

Social media and interpersonal relationships among the employed and the undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

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Abstract

The rise in technological advancement has greatly influenced the use of internet for socialization with different dedicated websites such as Facebook and WhatsApp. This form of communication termed “social media” has become a veritable instrument for maintaining relationships and meeting new people. Individuals could go beyond the traditional form of communication and use social media platforms to meet strangers online to share interests, business or consolidate existing relationships. It avails people the opportunity to reach out to anyone in any part of the world in few seconds. Both the employed, unemployed and undergraduates patronize and enjoy social media communication. The flexibility and convenience that social media communication provides have heightened its importance and usage. However, the differences inherent in virtual and physical communication in interpersonal relationship is very critical to this paper. Virtual communication face different challenges such as restricted interaction, lack of sincerity and real identity, anonymity and lack of physical presence. The focus of this paper is to examine the reasons behind the use of social media communication and the type of social media channels the employed and the undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University use. The way relationships are maintained or marred via social media communication is also the thrust of this paper. Findings

indicate that Facebook and WhatsApp are the most preferred social media platforms among the employed and undergraduates. The employed and undergraduates use social media communication for different purposes. However, social communication is the meeting point of both. The research samples 40 participants; 20 employed and 20 undergraduates using structured questionnaires and semi oral interview as instruments for data collection. Social brain theory by Dunbar is used in this paper as the model of analysis.

Keywords: social media, virtual, interpersonal relationship, facebook.

Introduction

The developments in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has influenced all aspects of life. It has collapsed the globe and made people closer to one another than they were in the last two decades. A lot of manual and traditional approaches have been replaced with more sophisticated, advanced scientific and technological methods. Educational activities for instance, have been digitalized. Lectures are now delivered by the use of computer via projector. Students can now access their results through the internet. Most banking and monetary transactions are presently done via the internet. Money is now debited and transferred through computer gadgets (mobile transactions). Administrative documentation and records are automated in various offices. The knowledge of computer related activities form the prerequisite requirements of employment in so many sectors today.

Technological advancements have afforded the internet a wider range and varieties of web related activities. These

activities range from sourcing information to interpersonal social activities. The traditional way of using town criers to deliver information to the people of a given community has been replaced with the modern and advanced wider method of communication enabled by ICTs platforms such as social media. The presence of internet has provided the world with a new dimension of communicating with people at ease and in faster degree. People can interact with people from a very far distance; sometimes from another country at the comfort of their homes through the use of social networking sites. Emailing, text messaging, video chatting and other telephone conversation methods have displaced the traditional posting of letters through post office and the delay in responses. Hence, there is need to understudy the interpersonal bearings of social media communication as different from traditional communication especially among the employed and undergraduates of UNIZIK which is the thrust of this paper.

Interpersonal communication does not occur as accident but it is a process which involves participants assuming and negotiating social roles in interaction. These roles or responsibilities are consciously or unconsciously negotiated. The speaker and the listener are very important in the communication process. Interpersonal communication exists within the space of writing and speaking. In written communication certain peculiarity abounds because of its distinctive nature. The writer sends his or her message across to his or her readers without physical contact. Sometimes the reaction of the readers are not seen or felt but communication must have taken place as the writer has delivered his or her thoughts. In physical or contact communication, interaction is dynamic. The sender and receiver have various contacts ranging from physical touch, genuflections,

body movements, speech to eye-contacts. The tone of voice of the interlocutors goes a long way to express their attitude, feeling and emotions. Other paralinguistic gestures can also contribute greatly in sending home the intended understanding and interpersonal relationships. However, where the listeners or listeners do not understanding the speaker, they have the opportunity of asking for a recap or clarification from the speaker.

Contrarily, the use of social media sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and others have greatly increased the gap or distance in communication. In fact social media has offered a great opportunity of connecting and building relationships among the young and old people in different parts of the world. These forms of social media communication take place via computer gadget such as laptops, hand phones, tablets and iPad. Hence, social media from part of computer mediate communication. In line with this assertion, Dunbar (2011) averred that the strength of a relationship many diminish when face to face encounters are not possible. This therefore, leads to the concern of this paper in investigating whether social media as a computer media discourse make, maintain or mar interpersonal relationship. This paper will also examine types of social media communication used among the employed and the undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University using Dunbar's Social Brain Theory as the theoretical frame work.

