session, 28th January 2011). She uses it to keep up to date with friends' lives, comment on their photos and leave messages on their profiles. She occasionally posted comments, particularly if she was doing something out of the ordinary as well as posting links to funny stories and videos which she thought would make other people laugh.

Fig 6.15: Joan's profile: sharing video content (online observation)

Joan also used the chat feature on *Facebook* to have longer conversations with friends online as she had not signed up to *Skype* at the time of the interview.[30] She sees the site as 'a bit of fun when I'm bored or have a bit of time to kill' (Joan, 28, Online session, 28th January 2011) and mentions that she wouldn't see herself as an 'active user' as she does not post a lot of comments on the site about the details of her daily life. At the time that the interview took place Joan did not have a smart phone with access to this site, however, during the online observation phase of the research Joan's posts revealed that by April 2011 she had purchased a phone which allowed her access the site. From this time her posts to *Facebook* became more frequent and began to include more everyday events. For example in this post sent from her mobile phone she announces the first ice creams of the season.

Fig 6.16: Joan profile post

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[30] Since the interview took place Facebook have bought Skype and have plans to integrate video calls onto the Facebook platform.

6.11: Kevin, 27, city suburb

I met Kevin on the 27th of January 2011 in the apartment he shares with his partner on the outskirts of the city centre. The interview was conducted in the living area of the apartment seated on the couch with my laptop on the coffee table in front of Kevin. There was a flat screen television in the living area attached to a DVD player and a *UPC* cable television receiver. Kevin is an avid gamer and spends plays games on his *Xbox* in the bedroom a couple of times a week while his partner watches soap operas in the living room.

Kevin was working in the city centre as a the civil servant at the time that the interview took place. He had the option of flexitime which allowed him to work from 8:30-10:30 to 4:30 and 6:30pm. Most mornings he began work at 10am and finnished at 6pm, commuting to work by car. His journey to and from work could take up to an hour, as he hits rush hour traffic in both directions. On his drive into work Kevin listens to the *Ray Darcy Show* on *Today FM* and on the way home to *Matt Cooper* also on *Today FM*.

At work Kevin has access to the internet with restrictions placed on access to *Facebook* and *YouTube*, these sites are not accessible in the office. Kevin' work was primarily desk based spending the majority of his day using his work PC. For this reason he was not interested in turning on a computer in the evenings when he returned home or over the weekend. These circumstances meant that Kevin was a very light user of *Facebook* and a number of times during the interview he mentioned that he was thinking about cancelling his account on the site. He did not have internet access in his home and did not own a smartphone at the time that the interview took place, he did however plan on buying one and felt that the purchase of a phone which enabled access to the social network site and would lead to an increase in his usage.

Throughout the day Kevin checks a number of websites to keep up to date with breaking news. Kevin has a keen interest in politics and the crisis in Ireland and although his job in the civil service prohibited him from

becoming a member of a political party he felt he would like to get more involved in politics at some point in the future. In the morning, after a cup of tea, he sits at his desk and visits the *Irish Independent* website (irishindependent.ie) reading through the main news stories of the morning. At lunch time he reads the news on the *RTÉ* website checking for updates. Throughout the day he also checks *breakingnews.ie* sporadically to keep up to date with any news that may be breaking in Ireland. His core media consumption through the day centred on online news. Outside news sites Kevin also liked to visit a number of commercial and entertainment sites. Kevin is interested in motoring and often visited *carzone.ie*, *whatcar.com* and *autoexpress.co.uk* to read about new car models which were being launched, look at cars which were for sale and comment on the forums on these sites. He also visited *donedeal.ie* regularly, checking for bargains and selling items which he no longer used such as media technology, musical instruments and sporting equipment. He used the internet to research purchases such as holidays and technology. For Kevin the internet is an informative and a commercial space where he goes to gain information on his variety of interests, to inform himself as a consumer and to make purchases. While he participates on forums relating to his interest in cars the curtailment of his access to social network sites meant that the communication function of the internet for Kevin was mainly carried out through his email account.

As the interview took place in the winter time Kevin described how his evenings were mostly spent in the apartment, but he hoped to begin getting out more when the evenings got brighter in the spring. His evenings consisted of returning from work at 6:00pm and watching the 6.1 News on RTÉ1, having dinner then maybe going for a walk before playing his Xbox for about an hour. After this time by himself he would join his partner in the living room area of their apartment and watch one or two television programmes together.

Kevin watches a mix of news current affairs, comedy and drama programming on television. He listed a number of his favourite shows, *The*

Savage Eye on *RTÉ2* and *Stargate* which he pre-records on *UPC* and watches at a time that suits him. He also likes to watch *Coronation Street* and *Grand Designs* occasionally.

Kevin has an account on *Bebo* but rarely accesses it, he thought it had been about two years since he logged onto the site. Kevin's *Facebook* profile contains information on his gender, relationship status, birthday, current location and hometown. He also lists his favourite films, music and television seriesand interests.

Fig 6.17: Kevin's Facebook profile page

When Kevin does get the opportunity to log onto his *Facebook* account he firstly visits his profile page and then moves on to look at his friends' pages. He doesn't spend too long on the site because he gets bored of it very quickly. He tends not to post comments himself but will reply to posts people leave on his page or use the site to connect with friends who are abroad by leaving a comment on their page.

6.12: Joanne, 29, provincial town

I visited Joanne on the 4th June 2011, in the four bedroom house which she owns with her husband Adam on the outskirts of a provincial town. We sat in her living room which had a large flat screen television connected to a *BSkyB* set top box and a DVD player. Joanne has a television and radio in the kitchen and a television in her bedroom. My laptop was placed in front of Joanne on the coffee table and I sat in a chair beside her. She guided me through the sites which she regularly visits online beginning with her *Facebook* account and moving onto *dailymail.co.uk*, *Google News Aggregator* and *Tripadvisor.co.uk*.

Fig 6.18: Screenshot of Google News Joanne's online session
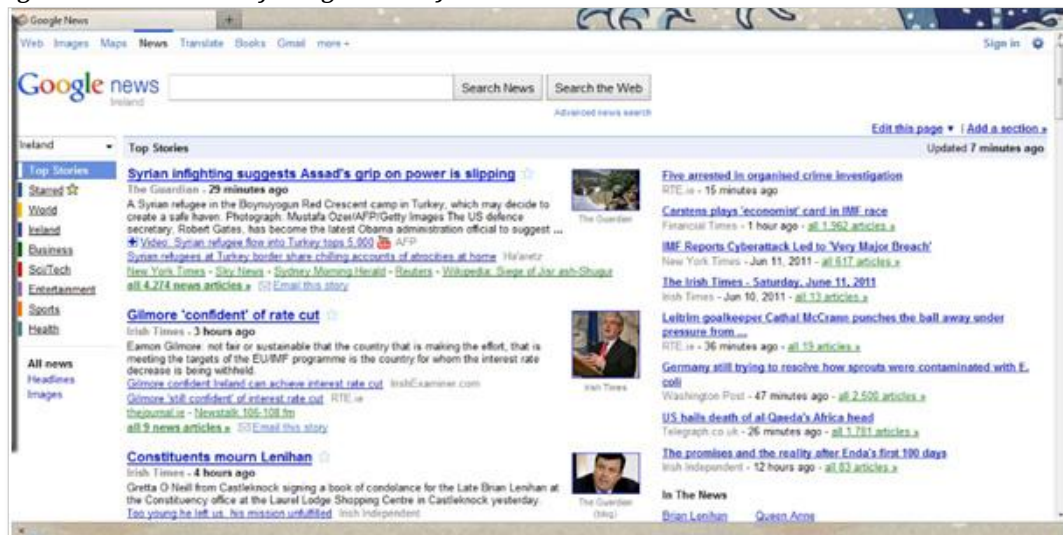
Joanne graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree from and moved to the provincial town she now lives in for a job in a large Irish firm. After receiving redundancy from that company she moved to her current position in a smaller firm. Her job is desk based and she spends most of her working day on her office PC. She drives to work each day to be in the office at 9am and returns home for lunch between 1 and 2pm. Her working day finishes at 5:30pm when she drives home.

Joanne's daily media use begins in the morning as she prepares her breakfast in the kitchen. She turns on the radio and tunes into the local radio station,

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listening to music and news updates on the breakfast show. She listens to the same radio station throughout her day; on the ten minute commute into work, on the office radio and again on her journey home from work at 5:30pm.

At lunchtime Joanne travels home for lunch. Each day she watches the end of the *RTÉ News at One* as she prepares her lunch and then sits down to watch the Australian soap opera *Home and Away* before returning to work for 2pm. On her *Facebook* profile Joanne had joined a number of pages relating to the show including the *Official Home and Away fan page* which she has occasionally commented on or liked pictures which were posted on the page. Throughout the working day Joanne has access to the internet without limitation and when there were quiet periods in the office she would check news updates through *Google* news aggregator and check her *Facebook* account on her phone. An email had been sent to employees in the company by management relating to internet use for non-work related purposes during office hours and since receiving this Joanne has reduced the amount of time she spends online while in the office. As part of her job she sometimes had to use *Facebook* and this work was carried out using her personal account on the office PC.

In the evening time television became a focus for Joanne's media consumption and during the week there were a number of programmes which she made time for. Of particular interest to Joanne was *Aircrash Investigations* which she watched at least once a week on *Sky 1* to gain an insight into the science behind air travel. While talking about this type of programming Joanne revealed that she had a fear of flying and got extremely nervous when getting on a plane. She admitted that perhaps watching these shows contributed to this but her interest the role of science in life won out and she continued to set time aside for this programme.

> "I think with me I have to always know what's going on and I
> think that's why I have a fear of flying, I think if I was in the

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cockpit I might be happier. But I like to know the unknown as much as I can scientifically."

(Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011, Interview)

Many of the programmes which Joanne watched were factual and her viewing often centred on the *Discovery Channel* during the week. She also watched the evening news on *RTÉ1* either at 6pm or 9pm. Joanne and her husband used the digital recording feature of their *BSkyB* package to record programmes and watch them at a more convenient time, this was one of Joanne's favourite features of the service. During the week they recorded the British soap opera *Eastenders* and watched it together on the television in their bedroom before going to sleep.

Joanne's online social media use revolves around her *Facebook* profile but also includes a number of other sites where she posts comments and reads through discussions.

Fig 6.19: Joanne's Facebook profile
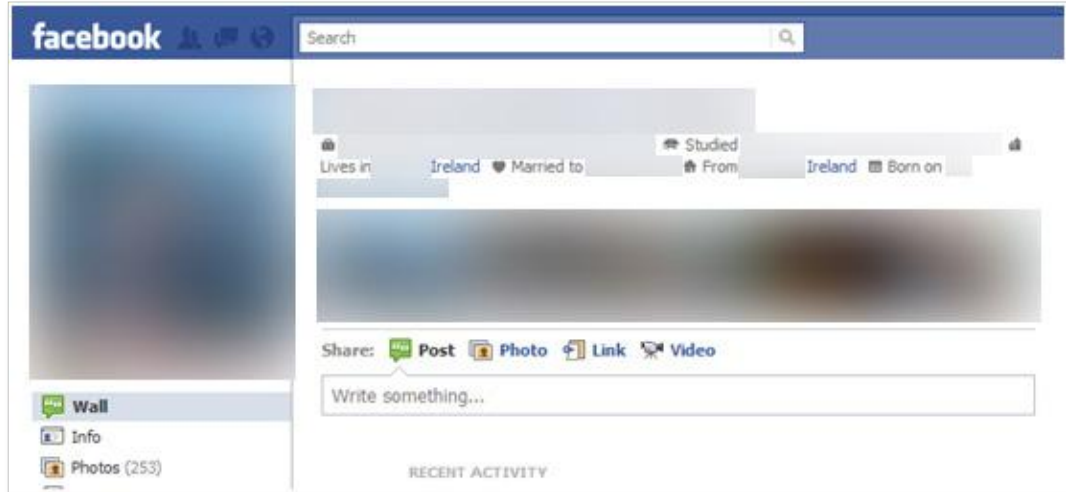
Joanne is a prolific user of Facebook using it daily to connect with friends and family through posts about her everyday life, trips she takes with her husband and photographs. Joanne posts comments and photographs relating to a wide variety of topics including; the weather, news stories, daytrips and holidays, her family and friends, going out and relaxing at home.

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Fig 6.20: Joanne Facebook photo post holiday

The majority of Joanne's posts to her *Facebook* profile were about her daily life, but she also included comments on news stories, the effect of the economic downturn in Ireland and her interest in science as can be seen in the posts below.

Fig 6.21: Joanne Facebook post: News article from The Irish Times

Fig 6.22: Joanne Facebook post: Video from The Daily Mail

Joanne's siblings live abroad and the site had become a hub for keeping up to date with their lives. Joanne commented regularly on photographs of her nephews and keeps a number of albums on her profile dedicated to them. She exercised caution in relation to these albums, setting higher privacy levels on them than her other albums. She was concerned about images of her nephews being openly available to anyone on her page and therefore these albums were only accessible to family and close friends. She was extremely proud of her family and liked to show the other women in her office pictures of her nephews if they have visited or if a new album of photographs had been posted by her siblings.

When Joanne watched talent shows like *The X Factor* or *Britain's Got Talent* she logged into her *Facebook* account on her phone or laptop to connect with friends who are also watching the programme. She described how "it almost felt like you were watching the TV with people in the room and having a commentary about what was going on" (Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011, Online Session) as comments about contestants and predictions on who would win were exchanged via the newsfeed. Outside *Facebook* she posts reviews of accommodation and holiday destinations on *Tripadvisor* and reads through the comments section of *The Daily Mail* website, especially if there is a story of particular interest to her in the news, for example the Queen of England's visit to Ireland in the summer of 2011.

Chapter Seven: Contextualising online social media use in everyday media consumption patterns

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will contextualise the use of online social media sites within participants' general media consumption in order to gain an insight into the role of these sites in their everyday lives. This research posits that it is important not to examine the use of online social media in isolation but within the context of general media consumption practices of participants. Through the analysis of participants' media diaries and interviews, this chapter will explore how 'old' and 'new' media converge in the lives of participants.

This chapter addresses research question one put forward in chapter one which sought to examine how online social media relate to other media technologies in participants' everyday lives. 'New' media use does not occur in a vacuum, it influences and is influenced by the consumption of 'older' media formats. Analysis of participants' reflections on their media use reveals the habitual character of use and the incorporation or domestication (Silverstone & Hirsch, 1992) of different media technologies into daily life. The results here also show that far from replacing 'old' media formats such as television and radio, there is evidence of convergence (Jenkins, 2006) in media consumption where digital media complement participants' consumption of other formats.

Leading on from the participant profiles presented in chapter six, the following sections provide insights into how specific media technologies are incorporated into the daily routine. The aim here is to establish the place of

these media technologies in the participants' everyday routines as well as the uses and meanings ascribed to them by these individuals.

7.2 Overview: Patterns of Media Consumption revealed in media diaries

As presented in chapter five (section 5.6.1) participants recorded their use of different media formats over the course of week, completing the structured form which was provided by the researcher. Diaries were completed at the participant's convenience. Ten participants completed media diaries.[31] Analysis of the media diaries included measurement of the time spent by participants with different media formats, a breakdown of programme genres consumed via television, radio and the internet, and finally analysis of media use as individual and collective experience over the course of the week. This analysis of the diaries revealed that while online social media and the internet in general had become spaces of communication and media consumption for participants they had not replaced traditional media formats, such as television and radio. *Figure 7.1* below provides a breakdown of the different media formats consumed by participants over the one week period.

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[31] Michael did not complete a media diary due to work commitments.

Fig 7.1: Media Consumption Breakdown for week (Measured in hours)

Media Consumption Patterns

Eoghan: 12.0, 5.3, 4.5
Joanne: 43.8, 14.3, 8.4, 2.5
Adam: 62.7, 11.7, 5.0, 0.3 (Gaming)
Patrick: 3.0, 8.2, 0.5, 1.3
David: 0.2 (Radio), 10.5, 13.9, 2.3
Joan: 3.0, 11.3, 4.1, 4.2
Kevin: 2.8, 10.4, 8.0, 0.5, 5.9, 0.4 (DVD)
Cathy: 5.8, 22.8, 5.2, 2.6
James: 2.8, 12.3, 4.3, 0.7 (Print), 0.7 (Book)
Anne: 15.5, 4.3, 2.7, 1.5, 2.5, 0.4 (Gaming), 0.5 (Print)

(Hours)

Legend:
- Radio
- TV
- Internet
- Print
- Gaming
- Phone
- Cinema
- DVD
- Book
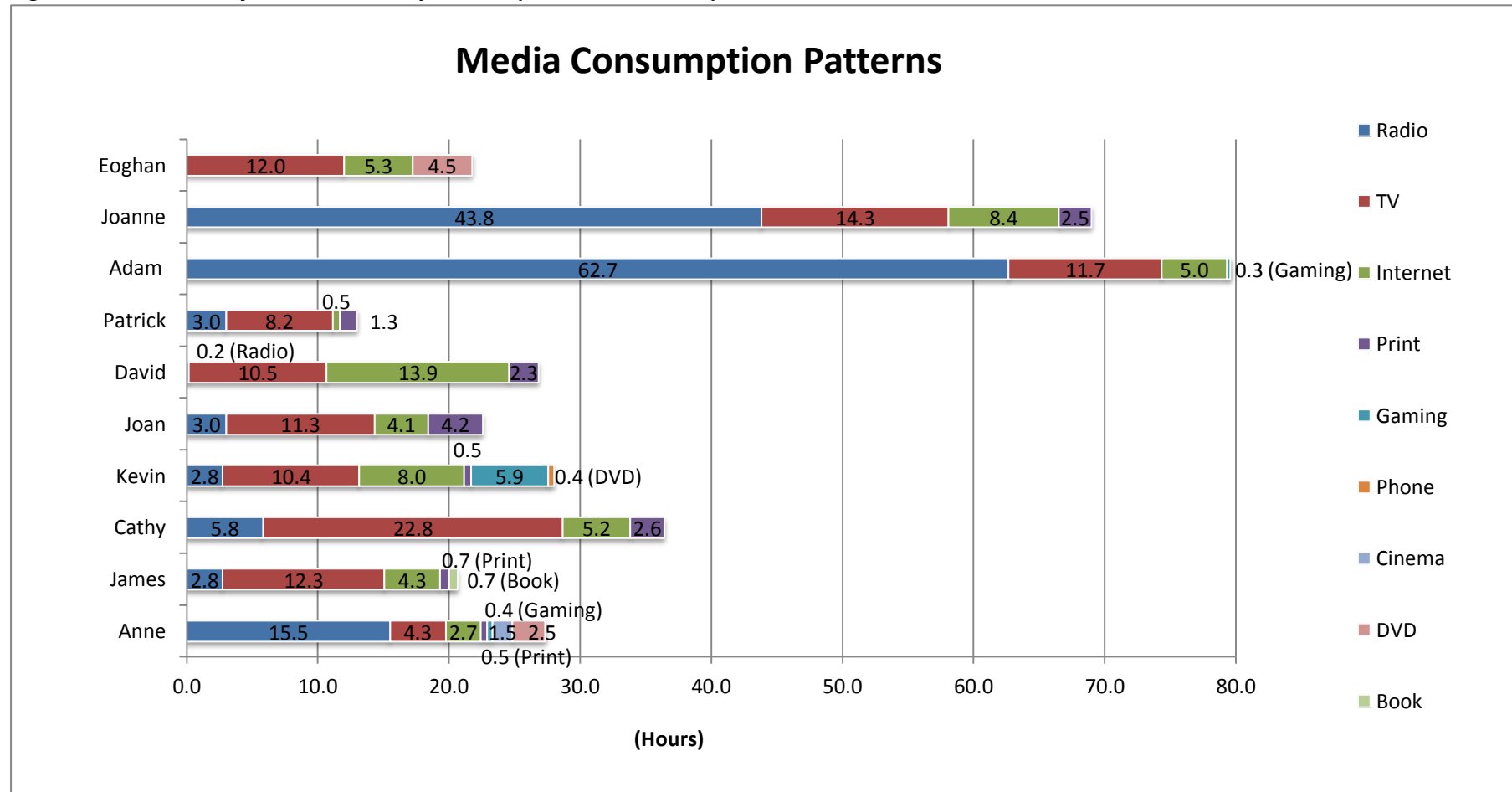
Figure 7.1 illustrates that television is the primary media format consumed by Eoghan (12 hours), Patrick (8.2 hours), Joan (11.3 hours), Kevin (10.4 hours), Cathy (22.8 hours) and James (12.3 hours). Radio is the dominant media format for Joanne (43.8 hours), Adam (62.7 hours) and Anne (15.4 hours). Finally David is the only participant for whom the internet is the primary media format utilised throughout the course of the week, logging 13.9 hours of use.

For these individuals the data gathered from their media diaries indicates that online social media and general internet use have become part of their wider media consumption habits. Internet media co-habit the participants' media use throughout the week and time is given to both 'old' and 'new' media formats. This demonstrates that internet media have been appropriated into the everyday lives of participants and are utilised in conjunction with other older media technologies, reflecting Silverstones' (1992) theory of domestication. The following sections examine the specific media technologies utilised by participants drawing on data gleaned from the qualitative methods utilised in this study. They provide an exploration of these individuals' use of different media formats in everyday life, in order to locate the use of online social media within their broader media repertoires.

7.3: Television

All eleven participants who took part in this research had access to television in their homes. All participants but one subscribed to digital television packages requiring a monthly fee to be paid; David, Joan, Kevin, Eoghan and Cathy, subscribed to the *UPC* cable Network; Michael, Patrick Joanne and Adam subscribed to *BSkyB*; and James had access to *BSkyB* in his parent's home. Anne had access to terrestrial television in her home which included the four main Irish television stations; *RTÉ1*, *RTÉ2*, *TG4* and *TV3*; as well as Northern Irish stations *UTV* and occasionally *BBC1* and *BBC2*. The two BBC stations were unreliable and often reception was poor. As presented in the previous section, the media diaries revealed that television was the

predominant media format consumed over the course of the week for Cathy, James, Kevin, Joan, Patrick and Eoghan. For all participants television consumption consisted of a mix of news, current affairs and entertainment programming and was the principle media platform for participants in the evening. Routines of television consumption became visible in the media diaries and subsequent interviews. The following two sections present analysis of participants' routine consumption of news and current affairs and entertainment programming.

7.3.1: Television News Programming and daily routines

Cathy, Kevin, Joan, Joanne, Eoghan, Anne, James and David watched televised news programmes at least once per day. *RTÉ News* was most popular among participants and was watched in the evening either at 6pm or 9pm. Some participants supplemented this with news from Irish commercial station *TV3* (James) and British broadcasters *BBC* or *Channel 4* (David regularly and Joan occasionally).

