

UTILIZING CONTENT ANALYSIS ON THEKNOT.COM TO STUDY
AN ONLINE WEDDING PLANNING COMMUNITY FOR NEW JERSEY

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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As with other aspects of our culture today, wedding planning is increasingly discussed and implemented online. Information is disseminated through online media attention, advertising, and computer mediated communication. The latter provides an avenue through which the impact of community building and relational culture can be established.

My dissertation analyzes an online wedding planning forum on TheKnot.com to exemplify the ways by which a community is built through online postings and discusses the characteristics of this community. Utilizing the uses and gratification theory, content gratifications are examined through the types of topics publically viewable on an active online wedding planning Website. Because of the extensive reach of such forums, one particular region, New Jersey, will be examined. Process gratifications will be discussed as participants share personal experiences from their time spent on this particular online bulletin board planning their wedding celebration.

Furthermore, the dynamics of interaction among this group will be analyzed over the course of half a calendar year and will show the types of interaction taking place through content analysis.

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Dedication

To my mother, Ellen Thelin, and husband, Jim Davison – I dedicate the completion of this professional achievement to them and acknowledge that without their constant love, assistance, and encouragement, this goal would never have been achieved.

To my children, Andrew and Keira Davison – “My turn! I did it!”

To my father, Lowell Thelin, and sister, Alexandra Thelin Blackowski – Thank you for cheering me on and for all your support.

I love you all!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A wedding is viewed as one of the most important events in a woman's life.¹ It ranks with her birth, the birth of her children, and her death in the ritualistic milestones celebrated. While a wedding is comprised, for most couples, of a bride and a groom, the commercial wedding industry targets women only (Snizek, 2005). Brides are believed to be more likely than grooms to think of certain things as essential to the wedding (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). The idea was promoted that weddings were women's work, and women belonged in the home (Howard, 2010).

So why is this important? As will be shown, the wedding and its related industry has changed radically since wedding planning historically began. What was once an event celebrated by a small community has evolved and shifted into a multi-million dollar empire. Formerly, there were relatively few ways to do weddings differently. They all featured a bride in special apparel chosen carefully for the occasion, a ceremony, and perhaps a celebration conducted after the ceremony itself. Sometimes there were special flowers or touches, but this was not mandatory. There were relatively few options to do things in a unique fashion. The old adage was that a bride had something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue. Ideas for the big day were tapped from a mother, sister, or friend, or from another event that the bride had attended. In the early part of the 20th century, bridal consultants and magazines appeared to give ideas, but even these were of limited variety.

With the rise of the Internet, all this changed and a shift occurred. McLuhan (1964) famously proclaimed that the medium is the message. McLuhan formulated his

¹ Until the United States Supreme Court decided the case of Obergefell v. Hodges (2015), weddings were restricted to unions between a man and a woman. The influence of this case on the wedding industry is yet to be determined.

theory that the medium itself, not its content, is the focus of study. He categorized media as being either hot, and providing full involvement, or cool, and providing less involvement.

McLuhan's theories were expanded by Bolter and Grusin (1999) in *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. The subtitle of their work is important, as the insertion of the word "new" makes it clear that McLuhan's theories, much like remediation itself, are also evolving. They declared that "the ultimate purpose of media is...to transfer sense experiences from one person to another" (p. 3). However, this new Internet media is not isolated from the past, but is influenced by the earlier media that preceded it and is constantly refining it. While the Internet is a new medium, it constantly reproduces and replaces earlier forms, in the process they call remediation.

Media connects the medium and the message, and Bolter and Grusin found remediation to provide the fusion between the two. They define remediation as representation of one media in another. This is one of the hallmarks of digital media, such as the Internet, in which cultural significance is achieved because of the refashioning of earlier media in its structure. For example, television has remediated film and photography has remediated painting. The overlap of the old and the new provide a new experience to the viewer. Similarly, online wedding planning has remediated the wedding planning of the past.

Bolter and Grusin also discussed the concepts of hypermediacy and immediacy. In immediacy, not only is information transferred, but a totally new experience is also created. They write, "Immediacy is our name for a family of beliefs and practices that express themselves differently at various times among various groups, and our quick

survey cannot do justice to this variety. The common feature of all these forms is the belief in some necessary contact point between the medium and what it represents” (p. 30). In immediacy, the medium attempts to make itself transparent, so that the viewer forgets for a moment that there is something allowing the experience to happen, and that they live in this virtual world while they are having the experience. Wedding planning on the Internet incorporates this sense of immediacy. The participant in an online wedding forum forgets for a moment that their experience is happening in the virtual world, and it becomes real.

In contrast, in hypermediacy, there are layers of media, and the viewer is always aware that they are experiencing a mediated experience. They write, “In every manifestation, hypermediacy makes us aware of the medium or media and (in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways) reminds us of our desire for immediacy” (p. 34). Watson (2016), in her review of the book, notes that “They suggest that our media-saturated culture simultaneously desires to foreground and erase media technologies.” As in a reality television show, participants in an online forum are being watched by other participants, and are also able to see what other people are saying about them, creating a multi-layered experience.

As a result, according to Bolter and Grusin (1999),

It would seem, then, that *all* mediation is remediation. We are not claiming this as an a priori truth, but rather arguing that at this extended historical moment, all current media functions as remediators and that remediation offers us a means of interpreting the work of earlier media as well. Our culture conceives of each medium or constellation of media as it responds to, redeploys, competes with, and reforms other media. In the first instance, we may think of something like a historical progression, of newer media remediating older ones and in particular of digital media remediating their predecessors. But ours is a genealogy of affiliations, not a linear history, and in this genealogy, older media can also remediate newer ones. Television can and does refashion itself to resemble the

World Wide Web, and film can and does incorporate and attempt to contain computer graphics within its own linear form. No medium, it seems, can now function independently and establish its own separate and purified space of cultural meaning (p. 55).

Bolton and Grusin conclude that the process of remediation is an ongoing one, and media will continue to develop and expand in new, yet uncharted, directions.

What began with *Godey's Lady's Book* and wedding magazines progressed to television programs and reality television. With the advent of the Internet, a new media came onto the scene, and all of the previous forms became incorporated into the new. In contrast, today the pages are not flat. Websites have remediated to a format which is multi-layered with hyperlinks and video clips, conversations and quizzes, games, and interactive media. However, this is not a static process.

Today, Bolton and Grusin's remediation theory is being remediated itself into a conglomeration of not only media but media as an entertainment and commercial entity. This has evolved to a culture where there are manufacturers and vendors, all of which have their own websites, highlighting their products and services. The possibilities expand to an exponential degree. But even this does not provide a way to determine which of the multiple options really are suitable for a particular bride's tastes. After all, theoretically, it is her special day, and she only gets to do it once. With the increase of options available to them, brides want to make sure that every detail of their big day is perfect and an Internet bulletin board is a place where this is currently happening. The idea of a forum is the perfect solution to achieve this, a sounding board and review mechanism where prospective brides can ask others who were going through the same thing, or had recently gone through it, what worked for them. It offers the ability to communicate with like-minded others, no matter where they live or their relationship in

real life. With a bulletin board, there is a flow and exchange of ideas. As a result, it changes the way weddings are planned and conducted, and modifies existing practices and creates a whole new industry. This new industry, however, owes much to the past, as it has built upon it and expanded it in its evolution.

Once such forum is located on TheKnot.com. This forum provides the basis for the within study. The ways in which communication has been expanded through this medium and to what extent it occurs also will be explored. It will be shown that sites like TheKnot.com foster discussions about the bridal industry and influence wedding culture in New Jersey. My research will answer the following research questions about wedding planning through an online forum. First, how are community building and relational culture exemplified through postings and relationships made by prospective brides on the online New Jersey bulletin board of The Knot.com? Second, how are participants' perceptions and actions affected throughout the online wedding planning process on TheKnot.com's New Jersey board from a uses and gratifications theory perspective? And third, how do strong or weak ties created affect the emotional and informational support among New Jersey brides-to-be as a result of their participation in the relational online community on TheKnot.com? This will be done through interviews with bulletin board participants, an analysis of initial postings through content analysis, a reply post analysis through content analysis, and a discussion of relevant theories and thinking in this area. The theoretical perspectives that will guide this research study include the Internet and interactive dimensions of media, the dynamics of interaction in online communities, the creation of ties, the uses and gratifications theory, content analysis and intercoder reliability, and interaction in online groups through content analysis.

This study begins with an examination of the wedding industry today to show how the industry began and how wedding planning has been viewed historically.

A. The Wedding Industry Today

The wedding industry has become an increasing lucrative market in recent years. It has been estimated that this market generates between \$50 and \$70 billion annually (Engstrom, 2008). In 2009 alone, there were 2,077,000 weddings in the United States (Mar-Nel Productions, 2012), which rose to 2.14 million in 2014 (The Statistics Portal, 2016). The average cost of a wedding in 2014 was estimated to be \$31,213, making it a major life expense for those just starting out with married life. The most expensive area to get married is New York City, NY, with the average wedding there, excluding the honeymoon, reaching \$76,328. For northern New Jersey, the average wedding cost is \$53,986. For the most part, the bride's parents contribute 43%, the bride and groom contribute 43% and the groom's parents 12% (XO Group, Inc., 2015).

Brides-to-be carefully mull over all their choices as they meticulously plan every moment of what is to be forever known as their 'special day,' and at times spare no expense so their dream does ultimately become a reality. Mead (2007) declares that "weddings provide an unparalleled lens upon the intimate sphere of American life, and that the way we marry reveals a great deal about prevailing cultural expectations of love, hopes for marriage, and sense of the role of family" (p. 7). Increasingly in our culture, wedding ceremonies are becoming more elaborate and more personalized. As Otnes and Pleck (2003) note, "except on the lowest rungs of the socioeconomic ladder, the decision

to plan and execute elaborate weddings is rarely questioned, and seems now to be considered not only a rite but also a right in North American culture” (p. 3).

The bridal media emphasizes the cost and complexity of a wedding, and one can find many bridal publications on newsstands, all concentrating on bridal fashions and wedding trappings rather than on the relationship created by the wedding (Engstrom, 2008). Many of the elements included in what has come to be known as a traditional wedding include: a bride who wears a long, white gown, a multi-tiered white cake, beautiful fresh flowers, a religious setting, attendants for both the bride and groom in matching finery, a post-ceremony reception, and a honeymoon. This ‘traditional’ or lavish wedding “is the dominant form in much of global culture today” (Otnes & Pleck, 2003, p. 3).

This phenomenon is understood as the right of a couple, their families, and their guests to immerse themselves in a luxury experience and in recent times, the planning process has become a highly mediated affair. This ‘once in a lifetime’ event has evolved and “Because lavish weddings also embody our sacred beliefs in marriage and religion and feature luxury goods that make the couple feel like celebrities for a day, these events have more potential than almost any other ritual to help people experience the feeling of being transported out of everyday space and time” (Otnes & Pleck, 2003, p. 13). Media culture, of which a bulletin board is a part, has targeted this experience and has created this multi-billion dollar industry that is growing with help from printed, electronic, and televised media. As such, “Weddings are social events, as distinct from the private and always mysterious marriages that they inaugurate; and they give expression, one way or another, to the values and preoccupations of the society in which they take place” (Mead,

2007, p. 7). This evolution is a natural progression in accord with the remediation theory, in which one form of media is represented in another and information is fused from everything preceding (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). This creates a situation where not only is information presented, but a new sensory experience is provided as well. Therefore, to understand this, bridal customs of the past must first be explored. This will be contrasted with wedding planning in the media today, and the role of remediation in connecting media of the past to the media of the present will also be discussed.

B. Historical Bridal Customs

Bridal traditions in the United States go back to biblical times. Ebeling (2010) notes that special articles of clothing were worn by women to denote special occasions. For example, for her wedding, a woman “would wear a veil to cover her face” (p. 93). In Psalm 45, the garment worn by a wealthy woman on her wedding day was described as follows: “The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes; in many-colored robes is she led to the king” (Psalm 45.13-14 New Revised Standard Version, 2001). This use of a veil is still seen today in bridal fashion as a protection against malicious spirits and as a symbol of purity (Chesser, 1980).

From the colonial period through the nineteenth century, weddings were seen as a celebration by the community to recognize the beginning of a new union of man and woman. They were not influenced at all by consumerism, but rather by the desire of a community to celebrate the couple. The bride wore her best dress, which usually was not white, and which was expected to be worn again after her wedding (Howard, 2010).

Timmons (1939) noted that just prior to World War II, 1/3 of the couples managed to do without an engagement ring. Sixteen percent were married in clothes they already owned. One third married without a wedding reception in addition to the ceremony, and one-third did not have a honeymoon. The average cost of a wedding in 1939 was \$392.30 (Mead, 2007). In today's culture, many brides are unable to find a dress to wear for less than \$400, let alone spending that amount on the entire affair.

The tradition of a white wedding was begun in 1840 when Queen Victoria married Prince Albert. This heralded the traditional white wedding. Prior to 1840, the most common color for a wedding dress was red or another bright color. In 1840, Queen Victoria changed the tradition when she wore a white dress. This was copied by the wealthy and the tradition spread. The choice of the color white for a wedding dress had nothing to do with representing purity. It was, instead, a sign that the wearer could afford to have a dress that would never be worn again (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). By the 1920s and 1930s the long, white silk gown had been established as the fashion and started the bridal apparel industry (Mead, 2007). During the Depression, brides wore their best dress or a white dress which could be dyed and worn again (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). World War II presented the industry with obstacles – many brides married quickly before their grooms went off to war. When rationing of silk for parachutes was introduced, Congress passed an exception for bridal wear (Mead, 2007). It was after World War II that Hollywood stars and royalty wore the elaborate white dresses that we know today (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). Marrying in white became the standard, which was aided by mass produced gowns from synthetic fibers. By 2006, brides spent an average of \$1,025 for their wedding dresses (Mead, 2007).

Wedding music was also influenced by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. While music at weddings has existed for more than 400 years, the pattern for the inclusion of music into wedding ceremonies was started by this couple. At their wedding, the “Wedding March” by Mendelssohn was played as a recessional, and this started a tradition which has endured up to the present (Kerr, 1965). Other classical wedding composers included Handel and Mozart. One reason for this was attributed to the scarcity of other compositions designed to be used at weddings, and the desire of brides to use standard musical pieces. For over 70 years, Mendelssohn and Handel were the standards for brides to use, which was attributed to the lack of knowledge by brides about music and no other influences to emulate (Kerr, 1965; Parsons, 1964).

Wedding cakes were mentioned as early as the seventeenth century. Prior to this time, cakes were a form of flat bread, and due to the high cost of sugar, it was not widely used until the 1700s. The first bridal cake recipe emerged in 1769, in a cookbook called *The Experienced English Housekeeper* by Elizabeth Raffald. It went through 36 editions and she was the first to recommend covering the cake first with almond icing and then with an icing of egg white and powdered sugar. Subsequent bakers made them more and more elaborate. By the early twentieth century, the cake was elevated to three tiers on raised pillars. Initially, the bride alone cut the cake, but by 1938 the groom assisted her in this, which turned into a joint cutting of the cake. By the 1980s, this evolved into a ceremony which was invariably documented by a photograph. (Charsley, 1988).

Flowers have always had an important place in wedding ceremonies, and brides of the Middle Ages would wear their favorite flowers as a garland (Chesser, 1980). In Victorian times, flowers were used to make a bouquet and to decorate the houses of the

bride and groom to symbolize abundance and virtue (Lacey, 1969). Wedding guests scattered flowers from the bride's house along the path that she would walk to church, much like the modern day flower girl. Orange blossoms were thought to represent fruitfulness; baby's breath, fertility; or rosemary for remembrance (Chesser, 1980).

Wedding gift giving did not begin until the 1880s. Initially, these were items from the family only, and were handmade. After the Industrial Revolution, there were seamstresses and department stores to supply gifts (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). In 1901, a trade journal for storekeepers called the *Dry Goods Economist* published an item entitled "June Brides a Fair Mark," advised, "The merchant of refinement may reach all or nearly all, and tell in an unobtrusive way of how much you can do for them in the taking care of many details incidental to the preparation of a wedding trousseau" (Mead, 2007, p. 5). The tradition became to display gifts received, which caused an obsessive public inspection of gifts and trousseau, in which the more valuable the gift, the higher status of the guest in the couple's world. This encouraged giving gifts above one's means (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). Between the 1920s and the 1950s, jewelers, caterers and gown manufacturers encouraged brides, through the media, to want a certain standard of goods (Mead, 2007).

The wedding ring is probably the oldest marriage symbol. Its circular shape symbolizes eternal love, and most brides and grooms employ wedding rings in their ceremonies (Chesser, 1980). Romans and Greeks used wedding rings, and ancient Egyptians did as well, as evidenced by the fact that some were found in the tombs of ancient Egypt. In early societies, such as the medieval Jews of Greece and Turkey, the man wore an engagement ring, as it was thought to symbolize power and authority

(Lacey, 1969). However, this evolved into a belief that the wedding ring was a symbol of bondage and obedience, and such rings were worn by women exclusively until hundreds of years later (Thompson, 1932). Wedding rings historically have been made out of iron, reeds, and gold (Chesser, 1980).

Engagement rings did not become prevalent until the early 1900s. Diamonds were thought to guard against temptation from Satan (Chesser, 1980). Prior to the Depression, diamond rings were available, but not considered an essential element of an engagement (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). Americans started giving and wearing diamond engagement rings in the latter part of the nineteenth century, after discovery of diamond mines in South Africa made diamonds more available (Mead, 2007). During the Depression, the supply exceeded the demand, as new diamond mines were discovered (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). To stimulate the demand, De Beers, the company which controlled almost all of the world's diamond production, formed an alliance with a New York advertising agency. In the 1930s, the advertising agency N. W. Ayer began to create, on behalf of the De Beers diamond company, an advertising and public relations campaign to make consumers believe a diamond engagement ring was essential (Mead, 2007). This campaign coined the slogan "A Diamond is Forever" in 1939 (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). There was an active effort to make diamonds part of the romantic consciousness (Epstein, 1982), employing Hollywood stars to wear diamonds (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). As Epstein (1982) notes, the diamond engagement ring "could subtly exploit the premarital insecurity women were found to have in their relations with men. Even though the tradition of diamond engagement rings was, at least in its popular form, mainly an invention of the late nineteenth century, the advertising agency decided to

give deep historical roots and establish it in the public's mind as an inseparable part of the marriage process" (p. 128). In regard to this marketing campaign, "Through psychologically designed advertising and public relations, women could be further conditioned to think of diamonds as a necessity of life" (Epstein, 1982, p. 131). By the end of World War II, the diamond engagement ring was entrenched in popular culture, and by 1965, 80 percent of couples had a diamond engagement ring (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). The jewelry industry also encouraged grooms to get a wedding band, and the double ring ceremony began, which was not common in the United States prior to World War II (Howard, 2010).

Just as the white wedding has become the standard to which all weddings are held, other elements have also become standard. The early wedding traditions just discussed were expanded to include the father walking his daughter down the aisle, the ceremonial cutting of the wedding cake, the father/daughter and mother/son dance, the tossing of the bridal bouquet and garter, and taking a honeymoon after the wedding day has past (Bambacas, 2002). Other wedding elements which have historical annotations include setting a date which is fortuitous, including witnesses who were the forebears of today's bridesmaids and groomsmen, having the bride's father give away the bride, and including children in the ceremony (Chesser, 1980).

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, more businesses arose to aid brides of the middle and upper classes. These businesses included magazines, department stores, and the jewelry industry. *Bride's Magazine* was first published in 1934 and *Modern Bride* began in 1949, both of which began the process of bringing commerce to weddings. Department stores started gift registries, where guests could purchase items

that the couple to be married desired. Department stores in this period also began bridal fashion shows and bridal salons, where brides could choose their apparel in a section of the store devoted just to them (Howard, 2010).

The traditional wedding elements are increasingly being scrutinized by women planning their weddings and tossed aside for new, more creative ideas. While these elements were becoming more prevalent through the end of the twentieth century, it was not until the rise of the Internet that they reached the position they are in today. The Internet allows those planning weddings today to increasingly add additional elements to wedding culture and is in turn creating new realities (Flanagan, 2001).

In addition to the options offered by the traditional selection of flowers, wedding dresses, wedding cakes, attendants, music, and rings, there are an exponential amount of options now available. The sheer quantity of these elements would have been impossible in society even twenty or thirty years ago due to their dizzying variety. The options in this new wedding culture include photo booths, Viennese dessert tables, mood lighting, monogrammed gobos, save the date announcements, videographers, ribbon wands, and cocktail hour musicians, to name a few. In the area of transportation alone, there are the family car, classic car, limousine, party bus, horse and carriage, trolley, shuttle bus, and school bus as possible alternatives. How can prospective brides possibly catch up on all these ever-changing elements in the short period of time available to her after her engagement and prior to her wedding?

One way would be to utilize the Internet to see the latest offerings for upcoming weddings, and to discuss with other brides-to-be what they are using and what they have seen work for others. Each bride wants her day to stand out from all others, and one way

that she believes that she can achieve this is to incorporate more and more distinctive touches, which invariably seem to increase the cost of the wedding experience. It is reasonable to conclude that unless a bride-to-be has heard about these options as having been used by others, they would never occur to her. It is this function that the Internet bulletin board, such as the one on TheKnot.com, has come to fill. With each option, a corresponding industry has sprung up to satisfy a bride's wish. While the industry earns billions of dollars, it is made up of many small enterprises (Terrell, 2012). Many of these suppliers are small entities and locally owned, including photographers, wedding venues, and florists. The local nature of these industries makes communication on a limited local forum the most beneficial to its members. As will be shown, the prospective brides are communicating with each other in a way to achieve this that would not have been possible in any other format, and this has brought about an entirely new way to look at wedding planning.

C. Bridal Industry Response

This new expansion of consumerism has been embraced by the bridal industry. The wedding industry of today greatly increases traditional bridal customs. It also intelligently recognizes what, as Sniezek (2005) notes, is the temporal quality to weddings and wedding planning. He declared that there is a "common belief that weddings are temporary ritualized ceremonial occasions that do not reflect 'ordinary' life. In this view, a wedding is a short-lived voluntary undertaking and not a necessary ongoing family work" (p. 216). As Nelson and Otnes (2005) write, "Marriage occurs in the majority of world cultures, and the wedding itself is a special ritual – a rite of passage

that culturally marks a person's transition from one life stage to another and redefines social and personal identity" (p. 89).

Brides take the ritualistic elements of weddings past and build upon them to create their own brand of ritual. The ritualistic aspect of a wedding is significant. As Otnes and Pleck (2003) express it, "Certainly, if rituals impose order, enable us to feel connected to others, and transform us in some significant manner, then weddings qualify as rituals. Given the relative absence of initiation rites in Western cultures, and the declining amount of flourish that people put into funerals, weddings in the twentieth century have become *the* major ritual of the entire life span" (p. 4). Weddings used to symbolize the transition into adulthood, but with many couples marrying later in life, a wedding no longer acts as the point of change. Still, individuals give great importance to this ritual and see it as the most momentous in today's society. Otnes and Pleck (2003) continue, "Rituals become more elaborate when the public perceives the social institution being celebrated (in this case, marriage) as tenuous and vulnerable" (p. 7). Weddings and their requisite expenses create and legitimize marriage (Engstrom, 2008).

The most significant thing that the wedding industry is selling is fantasy and "If a bride buys into the wedding industry, she is promised the happily-ever-after that she, in her big white dress and tiara, deserves" (Mead, 2007, p. 10). The ability of all classes to find funding for extravagant weddings, through credit cards and loans, has made all classes able to produce such a spectacle. However, "While weddings remain important markers from the standpoint of social visibility, their ability to make an overarching statement about prestige within their social class has become diluted as previously inaccessible goods and services have trickled down" (Otnes & Pleck, 2003, p. 6).

The increase in opulence sought by brides-to-be has not gone unnoticed by the wedding industry. It has been noted that “Weddings have become a year round shopping spree, with wedding costs increasing an average of 5 percent [per year] over the past 15 years” (Daniels & Loveless, 2007, p. 74). Besides challenging the traditions of a white wedding, today’s engaged women are using materialism as a form of empowerment and are pushing the definition of a contemporary wedding to new heights. Cultural values approve of and encourage consumerism using the wedding day as the scapegoat. The idea that nothing is too grand or too expensive for your one, special day is used as a justification. Wedding planning Web sites rose as significant competitors for the attention of brides since they were established in the late 1990s. For example, “The Web site of The Knot offers, in addition to the kind of editorial content typically found in magazines, online tools such as budget calculators, serves as a portal for wedding-related online shopping, and has built an enormous community of brides who contribute to its message boards” (Mead, 2007, p. 19). In addition, with the availability of more money to spend on weddings, great affluence is the norm, and people have to search for individualism and self-expression in regard to their weddings. Otnes and Pleck (2003) note, “Distinctiveness is now as important as luxury, because taste becomes as much a marker of class as money” (p. 6).

Women have been taught to see the engagement period as a time to remake themselves (Mead, 2007). There is a connection in the mind of the bride-to-be between romantic love and the love of material goods (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). Advertising, marketing and the media remind women “that their lives are incomplete unless they experience romantic love” and “Once having found it, reward themselves for doing so by

consummating the accomplishment through the bestowal of a diamond engagement ring, a lavish wedding, and a honeymoon. After all, marriage is still seen as the endpoint of romance, and a lavish wedding as the best portal to marriage” (Otnes & Pleck, 2003, p. 12).

The potential for regret is high as “the American Wedding is an enterprise in which the newly engaged anticipate being exploited to a certain degree, but points out that even the most savvy bride sometimes worries she will regret foregoing something on her ‘special day’” (Mac Adam, 2007, p. 1). Due to consumerism, those planning a wedding may fall prey to the “ways the wedding industry is always upping the ante for the wedding couple. Where videographers once simply filmed the wedding and reception, now they offer extravagant packages where they create multimedia videos to screen at the reception that render the bride and groom’s courtship ‘story’” (Mac Adam, 2007, p. 1).

The idea of excess and fantasy are highly imbued in wedding culture. So much so that the portrayal of weddings in the media, in the form of magazines and etiquette books, television programs, films and websites, become the dominant version (Engstrom, 2008). In fact, the consumerism exhibited by many brides can get so out of control that there has even been a nickname coined for it. The term “bridezilla,” which first appeared around 2001, has been used to nickname any bride who will do anything, and everything, in her power to ensure her wedding day will progress exactly as she wishes, down to the very last detail. This term describes the out of control bride (Mead, 2007). Whether the concerns are monetarily or socially driven, “The problem usually comes when out-of-control bridezillas wrap themselves up with planning for the big day – and don’t plan for

the day after” (Balz, 2006, p. 13). Mead (2007) is “suggesting that the industry creates such a monstrous and demanding bride because such a creature will always want more, demand more and spend more” (p. 2). One commentator asks, “Does the market’s usurpation of liberal feminist ideals provide what it is, in theory, supposed to provide for these women – namely, liberation, satisfaction, and the happiness of ‘having it all’? Or does it produce the opposite of what it promises – namely, domination, disenchantment, and detachment” (Blakely, 2008, p. 660). Bridezilla is just a shorthand way to describe a whole nuptial system that is out of control (Mead, 2007).

According to Boden (2001), a “superbride” is both a rational project manager who has a methodical attention to detail and an emotional childish fantasizer. As Blakely (2008) states, “The superbride is thus part bridezilla – an extremely picky and uptight bride who has left nothing unplanned or unorganized – and part Cinderella – indulging her childhood fantasies, acting spoiled and pampered, and being treated like royalty” (p. 659).

Some brides even extend this dominance to their wedding attendants. Brides have required their bridesmaids to get chemical peels, botox, dermal fillers, tooth whitening, and breast augmentation (Ellin, 2008). One Asian bridal party member commented, “‘We’re all Asian and didn’t have a whole lot of cleavage, and she found a doctor in L.A. who was willing to do four for the price of two,’ said Ms. Lee, who wore a push-up bra instead” (Ellin, 2008, p. 1). A New Jersey wedding planner told of one bride who wanted attendants to get professionally spray tanned for a Hawaiian themed wedding. Two women were claustrophobic and could not stand in a tanning capsule. They asked if they could use regular tanning cream. The bride refused because she wanted everyone to be

the same shade, and the two dropped out of the wedding and ended their 20-year friendship with the bride over a spray tan (Ellin, 2008).

The wedding day, and all the days leading up to it, is fraught with anxiety for the engaged couple. Flanagan (2001) discusses how “wedding merchants capitalize on the emotional vulnerability and social anxiety that afflict people planning a formal wedding. If you love her, shouldn't you spend two months' salary on the diamond she's going to wear forever? Would you deny a cherished daughter the same sort of party that all her friends had?” (p. 113). As a result, there are mixed emotions for these consumers and these ambivalent emotions are generated by the marketplace (Otnes, Lowrey, & Shrum, 1997). As they express it, “consumer ambivalence is the simultaneous or sequential experience of multiple emotional states, as a result of the interaction between internal factors and external objects, people, institutions, and/or cultural phenomena in market-oriented contexts, that can have direct and/or indirect ramifications on prepurchase, purchase or postpurchase attitudes and behavior” (pp. 82-83). A wedding is the perfect case study for exploring consumer ambivalence (Otnes, Lowrey, & Shrum, 1997). Brides believe they must select the one option that encapsulates their own personalities and tastes and “Thus, the mixed emotions that our brides experienced when products failed to live up to internal expectations were apparently due to the paradox of having to find a product or service that can ‘singularize’ the bride from among typically mass-marketed, mass-advertised, and mass-produced commodities or parity services” (p. 85). They continue, “Moreover, our informants were conscious that many brides do experience moments of ‘hierophany’ such as ‘the perfect dress feeling,’ and no doubt felt it was their

right to expect a transformative experience when selecting certain wedding artifacts as well” (p. 85).

While the wedding provides an escape from the mundane everyday life of a woman, it is only illusory and temporary, making a wedding both exotic and mundane (Engstrom, 2008). As Engstrom (2008) expresses it, “The wedding, and its surrounding fantasy, serves for women as a much-touted highlight of their lives, something to yearn for and value because after that one, special day, they must return to their domestic world comprised of the familiar, repetitive tasks” (p. 76). The question remains whether creating a culture where a bride can have every whim and desire addressed, with vendors ready and able to do her bidding, has made a positive contribution to weddings or whether the sheer amount of options has become excessive and has set a level of expectation impossible to meet. TheKnot.com has astutely stepped in to provide this service, in both its positive and negative aspects.

D. Study of Wedding Planning on TheKnot.com

Over the last half century, functions that were traditionally assigned to domestic work have been absorbed into the market economy. This was described by sociologist Arlie Hochschild (2003) as the commercialization of intimate life. Commercial services meet the demands of the home and intimate life (Blakely, 2008). Hochschild (2003) describes this as the “commodity frontier”:

Janus-faced, [the commodity frontier] looks out on one side to the market place and on the other side to the family. On the market side it is a frontier for *companies* as they expand the number of market niches for goods and services covering activities that, in yesteryear, formed part of unpaid ‘family life.’ On the other side it is a frontier for *families* that feel the need or desire to consume such goods and services. On the company

side a growing supply of services is meeting a growing demand for 'family' jobs (pp. 35-36).

This is the niche that The Knot seeks to fill. Its empire reaches, as will be discussed, from websites to books to television programs. However, a major part of its impact is online. As with other aspects of our culture today, wedding planning is increasingly discussed and implemented online. The Internet enables brides to easily access information and communicate with numerous wedding resources (XO Group, Inc. - The Knot, 2014). Information is disseminated through online media attention, advertising, and computer mediated communication. The latter provides an avenue through which the impact of community building and relational culture can be established. This dissertation will analyze an online wedding planning forum on TheKnot.com to exemplify the ways by which a community is built through online postings and the characteristics of this community. Utilizing the uses and gratification theory, content gratifications will be examined through the types of topics publically viewable on an active online wedding planning Website. Because of the extensive reach and local nature of such forums, one particular region, New Jersey, will be examined. Process gratifications will be discussed as participants share personal experiences from their time spent on this particular online bulletin board planning their wedding celebration. Furthermore, the dynamics of interaction among this group will be analyzed over the course of half a calendar year and will show the types of interaction taking place through content analysis.

The research questions guiding this dissertation follow.

E. Research Questions

Online chat based around an emotional and uncertain time with many expectations, financial concerns, and a desire for individuality in a women's life are fulfilling individual desires for brides-to-be including interpersonal communication, personal reflection, and shared emotions.

Even more important to note is the timeliness of this research. In the past ten years, the Internet has affected the way society chooses to communicate as a whole for "the Internet has long been regarded as a medium that is particularly amenable to interpersonal connection and social activities" (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009, p. 321). In recent years, there has undoubtedly been a shift in society's use of face-to-face communication to the use of computer-mediated communication, especially through online mediums.

This dissertation will provide heuristic value through the three research questions presented. First, community building and relational culture will be discussed through postings and relationships made by perspective brides on the online bulletin board TheKnot.com in New Jersey. Secondly, there will also be an exploration of why participants join TheKnot.com's New Jersey board from a uses and gratifications theory perspective and how participants' perceptions and actions are affected throughout the online wedding planning process. This will expand the uses and gratifications perspective to this particular online community. Finally, the extent of the creation of strong or weak ties through emotional and informational support among New Jersey brides-to-be as a result of their participation in the relational online community on TheKnot.com will be examined.

Why individuals choose to frequent the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com and spend time posting and answering the questions of others in an online community related to wedding planning will be discussed.

1. RQ #1 – Community Building

How is community building and relational culture exemplified through postings and relationships made by prospective brides on the online bulletin board The Knot.com in New Jersey?

2. RQ #2 – TheKnot.com from a Uses and Gratifications Perspective

How are participants' perceptions and actions affected throughout the online wedding planning process on TheKnot.com's New Jersey board from a uses and gratifications theory perspective?

3. RQ #3 – Creation of Strong or Weak Ties Through Participation in TheKnot.com

How do strong or weak ties created affect the emotional and informational support among New Jersey brides-to-be as a result of their participation in the relational online community on TheKnot.com?

While online communities can be used as a medium for meaningful social exchange (Clerc, 1996; Rheingold, 1993; Turkle, 1995), virtual communities are defined as online groups of people who share certain behaviors or practices, enforcing certain

standards, who form a community or coexist in close proximity (Komito, 1998). While they do more than simply exchange information, do they meet the standard set by Carey (1989) of “the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality” (p. 18)? According to Kozinets (1999), the term ‘community’ is fitting if it is used in its most basic sense as a group of people who share social interactions, social ties, and a common space, even though this space is a computer mediated cyberspace. However, the strength of these ties has not been evaluated.

The exploration of these questions will provide insight into Internet communications, which are changing the way individuals connect and interact. This research will examine how The Knot maintains a culture aimed at unmarried women, maintaining the status quo of femininity. Since there has been an explosion in the prevalence of Internet communication, this study will provide markers for the future. It has only been in recent years that the Internet has been a major focus for communication, and its potential is unlimited. Examining its current use through this particular forum can provide insight into the future of Internet communication, if not all communication, and of the ties thereby created.

F. Selection of TheKnot.com

The Knot is a brand of XO Group, Inc., which is “the premier consumer Internet and media company dedicated to providing information, products and services to those planning their wedding, pregnancy, and everything in between” (XO Group, Inc. - The Knot, 2014). In addition to providing assistance during the wedding planning process through TheKnot.com, XO Group, Inc. includes TheNest.com for newlyweds and

TheBump.com for expecting and new parents, “connecting engaged couples, newlyweds, and first-time parents with the community, products, and inspiration they need to navigate the most intense years of their lives” (XO Group, Inc. - About Us, 2014).

The target audience for TheKnot.com and its brands is the female bride, who they feel to be their primary consumer. The groom is all but neglected, as are more non-traditional partnerships. It is unclear whether this was a result of design or whether the laws prohibiting gay marriage in many states across the country until recent time was the primary motivating force. It remains to be seen whether The Knot will move away from this and be more inclusive. However, in July 2013, The Knot released its first issue devoted entirely to same-sex weddings, *Gay Weddings by The Knot*, which could be a harbinger of a more inclusive policy.

TheKnot.com site is further divided into local and regional sections, containing forums for each of these regions as well. The New Jersey board is one of the most popular forums on The Knot.com nationwide with many threads exemplifying an active community where there is communication among the membership and ties are created. For these reasons, the New Jersey board was selected as the basis for the within study.

G. New Jersey Weddings

As with other states, weddings in New Jersey run the gamut from modest to extravagantly elegant. The evolution of wedding customs is due to many factors, but one constant must be satisfied in all marriages: the legal requirements for marriage in New Jersey. No matter what the rest of the ceremony and reception consists of, the statutory requirements in this state must be met. There are very specific requirements for a couple

to make their union legal, and these are spelled out in New Jersey laws. Neither person can be in another civil union, marriage, or domestic partnership. They must also be at least 18 years of age. If younger than that age, they must have parental consent.

Applicants under age 16 must have parental consent and have the consent approved in writing by a judge of the Superior Court, Chancery Division, Family Part. (NJSA 37:1-6, 2014).

Certain relationships are prohibited: “A man shall not marry or enter into a civil union with any of his ancestors or descendants, or his sister or brother, or the daughter or son of his brother or sister, or the sister or brother of his father or mother, whether such collateral kindred be of the whole or half blood” (NJSA 37:1-1(a), 2014). Likewise, “A woman shall not marry or enter into a civil union with any of her ancestors or descendants, or her sister or brother, or the daughter or son of her brother or sister, or the sister or brother of her father or mother, whether such collateral kindred be of the whole or half blood” (NJSA 37:1-1(b), 2014). Such a marriage would be absolutely void (NJSA 37:1-1(c), 2014).

Common law marriages contracted after December 1, 1939 are invalid if they are not accompanied by a marriage license, and all marriages “shall have been performed by or before any person, religious society, institution or organization authorized by section 37:1-13 of this Title to solemnize marriages; and failure in any case to comply with both prerequisites aforesaid, which shall always be construed as mandatory and not merely directory, shall render the purported marriage absolutely void” (NJSA 37:1-10, 2014).

The prospective couple must obtain a marriage license before the marriage can be lawfully performed in New Jersey. They must obtain the license from the city clerk or

registrar of the municipality in which either party resides and the license is valid throughout the State of New Jersey. If neither applicant is a resident of New Jersey, the application is obtained where the marriage ceremony is performed, but the license is only valid in the issuing municipality. The license is then delivered to the person who is to officiate the ceremony (NJSA 37:1-2, 2014). There is a 72 hour waiting period after the license is issued, and the ceremony must take place no later than 30 days after such issuance (NJSA 37:1-4, 2014). After all the legal formalities have been complied with, the couple can then celebrate their legal union.

New Jersey residents who get married, as with those in other states, have weddings which range from informal to formal. Some New Jersey weddings coincide with traditions in other parts of the country, while some of them are unique. However, in general, New Jersey weddings are considerably more expensive than in other parts of the country. It can be noted that because of this higher cost per wedding, New Jersey brides and grooms include more elements into their special day and these elements themselves can be more expensive.

This was shown in a study by the XO Group, which covered the United States as a whole. For this report, 16,000 brides and grooms married in the United States in 2014 were surveyed to uncover financial spending habits and trends. This study compared national and regional statistics “on the average cost of a wedding, how it is budgeted, the average number of wedding guests, spend per guest, wedding style trends and other key statistics related to weddings in America” (XO Group, Inc., 2015).

This survey first noted that the national average of a wedding budget rose to \$31,213, but guest lists were shrinking, with the average wedding now having 136 guests,

down from 149 in 2009. Rebecca Dolgin, Editor-in-Chief of The Knot, stated that “Couples are focusing on creating an amazing guest experience and reception details, including finding venues to reflect their personality. Perhaps the biggest change we’ve seen is in the amount of brides using their mobile phone to plan their wedding – it has doubled in just three years” (XO Group, Inc., 2015).

For 2014, The Knot formulated the following national statistics:

Top 2014 Wedding Statistics

- Average Wedding Cost: \$31,213 (excludes honeymoon)
- Most Expensive Place to Get Married: Manhattan, \$76,328 average spend
- Least Expensive Place to Get Married: Utah, \$15,257 average spend
- Average Spent on a Wedding Dress: \$1,357
- Average Marrying Age: Bride, 29; Groom, 31
- Average Number of Guests: 136
- Average Number of Bridesmaids: 4 to 5
- Average Number of Groomsmen: 4 to 5
- Most Popular Month to Get Engaged: December (16%)
- Average Length of Engagement: 14 months
- Most Popular Month to Get Married: June (15%) followed by October (14%)
- Popular Wedding Colors: Ivory/White (44%), Blue (37%), Pink (28%), Metallics (26%), Purple (23%)
- Dark blue specifically has continued to grow every year, from 10% in 2008 to 24% in 2014
- Percentage of Destination Weddings: 24%

The top trends for 2014 included:

- Couples using smartphones to access wedding planning websites increased from 33% in 2011 to 61% in 2014. 71% of couples had accessed The Knot on their smartphones.
- Personalization is on the rise, with couples choosing unique places to wed to show their individual style. Banquet halls (22%), country clubs (11%), and hotels (11%) were still popular places to hold weddings, but 40% chose unusual venues to hold their weddings.

- Couples are spending more on their reception and less on their ceremonies. They are spending more on catering, musicians, and cake, but less on pianists, organists, or religious institutions. Only 28% of ceremonies were held there, down from 41% in 2009.
- Half of all couples went over their wedding budgets. In 2014, 45% of couples went over budget, about 1 in 4 (26%) of couples stayed within their budget, and only 6% of couples came out under budget. 23% didn't even have a wedding budget, up from 17% in 2009.
- On average, the bride's parents contributed 43% of the wedding cost, the couple themselves paid 43% and the groom's parents contributed 12%. 12% of couples paid for the entire wedding themselves.
- More couples are using save the dates, 75% in 2014, up from 57% in 2009. This type of announcement is sent approximately six months to a year in advance of a wedding invitation so guests will not make other plans on that date.

The Knot listed the 25 most expensive places to get married and five of the six most expensive areas were in the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area. They included New York – Manhattan (\$76,328); New York/Long Island (\$55,327); New Jersey North/Central (\$53,986); New York/Westchester/Hudson Valley (\$52,954); Chicago (\$50,934) and New York/Outer Boroughs (\$49,781). New Jersey/South was number 10 at \$39,191. By contrast, Arkansas and Utah had the lowest wedding costs at \$18,031 and \$15,257, respectively (XO Group, Inc., 2015).

Other regional differences were apparent as well. In Nevada and New York City, the average marriage age was 32.7 and 32 years, respectively. West Virginia and Kentucky had the youngest brides, at 26.8 and 26.9 years, respectively. Engagements in North/Central New Jersey were 18 months, the longest of anywhere in the country. Brides in Utah and West Texas averaged engagements of 10 and 9.9 months, respectively. In Georgia and Hawaii, the percentage of casual weddings was 40% and 39%, while in North/Central New Jersey and Long Island, 36% and 35% were formal events. Brides in Manhattan and Long Island spent the most on their dresses, at \$2,914 and \$2,137, while brides in Idaho and Alaska spent \$982 and \$925. 85% of couples from North/Central New Jersey booked honeymoons, while only 44% of those from Alaska and North Dakota did the same.

The average 2014 budget breakdown, according to this survey, was as follows:

Category	2014 National Average Spend	2013 National Average Spend
Overall Wedding (excluding honeymoon)	\$31,213	\$29,858 ↑
Venue (reception hall)	\$14,006	\$13,385 ↑
Photographer	\$2,556	\$2,440 ↑
Wedding/Event Planner	\$1,973	\$1,874 ↑
Reception Band	\$3,587	\$3,469 ↑
Reception DJ	\$1,124	\$1,038 ↑
Florist/Decor	\$2,141	\$2,069 ↑
Videographer	\$1,794	\$1,700 ↑
Wedding Dress	\$1,357	\$1,281 ↑
Groom's Attire and Accessories	\$254	\$248 ↑
Wedding Cake	\$555	\$546 ↑
Ceremony Site	\$1,901	\$1,793 ↑
Ceremony Musicians	\$637	\$588 ↑
Invitations	\$439	\$443 ↓
Transportation/Limousine	\$767	\$732 ↑
Favors	\$275	\$281 ↓
Rehearsal Dinner	\$1,206	\$1,184 ↑
Engagement Ring	\$5,855	\$5,598 ↑
Catering (price per person)	\$68	\$66 ↑
Officiant	\$266	\$260 ↑

Figure 1. 2014 wedding budget national average (XO Group, Inc., 2015).

A study by The Wedding Report (2016), which compiles statistics and marketing reports for the wedding industry, showed that couples nationally spent an average of \$25,200 on their weddings in 2015, and varied from the XO Group figures due to the fact that a different sample survey population was used. That figure was about half of the median household annual income for the entire United States.

The WeddingReport.com, a site organized to help businesses in the wedding industry become more profitable through data, has been analyzing data from over 300,000 samples collected since 2005. For 2015, they derived their cost calculations from 8,010 surveys conducted in that year. They also used data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Census Bureau, Department of Labor, Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), Cost of Living Index (COLI), GeoLytics, Inc. and Easy Analytic Software, Inc. For wedding costs, they analyzed reports regarding 55 products and services in 10 categories from surveys with random pre-wedding and post-wedding couples all over the United States (The Wedding Report, Inc. - Methodology, 2016).

Among all states in the country, New Jersey ranks 11th in population with an estimated 8,958,013 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). New Jersey in 2012 had a per capita income of \$35,928, and a median income of \$71,637, according to the US Census Bureau. Only Maryland ranked higher, with a median income of \$72,999 and Alaska was third with \$69,917. Hunterdon County in New Jersey had the highest figure with \$105,880, while Cumberland County in New Jersey had the lowest at \$51,530 a person.

Reich (2014) compiled a chart showing how much of the median income for 2012 would have to be spent for a wedding within any given state for the same period, and

concluded that New Jersey was one of the states where the average amount spent on weddings was more than 50% of the residents' mean income.

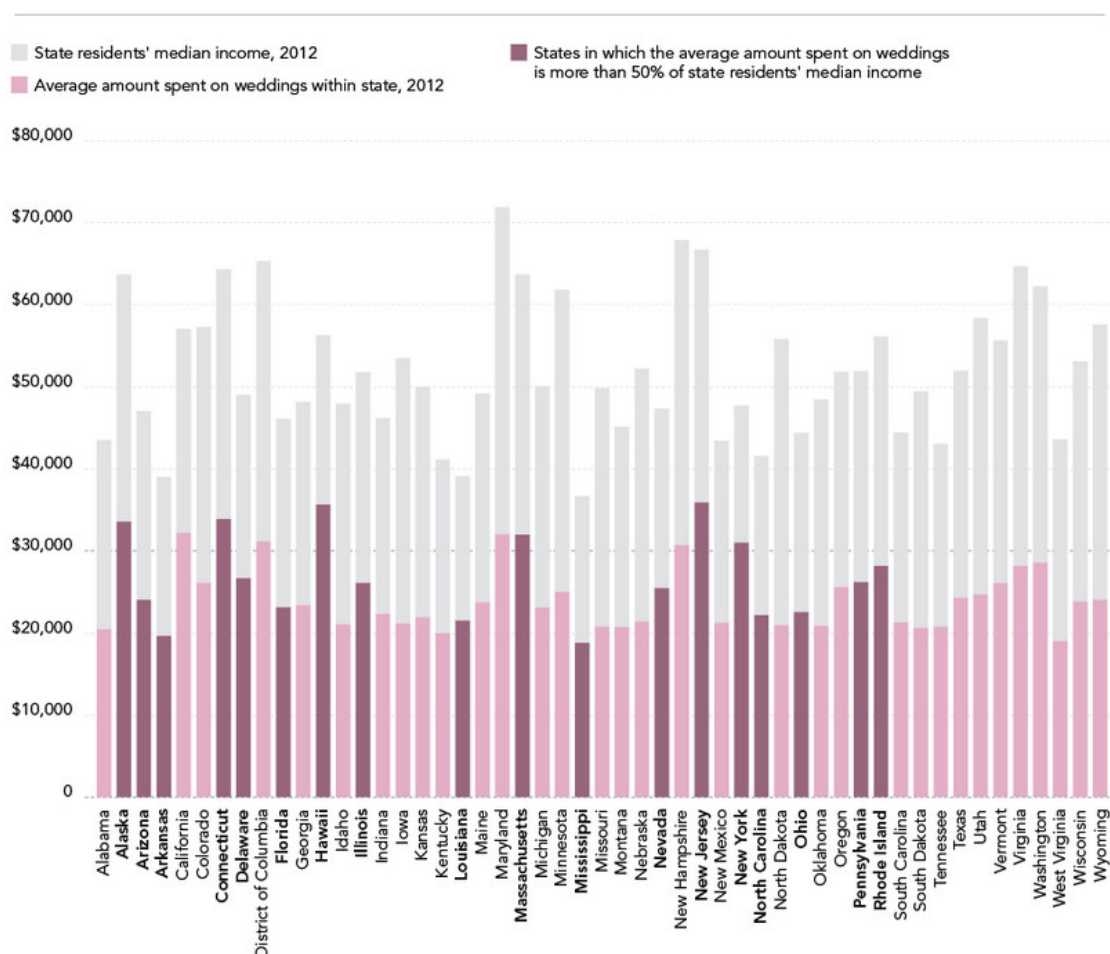


Figure 2. Wedding costs by state as compared to state residents' median household annual income (Reich, 2014).