Literature review

Studies on social media and mediated communication are unique especially in education as it forms one of the emerging issues in academic world. Although a lot has been done on the impacts of social media in academic performance but very little has been

carried out in relation to interpersonal communication especially among the employed and the undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University. The environments and organizations which people work and socialize have a lot of influence on the way in which people interact with one another especially on social media. The research of Markus investigates how policy adopted by organization can ensure that a supposedly learn medium can be used effectively to communicate rich information.

According to Markus “one might also expect social definitions and technology usage practices to converge with the technology’s material characteristics and over time...”(119) This therefore, underscores the available of permitted use of social media and other technologies within an institution or organization today. Writing on the importance of social media and other media communication in work place, Leidner and Jarvenpaa,(791) opine that email allows tasks to be completed and closure can be reached even when the co-workers cannot be reached by telephone. They further point that it is also useful in a teaching environment, as it enables one to be able to ask questions anytime the need arises through email.

Linguistic features of social media discourse

Social media has been identified as a form of electronic communication in social networking sites through which users across the world create online communities to share information, ideas, business products, personal messages and other content at ease. Some of the social media platforms and sites include: Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) or blogs, and email. Previous studies on social media and other computer mediated communication show that the linguistic structures of most online interactions are less standard, less

complex and less coherent than standard written language. Social media linguistic style tends to fall uneasily between standard and non-standard English (Crystal 244).

Although, some writings of social media are largely standard in spelling, punctuation and grammar, they depart from the norm in various ways. Crystal agrees on this departure:

As regard grammar, stretches of text defy conventional analysis in terms of sentences. The discourse expresses a sequence of units of thought, but these do not correspond to the kinds of sentence division we have been taught to associate with “elegant” writing. At lower levels of grammar, too, there are features which would be considered unacceptable in traditional printed publication (244-5).

The argument of Crystal presented above stress the deviation found in social media communication which is neither a representation of standard writing or purely standard spoken discourse. Crystal concludes that the internet language combine features of speech exchanges and written communication. Many words and constructions, for example are characterized with contraction forms; length coordinated sentences appear complex, although normal. He further underscores that writing in social media displays different characteristics such as multiple instances of subordination, elaborately balanced syntactic patterns and items of vocabulary that are never spoken (18). This perhaps could be attributed to different levels of age and educational status.

Unconventional orthography in social media interaction also reveals when textual representation of auditory information such as prosody, laughter and non- language sounds become necessary (Herring, 612). To Herring, facial smiley of emoticons is used to express emotion in social media. Some other forum and unconventional abbreviations and spelling are used. These create uniqueness in social media discourse from other communication styles and as well create the features of spoken and semiotic appellations. However, how this discourse form contributes to the interpersonal bond in discourse remains unknown.

The classification of social media discourse as either written or spoken form of communication has become an issue of concern. The linguistic structure and form of social media vary from one platform to another. Herring observes, variation in structural complexity in emails, blogs or discussion forums. To him, the social situation reflected in discourse determines the linguistic structure that is appropriate to the context and the level of formality or informality. Notwithstanding, the forms of language in blogs and discussion forums are less complex and combine features of both written and spoken language compared to that of emails.

Social media and interpersonal relationship

Social Media sites have become veritable platforms where people can create global relationship from the comfort of their homes or offices. Social Media forums allow users to build a personal profile, invite friends and colleagues, interact, entertain and educate individuals through the exchange of public profiles, photos, audio and video files, digital information and artifacts, emails, instant messages, and contact information through virtual

worlds (Kaplan and Haenlein, 65). Both mutual and distant relationships could be created through social media.

The impact of social media on social, personal and interpersonal relationships in the world cannot be under played. Social media fundamentally exists in order to enhance interpersonal relationships. Communicating with people through social media platforms allow people to contact with anyone, anywhere in the world no matter the distance from each other and regardless of time or zone (Kansoy 16). The medium of creating interpersonal friendships through social media is easier, cheaper and faster. Several social media relationships have metamorphosed into physical and real world events. Very many persons have been made successful in life through the assistance of social media friends. Some have married someone who they contact through social media. Others have received medical assistance and other forms of support from the contacts made through social media. Hinduja and Patchin discovered that online interaction provides a means in which one could learn the ability to relate with others, tolerate differing viewpoints, expressing thoughts and feelings in a healthy way, and practice critical thinking skill (127).