Participants described their routines, which often included watching the news when they returned home from work while preparing meals at lunch and in the evening. In these instances the news provided background noise for participants as they carried out these daily tasks.

> "Sometimes I come home for lunch at 1[pm] and I'd have the 1 o'clock news on in the background and then I'd watch Home and Away."

> (Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011, Interview)

> "When I come in I always have the telly on when I'm cooking so if I'm finished at 5[pm] I'd normally have the *RTÉ* news on at 6 in the background."

> (Joan, 28, 28TH January 2011, Interview)

News programming in these instances can be viewed as a background soundtrack to tasks which participants are engaged in, for Joan and Joanne while preparing meals. In these instances participants do not sit down to watch the news, and do not give the programme their full attention. The use of news media demonstrated here could be viewed as quite passive as Joan and Joanne listen to the news in the background. However, following the discussion in section 2.3.2 surrounding media uses and gratifications, news on these occasions also provides relational, information and surveillance gratifications (Katz et al, 1974). News provides company at times when the participants are in their homes alone. They seek out news programming as it also provides information relating to national events and the national economic and political situation information which participants also use in their interpersonal relationships in various situations.

David was one of the few participants who talked about watching news from international sources. Here he described watching British news coverage for the analysis of current affairs.

> "Usually news when I get in, and usually British news because I'd be watching the Irish news later on. So usually *Channel 4* and it's good because it has analysis as well as current stuff then later on *Prime Time*, *Vincent Browne* is usually fairly decent in the evenings"

> (David, 27, 2nd February 2011, Interview)

David was interested in viewing the analysis of news events from different perspectives and this was evident across the data sets gathered from him in this research. He watched different news programming on television, watching *RTÉ News* each night at 9pm and *Channel Four News* at 7pm. He also watched current affairs programmes on both *RTÉ* and *TV3*; *Prime Time* and *Vincent Browne* respectively.

David presents an active mode of news consumption in two predominant ways (Fiske, 1987). Firstly, in his consumption of news media he utilises numerous television sources to gain information on news stories. He actively seeks out sources which provide not only the 'facts', but also analysis of news stories and events. Secondly, he moves from a passive consumption of news as facts to a more critical position where he analyses the messages being presented and the modes of presentation from a variety of sources. I would posit that this is related to his education in media studies and his exposure to policy making and media in his place of employment.

Cathy felt there was a duty to keep up to date with the news, especially within the context of the economic and political crisis in Ireland. She often watched one news programme in the evening after coming home from work on *RTÉ*.

> "I'd watch the news, I wouldn't watch the 6 o'clock and 9 o'clock, I'd watch maybe one, and sometimes I don't watch it at all, And Sky News only the odd time if I flick to it and there's an interesting headline."
>
> (Cathy, 28, 26th January 2011, Interview)

Cathy mentions here that sometimes she does not watch the news at all. While televised news regularly forms part of Cathy's evening routine it is not an integral part of it, unlike other participants such as David. As described in her profile in chapter 6 the internet was Cathy's main source of daily news. In her media diary Cathy watched the news once every evening during the week but did not watch any news programming over the weekend. There is a loyalty here to the national broadcaster *RTÉ* for news programming; indeed Cathy had also joined the *RTÉ News Facebook* page through her *Facebook* profile.

A number of participants were regular viewers of current affairs programming such as *Prime Time* (*RTÉ1*) and *Vincent Browne* (*TV3*). These programmes were integral parts of their weekly viewing habits. While David,

James and Eoghan regularly watched these particular current affairs programmes, they served different purposes for each participant.

David watched *Vincent Browne* for both information seeking and entertainment purposes. He tuned in not only for the analysis provided of national issues but also for the spectacle of debate and the tough questioning of panellists by the host. Along with viewing David also tended to comment on his *Facebook* profile as he watched these programmes often entering into discussions with friends around various issues.

> "What I find really interesting about social media is that I often find myself watching TV programmes along with somebody else online, sometimes with two people and you have constant discussions, that would probably happen most days even if it's drama or current affairs through MSN but sometimes through *Facebook*."

(David, 28, 2nd February 2011, Interview)

Fig 7.2: David Facebook commentary on Vincent Browne, Online Observation

In this instance a convergence of media platforms is evident in David's viewing of television, current affairs programming in this instance. Jenkins (2006) posits that new media converge with older media formats in media consumption among contemporary audiences. Here David demonstrates that through the convergence of television and his online social media profiles he creates shared media experiences with friends online. Although this example

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is not of the national scale which Morley (1996) discussed, the use of multiple media formats here facilitates media practices to continue in spite of geographical distance. However, it must be noted that David had appropriated the technology in this way and was a regular contributor to online forums, he was comfortable both using the technology and in discussing public issues.

In his interview James talked about the change in format of current affairs programmes. He discussed how audience contributions were changing to shorter formats such as text messages and *Twitter* which he saw as being "very short and sweet and it's ideal for something like broadcasting" (James, 25, 10th February 2011, Interview). This reflects the prevalence of the 'soundbite' as a key instrument in political communication, particularly since the popular adoption of television (Street, 1997). James' observation reflects the manifestation of the soundbite in audiences' interaction with television programming, specifically current affairs, through *Twitter*. Eoghan also used *Twitter* as well as the *politics.ie* forum while watching current affairs programmes, in particular *Tonight with Vincent Browne* on *TV3*. He represents what *Twitter* describes as 'silent listeners'[32], his motivation is in seeing the opinions of other viewers.

> "You'd be watching Vincent Brown, some of the stuff he comes out with is nuts and some of the people on it are bonkers so it's interesting to see people's interaction about what's going on [via *Twitter*] ... *Vincent Browne* is good craic. It's nice to see what people's opinions are. I mean you can pigeonhole people who are members of political parties and it's nice to see what you pigeonholed them as reinforced."
>
> (Eoghan, 26, 7th April 2011, Online Session)

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[32] 40% of active *Twitter* accounts are 'listeners', users do not send out tweets but follow others. Source: http://blog.Twitter.com/2011/09/one-hundred-million-voices.html?m=1 (published and accessed 08/09/2011)

Unlike those who are not members of political parties his interest lay in observing the opposing argument. This mode of use reflects Tobias Ollson's (2006) research into the use of the internet among politically active teenagers in Sweden which found that young party members watched televised debates to learn how politicians conducted themselves in debate and not necessarily for information seeking purposes. It is also interesting to note here that for Eoghan this particular current affairs programme provided a number of uses and gratifications (Katz et al, 1974). The programme is a source of information but also a source of entertainment and amusement owing mainly to the presenter Vincent Browne's chairing of the debate. In this instance the pleasures of viewing, more often associated with entertainment formats, come from the spectacle of the debate on the programme.

7.3.2: Entertainment programming and daily routines

For Cathy and Joan entertainment programming became a focus for the evening with a range of soaps, factual and reality television. Cathy was the heaviest television user among participants watching just less than 3.5 hours on average every day. She watched the evening news most days and also liked to watch a range of entertainment programmes. She described how these were often 'hot topics' of conversation in work.

> "I watch *Grey's Anatomy* every week, I love it, and soap wise I'd watch *Coronation Street* and *Eastenders*. Now I mightn't watch any of them for a week and I might watch every single day for a week it's week on week off...I'd also watch the *X Factor* and *Dancing on Ice* as well they're often a big topic entertainment wise...*Dancing on Ice* has just started and I think I've watched it twice but I do talk about it in work because there's interesting people on it...last year I watched *Big Brother* and I watch it every year. But I wouldn't watch it every day, I'd know who's in the house and who's leaving and stuff like that...I like the big ones the mainstream ones"
> (Cathy, 28, 26th January 2011, Interview)

At the time that the research took place television was the dominant media format used in her leisure time. After work it became a focus for relaxation and escape. Cathy describes a number of different programme genres which she watches regularly; dramas, soaps and reality television. These programmes also served a social purpose for her, particularly reality television programmes, which provided topics for conversation at work. As described in her profile Cathy had been a fan of reality television shows since she was a teenager and this continued through her twenties.

Joan also described her evening routine which included a selection of entertainment and factual programming.

> "I'd watch the soaps, that'd be the only thing I'd really have to watch. There is a couple of series that I would be following. I suppose because of the nature of the job that I'm in, *Mary Queen of Shops* on *Channel 4* and I'm watching *The Cocaine Wars* on *TV3* at the minute which is about Ireland's drug lords. There are one or two things that I do watch in my leisure time."
> (Joan, 28, 28th January 2011, Interview)

Again television was a focus for Joan's media use in the evening after work. Here, she described watching more factual and 'info-tainment' programming relating to her experiences, her work and the area she lived in. The programme choices which Joan revealed in her interview demonstrate that while television did provide a diversionary function the content chosen provided a source of information relating to her life experience.

Michael described how his recent subscription to *BSkyB* had changed his television consumption habits. He had previously been living in a house with no television but after subscribing he now watched a half an hour a day and more at the weekend. As noted in his profile in chapter 6 (Section 6.9), Michael watched a mixture of factual and entertainment programming.

> "For 9 months I didn't have a TV or Internet and since I moved into my new gaff there we got a TV, *Sky* the whole lot and for the first two weeks I was watching TV nonstop but now probably about a half an hour a day. Weekends a lot more because you can just sit and watch TV all day because you've nothing else to do."

.(Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Interview)

Here access to technology increased Michael's television consumption initially, however, as the technology was assimilated into Michaels everyday life it became much less of a focus and his television consumption reduced. Television fulfils a diversionary gratification for Michael as he uses it to fill time when he has nothing else planned. In the interview he noted that the majority of his television viewing occurred at the weekend and centred on sports, entertainment and documentary programming.

David observed that he did not watch as many entertainment programmes as he used to due to his work schedule. He also noted that after coming home from work he found it easier to watch current affairs and news programming for convenience and as it was easier to follow if he missed the beginning of a programme.

> " I used to [watch] a lot [of entertainment programming]but not so much anymore, living here I get home so late that I might miss a lot of stuff that I would have liked to have watched at say 7 or 8 o'clock. And then it's almost easier to just digest current stuff you just turn it on and it's there."

(David, 27, 2nd February 2011, Interview)

David provides an interesting observation on one of his reasons for choosing to watch more current affairs programming in his evening routine. As he returned home at different times each evening he could not schedule specific slots of time in the evening for entertainment formats such as drama. Instead he chose to watch current affairs programmes. As he consumed news

throughout the day he would have an insight into the topics being discussed and could therefore tune in at any point.

Joanne provided a deep insight into her media routine in the evening time. As noted in the previous section, media was used by Joanne as a background soundtrack while preparing dinner but while compiling the media diary Joanne found that she watched less television than she had previously thought. She listed a number of programmes which she liked to watch, *Home and Away* was a regular choice which she watched at lunchtime if she was at home or recorded to watch later on. She also watched *Grey's Anatomy* and *Eastenders*.

> "Really when I come home I stay away from the computer at least for a few hours and I'd have the TV on or the radio on while I'm cooking and it would be very passive I wouldn't be paying attention. And maybe at about 7 or 8 I might watch TV but very little, I rarely sit down to watch the telly. And it's only when I was doing the diary that I realised that. It's only something that I would do as a last resort...I think it's the Sky+ you can record things now. I don't watch any of the reality TV shows. None. I have nothing really that I say I have to watch that tonight."

(Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011, Interview)

Here Joanne provides an interesting insight into the place of media in her evening routine. After working all day on a computer she chooses to avoid using her laptop at home for a few hours. At this time other media technologies are focused on, the radio and television, albeit functioning as background noise mainly to household chores. While Joanne noted that she didn't watch as much television as she expected to, she does make a subtle distinction between watching television via the live schedule and watching programmes recorded using *Sky Plus*.

7.3.3: Television on-demand

On-demand television appears in a number of guises within this study. Firstly there is on-demand television available through time-shift technology within digital or cable television subscription services from *UPC* and BSkyB. The hardware associated with these services includes a digital recorder and hard drive which can be used to record and store programmes to watch at a time that is more convenient for subscribers. These services appeared on the Irish market in 2006 (Sky) and 2007 (UPC). Time shift television viewing has been available to consumers since the development of the VHS recorder. For participants in this study this type of digital recording has taken the place of VHS recording, in some instances to the point where this new technology is viewed as the first incarnation of this type of television viewing.

The second mode of on-demand television occurs online, through official websites established by mainstream television stations where programmes are available to be streamed and viewed online. Services used by participants in this research include Irish services *RTÉ Player*, *TG4 Player*, *TV3 Player* and the British service *4OD* established by Channel Four. Use of these services by participants depended on the technology available to them and the reliability and strength of their broadband connection. Participants resident in the city were more likely to use these services than those who lived in provincial towns or rural areas, reflecting the digital divide which exists between urban and rural areas in Ireland.

Finally websites which allow users to download copies of television programmes were used Eoghan and Michael. These websites are structured around a file sharing format and are often used to download content which has not been released to mainstream television in the European Region. This section will illustrate how participants utilised on demand television services.

As discussed in the previous section, David explained in his interview that he watched a mix of current affairs and entertainment programming after work. He also described how his entertainment viewing had changed and he tended to utilise online on-demand services such as *4OD* to watch drama as his work

schedule meant he couldn't regularly watch a series on a television schedule.

> "because of the working lifestyle I find it increasingly hard to get into a routine of watching a serial drama at the same time every week so that's why the internet comes in very handy. Certainly a lot of my friends would do the same it's much easier to follow things online at your own pace. And then people would watch TV more for current affairs than drama."
>
> (David, 27, 2nd February 2011, Interview)

James, Eoghan and Patrick also discussed using on-demand services and online file sharing sites but for different purposes. Like David, James and Michael arranged the television schedule around their lives especially for watching documentaries when the television schedule didn't suit them. James utilised the official online players while Michael recorded programmes using *Sky Digital* or downloaded programmes from the internet. James expressed a sense of wonder towards the capabilities which on-demand television services provided.

> "I might hear of a documentary that I would like to see but it wouldn't suit me to sit down and watch it at that time so I would go onto, *TG4 Player* is fantastic, it has great documentaries on it, *4OD* less occasionally, *RTÉ player* ... it's a bit bizarre now that you could have a documentary on television and you can say I must watch that, but you can pick and choose what time to watch it."
>
> (James, 25, 10TH February 2011, Interview)

Joanne recorded episodes of *Eastenders* to watch with her husband Adam as they were going to sleep, she used the *Sky* digital recorder to save programmes and films to watch at a time that was convenient.

"If there's something I want to see I'll usually set it to record on the *Sky* and then watch it at my leisure whenever, same with films."

(Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011, Interview)

Similarly, Michael identified the benefits of digital television in his life as he could now create a personal television schedule which fitted around his working and social life.

"TV Series, I'm never obsessive but if I am I just download them and then just watch them on my own time. That's the thing about digital TV it's there whenever you want it to be, so you don't miss schedules anymore. If I was out for the night you just record it and then you'd consume it like that."

(Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Interview)

Eoghan tended to download entire series of fictional programmes and watch a number of episodes at a time. He talked about his impatience to wait for a week to see the next episode in a series and watching multiple episodes in an evening had become a shared media experience with his partner.

"I tend to be very impatient and so is [partner]. So like *Boardwalk Empire* we downloaded the whole thing and watched it.

CE: And where would you download it from?

E: Torrents, so yeah you get them in HD, so you can download them onto an SD card stick it into the DVD player and watch it on the TV so it's much better. You can watch 2 or 3 episodes and watch them whenever you want, it's much easier."

(Eoghan, 26, 7th April 2011, Interview)

Interestingly there were no qualms expressed by participants surrounding the moral and legal issues of using file sharing sites. The focus for participants Eoghan and Michael who used these sites was on their personal

objectives to watch television series uninterrupted by scheduling and release dates.

The entrance of digital technologies into television viewing has provided the opportunity for participants to interact with television schedules and fit these around their everyday life, as opposed to being constrained to static television scheduling. In these instances there is evidence of Jensen's (2001) conception of the *consultation* mode of audience interactivity discussed in chapter two (Section 2.3.5 p: 40), whereby users can utilise digital technology either online through specific websites or offline via their digital television recorder to tailor television schedules to their lives within parameters set out by their television providers.

These media routines demonstrate that the 'old' media of television continues to play a dominant role in evening leisure time for these participants. During the week television provided a leisure and informative space for participants. These examples of television consumption demonstrate that a number of the paradigms relating to audiences, discussed in chapter two, continue to have relevance in contemporary society. The application of the uses and gratifications approach developed by Katz (1974) illustrates that television takes on a number of uses for participants. Different uses and gratifications are evident information seeking, relational and entertainment or diversion functions are all present. Active consumption of media is evident among participants in the selection of sources and in analysis of news reportage and in the discussion which takes place around these programmes. Finally, the technological affordances of digital television allow participants to tailor television schedules to their lives providing a consultative mode of audience interactivity (Jensen, 2001).

7.4: Radio

A number of patterns emerge from this small sample in relation to their consumption of radio, The morning routine and daily commute were dominated by radio use for Anne, Kevin, Cathy and Joan. For Anne, Joanne

and Adam the radio was a constant presence throughout the day providing a soundtrack to the working day in the home and office. For Kevin and Cathy, commuting to work by car, morning radio programming was a fixture of their routine at this time of the day. Programming in these instances tended to be a mix of music, entertainment and news bulletins on *2FM* and *TodayFM*. For these participants radio was also a feature of their return journey. Kevin tuned into *The Last Word* news and current affairs discussion programme on *Today FM*.

> "on my way home I listen to *Matt Cooper* in the car, I always listen to *Matt Cooper, The Last Word* and *Ray Darcy* in the morning"
>
> (Kevin, 27, 27th January 2011, Interview)

Cathy chose evening music and entertainment programming on *2FM* or *George Hook* on *Newstalk* if she wanted to listen to what she described as 'something more newsy' (Cathy, 28, 26th January 2011, Interview) on her commute home from work

Radio was the most dominant form of media consumption for three participants Joanne, Adam and Anne. For each of these participants the radio was a constant presence in the background throughout their day. For Joanne and Adam there was a radio on in their workplaces, an office and a car repair garage respectively, tuned into the same local radio station throughout the working day.

> "At work there's a radio on the whole time in the background, the local radio station and it's on very low because we'd be on the phones and more at news time I'd listen to it."
>
> (Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011, Interview)

Morning radio programming on *2FM* and *TodayFM* provided Anne a soundtrack to her morning walk and also to her day during which she

listened to radio talk shows and music on *2FM*. Anne worked in the home and described how the radio provided a soundtrack to her day.

> "Well I listen to the radio all day; I'm more of a radio person than a
> TV person."

> (Anne, 29, 15th October 2010, Interview)

For James his morning routine involved listening to a local radio current affairs programme roughly three times a week. James utilised his *Facebook* account to participate in discussion with other listeners to this programme, demonstrating a convergence (Jenkins, 2006) between 'old' and 'new' media consumption practices.

> "If I was here in the morning and I was listening to [local radio
> programme] I would go onto the *Facebook* page where you can
> comment. It's a current affairs early morning show. They read
> the comments out, obviously not all of them, you can text in
> either but sometimes it's better just to [use Facebook]."

> (James, 25, 10th February 2011, Interview)

Joan's radio use included sporadic snippets on the stock room radio in work. In her media diary Joan reported listening to the same morning radio programming as Kevin, Cathy and Anne, both in her home before leaving and on her way to work either on the train or in her car.

> "In work we have a radio in the stock room...I can't get to hear
> the lunchtime news but if there was something on the radio that
> I like to listen to I would stay to listen to it."

> (Joan, 28, 28th January 2011, Interview)

Patrick who spent a lot of time commuting to and from work listened to the radio frequently. He often tuned into music and entertainment programming on *BBC Radio 1* and often used the Internet when he

returned home to look up DJs' playlists.

> "I'd listen to [*BBC*] *Radio 1* a lot...sometimes when I'm coming home in the car there might be a song on and I didn't get the name but on *Radio 1* you can go into the DJs specific shows and it gives you a tracklist...because I'd be in the car a lot I'd be listening to the radio a lot."

> (Patrick, 27, 8th June 2011, Interview)

These examples, in relation to radio, demonstrate that there are continuities of traditional forms of media consumption. There is also evidence of emerging modes of convergent media consumption, between traditional and online media formats (Jenkins, 2006). However it is important to note that while new technologies are being used to interact with broadcast mediums these are reflexive of practices which have been associated with the radio talk show format for decades. Research such as Sara O'Sullivan's (1997) examination of talk radio in an Irish context, question the role of audience participation and continue to have relevance in relation to the use of online social media in this context.

7.5 Print:

Following well publicised consumption trends[33], newspapers on the whole were not a daily purchase for these participants. In terms of news consumption the internet had become the primary source of news complimented by televised news programming for participants. Online news consumption will be examined further in section 7.7 below.

As presented in his profile (Chapter 6 Section 6.2) James described how he used to buy a newspaper when he was working, since then his newspaper purchases had become sporadic. For others older formats persisted. Anne

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[33] The Audit Bureau of Circulations *Island of Ireland Report* on newspaper circulation in the Republic of Ireland found a decline of 6.2% in sales of daily morning newspapers and a 9.1% drop in sales of Sunday titles in the period between June and December 2011. Source: http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/breaking/2012/0223/breaking58.html

described a preference for something tangible and her newspaper consumption centred on local newspapers and her political party's monthly newspaper.

> "I don't like to read anything off the Internet I like to have something tangible. But newspapers I'd read the [local paper]... I read the [local papers] because you're getting an honest opinion I feel, it's all about the town as well and because I'm a town councillor I want to know what's happening."

(Anne, 29, 15th October 2010, Interview)

Here Anne describes her preference for the coverage of events in local papers. A number of experiences with the press since becoming a councillor where she was misquoted or quoted out of context in national publications led her to take a more critical approach to her news consumption, ' I take what I read in the papers not with a pinch of salt, but I don't believe everything I read in them, you can't' (Anne, 29, interview 15th October 2010). In this instance her experience dealing with the press influenced her consumption and interpretation of the news.

Joanne described the differences she found between reading a newspaper in hard copy format and reading news online. She tended to only buy a newspaper at the weekend and described how if she bought a Sunday paper she could read it for two weeks due to the different supplements that came with it. Her main source of news was the *Google* news aggregator which she would check several times a day during the week.

> "I think you take it in better and the other thing about reading a [hardcopy] newspaper is that you read articles that you wouldn't normally read because online you have to actually physically click into them whereas in a newspaper it's just there to be read, you don't have to do anything it's just on the column and you might find something interesting. So I suppose you learn something more

from reading a newspaper...you would read more spectrum of stories than you would online"

(Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011, Interview)

Joanne's perspective here is interesting in relation to the comparative she makes between her consumption of online and hard copy news. There is a contrast here to the perception that information presented online, through the provision of hyperlinks to related content and easy access to different topics of interest can open up a greater range of subjects to users (Lister et al, 2008). Joanne counters this assumption by asserting that in her experience she would tend to read a broader range of articles in a print newspaper as they are laid out in front of her. Online, due to the use of search engines, Joanne's experience of online news is limited by the search terms she utilises and by the topics which interest her most.