New Jersey was ranked 16 out of 51 states for number of weddings, with 44,383 for 2014. For average wedding cost in 2014, it was ranked 2 out of 51 states, with \$38,775 being the average cost of a wedding for 2014. This was despite the fact that New Jersey only ranked 11th in population out of 51 states. Total sales for the wedding industry in New Jersey were \$1,720,950,825, which ranked 9 out of 51 states. The average number of guests was between 149 and 159, ranking New Jersey 8 out of 51

states. The Wedding Report ranked New Jersey overall as being number 2 out of 51 states (The Wedding Report, Inc, 2016).

For attire and accessories that year, New Jersey brides spent an average of \$280 on dress accessories, with total sales of \$12,054,423; tuxedos or suits cost \$123 to purchase or \$248 to rent, with totals of \$5,295,336 and \$10,676,774. Brides in New Jersey spent an average of \$1,487 on dresses, or a state wide industry total of \$64,017,595.

New Jersey brides spent an average of \$78 apiece for hair service, \$63 for make-up service, and \$52 for a manicure and pedicure. This added up to sales of \$3,358,018, \$2,712,245 and \$2,238,679 respectively.

For entertainment in 2014, New Jersey weddings averaged \$915 for a DJ, \$2,154 for a live band and \$776 for musicians or soloists. The total spending for each category was \$39,392,132, \$43,976,452 and \$21,697,961 respectively.

New Jersey weddings featured many flowers and decorations. The average for boutonnieres and corsages was \$180, or an industry total of \$7,749,272. The bridal bouquet averaged \$185 and bridesmaid bouquets averaged \$221, for totals of \$7,964,529 and \$9,514,384. Event decorations averaged \$563, with event flower arrangements \$564 and event table centerpieces \$407. The industry total for these was \$24,238,000, \$24,281,052, and \$17,521,965. Flowers for the flower girl averaged \$109, with a total of \$4,692,615, and flower petals came in at an average of \$119, and a total of \$5,123,130.

Gifts were also a big part of New Jersey weddings in 2014. Gifts for attendants averaged \$129, gifts for parents \$145, tips for all services were \$466, and wedding favors

were \$282. The industry totals for these were \$5,553,645, \$6,242,469, \$20,062,004, and \$12,140,526 respectively.

Ceremony programs averaged \$135 per wedding in New Jersey, with a total of \$5,811,954. Engagement announcements averaged \$121, with a total of \$3,705,537 in business. A guest book cost averaged \$69, with a total of \$2,970,554 in sales. Invitations and reply cards averaged \$270 per wedding, with total sales of \$11,623,908. Postage accounted for \$126 in the average New Jersey wedding, with a total of \$5,424,490. Reception menus were \$137 per wedding, save the date cards were \$130, table name and place cards averaged \$97, and thank you cards \$104. These totaled \$4,621,158, \$5,596,696, \$4,132,945 and \$4,477,357.

In New Jersey, the average cost of an engagement ring in 2014 was \$4,199, and the average cost of wedding bands was \$1,506. For the industry, this added up to \$180,773,290 and \$64,835,574.

Photography and video was also an expensive part of the New Jersey wedding of 2014. Digital and photo cds averaged \$397, or a total of \$15,681,845. An engagement photo session was \$513, or an industry total of \$18,442,468. Prints or enlargements accounted for \$296 in the average wedding, or a total of \$11,035,389. The traditional leather bound album averaged \$553, with a total of \$15,953,469 in sales. The average cost of a wedding photographer was \$2,073, with a total of \$89,245,780 spent that year on photography. The wedding videographer averaged \$1,333, with an industry total of \$40,822,152.

Many New Jersey weddings of 2014 included planners or consultants. A la carte services averaged \$1,070, the average cost of a day of wedding coordinator was \$923,

getting started on planning cost \$979, and the full service was \$3,298. A month of direction cost \$1,234. This translated into industry revenues of \$4,274,083, \$9,422,067, \$1,738,038, \$35,130,032, and \$3,833,804, respectively.

Finally, costs for New Jersey weddings regarding venue, catering, and rentals were tabulated for 2014. The average cost of the ceremony officiator was \$267, with a total of \$11,494,753. Event accessories averaged \$416, event bar service \$3,087, event food service \$6,176, event location \$4,652, and event rentals \$2,229. This totaled \$17,909,428, \$132,900,011, \$265,886, 126, \$200,275,625, and \$95,961,816, respectively. The average cost of a hotel room after the reception was \$397, with an industry total of \$17,091,449. A limo rental averaged \$610, with a total of \$18,410,068, with other transportation costing \$648, with a total of \$15,818,101. The rehearsal dinner cost averaged \$735, with a total of \$31,642,860, and the wedding cake cost averaged \$546, with an industry total of \$23,506,124.

The event food service was far and away the most expensive element of a New Jersey wedding in 2014, followed by the event location, the engagement ring, the event bar service, event rentals, the photographer, and the wedding dress. While the traditional elements are the most expensive, New Jersey weddings also feature other, more varied, and non-traditional expenses. These costs translate into New Jersey weddings that are both traditional and unique.

A comparison between the costs involved in a New Jersey wedding, which is ranked 2 in the cost of weddings in this country, and the costs involved in a wedding in Utah, which ranked least expensive, also shows the difference in costs between the two cultures. Two zip codes in the two states were compared, one in 07078, Short Hills, New

Jersey, and one in 84101, Salt Lake City, Utah (The Wedding Report - NJ, 2016; The Wedding Report - UT, 2016). The attire and accessories cost in New Jersey was more than three times the cost in Utah, and flowers were five times more expensive in New Jersey. The average cost of wedding jewelry in New Jersey was four times greater than that in Utah. A wedding planner cost eight times more in New Jersey than it did in Utah. The biggest dollar gap came in the costs associated with the wedding venue, which was \$30,750 in New Jersey but only \$5,666 in Utah.

A few of the reasons why weddings in Utah are less expensive than in New Jersey include the fact that many wedding sealings in Utah take place at a Mormon temple or meetinghouse as part of the customs associated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. There is no cost to use these facilities to members. In fact, “A bride doesn’t even need a wedding dress to be married in the temple. Many LDS temples rent out white dresses and temple clothing for a few dollars, and these are suitable for a sealing. That means a girl can arrange a wedding for the cost of transportation to the temple and \$3.50 for clothes to wear” (Boyd , 2014). Additionally, Mormons do not typically drink alcohol, a substantial line item cost for many weddings, which contributes to a lower reception cost (Canham, 2015).

Finally, a “do-it-yourself” attitude has kept costs lower for Utah brides as many swap services, not money, for wedding elements and haggle with vendors to get the best deal possible. This may be because many brides are part of a big family with many children eventually planning weddings, typically in their early to mid-twenties, younger than couples in other parts of the country, per Mormon norms. As a result, families

keep in mind future costs that will be associated with other children, producing a “drive to get the nicest wedding for the cheapest cost” (Canham, 2015).

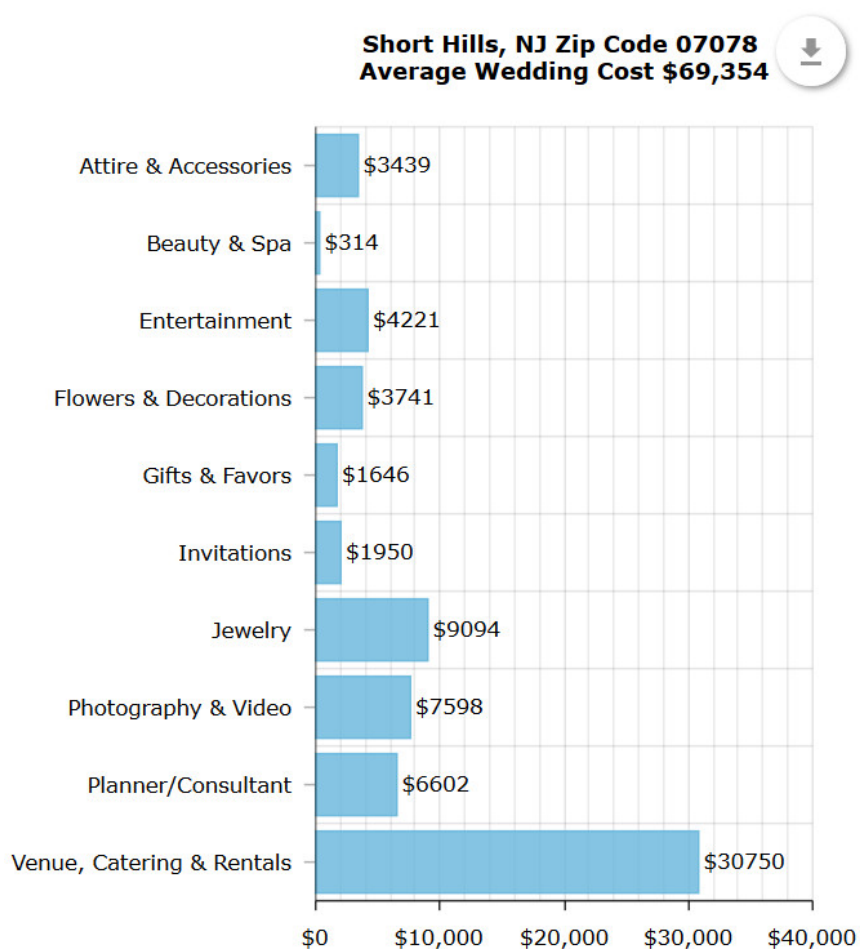


Figure 3. Average wedding costs in Short Hills, NJ (The Wedding Report - NJ, 2016)

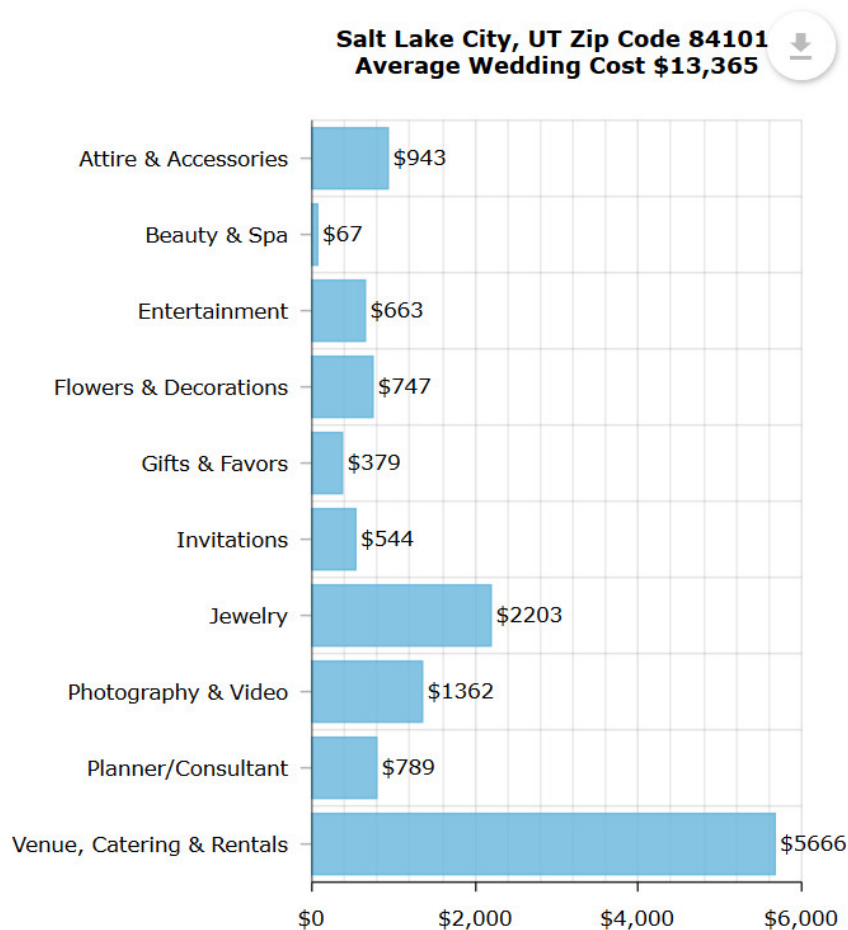


Figure 4. Average wedding costs in Salt Lake City, UT (The Wedding Report - UT, 2016)

Because of the large amount of money spent on New Jersey weddings, couples have the ability to have any kind of wedding of their dreams. It can incorporate all traditional elements, or branch out into an entirely new direction. With the average cost so high, any and all personal touches can be incorporated.

NJ.com (Olivier, 2015) compiled a list of its favorite New Jersey weddings of 2015. Included in this list were an elegant wedding at the lavish English Manor in Ocean Township and one at the Meadow Wood Manor in Randolph, representing the traditional and elegant route historically taken by brides. However, the list also included weddings

which were a far cry from the usual. One was a wedding in which “Lions, tigers, bears and eternal love defined this wedding, held at the Six Flags Great Adventure safari.” It also listed an Avengers themed wedding, held in Branch Brook Park, Newark, where the bride and groom rented a theater for their guests to enjoy a private viewing of *Avengers: Age of Ultron* while drinking cocktails and eating snacks. The reception was held at a gourmet pizza restaurant and the groom wore an Iron Man t-Shirt under his dress shirt.

In another featured wedding, the Shannon Rose Irish Pub in Woodbridge was transformed into Hogwarts for a Harry Potter themed event. The officiant came prepared with an “Elder Wand” and an adapted script, and married the couple by declaring, “By the power vested in me by the state of New Jersey and all the magic at Hogwarts School of Magic, I now pronounce you husband and wife” (Griffith, 2015). Another couple was married at WoodsEdge Farm, amid a herd of alpaca and llamas. A baseball loving couple held their reception at FirstEnergy Park in Lakewood, the home of the minor league baseball team the Lakewood BlueClaws. It included t-shirt cannons, a live band, cheese steaks and cotton candy. An Elvis impersonator also entertained, and the groom did a home run trot inside the stadium.

A vampire-themed wedding was also a NJ.com favorite, with the bride and groom dressed as the undead. They consecrated the marriage by drinking wine with drops of their own blood in it. The bride arrived in a hearse, and pallbearers slid her coffin out, place it upright, and opened it, whereupon the groom awakened her with a “true love’s kiss.” NJ.com noted, “The dinner was actually shaped into a zombie corpse. The head and feet were meatloaf (with onions used for toenails), the stomach had meatballs and kielbasa, and the legs were different pans of pasta” (Bodkin, 2015).



Figure 5. A New Jersey bride arriving at her wedding in a hearse and coffin (Bodkin, 2015).

Therefore, to the prospective brides planning their weddings on TheKnot.com, having the ability to discuss all of the elements and touches that they want to incorporate with other brides who are also planning their own weddings, enables them to truly customize this event so that their wedding is truly unique.

H. Outline of Chapters in this Study

The following chapters present the history, contextualization, theory, methods, discussion, and conclusions related to the research questions introduced. Chapter 2 will begin with a look at the historical role of media culture in wedding planning, beginning in

the 19th century, which looks at the roles weddings play in society, and media coverage of weddings. Its evolution culminated as wedding planning as an industry where celebrities, royals, and reality television all portray lavish weddings as an ideal for all women. The role of social networks, such as Facebook Groups, will also be discussed. Attention will also be given to the role that apps are playing in wedding culture and future possibilities will also be noted.

This is followed in Chapter 3 by information related to the website TheKnot.com including contextualization, corporate structure, ownership, advertising, a comparison to other online sites, moderation, privacy, and terms of use policies. This particular site is uniquely situated in popularity and accessibility for study of community building, uses and gratifications, and the creation of ties and this is the reason why it was chosen for this research. Then in Chapter 4, a literature review discussing the Internet and interactive dimensions of media will be explored with an overview of online discussion environments, general online communities, online gaming communities, and wedding planning and computer networks. The dynamics of interaction in online communities and the creation of ties will also be explored. Additionally, the theoretical perspectives guiding this research, including the uses and gratifications theory, content gratifications and process gratifications, content analysis, intercoder reliability, and interaction in online groups through content analysis will be addressed.

The methodologies of this study, which include utilizing structured interviews in Chapter 5 and a content analysis of postings on TheKnot.com in Chapter 6, comprise the next topics to be explored. The methodology of the interviews, including participant demographics, survey design, procedures, and interview questions and analysis are

included. This is followed by an in-depth content analysis of initial posts and responses which discussed the design, data set, and a look at the participants of the study. A discussion on popular topics, non-traditional idea utilized by participants in their weddings, community building, and relational culture is also contained. Finally, in Chapter 7, the value of this study, limitations, future research possibilities, and conclusions from the research questions will be provided.

Chapter 2: The Historical Role of Media Culture in Wedding Planning

Brides and their families have always planned weddings. What has changed over time is the ways ideas are shared. In the past, etiquette books, news clips on television, and small photos in featured magazine articles may have exclusively served as media guides for what is customary at a wedding. Today, reality television shows that showcase aspects of the entire wedding planning process, books filled with glossy photos of the best gowns, color-schemes, or wedding flowers line the booksellers' shelves, and entire magazines showcasing wedding vendors advertising their services abound, providing many options for each fiancée to consider.

A new industry, wedding planning, arose to assist in the decision making process. The wedding planning industry began in the United States around the late 1970s to the early 1980s because the baby boom generation was in prime matrimonial years. Women formed an increasingly large force in the labor market, which set the stage for outsourcing of wedding planning (Blakely, 2008). As one does when hiring outside help such as childcare, dog walker, personal chef, or personal assistant, one is reminded that “wedding planners are a form of outsourced labor; the unpaid work of mothers and daughters is transported from the home to the public marketplace” (Blakely, 2008, p. 640).

Wedding planners, even in today's Internet culture, are flourishing. As Daniels and Loveless (2007) note, “The abundance of information available on the Internet can overwhelm a prospective bride and groom. While some suggest that the proliferation of material available on Web sites negates the need for a wedding consultant, quite the opposite is true” (p. 54). As a result, there has been an expansion of the role that

wedding planners fill, whether they are professional planners or friends or acquaintances. In 2008, there were an estimated 10,000 wedding planning businesses (Blakely, 2008).

Boden (2001) and Geller (2001) maintain that it is the media that has helped create the identity of the contemporary bride as a consumer. This includes coverage by the media of celebrity and reality weddings, by all forms of media. This section will discuss the history of the media in wedding planning, celebrity and royal weddings, weddings as viewed in reality television, on social networks, and through apps. This history is significant because it shows a progression from earlier media such as magazines and television shows that overlap with the Internet experience through bulletin boards today. Wedding planning online owes its status to the shift that has incorporated the old with the new.

A. History of Role of Media in Wedding Planning

The “wedding industry” began in Britain and the United States around the nineteenth century with etiquette books detailing how things should be done (Monger, 2013). The assumption embedded in media messages is that marriage is a life goal for women (Daniels & Loveless, 2007).

In the mid- to late nineteenth century, society’s elite hired a master of ceremonies, who performed day of the wedding coordination services (Blakely, 2008). To assist brides on purchasing the correct wedding attire as early as the 1880s, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, one of the most popular and widely circulated magazines, which was targeted for women, promoted wedding wear (Godey’s Bridal Fashion, 2014).



Figure 6. A bridal advertisement from the 1880s in *Godey's Lady's Book* (Godey's Bridal Fashion, 2014).

This tradition stemmed from the mid-to-late-eighteenth century, where masters of ceremonies were hired for coordination of the day of the wedding. In the 1920s, some stores selling wedding wear hired bridal secretaries for assistance (Blakely, 2008). These women gave advice about etiquette, protocol, and available merchandise (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). In 1951, the first association of bridal consultants formed, which was called The National Bridal Service and it operated in 41 states to train bridal secretaries who earned commissions from vendors hired by the clients. This was originally for the wealthiest, but expanded into the middle class as more and more people became able to utilize and pay for their services (Blakely, 2008).

Wedding planning as an industry began in the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This was due to the fact that the baby boom generation was in its prime

matrimonial years (Blakely, 2008). It was also due to the fact that women were participating more in the labor force, were spending less time in the home, and were investing more time and energy on their career and education (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). Most recently, bridal magazines, reality television, and the portrayal of lavish weddings in media give the message that weddings are the goal of romantic relationships, and the key goal for all women (Engstrom, 2008).

Contributing to the rise of the industry is the wide visibility of opulent weddings of celebrities and royals in the media, which will now be explored.

B. Celebrities and Royals

Media forms a vital role in our culture. As Widedstedt (2009) expresses it, “Society, whether we prefer to call it global, local or national, is imbued with mass media – the culture of the twenty-first century is a media culture. People can express and receive their experiences through digital media, fulfill their needs for information as well as friendship through interactive media, and eagerly explore new ways of being constantly connected to the media flow. Media as a means of communication are undisputedly and uncontestedly central in contemporary culture” (p. 1). Celebrity weddings and the choices made by celebrities have captured the interest of the public (Daniels & Loveless, 2007).

One possible reason that weddings have risen to this level of concentrated intensity is due to the media attention that is given to the weddings of celebrities, royals, and other individuals in the public eye. Women who are to be married are especially enthralled by images of these lavish affairs and they believe that they can have an event

for their own nuptials that parallels that of the wealthy and the famous. Wedding publications today look to those celebrities in a position of showcasing purchasing power for inspiration and ideas, and feature reproduced colorful images of lavish parties for the engaged planner to emulate. The coverage of celebrity weddings by the media is not a new phenomenon as the celebrations of the privileged have been showcased in magazines and books to those women who are now planning their own elaborate wedding affairs (Mead, 2007).

Two weddings of the 1950s are the epitome of the “fairy tale fantasy” for the union of man and woman: Jacqueline Bouvier’s vows to John F. Kennedy on September 12, 1953 and the wedding of Grace Kelly to Prince Rainier III of Monaco on April 19, 1956. The Kennedy wedding was described in written media as follows: “The wedding was celebrated at St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Cathedral in Newport, Rhode Island, on a crisp, sunny day. A breeze whipped up whitecaps in the bay as waves of publicity powered by the groom’s father, Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, drove crowds to the streets. It was he who had picked out Jacqueline Bouvier as the right wife for a future president of the United States, and he is said to have run the whole event like a Hollywood production” (Cavendish, 2003, p. 54). The press described minute details of the party and the fashions worn so that many could live vicariously through the descriptions published (NY Times, 1956).



Figure 7. Jacqueline Bouvier and John F. Kennedy wedding photo. Photo: *The New York Times*, September 13, 1953.

Grace Kelly was an American movie actress when she met her future husband Prince Rainier of Monaco at the Cannes Film Festival in 1955. The two married a year later in what the written media termed “The Wedding of the Century” (NY Times, 1956). Sketches of the wedding dress and that of the outfit worn to the civil ceremony held a day later received widespread interest in the press. Regarding the civil ceremony, the New York Times wrote, “today’s ceremony was an intimate one, relatively speaking. About a hundred persons were present in the room. However, television cameras carried the ceremony to millions of persons throughout Western Europe. In the television audience were 1,500 reporters who were not allowed in the throne room itself” (NY Times, 1956). These descriptions put the media at the forefront of describing the events of the day and had an impact on how these weddings were shared with society.



Figure 8. Grace Kelly and Prince Rainier III of Monaco wedding photo. Photo: Getty Images.

The media also reported in great detail the wedding of Princess Diana to Prince Charles on July 28, 1981. This wedding also sparked great interest by the public and began the romantic, fairy tale dress designs of the 1980s that were highly publicized in photographs in magazines and books. More recently, the royal wedding of Prince William to Catherine Middleton was a popular media topic. Primetime television coverage included a special edition of the ABC's program 20/20 titled *William & Catherine: A Modern Fairytale*, anchored by Barbara Walters. The hour-long show included photographs, home videos, and speculation about the ceremony which took place on April 29, 2011. Magazines ran articles and created special editions of their

publications about what facts were known and were presumed for the nuptials. On the day of the event, many television stations aired live coverage from London beginning at 4:00 AM EDT and many Internet sites streamed live video coverage all day so those in the United States could feel as if they were there witnessing the event firsthand. It was clear the media had a large role in how this grand ceremony was shared with the entire world.



Figure 9. Prince William, Duke of Cambridge and Catherine Middleton wedding photo. Photo: PA Images.

C. Wedding Reality Television

Celebrity couples are not the only individuals whose marriages have been featured in the media. Television has also contributed to the view that society has of marriages, for better or worse. These focus on the experiences of ordinary people in

unscripted environments. One of the first of these programs was The Learning Channel's *A Wedding Story*, which offered an overview of an American wedding (Engstrom, 2008) and featured the courtship stories of people from all different backgrounds, religions, and financial positions across the country. *A Wedding Story* premiered on The Learning Channel in 1996, making it an early example of this genre. It was inspired by the tremendous popularity of televised weddings, especially that of Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson in 1986. By 1999, with 200 episodes, it became one of the most popular programs on the channel. (Galician & Merskin, 2007).

In 2015, there were 32 wedding-related television programs on air, including *Say Yes to the Dress* (premiered 2007), *A Wedding Story* (premiered 1996), *Bridezilla's* (premiered 2004) and *Four Weddings* (premiered 2009) (Hefner, 2015). Traditionally, it has been believed that such wedding programs engage the viewers to become enraptured in the process (Giorgio, 2011). Another noted that it “mobilizes fantasies, dreams and images of the traditional white wedding” and offers “soothing stories about heterosexuality, love, and marriage, and fantasies about spectacle and celebrity” (Sgroi, 2006). These studies emphasize the fantasy aspect of viewership. A study by Hefner (2015) concluded that watching wedding-related reality television may be beneficial, since “Television content featuring lavish dates and ultimate commitments of marriage may serve to increase the endorsement of these beliefs, thereby potentially paving the way to the formation and maintenance of healthier relationships” (p. 14). It offers hope to unmarried couples who want a fairy tale wedding in the future, and provides comfort to those who are single and who yearn for their own happy endings.

1. Wedding Reality TV Overview

Cultural training has reinforced to women that a wedding is one of the most important events in her life, perhaps second only to the birth of her children, even though a typical wedding ceremony only lasts an hour. Movies, television shows and Internet videos have all encouraged the idea that they must create a fantasy perfect day, a day they have been trained to expect since they were young, and products and industry have proliferated to go along with this view. However, studies have shown that often women who buy into this fantasy actually end up with less successful marriages. (Ames & Burcon, 2016). This televised representation of weddings is a well-known and ever increasing genre.

Reality television is a part fictional and part nonfictional representation of life and events (Queen, 2013). Participants on reality TV are orientating to a 'double frame.' The first is the immediate and local audience of the other show participants, and the second is the 'mediated context of a reality TV show,' which provides a national viewing audience (Thornborrow & Morris, 2004). Known participants are "addressees," and those who are known but not directly addressed are the "auditors," while those who are not directly addressed, such as the audience at home, are the "overhearers" (Eberhardt & Downs, 2015). Addressees and auditors are the main focus, but there is always an awareness of the overhearers as well. In addition to the audience, there are always camera crews and microphones, which serve as constant reminders that the participants are being observed. As a result, reality television has proved to be a good fit for wedding related television.

The uses and gratifications theory was used by Hefner to focus on why individuals sought out this particular type of media content. As was discussed earlier, people make different choices about what media to view based on their own personal

characteristics, thereby exercising control over it (Katz, Blumer, & Gurevitch, 1973-1974). This focuses on what the individuals do with the media (Klapper, 1963). Some of the reasons have been identified as habit, arousal, escapism, learning, interpersonal activity, social utility, relaxation, entertainment, reality exploration of personal identity and a way to pass time (Bryant & Thompson, 2002; Rubin, 2002). Therefore, the uses and gratifications theory explains how the choices individuals make in media consumption have “more of an influence on those effects than does the actual content itself” (Hefner, 2015, p. 3).

The decade of the 2000s expanded reality TV weddings to showcase real life couples to be married. They included *The Real Wedding Crashers*, a spin-off of the popular movie, followed the antics of improvisational comedian actors who attended weddings they were not invited to with the goal of creating uncomfortable and funny situations for wedding guests. *Whose Wedding is it Anyway?* followed the event planning process from the point of view of a hired wedding planner; *Rock the Reception* showcased the pre-wedding planning when a couple hired the popular husband and wife choreographic team of Tabitha and Napoleon D’Umo from the television show *So You Think You Can Dance* to teach them a fabulous first dance to perform at their reception; and *Married Away* focused on destination weddings and all the additional details that must be addressed for such an event. (Ingraham, 1999)

Buff Brides aired on the Discovery Health Channel in 2003 and followed a group of brides as they attempted to trim down for their upcoming weddings. *‘Til Death Do Us Part* ended in a “wedding between a tattooed rocker and a former Playboy Playmate and a Baywatch beauty” (Huff, 2006, p. 61). Reality pioneer show *Survivor* also resulted in a

reality wedding. Bob Mariano and Amber Brkich met on *Survivor*, where they fell in love and got a television special about their wedding, then subsequently appeared on *The Amazing Race*. The two built a career around their television appearances.


In 2005, ABC Family Channel aired a reality show in Las Vegas set around the Las Vegas Garden of Love, one of Vegas' wedding chapels, and the family that ran the chapel (Huff, 2006). Other reality TV weddings include shows such as *Joe Millionaire*, *Temptation Island: The Wedding*, and *Who Wants to Marry My Dad?*, a show in which female contestants proposed to the father of a family while wearing a white gown (Ingraham, 1999). Additionally, the Lifetime television channel regularly features celebrity weddings and other wedding related shows. Their *Weddings of a Lifetime* offered fairy tale weddings with a commercial link. One such example was Walt Disney World's *Fairy Tale Weddings*, a cross promotional effort with Disney so that the traditional ideas of marriage were linked with Disney properties, maximizing their selling potential (Levine, 2005).

Those that do make it to the altar are celebrated. Where once televised weddings were reserved for royalty and celebrities such as Prince William and Katherine Middleton or Princess Diana and Prince Charles, as discussed earlier in this chapter, televised weddings are becoming more and more frequent, and are not reserved solely for royalty. The reality shows *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* allow a prospective bachelor or bachelorette to select a prospective mate from a pool of contestants, eliminating one each week until only one remains, who may then receive a marriage proposal. The goal is for the couple to have their courtship during the course of the show, with the last episode culminating in the proposal. It has been noted that this is similar to the Indian concept of

an arranged marriage. Davé (2010) notes that this alternative representation of arranged marriage blends Indian American and American cultural values toward marriage and arranged marriages. Family and their expectations play a large role in arranged marriages and similarly, participants on *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* have an opportunity for the family to meet the prospective life partner and give their opinions.

There have been four televised wedding from *The Bachelor* or *The Bachelorette* couples. Sean Lowe married Catherine Guidici on live television, Trista and Ryan Sutter had a live wedding in 2003, and two other couples, Jason and Molly Mesnick and Ashley and J.P Rosenbaum also had their nuptials televised live. Most recently, an episode of *The Bachelor at 20: A Celebration of Love* culminated with the filmed wedding of Jade and Tanner Tolbert, a fifth couple from *The Bachelor* franchise, on February 14, 2016. (American Broadcasting Company, 2016).

The idea of finding a perfect match can also be seen in *The Millionaire Matchmaker*. In this program, individuals were paired together by a professional matchmaker with the hopes that two strangers will find true love because they have already been deemed compatible by an outside observer. The end results of these shows have not led as many couples to a lifetime of happiness as promoted, however. Similarly, and perhaps one of the strangest shows, was *Married at First Sight*, where two of six contestants agreed to marry strangers on the FYI network. This social experiment used four experts, a sexologist, spiritualist, psychologist and sociologist to create three couples based on scientific matchmaking (FYI Network, 2016).



TYPE	TITLE	NETWORK
Series	<i>A Wedding Story</i>	TLC
Episode	<i>Bridal Battles & a Missing Marine</i>	Style Network
Series	<i>Bride vs. Bride</i>	WE/wegobridal.com
Series	<i>Bridezilla</i>	WE/wegobridal.com
Series	<i>For Better or For Worse</i>	TLC
Series	<i>Instant Weddings</i>	Lifetime
Episode	<i>My Fair Brady: The Wedding Special</i>	VH1
Series	<i>Platinum Weddings</i>	WE: wegobridal.com
Episode	<i>Rob and Amber Get Married</i>	CBS
Series	<i>The "I Do" Diaries</i>	Lifetime
Series	<i>The Real Wedding Crashers</i>	NBC
Online TV	<i>the Wedding Television Network</i>	http://www.tvwed.com
Episode	<i>Trista Rehn and Ryan Sutter's "Bachelorette" Wedding Special</i>	ABC
Series	<i>Ultimate Weddings</i>	Comcast
Online TV	<i>WeddingTV.com</i>	Sky channels
Series	<i>Wild Weddings</i>	TLC
Series	<i>Whose Wedding is it Anyway?</i>	Style Network

Table 4.3 Reality TV Wedding Shows, 2000-2007

Figure 10. Wedding reality television shows, 2000-2007 (Ingraham, 1999, p. 204).

Wedding reality shows are not just an American interest. In the Turkish television show, *The Perfect Bride*, the mother of the groom was the one who selects the bride for her son. She was the one doing the proposing, and the show depicted the interaction among mothers, sons, and potential brides (Ardizzoni, 2009). In the Italian show *LaSposa Perfetta*, there was an emphasis on the physical qualities of the bride. This show allowed the viewers and the mother of the groom to rate prospective brides on their physical traits (Ardizzoni, 2009).

Some of the shows also play into American stereotypes, such as *My Big Redneck Wedding*, which casts the participants in a negative light. This show explored ethnic identity and class difference. Couples on this show were depicted as lacking taste, acting foolishly, and coming from dysfunctional families. For example, one couple, Anna and

Bo, made benches for the guests to sit on during the ceremony from boards stacked across tires. Anna tossed her bridal bouquet over a mud pit, and the bridesmaids had a mud fight while attempting to catch it. Amyie, another bride, bought her wedding dress from a consignment shop then used a bedazzler to write her groom's name across her gown. A different couple, Rawni and Rob, jumped into a mud pit after their ceremony. (Click, 2010).

The sheer number of wedding reality television shows outlined here speaks to the popularity and influence they have had on modern brides-to-be. They are pervasive, bombarding brides with opulent events, which entice the bride's fantasies and ultimately increases the consumerism involved in planning weddings.

2. Wedding Reality TV and Consumerism

Televised wedding reality TV shows also include emotional conflict and short-term disregard for economic consequences. Notably, "Beyond the emotional drawbacks, the consumption patterns associated with many weddings are accompanied by wanton spending, self-centeredness, excess, and waste, and therefore are subject to critique" (Daniels & Loveless, 2007, p. 74). Daniels and Loveless continue, "The urge to splurge is driven by the quest for the perfect wedding. This perfectionism has ballooned into a wedding obsession craze that has become the latest cultural contagion" (p. 77). Many reality television shows glorify impulse buying, the desire to fulfill a fantasy, a need for social gratification, as well as disappointment, regret, and anger (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). One such example was *Bridezillas*, a show where the stress of planning a wedding drove the brides-to-be to complain, scream, and cry when their ostentatious

planning did not go smoothly. In addition, “From an early age, many women fantasize about their dream wedding, with ubiquitous fairy tales such as Cinderella, Snow White, and Beauty and the Beast feeding young imaginations that translate into adult purchase decisions” (Daniels and Loveless, 2007, p. 77). As was evident with the many brides on *Bridezillas*, “The lavish wedding allows for a temporary escape from a world of imperfection...The pursuit of perfection is fueled by the commercialization of the white wedding which started in the mid-1800s” (Daniels & Loveless, 2007, p. 77).

Poor body image and low self-esteem are also showcased in reality television shows for “The desire to look perfect, be perfect, please everyone, and have celebrity-like events leads brides to take extreme measures such as undergoing liposuction or having their jaws wired shut to ensure that they will reach their desired dress size” (Daniels & Loveless, 2007, p. 77). In fact, these extreme acts are actually realized on the reality television show, *Bridalplasty*. According to the E! Network, which produced the show, “*Bridalplasty* brings together engaged women who are seeking complete image transformations before their big day – they want the dream wedding AND the dream body to go along with it” (Hutchinson, 2010). Each week, contestants competed in challenges and winners were rewarded with a surgery from their “wish list” such as rhinoplasty, liposuction, breast augmentation, or botox.

There is the belief that if a couple spends a great deal of money on their wedding, it shows that they are more committed and less likely to obtain a divorce (Otnes & Pleck, 2003). The money is typically spent on socially desirable and culturally important items and customs, but where did the list of “must haves” come from? There are many reality television shows that document many of the potential excessive elements of expensive

weddings. Brides-to-be may see these programs and feel the desire to include these elements in their events because others have. These shows included: *Say Yes to the Dress*, which followed the employees of posh Kleinfeld Bridal, a wedding dress store in Manhattan which carries designer name brand wedding couture; *Amazing Wedding Cakes* which showcased extravagant wedding desserts; and *Platinum Weddings*, which advertised the lavish and extremely expensive weddings as excessive and included the budget for such an over-the-top event.

Sensibly, there are reality television shows that put the monetary element of weddings in perspective. *Rich Bride, Poor Bride* followed a couple and using their budget as a guide, tallies up their wedding expenses after their event, a price tag which may be vastly different than the original number budgeted. In the show *For Better or for Worse?*, couples gave up all decisions about their event to the control of their family, friends, and a wedding planner they know nothing about. Their wedding was planned in a week on a \$5,000 budget. Shows such as this demonstrate how many expectations are met while traditions are excluded or included within reason, and without great expense.

A study of the show *Real Weddings from The Knot* by Engstrom (2008) quantitatively analyzed 20 episodes and concluded that the two real stars of the programs were the bride and the wedding itself. There were recurrent patterns regarding the reinforcement of femininity in the bride's roles and responsibilities. She was either viewed as a physical object, as exemplified by her gown and physical preparation, or she was the overseer of the whole process of wedding planning so as to create a special day that matched her ideal of perfection. Regarding the wedding itself, Engstrom concluded that major and minor problems of wedding planning are always resolved and a perfect

wedding is achieved. She also concluded that the wedding as a social event and excuse of consumerism was more important than the relationship of the couple (Engstrom, 2008).

Wedding reality television programming embedded corresponding advertising into wedding programming. Programs such as the above “support a wedding-industrial complex that needs the romance and fantasy in order to keep weddings and marriage desirable and profitable” (Ingraham, 1999, p. 173). This link between wedding programming and suppliers of wedding related goods and services has created a situation in which they are intertwined, each receiving economic benefit while encouraging viewers to spend more and more so that they too can have their fantasies made real.

D. Social Networks: Facebook Groups

The ideas that the bride has envisioned through her consumption of media now need to be translated to her special day. This process also has evolved historically. What was once a task for a circle of friends or a hired wedding planner has now expanded to encompass social networks in the wedding planning process. Social networking sites are continually changing. Listserv, Usenet and AOL were once the predominant sites for users looking to communicate with other users. These progressed into the bulletin board, the category of networking employed by TheKnot.com. Initially, online communities were supported by lists and asynchronous and synchronous message boards. Bulletin boards are now often eclipsed by blogs, wikis, and social network sites, commonly referred to as Web 2.0 social media applications. The unique aspect of social media sites is that they let users display their social networks through a list of friends who are also users of the system, resulting in connections that would not otherwise have been made

(Bender, Jimenez-Marroquin, & Jadad, 2011). Because of this evolutionary process, it can be envisioned that the bulletin board will be surpassed by another form of media communication. This transition is already occurring. The question remains whether the bulletin board will be able to maintain a communication presence online in view of the new technologies.

These new social network sites are “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211).

Currently, the predominant social network is Facebook. As of the fourth quarter of 2015, Facebook had 1.59 billion monthly active users, making it the most popular social network worldwide (Statista, 2016).

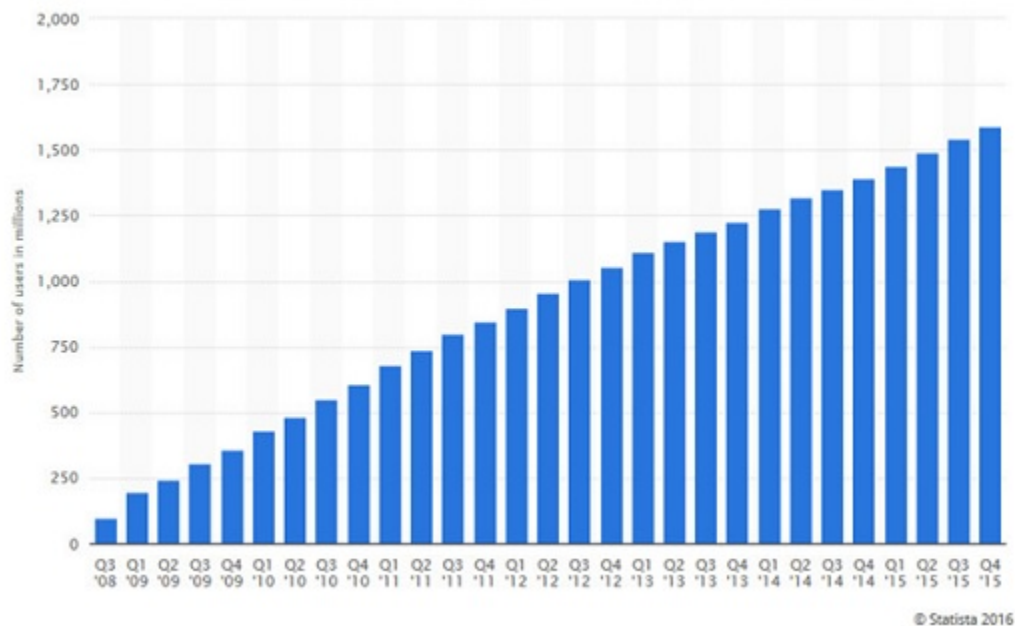


Figure 11. Facebook users in millions by year and quarter (Statista, 2016).

It was found by Boyd and Ellison (2007) that Facebook is used primarily to maintain or reinforce existing relationships rather than to meet new people. As with bulletin boards, Facebook relies on weak ties considered particularly effective to the diffusion of information (Granovetter, 1973; Lewis, Gonzalez, & Kaufman, 2012). Connections on Facebook can be changed by forming a tie, dissolving a tie, or doing nothing. If given the opportunity to make a change, short-term goals will be pursued (Lewis, Gonzalez, & Kaufman, 2012).

Initially, Facebook merely enabled users to create individual profiles. This evolved in 2006 to a platform where news “feeds” were created, incorporating all recent posts from “friends.” Now, a user can maintain an individual profile, upload photographs, and also leave messages for friends who are offline (Pi, Chou, & Liao, 2013). In addition to individual pages, there is a feature in Facebook called Facebook Groups. This enables users to share common interests. According to Facebook, “Facebook Groups make it easy to connect with specific sets of people, like family, teammates or coworkers. Groups are dedicated spaces where you can share updates, photos or documents and message other group members” (Facebook - iPad App Help, 2016). There are also different privacy settings that can be created. A group can have all information public and generally available to everyone on Facebook. The group can be private or closed, and then posts are visible only to group members. Membership can be controlled by requiring them to be approved or added by administrators. In a public or closed group, the invitation and joining of a new member is shown in the News Feed and search. Groups can also be secret, and then they do not appear in search results. They can only be seen by members to the group. (Facebook - Groups, 2016). Facebook users

can also create “Pages,” which are similar to Groups, but without the ability for privacy. Page information and posts are public and are generally available to anyone on Facebook who wants to join the group. Anyone can connect with a Page and get news updates.

Diverse entities have created groups to spread information and recruit members. Once a person is a member of such a group, he or she can receive messages and information not available elsewhere, and be more motivated to engage in the ideology of the group. These online groups strengthen social contacts, community engagement and attachment. Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2009) explored the needs met by individual participants by applying the uses and gratifications theory; four needs for using Facebook groups were ascertained. These were socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information. Those who participated to satisfy socializing needs used Facebook Groups to meet and talk with others and gain peer support and a sense of community. Those who obtained entertainment gratification obtained amusement and leisure needs. Those who had information needs used the Groups to learn about events and specific products and services. Finally those who were looking for personal status did so to “make themselves look cool” and to develop their career (p. 731).

In another study, it was determined that Group members were willing to share knowledge if it was perceived that they would help others (Pi, Chou, & Liao, 2013). Factors which affected this were reputation, expected relationship, sense of self-worth, and subjective norm.

Just as with bulletin boards, Facebook Groups have also sprung up dealing with support for specific issues faced by the members. Fifteen public Facebook Groups that focused on diabetes management were studied by Greene, Choudhry, Kilabuk and Shrank

(2011). Approximately two thirds of the posts included sharing of diabetes management information, and 29% of the posts featured an effort by the poster to provide emotional support. There was also promotional activity, however, with no accountability or checks for authentication. Comment analysis was the tool used for analyzing the posts.

Advertising was prominent, utilizing Facebook as a marketing space. It was noted that diabetics, due to the nature of the disease, might not be representative of other chronic illnesses and “street-level” management of diabetes. It was noted that “We find the promise of a community to support and educate others with similar conditions as well as the perils of an unregulated environment supporting substantial promotional and data-gathering activities” (p. 291).

Another study found 620 breast cancer support groups on Facebook, containing 1,090,397 members (Bender, Jimenez-Marroquin, & Jadad, 2011). These groups were created for fundraising (44%), awareness (38.1%), product or service promotion (9%) or patient/caregiver support (7%). Most of these groups (85%) had 25 wall posts or fewer. The low percentage of Groups established for support was found to be correlated to the format of Facebook. In bulletin boards, there is relative anonymity and privacy, allowing participants to communicate about personal and socially stigmatizing topics. On the other hand, in Facebook, the visibility of user profiles and group membership make the communication less anonymous. While the Facebook Groups would increase the ability to raise funds and awareness, they made them less suitable for potentially embarrassing and personal topics.

This is consistent with the research of Abramson, Keefe and Chou (2015), who found by examining communication on a Facebook Page for breast cancer awareness that

health related dialogues occurred, with themes of self-expression, promotion of health awareness, support for breast cancer research, and unpredictable evolution of communication.

Facebook Groups as learning management systems were discussed by Meishar-Tal, Kurtz, and Pieterse (2012). Facebook was used as a course website, delivering content and maintaining interactions among students. The students in this study expressed satisfaction with this method of learning.

The monetization of Facebook can also be problematic for users, something not as overtly encouraged on a bulletin board. Note that there is a strict prohibition on TheKnot.com of users who are also vendors and any of these who attempt to join a forum are immediately banned. In Facebook, such prohibitions are not present, and, in fact, are encouraged by Facebook as it is a source of site revenue. This was explored by Dallaway (2010) where it was noted, “the way that Facebook monetizes data became glaringly apparent to me when wedding dress and wedding venue advertisements appeared on my profile within days of my engagement” (p. 5) It is unclear whether this algorithm for advertisers would apply to private group pages as well.