Conversely, Kansoy observed that despite the potential advantages of social networking there are a number of concerns. To him, social media can cause negative emotion among people. He therefore illustrates the negative aspects of social media in interpersonal relationship, thus,

“Many people would like to share their photos and their successes, it is easy for people to feel disappointed, envy and jealous. When people find they cannot compete with others, they will feel some

pressure and upset. Besides decreasing the amount of face to face interactions, social media usage decreases also the quality of these interactions. The people, who are used to staying connected continuously, cannot stay offline from a long time. No matter if they are in a family meeting (16-17)”

The illustration above could be understood that over attachment to social media can affect not just interpersonal relationships but intrapersonal relationships. The forms of relationship people create and maintain in social media could take different shapes and dimensions. It could flow from ordinary to intimate friendships to even family relationship. Social media has influenced people’s relationship because it allows people to connect with a larger base of people more quickly. Social media users also tend to overestimate their level of intimacy and responsibility in maintaining these virtual relationships (Jain, 20). The attitude and behavior of people could also be influenced by the range of friends one makes through social media. Some copy the behavior, belief and dressing code of others from social media sites without considering their cultural orientations. Jain points that Social media users may compare their relationships and successes in life to other users’ lives, and this can have a positive or negative effect on the psyche.

Although face to face communication relationship creates room for people interacting to see themselves, and have body contact and gestural explanation but without face-to-face interaction, there is a possibility of valuable nonverbal communication cues going undetected or simply being disregarded, which may cause a distance or misunderstanding

during communication. A study conducted by Kraut, Scherlis, Mukhopadhyay, Manning, and Kiesler, measuring the impact of social and psychological involvement regarding Internet usage and well-being, found a relationship between the greater usage of the Internet and the declines in the communication between family members within a home (19). This study further suggested that Internet usage can result in the reduction of family communication and face-to-face interaction (Kraut et al 96).

People communicate on daily basis through social media, however Social media usage and communication influences the type of interaction and socialization within a person's environment. Hence this study aimed at investigating social media and the interpersonal relationship among the employed and undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University. The role of the social media in building a harmonious relationship among the employees and the undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University and how it transcends into real life situations will also form the interest of this study.

Theoretical framework

The concept of Social Brain Theory was culled from Dunbar Robin's hypothesis (1992) on his study of human relationships within their complex environment and foraging area. The brain could account for networks of different people together with struggle for survival. The theory therefore resulted from the complexity of our environment. The complexity of our social life requires a big brain to keep track of social relationships, especially when the group is large because a bigger group means more relationships to remember. Dunbar placed a text of comparing both foraging area and group size with neocortex ration- the proportion of brain neo cortex to other brain area

(considered a better measure of overall “braininess” than absolute brain size). However, a bigger group was associated with a larger neocortex ratio, supporting the social brain hypothesis. In contrast there was no clear relationship between brain size and environmental complexity. The brain is active in communication as the recipient of the message reconstructing the meaning intended by the sender.

Applying this theory to the concept of modern world of humans, Hill and Dunbar looked at the size of networks to which people send Christmas cards. 153.5 was the mean total population of the households receiving cards from any individual. Only a fraction over the predicted maximum number and in practice recipient household equally related well. In relation to technology and social media, Firth observed that this theory of social brain has been applied recently by other researchers to know whether technological developments have expanded the size of our natural social network. It appears that they haven't done so significantly. Despite the large number of contacts people often establish on twitter and other social media sites, the number they regularly communicate with remain under 200 (Goncalves et al), hence, its place in the present study.

The key concept of this hypothesis is that evolution has determined a cognitive limit on what we can do; as we have other mental limits such a short term memory capacity, the brain is simply not capable of maintaining a greater number of close relationships. The smaller number or size of relationship one keeps on social media, the more chances of maintaining a stronger relationship. This is because naturally human beings have a natural group say village community or kindred and group of friends a push of the limit beyond a certain point directly or indirectly will impact on the quality of the relationship. Dunbar

calculated a hypothetical limit on the human cognitive ability to maintain interpersonal relationship, defined as approximately a mean of 150.