7.6: Internet

All of the diarists had broadband internet access in some form over the course of the week they completed the media diaries and at the time of their interview. The following table summarises reported internet access from the media diary phase. An internet session here is defined by the diarist, in the analysis of the diaries any time a participant reported being online it was counted as an 'internet session'. There is no time limit to this.

Table 7.2: Daily internet Session reported by participants in media diaries

Participant	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Total
Anne	3	1	0	1	0	1	1	7
James	2	3	1	2	0	2	0	10
Cathy	2	1	0	1	2	1	1	8
Kevin	5	4	3	3	3	0	1	19
Joan	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	4
David	3	3	3	3	2	1	1	16
Eoghan	3	5	5	3	2	0	1	19
Joanne	5	3	4	5	5	2	2	26
Adam	1	2	1	2	1	3	1	11
Patrick	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2

Levels of internet use often tied in with the levels of access participants had during the day either in the workplace or in the home. Six participants had broadband access at work. Cathy, Michael, Joanne, and David had unlimited access which allowed them to log onto their online social media accounts from their work PCs. This happened sporadically during the day when they were not busy. The only limitation to Eoghan's internet use at work was a firewall which prohibited the use of *YouTube*, however he did have access to all of his other online social media profiles. Kevin also had access to broadband at work, however there was a firewall in place which prohibited the use of *Facebook*, but he could log onto other websites on which he had profiles. His limited access to *Facebook* both at work and at home meant that Kevin is a very light user of the site often expressing a lack of knowledge and interest in it. The internet took on a number of key roles for participant's including information (I), news (N), entertainment (E), connection (C) and

discussion (D). The table below presents how this range of Internet use was recorded in the diary stage by participants.

Table 7.3: Main functions/uses of the Internet as reported by participants in diary phase

Name	Email (C)	OSM check updates (C/D)	OSM posting (C/D)	Forums (I/D)	Commercial (I)	Information (I)	News (N)	Entertainment (E)	Chat (C/D)
Anne	4	4	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
James	4	7	7	0	0	2	5	2	2
Cathy	8	7	0	1	1	0	6	3	0
Kevin	7	0	0	3	10	7	9	2	0
Joan	1	3	1	0	4	3	1	0	0
David	12	10	3	12	2	0	9	0	5
Eoghan	1	4	0	0	4	3	12	14(sport)	0
Joanne	8	8	3	0	6	5	13	9	2
Adam	0	10	0	2	6	1	0	1	0
Patrick	2	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0

Differences in use between those who have access to the internet at work and those who do not are apparent here. For Kevin, Cathy, Eoghan, Joanne and David the working day is interspersed with sessions on the internet where emails and news are checked primarily. Kevin presents as the heaviest internet user in the workplace regularly checking news updates on *independent.ie*, emails and online commercial outlets. He also spends time seeking out information relating to gaming, movies, cars and travel. Cathy, Joanne and Eoghan tended to access the internet at work for regular news updates, checking emails and their *Facebook* accounts. Eoghan spent more time reading analysis articles on news websites such as *The Irish Times*, *The Guardian* and his political party's website. He also kept up to date with sports news, regularly checking the sports sections of a number of the same news

sites. Finally David accesses email and *Facebook* accounts, *irishtimes.com* for news updates on a regular basis as well as logging into a special interest forum on which he is an active member.

Joan's internet use over the course of the week was quite low, a fact she highlighted during her interview. Internet sessions for Joan typically occurred in the evening time while watching television. She accessed her *Facebook* account and commercial sites mainly, checking her email account only once throughout the course of the week. Anne checked her email and *Facebook* accounts each time she logged onto the internet, except on one occassion when she was looking at a property website. She utilised the chat function on her *Facebook* account to connect with friends. Finally James accessed the internet usually in the morning and at night. He logged onto his email and *Facebook* accounts regularly, checking updates and posting comments. He also checked news sites *rte.ie/news* and *utv.co.uk* for news updates.

7.6.1 Online News/Current Affairs

In relation to news consumption the internet takes on a specific role for participants. For James, David, Cathy, Kevin, Eoghan, Joanne and Michael the internet provided an up to the minute news source where the quick availability of current information was key. Kevin, who declared "I have to know what's going on", described himself as a 'news junkie' (Kevin, 27, 27th January 2011, online session). For Kevin reading news online (*independent.ie* and *rte.ie/news*) had completely eradicated the necessity to buy hard copy newspapers.

> "I have a routine everyday when I go into work the first thing I do after I get a cup of tea is sit down and read the *irishindependent.ie*. I always read that first thing in the morning and then at lunchtime I read the *RTÉ* news just to see any updates"

> (Kevin, 27, 27th June 2011, Online Session)

Similarly for Cathy, online news allowed her to keep up to date with news stories and she described how the website *breakingnews.ie* brought her 'news quicker than you'd get it anywhere else' (Cathy, 28, 26th January 2011, Online Session).

In the following quotation from his online session James compares the *RTÉ* online election coverage with coverage on the political forum *politics.ie*:

> "I mightn't even check the live election [on RTÉ] because there's a lot of stuff omitted from it, I feel, from looking at politics.ie. It's not exactly cutting edge. It's kind of lazy news, say there's a press conference and they'll just say Enda Kenny says and stick in a two line quote. You get no analysis on it so in that respect it's fairly lazy. On politics.ie, you can try to analyse it yourself but because you're biased you're going to analyse it your own way anyway. A lot of people who actually work in the Oireachtas as secretaries or they work for the party or journalists are on it as well as they're there in the Dáil or at conferences and they can tweet and they or their friends will quote the tweet and turn it into a post."

 (James, 25, 10th February 2011, Online Session)

James utilised the internet to access greater analysis of events through alternative news sources such as *indymedia.ie*, *politico.ie* and his *Facebook* account. He also logged into spaces of discussion such as the forum *politics.ie* where breaking political news was provided directly from reporters and staff in the houses of the Oireachtas and analysed from a greater variety of political outlooks. Through these practices James demonstrates an active engagement with the news media he consumes. This can be viewed to emanate from his experience within his political party and his role in campaigning in the local community.

Michael's main news sources were online news websites such as *irishtimes.com*, *bbc.co.uk* and *breakingnews.ie*. When it came to televised news

programming he described how he preferred to be part of the audience at the filming of current affairs programmes as he was living in Dublin.

> "news wise I'd much rather actually go to something like The Frontline...if there was something I was interested in, I keep an eye on it and... I'd much prefer to go to get tickets...actually go to the show rather than watch it on TV."

> (Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Interview)

These insights into online news and current affairs content demonstrate a number of different news consumption patterns among participants. Firstly, an observational mode of consumption where participants continually check news updates throughout the day using one or multiple sites. The main focus of this type of consumption is to keep up to date with breaking news as it happens. Secondly there is a more analytical mode of consumption where participants utilised the different media sources available to them online to compare and contrast coverage of events relating the crisis in Ireland and in particular the general election campaign in 2011.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented participants' daily media consumption patterns. It examined participants' daily media rituals, identifying patterns of media consumption and spaces of use in order to contextualise the use of online social media in everyday life. In relation to general media consumption patterns among participants, new and old media formats were features of daily media consumption. Radio and television consumption were major features for all participants. In some cases digital media played a supportive or enhancing role for participants providing customisable viewing schedules for entertainment programming and spaces to interact and collect further information about favourite programmes.

Online news media has taken the place of daily newspaper purchases for the majority of participants. This form of news consumption can be seen as the provision of an old media format through a new technology, a phenomenon referred to by Sonia Livingstone as 'old wine in new bottles' (2003: 15). The following chapter delves into participants' use of online social media in particular, examining how these sites are utilised in participants' everyday lives.

Chapter Eight: Uses of online social media

8.1: Introduction

This chapter focuses specifically on participants' use of online social media sites, drawing on data gathered from all methods utilised in this research as presented in chapter five. The aim of this chapter is to examine the uses and conceptualisation of these sites in participants' everyday lives.

Firstly this chapter identifies the online social media sites utilised most often by participants, examining issues of access and levels of usage. The chapter then moves on to present the functions of online social media for participants and their conceptualisation of these spaces. Finally the chapter addresses the use of these sites for discursive practices.

All eleven participants in the qualitative elements of this study had multiple online social media profiles. These included social network sites such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, video sharing sites such as *YouTube*, online discussion forums where participants read, discussed and 'lurked' on specific topics of interest and finally consumer recommendation websites where participants wrote reviews of services and products which they had purchased. This chapter presents participants' routine use of these sites and their attitudes and concerns towards using them. The results of the empirical research demonstrate linkages between the uses of online social media and participants' offline activities.

8.2: Facebook

Facebook was the most popular online social media site used by the eleven participants who took part in the empirical aspects of this research. However, the use of this site fluctuated between those who logged in daily to those who rarely logged into their profile. Through media diaries, online sessions and interviews participants provided accounts of their routine use of their *Facebook* profiles. Account activity varied among participants depending on their working situations. The following table presents the number of times per day that participants logged onto *Facebook* as reported in their media diaries. *Facebook* was viewed by participants as accessible and easy to use as well as being a space where the majority of their friends went online.

Table 8.1: Frequency of Facebook log in reported per day in media diary kept for one week

Name	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	**Total**
Anne	2	1	0	1	0	1	1	6
James	2	3	1	1	0	1	0	8
Cathy	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	7
Kevin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Joan	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	3
David	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	11
Eoghan	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	5
Joanne	3	2	3	1	1	1	1	12
Adam	1	2	0	1	0	3	1	8
Patrick	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Kevin and Patrick exemplify the impact that employment situations can have on online social media use. As revealed in his media diary and presented in Table 8.1, Kevin did not log into his *Facebook* profile over the course of the week. He has a desk based job and works on a computer all day, however, there are restrictions placed on access to *Facebook* in his office. In his interview Kevin asserted that he would like to use the site more often but

after working on a computer all day he did not want to spend his leisure time using one as well.

> "I barely ever use it, the reason I don't use it is because we're prohibited from using it in work. And 99% of the time when I'm on a computer is in work from Monday to Friday and we're not allowed to use any social networks whatsoever. So when it comes to the weekend the last thing I want to do is go on the computer because I've been sitting at one all week in the office. I don't go on *Facebook*; I'm very rarely on it. A lot of the stuff I have on it, like the photos and all, a lot of what I have on it is a tiny reflection of what I do in my life like holidays and stuff like that. I barely use it at all."

> (Kevin, 28, 27th January 2011, Online Session)

Patrick was also a light *Facebook* user, logging onto the site only once during the week that he completed his media diary. Patrick presents a different working situation to Kevin. In his work in the aviation industry he has access to a shared computer in a communal staff area which is used solely by employees to check email and update schedules.

> "It depends on what way I'm working and whether I have access you know.
>
> C: And would you have access in work at any stage?
>
> P: No, never."

> (Patrick, 27, 8th June 2011, Online Session)

For those with access to the site during the day at work, *Facebook* use tended to be quite routine during the working week with short sessions of between 2 and 10 minutes occurring throughout the course of the day. Extended sessions tended to occur in the evening time and at weekends when there was time for participants to browse friends' photos, follow links to external sites and use the chat function. These insights demonstrate that working

situations had an impact on the amount of time which could be spent on this particular site by participants.

The participants who took part in this research provided different elements of personal information on their *Facebook* profiles. As can be seen in *Fig 8.4* all participants used their real names on their *Facebook* profiles and also provided an array of personal information which was visible to friends. The personal information which participants included on their *Facebook* profiles correlated with the personal information discussed in the interviews.

This reflects boyd and Ellison's (2008) descriptions of social networking sites as ego-centric spaces centring on the individual as opposed to a topic of shared interest, where offline relationships and connections are mirrored. In this type of online space, there is little space to present an alternative or subversive identity as users are predominantly interacting with people whom they are already connected to offline.

Table 8.2: Personal details provided to friends on Facebook profile (Key: Y=Yes; N=No)

Participant	Name	DOB	Gender	Education	Relationship	Hometown	Current location	employment	religion	political	Contact
James	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Adam	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
Eoghan	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
David	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Anne (personal)	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
Anne (councillor)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
Cathy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
Patrick	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Michael	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Joan	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Kevin	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y
Joanne	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Of those participants who declared a political affiliation on their profile page, all but one were either members of a political party or active in campaigning offline. James and Eoghan, who are members of political parties, included their political orientation without declaring explicitly which party they were members of. Anne provided her party affiliation on her personal profile page but not on her councillor profile page. Finally David declared his general political orientation. Joanne was the only member of the group of participants who do not routinely engage in civic action to provide a comment on political views. In this space she shared a general sentiment "Wish everyone would stop pointing the fingers & just get some work done!" (Joanne, 29, Online Observation). This general sentiment reflects Joanne's approach to the place of her online profile in the discussion of public issues. Joanne had many opinions on a variety of social issues and party politics, however, in her interview she explained that she didn't want to upset anyone or cause arguments with her friends online by expressing her opinions in a direct manner. By including this sentiment on her profile she demonstrates awareness and an interest in the actions of the state and current affairs in a way which will not offend her friend groups online.

None of the remaining participants provided a political view and this can be seen to correlate with their conception of what *Facebook* should be used for and their orientation towards politics. For Joan, Cathy and Kevin, *Facebook* was not a space for political discussion or the declaration of opinions on this area. Interviews revealed that for these participants politics was something to be discussed among a private group of close friends and family and not on the public forum of a social network. Adam described in the interview that he did not take an interest in politics. Patrick did not use the site often and also discussed a wariness around putting too much information up online. Finally Michael had described in the interview that his experience in online marketing meant that he was very reluctant to post anything to his profile, and most of the content on his page had been posted by other users.

"My profile is very much contributed to only by people who know me, so the pictures, they're not uploaded by me. I'm tagged in photos and that I think the last time I would have uploaded photos would have been a year ago and that would have been before I started looking at the privacy and all that stuff … I never use it to anywhere near its full capacity my own profile"

(Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Interview)

This analysis of the personal data provided by participants provides an illustration of the links which exist between online and offline life in the online space of the social network site. It supports boyd and Ellison's (2008) description of these spaces as bound up in the offline world. Utilising the interview and online observation data allows for a richer picture of the commonalities between the two spaces to be explored. To look at these profiles in isolation it could be deduced that these participants have no interest in politics and public issues more generally. However when combined with the interview data it becomes more apparent that this is not the case.

8.3: Twitter

In contrast to the adoption of *Facebook* by participants, *Twitter* was not as popular with Cathy, Anne, Joanne, Eoghan and Michael, having accounts on micro-blogging site. Of these participants Michael and Cathy could be classed as readers or 'listeners', using this site to follow breaking news and sports stories and celebrity life respectively. Anne, Joanne and Eoghan had created profiles but rarely, if ever, used them.

Michael described how his use of *Twitter* often centred on news and sports stories, following people who were reporting on particular events.

"I use *Twitter* for keeping up with news so if there's something that I'm particularly interested in a week like a news story I'll follow a load of people on that. Most of the time I'm just looking for

bang up to the minute news so for some of the sporting events some of the football, the golf I'd only watch it on twitter I didn't use TV at all...For something like elections I think it's excellent because you don't need the picture. It's just pure data that you're looking for so it's fantastic ... of course you have to be selective in terms of the people that you follow but that doesn't really take long, if somebody bullshits you on *Twitter* the community excommunicates them, it's very much peer review. You know what you're getting. If somebody has thousands of followers you know they're going to be good. So it's a very good system of information.

(Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Interview)

Michael felt he could get information on breaking news. However while he would follow these stories through *Twitter* he rarely, if ever, made a contribution to the development of a story or entered into an online discussion. Here he highlights the 'peer review' system at work on the site portraying the trust he has in the information found on the site, the communal sharing of information in this instance can be seen as a manifestation of the 'folksonomy' (Vander Wal, 2004; Lister et al, 2008) function of online social media as discussed in chapter two.

Cathy had a very specific use for her *Twitter* account which focused exclusively on following celebrities. She described how *Twitter* provided an escape or a distraction for her, as she followed celebrities' accounts to gain an insight into their lives. Cathy did not follow anyone she knew and had not sent a tweet since setting up her account.

"I use *Twitter* mostly for entertainment I've never tweeted in my whole life. I use it on my phone. I've got wifi in work and I connect to that and it synchronises everything, so at lunch time if I'm sitting chilling out I'll have a look through *Twitter*. I never really use it on the internet. I enjoy it, it's funny, it makes me laugh.

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Facebook is comments that people I know put up but I just love reading celebrities; I just get a kick out of it. I just think it's really funny the stuff that they say and they get away with as well. "

(Cathy, 28, 26th January 2011, Online Session)

In contrast to Michael's use of the site for information seeking relating to news and sporting events, Cathy utilises the site as a source of entertainment and diversion throughout her working day.

Joanne had set up an account on *Twitter* and used it to connect with celebrities associated with the *X-Factor*. However she found the structure of conversation and symbols used on *Twitter* a barrier to her engagement with the site and therefore had abandoned it.

"I have an account with *Twitter* but I never tweet...I used to follow, around the time of *X Factor*, Dannii Minogue. She would have a few good links to behind the scenes stuff ... I just don't understand it, I don't know what all the @s and the # keys mean I don't find it as easy to use as other things, I just don't get it!"

(Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011)

After becoming a local councillor Anne was asked by her party if she had a *Twitter* account. Like other participants she did not understand the appeal of *Twitter* saying, "I don't do *Twitter*. I did *Twitter* for about 10 minutes but no, I don't get it".

A similar sentiment was also expressed by Eoghan in his interview. He had an account on *Twitter* which he most often utilised to follow debates surrounding current affairs programmes.

"It's snippets of information. It's people making comments ... *Twitter* is a lot of people who like the sound of their own voice. It's all about putting your idea out there having thought about it. Whereas I think Facebook is less so of that...I just don't see the use

in Twitter*. I know about 6 million people disagree with me. It's probably more like 60 million but it's not for me."

(Eoghan, 26, 7th April 2011, Interview)

Eoghan was critical of the site, he felt that *Twitter* provided a more manicured version of people's opinions than *Facebook* citing the aesthetics of *Facebook* providing a space which he felt were more interactive.

8.4: Online Survey Trends

The online survey was utilised to gain an understanding of the online social media sites utilised by a broader group of 106 Irish adults aged 25 to 30. Respondents were asked *"What Online Social Media Sites do you have a profile on?"* and given a list of options to chose from. There was no limit set on the number of answers which could be provided for this question. Figure 8.1 below presents the data collected in the online survey of 106 respondents in Spring 2011.

Fig 8.1: OSM sites used by survey respondents (Source: Online survey N=106)
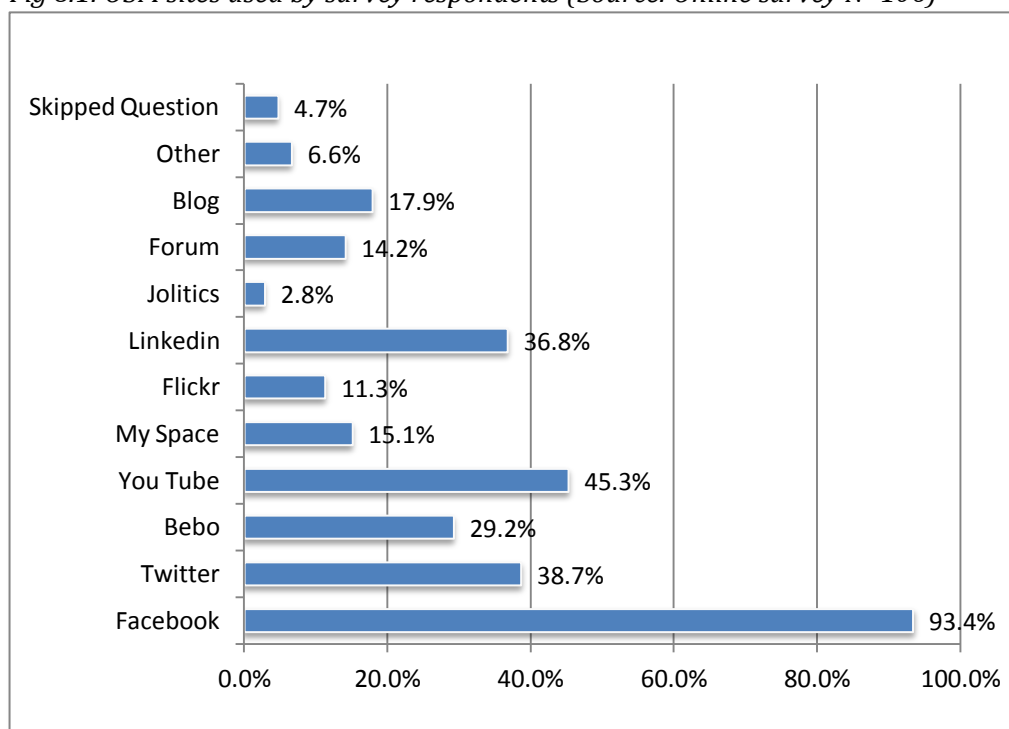
Facebook was by far the most popular online social media site among this group with 93.4% of respondents having profiles on it. This is in keeping with the membership figures provided by Facebook, set out in section 1.2.2, which illustrated the high levels of adoption among this age group. This was followed by YouTube 45.3%, *Twitter* 38.7% and LinkedIn with 36.8%.

It is important to note the small scale of the sample involved in both aspects of this study, therefore, while this data provides an insight into the levels of adoption a larger scale survey would be needed to provide data that can be generalised to the broader public.

8.5: Contact and connection function of online social media

Perhaps unsurprisingly contact and connection were cited by participants as the main reason they utilised online social media sites. These sites provided an inexpensive, manageable and convenient way for these individuals to maintain contact with friends and family from home and different stages of their lives. Indeed the online survey conducted as part of this research revealed that keeping up to date with friends was the most frequent use of online social media for participants with 77.4% of respondents citing this as their primary use for these sites. Three modes of connection are discussed here, observation, private messaging and nostalgic connections.

Observation

During the online session and interview, participants described what a typical session on *Facebook* entailed. Visits to the site often revolved around the news feed page, where posts from friends and groups are amalgamated.

> "The first thing I do when I log on is, just to be nosey, go through the updates from all my friends just to see if there is anything exciting...I like looking at photographs that people put up of events and that, I'm a bit of a nosey parker. I just pop on mainly to see if there's anything going on that I'm missing out on."