It was suggested by Pi, Chou and Liao (2013) that a social networking culture could be strengthened if the group administration would express rules for rewards and punishments clearly, and organize activities to promote member interactions and communications. Administrators could also give positive feedback to those who contribute knowledge to others, thus enhancing self-worth and reputation.

Study of Facebook Groups is made very difficult because it is impossible to collect demographic information of users due to privacy settings. Users are required by

Facebook to identify themselves. Its terms of service specify that a user may not “impersonate any person or entity, or falsely state or otherwise misrepresent yourself, your age, or your affiliation with any person or entity” (Facebook - Terms of Service, 2015). Any study of Facebook would, due to privacy restrictions, be limited because of “the absence of observation itself, private data and missing data” which “can easily be confounded” (Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008, p. 95). Settings of Facebook Groups that are limited or private also cannot be accessed by those who desire to conduct studies of group members. It is impossible to even search for the names of groups that exist, since those which are private are not indexed.

Nevertheless, as expressed by Lewis et al. (2008), “As the Internet in general and contemporary SNSs [social networking services] in particular play ever-greater roles in everyday life, virtual and ‘actual’ communications, relationships, and identities become virtually indistinguishable—creating, in the process, a wealth of new opportunities for social scientific inquiry” (p. 341).

E. Apps and the Future

With the evolution of new media, the communication method of choice is continually being redefined. With the advent of Facebook, the question becomes what is the role that an online bulletin board will play in the future. In fact, it is unclear whether Facebook itself will still be around five or ten years from now. At a certain point, it is probable that Facebook will begin losing members and that they will gravitate to something else. The Internet is an open territory and there is always room for someone to create a new model. It is impossible to predict what this is going to be.

TheKnot.com, as was discussed in the chapter on New Jersey Weddings, hinted at one possibility in its report of the top 2014 wedding trends. It noted that one of the breakout events of the year was that couples were using their smartphones to plan their weddings. In 2014, according to The Knot, the use of smartphones to access wedding planning sites nearly doubled from 2011. In 2011, 33% of couples accessed TheKnot.com from smartphones, while 61% did so in 2014. It further found that 5 out of 10 brides actively planned their weddings on mobile devices. 61% researched gowns, up from 27% in 2011, and 57% researched wedding vendors, up from 22% in 2011. (XO Group, Inc., 2015).

If this becomes the wave of the future, this will completely change the way in which brides-to-be will communicate. It will change from an environment where there can be dialogue with others in like situations to a technology governed atmosphere where there will be an app for everything, but a limited opportunity for discourse with others.

A list of 16 apps and gadgets for wedding planning was compiled by Bagish (2014b), and none of these apps provided an opportunity for communication with others. They ranged from Fitocracy, which tracks physical activities leading to the wedding; Evernote, which lists notes for different items of planning; WeddingWire, an online resource for all things wedding related; Mint, which manages all aspects of a budget; Appy Couple, which sets up a personalized digital webspace; Zola Registry, which creates an online registry; Spotify, which creates a wedding playlist; and Instaprint, for printing guest photos on the spot. Note that none of these encourage communication other than the limited ability to share notes for planning such as Evernote provides.

Bagish (2014a) also compiled online wedding planning tools. These included Little Borrowed Dress, where brides and bridesmaids can exchange wedding wear; Guesterly, where a wedding couple can produce a wedding yearbook of their guests; Lover.ly, a site inspired by Pinterest.com where the engaged can save their favorite wedding ideas to “bundles;” and Wedding Spot, which helps brides find the right venue.

If they become the wave of the future, these sites and apps will take away the communication aspect of planning a wedding and getting ideas in a threaded or wall-like setting, and move into an area where the ideas are pre-generated by Internet sources. It is in some way returning to the past, where wedding planning was limited by one’s own ingenuity, but building upon that concept to add commercialization as the primary focus, rather than communication. Ironically, with all the resources in the world available to a future bride, she may be limited by her ability to use technology, for if one is not fluent in this brave new environment, all of its advantages will be negated.

Chapter 3: TheKnot.com

A. Contextualization of TheKnot.com

As previously discussed in Chapter 1.F, TheKnot.com forums were chosen to exemplify the ways by which a community is built through online postings and discusses the characteristics of this community. The organization of this particular website makes this possible and following is an overview of its structure.

On TheKnot.com community forums, any registered user to this wedding planning mega-site has the ability to create threads and reply to posts created by other users on any sub-board. Individuals who wish only to read the posts and not provide personal commentary are not prohibited from viewing all posts. TheKnot.com's bulletin board material also appears as results in Web search engines.

To become a member, TheKnot.com requests demographic information and personal details such as first and last name of the bride- and groom-to-be, email address of the person creating an account, wedding date, wedding location, current address, and stage of wedding planning (no engagement ring yet, ring on my/her finger – just started planning, midway through my planning, within weeks of my wedding, or married). The individual then creates a unique username and password. The username will be included on every post and reply in which the member participates.

Once registered, a member has the ability to post on any of The Knot's Community boards. "Like distinct neighborhoods within a big city, thematic subdivisions in a large Web community will bring together people who have something in common, and give them a smaller and more focused group to identify with" (Kim, 2000, p. 310).

Though TheKnot.com is a huge wedding-planning resource, it has been subdivided into smaller communities around specific topics.

TheKnot.com has many sub-boards, arranged into categories by either Topic, Wedding Month, City, Culture and Theme, or Life Boards because “if your goal is to build a large-scale, thriving, sustainable community organization, you’ll need to find some way to sustain a sense of intimacy and familiarity within the larger setting. The first and most basic way to address this issue is to create meaningful subdivisions, as all large-scale communities do” (Kim, 2000, p. 310).

There are 38 Topic boards, which include Knottie Tech Help, Attire and Accessories, Budget and DIY Weddings, Ceremony and Vow Ideas, Chit Chat, Customs and Traditions, Etiquette, Favors, Flowers, Food and Cakes, 40-Plus Brides, Gay Weddings, Getting in Shape, Giveaways, Honeymoon, Invites and Paper, Just Engaged and Proposals, Luxury Weddings, Military Brides, Moms and Maids, Music, Not Engaged Yet, Offbeat Weddings, Outdoor Weddings, Photos and Video, Plus-Sized, Pre-Wedding Parties, Reception Ideas, Registering and Gifts, Second Weddings, Snarky Brides, Students, Wedding 911, Wedding Hair and Beauty, Wedding Classifieds, Wedding Party, Wedding Recap and Withdrawal, and Wedding Woes.

Additionally, every month from January 2012 to December 2017 has an individual board for a total of 72.

There are 108 city boards. Many of the City boards cover an entire state and there can also be multiple boards for a major geographic region. The City boards include Alabama, Alaska, Arizona-Phoenix, Arizona-Tucson, Arkansas, California-Bay Area, California-Central, California-Inland Empire, California-Los Angeles, California-Napa,

California-Northern, California-Orange County, California-San Diego, California-Tahoe, Colorado, Colorado-Denver, Connecticut, DC, Delaware, Florida-Central Florida, Florida-North Florida, Florida-South Florida, Florida-West Coast, Georgia-Atlanta, Georgia-Savannah, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Illinois-Chicago, Illinois-Southern Illinois, Indiana, Indiana-Indianapolis, Iowa-Des Moines, Iowa-Quad Cities, Kansas, Kentucky, Kentucky-Louisville, Louisiana-Baton Rouge, Louisiana-New Orleans, Maine, Maryland, Maryland-Baltimore, Massachusetts-Boston, Massachusetts-Cape Cod, Massachusetts-Western Mass, Michigan-Detroit, Michigan-Grand Rapids, Michigan-Lansing, Michigan-Northern, Minnesota, Minnesota-Minneapolis and St. Paul, Mississippi, Missouri, Missouri-Kansas City, Missouri-St Louis, Montana, Nebraska, Nebraska-Omaha, Nevada-Las Vegas, New Hampshire, New Jersey, South New Jersey, New Mexico, Central New York, New York-Hudson Valley, New York-Long Island, New York-New York City, New York-Upstate, New York-Western, North Carolina, North Carolina-Outer Banks, North Carolina-Raleigh-Durham, North Dakota, Ohio-Cincinnati, Ohio-Cleveland, Ohio-Columbus, Ohio-Northeast, Ohio-Toledo, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania-Central, Pennsylvania-Northeastern, Pennsylvania-Philadelphia, Pennsylvania-Pittsburgh, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Carolina-Charleston, South Dakota-Sioux Falls, South New Jersey, Tennessee, Texas, Texas-Austin, Texas-Dallas and Ft. Worth, Texas-Houston, Texas-San Antonio, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Virginia-Richmond, Washington, Washington-Seattle, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Canada, Canada-Alberta, Canada-Toronto, and Canada-Vancouver.

Culture and Theme boards number 23 and consist of African American Weddings, Asian Weddings, Beach Weddings, Catholic Weddings, Chinese Weddings,

Christian Weddings, Destination Weddings, Eco-Friendly Weddings, Fall Weddings, Gothic Weddings, Interfaith Weddings, Interracial Weddings, Jewish Weddings, Latino Weddings, Luxury Weddings, Muslim Weddings, Retro and Vintage Weddings, South Asian Weddings, Sports Weddings, Spring Weddings, Summer Weddings, Vineyard Weddings, and Winter Weddings boards.

Finally, there are 31 Life Boards: 9 to 5, BNOTB (Babies Not on the Brain), Buying a Home, Cleaning and Organizing, Coupon Codes, Crafts, Decorating and Renovating, Entertaining Ideas, Entertainment, Family Matters, Fashion and Beauty, Gadgets and Technology, Gardening and Landscaping, Getting Pregnant, Green Living, Health and Fitness, International Nesties, Married Life, Military Nesties, Money Matters, Pets, Politics and Current Events, Relationships, Same-Sex Households, Sex and Romance, Sports, The Nest Book Club, Trash to Treasure, Travel, Trouble in Paradise, and What's Cooking?

TheKnot.com awards active posters a rank badge which appears next to a poster's name to indicate how many posts an individual has made on the site. The graphics look like award ribbons and visually indicate whether a particular user is a Newbie ('you might have been lurking for quite some time, but you're new to posting') poster with 0-500 posts, Bronze level with 501-2000 posts, Silver level with 2001-6000 posts, Gold level with 6001-15000 posts, or Platinum level with 15001 posts or more.

B. Corporate Structure, Ownership, Advertising

The Knot is a bridal media company and the self-proclaimed "#1 wedding website," TheKnot.com, boasting 2.1 million unique visitors a month, with expansions

into magazines, books, and reality television in its program *Real Weddings From The Knot* on the cable outlet Oxygen. It offers informal instruction to women regarding the way that weddings should be conducted (Engstrom, 2008). The size and popularity of this site makes it an ideal subject for research and is why it was chosen as the subject of this study.

TheKnot.com began in September 1996 as a part of America Online (Engstrom, p. 63). The site promotes various wedding retailers and relies heavily on advertising. It has links on its site to such sublinks as “Dresses,” “Local Vendors,” “Invitations and Paper,” and “Photography and Videos.” It claims to be “The most beloved wedding brand, reaching nearly 8 in 10 US brides – and more affluent brides than any other bridal media” (XO Group, Inc. - The Knot, 2014). It also claims to have a searchable gown gallery with 20,000 photos from 600 designers, and 13,000 local florists, photographers and wedding venues (XO Group, Inc. - About Us, 2014).

Advertisers can buy Web space for graphics that appears on the sides of all TheKnot.com pages and can also pay to appear in local vendor listings. However, vendors of any kind are not permitted to advertise their services on any community board and doing so may be cause for post deletion or banning from further participation. This includes links to personal Etsy shops or any mention of profiting. Users must agree to The Knot’s Privacy Policy, which describes the kind of information collected from an individual’s choice to participate. See Appendix 1 for the full policy.

The brand also includes *The Knot Magazine*, published quarterly and available in bookstores. This magazine launched in 2002, and the company now also has 17 regional magazines “Designed to help brides and grooms plan their weddings in their hometowns

(even if they live in other cities)” (XO Group, Inc. - Press Room, 2014). Each of these magazines is replete with advertising of each specific topic. These feature “Real Weddings,” which are billed as “Inspiring hometown weddings and the ingredients that make them special” (XO Group, Inc. - Press Room, 2014). The Knot has also formed a partnership with publishers to produce a series of books especially for brides and grooms. These books are authored by Carley Roney, one of the founders of The Knot, and she writes about “true tales, insider advice, checklists, and in-depth sections on updated wedding etiquette” (XO Group, Inc. - Press Room, 2014).

The Knot began broadcasting its own wedding television channel in March 2005. This is a 24/7 streaming wedding television channel. On this channel, viewers can watch reports on demand, but must view targeted ads first (Engstrom, 2008), exemplifying the fact that even in “on demand” programming, there is some form of external sponsorship.

Even after the wedding is over, The Knot continues to try to hold on to its target audience. It has two sites, TheNest.com, which is about all things home related, especially for new couples, and TheBump.com, which is about all things baby related. Presumably, one can transition easily from The Knot to The Nest to The Bump, all the while frequenting the same advertisers. The Nest offers sections on home décor and advertising, love and sex, and food and recipes, all of which are accompanied by ads touting products fitting these categories. The Bump is all about getting pregnant, pregnancy and parenting, again accompanied by advertising targeting this audience. These three sites are cross linked and promoted, insuring a seamless transition from one to the other.

Keeping advertisers in the forefront is key to the success of The Knot.

TheKnot.com merged with Wedding Channel in 2006, making its marketing reach even greater. For the first quarter of 2011, total revenue for the quarter was \$27.5 million.

The XO Group, Inc. is publicly traded on New York Stock Exchange. For 2014, its net revenues were \$143.7 million, up from \$133.8 the prior year. Over the last 5 years, its net revenues have been steadily increasing. (CNN Money, 2015).

As Engstrom (2008) expresses it, “The message across these media points to implicit and explicit endorsement of not only the institution of marriage but to the importance of consumption in attaining and maintaining it” (p. 65). The bridal industry is being supported in the name of instruction and entertainment.

It adheres to the practice as performed in other product branding that people understand the badge value of the product because of the way it makes them feel. This is similar to the experience of Nike, in its understanding that people buy shoes not because of the rational benefit contained in the technology, but because of the way they felt while wearing the shoes. Nike overtook rival Reebok in the early 1990s with this realization (Frank & Montague, 2001).

C. Comparison to Other Online Sites

As of January 2011, The Knot and its companion site, Wedding Channel, have the most page views and unique visitors by far when compared to other popular online wedding communities such as Brides, Project Wedding, Wedding Wire, and Martha Stewart Weddings (Magnet Street, 2011). Other niche wedding planning websites available in cyberspace include Wedding Bee, Style Me Pretty, NYCity Weddings,

Wedding Mapper, Offbeat Bride, One Wed, Chocolate Brides, Get Married, Best Destination Wedding, WedAlert, Wedding Basics and Bridal Tweet. All of these communities have forums as part of their online presence, except WedAlert.

The Knot features vendors, forums, do-it-yourself instructions, advice, personal wedding websites and planning tools, but does not feature a blog nor facilitate giveaways. The following graphic from Magnet Street (2011) compares the other mentioned wedding sites and their attributes.



Figure 12. A listing of top wedding communities and a chart of their components (Magnet Street, 2011).

The size of the community supported by each bridal website follows. The height and width of each cake represents page views and unique visitors, respectively.



Figure 13. Community sizes: Monthly page views and unique visits (Magnet Street, 2011).



Figure 14. Niche wedding communities (Magnet Street, 2011).

D. Moderation, Privacy, and Terms of Use Policies

Members of TheKnot.com, affectionately referred to as “Knotties” by fellow members, can also take on a leadership role in TheKnot.com’s online community. In addition to registered members, the board structure also utilizes moderators. Moderators are Knotties who go above and beyond their membership. They realize that the time they spend on the boards can be used to make them better, so they volunteer their time to moderate specific boards in the community. These members frequent the boards just as other users, but are also around to help other members and address issues. Moderators also have the ability to warn/ban users when necessary, based on their own discretion after reading and understanding the community rules (The Knot, 2015).

According to TheKnot.com’s terms of service (Appendix 2), moderators have the same privileges as all other members, but they are identified to patrol individual sub-boards on a volunteer basis to help when problems occur between members and to address any issues that arise. Moderators are the eyes and ears of The Knot staff, affectionately known as “The Knot Gods” on the board. The full terms of service is included in Appendix 2.

Moderators are accountable for four major responsibilities on the board they watch over: 1) reviewing flagged posts, 2) deleting comments, 3) closing and deleting threads, and 4) warning or banning users.

Members have the ability to flag questionable posts, which reports the post to moderators and The Knot employees, anonymously. This is not a way for users to indicate displeasure with a post or user as it is not a dislike button. Members flag posts,

which are then reviewed for the inclusion of spam, harassment, online vandalism, a member's personal information, or a post impersonating another member or an employee of The Knot. If any of these violations of the community rules are present, the moderators and The Knot administrators will take appropriate action.

Secondly, inappropriate comments that violate The Knot community rules can be deleted by the moderator on the board they watch for any of the reasons previously listed. Any posts between members who are disagreeing with one another do not violate any community rules and are not deleted.

Finally, moderators can issue warnings to threads that are not following the terms of service, and may outline violations, but will not specifically name violators by name. After a warning has been issued, if a thread has had five or more violations, the thread will be closed. Users that repeatedly violate the rules of the boards may also be banned from utilizing the board in the future (The Knot, 2015).

The structure of the community forums of this particular bulletin board, as studied through the theoretical perspectives discussed in the next chapter, provide a framework through which communication can be studied. The success of this from a historical combination of theories, histories, and methodologies will be the focus of my study.

Chapter 4: Literature Review: Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical perspectives that will guide this research study will be presented in this chapter and include the Internet and interactive dimensions of media, the dynamics of interaction in online communities, the creation of ties, the uses and gratifications theory, content analysis and intercoder reliability, and interaction in online groups through content analysis.

It was 1970 when Marshall McLuhan pronounced that ‘cool’ and inclusive ‘electric media’ would ‘retribalize’ human society into clusters of affiliation (McLuhan, 1970). Kozinets (1999) notes that people are not only retribalizing; they are “e-tribalizing” (p. 253). Rheingold (1993) used the term “virtual community” to refer to “social aggregations that emerge from the new when enough people carry on... public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (p. xx). Armstrong and Hagel (1996) have defined consumers united by a common interest “communities of interest.” The reliance of computer-mediated communication by networked social environments is becoming more and more prevalent (Butler, 2001). Knowledge is the most important research of such a community because it is intangible and its processes are hard to imitate (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). The Internet provides new opportunities to interact (Baym, 1993; Kraut, Scherlis, Mukhopadhyay, Manning, & Kiesler, 1996; Rheingold, 1993). As will be discussed below, the Internet has created communities of interest in regard to the wedding industry in general, and specifically TheKnot.com.

A. The Internet and Interactive Dimensions of Media

Increasing domination of the Internet has exposed brides-to-be to myriad ideas with just the search of a few key words. This is part of a growing trend, where people seek likeminded groups established on the Internet for support. These data networks allow individuals to engage in communication with many people by sending and receiving messages, creating basic communication capabilities which support significant social activity (Butler, 2001). Members benefit from external network connections because they gain access to new ideas and expertise not locally available (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). These sites do more than just provide a place where people can communicate; they are social structures that support ongoing activity (Finholt & Sproull, 1990; Sproull & Kiesler, 1990). They are similar to traditional social structures in many respects. Traditional social groups provide benefits to members, such as task-related advice (Blau, 1955; Dalton, 1979; Durmuşoğlu, 2013; Kanter, 1977), social support (Ibarra, 1995; Kram, 1988; Vigoda-Gadot & Talmud, 2010), companionship (McClelland, 1985; Roberts, 1998; Rubenstein & Shaver, 1980), opportunities to influence others (Winter, 1973), access to information, the dissemination of ideas, and support for like-minded action (Wellman, 1990; Wellman & Wortley, 1989; Wellman & Wortley, 1990).

Online social structures support the development of interpersonal relationships, feelings of companionship, and affiliation to a group (Furlong, 1989; Hiltz, 1985; Rheingold, 1993; Walther, 1994) as well as discussion and knowledge sharing (Abbott, 1988; Kraut, Attewell, & Kiesler, 1997; Wellman, 1995), permitting easy access to information and the dissemination of ideas (Constant, Sproull, & Kiesler, 1996; Finholt & Sproull, 1990), providing social and emotional support (Haythornthwaite, Wellman, &

Mantei, 1995; King, 1994; McCormick & McCormick, 1992; Rice & Love, 1987; Sproull & Faraj, 1995; Walther, 1996), and encouraging social action (Ogan, 1993).

This is true for wedding planning (Eligon, 2008), support for particular diseases (Coulson, Buchanan, & Aubeeluck, 2007; Coursaris & Liu, 2009; Lieberman & Goldstein, 2005; Lieberman & Goldstein, 2006; van Uden-Kraan, Drossaert, Taal, Shaw, Seydel, & van de Laar, 2008; Weinberg, Schmale, Uken, & Wessel, 1996), medical treatment options (Foderaro, 1995; King, 1994), dental anxiety (Buchanan & Coulson, 2007), teen health and sexuality (Suzuki & Calzo, 2004), senior communities (Furlong, 1989), parenting forums (Sarkadi & Bremberg, 2005; Brady & Guerin, 2010) and pregnancy support (Arnold, 2003). In regard to the latter, one author noted that women may feel the need to turn to someone other than medical practitioners or their family for source of information about pregnancy and childbirth. Arnold (2003) declared that “women felt empowered by the information and relational support they received through participation in the bulletin board,” and particularly for women, “empowerment is a process that occurs through the establishment of relationships based on mutual empathy and support” (p. 46). Further, “these mutual, empathetic relationships then provide the participants with the confidence and energy to take action in their lives. For the women who participated in this bulletin board, the process of empowerment occurred through the development of such mutual supportive relationships, and the exchange of information within them” (p. 46). In sum, “social networks are a critical source of valuable information and resources” (Burt, 1992).

The same rationale can be applied to bulletin boards devoted to wedding planning. As Kim (2000) notes,

As a society we're working harder, juggling more roles, and spending more of our free time at home – exhausted from our multifaceted lives, fearful of the violence that we see in movies, TV and video games, and physically removed from our family, friends and neighbors. So we go online – to shop, play games, trade collectibles, argue politics, or just shoot the breeze. The Web is becoming our collective town square – more and more, people are turning to Web communities to get their personal, social and professional needs met. This translates into a tremendous opportunity for Web community builders (p. ix).

1. Online Discussion Environments

The World Wide Web offers a truly a unique forum via online communities for computer-mediated communication and can connect individuals that would not have the opportunity to exchange ideas at the same rate if using another channel or offline community. As stated by Preece et al. (2003), an online community is a group of people who interact in a virtual environment, whereby those who communicate do not have to be present to respond to each other, and can find an instant, more accessible bond with other Internet users. This can refer to a wide variety of online activities. In the Internet, individuals can join in online communities that communicate only through computer-mediated communication. These provide communication among the social actors, and the boundaries between real and virtual can become blurred (Talamo & Ligorio, 2001). Such groups can “offer members a sense of belonging, connection, and cohesion. These groups, which outnumber all other forms of therapy, provide a place where members can learn they are not unique in their concerns” (Page, et al., 2000, p. 133). In these groups, there is an ability to hear feedback from other group members and to benefit from giving personal viewpoints to others (Page, et al., 2000). It is in the ‘social situation,’ according to Goffman (1964) that “an environment of mutual monitoring possibilities, anywhere within which an individual will find himself accessible to the naked senses of all others

who are present, and similarly find them accessible to him” (p. 134). For those in remote areas, these groups may be the primary way to participate in support groups. In general, we are becoming more mobile and our locations change rapidly in real life, making the virtual world all the more appealing. The ease with which we can transport ourselves, yet still remain in contact with a virtual community, increases the significance of the benefits of the virtual world. Communities are formed “to overcome the confines of real life in cyberspace, and envision cyberspace as a utopian universe for achieving equality” (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000, p. 179). The Internet has been thought of as the ultimate in community building and enrichment, “through which users can create relationships online in ways that have never been possible through traditional media” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 20). Healy (1996) adds, “The Internet is a testimony to that interdependence and a perpetual reminder that our lives are intrinsically and inescapably social. In the face of increasing geographic and occupational mobility, we need ways to maintain connections and connectedness, and the Net provides almost limitless possibilities” (pp. 64-65).

Another implication of online communities when compared to offline ones is the greater ease of accessibility via computer, cell phone, or any other electronic device with Internet connectivity. In our society, use of the Internet has become a daily repeatable event. According to LaRose and Eastin (2003), this usage has become a habit. They state, “Habit is a form of automaticity, a pattern of behavior (e.g. checking one’s email) that is triggered by an environmental stimulus (e.g. seeing one’s computer desktop in the morning) and performed without further active consideration... We may have thought carefully about our communication options the first time we used email; for example, but by the hundredth time we did not” (p. 10). Therefore, the messages that are conveyed

online may not be as well thought out or may not come across as intended when utilizing this technology as compared to the verbal and nonverbal cues that are evident in offline communication.

Both offline and online communication are shaped by a number of factors. In regard to an online community, the messages, purpose, software, governance, size, age and stage in the life-cycle, culture, and whether there is an addition of a physical component to the virtual one are all factors that shape the environment. These elements are determined by the characteristics of the members of the community and the rules set up for the community. For example, a community with a synchronous chat system will have a different character than one with an asynchronous bulletin board. (Preece, Maloney-Krichmar, & Abras, 2003). Likewise, offline communication is influenced by these same factors as well as the physicality, appearance, words, visual aids, voice, facial expressions and gestures, body language, and presence of the communicators. Here, a discussion in a classroom is much different than one would experience as a spectator at a baseball game.

Social networks as a type of online community can fulfill the need for validating trust for users when similar trust networks are not available offline. As Mislove et al. (2009) expresses it, “Many social networking sites, especially those used for advertising and ecommerce, ranging from mail to auctions, implicitly rely on some form of trust. For example, when a user accepts email from an unknown user, she is trusting the other party not to send spam. When a user selects a winning bidder in an auction, she is trusting the other party to pay the winning amount, and the winning user is trusting the seller to produce the auctioned item” (p. 41). They continue, “An unknown user should be highly

trusted only if multiple short disjoint paths to the user can be discovered” (p. 41). Users in the fringe will not be highly trusted unless they form direct links to other users. The ‘social’ aspect of these networks is self-reinforcing: in order to be trusted, one must make many ‘friends,’ and create many links that will slowly pull the user into the core” (p. 41). Offline, there is a similar process, but not as complex, to maintain trust. If junk mail is received, it is merely recycled and one can be asked to be removed from a future mailing. When a person walks into a store, money is traded instantly for an item. Online, every interaction is suspect, even when a ritual, such as an online purchase, is made, and this is another way which distinguishes online from offline communication. Yet, one advantage of online communities is that they can provide “weak tie” support, which will further be discussed in Chapter 4.C, which includes relationships that exist outside close family dynamics. This type of support provides anonymity and objectivity which may not be present in family groups (Turner, Grube, & Meyers, 2001), especially offline.

2. Online Communities

The history of online communities is an extensive topic beyond the scope of this study. However, it is important to be aware of its development and some of the highlights will be discussed in this section.

Computer networks that link people, as well as machines, become social networks and the members of these communities want to link with others for support, information, and companionship (Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Garton, Gulia, & Haythornthwaite, 1996). These networks began in the 1960s when the US Defense Department’s Advanced Projects Research Agency developed ARPANET, which linked university

computers to their users. In the mid-1970s, the Electronic Information Exchange System supported computerized conferences of scientific researchers (Cerf, 1993).

Online communities continued to evolve in the 1970s, when email was used as a way for researchers to facilitate communication. The first graphic to appear on the Internet, called an emoticon, was a smiley invented by Kevin Mackenzie in 1979 to liven up the dry context of the emails he sent; more graphics appeared in the mid- to late-1980s (Preece, Maloney-Krichmar, & Abras, 2003).

Personal computer use grew exponentially in the 1980s, organized into central communication hosts. These hosts were all linked together through the “Internet” and the “World Wide Web,” which connects computers through high capacity communication lines, each of which has its own local network.

A next noteworthy development in Internet communication was the bulletin board, a place online where people post messages to each other. Usually these messages are threaded, meaning that they start with a topic, and people can post replies to this topic directly underneath it (Preece, Maloney-Krichmar, & Abras, 2003). They became more popular as computers became more inexpensive and therefore more accessible, with larger numbers of channels and networks and large numbers of people who were now able to post and receive immediate feedback (James, Wotring, & Forrest, 1995) from others who were also online reading the same message at the same time or who would read it at a later time. While this use was at first strictly nonprofit, commercial use began in the 1990s. Community bulletin board systems and global profit networks such as America OnLine proliferated during this period. By late 1995, AmericaOnLine had an estimated 4.5 million subscribers, CompuServe had 4 million, and Prodigy had 1.5

million (Lewis, 1996). These commercial systems linked with the Internet and the growth expanded. The Internet's potential uses expanded as well (Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Garton, Gulia, & Haythornthwaite, 1996).

USENET News emerged in 1984, which was like a bulletin board where discussion topics were listed in a hierarchy, enabling users to read and post messages to different newsgroups, or categories. As of 1992, approximately 37,000 organizations worldwide were connected to the USENET. The USENET then consisted of more than 1,500 newsgroups and each newsgroup consisted of a single topic area. Each message had a subject line, and messages with identical subject lines constituted a thread. Threads could be followed forward to the most recent post or backward to the initial post, with all messages in between also available (Lewenstein, 1995). Lewenstein (1995) suggested that computer-mediated communication would not replace traditional face-to-face communication because while online communities allowed discussions without regard to time or space, they “do not allow researchers to acquire efficiently all the information (including judgments about veracity, thoroughness, and group opinion) that go into making scientific judgments” as is done in offline communication (p. 144).

From this, non-technical online communities, such as The WELL, were established. The WELL was founded in 1985 as the Whole Earth ‘Lectronic Link, as a place where writers and readers of the Whole Earth Review could have a dialogue (What is The WELL, 2014). This evolved into a place where there could be intellectual and social discussions. The first WELL computer and modem was located in Sausalito, California. Members of the asynchronous communities formed friendships, provided support for each other, and founded groups such as Craig’s List. Because the WELL

encouraged offline meetings, it encompassed face-to-face as well as virtual community (Healy, 1996).

In regard to synchronous communities, where all of the participants must be online at the same time, the first chat system was the Internet Relay Chat, or IRC. This was developed in 1988 by Jarkko Okarinen. Evolving from this was the ICQ and AOL Instant Messenger. ICQ was developed in Israel in 1996 and purchased by AOL in 1998. Today's version of instant messaging includes the sending of text messages via cell telephones to either one recipient or multiple, the more public posting of messages by way of the Internet site Twitter.com, Google's Gmail gchat, or via Facebook, for example.

CompuServe, owned by H&R Block, was the oldest major bulletin board and it supported nearly 992,000 members by 1992 (James, Wotring, & Forrest, 1995). Prodigy, another national bulletin board service, was released in 1990 and by 1992 had more than 1.3 million subscribers. According to James, Wotring and Forrest (1995), bulletin boards have: "1) a large potential audience; 2) fast sending and receiving of messages; 3) nearly transparent 'posting' of messages (weak gatekeeper functions); 4) large variety of special interest groups; and 5) relatively low cost [at the time this article was written, CompuServe had a per hour charge]" (p. 2).

What followed included three-dimensional environments with high graphics, such as The Palace, established in 1995 where users visited chat rooms, known to the community as palaces, as a graphical avatar and interacted with others who were also logged on (James, Wotring, & Forrest, 1995). Similar to The Palace is Second Life, a privately owned, subscription-based application which was founded in 1998. Second

Life offers an environment where individuals come together in an online community through representation by an avatar. Radde-Antweiler (2007) notes, “An increasing number of residents use this World not only as a kind a virtual playground but as an enlargement of their real-life possibilities that has to be taken seriously” (p. 188).

By 2001, according to a survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 84% of all Internet users had contact with an online community and 79% maintained regular contact with at least one group (Packel & Rainie, 2001). At that time, there were tens of thousands of communities, including e-mail lists, electronic bulletin boards, online chat groups, and role-playing domains (Dahlberg, 2001). Many of the communities were linked to larger entities, such as OneList.com, with 900,000 groups and 18 million members, and Geocities, where people could build their own personal websites, which were centered around various communities, such as “Area51” or “Heartland.” These were corporately owned, giving the Web space for free to the users, but charging fees to advertisers to have ads placed on the sites (Dahlberg, 2001). Free Web space made the Internet communities more and more accessible. By 2003, the Internet was embedded in everyday life, and “became the utility of the masses rather than the plaything of computer scientists” (Wellman, 2004, p. 125).

Communities on the Web sprung up covering all types of interest and knowledge. Almost any topic or interest can be found on the Internet in an online group. In addition, the use of the Internet kept expanding. Search engines, such as AltaVista and Google, organized information so that it was readily available for all users, and Web blogs enabled everyone to have their own diary online (Wellman, 2004). Communities such as the BlogHer Publishing Network, which was founded in 2005, “leads the new women's

web as a social publisher, as a research hub and with its in-person events” for, by, and about women together, allowing visitors to a participating blog to read and have access to many similar diaries with just the click of a button, without any additional searching required by the user. The BlogHer Network “reaches an audience of 100 million across premium blogs, Web sites, Pinterest, Facebook and Twitter” and also holds multiple conferences a year on different topics such as food, business promotion, and general camaraderie, where participants come together to expand their online community offline. (BlogHer Network).

Recently, online social networks have gained in popularity and are now among the most popular online destinations. These include Facebook (1.44 billion monthly active users as of March 2015), MySpace (over 190 million users), LinkedIn (over 11 million) and LiveJournal (over 5.5 million people), and are all sites built on social networking (PRNewswire, 2015; Mislove, Marcon, Gummadi, Druschel, & Bhattacharjee, 2009). These online social networks are organized around users, rather than around content and “The resulting social network provides a basis for maintaining social relationships, for finding users with similar interests, and for locating content and knowledge that has been contributed or endorsed by other users” (Mislove, Marcon, Gummadi, Druschel, & Bhattacharjee, 2009, p. 29).

3. Online Gaming Communities

After the World Wide Web was developed in the early 1990s, online communities began to proliferate. Among the first were online gaming worlds, such as Doom and Everquest, where participants were represented by avatars (Preece, Maloney-Krichmar, &

Abras, 2003). Online gaming has evolved to include for-pay gaming system communities such as Microsoft Xbox One and Sony PlayStation Network. Multiplayer gaming is not just limited to those sitting next to the player on the couch anymore. Now for a fee, while enjoying games that allow for more than one participant, one can choose an opponent that may be on another continent, as long as they are logged in to play at the same time.

Interactive games are the future of video games. This transitioned into computer games for very large computers that were not available to the populace (1940s and 50s), home gaming systems (1968) and video arcade machines (1971) (Kooiman & Sheehan, 2015). Prior to this, video arcade games had been using track balls to control movements. Atari created the game Pong in 1972, which was the first video arcade hit and then created a new interaction for its game, the joystick, which allowed for movement in four directions. Video game consoles included the ability for users to engage their characters in fighting, adventure, and role playing games. The Apple Macintosh computer was the first to use a mouse to manipulate a graphical user interface in 1984, which revolutionized gaming.

Handheld video games were introduced by Mattel in 1977, and included the Nintendo Game Boy, the Atari Lynx, and Sega Game Gear. By 2003 cellphones were becoming mainstream, and Nokia, one of the cell phone leaders, introduced a device that was both a phone and a gaming device. The introduction of the Apple iPhone in 2007 created a market where cell phones combined with available apps could use their phones for gaming capacity as well. (Kooiman & Sheehan, 2015)

Active games require players to move during cooperative and competitive games. Earliest types of interactive games included interfaces that supported people communicating with each other, such as playing soccer through a video conference, flying in a virtual environment, or exercising cooperatively (Mueller, Stevens, Thorogood, O'Brien, & Wulf, 2007). There is an input device which transmits information to a computer. This has developed into social gaming where one's opponents are connected through the computer so that games are being played in real time with active opponents. Players are then available and easily accessible in the real world (Trepte, Reinecke, & Juechems, 2012). Not only do gamers play online, but they also use the Internet for information on games and to connect with other players. As activities go digital, they break away from restrictions that limited them as to time and place (Eklund, 2015).

Gaming has become part of an online life which is an extension of social networks where the same relationships are nurtured online as offline (Eklund, 2015). Research on social interaction and friendship formation has shown that two different types of social ties are present in the social implication of games: bridging and bonding social capital. Bridging social capital refers to the weak social ties in which people feel informed and inspired by each other (Trepte, Reinecke, & Juechems, 2012). Bonding social capital refers to strong social ties that deliver emotional support and understanding (Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006). As with social network sites and online communities, studies have found only weak influences (Beaudoin & Tao, 2007; Huvila, Holmberg, Ek, & Widén-Wulff, 2010; Lee & Lee, 2010). A study by Trepte, Reinecke, and Juechems

(2012) concluded that three underlying processes – physical proximity, social proximity and familiarity determine the formation of offline social support through gaming.

As with other online activities, “the production of social networks and the circulation of social capital proves to be one of the most important aspects” (Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003, p. 89).

4. Wedding Planning and Computer Networks

The combination of weddings and computer networks existed almost as soon as the 1990s boom began. For example, virtual worlds, such as Second Life, a privately-owned, subscription based application, offers an environment where people perform rituals, such as weddings (Radde-Antweiler, 2007). Avatars are used to represent the users, and these virtual counterparts have weddings rivaling those in the real world. There are people who offer their services as wedding designers in Second Life, and there are various settings in which the avatars can get married. One can choose wedding clothes, jewelry, and presents, very much like their real life counterparts (Radde-Antweiler, 2007).

Computer social networks contain text-based interactions with messages entered on keyboards and transmitted in ASCII code. Basic email is an asynchronous form of communication by which messages are sent from one person to another, or to a group of people. Since email is bidirectional, the recipients can easily respond. These messages can also be stored, enabling the participants to be in different places and times. This gives more control over what is being written and sent. By the late 1990s, real time chat

lines, such as the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) also expanded (Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Garton, Gulia, & Haythornthwaite, 1996).

Email users note that this enables asynchronous communication, with rapid responses and the ability to forward messages. Users also claim that their level of communication rises as they become more and more proficient (Pickering & King, 1995). There are also changes created in personal tie networks, as will be further discussed in Section C.

Wellman et al. (1996) notes, “The rapid transmission of large files between individuals and among groups increases the velocity of communication, supports collaborative work, and sustains strong and weak ties” (p. 217). The relationship of strong and weak ties to computer communication will be discussed further below.

The rise of the computer has brought a whole new dimension to relationships in general, and relationships regarding weddings in particular. As Turkle (2009) notes, “The images of the computer offering a new expressive medium and of the computer offering a ‘schizoid compromise’ between loneliness and fear of intimacy are emblematic of the encounter between the machine and our emotional lives” (p. 280). She continues, “Today we suffer not less but differently. Terrified of being alone, yet afraid of intimacy, we experience widespread feelings of emptiness, of disconnection, of the unreality of self. And here the computer, a companion without emotional demands, offers a compromise. You can be a loner, but never alone. You can interact, but never feel vulnerable to another person” (pp. 279-80). The Web offers unprecedented opportunities for self-disclosure (Couldry, 2003). Couldry (2003) notes, “The Internet as a ‘many-to-many-medium’ is always potentially ambiguous as to whether you are communicating

with ‘the world’ or some private zone, or something in between, which makes the ritual dimension of self-disclosure on the Internet equally uncertain” (p. 129). He adds, “People, in their desire to be heard, will go on pressing for new connections to be made, and for old abstractions and formalities to be dismantled” (p. 143).

Online communities can be similar to face-to-face groups. “In terms of their social dynamics, physical and virtual communities are much the same. Both involve developing a web of relationships among people who have something meaningful in common, such as a beloved hobby, a life-altering illness, a political cause, a religious conviction, a professional relationship, or even simply a neighborhood or town. So in one sense, a Web community is simply a community that happens to exist online, rather than in the physical world” (Kim, 2000, p. x). Web communities “emerge from the net when enough people carry on... public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (Rheingold, 1993, p. xx).

These communities are bound together by common values, interests and consumption activities (Kozinets, 1999). For example, in regard to communities for older adults, Wright (2000) conducted a study of online supportive relationships. His study examined communication themes within social support messages among senior adults within an Internet community for this age group. He found that the most common themes were social support, humor, discussing family members with non-family members, and the use of others as sounding boards (Wright, 2000).

Many of these “e-tribes” are based on consumptive activities, such as online commerce, and are as a result of great interest to marketing and business (Kozinets,

1999). They provide fundamental changes to the way people shop and consume as well as communicate.

It has been noted that “Nothing has fueled the wedding frenzy of the fast five years more than the Internet” (Daniels & Loveless, 2007, p. 52). Print, television, and film, the traditional media forms, are all represented on the Internet. The longer an online user spends online, the more likely it is that he or she will join an online group. Once the interaction begins online, there is an increasing chance of turning to online sources for information and social interaction (Kozinets, 1999).

Web sites have brought wedding planning to the masses via The Knot, The Wedding Channel, and Brides, to name just a few of the countless Internet sites devoted to weddings and wedding planning (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). For example, on The Knot, vendors and planners clamor to be featured in the content on the site and television programs team up with The Knot to create wedding specials. The Knot Web site offers instant advice relating to all elements of wedding planning, while steering the customer to featured vendors and advertisers (Daniels & Loveless, 2007).

At online wedding community bulletin boards, brides can learn about anything and everything wedding-related from others going through the exact same planning process. Some of the more popular participatory community sites include TheKnot.com, Brides.com, and ProjectWedding.com. These online interactive communities provide a place where women can come together to share in the good times and the bad of the wedding planning process. TheKnot.com, in particular, is a comprehensive wedding hub on the World Wide Web which contains linked pages on all things wedding related. A sampling of topics, as previously discussed, include vendors for hire specific to a

particular region, wedding gowns and attendant attire, etiquette rules, ethnic and religious traditions, and honeymoon research. The site also features a wedding budgeter and checklist (McDermott, 2007). Of particular interest is the bulletin board area, featuring separate boards separated geographically by state and frequented by individuals planning affairs in that particular region, as well as special interest national boards specifically to discuss, for example, “wedding day beauty” or “reception ideas,” only. These national boards include participants from all over, not just a particular area. Individuals must specifically choose to join the message board area by selecting a username and password, and once the registration process is complete, they are permitted to post their questions and offer their advice to others.

Each message posted on the board is initiated by one of the board members, and involves a specific topic. The initial message is called a thread, and it is the first post of a topic. The discussion on the topic evolves from this thread. Huang (2010) notes, “The categorization of threads...can be done on an intuitive basis, by examining the overall purpose of the message, and certain expectations of what one achieves by posting an initial message (providing information, arguing for a certain point of view, etc.” (Huang, 2010, p. 201).

Some brides who have used the Internet to plan their weddings have made close friends with other prospective brides (Eligon, 2008). Eligon (2008) suggests that they do this to fill emotional gaps that their friends in real life cannot satisfy. Such communities “Focus on the shared ritual and offer camaraderie and information exchange” (Nelson & Otnes, 2005, p. 90). Brides begin by responding to a threaded query, and then increase their involvement so a close level of communication develops there (Eligon, 2008). He

declares, “Some brides chat from their desks at work, others can’t go to bed before signing in one more time, some even tune out their fiancé’s voice while riveted to the computer” (p. 1). Eligon (2008) interviewed one such bulletin board participant, and notes, “Elizabeth Salom, 22, said her best friend from childhood sometimes becomes jealous when she hangs out with friends from The Knot. She’ll put on a face and say something like, ‘Oh, your knottie friends are more important than I am,’”...She added: ‘Many times, we have a hard time explaining our friendships to other people. You say you’ve made some of your best friends on the Internet and people think you’re crazy’” (p. 1). It is through these developed friendships and established online communities that wedding customs become dynamic and those shifts, as well as the uses and gratifications participants feel, lend themselves to further research, as will be further discussed.

The Internet is also helpful for brides who are planning weddings that embrace more than one culture. Nelson and Otnes (2005) note that “Many brides – especially those planning cross-cultural weddings – use the Internet as a resource because it enables them to easily access information and communicate with widely dispersed providers of wedding resources” (p. 90). The blending of different cultures can cause cross cultural ambivalence such as “the emergence of mixed or multiple emotions that arise from conflict among values, norms, traditions and practices of different cultures not found within the same society” (pp. 89-90). The virtual communities can resolve a bride’s cross-cultural ambivalence through its roles as counselor, consumption advisor, sharing advocate, and cultural advisor (Nelson & Otnes, 2005).

While studies have probed the influence of the Internet on weddings using a variety of theories and methods, a study by Nelson and Otnes (2005) employed a new

qualitative research methodology called netnography or “ethnography on the Internet” (p. 90). In this form of study, “It allows the researcher to gain access to consumer discussions by observing and/or participating in communications on publicly available online forums” (p. 90). The researcher can unobtrusively collect data and study patterns of behavior using this method. With the abundance and popularity of wedding bulletin boards currently online, this methodology is poised to provide researchers with additional insight and information for future exploration. The fact that weddings will continue as individuals around the world grow-up, find their life partners, and eventually plan wedding-related events implies that weddings will continue with no end to the research material in sight. And, because the Internet is a global phenomenon, it allows for future wedding studies to easily expand beyond the borders of the United States.

B. Dynamics of Interaction in Online Communities

Online communities and their development have been discussed frequently in scholarly literature. Communication through the Internet has become a daily event for many individuals, ranging from checking one’s e-mail to surfing the Internet to visiting Facebook pages. Due to its inherent nature, the Internet is a natural focus in regard to communication and “as its name suggests, is not about an escape into isolation, but rather an ongoing and outgoing exercise in connectedness” (Healy, 1996, p. 57).

As previously noted, the history of the Internet begins with the early days of the ARPANET, which is an acronym for the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, in the 1960s. The ARPANET laid the groundwork for the packet switching networking technology between machines that would ultimately become the World Wide Web in the

early 1990s. Ultimately, Tim Berners-Lee and CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, were instrumental in developing the Web. By 1996, the Internet spanned the entire globe, connecting people across towns, time zones, and continents through Web sites and community groups supported by Web sites. The earliest form of communication on the Internet was e-mail, developed by Ray Tomlinson of Bolt Beranek and Newman, Inc., who selected the @ sign for use in email addresses in 1972. In the first form of e-mail, one person could send an e-mail message to just one person (Preece, Maloney-Krichmar, & Abras, 2003). Since that time, researchers have analyzed the textual, audio, and visual practices of Internet users, known as computer-mediated communication (CMC), a term which was originally coined by Hiltz and Turoff in 1978 (Hiltz & Turoff, 1993). They describe CMC as using “the computer to structure, store, and process written communications among a group of persons. When something is entered through one terminal, it may be obtained on the recipients' terminals immediately or at any time in the future until it is purged from the computer's memory” (p. 7).

As noted by Hiltz & Turoff, when discussing CMC, two different types of communication forms are included. Computer-mediated communication includes the “synchronous or asynchronous electronic mail and computer conferencing, by which senders encode in text messages that are relayed from sender's computers to receivers” (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000, p. 175). Web browsing, including audio and visual components, is also included in this definition. The computer, and more specifically the Internet, has had an impact on the way people connect, interact, and obtain resources from one another (Wellman, 2001). This may be synchronous, where all the parties that are communicating are present at the same time or asynchronous, where the parties do

not have to be present at the same time. Examples of synchronous communication include telephone conversation or chat rooms, and asynchronous communication includes an Internet bulletin board or e-mail. Generally, asynchronous CMC has been viewed as being impersonal. However, Turner, Grube and Meyers (2001) reported that it could be impersonal, interpersonal, or hyperpersonal. Impersonal CMC are task based interchanges with little interaction. Interpersonal CMC comprises socially oriented exchanges between users (Turner, Grube, & Meyers, 2001). Walther (1996) created the category of hyperpersonal CMC, which describes the depth of personal exchanges. Turner, Grube and Meyers (2001) noted that it occurs “within CMC based on senders’ and receivers’ reciprocal and hyperbolic construction of each other and their relationship, within a minimal cues environment” (p. 233). This especially relates to online support groups, because participants already have a common identity, and messages exchanged within the group reinforce this.