Methodology

The data for this research was collected using structured questionnaires issued randomly to sixty participants were selected for analysis in this study due to time and space constraints. Forty were retrieved, twenty are undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University; ten male and ten female where twenty are employed members of the same institution, some are lecturers, and some are non-teaching staff of the school. No particular department or faculty was chosen; it was randomly distributed. Semi-oral interview also accompanied the questionnaires to access the level of maintenance of interpersonal relationship in line with Dunbar's social brain hypothesis. Data was analyzed using frequencies.

Significance of the study

Maintaining interpersonal relationship between people of different class can be achieved through social media. The employed and the undergraduates can relate on social media to improve the quality of face to face relationship. This study therefore will enlighten the employed and undergraduates in educational institutions to maximize their relationships through social media. It will also educate users of social media networks on how to consciously maintain their interpersonal relationship through the number of social media friends they keep. The study will also debunk and change the orientation of negativism of social media. It will be an eye-opener to those who find it difficult to share their feelings with someone through social

media. Ultimately, it will add to the rich information and knowledge of scholarship.

Questions	Answers/response	No of participants	
		Employed	Students
Do you use social media, if no why?	Yes	15	20
	No		
	no phone for social media access	1	
	no knowledge of social media	3	
	not interested	1	
Do you have your lecturers or your students as friends on social media platform	Yes	2	1
	No.		19
What do you do socially together through social media?	Chatting and having fun	5	10
	Business and studies		
	Discussion on relationship matters	6	7
		4	3
Do you depend on social media contacts for support?	Yes	2	5
	No	13	15
Have you adopted social media to maintain your relationships? If	Yes (family, friends & acquaintances)	10	15
	No	5	5

so, with which relationships			
Which type of social media network do you use to maintain your relationships?	Whatsapp and facebook	15	20
How long have you used this social media?	2-5years 5-10years 10year above	5 7 3	15 5
Has social media ever cause misunderstanding in your relationship/s?	Yes No	5 10	15 5
Does it make a difference that you do not see the person you are communicating with? How so?	Very much difference because I don't see them physically to touch and know how they feel No difference	15	20
Have you ever exaggerated personal facts on your personal profile or manipulated photographs or used images to change your identity? Why?	Yes hide my age and protect myself and to avoid abuse or embarrassment No	5 10	15 5

Are you more likely to lie online that face-to-face?	Yes	5	15
	No	10	5
Are you more open with others using social network sites?	Only to best friends	10	16
	Only to some family members	4	4
	No	1	
Do you share personal photos, videos etc with everyone on your social network site?	Yes	10	20
	No	5	
From the top of your head how many people do you have in your contact list?	50-100	5	5
	200-500	5	10
	500-1000	5	5
Have you made useful contacts using social network sites? If so, in what kind?	business partner	7	5
	fiancée/ fiancé	5	3
	husband/wife	3	
	boy friend/girl friends		12
What is the best experience using the social media network	Informative/inspiring posts	10	10
	Jokes/interesting video	5	10
	Chatting with friends		
What is the worst experience using	Abusive chat and non educating posts	15	20

the social media network			
Has social media help you to resolve misunderstanding more than face to face and how?	Yes through private chat, the person reads and replies at a more convenient and quite than face to face.		
	No. if I have any issue I meet you face to face	10	20
		5	

Data analysis

The data collected for this study will be textually analysed in this section to examine the types of social media used by the employed and the undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in Interacting with best friend, close friends and family. The family includes: parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunties, cousins and those related through marriage. While best friends are those we share intimate information, secrets someone we call upon in an emergency. Close friends are those we share gossip, general help and advice. Acquaintances on the other hand are someone you say hello to and general formalities – work colleagues, classmates and etc

Type of social media network

Out of the 40 participants sampled in this study, the data shows that 35 use social media actively while 5 don't use social media at all. These five are cleaners and a security man. 20 out the 35 are students, 10 male and 10 female students. The remaining 15 are employed staff selected randomly. 10 are lecturers while the other 5 are non-teaching staff.