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(Joan, 28, 28th January 2011, Online Session)

"Facebook I use it mostly as a stalker, well you know, checking
up with people I haven't seen in ages or people who are
travelling and I might drop them a message. Never really use it
to comment on what I'm doing or anything anymore."
(Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Online Session)

These examples demonstrate participants' general use of their profiles on
Facebook. Reported here are activities which centre on keeping up to date
with the activities of friends through reading posts and looking at
photographs. They describe a voyeuristic mode of use and an observational
mode of connection.

Private Messaging:

Facebook's chat feature was used by a number of people in the group, while
David also utilised *MSN Instant Messenger*. Participants highlighted the chat
feature on *Facebook* as a means to connect with friends and family who they
did not see on a regular basis, either living locally or in many cases those who
lived abroad. The textual mode of conversations did not discourage long
conversations or in depth discussion, with one participant, David, describing
how the ability to include hypertext links to online content enhanced
communication. For Anne, Joanne, David and James, this mode of connection
was preferred to telephone calls or SMS services.

Anne emphasised the cost factor involved in contacting friends by phone
compared to the free service available through *Facebook*.

"It is another way to talk to someone and it's free. If I was
texting or ringing someone for an hour instead they'll just pop
up in the chat and you'll be having a conversation, it's good that
way."

(Anne, 28, 15th October 2010, Interview)

Joanne discussed how *Facebook* was replacing her phone as her main means of contact with friends.

> "I would probably keep in contact more with people through *Facebook* than I would on my phone. Talking on the phone would only really be mum and dad and [husband] the odd time and making appointments and stuff, texting would be mainly the friends and then *Facebook* would be the rest and friends."
>
> (Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011, Online Session)

Joanne described how *Facebook* had taken on a prominent role in maintaining connection with friends and family, through posting photos, commenting on posts as well as using the mail and chat features to connect with people more directly.

James highlighted his ability to maintain connections with friends and family who had moved away from his locality or had emigrated.

> "Talking to friends that I wouldn't see very often. My cousin who's in Australia, friends who are in Australia"
>
> (James, 25, 10th February 2011, Online Session)

David was the only participant to talk about using *MSN Instant Messenger*. He described how he used it to connect with friends and family, augmenting conversations with hyperlinks to the content which they were discussing.

> "MSN I use quite a bit for friends and family and it's brilliant you could be doing something and just get immediate contact with somebody at home."
> (David, 27, 2nd February 2011, Interview)

The ability to maintain connection with friends and family who had emigrated was especially important within the Irish context relating to the

economic situation and the rising emigration figures, particularly among the 25 to 44 age range.

Facebook was also highlighted by a number of people as having an impact on their use of email. Users described the ease of use of the site as changing the way in which they contact people online.

"I'll use the mail feature on it because that's very handy to have, you could have 180 friend or 158 friends but I mightn't necessarily have all those people's email addresses in my email account, so it's handy it's a great resource, like a contact book"

(James, 25, 10th February 2011, Online Session)

"I used to email a lot of people, I suppose now I connect with them more through *Facebook*...I don't know when the last time was that I actually wrote someone an email. It's all done through *Facebook* now"

(Joan, 28, 28th January 2011, Online Session)

This could demonstrate a change in the 'killer app' status attributed to email by Nancy Baym (2002) towards online social media's connection features. Dedicated email services, for some, were being used less and less as the social network profile became a primary focus of connectivity for participants online.

Nostalgic Connections:

Connecting with people through *Facebook* often entailed reconnecting with people from the past, directly with friends from school and college and indirectly through nostalgia groups connected to different phases of life.

"you could have a spurt of 'oh I haven't seen you in ages' and then it dies away in a couple of days. It's hit and miss I suppose it's the nature of human relationships."

(David, 27, 2nd February 2011, Online Session)

"some of my friends, people who I would have been friends with in primary school but they moved away I've only recently become friends with them on [*Facebook*] again."

(James, 25, 10th February 2011, Online Session)

"Then I suppose it might be that I haven't seen someone in 2 years but it might pop up that it's their birthday and I'd wish them a happy birthday. I suppose when you think about it, it is kind of weird but I suppose that's what *Facebook*'s all about"

(Joan, 28, 28th January 2011, Online Session)

Participants described these interactions to be fleeting, an initial burst of interest which quickly faded. If there was no continued connection offline these relationships existed solely as a friend connection online infrequently acted upon.

Reflecting on these three modes of connection evident in participants' use of online social media, it is apparent that while these technologies have been appropriated by participants' in different ways, they do provide a medium through interpersonal relationships can be maintained. While it has been argued that interactions through digital technologies can have a negative impact on the quality and intimacy of relationships, the evidence presented here demonstrates that in cases where friendships include offline connection online social media provide a forum in which relationships can be sustained. This correlates with Daniel Miller's (2011) research which hypothesises that interactions on *Facebook* between close friends enhances friendships and strengthens bonds.

8.6: Attitudes towards posting and discussion

While all participants posted on social media sites there were some divergent attitudes to, and practices of posting. All of the participants replied to friends' posts and had online conversations with them, however a number were reluctant to post.

> "I wouldn't really post pictures of myself, I'd post up group photos…things that people can share or that other people can relate to."
>
> (Joan, 28, 28th January 2011, Online Session)

> "I wouldn't comment on public things. I'd comment on my friends things'"
>
> (Cathy, 28, 26th January 2011, Online Session)

> "I have a lot of my own opinions but I don't go shouting them out to other people on social networking sites I just tend to keep to myself."
>
> (Kevin, 27, 27th January 2011, Interview)

In these instances Cathy, Joan and Kevin, viewed posting on social network sites such as *Facebook* as an activity reserved for interaction with friends and people who they were in contact with offline on a regular basis.

Anne who has two profiles on *Facebook* described the different uses she had for each of her profiles:

> "On my private [profile], I post daft comments like, 'god I'm wrecked' or 'I'm starving' or 'I want a Mars bar'… you leave a comment and that's it and then you can go into your friends and talk about happier, everyday stuff about your lives and things that you have in common. So that's what I like about

Facebook...on my [councillor profile] it's political issues "

(Anne, 29, 27th January 2011, Online Session)

Anne's photos on her councillor profile include pictures of her raising money for local charities and participating in local campaigns and events. These instances of use demonstrate the attempt by Anne to differentiate between her public life as a local representative and her private life. There is a clear demarcation between the types of content suitable for interactions with her constituents in relating to the former, and her friends and family in relation to the latter.

David participated regularly in online discussion on specialist sites. He was an avid user of an Irish architectural site, logging onto the site at least once a day, every day and was classified as a senior contributor on the site.

> "I've been a member, oh god, for about 9 years. I think it's the only forum available where [the city] is discussed in terms of the built environment. Planning issues, development and all those kind of things, and its increasingly influential we know planners and architects read it. And even though it's an architecture website...it's mainly an interest group for the public which is really good. People know in depth every street, every building."

(David, 27, 2nd February 2011, Online Session)

This online forum provides an outlet for David's personal and professional interest in architecture. In the interview he talked about entering lively debates about planning and development in an Irish context. The forum also led to offline connection and collaborations with other contributors.

Cathy and Adam expressed a reactive form of communication; they tended to reply to comments made by others rather than initiate a conversation. Cathy only posted when she felt she had something of interest to say.

> "I would respond to things rather than leaving up comments and

things like that. You know some people leave up messages four or five times a day and I'm not like that, I do it maybe once every two or three weeks. I do it when I have something to say basically."
(Cathy, 28, 26th January 2011, Online Session)

During the interview Adam also talked about replying to comments. However, during the course of the observation on his *Facebook* profile I found that he did post a substantial amount of photos relating to his keen interest in motorbikes and cars, an area in which he had a considerable level of expertise. Relating to comments he said:

"I wouldn't put up any under my name. See the way [friend] there she wrote up a comment then I'd put something up under that.

(Adam, 29, 4th June 2011, Online Session)

Figures 8.3 and 8.4 below display classifications of the posts left by the eleven participants on their *Facebook* profiles from January to May 2011. Figure 8.5 displays the mode of the post, what was posted by participants on their profiles, for example text, photos and videos.

Fig 8.3: Types of posts to Facebook Profiles for 11 participants Jan-May 2011(total number of posts:357)
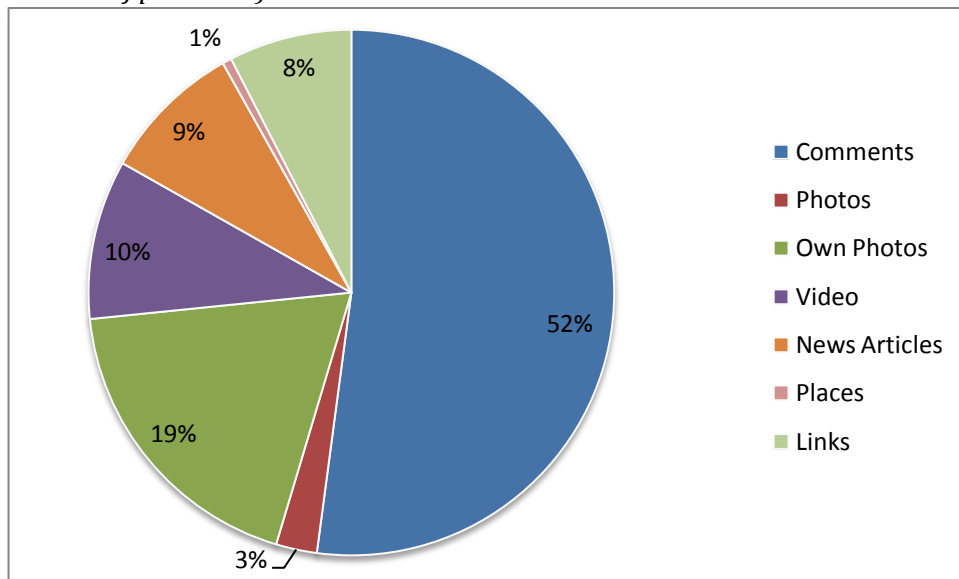
Fig 8.4: Classification of posts to Facebook profiles for 11 participants Jan-May 2011(total number of posts: 357)
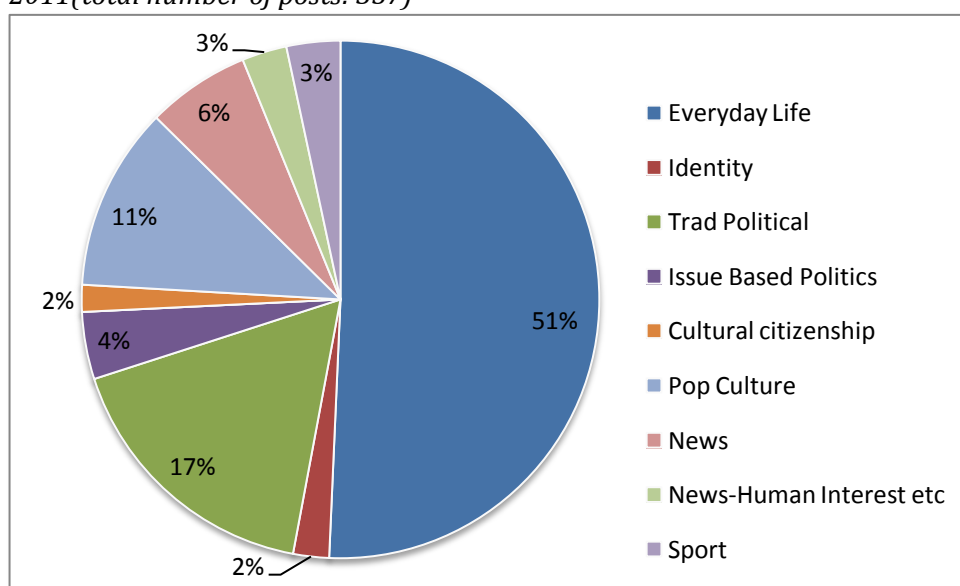
Posts about everyday life were most frequently made by participants. This included text and photographs depicting everyday events in their lives. The insights provided by participants demonstrate that these sites and this type of content play an important role in connecting with friends, family and the wider community. The banalities of daily life and the phatic communication practices engaged in online can be viewed as playing an important role in maintaining connections with friends and family.

> "I honestly couldn't tell you why. It's not like I want people to know what I'm up to but it's more like 'isn't this lovely, I want to say how lovely this is' that kind of thing. "
>
> (Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011, Online Session)
>
> "You can just put your thoughts down, the other day I posted 'The painting and decorating of the house is complete roll on Thursday because my wooden floor is coming'. Someone else that you know has the same problem as you and you feel a bit better and he feels a bit better and then you go your separate ways again."
> (Anne, 29, 27th January 2011, Online Session)

For others, such as Joan, the content she posted to *Facebook* was aimed at her friends and was intended to provide light relief for them.

> "I'd post, funny videos from You Tube if I find something that makes me laugh, I'd post them for my friends...just silly little things that might amuse other people, that I kind of get a bit of fun out of."

(Joan, 28, 28th January 2011, Online Session)

In the online survey respondents were asked 'What type of comments do you post on your profile?' Figure 8.5 below presents the responses provided. The question provided a set list of comment types and respondents were asked to grade the frequency at which they posted these categorised as daily, weekly, monthly, less than once a month and never. A percentage of respondents skipped this question or parts of it.

Fig 8.5: Frequency of activities on online social media profiles (Source: Online Survey N=106)
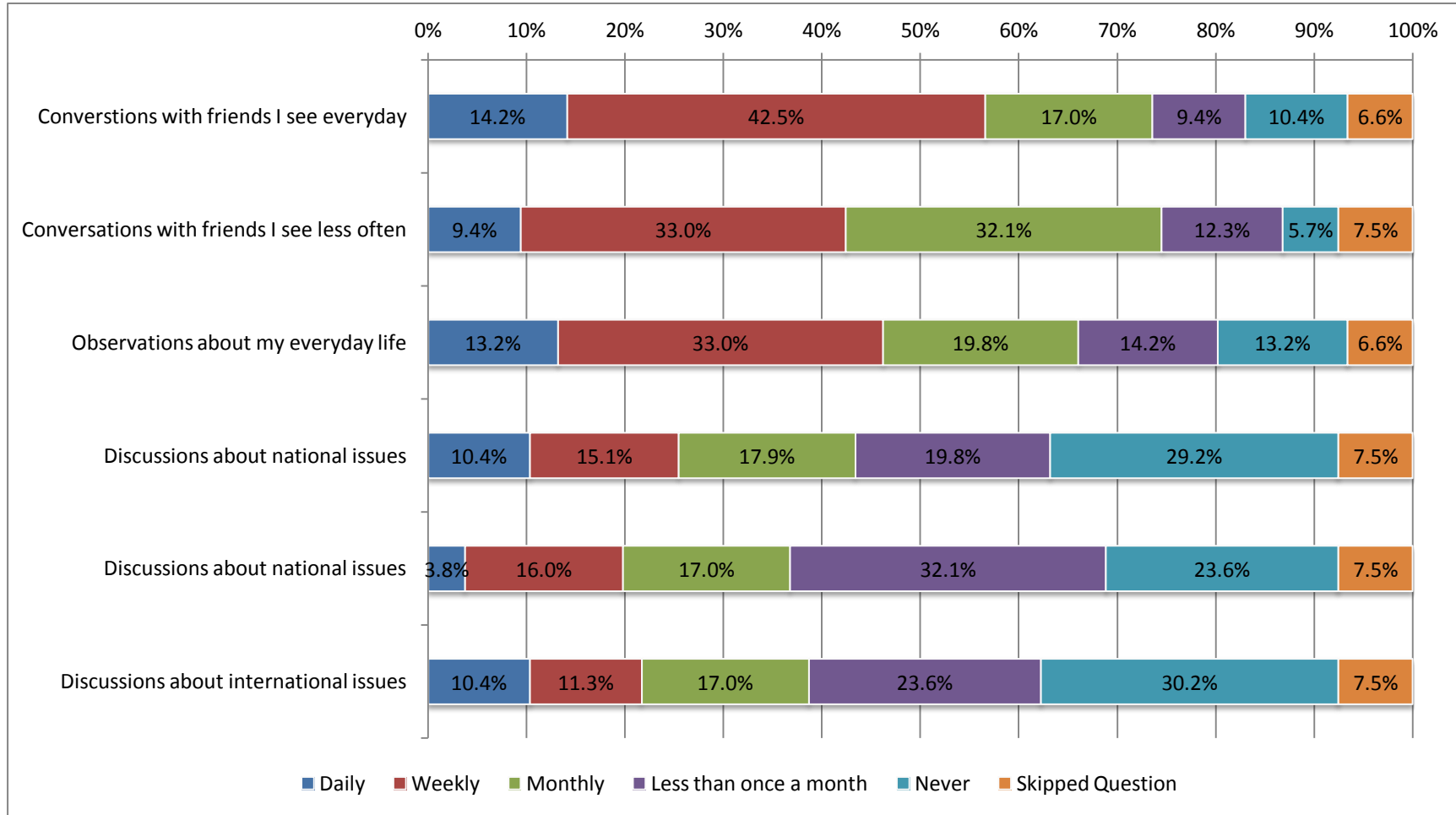
Focusing on the activities which respondents reported undertaking daily weekly and monthly, the most frequently posted comments related to friendship and everyday life. Conversations with friends respondents saw everyday were posted most frequently daily 14.2%, weekly 42.5% and monthly 17% (cumulative73.7%). Conversations with friends respondents saw less often were the second most common with these reported as happening daily 9.4%, weekly 33% and monthly 32.1% (cumulative 74.5). Following these conversations, observations about daily life was the third highest activity reported occurring daily for 13.2%, weekly for 33% and monthly for 19.8% of respondents (cumulative: 66%). These results demonstrate that among the individuals who participated in the survey interpersonal communication was a primary focus of use for online social media.

Following these activities discussion of national, international and local issues were the next most frequent activities. National issues were discussed by respondents daily 10.4%, weekly 15.1% and monthly 17.9% (cumulative: 43.3%). Discussions about international issues were entered into by respondents daily 10.4%, weekly 11.3% and monthly 17% (cumulative: 38.7%). Finally 3.8% of participants talked about local issues daily, 16% weekly and 17% monthly (cumulative 36.8%). I would speculate that this reflects the primacy of the political and economic crisis in the minds of respondents at the time that the research took place.

8.7 Online social media sites as discursive space

As with posting, there were varying attitudes towards discussion on online social media sites among participants. Those who entered into discussions about public issues on a regular basis tended to be those participants who were already active in spaces of discussion offline. Those who were members of political parties, Eoghan, Anne and James, regularly entered into discussions with people who shared their views.

While Eoghan did display his political beliefs online, and often entered into

debates with friends through his *Facebook* profile, he was critical of the medium, viewing face-to-face discussion as a much better format. He felt that the nuances of political argument were lost in online discussion.

> "Political discussions I would tend to avoid having on Facebook because it's a crap form to do it…it's fine to put arguments forward but at the end of the day it doesn't really bring anything forward. All you get out of that is that other people that may not be in the party and aren't willing to read through everything, unless your argument is correct and hugely thought out…actual physical interaction you've body language, you've all those things which are taken away in the format of interaction online."

(Eoghan, 26, 7th April 2011, Interview)

James' profile contained many expressions of his political affiliations and beliefs from status updates to the profile pictures which he used and even the groups he joined. He talked about using his profile picture as a canvassing tool during the election. Members of his party used the election poster of their local candidate for their profile picture. This practice was also demonstrated by Anne and Eoghan for their respective parties.

> "Well as you can see we're in election mode! … you tend to go a bit overboard on *Facebook*. As you can see people who have commented, like-minded people as you can see we all have the same profile picture."

(James, 25, 10th February 2011, Online Session)

Anne talked about a change in her use of online social media since she joined her political party. She noticed a transformation in the way she talked about issues and the frequency of her posts. Since joining the party she tended to post more comments on political issues than she had before. She also noticed that the mode in which she addressed issues had changed from comments relating to her personal situation to comments which related to a wider

societal concern.

> "Before I was in [political party] I probably wouldn't have [posted] politically as in commenting on Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael for the state of the country. If there was a budget cut or cuts in the one parent family and dole cuts whereas before I would have said that is ridiculous, now I probably would put it up on *Facebook*."

> (Anne, 29, 27th January 2011, Online Session)

A second level of discussion became evident among a number of other participants who were not members of political parties or civic society groups. Both Joanne and Michael, who were not members of political parties or civic society groups, talked about commenting on issues or events if they felt a sense of outrage about them. Michael talked in general terms saying that he entered into discussions very rarely but if he did it would be relating to

> "Something I'm very bitter about or something hilarious. But it'd have to be one of those two things which are admittedly very rare occurrences"

> (Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Interview)

Joanne went into some detail about an event which caused her to post a news article and begin a discussion. This incited a discussion with a number of her friends on *Facebook*.

> "One thing I remember lately, probably the last kind of current affairs topic, it was a while ago about a woman in Dublin and she was in council apartments and she froze to death[34]...I came across that somewhere on some news website and I posted it on

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[34] Here Joanne refers to the case of Rachel Peavoy a single mother who was found dead in her Dublin city flat on January 11th 2010 due to hypothermia. An inquest was held in Spring 2011 into her death. There was public concern at the time that Dublin City Council's suspension of the centralised heating system in the area had contributed to her death, the inquest found that this hadn't been a mitigating factor. (Newenham, 2011)

Facebook because I was just disgusted, because I just couldn't believe that in this day and age that that kind of thing was happening and that actually caused a lot of people to comment on it... there was a lot of talk about the effectiveness of the country's politics and stuff like that"

(Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011, Interview)

This instance provides an example of Dahlgren's mode of civic talk (2009). Here Joanne posted a news article relating to the Rachel Peavoy case. Her conversation with friends online began due to the sadness and outrage she felt relating to this particular case. On this occasion a discussion began relating this singular event to wider societal issues; the economic and political crises.

Moving to commercial sites and specialist sites a number of participants talked about their participation in discussions on sites which were of special interest to them. Both Kevin and Adam posted regularly on motoring forums; Joanne and Patrick regularly left reviews on *Tripadvisor* and Joan also left reviews on *menupages.ie*. A contrast is noticeable here between the topics which these participants feel comfortable posting opinions about online and their reluctance to post opinions about political or public issues online. I would speculate that there are a number of reasons for this.

There is a level of comfort associated with these topics among participants; they are areas in which they have a keen interest. However the interviews with these participants also show a reluctance to enter into discussions about public issues due to two factors. Firstly there is a sense that the spaces of discussion for politics and public issues are dominated by experts and tend to be unfriendly and harsh environments. Secondly there is a sense that political beliefs and standpoints are private matters and are therefore only shared among a group of close friends and family members. I would speculate that this reflects the offline lives of participants. Those who are members of political parties or civic society groups are used to expressing their opinions

in public settings whereas those who do not have this experience are reluctant to participate in debates of this nature either online or offline.