Prior research has shown that media channels have been ranked by the degree of personalness and warmth found in the medium. Face-to-face communication offline has been found to be the most rich, followed by telephone, electronic mail, personal written communication, and formal written communication (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000).

The virtual community differs from real-world relationships first in the number of interactions possible. One scholar notes that contemporary people in the western world know about 1,000 people but maintain only about 20 community ties (Kochen, 1989). Through computer communication, the size and proximity of one’s community can increase, forming new connections. Diversity also increases on the Internet, where it is easier to form bonds with people who have a variety of backgrounds. Relationships can

be formed by shared interests without the constraint of different social status. There is a shift of community of shared interests rather than a community of shared neighborhoods or groups. (Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Garton, Gulia, & Haythornthwaite, 1996)

Some scholars have viewed the Internet “as the ultimate in individualism, a medium with the capability to empower the individual in terms of both the information he or she seeks and the information he or she creates” (Singer, 1998, p. 10). Online communities are distinct from physical groups because “The Net erases boundaries created by time and distance, and makes it dramatically easier for people to maintain connections, deepen relationships, and meet like-minded souls that they would otherwise never have met. It also offers a strange and compelling combination of anonymity and intimacy that brings out the best and worst in people’s behavior” (Kim, 2000, p. x).

The Internet has novel informational characteristics, varying from “a mass-market medium to a vehicle for the provision of very specific high-value information to very specific high-consumption audiences” (Abrahamson, 1998, p. 15). It can range from a mass audience to a “fractionalized” one, with endless possibilities for coverage, ranging from sites geared to all, to those attracting a specialized segment, to those with no specific targeted community (Ruggiero, 2000).

Communication online has been shown to produce higher quality ideas, and maintains social distance. However, it is more difficult to reach an agreement since the number of ideas and the complexity of the process hinders agreement. Much of online communication involves the exchange of information, and resulting access to new information through new social circles. It is also used for social support, companionship, and a sense of belonging (Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Garton, Gulia, &

Haythornthwaite, 1996). This is true even when the groups are composed of people who hardly know each other (Haythornthwaite, Wellman, & Mantei, 1995; McCormick & McCormick, 1992; Rice & Love, 1987; Walther, 1996; Wellman & Gulia, 1999).

Online communities possess unique characteristics when compared to offline communities. Computer-mediated communication allows for large groups to share ideas and feelings even when group members are located hundreds of miles away from one another. Communities utilizing Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) use broader bandwidth, wireless portability, globalized connectivity, and personalization to keep in contact (Wellman, 2001). In the past, before any advances in transportation, people would typically only ever have contact offline with those that lived in the same community with them. Today, people from varied cultural, geographic, religious, social, and economic groups can exchange messages through the Internet (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998). Virtual communities consist of members who can come together from all over, contribute, read and link to other areas of shared interest on the Web (Smith, 1999). These groups create their own boundaries and impose them on themselves, which can create in- and out-groups (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998), as is done in real life. Communication scholars naturally find this technology of increasing interest because it removes the nonverbal cues of an interaction. Assumptions are made of communicators according to how they choose to type their thoughts, their identifiability, and what they decide to communicate. In offline communication, there are fewer assumptions as more information is available and is easier to clarify via verbal and nonverbal cues.

Research by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) has found that users chose the Internet to fulfill interpersonal needs because they avoided offline face-to-face interaction

or found it to be less rewarding. Those who were “more mobile, economically secure, satisfied with life, comfortable with approaching others in an interpersonal context, and who felt valued in their interpersonal encounters preferred the more instrumental Internet uses, such as information seeking. Those who were less satisfied and who felt less valued in their face-to-face communication used the Internet as a functional alternative to interpersonal communication, or to fill time” (p. 187). This resulted in reduced communication in the household, smaller social circles, and greater depression.

Reported reasons for using the Internet are varied. Some users are online to accomplish a specific goal, while others surf the Internet for fun. There are discussion groups in which some are observers, while others are active participants (Ruggiero, 2000). An example of mixed users in a single community would be CMC discussion groups which have provided support for patients as well as those whose loved ones are faced with various diseases (Turner, Grube, & Meyers, 2001). Prior research has demonstrated that as a medium for social interaction, the Internet is a place where the user would secure support and improve psychological well-being (LaRose & Eastin, 2003). This is especially important if support would not be readily available offline due to other life commitments such as employment and/or family raising or lack of an acceptable local option such as a support group.

Some members participate in online communities to seek information. This is collaborated by the weak ties approach, which suggests that people seek answers from those with whom they have weak ties when those with whom they have strong ties are not available. In addition, different sources of information can provide input which would aid in decision making. A positive explanation for the emergence of communal

sharing is that people share for an altruistic purpose because of their sense of belonging and because of the intimacy which their participation has generated (Park, Gu, Leung, & Konana, 2014). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that people exchange experiential more than cognitive information on bulletin board systems (Huang, 2010).

It has also been theorized that social status rather than social action is the main goal of Internet usage, with the activities pursued relating to achieving status (LaRose & Eastin, 2003). As LaRose and Eastin (2003) note, “Perhaps by finding like-minded individuals on the Internet and expressing ourselves in those venues we enhance our social status. Or, recalling Turkle’s (1995) *Life on the Screen* ethnography, perhaps the Internet is a means of constantly exploring and trying out new, improved versions of ourselves” (p. 25). As Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) express it, “Technologies such as the Internet, then, possess both interactive/social and informational/task-oriented dimensions for users. In this respect, the needs the Internet fulfills may not be too different from the needs met by more traditional interpersonal and media channels, including talk radio, which also enhances social interaction” (p. 180). Whatever the reasons, attributes of online communities are unique as compared to offline communities and are worthy of continued research.

However, these groups often never physically meet each other, and many interactions among them are fleeting and functional (Kozinets, 1999). Most social and psychological theories have been developed based on communication which occurs face-to-face. The main difference between online and offline environments is the strength of the ties between the participants. These ties are either weak or strong, and most online networks, such as stock message boards and The Apple Inc. message board, are described

as having weak ties (Park, Gu, Leung, & Konana, 2014). As a result, “people can easily leave an online community without regard for other members (p. 1).” However, the offline and online environments can be integrated and prior research has utilized the uses and gratifications theory to study communication in online networks.

C. Creation of Ties

The creation of ties is another topic that has been discussed by scholars in an attempt to evaluate behavior on the Internet. Ties are the links that bind individuals to other individuals, manifested by the kinds and frequency of communication (Pickering & King, 1995). Granovetter (1973) found that the strength of a tie would be determined by the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy, and the reciprocal services. These ties are classified as strong or weak based on four dimensions: time, emotional intensity, mutual confidence, and reciprocity (Pickering & King, 1995). Pickering and King (1995) defined strong ties as those which “are maintained through frequent and emotionally intense communication, often entailing the sharing of confidences, and over time, the establishment of reciprocity between the parties” (p. 480). Most network studies make use of Granovetter’s hypothesis (Jack, 2005). These are ties maintained between spouses, children, close friends, and co-workers with mutual dependencies.

Strong ties have frequent interaction, at least two times a week (Jack, 2005). The stronger the tie between two people, the greater the number of people to whom they will both be tied. Also, the stronger the tie between two individuals, the more similar they are (Granovetter, 1973).

On the other hand, according to Pickering and King (1995), “weak ties are maintained through less frequent and less emotionally intense communication, in relationships that do not require or encourage sharing of confidences or establishment of strong reciprocities” (p. 480). These are the kinds of ties maintained among extended family members, co-workers who are not central to the individual and everyday acquaintances. Weak ties have “bridges” between them, and these bridges create more paths among the network (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1365). The removal of any given tie breaks up these bridges, and according to Granovetter, this does more damage to the network than a removal of a strong tie. While a strong tie will hinder search, a weak tie will impede the transfer of complex knowledge (Hansen, 1999).

According to Granovetter (1973), it is the strength of the tie that determines the strength and quality of the relationship. He believed that a network should have both strong and weak ties. Weak ties would be critical to a social structure because through them, information flows to other areas and to the broader reaches of society as well (Jack, 2005). The importance of having both strong and weak ties is related to the desirability of connections to other social systems (Ibarra, 1993). While information gained through strong ties is more trustworthy, detailed and accurate, strong ties are perceived as being less beneficial than weak ties because the information they provide can be redundant because it stems from the same social circle (Burt, 1992). Jack (2005) measured strong ties in a business setting, and determined that when building and forming a relationship, it was the utilization of a tie that was important, not the frequency of contact. It was through strong ties that personal and business relationships were formed and maintained.

Within her experiment, it was through strong ties that knowledge and resources were disseminated.

Wellman et al. (1996) believed that online relationships often meet most of the criteria for strong ties, because they “facilitate frequent, reciprocal, companionable and often supportive contact... without the loss of relationships that often accompanies residential mobility” (p. 221). This is despite the fact that many online communities are comprised of people who have never met, are weekly linked, and socially and physically distant. People can read messages on many Internet boards invisibly without contributing. However, there can be an increase in self-esteem, a demonstration of expertise, an earning of respect, and the providing of aid (Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Garton, Gulia, & Haythornthwaite, 1996). In addition to personal attachments, there can be a strong attachment to the organization to which they are participating. Strong ties are more accessible and willing to be helpful (Levin & Cross, 2004).

Granovetter (1973) also studied weak ties and community organization. As a part of his thesis research in the 1960s, he interviewed people who changed jobs to ascertain how they found their new positions. He found that many people found information about new positions through personal contacts. However, these contacts were acquaintances rather than close personal friends (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010). This led Granovetter (1973) to develop his theory of strong and weak ties. He determined that if in a community each person was tied to every other person in the group and to none outside, the organization would be severely inhibited. While media information could reach all the members of the community, people rarely act on such mass-media information unless it is also transmitted through personal ties (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rogers, 1995).

According to Granovetter (1973), “Weak ties are more likely to link members of *different* small groups than are strong ones, which tend to be concentrated within particular groups” (p. 1376).

The diffusion of information is influenced by social network structure (Friedkin, 1982). As Friedkin (1982) determined, “Though weak ties may be less efficient than strong ties in promoting information flow, they may be nonetheless more important than strong ties in promoting information flow about activities outside a group” (p. 274).

While weak ties may be less efficient contributors, they are important simply because of their number of connections (p.284). Constant et al. (1996) further hypothesized that “Advice from more diverse ties will be more useful than advice from less diverse ties,” (p. 120) but found in actuality that advice from a less diverse group increased its usefulness. Also, weak ties account more for the dissemination of information outside of the organization. Finally, people maintain more weak ties than strong ties, and this increases the flow of information. On the negative side, there is a lower probability of information flow based on weak ties alone. Weak ties have been found to be instrumental in finding a job, diffusing ideas (Granovetter M. , 1983; Rogers, 1995), sharing public information (Uzzi & Lancaster, 2003) and technical advice (Constant, Sproull, & Kiesler, 1996).

Experiments on information sharing in some networks have found that some organizations do share knowledge and help others, even to remote strangers they will never meet (Constant, Kiesler, & Sproull, 1994). This is despite the fact that the availability of electronic communication technology is no guarantee that there will actually be a sharing of knowledge. These networks are made up of individuals who

choose to participate; some of these are sponsored by a specific organization or professional association (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). While it could be argued that in the absence of strong ties, help from weak ties might not be forthcoming or of a low quality, researchers found this not to be the case. Organizational motivation would also play a part (Constant, Sproull, & Kiesler, 1996).

Knowledge has been viewed as a public good related to communities (Wasko & Faraj, 2000), something that can only be provided if the group members contribute. Each community has its own language and rules. Three Usenet groups, similar to bulletin boards, were examined by Wasko and Faraj (2000). Participation in these groups was voluntary and people posted and replied to messages in an asynchronous text-only message system. When a message was posted it was visible to all readers, and little information about the participants was available other than an email address and what was disclosed by the posted. Wasko and Faraj categorized 531 comments through content analysis to determine why people participated in the community. It was determined that the participants believe that knowledge sharing was the right thing to do and that they also had a desire to advance the community as a whole. They found that members acted out of community interest rather than self-interest, and that self-interest impeded the functioning of the community.

In an experiment, Constant, Kiesler and Sproull (1994) studied employees in an 11,000 person firm. 208 employees in a two week period asked “does anyone know” questions and received 1,600 answers to those questions, mostly from strangers. Sharing can have a positive effect on the identity and inner qualities, and have direct personal benefits. Information was categorized into two groups, product or expertise, correlating

to tangible and intangible information. Information as a product was viewed to be the produce of reciprocal exchange and social transmission. However, information as expertise was perceived to be a part of themselves. This tied into their identity and self-worth. Bock et al. (2005) found in group knowledge sharing the reciprocal relationship affected the attitudes toward the sharing of knowledge. The more favorable the attitude toward knowledge sharing is, the greater the intention to share knowledge.

Computer networks make it easy and inexpensive to ask advice through the Internet (Constant, Sproull, & Kiesler, 1996). While a network is a set of relations between objects, social networks refer to the relationships between people. This can be used to describe such Internet locations as Facebook, Twitter, Linked in and bulletin boards. It can also refer to relationships in a more broad sense (Trefalt, 2014). People would rather turn to other people as opposed to documents to solve a problem (Allen, 1977; Cross & Sproull, 2004; Mintzberg, 1973; Pelz & Andrews, 1966). Relationships have been important in finding information (Burt, 1992). As Ellison, Gibbs and Weber (2015) describe it, social network site users “are influenced by site norms, which may be understood differently among users” (p. 107). A user is defined as “any individual who creates an account and agrees to the site’s terms of service and other policies” (p. 107). The audience “Can be global, limited to one’s entire friend network, or targeted to subsets of one’s articulated network” (p. 107). They are primarily used for social and interpersonal goals.

The issue of why individuals help virtual strangers, or those who have weak ties, where there is no immediate benefit to the contributor, and where those who are not members of the group can obtain the same knowledge as members has been discussed by

a number of scholars. Those who are looking for answers have no control over who sees their questions or whether they will actually get a response. Those who contribute knowledge have no assurance that the favor will be returned. This contrasts with face to face communication, where people know each other and there are expectations of obligation and reciprocity. In an electronic network, individuals access the network, review the questions posed, decide on what they will answer, and then contribute a response in their own personal time (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Help on a computer network is founded on organizational citizenship (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). In Constant, Sproull, and Kiesler's (1996) study, useful advice was received despite the lack of a personal connection between the parties. Weak ties provided more useful information. The number of replies did not relate to the usefulness of the information, or the solution of the problems. Replies of people responding due to organizational motivation were found by Constant to be more useful. The transmission of ideas in a group was found by Dokko, Kane and Tortoriello (2014) to depend in part on the psychological attachment to the entity. The person formulating the answer must think that their contribution will have value to others and, as a result, will derive personal benefits to the poster. Building an online reputation is a strong motivator for the contributor so that one's reputation in the group can be enhanced (Wasko & Faraj, 2005).

There would also have to be an element of trust from intermediary personal contacts. Levin (1999) found that when there was trust in strong ties, knowledge transfer between scientists and engineers occurred, but trust alone could substitute when there were weak ties. McAllister (1995) found there were two types of trust: affect based and cognition based. Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) distinguished this as benevolence,

which has a high affect component, and competence, which is cognition based. Levin and Cross (2004) concluded that “while benevolence-based trust improves the usefulness of both tacit and explicit knowledge exchange, competence-based trust is especially important for tacit knowledge exchange” (p. 1486).

Wasko and Faraj (2005) studied message postings on a bulletin board of a professional association. They determined that “a didactic link is created between two individuals when one responds to another’s posting” (p. 44) while studying the number of messages exchanged and the number of persons to whom the messages responded. A total of 3,000 messages were posted by 604 participants in the network in the time frame studied. This assessed the social capital among the participants in her study (. 44). They concluded that social capital “develops and plays an important role underlying knowledge exchange, despite the media richness limitations inherent in online communication” (p. 50). Those individuals who were connected to the greatest number of others were more likely to have longer lasting contributions to the group. It was also concluded that it is important to have a critical mass of active participants to sustain an online community. Individuals contributed a large volume of information in her study even though they had no expectation of reciprocity. On the other hand, direct reciprocity was not necessary to sustain communication in these communities.

Researchers have begun to evaluate the question of tie strength from active social media sites like Facebook (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010). Marlow et al. (2009) analyzed the friendship links contained in the user profiles to determine whether there were strong ties present. They found three types of links: 1) there was reciprocal communication if the user sent and received messages to the person at the other end of the link; 2) there was

one way communication if the user sent one or more messages to that person; 3) there was a maintained relationship if the user followed information about the other person by clicking on a link in the Facebook feed, or visiting the other person's page more than once. These ties are not mutually exclusive and can overlap.

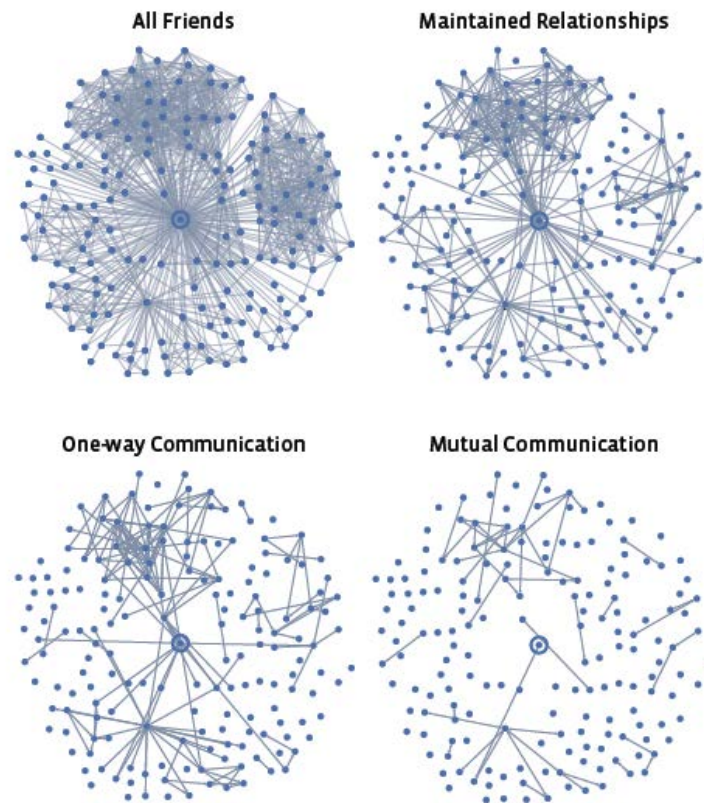


Figure 15. Four different views of a Facebook user's network neighborhood, showing the structure of links corresponding respectively to all declared friendships, maintained relationships, one-way communication, and reciprocal (i.e. mutual) communication (Marlow, Byron, & Rosenn, 2009).

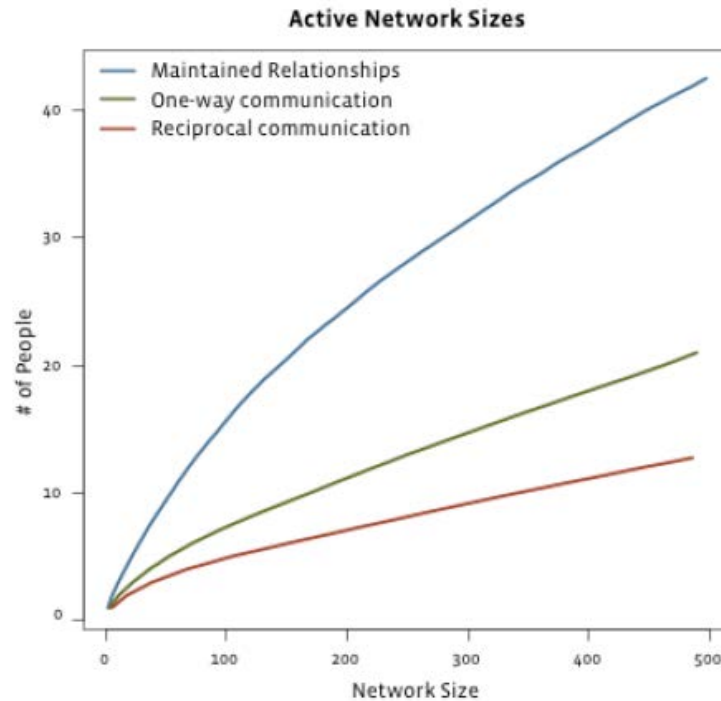


Figure 16. Active network sizes. The number of links corresponding to maintained relationships, one-way communication, and reciprocal communication as a function of the total neighborhood size for users on Facebook (Marlow, Byron, & Rosenn, 2009).

This study confirmed that even when people had a large number of friends on their Facebook pages, greater than 500, the number with whom they actually communicated was between 10 and 20 and the number that they actually followed was under 50 (Marlow, Byron, & Rosenn, 2009). Marlow et al. (2009) theorized that there was a third kind of tie, which they called “passive engagement.” Those in this category would keep reading news about those to whom they were linked even though they did not communicate with them.

Similar to Marlow’s study, Huberman, Romero and Wu (2009) analyzed Twitter links. For each user, they took the number of people who that user followed and then defined the strong ties of the user to be those to whom at least two messages were

directed over the observation period. For those with over 1,000 followers, there were below 50 to whom there were strong ties.

D. Uses and Gratifications Theory

An overview of the uses and gratifications theory and its application to online communities, including the multiplication of the uses of the theory, and commercial and marketing applications, is discussed below. By utilizing this theory, it can be studied why certain forms of media have been selected by users. This is the theory used in the within study to investigate the ways in which the information ascertained through TheKnot.com forum is processed by those who frequent it.

1. History of Theory

The uses and gratifications theory was established to “study the gratifications that attract and hold audiences to the kinds of media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological needs” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 3). In 1959, sociologist Elihu Katz was the first to use the “uses and gratifications” term and looked beyond “what do the media do to people?” and instead focused on “what do people do with the media?” (Katz, 1959, p. 2). Historically, this theory emerged as researchers focused on the idea of an active audience. Scholars noted “that although both uses and effects sought to explain the outcomes or consequences from mass communication, they did so by recognizing the potential for audience initiative and activity” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 8). Audience activity was thought to be variable because individuals have different ways of exhibiting engagement at different times in different settings. Audience activity can range from

both high to low levels of involvement. For example, individuals, especially if confined to a home or under stress, can form high levels of attachment to media, such as television, newspapers, and communication technologies (Ruggiero, 2000).

Uses and gratifications theory gives prominence to how and why individuals use media to satisfy needs (Klapper, 1963). Prior research utilizing the uses and gratifications theory focused on the motivation and behavior of an audience member and involved the use of certain mass media, particularly television, where certain programs were found to be related to specific human needs (Eighmey & McCord, 1998). Rubin (1994) defines these needs as including information acquisition, escape, emotional release, companionship, reality exploration, and value reinforcement. In regard to television, fulfillment can come from “a medium’s content (e.g. watching a specific programme), from familiarity with a genre within the medium (e.g. watching soap operas), from general exposure to the medium (e.g. watching TV), and from the social context with which it is used (e.g. watching TV with the family)” (Chandler, 1994, p. 1). The uses and gratifications theory has been studied related to specific television genres, a sampling of which include soap operas (Alexander, 1985; Babrow, 1987; Perse, 1986), news programs (Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rayburn, 1980; Rubin A. M., 1981; Rubin & Perse, 1987), reality television (Nabi, Stitt, Halford, & Finnerty, 2006; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007), and religious television (Abelman, 1987; Korpi & Kim, 1986; Pettersson, 1986). Beyond television, this theory has also been utilized to discuss talk radio (Armstrong & Rubin, 1989; Surlin, 1986; Turow, 1974) and magazine reading (Payne, Severn, & Dozier, 1988).

Rosengren (1974) proposed that individuals utilize media while evoking

perceived problems and perceived solutions. For each viewer,

The problems and solutions constitute different motives for gratification behavior that can come from using the media or from other activities. Together the media use or other behaviors produce gratification (or non-gratification) that has an impact on the individual or society, thereby starting the process anew (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994, p. 352).

This definition of fulfillment is true as well when one examines virtual Internet communities. These virtual communities (VCs) are popular social environments in which interaction occurs through a sharing of ideas, information and advice. This interaction would be impossible or too expensive through traditional media (Chan & Li, 2010).

The uses and gratifications theory has subsequently been applied to computer mediated communication and virtual communities. The Internet is the most rapidly developing new medium in history (Eighmey & McCord, 1998). As a result, it is the subject of growing business interest, and advertisers are examining the ways in which the sources on the Internet are successful and useful to consumers. This would enable them to not only provide information to the visitors of a website, but to individualize this information to each unique visitor (Eighmey & McCord, 1998, p. 187).

More recently, the uses and gratifications theory has been employed for social media including friend-networking sites (e.g. MySpace and Facebook) (Leung, 2013; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Wang, Tchernev, & Solloway, 2012), Twitter (Chen, 2011), and online gaming (Wu, Wang, & Tsai, 2010). Most notably, it has also been applied to the Internet (Charney & Greenberg, 2001; Dimmick, Kline, & Stafford, 2000; Eighmey & McCord, 1998; Ferguson & Perse, 2000; Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Kaye, 1998; Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999; LaRose, Mastro, &

Eastin, 2001; Lin, 1999; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Parker & Plank, 2000; Perse & Greenberg-Dunn, 1998).

Research regarding new media shows that the Internet is used either for information or entertainment (the “content”) or for the experience of using the media, such as browsing the Internet. These have been termed content gratifications and process gratifications (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004). In content gratifications, the focus is the message and in process gratifications, it is the actual use of the medium. Stafford, Stafford and Schkade (2004) gave the example that Internet users could be motivated by the enjoyment of random browsing, or by the desire for specific information from a specific Web site.

Online communities provide both content and process gratifications. Asynchronous communities allow content to be posted and explored immediately as well as in the future. This allows for many users to post questions and receive feedback on their thoughts and feelings, making it a content process. Other users can share their experiences in an effort to entertain or inform the original poster. Online communities also provide users who have interest in learning about different topics the opportunity to read a message when it is first posted, for example, and then return back to it the next day or the next month, if desired, which is a process gratification. The process of choosing which topics to open and explore satisfies the inquisitiveness of many participants.

Historically, the uses and gratifications theory has been prominent in the beginning of each new mass communications form, such as newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet. Ruggiero (2000) notes that personal computers have been linked to the fulfillment of gratifications such as social identity, interpersonal communication,

parasocial interaction, companionship, escape, entertainment, and surveillance. As new communication technologies rapidly materialize, the range of possible topics for uses and gratifications research also multiplies. This flexibility is particularly important as we are living in an information age in which “computer-mediated communication permeates every aspect of our individual and social lives” (p. 28).

Eighmey and McCord (1998) conducted a study which involved 31 participants who were selected so that the group would reasonably represent the user base of the Internet at the time of the study. Five websites were selected, representing major brands well known to consumers, receiving favorable reviews in the press, and representing a diverse range of approaches and industries. The five websites were then compared using nine groups of factors and 16 scalar items. This study called attention to the importance of organizational ideas and considerations of efficiency in the use of website design features. In the information age, people want information. This study indicates members of the World Wide Web audience are attracted to information that adds value in both form and substance, but that the information must reach visitors in a time period commensurate with the perceived value of the information (Eighmey & McCord, 1998).

The commercial aspect of virtual communities (VCs) was also discussed by Zhao, Lu, Wang, Chau and Zhang (2012). These commercially oriented VCs establish relationships among online strangers and provide important complementary information sources of products and services, but are also characterized by weak ties, geographical dispersion. A sense of belonging is a vital factor in the success of such a VC and is reflected by the “emotional attachment of the user to the virtual community” (Zhao, Lu, Wang, Chau, & Zhang, 2012, p. 574). A sense of belonging in a virtual community will

lead to a positive outcome. Participation in a VC usually refers to behaviors of sharing with and getting information, experiences, opinions, or knowledge from other users in the VC. Their study addresses which factors would cultivate the sense of belonging of members in a VC, and what factors would encourage the participation in the VC in terms of getting and sharing information, experiences, and knowledge. It was found that a sense of belonging was the most significant factor in participation, and that emotional attachment in a VC was an important factor in converting an inactive member to an active one. They concluded that VC providers should focus on cultivating the members' sense of belonging. The sense of belonging will make the members want to share knowledge, and that this desire is greater than the intention to get knowledge. The sense of belonging could be enhanced by organizing activities where members could get familiar with each other in face to face meetings, or by increasing personal exposure, such as by showing photographs. This would strengthen the economic value of the VC and demonstrated that trust was regarded as the primary factor of emotional involvement.

In regard to relationship marketing, McWilliam (2000) discussed the potential benefits of real time chat room communications and discussions in forums on bulletin boards. By making sure that consumers can interact freely with each other and build a friendly online community, marketers can follow consumers' perceptions about and feelings toward the brand in real time. These sites provide a forum for exchange of common interests, a sense of place with codes of behavior, the development of congenial and stimulating dialogues leading to relationships based on trust, and encouragement for active participation by more than an exclusive few. This depends on professional and

volunteer managers communicating with each other, while volunteer members interact with other members (McWilliam, 2000).

The question of whether or not a community can evolve over time was discussed by Chmiel et al. (2011). Threads of communications in an online bulletin board were grouped together and a moving average of the emotion type of the last 10 comments was calculated. It was shown that longer threads had more changes in emotional variance. It was also determined that negative emotion levels not only prolong discussions but can also damage cooperation among community members.

Shao (2009) examined user-generated media such as You Tube, MySpace, and Wikipedia to investigate how and why they are used, and what makes them appealing, through a uses and gratifications perspective. He concluded that the participants interact with the content as well as with other users for enhancing social connections and virtual communities.

The uses and gratification theory attempts to answer these questions by focusing on what people will do with the information obtained during media usage. It seeks to discover what is gained through media consumption and the context within which it happens. Yet, the content of the media is not the only determinant. According to McQuail (2010), gratification from media can be linked to information seeking, personal identity, integration and social interaction, as well as entertainment.

2. Application to Online Communities

The uses and gratifications theory can be applied to commercial and marketing aspects of online communities, as is exemplified by TheKnot.com. Many interesting

studies and theories have added to research which forms the framework for CMC and online community studies. For example, Ahern and Durrington (1995) studied a CMC environment in which one condition had a high level of group communication in contrast to one which had individual anonymity. A group of students, who had been taking courses together for approximately two or three years prior to this study and had established a high level of group identity, participated in a computer-mediated small group discussion. The researchers found that there was a sustained interaction sequence where each message builds context for the following message in succession. The availability of anonymity “encourages not only the participation of the individual members but also, in conjunction with the graphic-based interface, a more dynamic interpersonal multichannel interaction” (Ahern & Durrington, 1995, p. 6). While anonymity provided a safe environment in which to present one’s opinion, it also broke down the group’s ability to sequence interaction, engaging individuals only 50% of the time. In contrast, with a graphical interface, students engaged in coherent interpersonal interaction 62% of the time (Ahern & Durrington, 1995).

Healy (1996) noted that “The Internet, however, promotes uniformity more than diversity, homogeneity more than heterogeneity” (p. 62). This is because on the Internet, “talk tends not to get ‘overheard’; the boundaries separating virtual conversants are less substantial, but their effect is more dramatic. Two virtual places may be ‘separated’ by only a keystroke, but their inhabitants will never meet. Virtual encounters, as a result of their potential anonymous, fleeting nature, do not oblige their participants to deal with diversity” (p. 62). Dahlberg (2001) noted that research shows “even groups focused upon issues expected to involve diverse opinions often simply develop into ideologically

homogeneous communities of interest” (p. 618). When diversity is introduced, the individual representing the dissenting point of view is labeled as an outsider and others in the group may agree or choose not to disagree with the individuals representing the more popular view.

A number of different theories have been used in connection with Internet communication, including the uses and gratifications theory. Walther (1996) comments, “It is interesting to consider that the interactive quality of Internet communications implicitly connotes drastically different comparisons among different types of communication scholars who have different kinds of training” (p. 640). What follows are studies of online bulletin boards and the uses and gratifications theory and the findings of Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmokl, & Sapp (2006) related to Polish bloggers, Ginossar (2008) related to online cancer communities, and Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2009) related to Facebook groups.

A qualitative content analysis of Polish blogs was performed, aimed at understanding the content elements and user-initiated features (Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmokl, & Sapp, 2006). Most notable was the theoretical framework of the uses and gratifications theory. This study concluded that self-expression was the primary motivation for blog posts, and Polish bloggers were driven more by a desire for self-expression than by social interaction. Uses and gratifications was used because the framework is “built on the assumption that individuals pursue media-related behaviors based on specific predispositions or motive and social-psychological characteristics” (p. 705). It enabled the user’s motivations and resulting gratifications to be ascertained. Motivations were found to be driven through basic technical and content characteristics

(Papacharissi, 2004). Allowing readers to leave contents signified a social interaction motivation, and by discussing one's thoughts and feelings in a blog, self-expression was utilized. Their study focuses on the textual and visual content of Polish blogs and it employed quantitative content analysis using a coding structure. Only the front pages of the blogs were analyzed, and this entry page was the unit of analysis. A list of the users was created using a webcrawler. The blogs were categorized by entertainment, information, self-expression, passing time, and professional advancement. It was concluded that bloggers found particular gratification in expressing themselves in a forum where what they wrote was available to all. Topics were examined to provide further insight, and these included stories about school, meetings with friends, family life, dating, and going shopping. Blogging was found to be a medium that was also useful in outside life as an additional communication channel.

The uses and gratifications theory was also applied as a theoretical framework in the study of online cancer communities (Ginossar, 2008). A content analysis method was utilized by analyzing e-mail messages, which allowed for a direct examination of the actual uses of these groups. A link from the National Cancer Institute Web site server was selected, and the e-mail messages were analyzed according to a specific speech act. Messages were coded by the following categories: information seeking, information-reply, unsolicited information, emotional support only, political/advocacy, conflict, and other. It was noted that while prior studies in the content of communication did not apply uses and gratifications as a theoretical framework, findings now indicate that it is useful for studying "information and emotional support seeking in computer support groups" (pp. 352-353).

The uses and gratifications theory was also applied in a study by Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2009), which examined how Facebook groups were linked with life satisfaction, social trust, and political and civic engagement. Participants in the project were given a list of 16 statements regarding their use of Facebook groups and the following four needs were revealed for using Facebook groups: socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information.

Internet users progress from initially gathering information to increased social activities (Walther, 1995). At first, the user will browse for information purposes, to learn about the particular online site (Kozinets, 1999). In reading about the experiences of others, a reader may then become a frequent participant, and will then visit other sites that have third-party information recommended by the members of the virtual community. It is this type of communication that TheKnot.com seeks to encourage. Kozinets (1999) defines four member groups: tourists, minglers, devotees, and insiders. Tourists lack strong social ties to the group and only maintain a passing interest in the activities. The minglers maintain strong social ties, but are only marginally interested in the activities of the group. Devotees have a strong interest in the activities of the group, but few social ties. Insiders have strong social ties and strong personal ties to the activity.

It is these last two groups that the organizers of TheKnot.com want to pursue. Under the rule of 80-20, approximately eighty per cent of products and services are consumed by twenty per cent of the consumers (Kozinets, 1999). This would apply as well to online communities, where most of the interactions would be performed by a small number of participants. The community itself could encourage those who are tourists or minglers to upgrade their status.

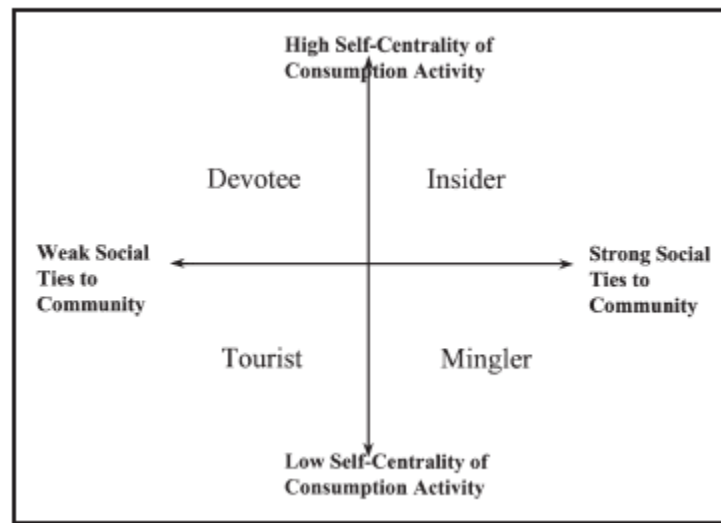


Figure 17. Types of virtual community of consumption member (Kozinets, 1999).

These roles suggest that marketers should follow strategies that appeal to each of these categories of computer mediated interactions. There is also a shift of power away from marketers and toward consumers, as consumers avoid marketing strategies that they find to be offensive. Also, consumers are more and more linking their tastes together as a community, and place great weight on the judgments of those in their communities. A growing number of Web users express their knowledge and experiences about products and services (de Valck, van Bruggen, & Wierenga, 2009). As Kozinets (1999) expresses it, “Virtual communities of consumption provide multiple opportunities for marketers to move beyond a simple bimodal isolation of consumers. In order to truly understand what customer needs, consumption must be seen from a social context that encompasses multi-nodal relations” (p. 265).

Virtual communities function as reference groups, where they talk about their purchases and tastes. In addition, group members are more likely to participate if they identify with the group and its aims. Group norms of behavior occur when there is

prolonged, computer mediated communication. In addition, online communities have rules that group members must follow to maintain membership in the community. There are often written rules that must be followed. This all leads to an environment where the online and offline personas cross. As de Valck et al. (2009) expresses it, “Informational reference group influence is a process of internalization of the perceived norms and opinions of the reference group as evidence about reality” (p. 187). This is most likely to occur when the person who obtains the information believes that the sender is knowledgeable about the subject and has no personal gain motive to give an opinion about the product or service (de Valck, van Bruggen, & Wierenga, 2009).

Bickart and Schindler (2001) investigated consumer behavior in online bulletin boards. They determined that online information produced by other consumers was perceived as more credible and reliable than marketer driven information. There is greater interest in and purchase intention of products discussed in these boards. Okleshen and Grossbart (1998) determined if participants view themselves as members of these groups they are more likely to have the other group members influence their consumer habits. Such word of mouth references result in community members becoming part of the “marketing force” (Nelson & Otnes, 2005, p. 91).

E. Content Gratifications and Process Gratifications

The uses and gratifications approach began in the 1940s in research concerning the effects of radio programs on their audience (Eighmey & McCord, 1998). People were asked about the self-reported perceptions and satisfactions they received from the medium. For example, radio program audience members were asked their reactions to

quiz programs (Lazarsfeld, 1940). This theory was also used in television (Rubin, 1994), where audience member behavior and motivation was focused upon. The audience members were seen as active gratification seekers interacting with the media rather than as passive recipients (Williams, Phillips, & Lum, 1987).

This expanded to analysis of university bulletin boards and other media. For example, Rafaeli (1986) found that bulletin boards served as mass media, because users reported recreation, entertainment and diversion, learning what others think, controversial content, and communication with others as gratifications received. Additionally, Swanson (1987) discussed the need to understand the role of message content.

While the uses and gratifications theory has been criticized (Ruggiero, 2000), this is not relevant to the research study being conducted. His criticism focused on the fact that users might not know why they choose what they are using, it is difficult to measure if the data is self-reported, and as a result, the theory may have weak predictive capabilities. None of these factors are present herein.

According to Stafford, Stafford, and Schkade (2004), there are three types of gratifications: 1) Content gratifications – This is concerned with the message in the content of the medium, whether it be through entertainment or information. 2) Process gratifications – These are concerned with the actual use of a medium, and would include such usages as surfing the Internet, or using a new technology. And lastly, 3) Social gratifications – These are concerned with the social gratifications achieved by the users.

Media can be used for the content contained in it, either for information or entertainment. These are referred to as content gratifications. Content gratifications are concerned with the messages contained in the media. Users are motivated by the desire

for specific informational content. In process gratifications, it is the actual use of the medium itself that provides the gratification. Gratification would be provided by random browsing and navigation. The act of random browsing would be gratifying to the user in this category. The third category, social gratification, is the use of the Internet by the consumer for social purposes. (Cutler & Danowski, 1980; Armstrong & Hagel, 1996). In the research discussed in this study, the relevant gratifications are content gratifications and social gratifications, as the message in the medium and its social implications is being explored rather than the use of the medium itself. It would not be possible to make a random post on the site studied in this paper.

A study was conducted by Stafford, Stafford, and Schkade (2004) which utilized a 45-item scale to identify content gratifications, process gratifications, and social gratifications. It was this study that was the introduction of social gratifications. Song, Larose, Eastin and Lin (2004) categorized seven gratifications which applied specifically to the Internet. These were virtual community, information seeking, aesthetic experience, monetary compensation, diversion, personal status, and relationship maintenance. The category of virtual community was a new gratification. Hanjun (2000) found that there was a connection between the motivational factors of the users and the types of websites they visited.

Recreation, entertainment, and diversion were found to be three gratifications discussed by Rafaeli (1986) of the use of university computer bulletin boards. Eighmey and McCord (1998) studied the motivations of users of commercial websites, and found that relevance, information, and entertainment value were the three major reasons why the users visited those sites. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) discovered five motivations

why people used the Internet: interpersonal utility; to pass time; information seeking; convenience; and entertainment.

F. Content Analysis and Intercoder Reliability

The uses and gratifications theory can be further explored through content analysis. Neuendorf (2002) defines content analysis as “the systematic, objective qualitative analysis of message characteristics” (p. 1). It is a method of analyzing documents, so that when classified into the same categories, words and phrases have the same meaning (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Writing at Colorado State notes, “Researchers quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part” (Colorado State University, 2015).

Content analysis is a method by which written, verbal or visual communication can be analyzed (Cole, 1988) and was first used to examine hymns, newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements and political speeches in the nineteenth century (Harwood & Garry, 2003). By the 1940s, content analysis was already widely used, despite the difficulty in examining texts without the use of a computer, and by the 1950s, methods became more sophisticated and focuses on concepts (Colorado State University, 2015).

There are three main phases for content analysis: preparation, organizing and reporting. Preparation is the selection of the unit to be analyzed. Then the data is coded

into categories so that there is a means of describing the phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

At the heart of the content analysis method is intercoder reliability, which insures that independent judges make the same decisions in evaluating the characteristics of messages (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). This determines whether different coders who receive the same training and textual guidance will categorize the same value to the same piece of content. If there is no such agreement, there is no determination that the data is reliable (Joyce, 2013).

Content analysis was described by Berelson (1952) as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (p. 18). Kolbe and Burnett (1991) defined it as “an observational research method that is used to systematically evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communication. These communications can also be analyzed at many levels (image, word, roles, etc.), thereby creating a realm of research opportunities” (p. 243).

Content analysis is uniquely relevant to the discussion of computer mediated communication. In all online environments, students exchange messages with one another. Email and discussion boards are the two most used tools (De Wever, Schellens, Valcke, & Van Keer, 2006). At first, research based on such discussions was restricted to gathering qualitative data about levels of participation (Henri, 1992). However, this did not distinguish the quality of interactions in email and bulletin boards. Therefore, content analysis was developed to analyze the information from asynchronous discussion groups, which is consistent with the goal of content analysis “to reveal information that is not situated at the surface of the transcripts. To be able to provide convincing evidence

about the learning and the knowledge construction that is taking place, in-depth understanding of the online discussions is needed” (De Wever, Schellens, Valcke, & Van Keer, 2006, p. 7).

The De Wever et al. (2006) study involved what they called “transcript analysis,” which is a context analysis technique that is “a research methodology that builds on procedures to make valid inferences from text” (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001, p. 10). De Wever, Schellens, Valcke, and Van Keer (2006) began with the choice of the unit of analysis to perform the content analysis. They noted that researchers could consider each individual sentence as a single unit, or to identify a consistent theme or idea in a message and to use that as the method of analysis, or to take the complete message posted at a certain moment in the discussion as the unit of analysis. Any of these three choices would be acceptable. As they expressed it, “The choice for a unit of analysis is dependent on the context and should be well-considered, because changes to the size of this unit will affect coding decisions and comparability of outcome” (p. 9).

As Tinsley and Weiss (2000) express it, intercoder reliability is essential because it measures the “extent to which the different judges tend to assign exactly the same rating to each object” (p. 98). There are two types of coding, information on the surface, and latent content beneath the surface (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). For latent content, coders must provide subjective interpretations, which as Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999) describe, “only increases the importance of making the case that the judgments of coders are intersubjective, that is, those judgments, while subjectively derived, are shared across coders, and the meaning therefore is also likely to

reach out to readers of the research” (p. 266). Coders must be given instruction on the types of variables, their values and their definitions (Joyce, 2013).

Additionally, intercoder reliability must be established when utilizing content analysis. Intercoder reliability is measured by having two or more coders categorize the units, which may be programs, scenes, articles, stories or words, for example, and then use these categories to calculate a numerical value for the extent of agreement among the coders. At a minimum, the researcher creates the set to be used and has the coders make coding decisions independently and under the same conditions. After this is achieved the researcher calculates one or more indicators of reliability. There are only a handful of methods available to accomplish this and there is a scarcity in information available about them (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002).

One such indicator is percent agreement, which is the percentage of all coding decisions made by pairs of coders on which the coders agree. This ranges from .00, which represents no agreement, to 1.00, which would be perfect agreement. This method is simple, intuitive, and easy to calculate. However, its drawback is that it fails to account for agreement that might agree simply by chance. This occurs more frequently if there are few categories in a coding scheme. This is the easiest to compute and the easiest to interpret. It becomes less reliable if three coders or cases are used.

A second indicator is Holsti’s Method, a variation on the percent agreement index, which is considered a poor method since it calculates across a set of variables and different units. Scott’s Pi takes into account the number of categories and the distribution of values across them. However, this index is considered to find coding results to be too low. It also does not account for differences in the way individual coders can distribute

their values across the coding categories. Cohen's Kappa is also considered to be too conservative in its results. For example, even if there is perfect agreement, there is a maximum value less than 1.00. As a result, this is used only in specialized cases. (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). Krippendorff's Alpha allows for any number of coders and can accounts for chance agreements. However, it is very complex and it is difficult to calculate. Krippendorff's Alpha "takes into account the magnitude of the misses, adjusting for whether the variable is measured as nominal, ordinal, interval, or ratio" (De Wever, Schellens, Valcke, & Van Keer, 2006, p. 10).

As a result, there is no consensus on the best index to be used for intercoder reliability. For example, Cohen's Kappa is widely used for coding behavior, while Cronbach's Alpha has been found to be inappropriate for intercoder reliability (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002).

Hughes and Garrett (1990) conducted a study of 68 articles in *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Marketing*, and *Journal of Consumer Research* during 1984 and 1987 and found that 65% used percent agreement. Kang, Kara, Laskey and Seaton (1993) reviewed 22 articles published in the *Journal of Advertising* between 1981 and 1990 that employed content analysis and found that 78% used percentage agreement. Pasadeos, Huhman, Standley and Wilson (1995) examined 163 content analyses of news messages in four journals, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Newspaper Research Journal*, *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* and *Journal of Communication* for the period between 1988 and 1993, and found that more than 51% of the articles did not address reliability at all, 31% used percent agreement, 10% used Scott's pi and 6% used Holsti's method.

G. Interaction in Online Groups through Content Analysis

There are various specific techniques used to perform analysis of Internet discussions (Catterall & Maclaran, 2002; Jones, 1999; Kozinets, 1998; Sherry & Kozinets, 2001; Thomsen, Straubhaar, & Bolyard, 1998). Kozinets (2002) introduced the method of netnography. This is “a written account resulting from fieldwork studying the culture and communities that emerge from online, computer-mediated, or Internet-based communications” (p. 197).