The twenty students who use social media both male and female frequently use Facebook and WhatsApp, and hardly use email or Instagram. Fifteen of the employed also use Facebook and WhatsApp. Ten out of the fifteen predominantly lecturers use email always for sending articles and mail though not every day. All the forty participants use phone and face contact to communicate either by calls or text message to family, friends and colleagues or classmates both close and distant. 20 of the students communicate with their best friends and close friends at local with WhatsApp, Facebook and face to face at least once every day. Friends at distant are communicated via Facebook and WhatsApp at least once every day. 10 employed communicate with their friends and colleague at local level through to face to face at least once in a day. 4 of the employed communicate with their best friends at local through phone call at least once in a day and 11 communicate with their best friends at local using Facebook or WhatsApp at least once in a day. The forty participants communicate with their family member both local and distant at least once in a month. Thirty-five of the participants communicate with them through WhatsApp or Facebook at least once in a month. Video calls are used for friends and family at distant by the thirty-five participants. Family members and best friends at distant are communicated face to face at least once a year by the forty participants.

Social media networking

35 out of 40 participants have signed up to Facebook, email or WhatsApp. In addition to these ones Instagram and twitter have been signed up by 10 participants, although not frequently used by them. The 20 undergraduates both male and female sign into

their social media account at least once a day while the 15 employed sign in at least once in a week.

How did you make your social media friends?

The 15 employed participants who use social media made their social friends through mutual friend and business while the 20 undergraduates made their friends through: mutual friends, responding to friend request, inviting friends and follow classmates.

Reasons for using social media

10 out of the 20 employed participants use social media for business, work related issues and to ease off stress while 5 employed use it for fun and keep in touch with other friends and colleagues. The 20 undergraduate students use social media mainly to catch fun and to communicate with classmates on school related matters. They also use it to find old and new friends.

Methods or channel of social media communication

The thirty-five participants who use social media communicate with family, friends and colleagues or classmate through private messages and wall post. The twenty students also use video calls, poke and sharing of video/pictures on social media communication for all their contacts both close and at distant. 10 of the employed participants use video calls only for family members at distant while 5 don't use it at all.

Interpersonal relationship via social media

This section analyses the use of social media for interpersonal relationship through data collected in the semi- structured oral

interview with 40 participants, although 5 of them are not users of social media but they provided the reasons in their own words. The result is summarized in the table below:

Findings and conclusion

Social media is predominantly used by the young people today. They can barely do without it. It has preoccupied their minds that some of them use social media during lectures and even during sermon in churches and other meetings. The rise of the use of social media has also increased its participation as many adults irrespective of place of work now join the young ones in patronizing social media networks such that if you have not signed into any of the social networks you are still an analogue person. Findings from this study show that the forty participants used for collection use phones but thirty-five of them have signed into social media actively.

This study also reveals that the forty participants use Facebook and WhatsApp more than any other social media networks. Emails are only used by lecturers who were sampled for sending articles and correspondences but not mainly for social conversations. Few of the students subscribe to Instagram and twitter. Social media has been discovered from this study to be a useful means of communicating with friends, family and colleagues at different location. Twenty students that form part of the data log into Facebook or WhatsApp at least once a day while the fifteen participants that are employed staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe University log in at least once in a week.

Social media, from this study can be used to resolve disputes as well as lay abuses on people especially when they are not close. Best friends are often communicated with on social media than family members. Employed participants use social media

more purposefully than undergraduates. They use it for business and communicate with colleague to disseminate information and ease stress of the day when they are less busy. Student use it always anywhere any time they can have access to it.

This study also shows that those with fewer friends on social media maintain their relationship more than those with larger number of friends because they can hardly chat effectively with all at the same time and remember them. This is in line with Dunbar's Social Brain Concept. Friends, business partners, fiancée/fiancé and husband and wife have been made through social media.

From this study, some people often hide their real identity and exaggerate the contents of their profile to set them high and appear good before friends on social media. There is no physical touch with friends and can hardly know when one is telling the truth on social media but there is communication. Few lecturers have and interact with their students as friends on social media same with the students because every one of them wants to respect one another.