These attitudes towards online discussion of public issues revealed a sense that the online space is constructed in different ways for participants in relation to their offline civic practices. For participants who are engaged in civic practices offline, their online social media profiles are utilised for the discussion of politics. While for those who are not engaged in these types of activity offline, online social media is a space in which the political should not be addressed. There is a sense here that boundaries are drawn around spaces where the discussion of public issues should take place and these should be adhered to. This provides an insight into the creation of 'public sphericules' (Gitlin, 1998) at a micro level, where participants can either participate in discussions or wish to ignore them completely.

8.8: Lurking, reading and listening behaviours

While participants varied in their attitudes towards posting and participating in discussions online practices of lurking, listening and reading, which remain invisible online, were revealed during the interviews. For many participants these practices represented a significant proportion of their time online.

James, David, Anne, Kevin, Eoghan, Joanne, Patrick and Michael described how they enjoyed and regularly read through comments in online discussions. Reasons for this practice varied for participants. These participants articulated in the interviews that they had their own opinions and read to gain an understanding of opposing arguments.

For Joanne, this reading practice enabled access to alternative opinions on public events. While reading through and gaining an understanding of these alternative stances she felt that she held strong opinions which would not be influenced through this type of interaction. When asked why she did not participate in discussions, she felt that in many instances other contributors had already presented her stance on an issue and that there was little need to

reiterate this.

> "A lot of the time you see something that basically takes the words out of your mouth. Around the Queen's visit I was looking at a lot [of commentary on discussion boards] and then I was more interested in what people were saying more so than what was happening because I just thought the differences in what people thought was just unbelievable…I'd have my own [opinion] and while you might read through and understand what someone is getting at I mightn't necessarily agree with it."

(Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011, Online Session)

Patrick also liked to read through online discussions but unlike Joanne found that he was influenced by other people's opinions in some instances. His reasons for not contributing to online discussion came from a professional concern. During industrial action in his workplace he had noticed how colleagues had used online discussion forums to highlight the action being taken and had received in many instances hostile responses. He felt that this was 'unprofessional' and could lead to problems at work for the individuals concerned.

> "I'm more passive I like to read what other people are saying rather than writing stuff myself but that's just a personal thing…That's why I like looking at the discussions because you can gain opinion like you might have an opinion but it can alter it and you can go actually they're right, I like hearing other people's opinions on issues…it's very easy just to judge quickly without getting all the facts… I remember when we had the whole issue in work back in January [industrial action] there were people writing on blogs, on the Sunday Business Post and people started getting nasty to each other and I just thought it looked very unprofessional which I didn't like and I think it can be very dangerous for your life."

Eoghan talked about the closed circle of contributors which he found populated discussions on newspaper websites. He portrayed a sense that these spaces were used exclusively by a small number of people and entering into discussion in these spaces would be futile.

> "sometimes I would read the newspaper comments, but again once you read it a few times you realise the types of people who comment and you have the same old names, people continuously pop up."

(Eoghan, 27, 7th April 2011, Interview)

As noted earlier Eoghan placed emphasis on the need for physical interaction when discussing matters of public concern and felt the lack of this in online spaces created both a hostile environment for discussion and a space where the focus was on creating concise arguments which often did not portray the nuances of this type of discussion.

Michael emphasised a lack of time as the main reason for not participating regularly in online discussion. As he talked through his use of these spaces he revealed that part of the reason for not contributing was due to a feeling of exclusion from these spaces, reflecting the sentiments of Patrick and Eoghan. His response also addresses how the range and volume of opinions presented in these sites can lead to a sense of paralysis as he spends time contemplating opposing positions and is left with no time to develop a conclusion of his own.

> "I've taken part on some [discussions] on that site *Bock the Robber* but 99.9% of the time I just read them. I put that down to not having the time. I'll read a couple of articles at lunchtime and then I'll go off and I might be thinking about it all day but I'd never think to go back and actually put another comment on it. Sometimes it's because I don't have a particularly harsh opinion

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on things, I tend to look at stuff more often than not I'm looking at things and I'd say oh, that's one point of view and I'll look at other points of view before I'll make a decision and at the end of the day with all those perspectives you kind of sit down and leave it, you don't actually come to a conclusion. But most of the time it's because you don't actually want to contribute to it, you don't have time or you don't feel part of it or whatever but you do feel more of a part of it reading about it in that kind of an environment."

(Michael, 27)

These responses present a number of factors which stop participants in this study entering into online discussions. A common thread here is the perception that spaces of discussion are populated by closed groups of regular posters. The conception of these spaces as hostile also plays a role in impeding participants making the leap from observer to contributor. There is also a sense that the quantity of information and varying opinions found in these spaces mean that actually contributing to discussion would be a futile exercise.

8.9: Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the use of online social media sites by participants and how this use is enmeshed into their daily lives. While all participants use these sites, differences persist in their modes and frequency of use.

The research revealed that participants utilised a number of online social media sites with a variety of uses for each, including interpersonal communication, information seeking, content sharing and discussion. *Facebook* was the most popular site among the eleven participants and respondents to the online survey, reflecting adoption levels of this site globally.

Three modes of connection between participants and online friends were identified from the empirical research. Observation, private communication and nostalgic connections were utilised by participants to facilitate and enhance connection with offline friends and to create, often fleeting, connections with individuals from different phases in participants' lives.

Participants' attitudes to posting content and comments to their online social media profiles varied depending on the types of content involved. It was discovered that posts relating to everyday life and important life events were most readily shared online, facilitating phatic communication between friends. In relation to the economic and political situation in Ireland participants who were engaged in offline political practices were more likely to enter into direct discussions relating to these issues.

Reading and lurking practices were also highlighted in this chapter, these practices constituted a significant amount of time spent by participants online and related to personal relationships as well as news events and the economic crisis. The following chapter delves into these areas further examining participants' conceptions and practices of citizenship during this period of crisis in Irish society.

Chapter Nine: Case Study: Conceptions and practices of citizenship

9.1: Introduction

This chapter will further explore the theoretical conceptions of citizenship discussed in chapter two through the empirical investigations carried out in this research. It presents the conceptions of citizenship held by participants in relation to the definitions set out in chapter two and the spectrum of citizenship practices presented in *Figure 3.1* (pg. 69). This chapter will describe and analyse participants' ideas of what citizenship entails and the practices in which they engage in everyday life through media use and engagement with the public sphere.

In addressing these areas this chapter attends to research question two (Section 1.3.2) through the presentation and analysis of outcomes from the empirical research. This chapter will present the conceptions of citizenship held by participants examining how these compare with the ideas of citizenship set out in chapter two. This chapter then focuses on the characteristics of citizenship associated with the sphere of public authority for participants; their status as taxpayers, connection with party politics and voting. In relation to media use and its role in connecting citizens to this sphere I will examine participants' consumption and use of news media, popular culture and online media. Finally the chapter addresses the orientation of participants to different levels of citizenship moving through a spectrum from the level of the individual to the local, the national and the international; examining how and if they connect with the public sphere in their everyday lives.

9.2: Defining citizenship:

For participants, conceptions of what citizenship entails and encompasses included a variety of practices. Firstly, relating to the traditional political arena, incorporating voting, paying taxes, political party membership and keeping up to date with news and current affairs and secondly, linking with more everyday activities, encompassing respect for other people, participating in discussions among friends, family and work colleagues and consumer purchases. As established in chapters four and five, the empirical research took place both during and after the Irish election campaign of 2011 which witnessed high levels of voter turnout amidst concern over the causes and consequences of the deep economic crisis.[36] For the individuals who participated in this research, citizenship is not solely confined to the arena of party politics; it exists in a broader sense for them, in their everyday life and in the communities in which they live. This section provides an overview of the types of citizenship practices that participants in this study engaged in. The following sections will delve further into more specific aspects of these practices.

While participants in this study acknowledged engagement with the sphere of public authority as central to their conception citizenship, it was clear from the interviews that citizenship encompassed activities outside of this structured arena. Among participants, citizenship included activity at individual, local, national and international levels, however in everyday life it is the individual and the local which take precedence for the majority of participants, while the national and the international are attended to sporadically within the parameters of major events such as general elections, budgets and international incidents. In dealing with this is it relevant here to emphasise that two different groups of participants emerged within the study presented in *Fig 9.1* below.

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[36] CSO (2010) Voter turnout in the 2011 election was 69.9% the second consecutive election to register an increase in turnout. Since the 1973 peak of 76.6% there was a gradual decline in voter turnout for general elections to an all time low of 62.6% in 2002. This is reflective of wider EU patterns.

Table 9.1: Classification of participants' engagement in collective civic action

Frequent Collective Civic Activists	Occasional Collective Civic Activists	Non Collective Civic Activists
Anne	Patrick	Joan
Eoghan	Joanne	Kevin
James		Cathy
David		Adam
		Michael

The first group labelled 'Frequent Collective Civic Activists' for the purposes of this research includes Anne, James, Eoghan and David. These participants were involved regularly in some form of collective civic action and were affiliated either with a political party or campaigning organisation. As described in Chapter 6 Anne, James and Eoghan were members of national political parties. They regularly attended party meetings, public meetings, protests and during the 2011 election campaign regularly spent their free time canvassing their local constituencies for support. David, while not a member of a political party, is also included in this group. As illustrated in chapter 6 David worked with a charitable civic agency and often took part in campaigns which involved public discussion and engagement with government departments. David was active in a number of online and offline forums where he campaigned for and lobbied politicians for the protection of Ireland's built heritage.

The second group labelled 'Occasional Activists' includes Joanne and Patrick. These participants engaged in collective civic action occasionally, occurring when their personal situations were directly affected by the economic downturn and government policy. For both Michael and Joanne the manifestation of this was when they participated in industrial action in the autumn and winter of 2010.

Finally there are the participants who did not participate in any forms of collective civic action at the time that this research took place, Joan, Kevin, Adam, Cathy and Michael. These participants did not engage in any form of organised collective action. This is not to say that they did not participate in any civic activities, but that these activities occurred at the level of the individual.

Section 9.2.1: Mapping Participants' Citizenship Practices

In order to illustrate the different modes of citizenship practices which participants' engaged in, *fig 9.2* below maps participants actions onto *Fig 4.1* which presented the different categories of citizenship practices to be dealt with in this case study.

Fig 9.1: Mapping the citizenship practices of participants

Participant	Party/electoral Politics	Issue Based Politics	Consumption	Cultural Citizenship
Anne	X	X	X	X
James	X	X		X
Eoghan	X	X		X
David	X	X		X
Joanne	X	X		X
Patrick	X	X	X	X
Joan	X			X
Kevin	X	X		X
Michael	X			X
Adam	X			X
Cathy	X			X

There is variation here between the different modes of citizenship practices which participants take part in. As we move towards participants who are classified in the 'Non collective civic action' group in *Fig 9.1* the modes of their citizenship practices become more limited. In each classification here the levels of participation in these activities differs among individual participants, this is further explored in the following sections. These classifications are drawn from data gathered in the interviews, media diaries and online observation.

9.3 Citizenship and the sphere of public authority:

9.3.1: Views on Politics and Political Participation

As part of the interview participants were asked what their impression of citizenship was, what they thought it encompassed and the attributes they associated with it. This section will focus on the participants' views on the place of party politics in citizenship. At this point it is important to highlight once again the context in which the empirical stage of this research took place. Participant recruitment began in the summer of 2010 with the empirical phase of the research extending from October 2010 to July 2011. As outlined in Chapter 4 this was a tumultuous period politically and socially in Ireland. In the political sphere the implications of 'The Bank Bailout' were being felt throughout society and the Fianna Fail/Green Party coalition government was under increasing pressure to call a general election. After much protest Taoiseach Brian Cowen ceded to pressure and called a general election which took place in February 2011. Socially the effects of the economic downturn and economic problems were to the forefront of many citizens' minds as unemployment figures rose, emigration levels increased and mortgage debt became a serious problem for many people. The dominance of these events in news stories and public discourse must be noted as the context within which the empirical section of this research was carried out.

Politics in its parliamentary form was mentioned by all participants. In terms of citizenship practices there were varying opinions on how people could get involved in civic society. Two participants, James and Anne talked about their participation in local issue campaigns and protests. Kevin acknowledged the role that public protest had in putting pressure on the Government; he expressed an interest in taking part in public protests but had not had the

time to participate in this way to date. David saw public discussion as a key way to get involved in creating a better society and often took part in public debates dealing with urban development and planning.[37] Other participants such as Cathy, Patrick and Joan saw the upcoming election and their vote as the primary, if only, way for them to participate as citizens in the environment of the time. The following quotations from the interviews outline the views held by some of the participants on what politics meant to them.

Cathy described how recent events in Ireland had led to her taking an interest in politics. Again her conception was tied to parliamentary politics and her relationship with politics appeared to be one of duty where she felt she had to keep up to date with public events as politics had become a topic of national conversation.

> "Politics it's not a word that I like and I'm not really into politics, but it's something that I have taken an interest in, in the last few months more so than ever. I always would have known who ran the country and who was in charge but it's only recently that I'll know what TD does what, I wouldn't have known that maybe this time last year...but now because politics is such a big thing, because they're all talking about it you know but it's not a topic that I like but I keep an interest just so I know what's going on."

(Cathy, 28, 26th January 2011, Interview)

Here Cathy's interest in politics can be seen to have grown for two predominant reasons. Firstly due to the context of crisis in Ireland, Cathy has taken a more active role in keeping abreast of key figures in Irish politics and events. This crisis situation has compelled her to take a greater interest in a

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[37] As part of his work, David taught a module in a third level institution to first year students. He also regularly presented his work at conferences and public speaking events which took place in the city.

topic which previously she had little interest. The second reason for her increased interest is borne out of a social function for political knowledge. The 'water-cooler talk' which occurred in her workplace meant that conversations often turned to the economic and political crisis in Ireland and in order to participate in these conversations a knowledge of political events and the political landscape of the time was needed.

Joan portrayed a more expansive conception of politics which included issues of personal concern and the politics of daily life. However, for her, politics at the time was dominated by the government and the upcoming election. Similarly to Cathy she felt a need to keep up to date with political events as they were a topic of conversation in everyday life. Working as a manager in a retail outlet she described in the interview how conversations with customers had moved from conversations about fashion and celebrities towards the political situation in Ireland.

> "Politics, obviously the first thing you think of is the government. But politics to me is public argument or public issues. There's politics in every daily situation...everything from children's allowance issues to issues in FÁS[38]...to the banking crisis. Politics for me is a word for arguing over issues, general issues and people standing up for what they believe in and obviously there's differences of opinion...In my own life, I don't know. I don't get that much involved in politics but like, in your own life, I suppose it's just to try your best to stay aware of current issues...the majority of conversations now are about politics and just even to stay in the loop of conversations you do need to take an interest."

(Joan, 28, 28th January 2011)

Joan's idea of politics can be seen to encompass a spectrum of issues, from

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[38] FÁS: Foras Áiseanna Saothair (Irish) or Training and Employment Agency is an Irish state agency dealing with employment and training. Website is available at: http://www.fas.ie

those which affect the everyday lives of the people in her life to the situation in the country at large and onto the Houses of the Oireachtas and the decisions being made there by politicians. Primarily her understanding of politics revolves around government, however, other aspects of life were disclosed during her interview. She sees politics as 'a word for arguing over issues' which is reflexive of Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) definition of politics as an arena where organised conflict takes place. Like Cathy the social aspect of political knowledge was also mentioned by Joan as a factor in her efforts to keep up to date with the actions of the government. In this instance Joan comments on the change in topics of conversation both in and outside work emphasising again the need to stay informed in order to participate in everyday personal interactions.

In their responses to the same question Kevin and David focused on government and the need for political reform at national and local level. Kevin noted the need for change within the electoral system to move away from the localised politics which has been a predominant feature of Irish political culture since the foundation of the state (Share et al, 2007; Ferriter, 2005). Kevin portrayed a sense of despair relating to the situation that the country was in and the 'self-serving' behaviour of Irish politicians.

> "In terms of what's going on now you'd think of it as a broken system messed up at the moment, a self-serving culture. I think it's a broken system, I think it needs change and I think we need constitutional reform…But it definitely needs change, needs new young blood to come into it. In my opinion, [we] need to get rid of some of the old blood and radically change the system, a system that works for the people and not just constituents. That's my opinion."

(Kevin, 27, 27th January 2011, Interview)

Politics for Kevin revolves around the system of electoral politics. He puts forward an argument for the need to change the focus of politics in Ireland

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from the local to the national, moving from public representatives' focus on satisfying constituents' concerns to have them focus on the national situation and take action based on what is best for the nation's citizens as a whole. There is a sense of despondence for Kevin in relation to those who hold political office currently. He notes that there is a need for new, younger people in public office and a change in the way the system is run.

David also focuses on this parochialism in Irish politics, like Kevin, he sees a need for dramatic change in the way local and national government operate.

> "I think in Ireland I associate parochialism with politics there's very few national issues that are discussed, issues of leadership or direction, it's usually local issues that are discussed more, a parochial approach which is really what has gotten us into this mess…local government here needs to be reformed to make it more relevant and efficient and I think national parliament should be about national issues and national direction and policy direction and then there should be less local government but more effective local government."

(David, 27, 2nd February 2011, Interview)

Both Kevin and David's assertions surrounding the need for change in the systems of government in Ireland can be linked to their working life and to discourse within the media at the time which dealt with the need for change in these systems.[40] Kevin had a keen interest in electoral politics and working in the civil service had dealt with local authorities in a number of roles. In the interview, and on his *Facebook* profile, David expressed frustration with the planning actions of local government and the need to centralise decision making. In his work he often dealt with the fallout from poor planning decisions made at local level on Ireland's architectural heritage.

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[40] See for example: Horgan-Jones, 2011; DeBréadún, 2011; Byrne et al, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2010.

James described how local activism was at the core of his conception of politics. Politics for him started his local area and this was reflected in the various campaigns he had been involved in as a member of a political party.

> "Personally activism local community based activism…it's broad there's no sort of one singular word or anything for it for me…activism that would be my first instinct but maybe that's just us [his party] other political parties mightn't think that at all…I joined because I saw work being done in the community when no one else was doing it. You just see the dedication of people you see they are stalwart members of the community. And I thought if it's good enough for them it's good enough for me."

> (James, 25, 10th February 2011, Interview)

Politics for James can be viewed as emanating from practical action which he has taken to highlight social problems and injustice at a local level. He was drawn to join his political party because of their action within the local community. On the surface this local focus can be seen as the anathema to Kevin and David's calls for change in the political system. However it can be seen that through these protests and campaigns James makes a connection between the decisions made by the government and the experiences of people in his locality, an instance of the personal becoming political. Reflecting the important aspect of citizenship described by Buckingham (1999) where connections must be made between individual experiences and the actions of governments.

These insights into participants' views of politics display a variety of stances and uses for political information. Cathy and Joan who view politics as increasingly relevant to their day to day experience during this period of crisis. Kevin and David who associate politics with activities contained within the Houses of the Oireachtas and local government, citing the urgent need for

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dramatic change in the way the political system operates in Ireland. Finally, James through the connections he makes between local experience, government policy and decision making, focusing on the impact of the crisis at a personal and local level. The next section looks at participants' responses which focus on their role as taxpayer.

9.3.2: Citizen as Taxpayer: A Consumerist View

For a number of participants who were employed, the payment of taxes was closely associated with their conception of citizenship and as the main reason for keeping up to date with national events. Cathy described how her status as a tax payer meant that she took more of an interest in the actions of government.

> "As I get older, it's because you're paying taxes and you want to see where your money is going, who's running the country, who is making mistakes. You tune in more then. You just mature in age I suppose"
>
> (Cathy, 28, 26th January 2011, Interview)

Running through Cathy's statement, there is the presence of the consumer rhetoric of value for money, the need to get value out of the public institutions which she funds through her tax contributions.

Echoing Cathy other participants expressed this train of thought associating citizenship with their status as tax payers. Both Joanne and Patrick talked about the duty they felt to keep informed of the actions of government since they had started work or bought property.

> "well as an Irish citizen I find that I believe I'm a good citizen, I pay my taxes and I don't do anything against the law.
>
> (Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011, Interview)

By obeying the law and paying her taxes Joanne felt that she was fulfilling her role as citizen, and was acting as a 'good citizen' should. At the national level Joanne's definition of citizenship revolved around the traditional arenas of politics, relating to government and the political party system. Through fulfilling her duties in relation to the areas of taxation, complying with state laws and voting Joanne feels she is participating as an Irish citizen.

Patrick discussed the responsibilities which he now has; his job, his mortgage and loans.

> "I think as you get older...when you buy a house, you have loans and you're working, issues such as tax you can relate to...when you're working you want to see what you're paying for so you do have to take an interest and it's important to vote. I suppose it's like growing up, the more responsibilities you have in life"

> (Patrick, 28, 8th June 2011, Interview)

Patrick relates these areas of his life to his conception of citizenship associated with 'growing up' and having to pay taxes. Here the 'responsibilities you have in life' for Patrick are related to monetary concerns, citizenship is about responsibilities, the responsibility to pay taxes and to vote.

For these participants, as well as Joan and Kevin who also expressed similar opinions, T.H. Marshall's (1992) first and third elements of citizenship are evident, the civic through obedience of the law and the social in the payment of taxes. Participants' portray a sense that as they move into their late twenties, away from the education system into the workplace; away from rental accommodation to the purchase of a home; or from shared accommodation to sharing with their partner, their responsibilities increase. In their personal lives they are committed to paying back loans or mortgages, and in their role as citizens they are committed to paying their taxes. This tax obligation becomes another bill to pay and as consumers they want to get

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value for money. This financial investment made to the state compels them to take an interest in the actions of government. Citizenship connected to taxation can be viewed as citizenship from a consumer perspective, where participants see themselves as customers for government services.

9.3.3: Voting

All participants viewed voting as an integral part of citizenship. Some expressed how voting had become important to them in recent times; often reflecting the opinions expressed in the previous section, since they moved from education to the workplace and started paying taxes. As the interviews took place between October 2010 and July 2011 it is again important to note the political context in Ireland during this period. As presented in chapter 4 this was a turbulent time in Irish society with Irish political life influenced greatly by the economic crisis. Events relating to this context, such as the general election, were to the forefront of participants' minds during the course of this research.

For participants who were not members of political parties or civic society groups; Joan, Cathy, Kevin, Patrick, Joanne and Adam voting in the election was viewed as the main, if not the only way to influence or affect change in government institutions.

> "Well I suppose it's the only way at the moment, if the country wants to change something let's vote for it"
>
> (Cathy, 29, 26th January 2011, Interview)
>
> "I suppose your vote is the main thing"
>
> (Patrick, 27, 8th June 2011, Interview)

Joan, who like a number of other participants would not usually take an interest in politics, described how she felt it was important to be informed about and vote in the general election.