De Valck et al. (2009) used netnography to study the interaction of members of a culinary community. The purpose of the study was to gain insight into how the members communicated and influenced each other in forum discussions. De Valck et al. followed forum discussions and contributions as well as visited member pages and read articles. They also participated in an offline community gathering, interviewed several participants, and systematically reviewed all topics discussed in the forums in a twelve month period. This consisted of 94 threads which were deemed to be interesting. The observation was further narrowed into 53 relevant discussion threads, which were found to be centered on cooking. The total posts investigated totaled 3163 by 82 different contributors. 54% of the group was categorized as core members, 42% was conversationalist, and 4% was classified as informationlists (de Valck, van Bruggen, & Wierenga, 2009, p. 197). The conclusions of the study were based on a content analysis of the postings. The discussions were found to be of four types: 1) sharing knowledge (discussions contained a lot of information); 2) negotiating norms (defining what is the accepted community practice); 3) opposing values (opposition to the norm); and 4) celebrating similarities (joyful identification) (p. 198).

Netnography was also used by Nelson and Otnes (2005) to study brides-to-be while they planned multi-cultural weddings on three message boards. That method was chosen, according to the authors, because it allowed the researcher to gain access to discussions by observing and/or participating on publicly available online forums. The first author conducted observations virtually, by observing and participating in discussions and archived messages on the forums of theknot.com, ultimatewedding.com and weddingchannel.com. Approximately 400 postings from brides-to-be in 16 different countries over a one year period were analyzed. Nelson read the posts and categorized them by using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method. Co-author Otnes audited these classifications and made suggestions in the interpretation.

The term content analysis originated in 1952 with Bernard Berelson. He described it as "A research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 74). It developed as a scientific method during World War II when Harold Lasswell undertook a governmental war project to analyze enemy propaganda. Lasswell later wrote *The Language of Politics* based on this war project. As Prasad (2008) notes, "Content denotes what is contained and content analysis is the analysis of what is contained in a message" (p. 2). Instead of asking people to respond to questions, it takes the communications that people have produced and unobtrusively evaluates them. Emphasis is placed on such aspects as system, objectivity, qualification, contest and validity, and making objective inferences about the message (Prasad, 2008).

Generally speaking, studies using content analysis involve the following six steps:

1. formulation of the research question or objectives; 2. selection of communication

content and sample; 3. developing content categories; 4. finalizing units of analysis; 5. preparing a coding schedule, pilot testing and checking inter coder reliabilities; and 6. analyzing the collected data (Huang, 2010).

Bales' (1950) Interaction Process Analysis developed an analytical framework for content analysis. This framework, as will be discussed more fully, reveals group behavior, member roles, and interaction patterns, particularly the social-emotional and task-oriented functions. Group activity that can be identified through the framework includes communication, evaluation, control, decision-making, tension reduction, and reintegration. Group behavior, according to Bales, is classified into 12 categories. Categories 1-3 deal with positive social-emotional behavior, including solidarity, tension release and agreement. Categories 10-12 deal with negative social-emotional behavior: antagonism, tension, and agreement. According to Bales, social-emotional interaction is necessary to mediate task-related interaction. Categories 4 to 9 deal with task-oriented behavior.

This approach was used by Finegold and Cooke (2006) to understand the attitudes, experiences and dynamics of interaction of students in online groups on the discussion board of the City University, Northampton Square, London in the academic year 2004-05. As will be shown, the researchers modified Bales' (1950) categories still further. Questionnaires, interviews, document analysis and discussion board analysis were utilized, and it was determined that the students enjoyed working in online groups and found the discussion board useful, but gave preference to other communication methods. Similarly, Huang (2010) classified topics on online bulletin boards into at least

two areas: inquiry, which would be a topic requesting advice or information, and argumentation, which would be a post for or against an opinion (p. 201).

Malik and Coulson (2010) utilized content analysis for infertility patient groups which turned to online support groups to seek information, advice, and support. The data used were messages posted to seven sub-boards of a UK peer-moderated online infertility support group. There were 864 discussion threads containing 17,686 messages between January and April 2008. Since the group did not require any form of registration to read the board, it was considered to be in the public domain. Content analysis was used to analyze the messages, based on the categories of social support of Cutrona and Suhr (1992). Each posting was analyzed for the presence of ten categories coded for self-help mechanisms. Online support groups were found to be helpful in promoting emotional support and self-disclosure, enabling the health care professionals to learn more and develop more resources to assist.

Content analysis consisting of sampling 1200 posts from a medical self-help bulletin board was performed by Amsbary and Powell (2013). Boards with eating disorders, depression, drug addiction and care giving support were analyzed. Posts were categorized solely according to certain wording, and qualified by eleven categories from Northouse and Northouse (2004). These included instillation of hope, feeling of universality, imparting specific information, feeling of altruism, approximate family relationships, improve relating skills, imitative behavior, interpersonal learning, cohesiveness, catharsis, and existential factors. A count and percentage was made of each category. It was found that the preponderance of messages related to advice giving.

Messages from a Huntington's disease online support group were analyzed by content analysis (Coulson, Buchanan, & Aubeeluck, 2007). In total, 1313 messages were content analyzed using a modified version of the social support behavior code developed by Cutrona and Suhr (1992). This was used to assess the frequency of support behaviors that were categorized by five main groups: information support, esteem support, network support, emotional support, and tangible assistance. The research team modified this as necessary; for example the subcategory "listening" was eliminated, and the subcategory "physical affection" was modified to "virtual affection." A subcategory called "anchorage" was created. Each message was coded and calculated based on the five main categories. Emotional and informational support was found to be the key functions of this online group, followed by network support.

1. Bales' Interaction Process Analysis

Social psychologist Robert P. Bales classified behavior "act by act, as it occurs in small face-to-face groups, and a series of ways of analyzing the data to obtain indices descriptive of group process, and derivatively, of factors influencing that process" and termed this "interaction process analysis" (Bales, 1950, p. 258). He grouped these into twelve observation categories. They are as follows:

1. Shows solidarity (raises other's status, gives help reward)
2. Shows tension release (jokes, laughs, shows satisfaction)
3. Agrees (shows passive acceptance, understands, concurs, complies)
4. Gives suggestion (direction, implying autonomy for other)
5. Gives opinion (evaluation, analysis, expresses feeling, wish)

6. Gives orientation (information, repents, clarifies, confirms)
7. Asks for orientation (information, repetition, confirmation)
8. Asks for opinion (evaluation, analysis, expression of feeling)
9. Asks for suggestion (direction, possible ways of action)
10. Disagrees (shows passive rejection, formality, withholds help)
11. Shows tension (asks for help, withdraws out of field)
12. Shows antagonism (deflates other's status, defends or asserts self)

These categories were further arranged to show the mental state of the observer, although not included on the observation form. They were arranged into a series of complementary pairs from the center pair outward. Thus, 6 and 7 were paired; 8 and 5, and so on (p. 258).

These categories were also grouped into four sets. The first three categories were labeled "A: Social-Emotional Area: Positive Reactions." Categories 4 through 6 were labeled "B: Task Area: Attempted Answers." Categories 7 through 9 were "C: Task Area: Questions" and 10 through 12 were "D: Social-Emotional Area: Negative Reactions." This produced six interlocking functional problems: problems of orientation, evaluation, control, decision, tension-management, and integration (pp. 258-259).

A scorer would observe a group and would proceed in three stages. The first would be to decide what the situation is like, the second is to decide what attitudes should be taken toward the situation, and the third is to decide what to do about it. Because this method was used to evaluate face-to-face contact, in the case of multiple observers, reliability required intensive training (p. 262).

2. Finegold and Cooke Modification

Finegold and Cooke (2006) explored the dynamics of interaction in online groups. They studied attitudes, experiences and dynamics of interaction of students working in online groups at City University in London, England. This was done through analysis of the content and structure of online discussion board messages. The research questions presented were what were the students' attitudes toward, and experiences of, working with groups, and what were the characteristics of group dynamics that could be discerned in students working in online groups (p. 203).

Finegold and Cooke used questionnaires, interviews and analysis of documents in their study. Group processes were investigated through comments made by five users in a university module in which twenty students were enrolled. The module was divided into groups of four. Six additional students provided comments through a discussion board and email.

Structural analysis was determined through study of four compulsory university modules. In each module, one group was selected for both structural and content analysis. Structural analysis was conducted by calculating each member's postings as a percentage of the whole group. The number of those who did not post any message determined the number of group members not participating. The study also compared the number of messages posted by full time students against those who were part-time students (p. 205).

In regard to content analysis of these messages, Finegold and Cooke used the framework established by Bales. As they stated, "This framework is useful for revealing

group behavior, member roles, and interaction patterns, particularly the social-emotional and task-oriented functions” (p. 205).

These researchers altered the Bales framework to account for the online environment and to establish group interaction.

Categories in italics are additions to the original process analysis.

Social emotional area: positive reactions

1. Shows solidarity, raises other’s status, gives help, reward
2. Shows tension release, jokes, laughs, shows satisfaction
3. Agrees, show passive acceptance, understands, concurs, complies

Task area: attempted answers

4. Gives suggestion, direction, implying autonomy for other
 - 4.1 Gives organization suggestion or direction*
 - 4.2 Gives task suggestion or direction*
5. Gives opinion, evaluation, analysis, express feeling, wish
 - 5.1 Gives evaluation, analysis, peer review*
 - 5.2 Gives opinion, expresses feeling, wish*
6. Gives orientation, information, repeats, clarifies, confirms
 - 6.1 Gives personal information (positive social or emotional)
 - 6.2 Gives topic-related information
 - 6.21 Gives non-referential topic-related information: make no reference to others’ statements*
 - 6.22 Gives referential topic-related information: make direct or indirect reference*

to others' statements

6.3 Gives technical information

Task area: questions

7 Asks for orientation, information, repetition, confirmation

7.1 Asks *for* technical information *or reports a technical problem*

7.2 Asks *for* topic-related information

7.21 Asks *for non-referential topic-related information: make no reference to others' statements*

7.22 Asks *for referential topic-related information: make direct or indirect reference to others' statements*

7.3 Asks *for* personal information (positive social or emotional)

8 Asks for opinion, evaluation, analysis, expression of feeling

8.1 Asks *for evaluation, analysis, peer review*

8.2 Asks *for opinion, feeling, wish*

9. Asks for suggestion, direction, possible way of action

9.1 Asks *for organizational suggestion or direction*

9.2 Asks *for task suggestion or direction*

Social emotional area: negative reactions

10 Disagrees, shows passive rejection, formality, withholds help

11 Shows tension, asks for helps, withdraws out of field

12 Shows antagonism, deflates other's status, defends or asserts self

Categories 6 and 7 were expanded to giving and asking personal, topic-related and technical information. Categories 6 and 7 were expanded to reflect how previous information from group members can affect interaction. Categories 5 and 8 were subdivided so that there was a distinction between evaluation, analysis and peer review and that of opinion, feeling, and wish. Categories 4 and 9 were expanded (Finegold & Cooke, 2006, pp. 203-205).

The unit of analysis for this study was a sentence, and all sentences in each message for each of the four sample groups were analyzed by assigning them a category number from the framework developed. If there was more than one category that could be appropriate, the closest one was determined through reference of the surrounding context.

The findings of the Finegold and Cooke study were as follows:

- a) Perceived purpose of the asynchronous discussion board in group work: The discussion board was seen as an acceptable alternative to face-to-face meetings and the most convenient way of contacting group members. Most preferred the ability to choose among email, group postings, and face-to face interaction. Some students only used the discussion board if they were required to do so to accomplish a group task.
- b) Enjoyment and concerns in online groups: This study concluded that most students enjoyed working in online groups, although some preferred not to work in this manner. The most often expressed concerns involved group members not participating on the discussion board and not participating in group tasks. Finding

time to participate in group discussions and postings was an issue for some group members.

- c) Motivation to use the asynchronous discussion board for group work: If the whole group was able to meet face-to-face, some students were less likely to use the discussion boards. This was because they were not enthusiastic about technology and the fact that they would rather spend time on actual course work. When they did use boards, they stated that they were motivated by a desire to show progress to the instructor and the other members of the group.
- d) Usefulness, benefits, and challenges of using the asynchronous discussion board for group work: If the students could not meet face-to-face, they found the discussion boards useful because they could share ideas, experiences and resources even though they were physically apart from each other. Some thought their learning improved because they were able to reflect on messages and improve their communication skills. Some, however, found the discussion board to be impersonal and intimidating. In regard to attachments, some students found this easier to accomplish through e-mail. Others also preferred e-mail because problems could be discussed in confidence. While some found challenges with the discussion board, others had no issues at all. The most commonly mentioned challenge was the time intervals between replies. Some students experienced anxiety over messages due to a lack of visual clues. The fact that the messages could not be deleted, updated or searched was cited as a limitation of the message group studied, and technical problems prevented some students from using the board.

- e) Relative importance attributed to face-to-face meetings in online group work:

Most students wanted to meet face-to-face for group work, and that bonding with group members and explaining complex ideas was easier in person. This was especially useful in the beginning of group tasks to make initial assignments and at the end of the task so that the work could be compiled for submission or group presentation.

- f) Perception of discussion in online group work: Students liked the idea of discussing issues in smaller groups of three or more students, and they recognized that it was a good idea to have conversations memorialized on the discussion board.

- g) Role of the lecturer in online group work: If the lecturer participated in the online group, that was seen as an advantage by the participants. They thought that the lecturer should contribute and provide motivation. This would include clarifying coursework and student progress as well as correcting incorrect student postings. In addition, some felt that instructors should initiate discussion and address problems with technology, encourage those not participating, and mediate disagreements. Most believed that instructors should not allocate group responsibilities. Some instructors did contribute information, encouragement, and opinions. Some students, however, did not feel that the participation of an instructor would make a difference to the group because there was already sufficient interaction taking place. The same functions that instructors could provide were already being served by the students, and the students stated that this kind of feedback was more important.

- h) Process of conducting online group work: Students who were full-time tended to post more than those who were part-time. Most students stated that there was no leader in their online group, and that roles were simply assumed. Some thought an online group leader would be beneficial, while others disagreed. Most students did not form any rules for how often or when to publish on the board, and assumed that other group members would view the board regularly.
- i) Factors contributing to the success of online group work: The most important factor in determining whether an online group was successful was active participation by its members. Also important was an atmosphere of trust and respect, shared objectives and being supportive to other group members. Additional factors for success included group working skills, decision making, consensus building, and dealing with conflict. Smaller groups were favored over larger ones. It was important that students were familiar with other group members to communicate effectively, and being familiar was determined to be more important than meeting face-to-face. However, it was better to like the members of the group than to be familiar with them. Interaction could only take place when the board was functioning technically. Finally, it was the nature of the task that determined how motivated students were to participate.

Chapter 5: Individual Interviews

A. Methodology

In an effort to better understand the impact of the participation on the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com Internet bulletin board and its impact on the uses and gratifications incorporated into the weddings of the bulletin board participants, a series of individual interviews were initially conducted. Through interviewing, participants were able to provide answers to the questions asked of them regarding the gratification obtained through participation in the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com. Unlike a survey, which would restrict data collection to previously established answers and categories, interviewing allowed each individual to explicitly express their feelings and views about this emerging wedding planning tool.

The questions used in each interview explored the nature of the participation, media resources utilized, emotional assistance provided, shift in cultural perceptions, personal experiences of participants, the motivations of participants, the impact of participation on the individual and their idea of what their wedding should include, and the broader social/cultural context.

The participant demographics, survey design and procedures, and the ten interview questions and analysis now will be discussed.

1. Participant Demographics

Subjects were selected to be interviewed from a purposive and convenience sample of recently married women in northern New Jersey who were members of TheKnot.com while engaged to be married and planning their weddings. All potential

participants who were approached and asked to take part in an interview regarding their experience on the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com agreed to participate. A total of nine females ranging in age from 22 to 33 were interviewed. Once participants agreed to be interviewed, they were informed that the purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of online media exposure which influenced their perceptions and actions throughout the wedding planning process. An interview time and place that was mutually convenient for the interviewer and interviewee was arranged.

Subjects were asked to discuss the ways in which online media influenced their wedding planning and the selections they made. These interviews were all qualitative in nature, and were looking for personal observations of an oral history nature. My study was looking at the ways in which these subjects expressed their time using the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com for their personal experiences in wedding planning, not for testing a hypothesis. Such responses do not need a large number of interviews and are consistent with accepted practice in this area. Even a single response would have provided information regarding the topic surveyed, and after conducting nine interviews, it was felt by this researcher that sufficient evidence had been obtained on the desired topic.

When conducting qualitative research, a commonly asked question is “how many interviews are enough?” The National Centre for Research Methods asked this question to 14 renowned social scientists and 5 early career researchers. Most responded “it depends,” based on the research aims and objectives, the epistemic communities, and available time and resources (Baker & Edwards, 2012, p. 2). Those interviewed were renowned social scientists who had expertise in social research. They were asked to

respond to the key question “What advice would you give a student who asked you how many interviews they should carry out for their qualitative research project?” (p. 2)

The pioneering qualitative researcher, Harry Wolcott, noted:

That is, of course, a perennial question if not a great one. The answer, as with all things qualitative, is “it depends.” It depends on your resources, how important the question is to the research, and even to how many respondents are enough to satisfy committee members for a dissertation. For many qualitative studies one respondent is all you need – your person of interest. But in general the old rule seems to hold that you keep asking as long as you are getting different answers, and that is a reminder that with our little samples we can’t establish frequencies but we should be able to find the RANGE of responses. Whatever the way the question is handled, the best answer is to report fully how it was resolved (pp. 3-4).

Patricia and Peter Adler advised that the number was determined by the research objective. They differentiated between quantitative approaches that attempt to describe and understand what people do with qualitative approaches that attempt to understand how and why people perceive, reflect, interpret, and interact. Adler and Adler indicated that quantitative researchers usually have an idea of how many cases will be needed to test a hypothesis, while qualitative research is exploratory by nature and the number of subjects needed would not be determined in advance (pp. 4-5).

Charles Ragin emphasizes that in a qualitative study, once the researcher finds that the evidence is so repetitive, there is no need to continue the study. Baker and Edomon note, “Thus for Ragin, Wolcott and many of the other experts, saturation is central to qualitative sampling” (p. 5). Louisa Passerini and Linda Sandino note that one interview is valid within oral history and a single qualitative interview can provide sufficient subjectivity. Jennifer Mason advises researchers to consider whether a greater

or fewer number of interviews would produce the desired outcome. While an inexperienced researcher might want to conduct more interviews because this is perceived as “better,” this is not necessarily the case, according to Mason. Tracey Jensen identifies “the need within qualitative research to build a convincing analytical narrative based on ‘richness, complexity and detail’ rather than statistical logic” (p. 5). Howard Becker advises that researchers should begin early in their process to start thinking about what evidence they will need to complete their research, and this varies from project to project.

Though every attempt was made to interview a diverse sample population, it must be noted that the sample population was selected from a very specific group of recently married women who had utilized the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com. However, the information gathered from the interviews is an initial attempt to explain the motivations and practices of engaged women going through the ritual of planning a wedding and has provided a starting point for further study in this area.

2. Survey Design and Procedures

Prior to conducting each interview, an informed consent form was given to each participant, who was then asked to sign it. The informed consent form included statements regarding the focus of the study, confidentiality and voluntary participation. At this time, participants also learned that the answers they were about to provide would only be used for research purposes. Participants were also notified that their identity would not be elicited or disclosed in this study. Each interview and participant was

assigned a number and will only be identified by that number. The transcribed interview sessions also preserve anonymity. After consent was given, the interview began.

Each interview lasted between 15 and 20 minutes and was digitally taped to record participants' answers to a series of interview questions and demographic questions: age, date of engagement, join date on TheKnot.com, and date of marriage. After each interview was completed, the session was transcribed with the assistance of the digital recorder to preserve the accuracy of the responses.

3. Interview Questions and Analysis

a. Q1: Please tell me how you started participating in the New Jersey board on TheKnot.com

When asked how each subject began participating on the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com, interviewees indicated they were either referred by a friend (6 participants) or came upon the site through a search engine (2 participants), or Internet advertisement (1 participant). Some signed up to become full-access members immediately after discovering this community (5 participants). Others perused the posts of the New Jersey board before signing up with a unique member moniker (4 participants).

During the period when two of the participants became members and were utilizing the New Jersey board to read messages but did not contribute to the community as an active, posting member, these women referred to themselves as "lurkers." This distinction was important to them to clarify because at the time when they were referred

to the board or discovered it, neither woman was engaged. Participant 2 explained, “When a friend of mine got engaged, I started lurking on there and then when I got engaged, I just immediately started posting.” Participant 1 adds, “I had looked at it before I was engaged a little bit, but didn’t post anything. And then once I got engaged, I signed on [to post] then.” They discovered from their lurking that it is a community taboo on the New Jersey board to make any post if one is not yet officially engaged. Members who contributed to the New Jersey board who were not engaged were shunned by members who felt legitimized by their classification as engaged women. While the bulletin board had no official restrictions for membership, the members of the New Jersey board and presumably other wedding planning-related boards on the site, created their own in- and out-group beginning with their classification of being engaged.

b. Q2: How did the New Jersey board on TheKnot.com assist you in planning your wedding?

The women received assistance with many wedding ceremony and reception elements from their participation in the New Jersey board at TheKnot.com. Participant 6 was thoroughly satisfied with the help she received from the New Jersey board on TheKnot.com. She indicates, “I would not have had the same wedding without [the New Jersey board]. It helped me with everything tremendously. Any time I needed a recommendation for something, I posted and had ten responses in a few minutes. I am really grateful to [the board] because it is such a good resource.” This sentiment was echoed by Participant 9 who initially “knew nothing about planning a wedding or what was involved. It became overwhelming thinking of all of the little details. But I was able

to ‘steal’ ideas from other women [on the New Jersey board] and had a gorgeous wedding.”

Specifically, ideas for decorating, dresses, hairstyles, favors, venues, invitations, readings and vendors such as photographers, deejays, and florists were mentioned by the interviewees. For favors, Participant 8 received the name of a vendor who specialized in making caramel apples for her fall themed wedding from the New Jersey board and also purchased gifts she gave to her bridesmaids’ from another bride-to-be who was reselling them at a discount. When a new vendor was needed, Participant 7 turned to the New Jersey board for assistance:

I remember when I was doing photography, we had actually picked a photographer and we got cold feet about them and wanted to change, but we didn’t have too much time left. So we went on there and people recommended another photographer and it went really smoothly. Instead of getting anxiety over it, it was really nice because everyone was so helpful in being able to give recommendations. That is probably the biggest thing that I remember because it worked so well. And that really helped out a lot.

The interviewees also learned of additional wedding paraphernalia that was unfamiliar to them until they began frequenting the board. Participant 1 made ribbon wands so “when you leave the church, instead of throwing rice in the air, you wave a wand that has ribbons on it” and contemplated crafting out-of-town bags for when guests arrive at the hotel at which the bride has blocked rooms off for the wedding guests. In these out-of-town bags are “water, and snacks, and directions to different [local] things” so guests can make the most of their time in the vicinity near the wedding location. A unity candle was used by Participant 2 and her husband during their ceremony. She explains how during the ceremony, “my husband’s mother and my mother came up and

lit two candles. Using those two candles, my husband and I lit the unity candle together to symbolize our unity together as a couple” and the symbolic joining of the two families.

Another popular wedding planning must have for the engaged women on the board was a save the date, or STD. According to Participant 2, “a save the date is an announcement you send out maybe a year before the wedding to inform [guests] about your wedding so they can make travel arrangements and arrange to be at the wedding.” This communication informs the recipients that a wedding invitation for that date will be forthcoming. Therefore, do not make other plans for that day.

The New Jersey board also proved useful for other unique circumstances. The online nature of the board assisted Participant 5 and Participant 9 as these women planned their weddings in New Jersey while living in California and Maryland. Participant 4 claims she did not use the board “that much for planning my wedding. I was mostly on it just to pass time, like chat with people. Once in a while I would throw ideas out there, but I don’t think I really took anything away from it.” For her, the social aspect of the community was paramount to the potential resources that could be found from the other members. She still considered herself an active and accepted member of the group, but chose to focus her time fulfilling a social need to connect with others at a similar time in their lives over a material need to plan an elaborate wedding. Participant 3 found comfort through the board in the fact that it “helped to bounce ideas back and forth with [other posters] and get new ideas and unique ideas as far as having a wedding and resources and tips and advice and just non-wedding stuff, too.”

Participant 7 summed up her experience by stating,

Being able to chat with a lot of other brides at the time, you could ask questions, they would give you answers. If you had ideas, if someone

used it already, they could tell you how it went and it was really, really good in terms of being able to get an idea of what you think would be good and what wouldn't be good. Especially when you first start planning a wedding, you're kind of overwhelmed by how much there is to do. It was kind of nice to have a comfort zone of other people going through it and being able to help you step-by-step.

c. Q3: How did the board make you feel during your engagement?

While planning their weddings, participants were able to receive daily affirmation, as well as criticism, related to their choices on the New Jersey board.

Participant 1 received compliments on her wedding dress and also received input from other brides who were also planning around a similar theme as she. However, she found that the way she asked her questions of others, as well as her point of view on certain wedding rituals that she may or may not have been including, influenced the responses she received. She noted, "If I had an idea and they didn't like it, they'd let me know if they didn't share the same belief...and sometimes [my ideas] weren't accepted very well if I had a different point of view."

Overall, participants felt the board made their wedding planning a positive experience. Participant 1 indicated the New Jersey board made her feel "Excited. I think it made me feel really excited to be planning. And the positives definitely outweighed the negatives." When describing her experience, Participant 7 relayed that the board made her feel "really good" throughout because

At the time I was on, there were a lot of really great people. I was constantly talking with them all day long and if I had a question, they would respond. It made me feel really good about what I was planning due to the compliments about what a great job I was doing. It was really great just getting to meet new people through the process.

Participants 3 and 5 relied on the information they received on the board to find local vendors. This was extremely helpful for Participant 5, who was planning her New Jersey wedding while living in California and was unsure what typical costs for the area were and what should be included in the various packages vendors offered. The board gave her an outlet to vent her frustration as well as giving her a place to bounce ideas off people. Participant 3 read “rants and raves” from others to help her select a photographer. As a bonus, she and Participant 6 felt fortunate to make new friends going through the same emotional rollercoaster related to wedding planning. Participant 2 echoed these feelings. She noted

They were very supportive of different things that I did and it was very informative so it was a good group to go to if you had a question because a lot of my girlfriends didn’t get engaged or even have boyfriends at the time, so it was a way to bounce off ideas with other people.

Participant 4 also felt the New Jersey board was useful since her friends were already married and were not interested in talking with her about her wedding the same way other engaged women on the board were when she needed to talk to someone. Likewise, the board was described as an invaluable resource for Participant 9.

Everything was not always smooth sailing and easygoing on the New Jersey board. For her experience, Participant 8 noted how things were “sometimes good, sometimes not so good,” though most of the time it was good. She explained how one of the girls on the New Jersey board started “picking” on one of the other girls and Participant 8 felt by standing up for the girl that was being singled out, in turn, she was the new target and felt she was getting attacked unnecessarily herself. She explained her experience by adding

I think when you have girls who don't really know one another and there are a lot of girls that have a lot of questions, people tend to jump down their throats. And then they get on a rampage how people are annoying and it just gets – it tended to get very catty at times in there. If you stuck to the wedding planning and only saw the wedding planning part of it, it was a great resource to vent, to get ideas. But when it became catty, I just pretty much logged off.

d. Q4: Please tell me about any ways your ideas about your wedding changed after you began participating in the board.

Once these brides-to-be came together online to discuss their weddings, many participants' ideas about their wedding changed. When thinking about a reception location, Participant 2 had an idea in her mind of the type of place she wanted to utilize. She was able to rely on the influence of others' past weddings and their experiences at various potential locations to help her plan the event she envisioned. Participant 6 added more details to her wedding than she would have otherwise. For example, at the end of the ceremony, her guests blew bubbles instead of throwing the traditional rice. She also chose to have a card box to hold wedding cards from her guests and decorated the aisle of her church with rose petals. The favors Participant 7 gave to her guests were first identified through the New Jersey board. Through referrals, she found an appropriate cookie cutter and a recommended baker. In the end, she felt "It went over really well and the baker was phenomenal. That was a big thing that I wasn't originally intending on doing." Without the New Jersey board, these participants would not have been aware of these elements to include in their wedding day.

A confidence boost was a result Participant 5 experienced. She designed her programs, ceremony decorations, place cards, favors, and menu cards and successfully executed all these elements for her wedding day. Through the New Jersey board, she was

able to buy her supplies for less money from Web sites she was directed to by others on the board, cutting costs from the bottom line of her budget. Participant 7 was also pleased with the unique ideas that were presented by brides-to-be on the New Jersey board noting, “Before I was planning, I never would have thought to do anything on my own.”

On the other hand, Participant 1 felt monetarily she ended up spending far more money due to other peoples’ ideas. There were many things that interested her and she ultimately chose to include in her wedding day. She felt her budgeting suffered because “after seeing ideas, there were just things that I had to have, had to do...that made me spend more money” than she had initially planned. Participant 3 was also influenced by ideas from other engaged women. She felt there were “trends” at the time she was planning and she found herself wanting to do things because it was what other brides-to-be were including. For her own wedding, she included a projection of her wedding monogram on the wall of the reception hall, commissioned a monogram aisle runner for her wedding ceremony, and elaborate gifts for her bridesmaids to thank them for their support and participation. She feels she “found herself giving more, doing above and beyond the norm just because other people were doing it. It was just the cool thing to do. So that’s how I got sucked in” to spending additional money.

While others may have been influenced by new ideas on the New Jersey board, Participant 4 indicates she always knew what she wanted and did not sway from that. For her, the New Jersey board was a place for social interaction more than wedding planning. Participant 9 also felt confident in her vision before joining the online bulletin board. She indicated her ideas did not change, but the details made her day more elaborate.

e. Q5: What were your relationships with other people on the board like?

Relationships with other brides-to-be on the New Jersey board varied from participant to participant. Participants 2 and 6 both made note of the fact that their experiences were overall positive, but there were some disagreements and drama-filled situations between some of the members of the board. Participant 1 compared her experiences to high school, noting a “popular crowd, the unpopular crowd, and the people in the middle.” Personally, she felt like she was not a member of either extreme and admittedly “didn’t cause any problems and gave everyone pretty much positive feedback.”

Participants 2 and 3 noted that often, the virtual relationships formed led to face-to-face encounters, termed “get-togethers” or GTG for short. At these GTGs, Participants 3 and 7 described how groups as large as 15 or as small as 4 would meet at a public location, such as a restaurant, mainly to continue their discussion of wedding plans. These GTGs also led to further meetings between some of the women beyond wedding planning and strong ties were developed that continue to this day, as described by Participant 4. She explained how five contacts from the New Jersey board went from being virtual acquaintances to real life friends and have remained friends to this day. While Participant 5 never met any of the women she spoke to until right before her wedding took place, she was very pleased to describe how she did indeed meet the women she talked with online. For Participant 9, she became close with a few women, and one in particular she is still in touch with on a daily basis and their children now play together. She began her friendship with the other woman when they learned they were

“date twins” while planning their weddings. They were married on the same day and coincidentally, had daughters four days apart in age. Participant 8 felt

The get-togethers were awesome. You’re talking to people for nine months, a year, sometimes a year and a half and they’re helping you and you’re helping them. You’re venting to each other and you’re being supportive during the process and then you get to put a face to the name and it’s really cool. It was a different experience for me because I’ve never not known somebody and then hung out with them outside of [the board]. My [now] husband thought I was crazy because I was going to meet people from the Internet. He just didn’t get it. But it was a lot of fun and a really nice way to, like I said, put a face to a name and the sit there and talk and relate. You have this huge thing in common with somebody else and they’re going through exactly the same thing you’re going through so it’s like a calming presence. It’s very calming to know there are other people going through it, too.

Participant 7 felt that overall, her experience was very positive. She explained how “I just found a lot of people that were going through the same thing I was going through and it was nice to have that comfort through it all. You get to know that they’re doing the same thing that you’re doing. It’s great for that type of process because there is so much going on and not all your close friends are going through the same thing so they don’t quite understand.” This echoes the experiences participants noted when asked about their overall experience with the board earlier in the interview.

f. Q6: Please tell me about any ways your wedding budget changed after you began participating in the board.

As the participants discussed wedding plans with others on the New Jersey board, wedding budgets underwent some revisions and scrutiny by each bride-to-be. Prior to her wedding planning, Participant 1 had said in the past that she would rent a dress because she did not want to spend the money on one. She explained how that quickly changed

and indicated that she visited approximately five dress salons in her hunt for the perfect dress, which ultimately did cost more than the amount she had once envisioned.

Participant 2 used information gathered from others on the board to set her budget. Initially, she and her fiancé did not have a budget for certain wedding elements, such as the reception site or flowers. Based on what others indicated they paid to their vendors and what was included in those prices, they decided what they wanted and what an acceptable price to pay would be. In particular, she found it very helpful for her favors.

Participant 4's budget went down after she began participating on the New Jersey board. After learning she was pregnant during her wedding planning, she came to the realization that there were going to be more important things to spend her money on in the near future and all the "stuff" for the wedding no longer had as much significance to her. Participant 9 did not have a budget in mind after she began planning her wedding, but she knew she needed to keep the event as inexpensive as possible and felt that her costs were kept at a minimum through the help of those individuals on the New Jersey board.

Participant 5 also felt her overall wedding costs decreased. She attributes this to the fact that instead of going to local stores or hiring vendors to create some of her wedding projects, she was able to learn how to create the items herself using supplies found online in bulk or with a coupon for a much cheaper price. The board also saved Participants 7 and 8 money. Participant 7 put her own touch into her wedding by creating place cards, programs, and bathroom baskets from ideas she learned on the New Jersey board from other members. From suggestions, Participant 8 was able to save money on

her programs and her place cards because the other women on the board taught her how to make them herself. She was very excited that she got the final product that she wanted because she bought the paper and the ribbon herself. Family members also aided her in creating items for her wedding, but “the girls on the whole really trimmed my budget by a lot by teaching me the do-it-yourself techniques so I could do all that stuff on my own, which was time consuming, but in the end was totally worth it.” Participant 7 echoed, “It was kind of fun to put my own touch on things.”

Not all participants felt the board saved them money, however. For Participant 6, she felt her budget increased four-fold because of all the great ideas she was exposed to that other brides-to-be were incorporating into their weddings. Her budget “wasn’t that high to begin with, but it definitely increased” as a result of her interactions with others. The budget for Participant 3’s wedding also went up. This increase was a result of the fact that she found herself “doing things that I probably would not – did not – even know existed.” Elements such as a monogrammed aisle runner, a monogrammed light display for the ballroom dance floor at the reception, and monogrammed cocktail napkins were incorporated into her big day. She felt compelled to include these things that she otherwise would not have done and looking back, can only describe them as the “stupid little extras I was reading they were doing and I wanted to do too.” These extras added approximately \$5,000 to her overall wedding cost.

g. Q7: Please tell me about your experiences with TheKnotTV.

While participants were influenced by other members of the New Jersey board, not one indicated they were influenced at all by The Knot TV, an embedded, streaming

area on every message board page which was composed of shorts spots by many of the big name advertisers on TheKnot.com Web site announcing trends, fashions, and overviews of lavish weddings. Participants indicated they would immediately turn off the feed, minimize the window, or employ a technique another member concocted to eliminate the inclusion of that element altogether when visiting the New Jersey board. The Knot TV was described as “a waste” by Participant 6 and Participant 1 added that she “hated it and would mute it every single time I came on the board.” Instead, Participant 8 would look up any of TheKnot.com’s members’ profiles, also known as a bio. She was especially interested in viewing the wedding photos of the women who were already married and who had included photos from their wedding day in their bio. This way, she could look at their photos and get ideas, especially since she did not have access to streaming media at her office, where she did a majority of her wedding planning.

h. Q8: Please tell me about other wedding media or resources you used.

Besides the New Jersey board, participants received a majority of their wedding planning ideas and resources from word of mouth, taking mental notes at weddings they attended, bridal magazines, books, and the Internet in general. Specific magazines included *Martha Stewart Weddings*, *InStyle Weddings*, and *Inside Weddings*. Some participants also visited Wedding Channel.com, but mainly, participants gave most of the credit for their resources to the New Jersey board. Participant 7 found bridal magazines to be overwhelming because there was so much information in one place, but it was not

very comprehensive nor could it cover as many options as those she found on the New Jersey board. Participant 8 felt the other members of the New Jersey board were honest in their experiences with a particular vendor or service and she appreciated that. She felt the responses she received to her questions were genuine and the other members did not have anything to lose by telling her about their positive or negative experiences.

i. Q9: What do you remember most vividly about your experience with the board?

Overall, the participants recited a varied assortment of topics when asked what they remember most vividly about their participation on the New Jersey board. The countdown graphics which appeared in the signature portion of many posts and indicated how many days were left until that particular individual's wedding were a favorite experience for Participant 1. She felt a connection with the bride-to-be as the countdown went down to the day of the wedding because she "liked that I was able to share in their happy day that way." Participant 4 cited the "catfights" she read about between different members as her favorite memory. To her, they "made for an interesting day... You couldn't pull yourself away when all that started."

Participants 2, 3, 7 and 9 enjoyed the friendships that developed. In particular, Participant 2 enjoyed watching the planning evolve for a certain bride-to-be, and once she was married, Participant 2 would anxiously await that bride's return to the board. Participant 3 liked having access to the resources of all these women at her fingertips. She explained how helpful everyone was and what a great place the community was. Participant 7 also felt this way. Chatting was exciting for her as she would await what

others had to say. She spent all her free time on the New Jersey board and meeting new individuals was an added bonus.

The interaction between members of the New Jersey board also made the experience worthwhile for Participants 5, 6, and 8. Participant 5 cited her first post to the board and the overwhelming positive response she received to the question she asked. The quickness and kindness expressed by those individuals was what made her want to continue to come back and become an active member of the community. Eventually, some of those individuals who commented on her posts also became her good friends offline. The friends Participant 6 made in real life are also most memorable for her and she has even attended the weddings of many of the women she met on the New Jersey board. Participant 8 enjoyed meeting the women at the get-togethers most vividly. She stated the camaraderie really helped her because of the immediate connection she had with those who were going through many of the same, stressful emotions.

j. Q10: Please tell me about any other bulletin boards or social interaction sites you have used.

The popularity of the New Jersey board as a forum for communication was a unique experience for most participants when they first joined. Most participants were not previous members of online bulletin boards and those who had any experience with online communication sites mentioned Yahoo! Groups for recipes and area activities, teaching chat rooms, and Web sites for elementary and early childhood teaching, none of which are analogous to the message boards at The Knot. Participant 6 also mentioned her short-lived membership in a message board related to *Sunset Beach* before the soap opera

series was canceled. The lack of experience in this forum of communication speaks to participants' uninfluenced affinity toward this channel of communication. There was no participant, except perhaps Participant 6, who had ever been a part of such an influential way to transmit ideas across the Internet.

Accordingly, the positive experiences at the New Jersey board have influenced the participants' current membership experiences. After TheKnot.com, participants also joined and became active at similarly setup message forums at BabyCenter.com and TheNest.com. Baby Center and The Nest employ the same types of message board functions as The Knot. The type of format used by these sites allows for continued interaction encompassing participants' new interests that have been discovered and cultivated after wedding planning such as money concerns, homemaking, gardening, starting a family, cooking, and pets. A natural progression from wedding planning to a wider scope of topics can be noted.

Chapter 6: Application of Content Analysis

From the uses and gratifications perspective, content analysis will be utilized to discuss the community building and relational culture amongst board members and what participants gain from their choice to participate on the New Jersey bulletin board.

The design, data set, and participants, including both posters and commenters, will be examined below. As discussed earlier, questions to be explored are: How is community building and relational culture exemplified through postings and relationships made by perspective brides on the online bulletin board The Knot.com in New Jersey? How are participants' perceptions and actions affected throughout the online wedding planning process on TheKnot.com's New Jersey board from a uses and gratifications theory perspective? And finally, how do strong or weak ties created affect the emotional and informational support among New Jersey brides-to-be as a result of their participation in the relational online community on TheKnot.com?

A. Design

Through an exploratory study utilizing content analysis of the postings and relationships made on the New Jersey Internet bulletin board on TheKnot.com, the effects on the uses and gratifications which influence participants' perceptions and actions throughout the wedding planning process will be discussed. The Internet has become an increasingly popular home for wedding community bulletin boards where brides can learn about anything and everything wedding-related from others going through a similar planning process. This is accomplished through computer-mediated communication, which allows for large groups to share ideas and feelings even when group members are

located across different counties in a single state, miles and miles away from one another. By conducting a content analysis of the public posts on the New Jersey board over a 6-month period from January 1, 2013 to June 30, 2013, community building and relational culture amongst board members will be critically studied.

Discussions which reveal personal details, feelings, and experiences take place quite frequently on the New Jersey board of the popular wedding planning Web site TheKnot.com. A content analysis of public posts from participants on the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com aims to address this lack of research and add to the body of available literature on this developing method of wedding planning via the Internet. It will be an extension of the work by Finegold and Cooke (2006) which addresses the understanding of attitudes, experiences and dynamics of interaction of students working in online groups through a discussion board analysis utilizing an adaptation of Bales' (1950) Interaction Process Analysis. Each of the 602 threads created during the 6-month period was categorized.

B. Data Set

The data for this study was gathered from publicly available initial posts composed by members who participated on the New Jersey board of the TheKnot.com between January 1, 2013 and June 30, 2013 and the subsequent comments to those posts up until the day of data collection in May 2014. The time period was randomly chosen. At the time of the data collection, the New Jersey board had a total of 24.5K discussions and 197.1K replies recorded on TheKnot.com and available for public viewing. A total of 602 threads and 3,589 comments to those initial posts occurred in the community and

were analyzed during the chosen time frame for this research. Of the 602 posts, 53 of them did not receive any comments at all.

There was no imposed cutoff date for the inclusion of comments. The way in which the bulletin board software is implemented, visitors and members have the ability to sort the posts they view to their preference. One way is to list topics chronologically, with no regard for the latest comments. The other option is to have topics with recent comment activity ‘bumped’ to the top of the main forum page. As questions can be timeless, in the second view option, it would be possible for a topic that was initially created six months previously to appear at the top of the main page.

A more in-depth look at the scale use for this research project, the establishment of intercoder reliability, initial post analysis, and examples of categories follows.

1. Scale Used for this Research Project

The research conducted by Finegold and Cooke (2006), which utilized *A Set of Categories for the Analysis of Small Group Interaction* by Bales (1950), was adapted to study the 602 threads on the New Jersey board on TheKnot.com from January 1, 2013 through June 30, 2013.

Bales’ scale was originally developed to observe face-to-face contact with multiple observers. Under his guidance, intensive training was required and subjective criteria were used based on observation alone to establish intercoder reliability. One must remember that in 1950, there was no Internet, no Internet bulletin boards, and therefore the initial scale was not developed for use online. However, in 2006, Finegold and Cooke were able to modify the same scale Bales created over 50 years later to study

a college class utilizing an online content management platform equipped with a bulletin board. With a limited number of posters working in online groups, bulletin board messages were categorized and the original Bales' categories were expanded.

For this research project, the 12 major categories originally established by Bales were used, as well as an additional category Finegold and Cooke added (7.3). All posts from the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com were categorized in the time period established and all posters were included. Like Finegold and Cooke, Bales' scale was modified for online communication and group interaction. However, many of the additional categories included by Finegold and Cooke did not translate to TheKnot.com New Jersey bulletin board and were therefore not utilized. The New Jersey board is a specialty board of TheKnot.com's vast subcategories. Therefore, the focus is narrow in that participants choose to post there because they will most likely be wed in New Jersey and have information to add and ask related to the planning process in this area. Because of the narrow nature of the topics discussed, it was not necessary to expand as many of the original 12 Bales' categories as was done in Finegold and Cooke's study. In fact, only one of the expanded categories developed by Finegold and Cooke was included as it clarified the difference between asking a general question (e.g. "How much does a deejay cost?") and asking a personal question (e.g. "How much did you pay for your deejay?"). This distinction is important to note because as information is exchanged on this particular bulletin board, the personal experiences add credence, especially since there are different price ranges for each vendor and brides-to-be may need to be mindful of a wedding budget and the amount of money for each item they choose to include in their celebration. Posts that were categorized as 7 were not necessarily categorized as 7.3.

Sharing personal experiences with vendors can aide others in the wedding planning process, as well as introduce new ideas and providers. While general questions are asked and information is provided, it is the personal experiences of others that shape and influence decisions. Therefore, while categories 7 and 7.3 are similar, they are actually two unique groupings and were useful in different instances for participants on the New Jersey board.

In the Finegold and Cooke study, the bulletin board module was used to supplement a college class, which also met in person, and face-to-face communication was also analyzed. TheKnot.com had a different relationship amongst members as face-to-face communication did not occur and the individuals choose to participate in this medium only with no prior or ongoing relationship or group membership. Finegold and Cooke wanted to determine if online communication was a convenient way to connect group members for a task as opposed to email and face-to-face communication. On TheKnot.com, participants are required to use the bulletin board format. By choosing to participate, members, by default, have chosen bulletin board communication as their preferred method and there is no discussion as to whether bonding would occur easier in person, as that is not an option.

Finally, Finegold and Cooke had a lecturer associated with each group of their participants. Whether the lecturer should participate was a part of their study, as well as the part-time vs. full-time distinction of the students. On the New Jersey board, all participants are equal, even the moderator.

Therefore, because of the differences presented between Bales' scale and the modified Finegold and Cooke scale, the framework utilized for this research is as follows:

Social emotional area: positive reactions

1. Shows solidarity (raises other's status, gives help, reward)
2. Shows tension release (jokes, laughs, shows satisfaction)
3. Agrees (shows passive acceptance, understands, concurs, complies)

Task area: attempted answers

4. Gives suggestion (direction, implying autonomy for other)
5. Gives opinion (evaluation, analysis, expresses feeling, wish)
6. Gives orientation (information, repeats, clarifies, confirms)

Task area: questions

7. Asks for orientation (information, repetition, confirmation)
- 7.3 Asks for personal information (positive social or emotional)
8. Asks for opinion (evaluation, analysis, expression of feeling)
9. Asks for suggestion (direction, possible way of action)

Social emotional area: negative reactions

10. Disagrees (shows passive rejection, formality, withholds help)
11. Shows tension (asks for help, withdraws out of field)
12. Shows antagonism (deflates other's status, defends or asserts self)

As in Finegold and Cooke's study, each post was read one sentence at a time and each line was then categorized appropriately from the modified Bales' scale above. All

posts were categorized once by the primary investigator, and then revisited and categorized again to test coder reliability. Like the Finegold and Cooke model study, many posts from the New Jersey board on TheKnot.com were cross-categorized into many categories as each sentence requested or stated different intentions. Each post could have as few as 1 and as many as 13 categories associated with it.

No posts were categorized in more than 6 combined categories. The most frequent number of category tags in an individual post was 3 with 214 posts tagged as such, followed by 191 posts categorized into 2 categories. The remaining posts were placed into 4 categories (102 posts), 1 category (71 posts), 5 categories (23 posts), and 6 categories (1 post).

Category tags	Total count
1	71
2	191
3	214
4	102
5	23
6	1

Figure 18. Count of category tags per thread. This figure illustrates the number of category tags associated with threads.

The category counts indicate that few posts are simple, and even fewer are highly complex. Instead, posts are most likely to be complex enough to point and contain enough details to provide information and ask for responses, but not too complex to be overwhelming to readers. As most posts are categorized into 2 or 3 categories, a board norm emerged over time and was established and most posts follow this norm of the

forum to keep the range of the content at a regular rate and to focus on just a few things per post.