This study therefore concludes that social media can be very helpful in social and interpersonal relation if gainfully and positively exploited by the users. The fewer and meaningful friends one keep on social media, the better chances of improved relationships. Truth should be told both in face to face contact and in social media to enhance integrity in relationship. This paper recommends further study on gender and social media relationship.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

The researcher is carrying out a study on Social Media and Interpersonal Relationships among the Employed and the Undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Please assist the researcher to fill in this questionnaire

Age: 17-20 20-30 30-40 40-50 50-70

Gender: Male Female

Status: Student lecturer non- teaching

Department: _____

Before attempting the questions, please read the following definitions:

- Local = within 50 miles
- Distant = over 50 miles
- Family = parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunties, cousins and those related through marriage.
- Best Friend = share intimate information, secrets someone you call upon in an emergency
- Close Friend = share gossip, general help and advice
- Acquaintances = someone you say hello to and general formalities – work colleagues, classmates and etc

Please enter your method of communication on the scale of 1:6 for each cell in the following table (1 is being the most preferred and 7 being the least). Please do not repeat the same number in one row

What method of communication do you use for the following the persons:

Relationship Type	Method					
	Face to Face	Phone call/text	Email	Facebook	Whatsapp	Other social networking sites
Family (local)						
Family (distant)						
Best friend/s (local)						
Best Friend/s (distant)						
Close Friend/s (local)						
Close Friend/s (local)						
Acquaintance/s (local)						
Acquaintance/s (distant)						

Write A, B, C, D or D in the column for the frequency and method used when communicating with friends, family or

colleagues as seen in the table below. You can choose one or more.

- (A) At least once a day
- (B) At least once a week
- (C) At least once a month
- (D) At least once a year
- (F) Hardly

	Method					
	Face to Face	Phone	Email	Facebook	Whatsapp	Other social networking sites
Best Friends (local)						
Best friends (distance)						
Close friends (local)						
Close friends (distance)						
Family (local)						
Family (distant)						
Colleagues/class mate (local)						
Colleague/class mate (distant)						

SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKING

The remainder of the questionnaire is for participants with Social Media Networking accounts. If you do not have one, don't border

filing.

1. Which social networking sites (SNS) have you signed up to?
 Facebook { } WhatsApp { } Twitter { } Instagram { } Myspace { }
 Others specify-----

2. How often do you sign into your account? At least once a day { }
 once a week { } at least once a year { } hardly { }

3. If you have made new friends through social media sites, how did you meet?

Mutual friends { } business/studies { } Responding to a friends' request, all of the above { } { } others specify-----

4. Why did you sign up to social media networking sites?

To make new friend { }, to keep in touch with existing friends { }
 find old friends { } keep in touch with family { } catch some fun { }
 business/studies { } others specify -----

5. Which of the following methods do you use when communicating with the following on social media?

Tick all that apply

Relationship Type	Method					
	Wall post	Private message	Video calls	Share photo/video	Poke	Other specify
Family (local)						
family (distant)						
Best friends (local)						
Best friends (distant)						
Colleagues/						

classmate (local)						
Colleagues/ classmate (distant)						

Interviews questions

Part 1 - Relationships

1. What do you do socially together through social media?
2. Do you depend on social media contacts for support? – give me an example
3. Have you adopted social media to maintain your relationships? If so, with which relationships (family, friends, acquaintances)? You have had a bad day, do you contact friends? If so, how? – how do they help?

Part 2 – Online social relationships & general technology use

1. Which type of social media network do you use to maintain your relationships?
2. How long have you used this social media?
3. has social media ever cause misunderstanding in your relationship/s?
4. Does it make a difference that you do not see the person you are communicating with? How so?
5. Have you ever exaggerated personal facts on your personal profile or manipulated photographs or used images to change/protect your identity? Why?
6. Are you more likely to lie online that face-to-face?
7. Are you more open with others using social network sites?
8. Do you share personal photos, videos etc with everyone on your social network site?

9. From the top of your head how many people do you have in your contact list?
10. Have you made useful contacts using social network sites? If so, in what kind?
11. What is the best or worst experience using the social media network?

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