"we have an upcoming election...for people like me and there are probably thousands of people like me who don't take a massive interest it's very overwhelming ... for everyone to actively seek out information that we need because we can't have the excuse of not having the information...it's everyone's responsibility to make sure they're informed enough to vote."

(Joan, 28, 28th January 2011, Interview)

Here Joan states her opinion that everyone has a duty to vote and to make an informed decision in their choices due to the economic situation which the country found itself in.

There is a sense here that participants feel a connection to the state and view their vote as having an influence on the way in which Ireland is governed at a national level. This would relate to David Buckingham's (1999) work which found that middle class students saw more of a connection between their lives and the state and felt that they would have some level of influence in this arena through voting. However this can also be viewed in another mode. In these instances there was a sense in the interviews that participants felt that voting was the one and only way in which they could express their opinion on how the government was performing. With general elections occurring once every four years, there was a sense among these participants that once they fulfilled this obligation to vote they trusted that the government would do their best for the country. So, while voting was viewed as important in allowing participants a chance to influence government, there was also a contradictory feeling of resignation where once voting was over they had to live with the consequences until the next election came around.

In relation to voting a number of participants discussed the need to move away from parochialism in Irish electoral politics. Joanne talked about the need to look beyond both the local and traditional familial party ties and vote with the national interest in mind.

"I think one thing is, in elections, not going with what you think would be the right way but what you think is the right way for the country overall."

(Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011, Interview)

Here Joanne displays an awareness of the national context in which she was voting, the economic and social crises in Ireland. Her response here can also be seen to tie in with rhetoric which dominated campaigns throughout the 2011 election relating to the need to vote with the national interests in mind.

David argued that more civics education was needed for people of his age group to gain a greater understanding of the electoral system as well as the political parties which people were voting for. He noted that parochialism and voting along inherited party lines continued to be prevalent among members of this age group despite the access which they had to information from a variety of information sources.

"the major problem is that people just merge into their 20s and their 30s with no real understanding, people don't even know how the electoral system works because they're never taught it, they don't know the people they are voting for, who they are, what they represent. Certainly a third of voters that actually vote don't have a clue about who they are voting for, what they represent and what their policies are, which is a problem."

(David, 27, 2nd February 2011, Interview)

He saw the need for critical approaches to politics, a greater need for people to be informed about the political system and to critically appraise election candidates in relation to the national context . Leading on from this David asserted an opinion that his peers lack a basic understanding of the way the Irish electoral system works.

In their interviews Eoghan and Michael discussed why they abstained from voting in the general election. They saw that there was a lack of public representatives in their constituencies who reflected their views. In Eoghan's case this can be viewed as contradictory, however the constituency in which he voted did not have any members of his party or similarly aligned candidates on the ballot paper. Throughout the election campaign he spent his evenings canvassing areas where candidates from his party were on the ballot. Michael had not voted in previous elections and did not vote in 2011, he was disillusioned by the lack of choice in the Irish political system, as well as what he perceived as endemic corruption.

> "I wouldn't necessarily view it as political you know I haven't voted in a couple of years and I do think it's important, but last few years in Ireland haven't been great in terms of choice. I was pretty disillusioned with the way the political system was going in the past few years, even though that's a bit of a cop out to say but that's the way things were. I don't see citizenship as being much to do with politics at all."

(Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Interview)

Here Michael described a sense of helplessness and hopelessness that the political system would change but that, for him, citizenship exists outside of this realm, in the community. Within the realm of community Michael felt that he could see an impact of his actions whereas interaction with the political system through voting didn't offer the same visible results. Michael talked at length in his interview about the need to move away from using historical familial political affiliations as the basis for deciding how to vote adding that "we might think this is confined to older generations but it happens with younger people just as much, people my age who according to who their parents vote for" (Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Interview).

Among participants in this research voting is in the main viewed as an important act of citizenship. For participants it is viewed as the dominant

way in which they can exert control or influence over government. There is a sense within the context of crisis at the time that voting is especially important, a duty and responsibility which must be carried out. For some participants they see a need to move away from parochial politics or voting along familial lines to vote with the national interest in mind. There is also evidence here which shows that abstaining from voting in the election for some participants cannot be simply viewed as reneging on this responsibility, for both Eoghan and Michael conscious decisions have been made in their decisions not to vote in the election. It is evident that voting remains a central facet of citizenship for participants in this research, an act which bears responsibility and duty to either vote or to consider carefully the reasons to abstain.

9.3.4: Political Party Membership

Three of the participants, Anne, Eoghan and James, are members of political parties. In the interviews they were asked what made them decide to join a political party and the reasons behind their choice of party. Of the three, two had joined parties while studying in college. James talked about how he was attracted to his party due to their work in his local community and on student issues especially in comparison to other parties who were on campus.

> "I was about 21. From being in college I saw how active they were on student issues and then I'd go home and see how active they were [there], and I thought they're everywhere and there were no other political parties doing that…in college you get people from all around the country and I think that is reflexive of work done on the ground all around the country."

(James, 25, 10th February 2011, Interview)

Eoghan joined a political party while at college and relayed similar reasons for joining in terms of activism within his party. He also discussed the socialist ideology on which his party built their campaigns at length.

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"I went to college and we had the anti-fees protests...but I've always been annoyed at how society is run...I was in [college] and [my friend] had gotten involved in the [party] and as soon as I heard he'd gotten involved in the [party] I wanted to go to a meeting...I mean it's by talking to people who are grounded in actual events working class people who have lived through different experiences and break down the need to change society but also how do we that. Not an abstract, but basing it in the actual objective conditions as they are...When the unions actually bother to mobilise, that's inspiring stuff and that makes you realise why you are in something that wants to fundamentally change society."

(Eoghan, 26, 7th April 2011)

The third participant, Anne, was a member of a political party and public representative on her local council. Anne described how she became involved in her political party through local level campaigns and activism and was then encouraged by party members to become a full member of the party. As set out in her profile in chapter 6 Anne's involvement in the political party began through working on campaigns with the party focusing on local issues in her area. The emphasis in Anne's account is the work that the party did in the local area.

"with the local hospital campaign [to save the local hospital from closure] I did flyers and gradually I was doing more and more... because we're [referring to her political party] very proactive about things and I thought this was really good... they are for the working person...they're likeminded people, that is probably what drew me to it."

(Anne, 29, 15th October 2010, Interview)

What is common to all three accounts is the sense of seeing the results of their actions, and the activity of their parties in their lives and the lives of

members of the community in which they live. Their decisions to make the step to join political parties can be seen to emanate from a number of factors; their personal experiences, education and the influence of family and friends. Anne described how she watched as the recession affected the lives of those around her, friends and family members lost jobs and she was unable to find employment after graduating from college. Her partner could not find work and she feared for her son's future, concerned about the Ireland that he would grow up in. She had taken modules in politics as part of her degree and had become interested in political culture in Ireland at this point and her partner had encouraged her to participate in campaigns and join the party. She saw her political involvement as a way to contribute to society at primarily a local but also a national level.

Eoghan had become interested in the history and socialist political movement first while studying history for his Leaving Certificate[44] programme at secondary school and went on to study history as part of his degree at third level. While in college he joined his political party seeing it as a practical manifestation of the theoretical knowledge he gained in class.

James also studied politics as part of his degree and, as illustrated, he joined his party due to the work they were carrying out in his local area. At the time that this research took place James was searching for work and had not found a full time paid position in the 18 months since leaving college. He was frustrated with the political landscape in Ireland and the impact of the recession on citizens, he saw his party as providing an alternative approach one which would help to create more jobs and increase equality in society. James' family had a history of political involvement associated with other political parties.

While other participants were not members of political parties this same association of citizenship with the community and the local was evident in

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[44] The Leaving Certificate is the name given to final exams in secondary education in Ireland students sit an average of seven subjects in June of each year.

many of the interviews that took place. The place of community in participants' conceptions of citizenship will be dealt with in the following section

9.4 Citizenship and everyday life: Community and the local

For a number of participants citizenship centred on what they could do in their everyday life to make their community a better place to live. In dealing with this, participants talked about a lack of time to participate in collective action due to employment situations and time taken up by other leisure pursuits, therefore smaller everyday actions which fitted into schedules became acts of citizenship for participants, with the local level being the focus in these instances.

As noted by VanZoonen (2005) civic and political engagement must compete for time in individuals' lives with other leisure pursuits and media preferences. In relation to this area of citizenship the predominant focus which emanated from interviews was on individual as opposed to collective action. Participants talked about helping people in the local community, having respect for others, being friendly and getting to know their neighbours as key elements of civic participation. These sentiments were also reflected in the results of the online survey where community focus, an emphasis on respect and helping less fortunate members of society were viewed as central to the responsibilities of citizenship. There is a prevalent sense that individual action is sufficient. Participants, who did not participate regularly in civic groups, expressed opinions that through individual actions they were contributing to civic society. These actions included general friendliness in the community, consumption and aspects of cultural citizenship. This type of activity was viewed as removed from the political aspects of citizenship, in which a number of participants expressed little interest.

For participants such as Patrick and Michael citizenship was entwined with actions in everyday life as opposed to the sphere of public authority. Patrick's

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focus was on action he could take in his everyday life at an individual level. His conception of citizenship included having respect for other people in his community, treating them with courtesy and friendliness as well as being aware of his contribution to environmental issues by recycling and a move towards spending money in the local economy.

> "If every single person does their bit, were nice, even simple stuff like being good to the environment or buying locally, if everyone did just a little bit or just to be more aware...You know we all don't have to be running out getting involved in the community...simple things looking after each other, going back to core values... stopping to talk to people...I think if we all just even say hello, wave to somebody or go into a shop and smile it makes a huge difference to people, just acknowledge people."

(Patrick, 27, 8th June 2011)

There are a number of broader themes evident here. As explored in chapter 4 there was a perceived move away from community during the years of the boom and in the recession a focus on local community began to emerge especially in 2011. This was reflected in media outputs with RTÉ running a number of series which focused on action which could be taken by communities by working together for example *Dirty Old Towns* presented by Diarmuid Galvin and *Local Heroes- A Town Fights Back* presented by Fergal Quinn.

The views expressed by Patrick here were echoed by a number of the other participants. Michael viewed citizenship as completely removed from formal party politics saying, "I don't see citizenship as being much to do with politics at all" (Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Interview). Echoing some of Patrick's ideas he described how getting involved in charitable work as well as talking to his neighbours were important aspects of citizenship for him.

"I would consider myself pretty inactive although I would have a fairly idealistic view of what a contributing citizen is. To me a citizen is someone who's in the local community, it's not necessarily in the national, although you have to take an interest in that, but I think it starts at a very small level, saying hello to people knocking in on people things like that, that's how I would view being a contributing citizen."

(Michael, 27, 21st June 2011, Interview)

The influence of Michael's upbringing can be seen in this instance, he described how his mother had been involved in community groups and volunteering throughout his childhood. When he had the opportunity and time, he now used his skills to assist charities when he could, at the time of his interview Michael had just completed a website for a charity in his home town.

Both Michael and David discussed the urban space of the city and the effect they felt that it had on interpersonal relationships. Michael talked about moving from a rural area to the city and how he felt the city isolated people. He attempted to counter this by creating links with neighbours offering assistance with domestic tasks. David also talked about this isolation experienced in city life but he attributed it to the suburbanisation of urban living and saw the role of interaction in the community as the key to developing civic pride.

"Suburbanisation just explodes society and creates a more individual, car dependent, isolated society. Whereas urban living you're forced to share resources, share facilities, and engage and interact with people. I think a lot comes into that to encourage urban living and not just cities but encouraging villages and towns...it's very hard to foster civic pride where people don't engage or interact with each other, so I think that's important."

David demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the role of space in the creation of links between individuals, their community and their nation. This can be attributed to his education and employment as well as his comfort in expressing and discussing his opinions in a variety of settings; informal conversations with friends, online forums, public events and through his work. He was a keen proponent of urban living, communities sharing resources and the cultivation of 'civic pride' through everyday life, whether this was by sharing a bus to work or sharing a public park. There is a sense that for David creating a connection to the place he lives in is integral to the creation of connections to the community, and further to the state and politics.

In the same vein, Joanne talked about how the recession had changed relationships with her neighbours. Again she saw citizenship as bound up in the relationships in her local community and the work they did to support each other every day. Joanne reflected on the idea that connections between people within her locality were re-emerging in the economic climate of the recession.

> "I think community is something we lost a lot of. We lived in [estate] for a few years and I don't know who my neighbours were...now I think people are being nicer to each other. I think that's because people need people more now, whereas before they had loads of money and they could do whatever they wanted now we're at an age where there's people at home more, because they're not working. A big thing I find in [town] is that people are doing jobs for each other without any money, you do this and I'll do that for you."

(Joanne, 29, 4th June, 2011, Interview)

Joanne reflects here on the changing interactions in her locality. There is evidence here of the changes she found in moving from one area of the town she lives in to another, but also in the move from living in rental accommodation to becoming a homeowner. Two levels of analysis emerge in relation to this, firstly the situation can be looked at through the change in Joanne's living situation and secondly within the context of the recession. In the move from renter to home owner there is a move from potential transience to a permanency of residence. Within the context of the recession Joanne notes that more people are at home during the day due to shortened work weeks or redundancy, there is more time to meet people and in Joanne's instance the sharing of resources and skills. An alternative economy of barter is being established among members of the residential community in her estate.

These opinions were reflected in responses to the online survey. Respondants were asked if it was important to them to be a good citizen and to state what this entailed. Most frequent answers related to community and having respect for others.

Fig 9.2: Conceptions of citizenship (online survey n=106, answered question= 69, 105 coded units)
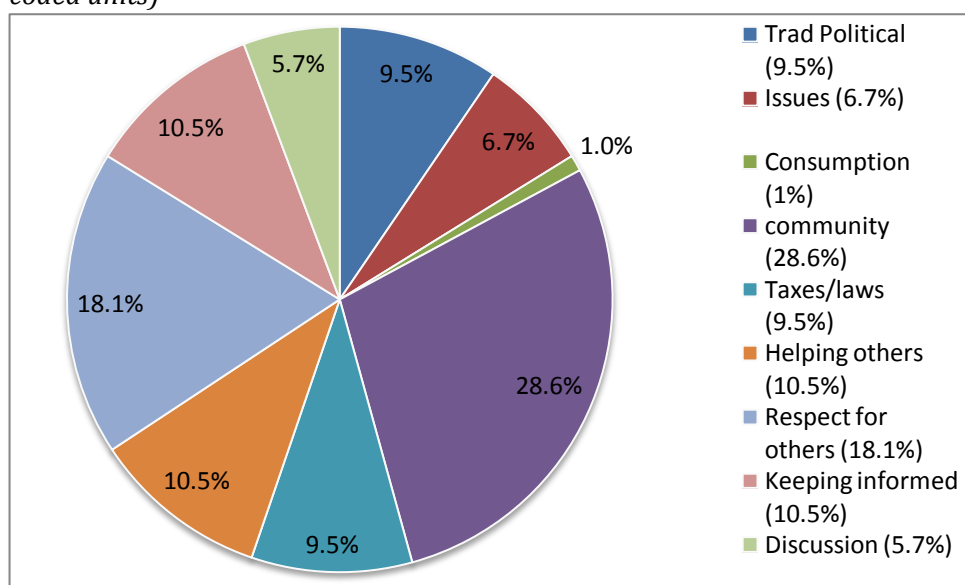
Answers revealed that community and having respect for others were the main themes that emerged. Out of 106 respondants 69 answered this question. Although this is a small sample the answers correlate with the interviewees conceptions of citizenship.

This focus on individual activities and local level engagement corresponds with the citizenship practices put forward in chapter 3 relating to cultural citizenship (Hermes, 2005), in particular involvement in local community groups (*Fig 2.1*). There is a perception among participants that a sense of community was lost during the years of economic growth in Ireland and that within the present period of economic turmoil community ties are reemerging. This could indicate a path towards broader political engagement for participants, from the everyday interactions among individuals to involvement in local collective activities there is a potential for broader public engagement to emerge from these links between neighbours. While embrionic these links created at a local level could have the potential to create connections between individuals and broader participation within the public sphere, an example of Dahlgren's (2009) hypothesis that from proto-political discussion and activities political engagement and participation can develop.

9.5: Issue Based Politics and campaigning

Eoghan, Anne, James and David were involved in either political parties or civic action groups. As presented in their profiles in chapter six Eoghan, Anne and James were all members of political parties and were involved in many campaigns to raise awareness for a variety of issues both national and international. They all regularly attended rallies and protests as well as publicising their work through social media, handing out leaflets and talking to the public.

James discussed a variety of campaigns which he had been involved in through his political party. Again the emphasis here was on the visibility of the impact which these campaigns had on the local community relating back

to his reasons for joining the party.

> "There were cafes in the college that were privatised and people were out of a job so we picketed with them. And that was good to help out at a very local level. We had a campaign which was for road safety, a slow down campaign. We ran a number of suicide prevention courses...And even more general stuff like leaflet drops on certain issues especially when we were leaving college a huge campaign was [against] the re-introduction of fees"

(James, 25, 10th February 2011, Interview)

James talks here about his early involvement with his party during his years in college. He described taking part in action which related directly to life in the college, the immediate environment in which his political involvement began. Taking part in campaigns which had direct relevance and impact on college life on a number of levels from employment issues among staff, to issues aimed towards students more specifically such as the re-introduction of fees, suicide and road safety. The embedding of these issues in the everyday routines of life within the college setting, allowed James to see the impact of his political involvement in a localised sense; and consequently place this within the wider national paradigm. This involvement in college politics provided James with the opportunity to make connections between the living situations of people in his community and governmental decisions at the level of the state.

Eoghan discussed the impact of collective action on a broader scale relating to historical action which caused change in society. Collective civic action was an important citizenship practice for him and this was reflected in his enthusiastic tone when he talked about taking part in well organised protests and discussing the activities of his political party.

> "You look at the community groups, you look at trade union

activity. Political movement and political change only happens systematically when masses of people organise within society, you only have to look at what happened in France in 1968 … that's moving beyond the electoral system and realising that you have to organise collectively within your class to break with the ruling class everywhere"

(Eoghan, 26, 7th April 2011, Interview)

Emanating from his education Eoghan displayed a nuanced and in-depth knowledge of political and social movements throughout history. Eoghan expressed the opinion that within the current economic and social situation in Ireland there was an opportunity for radical change to take place. In his workplace fellow employees had become more interested in his analysis of the socio-political situation in Ireland, they were looking for alternatives and more willing to listen than they had been in the past. The idea of 'collective action' is for Eoghan the only way to redress the imbalances which persisted in Irish society.

In talking about the campaigns and protests that she had taken part in Anne focused on one campaign relating to the conflict in Palestine. She talked about the restrictions placed on aid entering this area and her experience of visiting an aid ship which was due to set sail from Ireland.

"Yes there were a few issues, a few protests, a lot of protests actually that I would have been at. They were probably all related to Gaza...we went down to see the boat[46] but that was awful, we got on the boat and we saw all of the supplies that they had...they had things like Nutella and cream crackers, stuff that wouldn't go off. And there was colouring books and about 100 pencils and they said to us that they're not going to let the pencils on, and I asked why. And they said that they can make a bomb out of the lead

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[46] Here Joanne is referring to the Irish flotilla that travelled to the Gaza Strip in 2010 with aid supplies.

that's in a pencil."

(Anne, 29, 15th October 2010, Interview)

Here Anne discussed this campaign from her perspective as a mother discussing the situation that children in this region were living in and how this had compelled her to action. Relating an international issue to her personal experience as a mother, Anne creates a sense of connection to the children caught up in the conflict in the Palestine region. She has campaigned through protest, petition and offering her support in this instance to those bringing supplies to the area.

Through his work David often had to lobby politicians on issues relating to conservation and also regularly took part in public debates on these issues. In this role he discussed the link between his campaigning and the formal arena of party politics.

> "In work we do quite a bit of lobbying to get influence in terms of the built environment ... In terms of general civic activity that's the basis of our work. It's a charitable organisation and everything goes towards the public good and the public interest."

(David, 27, 2nd February 2011, Interview)

This connection with traditional politics through his work creates a connection for David between the decisions of government, his interest in the built environment and indeed in his wider life.

The other participants generally did not tend to get involved in collective action such as protest marches or lobbying. However for two participants collective action became a focus for them when the recession threatened their employment. Both were involved in high profile industrial disputes which led them to take part in protests and lobbying politicians. These cases exemplify the movement of a personal issue into a public arena where collective action occurs (Dahlgren, 2009). These instances prompted action

within the public sphere among individuals who ordinarily would not be orientated towards this space.

Patrick became involved in industrial action when the company he was employed by changed his working conditions. He began to attend union meetings and took part in protest marches during industrial action which lasted several weeks. He also emailed public representatives to highlight the situation within the formal political arena.

> "I would have gone to meetings and I would have been emailing TDs and I got more interested in employment rights...as a group of workers we became stronger and closer to people ... I would have demonstrated and I would have been very passionate about that ... I never would have done anything like that before ... when you have a passion or it directly affects you ... I always said I would like to keep going to meetings and everything but I haven't and I suppose I should have because it's important to keep it up and I might start it up again."

(Patrick, 27, 8th June 2011, Interview)

In these cases personal issues become political issues for participants, these are instances where the impact of government responses to the recession are seen to directly affect the lives of these individuals and they are motivated to participate in collective action often taking on very active roles. Joanne found herself in a similar situation and reflecting Patrick's action began to contact public representatives and take part in protest marches and public rallies.

> "I did a lot of research for a spokes group... I calculated all the jobs created in the country in the last 4 years and how many of them were created in [town]... for myself, from a statistical background I had to put it into facts and figures...I never did anything like that before. When I was younger I used to write letters to the Irish Times, I remember there were loads of letters giving out about the

smoking ban there were some tourists and they were giving out and I was incensed by their letter and I wrote in but I always put my name in Irish.

CE: So you think that there are things that you can do?

Joanne: Yes but I find myself doing them very anonymously

CE: So you wouldn't see yourself joining an organisation?

Joanne: No, I worry that I might alienate people in my life I don't know who specifically but I would worry that if I did that that people might think 'there's your one oh she's very opinionated and stubborn' Whereas I'd rather be easygoing and do that kind of stuff in the background and not really mention it."

(Joanne, 29, 4th June 2011)

Self-censorship was a recurring theme in Joanne's interview while she had opinions on many issues she was afraid to express them publicly either among groups of friends who may have opposing views or on her online social media profiles. Many of the participants who were not involved in political parties or civic action groups expressed similar sentiments about discussing their opinions on politics and current affairs. This will be discussed in further detail in section 9.7.