At the higher range, the post with the greatest number of category tags was by user danilynn72, who wrote:

Hi girls,

Hopefully you can help...I'm in a pinch...two weeks ago I went to my first dress fitting and had NONE of the above although the SHOES are major! I've been to Macy's, Nordstroms, Lord and Taylor's, DSW, MJM, etc. I'm short and wanted either a taller wedge or a platform but couldn't find anything. Everything in department stores was gold or silver...I'm looking for ivory! Where in Central NJ did you find your shoes or gosh even up north but preferably around me. I can't order online because I need them in a week and want to try them on. Any stores that have a large selection?

Also, will need a larger crinoline for my Casablanca A-line dress, WHERE in the heck do I buy that? I don't like the one my bridal store sells..it's huge!! Also, where did you get your veil?? I guess I can find a long line bra somewhere but some stores dont let you return them...gosh this is tough!!

All HELP kindly appreciated.
Danielle

This post was categorized as 4 (gives suggestion), 5 (gives opinion), 6 (gives orientation), 7 (asks for orientation), 7.3 (asks for personal information), and 9 (asks for suggestion). It received 14 comments.

Some threads were only classified into 1 category and received only a single tag. A total of 8 posts were classified as only category 1, 1 post was classified as only category 2, 7 posts were classified as only category 6, 21 posts were classified as only category 7, 15 posts were classified as only category 7.3, 4 posts were classified as only category 8, and 15 posts were classified as only category 9. These numbers indicate that there were 71 posts of 602 that were very specific in their content and could be

categorized singularly. When the range of content is limited, the users are asking or telling very specific things.

Category	Tag count
1	8
2	1
6	7
7	21
7.3	15
8	4
9	15

Figure 19. Threads classified into a singular category. This figure provides a count of threads classified into only 1 category.

2. Examples of Categories

The following describes the methodology for distinguishing the 13 possible categories utilized for the research and also provides examples of threads categorized in at least the category described. It is important to remember that each post was read one sentence at a time and other categories might have been assigned even though the example posts were selected to represent only one category. Note also that these posts are taken word for word from the posts submitted, grammar errors and misspellings included.

- a. Category 1: Shows solidarity (raises other's status, gives help, reward)**

Posts that were identified as category 1 spoke highly of another poster, vendor, or experience and may have encouraged others to hire the same company or mimic a similar service.

Post title: Just Booked DJ and Limo!

Very excited that I booked my DJ and limo this week! My DJ is Mike Chieffo from DJMC in Belleville, NJ. He has 5 star reviews and 25 years of experience. And he is the most personable, nicest guy to do business with. It's like planning with your best friend!

I also booked Danaro Limo from Carlstadt, NJ. Tony was also very knowledgeable, down to earth, and very easy to talk to. I feel like I hit the jackpot with these two guys!

Post title: Congrats to this week's bride!

Congrats and best wishes!

1-4-13 - jnmar071

b. Category 2: Shows tension release (jokes, laughs, shows satisfaction)

Category 2 posts included some of the more common ritual posts on the board, introduction posts and wedding reviews. These posts will be further discussed in a future section. Many of these two types of posts included common Internet vernacular such as “lol” and many sentences with exclamation marks, which highlighted the poster’s happiness and satisfaction.

Post title: Vendor Reviews 12.9.12 (PIP)

Hi! Below are my vendor reviews. I live in Brooklyn, but my wedding was in NJ, so I have a mix of vendors from both. Honestly, I would give them all an A+, so I did not bother rating them individually. I have included some pictures are below. Sorry that they are a little long! I found these reviews helpful when I was planning, so hopefully they can be a good resource for some of you. J

Venue-Clarks Landing Yacht Club

There are almost no words to describe how incredible our experience was at Clarks Landing. As soon as we walked in and saw the incredible view, and elegant decor, we knew that this was where we had to get married. Don and Nicole provide the most amazing customer service I have ever experienced. I do not think there was an e-mail that I sent or phone call that I made that was not answered within 1 hour. I knew that on the day of my wedding, I would not have to worry about a thing, and I was right! They managed to make us feel like we were the only wedding they had ever had-remembering every little detail. We have had so many people tell us that the cocktail hour was the best they have ever attended. Our wedding was the first day of Chanukkah and we asked them to do a potato latke station. They were happy to do something they had never done before. Don even suggested a Jelly Donut and coffee station as guests left. The food was incredible and our guests just loved it. Most importantly, the staff at Clarks went above and beyond! During dessert, my mother moved seats to talk to a friend, and when she looked down, she realized that her waiter had moved her cappuccino to her new seat. It was little things like this that really set Clarks apart. Even though our wedding was on a cold and rainy day, we did not even notice because everything was so seamless. They truly gave us the wedding of our dreams!

Florist-Petal Beach

Wonderful! As soon as I met Bonnie, I felt completely at ease about our flowers. All I wanted for my wedding was a bouquet of peonies in December (not an easy task!), and that is exactly what I got! My bridesmaid bouquets were gorgeous and exactly what I had asked for as well. As for my Chuppah- it was breathtaking. Bonnie is truly an artist, and it was just beautiful and perfect for the space. Petal Beach was worth every penny!

Band-Escapade from Craig Scott

We used the band Escapade from Craig Scott and we loved them! We had the acoustic guitar for our ceremony, and also added two horns to the band. I was a little nervous because we had asked him to play music that was not on their playlist for my walk down the aisle, as well as for our first dance, and they were amazing! About 8 weeks before you fill out an online form with the music that you want them to play, and on the Monday before the wedding, we had a phone call with the band leader, Ken Gold. I told him exactly what we were hoping for, and they delivered! Our friends were up and dancing the whole night which was exactly what we wanted. Their musicians are so talented and we were so happy with their performance!

Photographer-Heyn Photography

Marissa and the girls of Heyn Photography are incredible. We are so happy with the

preview pictures that we have seen (below), and we cannot wait to see the rest! Marissa knew I had my heart set on taking pictures on the dock behind our venue, so she came prepared with clear umbrellas. They came out so cute that they almost made me happy that it rained on my wedding day! During the reception, they had edited photos from earlier in the day and had them playing on a TV screen at the back of the room. We had no idea they were going to do this, but our guests loved seeing them!

Video-Villanovisions

We used Rob for my sister's wedding, so I knew he would be great. He is totally unobtrusive on the day. I felt like I never saw him, but he somehow captured everything. My only complaint was that he only let us pick two songs for the video and he picked the rest. I'm not crazy about the music he picked, but the quality of the video and the moments he captured were amazing, which is probably more important. He was also unbelievably fast. We had our full, edited video when we got back from our honeymoon.

Hair-Jeanine LaMacchia

I was so nervous about my hair for my wedding. I have very thick, wavy hair that many hair stylists do not know how to style. Thank goodness for Jeanine! I loved my hair at my trial, and decided to do it a little bit differently on the day of the wedding, and Jeanine did not skip a beat. Not only did I love my hair, but it even lasted through pictures in the pouring rain! Besides just being amazing at what she does, she is just so sweet. She traveled a little far for me, and there was a \$50 travel fee, but I thought she was totally worth it!

Makeup-Jeanine Mangan

Jeanine is truly an artist. She made me, my bridesmaids, mother and mother-in-law look flawless. It poured the day of the my wedding, but we still took pictures outside and the makeup lasted through it perfectly. I know there has been a bunch of negative feedback about her surprise assistant fees, however I think she may have found out that people were not happy. A week before the wedding she sent an e-mail saying there was no assistant fee. On the morning of the wedding she actually did bring an assistant (not her niece, but an actual MUA), and did not charge me a fee. I was very pleasantly surprised!

Dress- Birnbaum & Bullock

I had a bit of a unique situation with my dress. I saw it online and knew it was my dress. I went to the store and tried it on, and that was it! Robert Bullock and Steven Birnbaum design their own gowns and this is their flagship store in Manhattan. They have dresses in all different price ranges, and when I told them my budget they stuck within it. The designer is actually the one that fits you for your dress at the fittings, which was definitely a cool experience. Steven was wonderful and made me feel like a

princess! I would highly recommend them!

Veil- Bridal Veil Falls

This is a small shop in the East Village owned by a lovely woman named Margaret. If you bring her a fabric sample of your dress, she will custom make a veil for you. She has a ton of samples in her shop to try on. She even let me bring one to my fitting so that I could pick the correct length for my dress. She also does this for a fraction of the price of “designer” veils. I would highly recommend her!

Invitations- Elegantly Stated

Irene was one of my favorite wedding vendors! She did my sister's invitations when she got married, so I knew exactly who I was going to when my turn came. We ended up with beautiful letterpress invitations. We received so many compliments. Irene was incredibly detail oriented throughout the entire process- making sure that every comma and apostrophe was in the right place. She is also just so sweet and you can tell that she loves what she does and takes pride in it. If you are looking for invitations in any price range, Irene has it and more.

Calligraphy- Dani Writes

I know Dani is highly recommended on this board- so this is just another glowing recommendation! She did the calligraphy for my invitations and escort cards. She is fast and affordable and does great work!

Menus and Table Numbers- Wiregrass Weddings

I happened to find a round menu of theirs on Pinterest that I loved, that happened to match my wedding invitations (<http://www.wiregrassweddings.com/Round-Wedding-Menu-1549/>). I wrote to them to see if they could design something for me that was similar but with our names and wedding date and they did. They also made matching table numbers. They are SUPER affordable and many of my guests commented on how nice and different they were. They were also very fast.

Post title: Intro.

Hey all,

I am new to the board so I wanted to introduce myself before I started posting.

My fiance proposed Nov. 24th and we are just starting to meet with vendors. Very exciting!!

I just did dress shopping today at Bijou Bridal in Paramus. It was a blast... I was like a

kid in a candy shop.

My man proposed to be after 9 years of dating while we were getting ready to head out for a night on the town. We spent the day setting up Christmas decorations and just hangin. I was expecting it to happen eventually... but he TOTALLY caught me off guard and I did not even know he had been looking at rings.

Any brides doing a winter wedding? we have a date set for 1/11/14 in West Orange. I cannot waittttt (if you are married, does it go by fast? I hope so! lol).

Post title: I found a dress!!

After stressing about finding a wedding dress, I found one yesterday!! Yay!!!

I'm so relieved, I just had to share. :)

c. Category 3: Agrees (shows passive acceptance, understands, concurs, complies)

No posts fit into the category 3 description as no threads referenced other initial posts or posters to agree with them or comply with directives.

d. Category 4: Gives suggestion (direction, implying autonomy for other)

Posts in category 4 helped guide those who will be commenting by providing suggestions in the initial post to help provide more accurate answers. Sometimes this was done by supplying a specific area of New Jersey where the bride-to-be lives so a vendor in southern New Jersey was not suggested for a northern New Jersey wedding, or by providing a series of vendors the bride-to-be was contemplating using to set the stage for feedback on these specific providers.

Post title: photo books

Hi Brides! I had my boudoir photo shoot this weekend and it was amazing! My package included the shoot and photos on a hi res disk with the copyrights...the pricing for the photog to make a book was wayyyy too much so I am going to make my own, any rec's on what website to use? I know shuttfly, mixbook & piccabu all do this but I'm a little worried about the privacy of my photos...suggestions please

Post title: alternative rock first dance

Want to see what ideas everyone has for an alternative/rock first dance song. two that came to mind for me is dave matthews you and me and also band of horses- no one is ever gonna love you. any other ideas?

Post title: Venue's In Northern New Jersey

Ok So I am planning my wedding out of California (where my Fiance is stationed and I now live as well) to be held in New Jersey, were we are from, (I am from Newark, he is from Jersey City). I want to have the ceremony with the NY Skyline, but I am no fool, I know I will be paying for the location and scene. I have found our top picks

1. Liberty House
2. Maritime Parc
3. Michael Anthony's

All in JC. I have been reading reviews about them all and its more bad than good. The prices are a bit redic however, its understandable. I want to know if paying \$150pp is worth it with the food for Michael Anthony's? The view is nice, however, I havent found much detail on the space. \$120 and below is what I am looking to pay for an estimated 170 guest and open bar excluding gatuity and tax. Our theme is nautical and I did not want to go down the shore because I am not a fan of the jersey shore locations any more. NY is too expensive.

Does anyone have any suggestions on planning a wedding out of state (which is technically home) but still, and also, other JC, Hoboken venues as well as some inland venues in Northern Jersey, Essex, Hudson, Union, Middlesex county...

e. Category 5: Gives opinion (evaluation, analysis, expresses feeling, wish)

Many brides have strong opinions on the vision they have for their wedding day and the elements they wish to include. The posts where brides-to-be request a specific item or service to utilize on their wedding day are captured in category 5 posts.

Post title: Wedding Venue HELP!

Hi everyone! New on the boards...been engaged since November but just amped our venue search! So far, we've seen:

Il Tulipano
The Palace at Somerset Park
The Meadow Wood Manor

We really like these but still don't feel like we've found "it." Can anyone suggest anything that encompasses the elegance of the Palace with the warmth of the Manor and perhaps the affordability of Il Tulipano? Does this magical place exist?

We have also seen The Atrium, The James Ward Mansion and Seasons and have nixed those three.

Any other thoughts? Any suggestions would be welcome and helpful...if possible to include pricing for the fall of 2014, I'd send the greatest thoughts your way!

Thanks everyone!!
--C

Post title: WANTED: Bilingual, affordable Wedding Band

I need a Wedding Band that can perform Latin music as well as American, in the NJ area. Also, must be affordable. Please respond to this if anyone can provide these services or recommend a band. Thanks!

f. Category 6: Gives orientation (information, repeats, clarifies, confirms)

Posts in category 6 provide general information about the poster and the wedding they are planning.

Post title: Modern Venue in North Nj or Rockland/Orange County

My fianc and I are looking for a modern venue in north NJ Or NY. To hold about 150 people. We are planning a Thursday wedding next July so we are looking to get the most for our money. This is why we are doing it on a Thursday. We would like to stay under 90 per person with tax and gratuity. We also would like to have our ceremony at that location so an outdoor space would be great. And having a hotel on site or close as possible. Any ideas are greatly appreciated.

Post title: Including Hotel info with STD?? [Note: STD = Save the Date, an announcement of the wedding date sent to wedding guests before the formal invitation]

I know I have some time before my wedding (May 2014) but last night I was talking to my fiance about what I'd like to book now and what I think we can wait on. I was thinking that blocking out hotel rooms was something that could wait.

We're taking out engagement pics in April or May of this year and sending out our STDs shortly after. Would it be tacky or helpful to include the hotel information in the STDs?

The hotels we are interested would provide a shuttle to our venue (The Tides) and my fiance's family will be traveling from Brooklyn/Long Island/Staten Island.

g. Category 7: Asks for orientation (information, repetition, confirmation)

Category 7 posts ask for general information to be provided about a variety of different topics.

Post title: Seasons - food tasting?

I am getting married at Seasons in a few months and recently heard that when you go into to pick your menu, you don't get a food tasting. Has anyone been married there or recently picked their menu? Is this true? I will be very disappointed if it is. I have been

there before so I know the food is excellent, however, I would like to taste what we are actually offering to our guests.

Post title: Rumor has it David's Bridal dropped photo and video???

A friend of mine said David's Bridal is no longer offering photo and video. Does anyone know if the chain is in financial trouble or did photo or video just not work out for them? Been looking at gowns there and want to be sure they are still going to be in business. Tempted to ask at the store but employees always seem to be the last to know...

h. Category 7.3: Asks for personal information (positive social or emotional)

Posts in category 7.3 are similar to category 7 in that the user is asking for information, but this category is unique and was included from the Finegold and Cooke (2006) research because these posts ask for information based on personal experiences.

Post title: The Mill, Spring Lake

Has anyone had a wedding/party here? How was the food? Atmosphere? Ceremony? Thanks!

Post title: Anyone have an experience with JMA Prod or Blue Moon Prod

I am looking for a videographer for my friends wedding **GASP** for this Saturday. I found them on wedding wire and both had good reviews and they are available yay! I just wanted to see if there were any brides out there that have worked with them?! TIA

i. Category 8: Asks for opinion (evaluation, analysis, expression of feeling)

Category 8 posts ask for opinions from other users, perhaps based on personal experiences, or just what another person might do in a similar situation.

Post title: Abella Studios (Fairfield) Photographer

Has anyone been to one of Abella's Events and talked to them about their photo

package?

They emailed me a quote and it's still a bit high for us for just photo and I was wondering if I should wait until they have another open house and go check out the prices there to see how they are.

Any suggestions??

Post title: Tipping...ack!

So I can't seem to find a straight answer on this... My hair/makeup girl, dj, and photographers all own their businesses...do I tip them? Tax and gratuity is built into my venue price...how much do I tip the staff beyond that? And do I tip the wedding coordinator at the venue (which is a hotel)? Thanks!

j. Category 9: Asks for suggestion (direction, possible way of action)

Posts in category 9 asked questions that were looking for solutions to problems and ideas on how to turn dreams into reality.

Post title: Need hwlp finding a dress in 4 months

I'm trying to help my sister find a dress... All the shops she's called in NJ need 8 months in advance, but she only has 4 months until her wedding, any suggestions where she can go? Thank you!!!

Post title: How much to tip priest performing ceremony?

Hello everyone, I will be getting married this summer by a catholic priest in northern new jersey and was wondering how much I should tip. I'm not sure what is customary in this area, and I want to take into account that he will be going out of his way to perform our ceremony in a seperate parish. Any suggestions are appreciated :)

k. Category 10: Disagrees (shows passive rejection, formality, withholds help)

No posts were categorized as 10. As with category 3, no posts referenced other threads or posters to disagree with them or withhold assistance.

I. Category 11: Shows tension (asks for help, withdraws out of field)

Very few posts were tagged as relating to category 11. The 5 posts that were placed in this category expressed frustration and were classified on the board as vents.

Post title: Wedding Budget Out of Control

I am physically sick when I think how much we are spending on our wedding, I have never spent this much on anything; if I was buying a house the cost would be understandable. But for six hours of one day the price is horrific. And I'm sorry ladies, I'm not a DIY girl and I think that's what's the problem. Just venting

Post title: Guest List Dilemma

We asked our parents to give us their lists when we were looking at venues. Once we booked one, we asked them for addresses for those on the list. We've advised ALL parents involved that we are paying for the wedding ourselves and that our minimum of 140 will be met or just under. If we go over, it's more money out of our pockets and we want to keep the budget some what do-able and not go over board. They all understood.

My family is significantly larger than FI's family. My mom's original list had about 30 people (of which I had already jotted down 20 of them from memory)...NBD in my head. Fi's mom gave her list of maybe 10/15 people and his father hasn't given his list as of yet (fi's parents are divorced). So with the preliminary lists (including our friends/coworkers/bridal party) in an excel spread sheet we were at maybe 120 and had room to add some more. We ordered our STD's about a week and a half ago in hopes that we'd get them this week and out by mid week next week. Well, they are due to be delivered today (whoop! 3 days ahead of schedule!) and we both plan to have them out by this weekend. With that said, we asked our parents once the order had been placed, to get us the list of addresses ASAP so we could put it into excel and create our labels for mailing. We told them we wanted the list no later than Tuesday evening. No problem there.

I received my mother's list today. It went from the 30 that she originally had to over 70!!!! She is inviting family that we haven't seen in over 5 years!! And of course 3/4 of the list has check marks next to the people she would like an invite to go out to. I updated the list and OH MY GOD we've gone from 120 to 154 (which includes 3 little kids that are in our bridal party so they really don't "count" persay) and I still haven't gotten his mom's or dad's updated lists. We set the cap at 165 thinking that we can have an A list and a B list.

I'm just befuddled because my mother knows that we have a minimum and we're paying for this out of our own pockets, but yet almost 1/2 the list belongs to HER alone. How do I cut the list down with out hurting my mother's feelings? Would it be

wrong of me to say that those we haven't seen in over a year are taken off the list and put on the "B" list? I feel like my mother is overdoing the list because she wants all of her family (of which a good 20 probably will say no since they're in OH/TN/WA/CA/NC/SC/western pa) to attend.

HELP!!!!!!

m. Category 12: Shows antagonism (deflates other's status, defends or asserts self)

Posters with posts in category 12 were angry and upset with a vendor or fellow poster. Only 2 posts of the entire data set fit this description.

Post title: Michael Distasio - Photography - Little Falls, NJ - Horrible Experience

Hello Future Brides to Be:

I want you all to stay clear from Michael Distasio. I got married 5 years ago and still waiting for my wedding album, raw video and 5 videos that were included in my wedding package. This photographer already has been paid in full and told us he could not give us our photos/video until everything was paid in full.

I have left numerous emails, voice mail and text messages for Michael and his wife Kathy and as of to date my husband and I have not heard back. It has been 5 years married and the only thing we have received was our thank you photos. Michael no longer has a secretary (going on two years now) hence to say why he does not answer any of our calls.

It is now to the point where my husband and I are going to a lawyer to get this resolved.

I just want to warn those bridges who are seeking a photographer not to go to Michael Distasio. Who knows if I will ever get my video or photo album back and these are lifetime memories for my husband and I.

If there is anyone on this job board that has used Michael and Kathy and experiencing the same issues please let me know. I believe there are others out there where we can file a class action law suit against this horrible business.

Post title: David's Bridal in Freehold, NJ Ruined My Wedding. Do NOT choose them for your dress.

I traveled to Vegas for my wedding and realized i had a problem with my dress. David's Bridal Corporate will not return my calls or answer my emails. The store manager was rude, she would not help me once I was in Vegas and she blamed me when i came back to the store.

Here is the email that I sent them, to which they never responded. I just want everyone to know so you can reconsider ordering from David's Bridal.

Help, I need customer service.

I have left 4 messages over the past couple weeks at David 's Bridal Corporate Office. No one has called be back!

The store manager at David 's Bridal in Freehold, NJ referred me after I visited the store with a complaint.

I was married on January 16, and got my dress at David 's Bridal in Freehold. I let everyone know that I was getting married in Las Vegas and needed the train on my dress bustled so that my husband and I could walk around Vegas dressed up in our wedding clothes! I had my "second fitting" just a few days before leaving. I asked the tailor - who was not the person I spoke with the first day - about the bustle and if i should try it on, and she said, "You don't have to bother putting it back since we didn't do any alterations that would change the length or anything like that. Just take the dress and enjoy!" So I took the dress and I left.

I put it back on for the first time in the hotel a couple hours before the wedding. There was a hole in the back of the dress and couldn't find the bustle. Panicking, I called the Freehold store. A rep put on the store manager. She asked if no one showed me the bustle. I said no. She told me it could be hooks or loops inside the dress and to take it off and look for them. 'I'm sure they are there. Good luck, " she said. I took off the dress and spent an hour with the other people in the room looking for loops or hooks inside the dress. We never found them. I checked the back of my David 's Bridal receipt. I was charged \$35 for the bustle, but there was nothing marked down on the alteration sheet on the back! I was out of time, so I put on the dress without the bustle and got married, and then took the dress off and missed all of Vegas in my beautiful wedding dress.

Sometime after our honeymoon, I stopped back at David 's Bridal in Freehold to see if they could show me the bustle. It was there, but it wasn't anything like what the store manager described to me over the phone when i called panicking from my hotel room in Vegas shortly before my wedding. TAll the bustle was, was a loop directly on the back of the dress. It slipped over one of the buttons from an existing row of buttons that came with the dress.

OK, if the store manager bothered to look up my account, because I am sure you have on record what kind of bustle I had, and properly described it as a small loop on the

back of the dress, instead of describing ever other kind of bustle that I DIDN'T have, I would have been able to find the bustle, and really have my Vegas wedding the way we planned.

In fact, The only reason I finally chose the dress and accessories that did, was because I thought I would be walking around in my dress in Vegas.

When I told all this to the manager at the Freehold store, she said that the tailor shouldn't have let me go without showing me the bustle, but she said, "it's your fault because you left the store without knowing how to use the bustle." Then, at that moment, someone helping me with my preservation package asked me for \$15 more dollars to preserve my veil. I said no, way, I am not giving you people one more cent. That's when the store manager told me to call corporate.

You've got to be kidding me. Like i said in the store, first off it's not my fault when I asked about it, and the tailor says no, don't worry about it, take the dress and enjoy. And what about when I called? She didn't even bother to look up my account to tell me what kind of bustle I had to help me. The problem could have been solved there. I could have also been solved when I went back to the store, but this woman told me that it's my fault and offered to refund \$35 for my ruined wedding over a dress that I only got to parade around Vegas.

I don't even want the dress any more and I hate David 's Bridal .

Oh, and then I call corporate four times and don't have any return calls or messages.

I'm disputing the charge with my CC company and I am going to complain about this all over the internet. The only reason people go to your store is because David 's Bridal offers a store credit card, but you know what, it's not worth it.

Additionally, I think you should know, my friend and I waited at the register for more than an hour because the store associates weren't trained on register; they were all waiting for the store manager to come up and help them. Half the people in Brick are complaining about this. And one associate with red hair argued with me that i couldnt exchange my tiara even before I left the sales counter lol and no one gave me a box for the preservation kit I bought. I came back with the dress and my receipt asking what I do with it

3. Intercoder Reliability

As previously discussed, intercoder reliability is measured by having two or more coders categorize the units, which may be programs, scenes, articles, stories or words, for

example, and then using these categories to calculate a numerical value for the extent of agreement among the coders.

There are no established requirements for determining what is an acceptable level of reliability. Several methodologists (Banerjee, Caropozzi, McSweeney and Sinha, 1999; Frey, Botan and Kreps, 2000; Krippendorff, 1980; Popping, 1988; and Riffe, Lacy and Fico, 1998) have concluded that coefficients of .90 greater would be acceptable to all and .80 would be acceptable in most situations. Below that there is disagreement. The value of .70 has been found to be acceptable for exploratory research (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). For studies in communication, using the percent agreement, the goal is 80% agreement (Joyce, 2013).

Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Bracken (2002) recommended that all content analysis projects should be designed to include multiple coders and report the intercoder reliability among them. The index to be studied should be based on the variables and there should be a level of reliability which is acceptable. They also recommend that researchers not only use percent agreement to calculate reliability, but also to use another method as well to calculate reliability.

This study of the New Jersey board on TheKnot.com utilized two coders. Percent agreement and Krippendorff's Alpha were used. The later was computed according to the method calculated by De Swert (2012). Joyce (2013) also provides a method for the calculation of Krippendorff's Alpha.

Freelon (2010) also developed an online calculator for intercoder reliability. This calculator computed both percent agreement and Krippendorff's Alpha for nominal data coded by two coders, which calculator was used for this dissertation. A second coder

was instructed in the methods used to categorize all initial posts by the principal investigator. One hundred random posts were selected using the built-in function in the MySQL database of posts and the second coder recorded their categorization independently in a separate file. This is similar to the process utilized by Wasko and Faraj (2005) to establish intercoder reliability in a related study.

The categorizations of the 100 posts by the principal investigator and the second coder were then run through Freelon's online calculator. For this initial post analysis, the percent agreement is 97.9 and Krippendorff's Alpha is .92. This indicates adequate agreement and no additional coding is necessary by the second coder to establish intercoder reliability for the initial post analysis.

4. Initial Post Analysis

The categorical frequency of posts can be classified into three separate levels: low frequency, mid-level frequency, and high frequency.

Six categories constitute the low frequency distributions. No posts were classified as category 3 (agrees) or 10 (disagrees), and only 32 were placed into category 1 (shows solidarity), 11 into category 2 (shows tension release), 5 in category 11 (shows tension), and 2 in category 12 (show's antagonism). This is not surprising as category 3 is for posts that agree with other posts while category 10 is for posts that disagree. The absence of posts in these two categories speaks to the way the posts are arranged on TheKnot.com, as the software format does not provide a way to easily reference other posters, positively or negatively. The 2 posts in category 12 exhibit how acceptance is low for venting and negativity is not encouraged among participants.

Code	Category	Count
1	Shows solidarity (raises other's status, gives help, reward)	32
2	Shows tension release (jokes, laughs, shows satisfaction)	11
3	Agrees (shows passive acceptance, understands, concurs, complies)	0
4	Gives suggestion (direction, implying autonomy for other)	92
5	Gives opinion (evaluation, analysis, expresses feeling, wish)	313
6	Gives orientation (information, repeats, clarifies, confirms)	408
7	Asks for orientation (information, repetition, confirmation)	95
7.3	Asks for personal information (positive social or emotional)	135
8	Asks for opinion (evaluation, analysis, expression of feeling)	118
9	Asks for suggestion (direction, possible way of action)	332
10	Disagrees (shows passive rejection, formality, withholds help)	0
11	Shows tension (asks for help, withdraws out of field)	5
12	Shows antagonism (deflates other's status, defends or asserts self)	2

Figure 20. Categorical frequency of posts. This figure provides a total count of how many threads were classified into each category.

While category 1 had a slightly higher number of categorized posts at 32, users do not bond by showing solidarity in this community. While positivity is exhibited, the culture of the board does not encourage users to come on and suggest a vendor or experience unsolicited. This bulletin board's culture is wary of unsolicited statements and advice. In fact, some posts were flagged as being authored by vendors postings about themselves in such a manner to appear they are unbiased customers to encourage additional business. Participants are able to deduce these vendors by looking at the previous posts made by a particular user, as well as the number of total posts. If there are many posts about the same vendor, there is a strong indication that the user is affiliated with the business, and if the post count is low, it can indicate that the user is not an invested member of the community.

Categories 2 and 11 relate to showing tension release and showing tension and once again, with low instances of 11 and 5 posts, respectively, this board is not an outlet for venting. The participants show they take wedding planning very seriously here and this board is mainly for the exchange of opinions, information, and suggestions.

The mid-level frequency categories included 4 (gives suggestion), 7 (asks for information), 8 (asks for opinion) and 7.3 (asks for personal information). These categories speak more to the average posts found on the New Jersey board. Their frequencies were 92, 95, 124, and 135, respectively. The posts in these categories provide suggestions of what the poster is looking for, sometimes by name or location, ask for information in a general sense, asks for the opinion of others when a variety of options are presented, and ask for personal information from those who have used a specific idea or vendor.

The posts with the highest frequencies were 6 (gives orientation), 9 (asks for suggestion), and 5 (gives opinion, wish) at 411, 332, and 313, respectively. As the most utilized categories, it is demonstrated that the posters on the New Jersey board are actively attempting to become less anonymous to the community. Participants are providing information about themselves, actively asking for suggestions related to the planning of their wedding, and giving opinions on how they want to execute their weddings. They are interacting and asking for assistance by providing information to elicit informed responses.

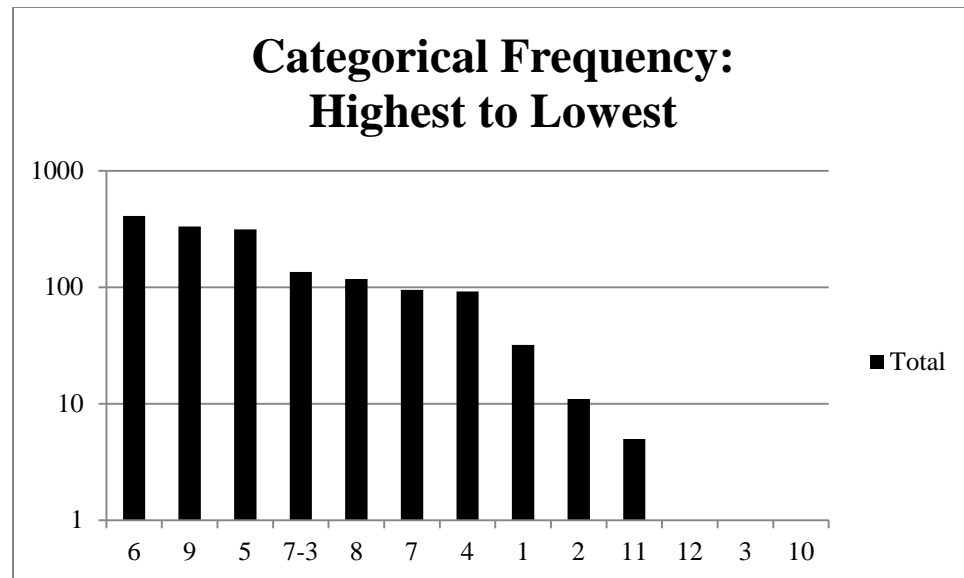


Figure 21. Categorical frequency from highest to lowest. This chart visually demonstrates the three separate levels of categorical frequency: high frequency (categories 6, 9, and 5), mid-level frequency (categories 7.3, 8, 7, and 4), and low frequency (categories 1, 2, 11, 12, 3 and 10).

5. Reply Post Analysis

In addition to analyzing initial threads, communication through reply posts was also investigated in accordance with the uses and gratifications theory. The measures for this study were derived from previously published studies. For the initial posts, the method used was that originated by Finegold and Cooke (2006), which modified *A Set of Categories for the Analysis of Small Group Interaction* by Bales (1950).

The form selected is a Web-based system similar to a physical bulletin board. Exchanges are visible to everyone and related messages are organized into discussion threads. Participation in the network is anonymous, but they have to log into the system in order to participate. Messages were observed and collected during a six month period from January 1 to June 30, 2013.

The text was first coded by reading the postings several times, moving them from the specific to the general and devising categories. Responses were then grouped into like categories. The resulting categories helped to define the function of the wedding bulletin board.

For the analysis of the comments, the methodologies employed by Wasko and Faraj (2000) and Wasko and Faraj (2005) were utilized.

Wasko and Faraj (2005) determined that knowledge contribution occurs when individuals are motivated to access a network, review a question posted, choose those they are able to answer, and take the time and effort to formulate and posts a response. To do this, the individuals must think that their responses are worthy and that they will create value. According to the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), individuals engage in social interaction with the expectation that it will lead to social rewards such as approval, status and respect. Their reputation will be enhanced and they will obtain enjoyment as a result.

In addition to individual motivations, there is also a connection among individuals, and there are links that develop among them. A greater number of individuals who are in regular interaction will increase the ties among members, and will obtain structural capital. Structural capital produces connections to the overall group. Individuals who have a higher proportion of knowledge contribution have greater direct ties to other members, and are more willing to contribute their knowledge to others. (Wasko & Faraj, 2005) Social interaction can be determined by the number of social ties that the individual has with others in the network (Ahuja, Galletta, & Carley, 2003).

Posting and responding to messages creates a social tie between individuals. The number of these ties determines a poster's centrality to the network (Wasko & Faraj, 2005).

Cognitive capital refers to the ability of group members to understand each other. One shares the skills, knowledge, specialized discourse and norms (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). An individual must know the language, and gain experience in applying the norms. In addition, on a bulletin board, the poster must have knowledge to contribute. Individuals with higher levels of expertise are more likely to provide useful information (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Greater skills and knowledge will increase the ability to contribute knowledge.

Finally, there is relationship capital, which exists when the members have a strong identification with the collective and have an obligation to participate (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Members are willing to help other members, and even strangers, because they are part of the group and have a common goal. There is reciprocity in that individuals reciprocate the benefits they receive from others, ensuring ongoing exchanges (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). This is true even though exchanges in electronic networks occur through weak ties among strangers, there is evidence of reciprocal support (Wellman & Gulia, 1999).

Structural capital, as in Wasko and Faraj's (2005) study, was determined by an individual's degree of centrality of the network. This was calculated as follows. If there was a link (one or more messages) between two individuals, a 1 was placed in that cell. If the two individuals were not linked a 0 was placed in the cell. This showed how many individuals there were and how many connections occurred.

In the study by Wasko and Faraj (2005), there were 3,000 messages posted by 604 participants. If an individual exchanged 20 messages with 15 unique individuals, there would be a degree of centrality of 15. An individual who exchanged 20 messages with only one individual would have a degree of centrality of 1.

In the within study, it would be difficult to assess cognitive capital since there was no evidence presented as to a poster's expertise or knowledge in the field. However, using the scale determined by Wasko and Faraj (2005), responses to TheKnot.com bulletin board were categorized for cognitive capital as follows:

- Very helpful (a score of 4) – the response directly answered the question posted and provided a knowledge source for the seeker
- Helpful (a score of 3) – the response directly answered the question
- Somewhat helpful (a score of 2) – the response did not directly answer the question but provided a valuable insight, or a partial answer
- Not helpful (a score of 1) - the response was not helpful to the knowledge seeker

Wasko and Faraj (2005) analyzed this by having a second coder independently code a subset of 100 messages. There was agreement on 92 of the 100 messages. Intercoder reliability was determined by using Cohen's alpha (Cohen, 1960), and was .84, which indicated adequate agreement. Because of the accuracy of the intercoder reliability for the first 100 messages, only one coder continued on with the rest of the messages. After assessing the helpfulness of the messages, an individual's helpfulness score was calculated by taking the mean helpfulness of the response messages.

The total volume of an individual's knowledge contribution was the total number of response message, ones which addressed a question, posted by each individual (Wasko

& Faraj, 2005). In their study, there were 2,555 messages posted by 597 unique individuals. Of those 2,555 messages, 1,156 were topic initiators, and 1,181 were responses addressing questions. Their study also determined that individuals who are central to the network and who are connected to a large number of others made more helpful contributions to the group (Wasko & Faraj, 2005).

In the Wasko and Faraj (2005) study, it was determined that relational capital may not develop in an electronic network due to a lack of shared history, lack of interdependence, infrequent interaction, and the lack of co-presence. It was felt that this was due to the fact that network-based interactions were generalized, and direct reciprocity was not necessary to sustain group action. Their study also found no relationship between commitment and helpfulness of responses.

Additionally, the within study also incorporated the return analysis research done by Wasko and Faraj (2000) in their earlier study. In that study of a bulletin board, 531 comments were categorized. Of this number, 23 did not fall into any coherent category. The remaining 508 were analyzed. Comments were categorized into the following:

- Tangible returns, including useful, with valuable information; answers to specific questions; and personal gain
- Intangible returns, including enjoyment, entertainment, and learning
- Interaction with the community – to advance the community
- Multiple viewpoints – interaction among people with different ways of thinking of things and cultural backgrounds

Each of these dimensions was used to generate scalar items (Wasko & Faraj, 2000).

The same two scales were utilized to categorize the comments on TheKnot.com New Jersey bulletin board. A second coder also independently coded the comments of the randomly selected 100 initial posts, as detailed in the intercoder reliability section. Utilizing the same procedure as the initial posts analysis and the preceding cognitive capital analysis and return analysis on the comments of the random 100 posts done by both the principal investigator and the second coder, the cognitive capital percent agreement is 98.1 and Krippendorff's Alpha is .94. For the return analysis, the percent agreement is 99.0 and Krippendorff's Alpha is .97. Again, this indicates adequate agreement to establish intercoder reliability.

In general, the comments generated by the users of TheKnot.com New Jersey board answer questions posed by fellow users and largely stayed on topic. All 3589 comments were coded by the primary investigator according to the scale established by Wasko and Faraj (2005). Intercoder reliability was established, as discussed above, by a second coder. It can be noted that comments fell into two categories: early (comment number 1, 2, or 3) or later (comment number 4+).

Comments coded as "not helpful" were three times as likely to be classified as such in later comments while the "somewhat helpful" were equally classified as such in early or later comments. Those labeled as "helpful" and "very helpful" were more likely to be classified in early comments. Comments that were "not helpful" were more likely to be categorized as such after the 5th comment and until the 12th as the helpfulness of a comment dipped after the succession of the 13th comment. "Very helpful" and "helpful" comments dipped at the 6th comment. This supports the statement that earlier comments more directly answer the questions asked by users and could be deemed more helpful.

The grouping of comments an initial post received could fit into one of the following groupings: 1) no comments at all, 2) few comments, 3) comments that provided answers followed by additional discussion, or 4) comments that provided answers followed by a tangent discussion.

Next, using the scale established in Wasko and Faraj (2000), comments were determined to be tangible, intangible, related to culture, or related to the community.

Early comments were more likely to be classified as tangible while later comments were more likely to be identified as intangible. As with the first analysis, comment #6 is where a dip occurred and comments became less tangible.

The first comment to an initial thread was 2/3 more likely to be classified as tangible as the response provided the information requested by the initial poster. The remaining 1/3 comments classified as intangible were seeking additional information from the post initiator and asked for clarification before others answered in subsequent comments. In particular, the second comment was classified as intangible in 114 comments, or roughly 20% of comments, because a large majority of those comments were written by the author of the initial post providing clarification and additional information or thanking the first commenter.

Most direct questions tended to be answered in an early comment. For initial posts that had a large number of comments, of interest was the comments that went off on a tangent from comment #6 to #10 and then went back on topic, and were classified as tangible once again toward the end of a comment thread. This demonstrated an effort to be civil and nurturing by commenters even after others in the comment thread had started their own discussions unrelated to the question posed in the initial thread.

Overall, regardless of the scale, the results showed the same trend which validates that earlier responses are more directly related and possess a more positive quality of information related to answering the questions of the initial thread.

The more frequently a user comments, the more likely comments are classified as helpful or very helpful.

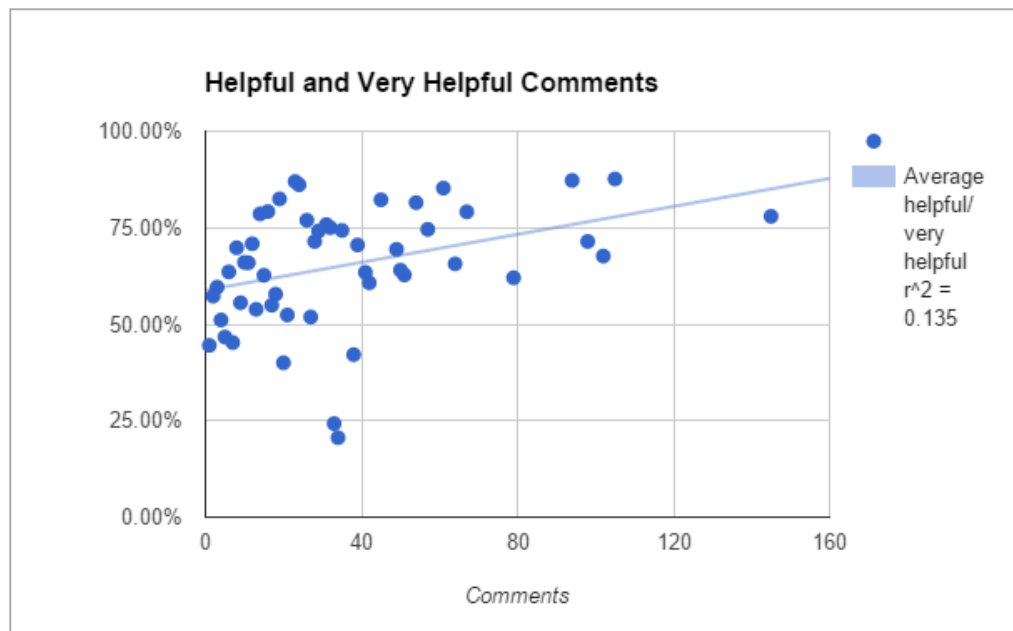


Figure 22. The clustering of helpful and very helpful comments.

The more frequently a user comments, the less likely their comments are classified as somewhat helpful.

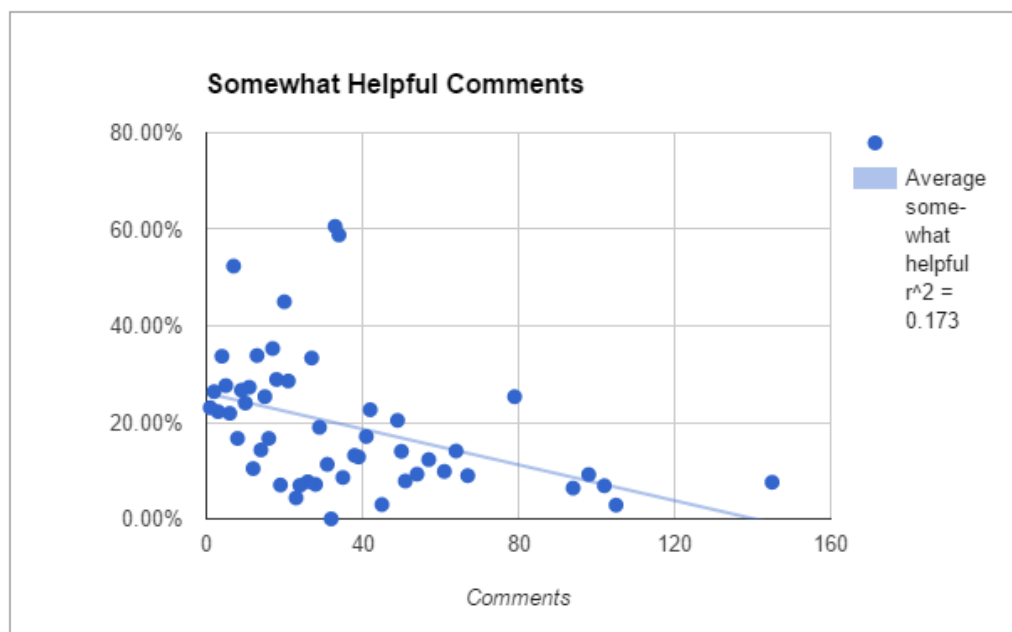


Figure 23. The clustering of somewhat helpful comments.

The more frequently a user comments, the more likely their comments are classified as tangible.

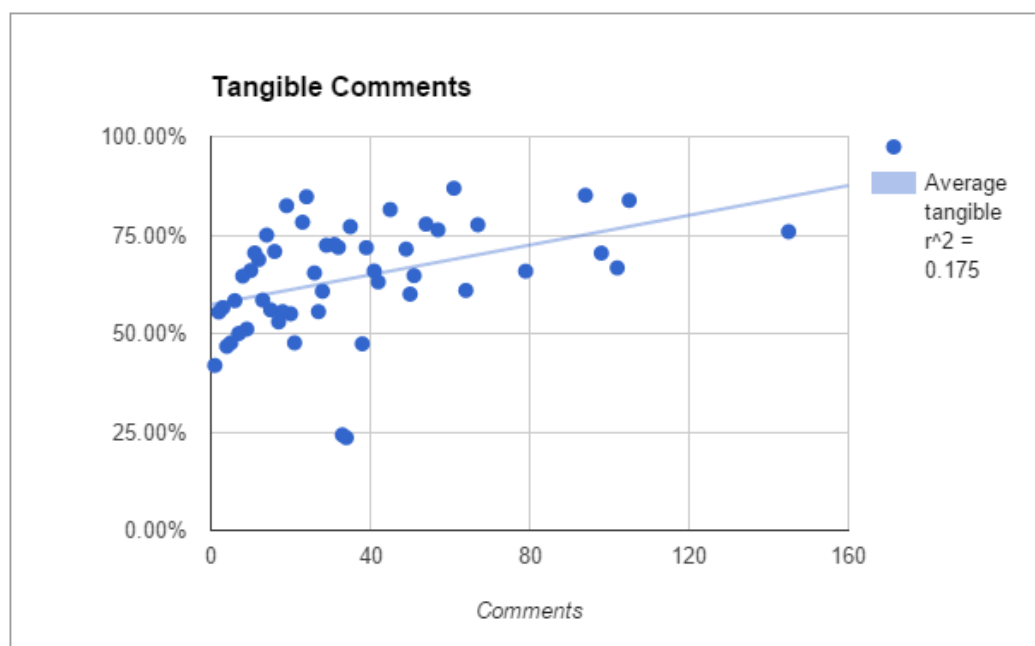


Figure 24. The clustering of tangible comments.

The more frequently a user comments, the less likely their comments are classified as intangible.