These examples demonstrate that participation in single issue campaigns as a mode of citizenship practice emerge from a number of spaces and situations. There is evidence here that individual experience has a role to play in the level of engagement with this type of campaign. For those who are not regularly involved in collective action individual experience in the workplace provided an impetus to participate in this type of action. For those already involved with political parties or campaign organisations there appears to be a broader sense of issues beyond personal experience. For others time pressures mean that participants cannot take part in this type of collective

action.

9.6: Media Use and citizenship practices:

This section will examine participants' news and entertainment media consumption exploring how the role which these genres have in relation to citizenship and citizenship practices for participants.

9.6.1: News Media

For the participants who took part in this study news media tend to dominate in terms of connecting to politics as conceived of in terms of the parliamentary system. As explored in chapter seven there was a sense of duty felt among participants to keep up to date with the activities of government and events at a national level, again this duty was magnified by the economic situation.

Joan described how she felt it was important to include news media in her daily life; this either came in the form of a free newspaper on the way to work or televised news bulletins in the evening after work.

> "I make sure I get some element of the news, we get a free paper on the way to work most mornings they hand it out at the [train] stop...when I come home from work, if I miss the 6 o'clock news I try to watch the 9 o'clock news or vice versa...it's a bit overwhelming at the moment and sometimes I think it's better not to watch or listen to it for a day or two. I would try to get in an element of news everyday whether it's paper, radio or some element definitely."
> (Joan, 28, 28TH January 2011, Interview)

Earlier in this chapter Joan described a need to keep up to date with news from a social perspective as conversations revolved around formal politics in her everyday life. However for Joan there was a need to escape the news

occasionally as she found reports on the political and economic situation 'overwhelming at times'.

In the interview Kevin described his voracious appetite for news. Kevin kept up to date with breaking news on the Internet throughout the day and also watched evening news bulletins.

> "I read the news everyday so if something happens I'll know about it straight away because I'm constantly online reading the papers and looking at the news. "

> (Kevin, 27, 27th January 2011, Online Session)

Joan and Kevin's news consumption was their sole mode of connection to formal politics. This is reflected among the participants who were not affiliated with collective civic groups such as political parties or campaign organisations.

Eoghan, a member of a political party, described the importance of being informed about political events on a global scale relating this to transformations on a global level.

> "Not knowing what's going on is disastrous, especially in the times we're living in. I mean things are changing so quickly. I mean who would have said that we'd have actual overthrow of governments, revolution but that has happened which means there is a change of consciousness happening."

> (Eoghan, 26, 7th April 2011, Interview)

This continued centrality of news media in the connection of citizen to state indicates that this traditional role of news media persists especially in the conceptualisation of the relationship among citizens. This is reflexive of Couldry, Markham and Livingstone's (2007) study into the role of media in public connection. They found that news media were at the core of mediated

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connection to public life among participants in a British context.

9.6.2: Entertainment media and discursive citizenship practices

In relation to entertainment media there was evidence that discussion could emerge about more personal issues which could have the potential to turn political through the consumption of entertainment media such as soap opera. This links to Dahlgren's (2009, p 93) assertion that everyday talk can take on a proto-political character and have a role in politicising citizens. This was revealed by two female participants relating to an *Eastenders'* storyline dealing with cot death and kidnapping. However, while they discussed the storyline in relation to their own lives and the representation of the central female character there was no evidence that this led to a broader political discussion.

> "everyone's talking about the baby snatching in *Eastenders*[47] and we were actually talking about that in work because there's a baby boom in my office there's lots of people pregnant and people were saying it's awful, I was kind of agreeing with them but then at the end of the day it's a drama."
>
> (Cathy, 28, 26th January 2011, Interview)
>
> "we would be comparative to real life...I suppose it's not really realistic but we were talking about the grief of loosing babies in real life...everybody takes a bit of the story and relates it back to their life in some respect we were relating it back to people that we know and we were actually talking about how it portrays women who loose babies and we were discussing how angry, people are about the storyline because they felt

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[47] This storyline was featured in the BBC soap opera *Eastenders* in Winter 2010. The storyline involved two characters, Ronnie Branning and Kat Slater who had babies of similar age. Ronnie's baby died due to cot death and she then swapped her dead baby for Kat's new born. The storyline received much criticism from viewers and charities trying to raise awareness of sudden infant death syndrome.

they were portrayed in the wrong way"

(Joan, 28, 27th January 2011, Interview)

These quotations from the interviews support Joke Hermes' (2005) argument that popular culture has a role in the exploration of moral issues in society and the representation of different groups. In these instances popular culture provides an opportunity to discuss personal matters, in this case of infant mortality, and explore these in a broader societal context such as the representation of women.

In relation to discussions around media in the workplace Cathy noted that a division existed between workmates who discussed entertainment programmes and those who discussed formal politics. There was also a spatial division evident where the canteen was reserved for the discussion of entertainment while political events were discussed within the office space.

"In work as well I would discuss politics, not with the people I would discuss the entertainment with. We'd discuss funny stuff in the canteen and maybe if you're over chatting to someone you might get talking about politics. Someone might shout out 'so and so resigned' and then we'd all start talking about it. But at the moment there's more talk about it than there generally is because of what's going on."

(Cathy, 28, 26th January 2011, Interview)

This division can be seen to emanate from the classification of these spaces in relation to the working day by employees, the former associated with leisure while the latter is connected to work and productivity. Again the broader context of the economy and political situation in Ireland were cited as factors influencing an increase in discussion of formal politics at work.

Depending on his work schedule Patrick watched a number of magazine style talk shows such as *Loose Women* (UTV). He talked about how programmes

which dealt with the recession, from a human interest point of view, had led to him changing some of his spending habits. Watching these types of programmes led him to change his consumption activities, focusing on buying Irish products in local businesses when doing his weekly grocery shopping. He viewed this activity as a way for him to do his bit to get the country out of the recession.

> "the whole economic crisis I followed that I suppose everyone did and we all have opinions on that...I was interested a lot in programmes that were buy Irish and support local and after that I go now into the Irish fruit and veg shop and to my local butcher whereas before I would have gone to say *Aldi*
>
> CE: And that would be through information that you got from...
>
> Patrick: TV shows, yes or looking it up on the internet just how we get out of a recession you know spending locally...those programmes would have changed me, well not changed me I would have known but made me more aware. When you see the real cost of it how it affects human beings then you kind of go, "we should be doing our bit."
>
> (Patrick, 27, 8TH June 2011, Interview)

There is a sense here of what the citizen can do as at an individual level supporting Jannelle Ward's (2010) ideas on consumption as a practice of citizenship. Patrick can be identified as a 'Socially Conscious Consumer' in this instance as he makes purchases aligned with a campaign to shop local. A sense of placation is evident; the feel good factor of buying Irish and contributing to society at an individual level suffices and does not necessarily lead to participation in any further action at a collective level.

Entertainment media was viewed by participants in general as unrelated to politics. This could be seen to correlate with Couldry and Markham's research (2007) in a British context which found that participants in their study did

not regard celebrity and entertainment media as serving to connecting them with politics and public issues. However, reading between the lines it here it becomes apparent that entertainment programming such as soap opera and lifestyle or magazine type programming had a role in guiding participants through societal norms and moral issues supporting the positions of theorists such as Hermes (2005), Liesbet Van Zoonen (2005) and Janelle Ward (2010). I would posit that there are a number of elements to this debate, entertainment media have been denigrated in contemporary culture as having nothing to do with politics or public issues. Although the work of academic disciplines such as cultural studies have argued and examined the political uses of popular culture the dominant rhetoric is that there is a stark division between popular culture and politics. This research shows that in some instances popular culture and light entertainment programming can provide a 'soft' approach to politics for citizens.

9.7: Public Sphere 2.0

Anne, James, David and Eoghan regularly engaged in online discussion of public issues on *Facebook*. James and David also utilised other more specialised sites to engage in more in-depth discussion.

For Anne her *Facebook* pages were the main site for discussion of public issues online. She found that discussions often involved people who were members of her political party and rarely friends from outside the party. She also browsed the *politics.ie* online political forum reading different opinions and following threads using her partner's account she had yet to set up her own account but felt she would get involved in debate on this site in the future.

> "I'd probably see a discussion between my [political party] friends... there would be discussion, but my friends that would be

outside of a political party, not really. But if I put it on my councillor [profile] yes you would get plenty of comments"

(Anne, 29, 27ᵀᴴ January 2011, Online Session)

James utilized his *Facebook* account to engage in discussion with a local radio current affairs programme. He also has an account on the more specialised *politics.ie* site where he engages in more in depth debate of public issues and politics. He used these opportunities to discuss his party's policy and his views on history and political theory.

David also used his *Facebook* profile to discuss politics and public issues with friends. He described how discussion on *Facebook* was limited, often revolving around 'one-liners' and little in depth analysis.

> "Usually there are one or two people who will comment on bigger political issues, they'll post a one liner usually, because of the nature of Facebook they are just one or two liner things. Because Facebook isn't conducive to discussion, [it's] sound bites. And equally if you are friends with somebody on it you are going to be preaching to the converted, everybody is going to be on the same wavelength anyway...in that sense Facebook can be a bit exclusive to some extent because inevitably you do focus in on people with similar interests. So in some cases it narrows your views or consolidates your point of view."

(David, 27, 2ⁿᵈ February 2011, online session)

While watching news and current affairs programming David often discussed both the production values and the issues being discussed with his friends.

> "I've a friend in London who's a political junkie so the last few days have been brilliant we've just been online constantly. There's been breaking news every minute so it's been constantly back and forward. And then watching *Prime Time* or the news or *Vincent*

Browne and all the excitement that came with that it was great getting his insight because he's a member of Fianna Fail, so I was getting a good insight from both points of view and then other people as well so definitely even though you'd be alone you'd be interacting as well.

(David, 28, 2nd February 2011, online session)

Fig 9.3: David's Facebook profile commentary on Prime Time leaders debate General Election 2011 (online observation)

These accounts of online discussion demonstrate the way in which participant's online discussion tends to occur between people of similar outlooks or political persuasion. The spaces for discussion on these sites can be seen to tie in with Gitlin's assertion that the development of ICTs could

lead to the fragmentation of the public sphere into a collection of 'public sphericules' made up of a variety of interest groups (Gitlin, 1998).

These uses of online social media for the discussion of politics and public issues are in direct opposition to the opinions of Joan, Kevin, Michael, Patrick, Adam, Cathy and Joanne explored in chapter 8 who did not view online social media as an appropriate space for the discussion of politics and public issues. They feel that their profiles are not a space for the declaration of political beliefs; this division between the former group of four and the latter group of seven correlates with participants' level of engagement with offline civic or political groups. Interviewees indicate a range of attitudes here towards online social media's potential as a site for a discursive space akin to Habermas' ideal public sphere. The former group of James, David, Anne and Eoghan see these sites as a space for discussion of varying depth. The members of this group are already involved in offline citizenship activities which see them partaking in group activism, political action and public discussion. The latter group tend to see the discussion of politics as a more private pursuit happening offline among small groups of friends and family. Unlike the first group these participants were not involved in any community civic groups but did demonstrate an interest in keeping up to date with the news and current events.

Utopian perspectives view the Internet as having the potential for the provision of a space where people can construct their identity independently of their demographic profile, providing a potential for debate to take place irrespective of the social situations of the individuals involved (Benkler, 2006; Negroponte, 1995) creating a space akin to Habermas' ideal public sphere. However the interviews revealed a sense that participation in online debate often correlates with offline collective civic activities. The idea that ICTs are playing a role in fragmenting the public sphere as per Gitlin (1998) is evident here. From the online activity of those participants who are involved in political parties and campaigning organisations this manifests through discussions which take place among people with similar outlooks

and experiences. For those who do not participate in these types of collective civic activity this fragmentation manifests in the spatial divisions which they impose on their online social media use in relation to what types of content these sites should encompass.

9.8: Conclusion

This chapter presented participants' conceptions of citizenship and the role of media in the practice of citizenship for each individual. All participants included ideas and activities associated with the sphere of public authority. This occurred in two modes. Firstly for participants who were members of political parties of civic society groups, connection with this sphere was maintained on a regular basis through participation in collective forms of action both on and offline. For participants who were not involved in such groups connection with this sphere was maintained through regular consumption of news and current affairs media, reflecting the findings of Couldry et al (2007) in a British context.

For participants who were in employment, their conception of citizenship was bound up in their status as taxpayers and their interest in politics linked to this status. I would speculate in these instances that participants' status as homeowners or renters was also of relevance in this regard. This motivation rested at the level of the individual due to their concern for information seeking in regard to their financial circumstances. The local community was at the centre of tangible citizenship practices that participants engaged in. From those who worked on single issue campaigns in their local community to those who felt respect and friendliness were duties to be carried out as citizens in their everyday lives.

In relation to the question this research asks relating to the role that online social media play in relation to citizenship, I propose that there is a reflection of offline activities in the use of these sites among participants especially in relation to discursive practices. Participants who were engaged in the discussion of politics and public issues offline were more likely to enter into online debate. This demonstrates that while the potential for a democratisation of voices in political discussion is available online, it is not inevitable that this will in fact occur.

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Chapter Ten: Thesis Conclusions

10.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide concluding remarks on the findings of this research, which conducted a qualitative examination into the use of online social media among Irish 25 to 30 year olds, within the context of economic, political and social crisis in Ireland. The research has contextualised the use of these technologies among eleven individuals, utilising a comprehensive multi-method approach which examined both the offline contexts of use and the online spaces utilised by participants on these sites.

Firstly I will revisit the main strands of the theoretical framework covered in chapters two and three, namely the audience studies approach to technology and citizenship and the public sphere. The following section will reflect on the key questions which this research addressed. Firstly, the use of online social media and how these technologies are embedded into everyday life for participants. Secondly, the use of online social media in relation to citizenship practices within the context of crisis in Ireland. I will then address the methodology employed in this study examining it's suitability and how it has shaped the outcomes of the research. Limitations of the research will then be addressed and finally I will discuss the potential avenues for future research which are opened up by this study.

10.2 Theoretical Framework

As signalled in the introduction, this research is situated within the field of audience studies examining how audiences interact with media texts and technologies in everyday life. Drawing on prior research and the methodologies employed in this field, this study set out to achieve a deep level of nuanced information and insights relating to the uses and appropriations of online social media among the target group of informants.

In addressing the technological aspect of the research field this study avoided the popular technological determinist theoretical frame, taking a social shaping of technology approach in order to examine the role and meanings of online social media sites within the context of everyday life for participants. This approach emphasises the autonomy of the user in interactions with technology, examining the contexts in which technology is adopted, used and assimilated into everyday life. This research was devised to traverse the oft cited division between online and offline spaces exploring how online media are embedded in offline routines, interests and practices.

The research also aimed to explore conceptions and practices of citizenship examining how media are utilised to make and create connections with public life in Ireland. To this end chapter two presented a range of potential citizenship practices, drawing on theoretical work which explored the shifting definitions of citizenship. It was noted how, historically, media formats have been central to creating a connection between citizens and state and this research examined how recent developments in online technology take on this role. Habermas' model of the ideal public sphere (1969) became a central reference point to examine this relationship.

10.3: Reflections on Research Questions

10.3.1: Research Question One: How are online social media embedded into everyday life and utilised by participants in an Irish context?

The central tenet of this research approach posits that it is important not to examine the use of online social media in isolation, but within the context of participants' general media consumption practices. Analysis of participants' reflections on media in everyday life in the primary research, revealed the habitual character of media use and the incorporation of different media formats into daily routines. This analysis demonstrates that while online social media, and the internet in general, have introduced new modes of media consumption, use and audience activity they have been assimilated into the broader media consumption patterns for these participants, where there is a convergence of 'new' and 'old' media technologies.

Sub question one: How do 'new media' formats converge with traditional media in participants' everyday life?

The results of the primary research informing this thesis also show that far from replacing 'old' media formats such as television and radio, digital media tend to complement and in some cases enhance participants' media consumption of these formats. For example, analysis of the media diaries revealed that while online social media had become spaces of communication and media consumption for participants they had not replaced traditional media formats such as television and radio.

Online social media platforms were found to be utilised to augment and increase connection to other members of the media audience such as James' use of his *Facebook* account to participate in discussion with other listeners to this programme, demonstrating a crossover between 'old' and 'new' media consumption practices. Examples such as this demonstrate that there are continuities of traditional modes of media consumption as well as evidence of emergent modes of consumption which encompass online media.

Sub question Two: What role do online social media sites play in the lives of 25 to 30 year olds in Ireland?

Online social media were found to encompass a number of uses and engendered a number of different conceptualisations by participants. They are communicative spaces utilised to conduct direct real time conversations with friends, relatives and acquaintances both near and far in text format which is enriched through the inclusion of hyperlinks, photographs and video content. They are often nostalgic spaces utilised to connect will old friends, to join nostalgia groups and reconnect with different phases of life. They are also surveillance spaces where participants kept up to date with friends through viewing status updates, photographs and posts but not necessarily commenting. This sense of connection was especially important during a period of time when rises in emigration meant that participants' peers were leaving Ireland in their tens of thousands. They are also, for some users, spaces of discussion where opinions can be expressed on pop culture and public issues.

10.3.2: How do participants use online social media to connect with political arenas of Irish life in this time of crisis?

Sub Question One: How do 25 to 30 year olds conceptualise and practice citizenship?

Participants relayed conceptions of citizenship which reflected the theoretical exploration conducted in chapter two relating to changing notions and critique of the definitions of citizenship in the literature. Participants' conceptions were reported in chapter six of this thesis. The scope of citizenship for these individuals ranged from connections with the arena of formal politics to a focus on community and individual actions. In relation to the formal political arena evidence of citizenship practice emerged at a number of levels. Firstly there were participants who engaged with this area through membership of political parties and civic society groups, for these

individuals this type of participation informed their ideas relating to citizenship, their outlook and the practices in which they engaged. Their focus was on collective action beginning at a local level but encompassed a national and occasionally international level of engagement. They created connections between the actions of government and the everyday lives of people within their community, whether this was in their locality, workplace or peer group.

A second group identified were not orientated towards collective action and their ideas on citizenship predominantly revolved around actions which could be taken by the individual to make a contribution to society primarily at a local level. Occasional interventions from this individual level to the collective level were witnessed when economic situation in Ireland impacted on personal situations. While collective action was entered into in these instances a long term engagement with this level of citizenship practice was not established.

Sub Question 2: How do 25 to 30 year old Irish adults connect to an Irish public sphere?

In relation to the media utilised by participants to connect with public areas analysis of the empirical results demonstrates that news media, was reported by participants to be the primary media format used in this relationship. This included online news sites created by established newspapers and news networks, news amalgamation sites and the use of specialist forums which provided breaking news. The predominant function of online news for participants was to keep up to date with breaking news stories. Offline, more traditional news sources continued to figure prominently in participants' media repertoires. Evening televised news bulletins were routine spaces of news consumption among participants. Online social media profiles were utilised in sharing news stories with friends and occasionally led to the discussion of public issues.

This research illustrates that online social media sites in isolation will not create an online public sphere which is inclusive of a broader range of people. While the potential for the development of a public sphere exists in these spaces, this research finds that participation in discursive practices by a broader public online is contingent on individuals' offline civic activities. The empirical research supports Gitlin's (1998) hypothesis that the impact of electronic media on the public sphere creates a landscape of 'public sphericules' consisting of disparate groups with little connection between them. This research finds that among the participants who took part in this research, participation in these spaces is contingent on pre established interests and orientations towards their content.

10.4: Methodology

As mentioned previously the methodology employed in this research utilised a multi-method qualitative approach in order to build in-depth and well-rounded insights into the use of online social media in everyday life. The nature and scope of the reported findings seem to fully justify this approach. The multi method approach employed allowed for the triangulation of results and the development of a more complete picture of the role played by online social media in citizenship practices. Structuring the methodology to include offline and online spaces revealed practices which would have gone unnoticed if the research had only focused on one aspect of consumption. This was especially evident in relation to the reading and 'lurking' practices which participants engaged in online. Here practices of information seeking which would have remained invisible were revealed during interviews with participants.

The research also highlights the value of reflecting on prior research into the relationship between individuals and media technologies. Methods utilised in previous qualitative audience and media research such as the semi-structured interview, diary and observation continue to have relevance in the contemporary media environment. This traversing of the boundary between online and offline provides an additional level of analysis which has the potential to complement large scale survey research into the uses of online social media which often examine online spaces in isolation from the offline context of use.

10.5: Limitations of the Research

One of the main limitations of a study of this sort is that the sample included in the qualitative empirical research is restricted to a small size. Due to this the results cannot be generalised to the broader population. However the detailed and nuanced insights provided by this type of research offers a depth of information which readily complement broader quantitative studies which have been carried out in relation to online social media use in Ireland.

This research successfully achieved its aim to augment the qualitative elements of the study by testing some of the trends relating to online social media use and citizenship which emerged in the core qualitative elements of the study. However, online surveys also have limitations as respondents are self selective and do not necessarily reflect the population at large.

Despite these limitations carrying out research which examines the personal, subjective experiences of individuals' interactions with media technology is significant in the field of audience studies. As digital media technologies change rapidly and one innovation is superseded by the next, techno-centricity can become the dominant paradigm through which society's relationship with technology is examined. The intervention of research which examines the experiences, everyday uses and broader media repertoires of individual members of society is necessary to explore the changes and continuities in the roles of audience members.

10.6: Possibilities for Further Research

This research opens up a number of opportunities for further research. Media texts and technologies are imbued with different meanings and uses depending on the people using them and the contexts of consumption. At a broader level, cultural and socio-economic situations also have an impact on consumption practices. The qualitative approach taken by this research to examine the use of online social media in everyday life revealed a number of areas which warrant further research to be undertaken.

This research raises questions regarding the use of the internet and online social media in the workplace. In the context of this research the workplace was treated as one space of media use within everyday life. A qualitative study focusing on particular workplaces in an Irish context would be welcome addition to the literature.

Another area of enquiry to be addressed relates to the different experiences of online social media use across demographic factors such as age, class and gender. While this research necessarily focused on the specific age range of 25 to 30 and a particular class group, there is scope to conduct similar qualitative research with participants with different demographic profiles.

With increased levels of emigration from Ireland in recent years there is scope to conduct research which examines the interpersonal relationships being conducted online among family members and friends. This type of study could qualitatively examine how friendships and intergenerational familial ties are maintained through online communication services such as *Skype*, social network sites and blogs.

Through the exploration of individual participants' use of online social media in everyday life this research took a 'bottom up' approach to the role of online social media in citizenship and politics. There is potential to qualitatively examine the use of online social media by established political parties and civic society groups in an Irish context. With local elections

scheduled in 2014 and a general election in 2016 there is opportunity to examine and compare the use of and attitudes towards these media within the political field.

This research focused on the use of online social media by participants recruited from in offline locations. To provide an account of the users of discussion spaces in online social media there is scope for a study which would begin recruitment in an online space examining the perspective of individuals who are active in these online 'public sphericules' in an Irish context'.

Finally, the economic and political context in which this research was carried out must be highlighted. The years in which this study took place were a time of turmoil economically, politically and socially. To revisit the participants as Ireland moves through these crises would be a potential avenue of research, providing an insight into how media is utilised to connect with citizenship under different socio-economic and political circumstances.

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Addendum 1: Habermas' Public Sphere

The origins of the 17th and 18th Century incarnation of the public sphere, which Habermas refers to, lie in the development of the capitalist economy in Europe from the thirteenth century on (Habermas, 1962 (1989 translation): 14-15). With changes in the economic structure of society came challenges to the traditional hierarchies of rule. The practice of capitalist modes of business allowed for the development of a new class, one which held a certain level of autonomy from the state. The separation of economic activity from the monarchy at this stage led to tensions between "town" and the "court", as they are referred to by Habermas, it is between the two that the public sphere of civil society comes into play as a space where these private individuals could discuss and potentially influence the actions of the court.

The bourgeois stratum of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to which Habermas refers was constituted of a learned elite and the upwardly mobile business classes. These members of society created a public which was based on education, as Calhoun puts it "the public sphere was initially constituted in the world of letters, which paved the way for that oriented to politics" (Calhoun, 1992:10). The press became one medium for the airing of tensions between 'town and 'court' and in the latter half of the seventeenth century periodicals began to appear which during the eighteenth century contained articles where discussion took place through the critical reasoning of social affairs. Gradually these articles began to direct their arguments to the authorities and "a forum in which private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion" was created (Habermas, 1962 (1989 translation): 25).

Figure 2.3 presented the structure of society as interpreted by Habermas. Divided between the Private Realm and the Sphere of Public Authority it can be seen that the ideal bourgeois Public Sphere, to which Habermas is connected, exists within the Private Realm. This is because it is made up of private people, people who hold no power to rule in society (Habermas, 1962

(1989 translation): 28). Habermas believed that people's characters and beliefs were formed in the private sphere of the Family's Internal Space and participated within the public sphere as fully formed entities. The emergence of a variety of cultural entertainment products in the eighteenth century allowed for a space where people would meet and discuss art and culture these included theatre, opera and museums. It is important to note here the inherent bias which is given towards the bourgeois classes; these are what would be deemed 'high' forms of culture which would be frequented in the main by the rising bourgeois class. In these arenas the bourgeois would mix with nobility and it was through this contact that many of the characteristics of the bourgeois sphere were learned (Habermas, 1962 (1989 translation): 29). This also reinforces the connection between the changes in the economy and the rise of the bourgeoisie. In the case of societies ruled under a monarchy the court was the forum for discussion and entertainment, the rising bourgeois classes also needed a forum and it would become the coffee house or salon where discussions of the public sphere would take place. Developing from 'the world of letters' this sphere of discourse originally centred on discussions of arts and culture later graduating to discussion of matters relating to state authority. (Habermas, 1962 (1989 translation): 30).

Habermas' definition of the public sphere as described above portrays a positive forum for public discussion. However, what this description hides are the exclusions which were inherent within it. Habermas presents an ideal of the public sphere based on the eighteenth century bourgeois version and attempts to make this an ahistorical ideal to be attained for true democracy. By placing this ideal in its historical context omissions become apparent, however it is important to note here that in presenting this as an ideal to strive for Habermas acknowledges these historically based exclusions. The eighteenth century bourgeois public sphere was exclusive to wealthy white males reflecting the patriarchal nature of society at the time and also the focus on material wealth. The public sphere advocates a forum where it is the views expressed and not the background of the speaker which holds merit,

however, in this case the uniformity of backgrounds permitted entry for discussion curtails the legitimacy of this argument. The danger with this from a Marxist perspective is that it implied that the bourgeois model was the ideal structure for a harmonious society. The omission of women, minority groups and the lower classes from the bourgeois public sphere has been highlighted by many groups and Marxist theory and discourse analysis are referenced as having major influence in deconstructing the public sphere and the oppositions which exist within it (Calhoun, 1992, p: 20).

Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Forms

Consent Form 1

Research Title:

A study into the role of online social media in citizenship practices among Irish 25 to 30 year olds.

This research is being conducted by Claire English as part of PhD in the School of Communications, Dublin City University (DCU). The project is funded by the Irish Social Science Platform (ISSP) and supervised by Dr. Barbara O'Connor.

The research aims to explore media use in everyday life among Irish 25 to 30 year olds. There are four elements of the research which participants are invited to contribute to, a week-long media diary, an online session, an interview with the researcher and a period of online ethnography. If at any stage you wish to withdraw from the process you are free to do so.

In signing this consent form you agree to take part in all elements of the study. You also agree to the content of all elements being used in the final research project. It can be arranged for you to receive a copy of the research upon completion.

In the interests of your privacy, your identity will be concealed through the use of a pseudonym.

Interviews will take place at your convenience and will be recorded using a digital voice recorder. The recordings will be stored on the researcher's computer which is password protected.

Transcripts of the media diaries and interviews will be stored in a secure filing cabinet.

Please sign here to agree to the above:

Name: ....

Date: ....

If you have any further queries about the issues raised above or any other aspect of the research please contact Claire English either via email: claire.english3@mail.dcu.ie or by phone on 0863668807

Consent Form 2

Recording consent form

Thank you for participating in this research.

This consent form is to give permission to Claire English (DCU) to record you using online social media. A screen capture recorder will be used in this process. The aim is to see how you use the sites and for you to show how you have set up your profiles.

Please read the statement below and sign where indicated:

I understand that my online session will be recorded.

I grant Claire English permission to use this recording for analysis and illustration of my use of online social media in her PhD research.

I do/do not permit screenshots from the session to be used in the final thesis. (Delete as applicable)

I would/would not like my identity to be concealed in any screenshots used. (Delete as applicable)

I give/do not give Claire English permission to follow me on my online social media profile(s) for a period of two months. (Delete as applicable)

Signature: _____

Print your name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Participant Descriptions

Name	Gender	Age	Household Composition	Occupation	Education	Internet Access	Social Media Used	Citizenship Activities
James	M	25	Lives at home with parents Rural Location	Unemployed	Third Level Degree	Broadband at home and in partner's house	*Facebook.com*, *politics.ie*	Member of left orientated party, campaigning, protest, canvassing
David	M	27	House Share: City centre apartment	Researcher, administrator Charitable organisation	Post-Graduate Diploma	Own Laptop at home with Broadband, Broadband access at work	*Facebook.com*, *boards.ie*, archseek.ie, MSN messenger	Participates in discussions and meetings offline and online discussion forums, campaigning and lobbying
Anne	F	29	Single mother lives with son in provincial town	Local town councillor	Third Level Degree	Own laptop at home with Broadband access	*Facebook.com*	Member of left orientated party, Councillor on local town council, campaigning, protest, canvassing
Cathy	F	28	Shares city apartment	Support technician for	Third Level	Broadband access at work, only	*Facebook.com*, *Twitter.c*	Information gathering,

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			with partner	multination al company	Degree	occasional access at home via work laptop and mobile dongle	om	voting
Joan	F	28	House Share city centre apartment	Store manager fashion outlet retail chain	Third level diploma	Broadband at home	*Facebook* .com, menupag es.ie	Information seeking, voting
Kevin	M	27	House Share with partner	Civil Service administrati on	Third Level Degree	Limited broadband access at work (cannot access social networkin g sites such as *Facebook*.c o and bebo.com)	*Facebook* .com. Autoexpr ess.co.uk	Information seeking, voting, follows centre-left party but cannot become a member due to Civil Service contract
Eoghan	M	26	Shares city centre apartment with partner	Project manager	Masters Degree	Broadband access at work with access to all online social media sites and accounts	*Facebook* .com	Member of left wing party with weekly meetings, involved in activism and canvassing
Joanne	F	29	Homeowner with husband (also taking part in the study) in provincial town	Insurance underwriter	3rd level Degree	Broadband access at home and work with no limits on access to online social media accounts, smartphon e with Internet access	*Facebook* .com,	Information seeking, offline discussion, single issue campaign, writing to politicians
Adam	M	29?	Homeowner with wife	Mechanic	Apprenti	Broadband access at	*Facebook* .ie,	No

			(also taking part in study) in provincial town		ceship	home, Smartphone with Internet access	bikers.ie	
Patrick	M	28	Home owner with sister in rural village	Senior Air Steward	3rd Level Degree	Broadband access at home	*Facebook*.com, youtube.com	Information seeking, single issue campaign, trade union member, writing to politicians
Michael	M	28	Apartment share city centre	Marketing Manager	3rd Level Degree	Broadband access at work and home with access to online social media accounts	*Facebook*.com, *Twitter*.com, quora.com, del.ic.ious.com,	Information seeking, discussions on/offline, volunteering with organizations and in local community

Appendix C: Media Diary Template

This is a record of your media use during one week, please fill out appropriate space when necessary.

Instructions:

1: There is space provided for each day for one week. Add the date at the top of each page.
2: Please fill in:

- time of day
- length of time spent using the media
- type of media
- technology used
- location
- whether you were alone or in the company of others
- the content of the media
- whether you discussed the media content with anyone.

3: If you miss a day, or forget please fill in as soon as you remember
4: Additional pages have been provided in case you need more space on any day during the week
5: At the end of the week please complete the reflection section highlighting any aspect of the diary keeping that you felt was important e.g. any stories you followed or felt strongly about, any observations on the media you used.

EXAMPLE:

Date: Monday 20 September 2010

Time	Time spent	Media	Technology	Location	Alone/Accompanied	Content	discussion
8am	40mins	Radio-Today FM	Radio on Mobile Phone	Journey to work-bus	Alone	Ian Dempsey Breakfast Show	Talked about the Gift Grub sketch with co-worker
9.10am	20mins	Internet-Gmail, *Facebook*, Irish	Office PC	Work desk	Alone	Checked emails, news headlines	No

		Times website				and updates on *Facebook*	
11.30am	15mins	Newspaper-The Star		Work canteen	Alone	Flicked through paper on break to catch up on news	
2pm	60mins	Internet	Office PC	Work desk	Alone/Group discussion	Research for work project	Discussed findings with rest of team
5.30pm	40mins	Radio-2fm	Radio on Mobile phone	Journey home from work-bus	Alone	Will Leahy-interview with Dermot O'Leary Sport and news	
7pm	180mins	Television-RTE, TV3, Sky 1	Television Sky Digital	In Sitting Room	With Flatmates	Watched Nationwide, Eastenders, Masterchef, News and Father Ted	Talked about drug abuse in Eastenders, news story about banks and Mrs Doyle in Father Ted
10.30	80mins	Internet-*Facebook*, YouTube, 4od	Laptop	Bedroom	Alone	Updated status on *Facebook* and replied to a few friends comments, uploaded photos, watched football videos on YouTube and episode of Shameles	Online chat with friend on *Facebook*

						s on 4od	

Please use this page to reflect on your experience of keeping a media diary during this week.

This page should be completed at the end of the week, feel free to write on the back of the page or add additional pages as necessary.

Date…………………………………………

Time	Time spent	Media	Technology	Location	Alone/ Accompanied	Content	discussion

Appendix D: Interview Plan

Key Question One: What media are consumed by 25 to 30 year olds?

Assessing the role of media in daily life

The aim here is to assess the place of media consumption in the lives of participants, as Van Zoonen notes politics must compete with other leisure pursuits in our lives and media is just one of these.

Q1:   Activities during the week? (work/leisure time)

Q2:   How much time is left for yourself and leisure?

Q3:   What do you do with free time?

Q4:   Is there anything you always make time for each week e.g. a TV show, cinema etc

Q5:   Anything you'd like to do more of given the time?

Sub question one: What is the relationship between the consumption of 'old' and 'new' media?

New media can often be eulogized as creating new types of audiences vastly different from those of mass media/old media. The aim here is to assess how new media fit into the overall media consumption of participants, the role they see new media as playing and how they consume these formats.

Q6:   What types of media would you use on a daily basis?

Q7:   Are there any media forms that you HAVE to use/watch/read daily?

Q8:   What kind of media do you like to use/watch/read/listen to?

Q9:   What type of media could you not live without?

Q10: Do you think your media use has changed much over through your 20s?

Q11: Do you use a computer daily? Would you access the Internet on a daily basis?

Q12: Where would you tend to access the Internet?

Sub question Two:

What role do online social media sites play in the lives of 25-30 year olds in Ireland?

Q13:   What online social networks are you a member of?

Q14:   What other sites would you use that allow you to post content/comment/discuss? (e.g.: You Tube/forums/news websites)

Q15:   How often would you log onto these networks?

Q16:   What do you mainly use these sites for?

Q17: What kinds of material would you post online?

Q18:   Would you produce content for your profile- eg: photos, video, animations, articles.

Q19:   Are you a member of any groups on the sites (comical/fan/special interest/business etc.)?

Q20:   Why did you become a member of these groups?

1.3.2 Key Question Two: Are online social media sites utilised in citizenship practices?

Sub Question One: How do 25 to 30 year old Irish adults connect to an Irish public sphere?

If member of a political party:

Q21:   Describe how they got involved and to what level.

Q22:   When they joined a party/org etc?

Q23:   What spurred them to join, an issue/friend/family

Q24:   Do they view media in a different light since joining?

Interest in Public Issues

Q25:   What kind of issues are you interested in?

Q26:   Where do you get information on these issues?

Q27:   Do you talk about these with others? Who?

Q28: Do you belong to groups/organisations connected with these issues?

Q29: Would you discuss these online or put forward your ideas on a Social Networking Site for example?

Q30: How do you feel the media represents these issues?

Q31: Have you followed any TV shows/celebrity who highlights these issues?

Traditional forms of civic engagement- voting, party membership

Q32: In the past have you voted in elections or referenda? Why, Why not?

Q33: Would you post a comment online if there was an issue which you felt strongly about?

Q34: Do you participate in any voluntary organisations?

Q35: Are you a member of any social clubs/special interest clubs?

Q36: Why do you feel you do not participate in political activities?

Definitions of politics:

Q37: What are your first thoughts when you hear the word politics?

Q38: Do you feel a connection to politics in Ireland?

Q39: Do you feel politics has a place in your life?

Q40: What kind of activities do you participate in which you would view as political?

Q41: Would you see the Internet as having a role to play?

Q42: Do you feel online social media can play a role in connecting you to politics-how do they succeed/fail?

Q43: Would you identify online if you are a member of a political party/support a party or social movement group/have no interest in politics?

Appendix E: Online Survey Template

This survey is part of PhD research being conducted by Claire English at the School of Communications, Dublin City University.

The purpose of the project is to examine the everyday use of online social media websites among 18 to 30 year olds in Ireland and to see if these sites are used in connection with civic activity.

I want to learn what we use these sites for, how they fit in with our use of other media such as television and radio and how they are used to connect us to each other and civic activities.

The aim of this survey is to get a broader picture of how online social media are being used in daily life.

Completing this survey will take approximately 15 minutes. If you are aged 18 to 30 I would really appreciate you completing the survey about your own use of online social media.

The questionaire is confidential and the information collected will be reported in aggregate form only.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at: claire.english3@mail.dcu.ie

Thank you for your participation, please feel free to forward this to anyone else you think might be interested.

Claire English

Age:

Gender

◯ Male

◯ Female

Do you currently live in Ireland?

◯ Yes

◯ No

If no, where?

What type of area do you live in? (select one)

◯ Rural Area   ◯ Large Town (25,000+)

◯ Rural Village   ◯ Suburbs

◯ Small Town (less than 10,000)   ◯ City

◯ Medium Town (10,000-25,000)   ◯ City Suburbs

Other (please specify)

Highest level of educational achievment to date

[ ]

Other (please specify)

[ ]

Are you currently: (please tick as many as apply)

[ ] Part-time Student   [ ] Full-time Employment

[ ] Full-time Student   [ ] Currently Unemployed

[ ] Part-time Employment   [ ] Carer

Job Title (please specify)

[ ]

Nationality

[ ]

What Online Social Media sites do you have a profile on? (select all that apply)

[ ] You Tube   [ ] MySpace

[ ] Blog   [ ] Linkedin

[ ] Forum   [ ] Bebo

[ ] Twitter   [ ] Facebook

[ ] Flickr   [ ] Jolitics

Other (please specify)

[ ]

Which two sites do you use most?

[ ]

What do you use your online social media profiles for? (select rating for each option)

	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Keeping up to date with friends	◯	◯	◯	◯
Local issues	◯	◯	◯	◯
Music	◯	◯	◯	◯
Sports	◯	◯	◯	◯
Entertainment	◯	◯	◯	◯
International politics	◯	◯	◯	◯
News	◯	◯	◯	◯
Celebrity gossip	◯	◯	◯	◯
Health Information	◯	◯	◯	◯
Fashion	◯	◯	◯	◯
National issues	◯	◯	◯	◯
Environment	◯	◯	◯	◯
Joining groups	◯	◯	◯	◯
Meeting new people	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other (please specify)

_____

How often do you use your profiles for the following? (select rating for each option)

	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Share photos you have taken	◯	◯	◯	◯
Share video you have created	◯	◯	◯	◯
Share video you find online (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo etc)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Read Blog Posts	◯	◯	◯	◯
Write Blog Posts	◯	◯	◯	◯
Share News Articles	◯	◯	◯	◯
Write News Articles	◯	◯	◯	◯
Share Entertainment Articles	◯	◯	◯	◯
Write Entertainment Articles (reviews etc)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Share Celebrity News	◯	◯	◯	◯
Read Celebrity News	◯	◯	◯	◯
Share satirical content	◯	◯	◯	◯
Create satirical content	◯	◯	◯	◯
Share funny content	◯	◯	◯	◯
Create funny content	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other (please specify)

_____

What types of comments do you post on your profile? (select rating for each option)

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less than once a month	Never
Posts to funny groups I am a member of	○	○	○	○	○
Observations about my daily life	○	○	○	○	○
Discussions about national issues	○	○	○	○	○
Discussions about local issues	○	○	○	○	○
Posts to fan sites	○	○	○	○	○
Discussions about international issues	○	○	○	○	○
Conversation with friends I see less often	○	○	○	○	○
Discussions about fictional TV shows	○	○	○	○	○
Posts to campaign groups I am a member of	○	○	○	○	○
Conversation with friends I see everyday	○	○	○	○	○
Discussions about factual TV shows	○	○	○	○	○

Other (please specify)

[   ]

How often do you keep up to date with the following topics? (select a rating for each)

	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Entertainment News	○	○	○	○
Latest Film Releases	○	○	○	○
Fashion	○	○	○	○
International Politics	○	○	○	○
International Issues	○	○	○	○
National Politics	○	○	○	○
National Issues	○	○	○	○
Local politics	○	○	○	○
Local issues	○	○	○	○
Music	○	○	○	○
Celebrity gossip	○	○	○	○
Economics	○	○	○	○
Religious Debates	○	○	○	○
Creating equality in society	○	○	○	○
Protecting the environment	○	○	○	○
Poverty in developing countries	○	○	○	○

Other (please specify)

[   ]

Did you do any of the following relating to this issue? (Select as many as apply)

- ☐ Looked for more information from offline sources
- ☐ Searched for further information on the internet
- ☐ Followed an online discussion about the issue
- ☐ Shared information through your social networking profiles about the issue
- ☐ None of the above

If not, why?

- ◯ Not enough time
- ◯ It won't make a difference
- ◯ Don't know anyone else involved
- ◯ I didn't know where to look

Other (please specify)

[   ]

Did you do any of the following relating to this issue? (select as many as apply)

- ☐ Joined/followed a group on ANY social networking site
- ☐ Became a member of a political party
- ☐ Became a member of an organisation which campaigns on this issue
- ☐ Took part in an online group activity relating to this issue
- ☐ Took part in an offline group activity relating to this issue
- ☐ None of the above

If not, why?

- ◯ Not enough time
- ◯ It won't make a difference
- ◯ Don't know anyone else involved
- ◯ I'm not the kind of person who joins groups like this

Other (please specify)

[   ]

Did you do any of the following relating to this issue? (select as many as apply)

- ☐ Contributed to an online discussion about the issue
- ☐ Created a video/newsletter/website etc to highlight the issue
- ☐ Discussed the issue with friends
- ☐ Discussed the issue with family
- ☐ None of the above

If not, why?

◯ Not enough time   ◯ It won't make a difference

◯ Don't know anyone else involved   ◯ I don't like to get involved in discussions

Other (please specify)

[   ]

Please describe any other action you took:

[   ]

Do you participate in any of the following activities?

☐ Volunteering

☐ Member of community group (e.g. Tidy Towns, Community Garden, Drama, Choir etc.)

☐ Protest

☐ Member of campaigning group/organisation (e.g. local services, environmental, poverty, animal rights etc)

☐ Signing Petitions

☐ Member of a political party

☐ Public discussion (offline)

☐ Public discussion (online)

☐ None of the above

Please state which groups you are a member of (optional)

[   ]

Is it important to you to be a good citizen?

◯ Yes

◯ No

If yes, what does this mean to you?

[   ]

If no, why not?

[   ]

Thank you for taking part in the survey.

If you are interested in taking part in an interview to discuss your use of online social media further please leave your email address or contact number in the space below.

Of the 3 topics you keep up to date with most, who do you discuss these topics with?

Select One

Topic 1	[ ]
Topic 2	[ ]
Topic 3	[ ]

Other (please specify)

[   ]

Name one issue that you have been particularly interested in the past 6 months?

[   ]

Would you describe this issue as

◯ personal

◯ local

◯ national

◯ international

Where did you get information about this issue from? (Select as many as apply)

[ ] National newspaper	[ ] TV News	[ ] Fictional TV programmes
[ ] Radio	[ ] College	[ ] International newspaper
[ ] Online social networking site	[ ] local newspaper	[ ] Internet specialist site
[ ] magazine	[ ] friends/family/work colleagues	[ ] other people
[ ] Personal experience	[ ] Online forum	
[ ] Factual TV programmes	[ ] Internet news site	

Other (please specify)

[   ]

Which source did you find most useful? Why?

[   ]

Appendix F: TAMS Qualitative Analysis Software

Sample Coding Structure

Code	Nested Category	Nested Sub Category
Online Social Media	Accessing Online Social Media	Frequency
		Home
		Work
		Mobile
	Online Social Media Sites	Facebook
		Twitter
		YouTube
		Specialist
	Uses	Contact
		Connection
		Business
		Identity display
		Life events
		Photos
	Concerns	Privacy
		Work
		Professionalism
	Attitudes to Posting	Content
		Posting
		Friends posts
		Reasons not to post
		Changes in time available
		Changes in usage modes
		Lurking/reading behaviours

Image: Coding interview transcript in TAMS analyzer