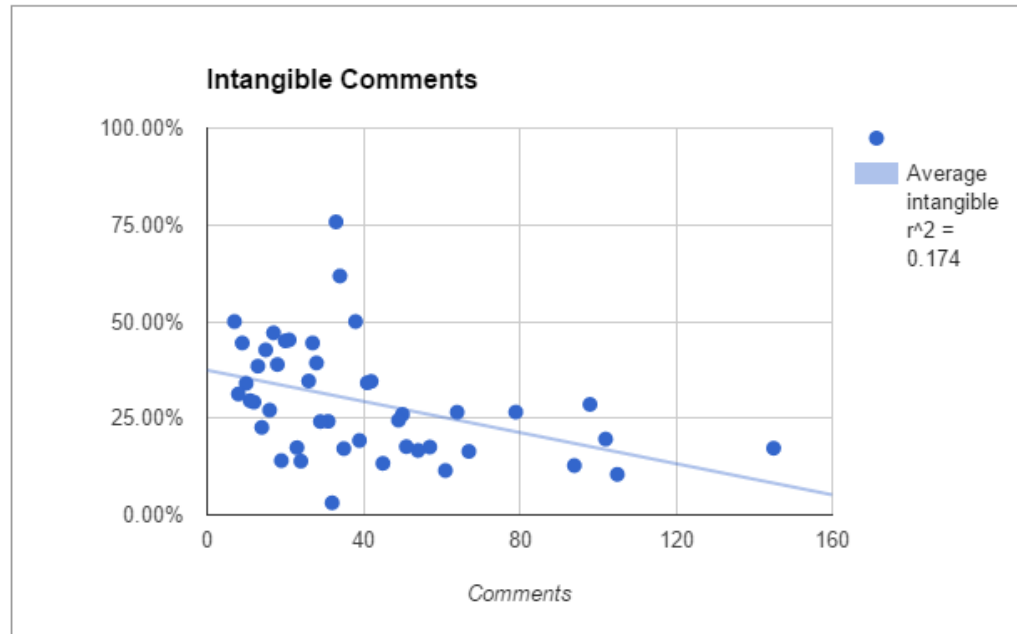


Figure 25. The clustering of intangible comments.

All users are posting comments classified as unhelpful at roughly the same rate.
A trend cannot be suggested.

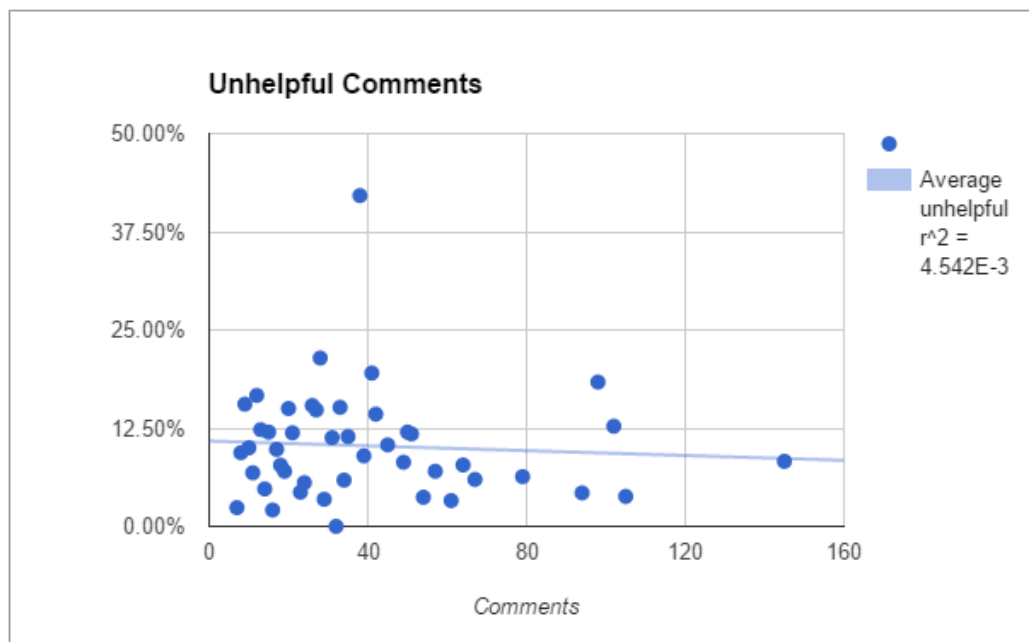


Figure 26. The clustering of unhelpful comments.

C. Participants: Posters and Commenters

The users of the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com have chosen to participate in this particular sub-board because they may be a bride-to-be planning a wedding in New Jersey, whether or not they live here, or they may have already planned and executed their New Jersey wedding and continue to remain an active member. As previously discussed, there is no requirement to join in the conversations except to create a TheKnot.com account and agree to the terms of service.

From January 1, 2013 through June 30, 2013, the chosen 6-month time period of study, a total of 602 threads were created by 305 users (“posters”) and 3,589 comments were authored by the 451 users who replied to those initial posts (“commenters”). There were a total of 546 unique posters and commenters. Not all posters were also commenters; 95 users wrote posts but never commented on the posts they created or any

other post in the data set. Likewise, 241 users commented on initial posts others had made, but did not create any of their own threads. These users had information to share in response to others' statements and questions, but did not initiate posts on their own.

Of the 602 threads studied, 53 of them did not have comments on them at all (8.8%). Many of these posts were made by unique users as 49 posters initiated these threads with no responses. Only four members had more than one post that went unanswered. Member xxstardust composed three posts titled "Congrats to this week's brides!" which listed the members who were to be wed that week. Member michelle221 had two threads that went unanswered. One was asking for alteration recommendations for a wedding gown and the other was an announcement to another member that michelle221 had sent a private message and to check their internal mailbox on TheKnot.com. Member weddinginnj also authored two posts, which were touting a particular vendor. It is likely the other member of the board did not reply to either of these posts as they appeared to be in violation of the terms of service agreement. Finally, member kdjt had two threads without any responses. One post was related to a very specific situation and asked about the process of collecting driver license information from wedding guests to grant them access to McGuire Air Force Base, where their wedding will be taking place. The other post asked for technical assistance with an online service offered by TheKnot.com.

The preceding examples demonstrate a handful of situations where the online community did not respond to a member's posting. Overall, this community is responding to a high percentage of the threads started (over 91%). Members are not only reading, but are also replying to questions and situations presented. A majority of threads

(80.2%) had at least 2 comments, 48.7% had 4 comments or fewer, and 76.9% had 8 comments or fewer. One in 10 posts had more than a dozen comments.

The average number of posts made by posters (only taking in to account data from those that posted 1 or more times) was 1.97 with the highest number of posts made by user michelle221 with 26 initial posts. The chart below details the post frequency. The most common number of threads created was none, with 241 users not creating threads. After that, 193 users authored 1 thread, 48 users authored 2, 27 users authored 3, 13 users authored 4, 9 users authored 5, 4 users authored 6, 4 users also authored 7, 2 users authored 8, another 2 users authored 9, 1 user authored 10, another 1 user authored 13, and finally, 1 user authored 26.

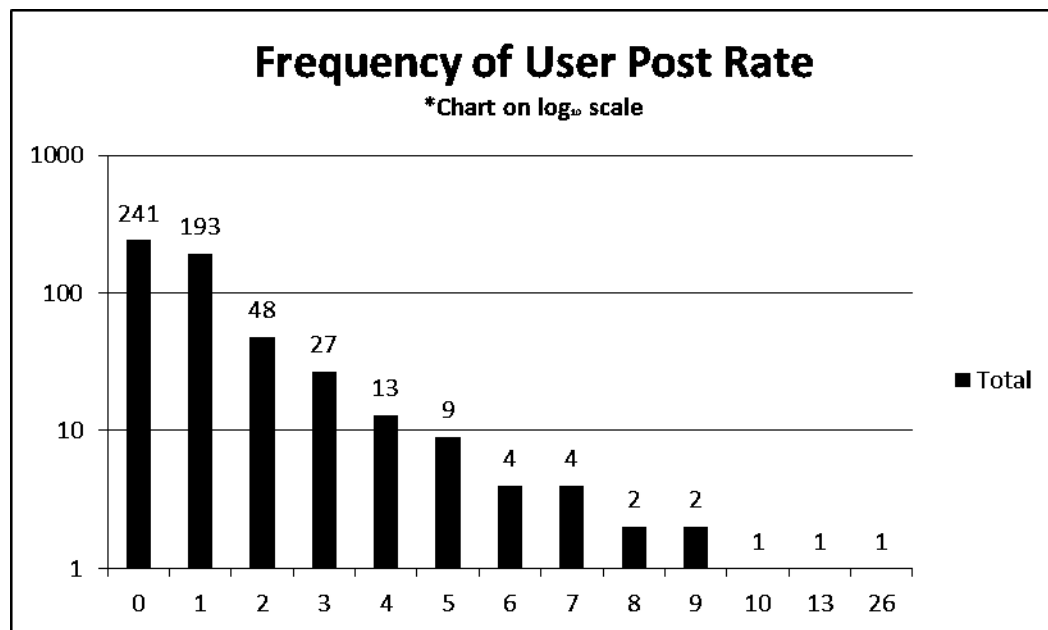


Figure 27. Frequency of user post rate. This chart illustrates the number of users who created a specific number of threads.

The average number of comments made by commenters (only taking in to account data from those that commented 1 or more times) was 7.84 with the highest number of comments made by user SewInLoveWithDMB with 145 comments. The chart below details the user comment rate. The most common number of comments written was 9 comments or below, with 457 users not composing comments. After that, 47 users authored 10-19 comments, 12 users authored 20-29 comments, 9 users authored 30-39 comments, 7 users authored 40-49 comments, 5 users authored 50-59 comments, 3 users authored 60-69 comments, 1 user authored 70-79 comments, 2 users authored 90-99 comments, another 2 users authored 100-109 comments, and finally, 1 user authored 140-149 comments.

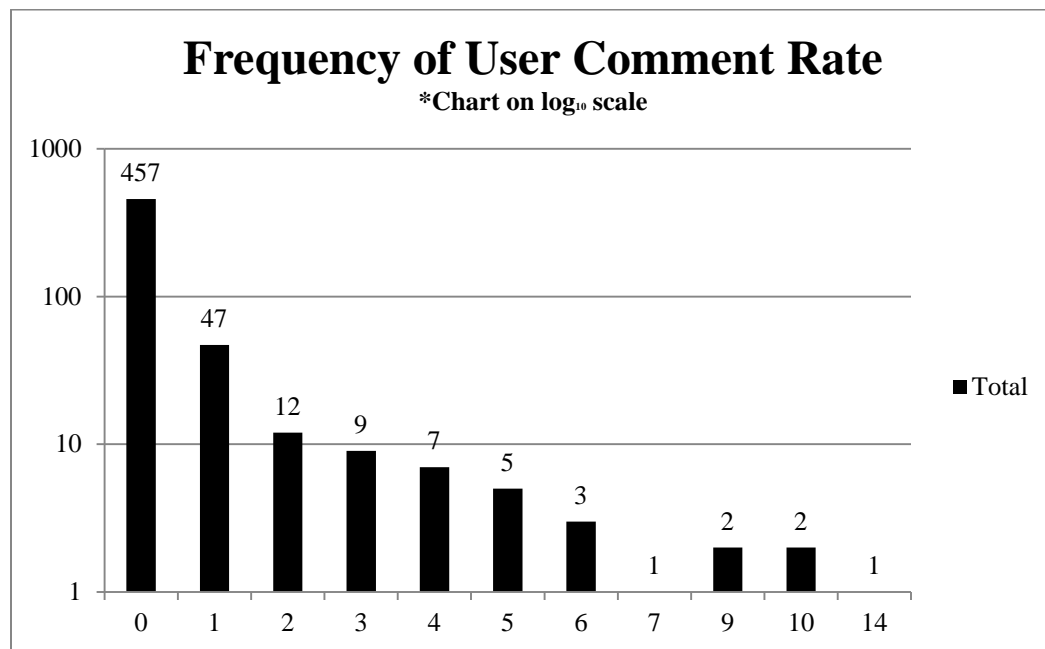


Figure 28. Frequency of user comment rate. This chart illustrates the number of users who authored a specific number of comments. The numbers along the horizontal axis represent a range of comments (0 = 9 comments and under, 1 = 10-19 comments, 2 = 20-29 comments, etc.) while the vertical axis represents the number of users who created those comments.

These averages indicate that a small number of users are doing a large number of the comments. In fact, 12.13% of the top 12% of users who created initial posts, which accounts for those who wrote 4+ posts, account for 50.66% of the total posts. Similarly, 9.96% of the top 10% of users who wrote comments, which accounts for those who wrote 19+ comments, account for 58.20% of the comments. As evidenced by these percentages, a relatively small amount of people conduct a large amount of activity.

1. Popular Topics Discussed

Today, there are many options available to brides-to-be as they plan their wedding day. For each option, an industry has evolved to satisfy that need and many of them are local businesses. This includes industries that never existed before and tie in with the idea that brides deserve every perfect detail for their day. This proliferation has changed the way weddings are conducted.

The number in parenthesis represents the number of times a particular term appeared in an initial post after conducting a specific keyword search. As might be expected, the topics that were discussed in the greatest number of posts were those associated with traditional wedding planning. These included: venue (129), reception (69), dress (54) and gown (11), hair (49), photographer (44), and florist (23) for a total of 379 mentions of traditional wedding topics.

However, in addition, and in keeping with the ability of the New Jersey bulletin board to introduce and evaluate new ideas, the following items, which would not have been part of wedding culture in the past, are now subjects of communication on the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com: dj (33), make-up/makeup (30), make-up artist (22),

videographer (22) and video (34), band (21), limo (15), centerpiece (13), favors (13), alterations (10), shuttle (8), photo booth (7), menu (6), save the date (5), hotel rooms (4), boudoir shoot (3), jewelry (3), Viennese table (2), chair covers (2), calligraphy (2), write own vows (2), event painter (1), and welcome bags (1) for a total of 259 mentions of contemporary wedding topics.

Therefore, of the 602 initial posts studied, there were a total of 638 traditional and contemporary topics; 63% were traditional, 43% were new. These percentages do not add up to 100% as multiple keywords can appear in an individual post. What these numbers show is that most of the posts on the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com have a commercial reference and as a result, the board is commercial in nature. This speaks to the uses and gratifications the participations experience because it provides a forum whereby the participants have their “social and psychological needs” satisfied through the media (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 3).

Contemporary weddings have changed because wedding planning has evolved to include new and unique additions to wedding celebrations and TheKnot.com has provided a forum through which these changes are evident. Not only is there communication among participants, there is communication regarding new aspects that would not have been considered years ago and never would have been part of a traditional wedding.

2. Non-Traditional Ideas Utilized

In response to the question posed in uses and gratifications theory “what do people do with the media?,” it has been demonstrated through interviews with members

of the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com that the brides expressed many ways in which their participation helped make their wedding celebrations unique and contemporary.

The New Jersey board of TheKnot.com was selected as the media to achieve this, creating involvement, attachment and satisfying their needs (Katz, 1959; Klapper, 1963; Ruggerio, 2000).

As previously discussed, ideas for decorating, dresses, hairstyles, favors, venues, invitations, readings and vendors such as photographers, deejays, and florists were mentioned by the interviewees. These non-traditional elements were discovered on and executed with guidance from other members on the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com.

Participant 1 made ribbon wands for guests to use after her and her new husband left the church instead of having guests throw rice. She also mentioned learning about out-of-town bags for wedding guests. A unity candle was used by Participant 2 and her husband during their ceremony to symbolize the joining of the two families. They also sent save the date announcements prior to the wedding day. For Participant 6's wedding, guests blew bubbles instead of throwing the traditional rice, a card box was used to hold wedding cards, and she decorated the aisle of her church with rose petals.

Participant 8 adopted the idea of using caramel apples for favors while Participant 7 gave her guests cookie favors identified through the New Jersey board. She also created place cards, programs, and bathroom baskets from ideas she learned on the New Jersey board from other members. Participant 5 included programs, ceremony decorations, place cards, favors, and menu cards she learned about on TheKnot.com.

Participant 3 included a projection of her wedding monogram on the wall of the reception hall, commissioned a monogram aisle runner for her wedding ceremony,

purchased elaborate gifts for her bridesmaids to thank them for their support and participation, and designed monogrammed cocktail napkins.

These elements, all of which were non-traditional, were all identified by TheKnot.com members. The brides would not have been aware of them had they not participated in the New Jersey board. The members liked the ideas enough to make them part of own wedding, satisfying their physiological and emotional needs, which was given prominence by the uses and gratifications theory.

3. Community Building

Another positive aspect of TheKnot.com boards is the sense of community it fosters. According to Kim (2000), “Community building...(is) the social and cultural dynamics, the power of a shared purpose, and the roles, rituals and events that bind people together into a group” (p. x). Many of the aspects of the New Jersey board, such as rituals, lifecycle, and join year, fit this definition.

a. Rituals

By definition, “Rituals are a crucial element of community development. They keep your members involved by forming habits, creating memorable experiences, and crystallizing your culture. It’s great when elders participate in community rituals, and even more powerful when they instigate and lead those rituals themselves” (Kim, 2000, p. 149). While analyzing the posts on the New Jersey board, many similarly themed posts emerged. In particular, the ‘introduction post’ and the ‘wedding review post’ were evident.

As part of the board culture, many users created a first post to include some personal information about them as a way to introduce themselves to the other members of the community before they posted or commentated on anything else. A first post was important as it showed the community why you were choosing to post on the New Jersey board and also that you were not a vendor, many of whom only created an account to support a specific business and promote only their work while masquerading as a bride-to-be. A list of each users posts was linked to each unique username, making it apparent to other board members what one had previously posted. An ‘introduction post’ was commonly one of the first interactions. Vendor-backed users, who typically would not know that an introduction post was common practice, would typically post about a vendor from the beginning, and were subsequently reported and removed from the boards by TheKnot.com staff. Some examples of introduction posts include:

Post title: Hi Everyone

Hey. I am practically new in this. I just got in engaged on Chirstmas. I live in North NJ. I just want to introduce myself. My name is Jessica and my fiance is Frank. We still at lost and haven't started planning anything.

Post title: Newbie

Hi everyone! I'm new here, as I just got engaged on New Years Eve. Fiance proposed during the midnight fireworks in front of Sleeping Beauty's castle in Disneyland! Now I can't wait to start planning my North Jersey wedding :-)

Another common post type was the ‘review post’ where brides who were recently married would come back to the New Jersey board after their wedding day and post their feelings about the vendors they chose to hire to tell others about the bride’s experiences.

These posts were typically very lengthy and filled with great detail and nuances about all elements the bride's wedding. In the following example, the bride acknowledges that even though her wedding was months ago, she felt compelled to write up her feelings about the people she hired for her wedding day to share her experiences. This post was not unique in its format as review posts always included the vendor's name, location, the name of specific point people, a rating on a scale as if the vendor was receiving a grade on an elementary school report card, and a justification for that letter grade.

Post title: My 9-7-12 Review! Long in Length & Long Overdue!

Sorry this is late but better late than never, right? When I initially signed up for The Knot, I wasn't even engaged yet (I'm sure there are others guilty of this too!)... lol Once we were engaged, my husband and I were still trying to determine where we would have our wedding (Long Island / Westchester/NJ) and we ultimately chose Jersey. I know some of you are from all over too, so I decided to post my review, as my vendors were from NY (with some in NJ). Hope this can be of use to you! If you have any questions about any of the vendors I used, feel free to FM me. I'm not on as often but I do get alerts when I receive new FM. Enjoy! :-)

My 9/7/12 Wedding Review

Engagement Party Invitations – Dori-Ann's Stationery – A

My parents handled the details for our engagement party but I found the invitations on Dori-Ann's website. The invitations resembled a Tiffany's Box which went along with our party theme perfectly. Dori-Ann actually provided my mom with a sample invitation so we could see the quality of the invite before we ordered... the quality was excellent especially since we thought the invitations were extremely reasonable in price. The reason for the A- is my mom said that she had to go through several proofs with her before the invitation was perfect and at times she'd take long to respond (everything was basically through email). My mom planned on using her again for my bridal shower, however when she went to look on the website, there was a notification saying that the shop is temporarily closed. Hope she reopens because we would definitely use her again!

Engagement Party Dress – Nile & Hudson Fashion (f/k/a Femme Couture) – Brooklyn, NY – A

I have purchased several dresses from this store and have always had a wonderful experience. It's family owned and I usually deal with Nina (the owner's daughter – she's a little younger so she's extremely helpful when it comes to picking out dresses). They mainly specialize in prom & sweet 16 dresses but they also carry dresses for girls our age & MOB's/MOG's. It's helpful if you have a general idea of what dress size you are beforehand b/c they don't have a seamstress on site. The seamstress they use is across the street (and I have gone to her before and she's good (but it's inconvenient that you have to go elsewhere for alterations).

Engagement Party Venue – Coveleigh Country Club (Rye, NY) – A

I didn't want an engagement party from the beginning but my parents insisted on throwing one for us so we compromised and had an afternoon cocktail reception at Coveleigh Country Club. The food was excellent and the staff was extremely attentive. The only thing I didn't like was that they did the cake cutting in the side room instead of in the main party room so whoever was in the other room missed us cutting our cake.

Engagement Party DJ – Extreme Sounds Entertainment (Bronx, NY) – A+++++

I knew I wanted background music for our party but I didn't want my parents to pay wedding prices for an engagement party. Dave (the owner) and I have been friends for several years so I knew I wanted to use him for the party. I gave him a list of must play & do not play songs which he followed completely. He honestly did a great job at our party & I highly recommend him (he does Sweet 16's, Weddings, Engagement Parties, etc.)

Engagement Party Cake – Home Style Bakery (Fishkill, NY) – B

My family has been ordering cakes from here for years and our engagement cake like everything else we have ordered was beyond delicious. We actually had two cakes in the shape of Tiffany's boxes (one white cake with cannoli cream & the other chocolate cake with whipped cream, fresh strawberries & bananas). The reason for the B is that they completely botched my DH's name on the cake!!! The cake read "Congratulations Melissa & Paul'... DH's name is PHIL. I was so caught up in everything I didn't even notice at the party & had no clue until 2 weeks later when my sister finally told me. I honestly wish she told me sooner because I would definitely have negotiated free cake for a year after that mess up lol.

Engagement Party Decorations & Favors (DIY – my mom) & Lucas Chocolates (Haverstraw, NY) – A++++++

My mom decorated the tables with votive candles (different sizes – purchased at Christmas Tree Shops), cracked ice (purchased at Christmas Tree Shops or Michael's), silk rose petals (purchased at Michael's) & our champagne glasses (purchased online). She ordered the glasses as our STD's favor & glued ribbon with our names & wedding

date (also ordered online) & a small silk rose to the stem of each glass. We also gave out chocolate caramel truffles made by Lucas Chocolates which were amazing! All of our guests raved about them. The staff at Lucas' also packaged each favor individually in a small Tiffany look-alike box with ribbon (which my mom provided). The favors were a huge hit & the room looked great!

The Dress!! – Kleinfeld's (NY, NY) Dress Shopping: A+++++

I knew I wanted a Pnina Tornai dress so I made my appointment while her trunk show was going on. I honestly had the best experience at Kleinfeld's. I worked with Keasha who was beyond amazing! She's really in tune with her brides and won't stop looking until she finds the perfect dress for you. The dress I wound up purchasing was the last one I tried on and Keasha was asking around for it my entire appointment (another bride had it) but it basically fit the description I gave her. She stayed within my budget and wouldn't even let me near dresses that weren't within it. I know some girls say that they felt rushed when they went to Kleinfeld's but I definitely didn't. My appointment was at 9:30 and I didn't leave til almost 12! Pnina was actually there that day and came over and said hello. She also personally measured me herself. The only thing I didn't like is that while I did not once feel pressured to buy my dress that day, I did feel a little pressured to purchase my veil & tiara. This had nothing to do with Keasha though... as soon as the girls in the accessories department hear that you purchased your dress, they run over with veils and headpieces for you to try on. Purchasing a dress is overwhelming as it is... don't even think about looking for veils and tiaras that day (regardless of what store you purchase your dress at)... make a different appointment and come back.

Alterations (also at Kleinfeld's): A+++++

I worked with Ellie who was beyond amazing! From the moment I walked into her dressing room, she treated me as though she had known me her entire life. She listened to my requests re.: my alterations & the end result was perfect. I couldn't have asked for a better seamstress.

Headpiece, DOJ & Veil – Bridal Styles (Brooklyn, NY) –

A+++++

I don't think there are enough pluses to give Edward & his staff the credit they deserve. Their work is like no other and regardless if you are spending \$100 or \$1,000, they treat every bride the same. When I went for my headpiece, I was asked how I planned on wearing my hair and one of the girls gave me a mini-updo similar to the style I wanted. This made it so much easier looking for & trying on headpieces. I think I tried on about 20 different pieces and not once did I feel pressured to buy a particular piece. They're extremely patient and will work with you until you find EXACTLY what you're looking for. I love this place so much that I also decided to come back to them to get my veil custom made. My veil was cathedral length with scattered Swarovski crystals throughout. I saw a similar veil at Kleinfeld's and it was \$3,000... my veil

from Bridal Styles was exactly the same and much more reasonable in price. I highly recommend them to anyone looking for accessories, headpieces & veils. They are certainly worth the drive, as I came from Westchester.

Church – The Monastery Church of the Sacred Heart (Yonkers, NY)

I feel funny rating a Church but everyone in the office was responsive, our priest was great (minus him having the girls walk down on the wrong side despite me telling him he was wrong – pick your battles, I guess?) My family and I do not live in Yonkers but my reason for choosing this Church is because my parents were married there over 30 years ago... it's also gorgeous inside! The outside is beautiful too but we didn't get any pictures in front since they decided to do surprise construction on the front of the Church the week of our wedding which they finished the day AFTER we were married (Note: Don't sweat or stress over things like this... there's NOTHING you can do about it =)).

Reception Hall – The Estate at Florentine Gardens (Rivervale, NJ) –

A+++++

There's a reason why this venue is voted the best in Bergen County, NJ every year...it's because they know what they're doing & do not disappoint! From the moment, my husband and I walked into the estate to look, we were blown away by the gorgeous ballroom & stunning chandeliers. Our initial banquet manager left to pursue another opportunity, so we worked with the General Manager, Maria. Having worked with our other banquet manager since the start, we were obviously a little nervous getting a new banquet manager six months before our wedding but Maria picked up right where he left off without any issues. When we arrived to our reception, we were greeted by Maria, Nancy (my amazing bridal attendant) & Jeffrey (our awesome Maitre d') & we were escorted to our bridal suite where Jeffrey went over & confirmed the details of the night. My husbands jacket was completely wrinkled from the limo ride so Nancy took it and steamed it for him. When we went upstairs to our cocktail hour, they had a table reserved especially for us. Once we were seated, Nancy & several other servers went around to each of the stations and brought food back to our table - so much that our entire table was covered with plates! Once we sat down for dinner, Nancy came & covered me with a large tablecloth in order to protect my dress. She was so on top of things!!! As for food, my husband had the Chateaubriand & I had the Chilean SeaBass. Both were DELICIOUS! Our other entree was the French Cut Chicken Breast stuffed with Spinach Cheese & I was able to have a piece of that when Jeffrey and the waitstaff came around & offered seconds... yes, SECONDS! We, along with our families & guests were completely blown away with the amount of food & how great everything was. From cocktail hour to dinner to Viennese hour to the hot pretzels & italian ices at the end of the night, no one can say they left hungry! Everything from the service to the food was top notch – I can only hope a mutual friend / family member has their wedding here so we can enjoy it again!

Photographer – Ricky Restiano (Bronxville, NY) –

A+++++

Amazing, Amazing, Amazing! From the moment we met Ricky, we knew we wanted him to capture the best day of our lives! In fact, he was the first and only photographer we met with! Ricky was a pleasure to work with and is truly is passionate about what he does. From our engagement shoots at Manhattan College & Citifield to our recent wedding, Ricky and team did not disappoint. On the night of our wedding, he had us, our families and guests speechless when he had a slideshow of 50 pictures from the day displayed on our DJ's plasma tv screens. They were amazing & we cannot wait to see the rest! So many people have complimented us on our pictures telling us they look straight out of a magazine and we most certainly agree with them! (Note: Many of the pictures posted in this review are Ricky's Pro Pictures)

Videographer – Moving Pictures, LLC (Ardsley, NY)– A+++++

Look no further when choosing a videographer. Moving Pictures is the best of the best! From the beginning of planning, I knew I wanted a cinematic type of wedding video... I wanted a "movie" of our day rather than a typical wedding video. I heard of Moving Pictures through word of mouth & they were the first & only videographer we met with. The funny part is...my husband didn't think video was necessary and when walked out of our initial meeting, the first words out of his mouth were "let's book them" and I'm so glad we did! Dave was awesome to work with from start to finish & he and our photographer were a great team. They were literally planning which moment to capture next while they were in the process of capturing the current one. Our internet recap (link below) brought people to tears! We can't wait to see the final product!

Link to view Recap: <http://www.movingpicturesllc.com/kuhner/>

DJ – DJ Serg Entertainment (White Plains, NY) – A+++++

There are not enough good things to say about Serg and his company. I grew up listening to Serg spin at the local clubs (Arena, POSH, etc) but the moment we met with him, my fiance (now husband) and I were impressed with how genuine he was about our day. When we were booking our vendors, we knew that we wanted nothing but the BEST and Serg did not disappoint. From start to finish our dance floor was packed the entire night. Our guests are still telling us how wonderful our DJ was. From oldies, to current songs to our special "classics" request, he played it all!

Flowers – Arcadia Floral Design (Mamaroneck, NY) – A+++++

After meeting with four other florists and not being 100% sold, my mother and I decided to make an appointment with Arcadia. We met with Jen & instantly clicked. She took my ideas for flowers (b/c my husband wanted nothing to do with this aspect of planning lol) and made them into a reality and was absolutely awesome to work with. A week after we booked, she made a sample of our high and low centerpiece so

we could see the flowers before even booking. On the day of the wedding, our bouquets & boutonnieres arrived early and the church & reception hall were set up on time & looked beautiful. Everything (including the bouquets) also held up the entire night. The overall beauty of the flowers not only set the tone for our wedding, but also enhanced the beauty of our day. I highly recommend them.

Day of Coordinator – Christine (Piece of Cake Events) – A+++++

Christine was my day of coordinator and she went above and beyond to ensure my wedding day was enjoyable and stress free. From the time we started working together, she was always available to offer suggestions or answer any questions I had. In the weeks leading up to my wedding, she confirmed all of my vendors & created a timeline for the day of which helped everyone stay on track. Additionally, she also kept the bridal party organized & on time which wasn't an easy task. There was a minor mishap with one of my vendors & Christine immediately stepped in and handled it so my husband and I wouldn't have to worry. I don't know what we would have done without her that day!

Cake – Palermo's Bakery (Ridgefield Park, NY) – A

Palermo's was our reception hall's required baker. We really loved the entire experience of going to the bakery, selecting our cake & the cake tasting which was accompanied with complimentary coffee, tea and water. I was in love with one of their cakes that I saw on their website and knew I wanted it recreated for our wedding. This wasn't included in the basic cake which was included in our hall's package, so we paid an additional upgrade fee. We selected alternating tiers of red velvet cake with cream cheese filling & yellow cake with cannoli cream. Both were delicious at the tasting although, sadly aside from our cake cutting, we didn't get to even have a piece of cake the night of our wedding due to being pulled in several directions all night. My only issue (and why they received an A without any pluses) is that I specified I wanted the cake flowers to be ivory & light pink to match our flower scheme & on the night of our wedding, the flowers were purple. The cake was still gorgeous regardless & we received many compliments on it.

Makeup – Anne of Anne DeMarco Cosmetics (Woodbury & NYC, NY) – A+++++

Anne DeMarco did the makeup for myself and my six bridesmaids for my wedding. She arrived on time (for a 6:30am start) and had all of us looking fabulous in no time. We all received many compliments on our makeup which held up the entire and looked great in pictures and her bubbly, outgoing personality definitely helped ease nerves on the morning of. The best around, by far – she'll have you looking and feeling like a celebrity on the most important day of your life!

Hair – House of Trends (Staten Island, NY) – A+++++

This salon is amazing! Jei & Dana did my bridesmaids & my hair for my wedding. Not only were they pleasant and professional but they arrived on time, were finished on time & our hair stayed perfectly. In addition to my wedding, I've gone to this salon several times for updos and have not been disappointed!

Limousines – Danaro Limousines (Carlstadt, NJ) – A+++++

We booked Danaro based on recommendation of our reception venue & they did not disappoint! On the day of our wedding our limos (Rolls Royce Phantom & Cadillac Escalade) arrived on time and were in pristine condition. My driver was also extremely helpful in fixing my dress and veil as I prepared to walk down the aisle. I will definitely recommend this company in the future!

Garter – Garters by Tania (Etsy): A+++++

I found Tania's etsy shop while browsing for other items for my wedding. Her garters are beautiful and although a little more than what I wanted to spend, I knew I would get my money's worth. She was very responsive and helpful.

Flowergirl Dresses & Favors – Forever More (Morris Park, Bronx, NY) – A+++++

My mom actually used this vendor for the centerpieces & favors for my Sweet 16 so she suggested we look there for favors for the wedding. It also turns out they carry Communion & Flower Girl Dresses from designers such as Joan Calabrese, US Angels, etc) so I decided to order the flower girl dresses from here as well. David was absolute sweetheart to work with. The favors & dresses arrived on time and when one of the dresses arrived with a snag in the fabric, he sent it back immediately and ordered a new dress. He also wrapped the favors for us for a small additional fee & they turned out beautiful. I'll continue to go to him for future parties!

Bridesmaid Dresses – Park Ave Bridals (Verona, NJ) – A+++++

Customer service was excellent, dresses arrived on time & the seamstress was great. Only one of my girls (not in the picture below b/c she didn't come to the Church since she couldn't get off work) opted to go to a dry cleaner to get her dress hemmed, taken in, etc.

Tuxedos – Bell Formal Wear (Bayside, NY) – A+++++

We went this vendor based on our friend's recommendation and were not disappointed. This is a family owned shop and the husband Spiro takes great pride in his work. I loved that he also personally inspected each tux that left his store. My husband's tuxedo was free since we had over 4 other groomsmen.

Travel Agent – Frosch (New York, NY) – A+++++

Yuron & George were amazing. They were so responsive it was almost scary at times. My husband handled all aspects of our honeymoon but I know he had nothing but GREAT things to say about Frosch and everyone he interacted with.

Rings – Kravit Jewelers (Oceanside, NY) – A+++++

My husband purchased my engagement ring from there & since he had a great experience with that, we decided to go back for our wedding bands. Bennett & the other employees are great... I'll stop in on occasion when we're in the area to get my rings cleaned & they're always happy to do it for me. My husband also purchased my wedding gift from them and hopefully he'll purchase a few more gifts from there too! LoL!

Honeymoon – Hawaii (Maui & Kauai) – A+++++

Can I go back now??? Kauai could quite possibly be my favorite place on earth. We stayed at the St. Regis in Princeville and it was amazing. The Four Seasons in Maui (although also amazing) was almost a let down after leaving Kauai because of how beautiful & authentic it was. Overall, although Maui was also pretty, it was a little too commercialized for what we wanted but we're glad we were able to experience both islands.

Programs, Menus & Placecards (second vendor) –
A+++++

My mother's friend is a Godsend! After hearing about the nightmare a week before my wedding, she ran to a craft store, purchased supplies & created brand new programs, menus & place cards in three days that were more beautiful than what I originally paid for. She's a saint and still to this day, I cannot thank her enough!

Calligrapher - Ying (Oceanside, NY) – A+++++

My aunt & uncle used her for their wedding and since I trust my aunt's recommendation, I did not hesitate in going to her. She does beautiful work and is a complete doll! Loved her! She also does invitations out of her home (which we did not know prior to going to her).

Bridal Shower – The Mansion on Broadway (White Plains, NY)

My mom hosted my shower so it's not far to give it a "grade" but everything was beautiful. The food and service were also excellent.

Ringbearer Pillow & Flowergirl Baskets – BeverlyClark Website – A

The pillow & baskets were beautiful. The pillow was a little smaller than I would have liked but otherwise, I loved the quality, etc.

Photo Location: Alder Manor (Yonkers, NY) – A

I wanted wedding photos that were different, edgy but also romantic at the same time so when I heard of this old estate in Yonkers (3minutes from our Church), I knew it would be the perfect place for our wedding pictures! You may have seen this place on Four Weddings, as it's where the Tri-State Area Brides gather at the end and the winner is announced! The reason for only giving an A is because it was harder to get in touch with someone to book a time for our photos than the President.

Wedding Invitations – RSVP (Mamaroneck, NY) – B

A few family and friends told me about this store so I decided to look for invitations here. My invitations arrived on time and were beyond gorgeous. As for customer service, it's extremely lacking. It helped that I had a general idea of what I wanted because I was left alone to look and practically had to beg for help. Had my mother not waited until the last possible minute, I would have shopped around. (Unfortunately I do not have an invite picture because I forgot to bring one on the day of!!)

Programs, Menus & Placecards (first vendor) – Lindsey at Rae of Art Designs – F

Well I guess you can say I saved the WORST review for last. I ordered our placecards, menus & programs from this vendor (who was a former LIW Bride) & when they arrived, at least one rhinestone (most had more) were missing from 74 programs & 23 menus. Everything was packaged poorly & several programs, menus and place cards were also bent. She did send replacement programs and menus but because it was less than a week until my wedding there wasn't enough time to glue rhinestones onto them. I was promised full reimbursement only received \$225 back and the vendor stopped responding to any of my emails asking for when I should expect to receive the rest. Apparently, she closed her business but in the event she's on here under a different name, let this serve as a warning.

Advice to all Brides to be: Enjoy all aspects of planning... it really does go fast. Don't sweat the small stuff because chances are, you'll forget about it before the day of. And most of all...the people closest to you may disappoint you at times or overall completely. Don't feed into the drama and just worry about yourself & your FH because at the end of the day, that's all who matters! Happy Planning!

Another ritual identified was evident at the beginning and end of initial posts. Many posts began with a colloquial greeting that included hi, hey, or hello such as “Hi everyone,” “Hi ladies,” “Hello all,” “Hi,” “Hi everybody,” “Hello,”

“Hello all,” “Hello ladies,” “Hello future brides-to-be,” and “hey ladies.” Many posts ended with “thanks” or “thanks so much” followed by at least one exclamation point, and often times two or three. This formal greeting and closing indicated that the posters included aspects of formal letter writing to help shape a positive perception while seeking advice in an effort to solicit feedback for the other users.

b. Lifecycle

The users of New Jersey board TheKnot.com follow a membership life cycle as described by Kim (2000). She addresses five successive stages of community involvement which included 1) visitors, “people without a persistent identity in the community,” 2) novices, “new members who need to learn the ropes and be introduced into community life,” 3) regulars, “established members that are comfortably participating in community life,” 4) leaders, “volunteers, contractors, and staff that keep the community running,” and 5) elders, “long-term regulars and leaders who share their knowledge and pass along the culture” (p. 118).

In the membership lifecycle, users can be classified based on either their post count or the date they joined the community. In either instance, visitors were not observed as they did not make their presence known on the board. As a public forum, all posts and comments are viewable to those with and without TheKnot.com accounts. If visitors did not post or comment, it is unknown if they were ever there.

When speaking of the “novices” versus the “regulars,” the number of interactions is the best way to classify individuals. Based on the total interactions during the

observation period, 440 users of 546 could be considered “novices” as they had less than 10 total posts or comments, combined, and can be classified as new to the board based solely on these small number of interactions. This is because it is unclear how often they frequented the board until they posted or commented. The remaining 106 members, roughly 20% of the users, can be labeled regulars as their posts and comments ranged from 10 to 151 interactions. These larger numbers indicate that users are involved and comfortable enough to interact with others, creating and maintaining board culture.

However, it is difficult to base “novice” as opposed to “regular” status on only interactions. It was noted, for example, there are users who only comment and did not create any initial posts, and they comment more than the users who have posted 1 initial post. These users were members the entire time of the observation period, never authored an initial post, but commented on average 6 times while those members who posted once only commented on average 3 times. Those that posted 1 time on average were members for a longer time period than those posting more frequently. In general, the higher the number of posts, the more recent the join date. However, a longer data collection time frame would be necessary to observe users as they transition from a planning role to that of a newlywed with insight to provide others. It appears from the current data that those who comment and have no unique posts are seasoned members while those with 1 post are transitioning to a new role. It is the case that many of the single posts are wedding reviews. However, while TheKnot.com asks users to provide a wedding date when creating an account, that date is never included on any threads or comments, making it impossible to tell where members are in their own wedding planning lifecycle. Without the wedding date information, all observations can only be assumptions.

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, the leadership on TheKnot.com was established prior to the observation period. A board moderator was identified, user jcg98, but it is unclear how this user was selected for such a leadership position. According to TheKnot.com's terms of service (Appendix 2), moderators have the same privileges as all other members, but they are identified to patrol individual sub-boards on a volunteer basis to help when problems occur between members and to address any issues that arise. Moderators are the eyes and ears of TheKnot.com staff, affectionately known as "The Knot Gods," on the board. New Jersey board moderator jcg98 initiated 4 initial posts and 51 comments, which ranked them thirteen on the list of total interactions among all users during the observation period. They joined TheKnot.com on May 22, 2010. Two of jcg98's posts were related to moderator duties and two were not. One post created a specific place where others could sell items no longer needed:

Post title: ** For Sale posts go HERE **

Please post your FOR SALE items in this thread.

A few ground rules:

- For Sale posts go in this thread ONLY. Anything posted on the main board will be moved to the Classifieds board and/or deleted.
- Vendors and spammers will be banned.
- When possible include photos (PIP).
- Do not include personal information. Request PMs or leave your email address only, or a link to your For Sale page for contact info.
- This post is for a listing only. Please do not reply directly to posters, page them on the board.
- National sale items (things you are willing to ship) should be posted on the Knot

Wedding Classifieds board:

http://forums.theknot.com/Sites/theknot/Pages/Main.aspx/wedding-boards_wedding-classifieds

The links for older for-sale items will be posted below. Please PM me or page me if you have any questions or issues with this thread.

The other post from May 24, 2013 was related to jcg98's status as moderator.

This post appeared approximately 1 month prior to the end of the observation period.

Post title: Mod Farewell

Dear NJ Knotties,

The Knot Gods have decided to do away with individual board moderators. Instead, they feel confident that they can handle all community issues on their own. They made this announcement this morning and it has already taken effect.

I've been a member of this board for three years, the mod for two, and always appreciated the community here. For all of you planning weddings, I wish you all the best. For all of you who are already old married hags, like me, I wish you much joy. :)

Going forward, if you have any issues - vendors on the board, people being abusive, other violations of the rules - you can alert The Knot Gods at this location:
<http://forums.theknot.com/discussion/977380/knottie-help#latest>

Or PM them or flag them, @KnotPorscha, @KnotJackie, @KnotIrene.

Lots of love and luck!
 - jcg98

Naturally, new members are learning the culture of the New Jersey board while the elders maintain it. "Being an elder isn't always a clearly defined role – it's earned through longevity, dedication, and knowledge sharing" (Kim, 2000, p. 147). A typical lifecycle of the wedding planning period is under 2 years. However, based on the join

date of members, this board has a large number of elders who were still active, even though it can be assumed that their wedding date has past.

The 5 most senior active members on the New Jersey board joined in 2000 and 2001.

User	Threads	Comments	Total	Join date	Time as member
sultryzulu	0	1	1	3/17/2000	12 years, 10 months
mmf1204	1	5	6	4/2/2001	11 years, 10 months
xcitedbride	5	9	14	8/8/2001	11 years, 5 months
BMG2013	1	5	6	8/11/2001	11 years, 5 months
Peaseblossom55	0	12	12	9/16/2001	11 years, 4 months

Figure 29. The most senior members on the New Jersey board. This chart lists the 5 most senior active members on the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com during the observation period and includes the number of threads created, comments authored, total interactions (threads + comments), date the user joined TheKnot.com, and the length of time as a member as of the beginning of the observation period (January 1, 2013).

Together, they authored 7 of the 602 initial posts and 32 of the 3,589 comments. While their lifecycle as a bride-to-be has most likely ended, it is shown that they are not as active as members who have more recently joined the board. Still, they have chosen to return to the New Jersey board to add to conversations approximately 12 years after they initially signed up on TheKnot.com, as measured from the start of the observation period.

User SewInLoveWithDMB, who joined August 29, 2012, was very active on the New Jersey board during the observation period. This user can be labeled an “elder” because “long-time members can function as elders even if they’ve never played an

official leadership role; their posts show that they've seen the community evolve over time. These people are viewed as role models (whether they like it or not), and newer members look to them for guidance about how to behave" (Kim, 2000, p. 147).

SewInLoveWithDMB had the highest total interactions with other members at 151, which included 6 initial posts and 145 comments to others' posts. During the six months, SewInLoveWithDMB had interactions with 336 of the 546 other members, meaning these others users posted on threads created by this user and/or also commented on a thread in which SewInLoveWithDMB also commented. There were many interactions especially with agu101, Dancer2873, gelaine22, HobokenBride2012, Chrissy241987, AJuliaNJ, silver0319, and Gordo2014. There may also be friendships that have developed, and "as your members become more involved, their buddy lists will group, and they'll spend more of their online time socializing with their friends" via the community that brought them together (p. 141).

User michelle22, who joined March 1, 2009, is another interesting member of this bulletin board. This person authored the highest number of posts with 26 and also commented 61 times. This number is double the next most frequent poster, aracely1234, who composed 13 initial posts, and joined on July 8, 2012.

There are other users that can be considered "elders" based on the number of interactions they had over the 6 months' timeframe. The following is a list of the top 25 users ranked by a sum total of the number of posts and comments they had contributed.

User	Posts	Comments	Total
SewInLoveWithDMB	6	145	151
HobokenBride2012	4	102	106
Dancer2873	8	98	106
agu101	0	105	105
gelaine22	0	94	94
michelle221	26	61	87
ohmrs2014	6	79	85
AJuliaNJ	5	64	69
Gordo2014	1	67	68
Chrissy241987	7	57	64
silver0319	3	57	60
SummerGr115	9	49	58
Giaspo	1	54	55
jcg98	4	51	55
Swazzle	3	50	53
lexi913	10	42	52
FutureMrsN3312	3	45	48
SMClark23	4	42	46
B2Z728	0	45	45
dalm0m	0	45	45
HappilyEverAfter2702	9	34	43
michella30	4	39	43
JoanE2012	0	41	41
Smitten2012	1	39	40
bereasonable2	0	38	38

Figure 30. User list by total interactions. This table lists the top 25 users by total interactions, which is the number of threads created plus the number of comments authored.

c. Join Year

Looking at the elder members brings up interesting data related to the date members joined TheKnot.com. When considering only at the join date for the users during this time frame, the numbers related to the membership lifecycle are quite different than those based on post frequency.

During the observation period, the join date of all participating posters and commenters was referenced. The majority of the participating community joined after 2011, two years before the observation period. This is not out of the ordinary as there is customarily a period of time after an engagement whereby brides-to-be plan their wedding and two years would not be an uncommon timeframe. Also, on the Internet, relationships can evolve more quickly than in the real world, especially in an active community. Kim (2000) notes “Time passes quickly on the Net. Social dynamics that take months and years to evolve in the physical world can emerge in a matter of days and weeks on the Web- especially when a community becomes hot” (p. 119). What is noteworthy of the longevity of this community is the number of members who joined prior to 2011 and were still active in the first half of 2013. From 2000 to 2010, there are still 132 of 546 members who were active on the New Jersey board.

Without further investigation, the length of time may indicate that participants joined before planning their wedding and never left, came back due to a second marriage, or maybe they originally joined, went dormant, and then decided to return to the New Jersey board. It is also possible that users now have a specialized role such as a matron of honor or a bridesmaid in another wedding and have reason to return to this online bulletin board. Similarly, some of the most veteran members may have joined TheKnot.com years before their wedding proposal or before there was even a significant other in their life. Perhaps the idea of planning a wedding was enough for them to create an account almost 13 years ago. In online communities, “Some new members won’t stick around for long. But others will find particular areas and activities that spark their

interest, and will become regulars – the lifeblood of your community, both socially and economically” (Kim, 2000, p. 140).

It is also interesting that there were 4 participants who joined in 2014 who had gone back and commented on posts made between January 1, 2013 and June 30, 2013 as they could not have been post authors during the observation period.

Year	Total
2000	1
2001	4
2002	5
2003	3
2004	3
2005	9
2006	12
2007	5
2008	19
2009	26
2010	45
2011	89
2012	178
2013	141
2014	4

Figure 31. Participants by join year. This table shows the number of participants who joined each year that were active during the observation period.

4. Relational Culture

The members of the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com have unique characteristics and interactions that keep this bulletin board interesting for all members. “If a community is a place ‘where everyone knows your name,’ a place where members feel a sense of belonging, connection, and camaraderie, then a[s] (sic) a community

builders, it's your job to create an environment that fosters these feelings – a place where newcomers feel welcomed and old-timers feel comfortable and appreciated” (Kim, 2000, p. 310).

A specialized language emerged among members which utilized acronyms in place of commonly used phrases. These included:

FI = fiancé
MIL = mother-in-law
FIL = father-in-law
PM = private message
DOC = day of coordinator, hired to ensure the wedding day runs smoothly
NWR/OT = not wedding related/off-topic
MUA = makeup artist

These phrases were seamlessly included in threads and comments often, which indicated many users were comfortable using them in their written conversations.

Unique topics beyond reception venues, wedding gowns, makeup, entertainment, photography and videography kept the New Jersey board stimulating to new and seasoned members alike. For example, live paintings were discussed as a distinctive element to include on the wedding day.

Post title: live painter/artist at reception

I've heard about this from a few people but no one knows the specific artists name or the approx cost...you hire a painter to come to your reception and they create a painting of your wedding during the reception which you get at the end of the night, everyone who saw it at weddings said it was such a cool thing for the couple to have, a great piece of unique art etc...anyone know anything about this?

Members were also supportive of users going through difficult times. Hurricane Sandy ravaged through New Jersey at the end of October 2012 and brides-to-be on the New Jersey board were still discussing many of the impacts the devastation had on their plans months later.

Post title: Wedding Pictures after Sandy

Hello my NJ superstars! I have come to you all in need of some help.

I am having my wedding reception in March in Toms River and we wanted to have our pictures taken in Point Pleasant. This was before Sandy and now we are wondering where we can take our wedding pictures. Any ideas/ starting points? We live in Bergen County, so to drive around and look for places is a little hard to do.

Thans a bunch!

Post title: Rehearsal dinner restaurant near Manahawkin, LBI area

Hello!

I am trying to find a place to host our rehearsal dinner in April. My future mother-in-law recently went down to Manahawkin/LBI and found out a lot of places are still closed due to the damage from Sandy.

Any suggestions for places in that area, even if we have to drive North/South or West 10-15 minutes, that are currently open, would be appreciated!

Thank you

Members of the New Jersey board were also supportive of others who were going through tough times during their wedding planning progress, be it due to obligations to the United States military or even a broken engagement.

Post title: Military Deployment

My husband and I unfortunately have to cancel our wedding due to an upcoming deployment. We would love to get our money back so that we can eventually have our dream wedding once the military gives him back to me, but our date needs to be rebooked. October 18th is up for grabs with ceremony starting at 6pm cocktail hour at 7pm and the party going until midnight. Details are all planned out if you want them. Contact me if you'd like more info.

Post title: Wedding Called off - Wedding date available

My FI and I have unfortunately called our wedding off. On top of being completely heartbroken, the venue is holding us to the date. In order to not be responsible for the entire day, the date must be rebooked. If anyone is looking for an amazing venue in northern NJ in September 2013, please contact me.

Thank you

Some initial posts were very engaging and asked more open ended questions to members as opposed to a single-topic post.

Post title: Married Ladies: Best and worst choices

This might have already been asked...but...

What was the best decision you made about your day? Could be a specific vendor, or just an overall concept of the wedding.

"Worst" might be a harsh word - but what was something you did that was not necessary? Did not go as planned? Did anything kinda bad happen, and how did you handle it?

I guess I just wanted to get an idea of choices people made that were fabulous, as well as choices that weren't as hot. Thank you!

Post Title: NJ item for out of town bags

I am tasked with getting a NJ item for our out of town bags. Since I lived in NJ my whole life, I am drawing a blank on what item I could get that would be considered uniquely NJ. I also don't want it to be expensive as I need to buy 30

of whatever I pick. I want to avoid chocolate as we did a chocolate item from my current state. Do you have any ideas?

All the elements discussed encourage members to participate in conversations and build an online community.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The New Jersey board on TheKnot.com was the perfect presence to study. The Knot is an especially apt name, since it ties information, entertainment, and merchandising together, linking together all aspects of the bridal industry. It creates an all-inclusive bridal shop, where its readers can access retailers and vendors for every imaginable product. It does this both through direct advertising and the use of links, where viewers can click through to purchase products, directly increasing the sales of its advertisers. In turn, because of its dependence on these advertisers, it sends the message to its readers the need for the items the advertisers sell, perpetuating the myth of the ideal wedding and its vital elements, which are directly related to the items its advertisers sell. Readers are constantly reminded that other wedding styles are either undesirable or do not exist. (Engstrom, 2008)

The Knot instructed women to perform the role of bride in the manner established by cultural traditions. It reinforced the perception that the “big, intricately planned wedding as *the* ideal and the image of the beautiful and beautifully dressed bride as the pinnacle of femininity” (Engstrom, 2008, p. 78).

Using the Internet to connect with individuals with similar interests is a common occurrence beyond wedding planning. The World Wide Web offers a truly unique forum for computer-mediated communication and can connect individuals that would not have the opportunity to exchange ideas at the same rate if using another channel. The Internet is being used to supplement face-to-face interactions here rather than to replace them.

As was discussed, there was a shift from the flat pages of print such as *Godey's Lady's Book* and wedding magazines to the dynamic options available through television

programs and reality television to the interactive webpages of the Internet. This new media updated the older forms of media and incorporated them. In this new incorporation, some of the old ways were kept. As was mentioned, today, however, the pages are not flat. Websites have remediated to a format which is multi-layered with hyperlinks and video clips, conversations and quizzes, games, and interactive media. However, this is not a static process.

Online wedding planning provides a new experience to the viewer due to the overlap of the old and the new because online wedding planning has remediated the wedding planning of the past. There is a sense of immediacy because the participant in an online wedding forum forgets for a moment that their experience is happening in the virtual world, and it becomes real. A multi-layered experience is created because, as in a reality television show, participants in an online forum are being watched by other participants, and are also able to see what other people are saying about them.

The New Jersey board also brought together these women to one Internet address with access to information all hours of the day and night. If a member had a question, they could post it and receive answers nearly instantly, as well as for days later. As a result, this online bulletin board has influenced the way many New Jersey weddings were planned and implemented, and has modified existing wedding practices, creating new local industries.

A. Value of Study

The research questions guiding this dissertation looked at community building and relational culture as exemplified through postings and relationships made by

prospective brides, participants' perceptions and actions affected throughout the online wedding planning process from a uses and gratifications theory perspective, and how the strong or weak ties created affect the emotional and informational support among New Jersey brides-to-be as a result of their participation in the relational online community on TheKnot.com. In doing so, this dissertation contributes to the evolving research on Internet use in a number of ways. Virtual communities on the Internet are developing rapidly. People are continually joining communities and participating there. There is also the ability for people to join multiple communities and to switch among them easily. As a result, they develop relationships within each community to a greater or lesser extent. There is the potential to develop a social system within each community, and the possibility of overlap among several different communities. Even more important to note is the timeliness of this research. In the past ten years, the Internet has affected the way society chooses to communicate as a whole for “the Internet has long been regarded as a medium that is particularly amenable to interpersonal connection and social activities” (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009, p. 321). In recent years, there has undoubtedly been a shift in society’s use of face-to-face communication to the use of computer-mediated communication, especially through online mediums.

This dissertation shows that a relationship can be formed through an online bulletin board. This relationship can be both informational and supportive, even if the members have never met before and are unlikely to meet in person in the future. The sharing of information through posts can be motivated by self-interest or by an increase to help the community. Members of these forums find that they are a valuable way to receive solutions to problems or to get ideas and feedback from other members. They do

not simply want to post questions, but are interested in the discourse which is generated, and this is a valuable area of communication study and research. This study, consistent with the results obtained by Hansen (1999), determined that weak ties are the most beneficial when advice is sought. For various reasons, some people have no way of communicating in this way with others than through the Internet.

It also utilizes the uses and gratifications theory to show how participation in an online bulletin board community leads to the creation of strong or weak ties. This can lead to further research in this area as this theory can be future developed for consumer Internet use.

In addition, it explores how the Internet is increasing its role on the culture of today, both in community building and in the creation of a society, which has economic and social aspects. The development of online communities also has a connection to the development of electronic commerce, and this connection is crucial to those who study merchandising, advertising, and product development. Using the uses and gratifications approach, consumer uses for the Internet are proposed, which can guide further inquiry of both a practical and scholarly nature,

An interactive medium and all of its ramifications is also important in our society. This study contributes to this by linking computer related communication to Internet commerce and how it operates, and the development of Internet specific ways of developing commerce will be useful for further research.

The uses and gratifications theory gives a better understanding of the reasons why users choose the Internet and its research for interaction. Content gratifications which are information related and influence the activities of the users in a consumer context. Those

which are social related also have a benefit for those who develop Internet sites, and this study provides some guidance in these areas. From the data collected as a representation of New Jersey, additional research can be conducted to examine whether these personal observations are also being made by other engaged women who are members of other geographic-based wedding bulletin boards.

It was also important to conduct this study as very little research is available on the topic of wedding planning, especially involving the uses and gratifications theory and the Internet. Because there are no immediate or long range risks to participants that may arise from the procedures used in this study, the potential benefits of continuing to conduct research on this topic are great. It was also valuable to extend Wasko's social capital model from a forum which is not strictly professional, as Wasko's was, to a forum focused on a social aspect, that of a wedding, and to see the ways in which the two studies correlate.

B. Limitations of Study

While there are limitations to the study of the New Jersey board of TheKnot.com, these shortcomings serve as a starting point to further research on this topic. As was noted previously, the New Jersey board is one of 108 city boards on TheKnot.com and while it is one of the most popular community boards, it is only a representation of a single board in a single geographic area. A future study could address whether the findings of this study would also apply to boards in other parts of the country. This study does not address whether similar boards in other parts of the country or in different

networks would have similar dynamics and would invest the same social capital into a different board.

In addition, the information collected from this board covered a limited time frame of half a calendar year and this could affect the study. The results obtained herein could be the same, or could be different if the study period was longer.

Additionally, the majority of participants appear to be female and heterosexual. Therefore, it is unclear whether input from same sex couples is welcomed or addressed on this particular board. A board where there is participation of more than one sex or where same sex couples are active participants could have entirely different results.

Since gay marriage was not legal at the time of the within study in New Jersey, the posts analyzed herein reflect only the traditional view of the bride being female, and it would be interesting to return to this question in the future. Certainly, the exclusion of the groom from the planning process in general by The Knot, and society, and the lack of male presence on forums at the time of this study, could also be relevant going forward.

Finally, this study focuses on active participant of TheKnot.com only. It does not evaluate those who choose only to read rather than posting. Also, it does not focus on the reasons why the participants of this bulletin board chose this particular forum, or why they chose at all to participate in an online bulletin board.

C. Future Research Possibilities

This study opens up many areas for possible future research, as will be discussed below. There are still many ways in which the results of this study can be applied.

In the future, the effect of having produced a “perfect wedding” could be evaluated. Did it provide happiness and satisfaction? Or disenchantment and disappointment? Did the planning process translate into a magical experience, or was the effect of so much time and concern so stressful that it outweighed the actual events of the day? It could be hypothesized that by spending so much time on the initial planning that the actual event is eclipsed. This would require identification of those who had participated in the bulletin board and the conducting of follow up interviews with those who had initially posted. Such a follow up study would be an interesting process of the contrast between the expectations of a bulletin board participant and the reality of how the event actually went.

In addition, so much of the focus of the participants on the bulletin board was on the planning process rather than on the relationship formed with the spouse-to-be. A follow up study could evaluate whether there is a connection between the initial planning and the actual relationship formed with the spouse. Were there unrealistic expectations based on the perceptions perceived in bulletin board postings? How did the actual relationship with the spouse compare with the “perfect ideal” sought by the bride-to-be? Were there any conflicts if the expectations were not met?

Future research should expand community building on bulletin boards. A future study could trace relationships formed through TheKnot.com. The corporate entity also has sister forums, TheNest.com and the TheBump.com. The Nest is geared to those newly married and the issues and experiences of that group. Similarly, The Bump is geared to pregnancy and newborn dialogue. These three boards together could encompass a number of years if a user followed the progression through all three. Since

the boards are regional as well, it is not unlikely that relationships formed online through these three could lead to personal encounters. This would be another possible study. Are relationships so formed lasting? Can bonds be formed? What types of bonds would these be, and what would be their strengths? If weak ties are initially formed, could they translate into strong ties? How many of the initial ties would remain? How many would grow?

Another topic for future research boards would be an examination of how Bolton and Grusin's (1999) remediation theory is being remediated itself into a conglomeration of not only media but media as an entertainment and commercial entity. This new industry owes much to the past, as it has built upon it and expanded it in its evolution. There is a consumer aspect to bulletin boards and the Internet in general. The Internet is increasingly being used to advertise products and brands. There are methods by which a prospective advertiser can discover the effectiveness of the ads it places. It can trace who is viewing its products, and whether the product is ultimately purchased as a result of Internet viewing. The number of page views and click throughs from links can easily be calculated. This is all important in determining the behavior of buyers. While The Knot does not permit posters to be advertisers, certainly the participants in answering the posts of others name specific suppliers and products. In addition, the editorial pages of TheKnot.com are replete with advertisements from paid purveyors of goods. A future study could address the ways, and to what extent, do posters of a bulletin board take information obtained on that bulletin board and use it to purchase products. Whether or not the bulletin board participants also investigate the advertisements contained on the main site and translate this into consumerism could also be studied. The possibilities

expand to an exponential degree as remediation occurs today and it remains to be seen what the next shift will be.

The posts made on TheKnot.com are archived on the board. Those which are posted most recently appear on the top, while the older ones drop to a lower position as new ones are originated. Through the bulletin board's search mechanism, posts from earlier periods in time can be brought up through a topic or keyword search. This historical function can also be the focus of future research. Do the customs and ideas change over time? For example, how have the styles of wedding dresses changed since posts were first written? Are same sex couples welcomed now that marriage is legal in New Jersey? Have the topics on the board adjusted to changing societal values and customs?

In the current study, all of the participants used computers and the Internet. There was no inclusion of those who chose not to. As a result, they might not be representative of all brides. Future research could evaluate this, and the effect that the Internet had as opposed to the kinds of planning and communication conducted by brides-to-be who did not have access to computers, or who did not prefer to utilize computer related communication.

The demographics of this study is undermined, other than the fact that all participants are presumably residents of Northern New Jersey. Future studies could be based on demographical criteria. Categories such as nationality, race, gender, economics, and occupation could be evaluated.

Online chat based around an emotional and uncertain time with many expectations, financial concerns, and a desire for individuality in a women's life are

fulfilling individual desires for brides-to-be including interpersonal communication, personal reflection and shared emotions. From this data, additional research can be conducted to examine whether these personal observations are also being made by other engaged women who are members of other geographic-based boards on TheKnot.com as well as on similar bulletin boards.

Another area for future research was identified during the interview process beyond an Internet bulletin board and its influences on those frequenting the message boards. Participant 6 noted that she discovered TheKnot.com through a friend that had planned a wedding for a college class. While she did not elaborate on this assignment, it would be interesting to gather findings on the lessons learned financially, emotionally, and materially by the members of this class and to conduct a longitudinal study in the future on the actual weddings of these individuals based upon the information gathered for the project at this time when the students were presumably not engaged. Will the wedding dreams materialize to a different reality? What aspects appeared in the class assignment and not at the actual wedding? Most important, what was the impact of advertising and communication transactions by these individuals as they were planning? These questions and more could be developed to study the differences between perceived and actual reality.

D. Conclusion

Community building and relational culture was found to be exemplified through the postings and relationships made on the New Jersey online bulletin board of TheKnot.com. A community was formed which existed online rather than in the physical

world, but it can be described as a community in every sense of the word. It was a place where the members could be alone at home, yet in the presence of others online. It had the advantage that the members were not vulnerable in the same sense that they would be in real life. Membership fulfilled the same needs and purposes that face-to-face communication did, with the advantage that these interactions could occur without regard to time or space. The members could meet those with like interests that they would not have been likely to discover otherwise. Members shared the rituals of life and exchanged information while developing their friendships. An increase in involvement on the message board directly increased this communication.

From a uses and gratifications theory perspective, the bulletin board satisfied social and physical needs in an online environment. According to the theory, these gratifications included information acquisition, escape, emotional release, companionship, and value reinforcement. The members could choose topics which satisfied these needs and receive feedback in the form of affirmations and criticism. It is a place where members could add details, explore ideas, and discover vendors to hire.

There was also gratification in their sense of belonging and emotional attachments. They could interact with the content as well as with other users. Gratification was received in their ability to express themselves, and this influenced their perceptions and actions throughout the online wedding process as ideas were shared. In addition to the recommendations and social chat with others going through the same planning process, participants used the New Jersey board to discuss traditional and new ideas for their special day. While many users lived in New Jersey, it was discovered that this was not always the case as some were planning from across the country. The

experiences of these users exemplify the uses and gratifications theory and add personal experiences to the literature available on this topic.

Content analysis of the posts for the period studied revealed group behavior, member roles, and a pattern of interaction. It was revealed that the posters shared ideas, experiences and resources even though physically apart. Weak interaction has been described as interacting to merely seek answers, without users becoming emotionally tied to the group. Strong ties are established when emotional support and the improvement of well-being are the results. For participants, their activity enhanced their perceived social status and the greater the sense of belonging, the more they wanted to share their knowledge. Categories with posts that gave information, asked for suggestions, and gave opinions were the most numerous. This indicates an attempt to become less anonymous by providing information about themselves and seeking recommendations. Therefore, this community would be categorized as one where the creation of strong ties occurred as a result of the participation in the online bulletin board.

Like all communities, the number and strength of interaction varies. However, the board was bound together through roles and rituals. These rituals included an introduction post, review posts, formal greetings and closings of posts, a membership cycle, and the evolution of the community over time. A specialized language was utilized, and there was response to particular user names. The relationships evolved more quickly than in the real world due to the nature of the posts and the community. This promoted interactions among the members and most notably, one member had interactions with 336 of the 546 members studied.

Very little research is available on the topic of wedding planning, especially involving gratifications, media exposure, and the Internet. Because there are no immediate or long range risks to participants that may arise from the procedures used in this study, the potential benefits of continuing to conduct research on this topic are great and may help future engaged couples plan their wedding celebrations. In addition to the observations made from the threads on the New Jersey board, the information gathered from the interviews is an initial attempt to explain the uses, gratifications, motivations, and practices of engaged women going through the ritual of planning a wedding and has provided a starting point for further studies in this area.

As each participant expressed individual reactions, gratifications, uses and influences from the New Jersey board on TheKnot.com Internet bulletin board, it has been shown that the interviewees have enjoyed their involvement with the group. From this data, additional research can be conducted to examine whether these personal observations are also being made by other engaged women who are members of other geographic-based boards on TheKnot.com as well as on similar bulletin boards on WeddingChannel.com, Brides.com, or iVillage.com.

Similarly, the research conducted through content analysis could be expanded to other areas of the United States to compare the results to other TheKnot.com geographic sub-boards.

As a result, all of the above contributed toward the building of the community, the achievement of gratifications, and the exemplification of ties through emotional and informational support. A sense of belonging was created which gave emotional and psychological support. Participants enjoyed contributing to the New Jersey board, as was

shown through the examples of users who formed ties to other participants. As a result of the ties that were created, a community was built and through the sharing of information, both personal and thematic, relational ties were created between the posters.

As discussed above, there are abundant opportunities for research in this area. Computer generated communication is impacting communication practices and will continue to be an important part of everyone's life. This knowledge is growing more and more complex. As was noted by Hanson (1999), "Most social network research has remained agnostic with respect to the content that flows through network ties, but even those researchers who have considered the content of what flows through those ties have not taken into account knowledge complexity" (p. 107)

Appendices

Appendix 1: TheKnot.com's Privacy Policy

Your privacy is important to us. We created this privacy policy ("Policy") to explain the types of information we collect through The Knot web sites, online services, mobile and other applications and social networking platforms on which it is posted (each referred to herein as a "Site"), as well as how we will use, disclose and protect this information once it is collected, and how you may be able to opt-out of some of our uses and disclosures of your information. By visiting this Site, you agree to the terms of this Policy as they may be amended from time to time.

As we further describe below, we may share your Personal Information with third parties for their marketing purposes. You can elect for us not to do so by editing your preferences in your account profile at <http://global.theknot.com/join/memberprofile.aspx>, or by emailing us at membersupport@theknot.com (please include your name, mailing address, and email address). See "Your California Privacy Rights" below for additional information.

Here are a few general principles to keep in mind as you read through this Policy:

This Site is owned or operated by XO Group Inc. or one of its subsidiaries (referred to collectively in this Policy as "The Knot," "we," "us," "our" and other similar pronouns).

As our business evolves, this Policy may change, so check back to this page periodically to make sure you understand how your Personal Information will be treated.

This Policy is incorporated into, and part of, our Terms of Use, which governs your use of the Site as a whole. Additionally, this Policy may be supplemented from time to time by other terms that apply to specific Sites.

Unless otherwise specified, this Policy does not apply to information that you may provide to us, or that we may obtain, other than from you through our Site, such as over the phone, by mail, or in person.

Advertisements that may be displayed to you on this Site and other sites may be customized to your interests and preferences based on your Personal Information and Site usage information (as further described below) collected through our Site. You may be able to opt out of such advertisements, so visit <http://www.aboutads.info/choices/> and <http://www.networkadvertising.org/choices/> for more information. Also, note, however, that if you opt-out we may still suggest offerings to you on our Site based on your history at our Site.

If you are located outside of the United States, you should know that the information you provide to us is being transmitted to us and processed in the United States and will be protected subject to this Policy and United States laws, which may not be as protective as the laws in your country. Also, this Site places cookies and local shared objects on your computer or device, as further described below. By using the Site, you agree to this.

Opt In and Opt Out

You may have the right to opt in to or opt out of certain of our uses and disclosures of your Personal Information. For example, when you are asked to provide Personal Information on this Site, you may have the opportunity to elect to, or not to, receive promotional messages from us by e-mail or by Text Message (as defined below). You may unsubscribe from our promotional emails by editing your preferences in your account profile on the Site, or by clicking on the opt-out link within the e-mail you receive. To opt out of our Text Messages, please follow the instructions provided in connection with the particular Text Message campaign. Please understand that it may take us some time to process any opt out request and that even if you opt out of receiving promotional correspondence from us, we may still contact you in connection with your relationship, activities, transactions and communications with us. You may also tell us that you do not want us to share your Personal Information with third parties for their marketing purposes, by editing your preferences in your Site member profile, or by emailing us at membersupport@theknot.com (please include your name, mailing address, and email address). To stop receiving promotional messages from third parties who already have your contact information, please contact them directly.

What information is collected on this Site?

Personal Information

While you may be able to visit and view content on the Site without providing any Personal Information, we may collect Personal Information on or through the Site in various circumstances.

"Personal Information" is information that can be used to identify you or contact you as an individual, as well as information attributed with such information. Personal Information includes, for example, your name; age or date of birth; postal address; e-mail address; telephone number; wireless device address; text message address; screen name or username; photograph; gender; geolocation information; payment card and other payment information; event dates and related information; information about your family; and interests, hobbies and demographic information. We collect Personal Information via the Site in a variety of circumstances, such as when you conduct a transaction on our Site; create an account on our Site; edit your online profile; sign up for our newsletters; sign-up for certain services; make online purchases; enter sweepstakes and contests; complete surveys; contribute to a chat room, bulletin board, message board, list serve, blog, wiki or other social forum on the Site; or submit a comment or question to us by using a "contact us" or similar feature on the Site. On some of our Sites, you may not be able to participate in certain activities or access certain content, unless you provide us with the requested Personal Information.

A "tell-a-friend" tool (or similar feature) on the Site or in our e-mails and other communications allows you to send information about our Sites, services and offerings to another person. In other circumstances, you may be able to provide us information about other people involved in your event, such as your significant other, wedding party, etc. When you use these services, we will typically ask you for the name or other information (e.g., email addresses) of the other person. This information will be treated in accordance

with this Policy. With the "tell-a-friend" or similar feature, we may automatically send an email inviting the recipient(s) to read the article, view the content or visit the Site. We store this information for purposes of sending this email and tracking the success of our "tell-a-friend" or similar feature. Your "friend" (i.e., the third party whose information you submit using such feature) may contact us at membersupport@theknot.com to request that we remove this information from our database (and in some cases, may be able to opt out of receiving future promotional emails from us).

An Internet or mobile-based call or similar feature on the Site enables you to call merchants or other third parties that are featured on the Site, such as vendors of products and services we think you may be interested in. If you use this feature to call a third party, we will record the phone call and any message you leave for the third party, as well as call information such as the number dialed, the date and time of the call and its duration, and your location as determined by your area code or as otherwise permitted. We may use this information for analytics, auditing and other purposes. You will be notified of this recording when using this feature.

Site Usage Information

As is the case with many Web sites, our servers automatically collect your IP address when you visit the Site, and we may associate that with your domain name or that of your Internet access provider. We may also capture certain "clickstream data" pertaining to your usage of and navigation around the Site. Clickstream data includes, for example, information about your computer or device, Web browser and operating system and their settings, the referring page that linked you to the Site, the pages or ads you see or click on during your visit and when and for how long you do so, items you download, the next Web site you visit when you leave the Site, and any search terms you have entered on the Site or a referral site. All of this information may be used for a variety of purposes, including, for example, to gather aggregated demographic or statistical information.

In addition, we may deploy various tracking technologies on the Site to collect additional information about your Site visits. These technologies may enable us to, for example, assign a unique number to you, to collect information about your usage of our Site, administer the Site and our systems, and to relate such Site usage information to other information about you, including your Personal Information.

By using our Site, you agree to our use of these tracking technologies. Examples of the types of tracking technologies deployed on the Site include the following:

"Cookies" are small data files stored on your computer or device at the request of a Web site. In addition to the general purposes listed above, cookies may enable us to recognize you as the same user who was at our Site in the past, and relate your use of the Site to other information about you, such as other Site usage information and Personal Information. Cookies may also be used to enhance your experience on the Site (for example, by storing your username) and/or to collect general usage and aggregated statistical information. Most browsers can be set to detect cookies and give you an

opportunity to reject them, but refusing cookies may, in some cases, limit your use of the Site or its features. To learn more about the use of cookies, including how to manage or delete them, [click here](#).

"Local shared objects, such as "Flash cookies," may be stored on your computer or device using a media player or other software installed on your computer or device. Local shared objects operate a lot like cookies, but cannot be managed in the same way. Depending on how local shared objects are enabled on your computer or device, you may be able to manage them using software settings. For information on managing Flash cookies, for example, [click here](#).

A "pixel tag" (also known as a "clear GIF" or "web beacon") is a tiny image – typically just one-pixel – that can be placed on a Web page or in our electronic communications to you in order to help us measure the effectiveness of our content by, for example, counting the number of individuals who visit us online or verifying whether you've opened one of our emails or seen one of our Web pages.

"HTML5" (the language some Web sites, such as mobile Web sites, are coded in) may be used to store information on your computer or device about your Site usage activities and to help determine how our Site is being used by our visitors, how it can be improved, and to customize it for our users.

The above tracking technologies may be deployed by us or our service providers on our behalf. For example, we currently use, and/or in the future may use certain third party vendors to collect Site usage information and track traffic to, from and around the Sites. To find out more about how your Site usage information is collected through the practices of, and how you may be able to opt out of certain information by, such third parties, [click here](#).

We may use third-party web beacons to help analyze where visitors go and what they do while visiting our website. By using our Site, you agree to our use of these tracking technologies.

Do Not Track Disclosures

Some web browsers may transmit "do-not-track" signals to the websites with which the user communicates. Because of differences in how web browsers incorporate and activate this feature, it is not always clear whether users intend for these signals to be transmitted, or whether they even are aware of them. Because there currently is no industry standard concerning what, if anything, websites should do when they receive such signals, we currently do not change our tracking practices (which are explained in more detail directly above) in response to "do-not-track" (DNT) settings in your web browser. If and when a final standard is established and accepted, we will reassess how to respond to these signals.

Our third party partners, such as ad networks, web analytics companies and social media and networking platforms, collect information about your online activities over time and across our Site and other online properties. These third parties do not change their tracking practices in response to DNT settings in your web browser and we do not

obligate these parties to honor DNT settings. Information about how to opt-out from your data being used by third parties can be found above under "Site Usage Information".

How we may use your information

We (or one of our service providers, on our behalf) may use your information (including your Personal Information and Site usage information) for a variety of purposes, such as the following:

- processing and fulfilling your transactions
- administering the Site, the Site's features and services, and your account with us
- enabling users to use the Site and the Site's features and services
- responding to your requests, questions, and concerns
- developing new features and offerings on the Site
- sending you marketing and other communications, including information about products, services, and events, of ours and of others, that we think might interest you. You may opt out of receiving such notices from us by following the instructions in the Opt In and Opt Out section above.
- protecting our rights and property
- customizing the Site to your interests and history with us
- tailoring ads displayed to you on our Site and elsewhere to your interests and history with us
- other purposes described at the time you choose to provide Personal Information to us

To perform the above functions, we may match information collected from you through different means or at different times, including both Personal Information and Site usage information, and use such information along with information obtained from other sources (including third parties) such as demographic information and updated contact information. We or our service providers may also use your information to assess the level of interest in, and use of, the Site, our e-mails and our other messaging campaigns both on an individual basis and in the aggregate.

How we may share Personal Information and Site usage information with others?

We may share the information we collect on the Site with others for a variety of reasons. In addition to the kinds of information sharing you might expect, such as sharing with our subsidiaries, affiliates and third-party providers who need your information in order to provide services to us or on our behalf, and sharing what you voluntarily post to public areas on the Site with other Site users, we may share your information:

- with our affiliates and other third parties (e.g., pre-screened organizations that have offerings we think may interest you, registry program participants, retailers, and other third party partners) for their marketing and other purposes, unless you tell us not to by following the instructions in the Opt-in and Opt-out section above;
- including limited personal information, such as your first name, first initial of your last name, wedding location, data, color preferences, and wedding theme, with our affiliates and other third parties (e.g., pre-screened organizations that have offerings we think may

interest you, registry program participants, retailers, and other third party partners) for their marketing and other purposes;

with our co-sponsor(s) if we obtain your information in connection with a contest, sweepstakes, offering, or other promotional activity that is jointly offered by us and any third parties, unless you tell us not to by following the instructions in the Opt-in and Opt-out section above;

when we believe in good faith that disclosure is necessary to protect our rights or property, protect your safety or the safety of others, investigate fraud or respond to a government, judicial or other legal request, or to comply with the law;

in connection with a corporate change or dissolution, including for example a merger, acquisition, reorganization, consolidation, bankruptcy, liquidation, sale of assets, or wind-down of a business.

In addition, we may share non-personally identifiable Site usage information (including aggregate data) with others, for their use, in a form that does not include your name or contact information.

If you participate in certain public or community areas of our Site, such as a chat room, message board, blog, or by creating a public profile), the information you voluntarily disclose will be accessible to other Site members and, in some cases, the general public. You should be cautious about the information you submit to these areas (e.g., make up a username that does not disclose your personal identity). On some of our Sites, you may choose to make your online registries available to guests and friends via a password. If you do not elect this option, then anyone visiting the Site will be able to search for and view your registry by using your first and/or last name and other information regarding your event.

Your California Privacy Rights

California's "Shine the Light" law, Civil Code section 1798.83, requires certain businesses to respond to requests from California customers asking about the businesses' practices related to disclosing personal information to third parties for the third parties' direct marketing purposes. Alternately, such businesses may have in place a policy not to disclose personal information of customers to third parties for the third parties' direct marketing purposes if the customer has exercised an option to opt-out of such information-sharing. As discussed above, if you wish to opt-out of our sharing of your information with third parties for the third parties' direct marketing purposes, edit your preferences in your account profile at <http://global.theknot.com/join/memberprofile.aspx>, or email us at membersupport@theknot.com (please include your name, mailing address, and email address). To find out more about your opt-out rights, see the "Opt-in and Opt-out Section" section above.

Social Networking

We maintain presence on several social networking and blogging platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, Wordpress and Pinterest, and we also may incorporate some third party social networking features onto our Site or utilize third-party provided

platforms to publish or manage the Site or portions thereof. Through these platforms and features, we receive some Personal Information and some Site usage information about you, and this Privacy Policy applies to that information as well. In addition, some providers of third party social networking or blogging platforms we utilize (such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, Wordpress and Pinterest) have their own privacy policies which explain how the third parties that provide them may collect, use and protect your information (e.g., if you establish an account with such platform providers directly).

Mobile Apps

We may make available mobile applications (or "apps") that you are able to download to and use from your mobile device. Depending on the nature and functionality of the app, we may collect Personal Information and non-personally identifiable usage information through the app. The app also may collect information about your mobile device, such as your device's unique device ID (UDID), the IP address of your mobile device, device type, operating system and connection information (e.g., WiFi, 3G, etc.). If you opt-in, some of our apps may collect your device's precise real-time location, and in such cases, you may be able to opt out from further allowing us to have access to such location data by managing your location preferences in the app and/or on your device. This Policy may be supplemented from time to time with additional terms applicable to individual apps, or individual apps may be subject to separate privacy policies of which we will notify you by posting them on such apps.

Third-Party Ad Servers and Networks

We may use third-party advertising companies to serve ads when you visit the Site. These companies may use information about your visits to this Site and other Web sites in order to provide advertisements about goods and services of interest to you. These advertisements may appear on this Site and on other Web sites. These companies may employ cookies, clear GIFs and other tracking technologies to cause relevant ads to be displayed to you. For more information about third-party advertisers and how to prevent them from using your information, visit the NAI's consumer Web site at <http://www.networkadvertising.org/choices/> or Aboutads.info at <http://www.aboutads.info/choices/>. We encourage you to read these businesses' privacy policies to learn about how they treat your information.

Wireless Addresses

If the e-mail address you provide to us is a wireless e-mail address, you agree to receive messages from us at such address, subject to your opt-out rights as described in the Opt In and Opt Out section above. You may change your e-mail preferences at any time, but your wireless carrier's standard rates will apply as long as you are receiving messages at a wireless e-mail address. If you give us a wireless e-mail address, you represent that you are the owner or authorized user of the device on which messages will be received and that you are authorized to approve the applicable charges.

Text Message Service and Other Communication

We may seek to send messages to you on your wireless device via short message service ("Text Messaging"). By submitting your mobile phone number, you consent to receive text messages and offerings from us to the mobile device associated with that number using an automatic system for such purposes unless and until you elect not to receive such messages by following the opt-out instructions provided in connection the particular campaign.

You represent that you are the owner or authorized user of the device you use to sign up for Text Messaging, and that you are authorized to approve the applicable charges. You may not consent on behalf of someone else. You consent to receive phone calls from us even if your phone number is listed on the federal or state "do not call" registries. You must be 18 years of age or older and reside in the United States to use our Text Messaging. You must first register and provide all required Personal Information, such as your name, text address, wireless carrier, and billing information (if fees are applicable to the Text Messaging), which may be either your payment card information or mobile service carrier information. We may also obtain the date, time and content of your messages in the course of your use of Text Messaging. We will use the information we obtain in connection with our Text Messaging in accordance with this Policy. Messages may be about our promotional offerings. You are not required to agree to this in order to purchase goods or services from us. An auto-dialer and/or artificial or prerecorded message may be used to make calls to you. Mobile access is required for Text Messaging, and text messages are not available on some carriers and devices. If fees are charged to your wireless account invoice, we may provide information to your carrier about them. Your wireless carrier and other service providers may also collect data about your wireless device usage, and their practices are governed by their own policies. We may also access the content of your account and/or wireless account with your carrier for the purpose of identifying and resolving technical problems and/or service-related complaints.

You may opt out of Text Messaging at any time by following instructions provided in connection the particular campaign, but your wireless carrier's standard rates will apply to any messages you receive. Your opt-out will be effective once we send you a text confirmation of your opt-out. You will then be placed on our "do-not-contact" list for marketing purposes. (We may still contact you about your transactions with us.) If you are a Nevada resident, you may contact the Nevada Attorney General for more information about your opt out rights by calling 775-684-1100, emailing bcpinfo@ag.state.nv.us, or by writing to: Office of the Attorney General, Nevada Department of Justice, Bureau of Consumer Protection, 100 North Carson Street, Carson City, NV 89701-4717. You agree to enter into, sign and receive this consent to receive text messages electronically. Print this page using your Internet-connected computer or device and web browser to retain a copy of your consent.

Your Access Rights

You may be able to review, update or modify certain of the Personal Information that is stored in a user account set up with us on the Site (if you have one with us on the Site) by logging in to the "My Account" or similar area of the Site or by contacting us using the

"Contact Us" information below. We may ask you to verify your identity and to provide other details before we are able to provide you with any information, correct any inaccuracies, or delete any information. Your right to delete your information is subject to our records retention policies.

Security

We use various efforts intended to safeguard the security and integrity of Personal Information collected on this Site. For example, where appropriate, we use Secure Sockets Layer (SSL), private networks, intrusion detection measures and firewalls, and payment card information is encrypted in our system. We also have in place various access controls and restrictions with respect to Personal Information, such as restricting certain employees from accessing Personal Information, requiring our employees to use password-protected screen-savers when they leave their desk and passwords to regain access upon their return, and keeping employees up-to-date on our security and privacy practices. Additionally, the servers that we store Personal Information on are kept in a secure environment, subject to various physical access controls. Despite these measures, however, we cannot and do not guarantee that information will be absolutely safe from interception during transmission or intrusion during storage, while stored on our system, or otherwise.

If you correspond with us by e-mail, text message, or using Web forms like a "contact us" feature on our Site, you should be aware that your transmission might not be secure from access by unauthorized parties. We have no liability for disclosure of your information due to errors or unauthorized acts of third parties during or after transmission. If you create an account on our Site, you are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of your account password and for any activity that occurs under your account. Please notify us of any unauthorized use of your password or account. If we believe that the security of your Personal Information in our care may have been compromised, we may seek to notify you. If we have your e-mail address, we may notify you by e-mail. You consent to our use of e-mail as a means of such notification. If you prefer for us to use the U.S. Postal Service to notify you in this situation, please e-mail us at membersupport@theknot.com (please include your name, mailing address, and email address).

Links to other Web sites

The Site may contain links, banners, widgets or advertisements (e.g., a "Share It!" button) that lead to other Web sites not subject to this Privacy Policy (including other sites that may be co-branded with our brands). Thus, the posted policies of these other sites will govern the collection and use of your information thereon, and we encourage you to read each such privacy statement to learn about how your information may be treated by others. Additionally, on some of our Sites, you may be able to register with or purchase directly from third party retailers, and these other companies' information practices are governed by their privacy policies.

Children under the Age of 13

The Site is not intended for children under 13 years of age. We do not knowingly collect or store any personally identifiable information from children under the age of 13. If you are under 13, please do not register on the Website, make purchases through the Website or send any information about yourself to us, including your name, address, telephone number or email address. If you believe that we might have any information from a child under the age of 13, please contact us at security@theknot.com.

Changes to this Policy

We may change this Policy from time to time. When we do, we will let you know by posting the changed Policy on this page with a new "Last Updated" date. In some cases (for example, if we make certain material changes), we may inform you by additional means, such as by sending you an e-mail. In some cases, we may obtain your consent to the changes.

Contact Us

If you have any questions or comments regarding our privacy practices, you should first contact The Knot Member Services by emailing membersupport@theknot.com and writing "Privacy Policy" in the subject line. You may also write to The Knot Member Services at 195 Broadway, Floor 25, New York, NY 10007 or call (877) 335-5252.

Last Updated: FEBRUARY 18, 2015

Appendix 2: TheKnot.com's Terms of Service

TERMS OF USE: Thank you for visiting The Knot website, mobile applications and/or other services. By accessing or using The Knot website (including the mobile optimized version of the website), online services, mobile and other applications and social networking platforms (each, a "Site"), whether automated or otherwise, you agree to be bound by these Terms of Use and any additional terms and conditions that are referenced below or otherwise may apply to specific areas of the Site. Please read these Terms of Use carefully before using the Site.

The Knot website and/or mobile application is owned or operated by XO Group Inc. and/or its subsidiaries or affiliates (collectively, referred to herein as "we" or "us" or "our").

Certain features, products or software that you purchase or download from the Site may be subject to additional terms and conditions presented to you at the time that you use, purchase or download them. And when you decide to enter a contest or sweepstakes, we present the terms and conditions for the contest or sweepstakes to you. In addition, some areas of the Site provided by our third party partners and are subject to separate terms and conditions of use, which are posted within those areas.

You represent that you are legally able to accept these Terms of Use, and affirm that you are of legal age to form a binding contract, or have obtained parental or guardian consent to do so. If you do not agree to these Terms of Use, you may not use the Site.

We reserve the right to change these Terms of Use at any time. Such changes will be effective when posted, provided that we may only amend the alternative dispute resolution, venue and time limit of claims provisions to the extent allowed by applicable law. By continuing to use the Site after we post any such changes, you accept the Terms of Use as modified.

NOTE: THIS TERMS OF USE CONTAINS A BINDING ARBITRATION AND CLASS ACTION WAIVER PROVISION IN THE "BINDING ARBITRATION" SECTION BELOW THAT AFFECTS YOUR RIGHTS UNDER THIS TERMS OF USE AND WITH RESPECT TO ANY "DISPUTE" (AS DEFINED BELOW) BETWEEN YOU AND US OR OUR AFFILIATES. YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO OPT OUT OF THE BINDING ARBITRATION AND CLASS ACTION WAIVER PROVISIONS AS FURTHER DESCRIBED IN THE "BINDING ARBITRATION" SECTION BELOW.

Rules of Conduct

There are rules of conduct that you are required to follow when you use the Site. You must not:

"harvest" (or collect) information from the Site using an automated software tool or manually on a mass basis (unless we have given you separate written permission to do

so). This includes, for example, information about other users of the Site and information about the offerings, products, services and promotions available on or through the Site.

use automated means to access the Site, or gain unauthorized access to the Site or to any account or computer system connected to the Site.

"stream catch" (download, store or transmit copies of streamed content).

obtain, or attempt to obtain, access to areas of the Site or our systems that are not intended for access by you.

"flood" the Site with requests or otherwise overburden, disrupt or harm the Site or its systems.

circumvent or reverse engineer the Site or its systems.

restrict or inhibit another user or users from using and enjoying the Site.

manipulate or forge identifiers in order to disguise the origin of any information posted on the Site or otherwise provided to us or our employees.

impersonate any person, including, but not limited to, other community members or our employees.

If you post something to the Site, such as comments or other content, do not post anything that:

uses strong, vulgar, obscene or otherwise harmful language,
uses racially, ethnically or otherwise, objectionable language,
infringes any third party intellectual property right (such as copyrights),
is defamatory (i.e., something that is negative and untrue about another person or entity),

divulges another person's or entity's confidential or private information or trade secret,
is fraudulent, unlawful, threatening, harassing, abusive or discriminatory,
encourages criminal conduct,

contains any information (such as inside, proprietary or confidential information) that you do not have a right to make available due to contract, fiduciary duty, or operation of law,

advertises or solicits business for products or services other than those that are offered and promoted on the Site,

contains any virus, malware, spyware or other harmful content or code, or

violates regulations promulgated by the Securities and Exchange Commission, or that of any securities exchange, such as the New York Stock Exchange or the NASDAQ Stock Market.

You also must comply with all applicable laws and contractual obligations when you use the Site.

Ownership of Site Content and Submissions

We or our licensors or partners own the intellectual property rights in the content and materials displayed on the Site. You may use the Site (including any content and

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Please do not send us your ideas for our business. We are always thinking and creating, and we may have similar ideas of our own. To avoid any disputes between us relating to ideas that you have submitted to us you agree that, if you send us your ideas, you are assigning to us the right to use them, and you waive and release us from claims that we have used your ideas without your permission.

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You also understand and agree that any action or inaction by us or any of our directors, officers, stockholders, employees, consultants, agents or representatives (collectively, "Our Representatives") to prevent, restrict, redress or regulate content, or to implement other enforcement measures against any content, conduct or potential Terms of Use violation is undertaken voluntarily and in good faith, and you expressly agree that neither we nor any of Our Representatives shall be liable to you or anyone else for any action or inaction to prevent, restrict, redress, or regulate content, or to implement other enforcement measures against any content, conduct or potential violation of these Terms of Use.

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To access certain features or areas of the Site, you may be required to provide personal and/or demographic information as part of a registration or log-in process. In addition, certain features of the Site are only available to our registered users, and to access those areas of the Site you will be required to log in using your username and email password.

You agree to provide true, accurate, current and complete information about yourself as prompted by the applicable registration or log-in form, and you are responsible for keeping such information up-to-date (this includes your contact information, so that we can reliably contact you). The information you submit must describe you (you may not impersonate another person or entity), and you may not sell, share or otherwise transfer your account information.

You are responsible for all activity occurring when the Site is accessed through your account, whether authorized by you or not. Therefore, if you create an account, be sure to protect the confidentiality of your account password. We are not liable for any loss or damage arising from your failure to protect your password or account information.

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The communications between you and us via the Site use electronic means, whether you visit the Site or send us an email, or whether we post notices on the Site or communicate with you via email. For contractual purposes, you consent to receive communications from us in an electronic form, and you agree that all terms and conditions, agreements, notices, disclosures, and other communications that we provide to you electronically

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We have the right to deny access to, and to suspend or terminate your access to, the Site, or to any features or portions of the Site, and to remove and discard any content or materials you have submitted to the Site, at any time and for any reason, including for any violation by you of these Terms of Use. In the event that we suspend or terminate your access to and/or use of the Site, you will continue to be bound by the Terms of Use that were in effect as of the date of your suspension or termination.

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We welcome links to the Site but only in strict accordance with the terms and conditions for linking set forth at http://www.theknot.com/au_linkedpartners.shtml. We reserve the right to revoke your right to link to the Site upon notice. If you receive such a notice from us, you agree to discontinue your link to the Site.

Indemnification

You agree to indemnify, defend and hold us and our affiliates, and our respective directors, officers, employees and agents, harmless from and against any claims, liabilities, losses, damages, costs and expenses, including reasonable attorneys' fees,

arising from or relating to your use of the Site, your submissions to the Site, or any violation of these Terms of Use, or applicable law, by you or by someone accessing the Site via your account. We reserve the right, at our own expense, to assume the exclusive defense and control of any matter subject to indemnification by you, in which event you agree to cooperate with us in defending such claims. This indemnification, defense and hold harmless obligation will survive these Terms of Use and the termination of your use of the Site.

Jurisdictional Issues

We control and operate the Site from our facilities in the United States of America, and unless otherwise specified, the materials displayed on the Site are presented solely for the purpose of promoting products and services available in the United States, its territories, possessions, and protectorates. We do not represent that materials on the Site are appropriate or available for use in other locations. If you choose to access the Site from other locations, you are responsible for compliance with local laws, if and to the extent local laws are applicable.

Applicable Law; No Waiver; Severability

These Terms of Use, and the relationship between you and us, will be governed by the laws of the United States and the State of New York, without giving effect to any principles of conflicts of law. Our failure to exercise or enforce any right or provision of these Terms of Use will not constitute a waiver of such right or provision. If any provision of these Terms of Use is found by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, you and we nevertheless agree that the court should endeavor to give effect to intentions reflected in such provision, and the other provisions of these terms and conditions will remain in full force and effect.

Binding Arbitration

Other than those matters described under "Exclusions from Arbitration" below, you and we agree that all disputes, claims, or controversies arising out of or relating in any way to these Terms of Use (including the validity, enforceability or scope of this Section), the Site or any content or services thereon (each, a "Dispute"), that cannot be resolved through negotiation in accordance with the "Notice of Dispute; Negotiation" clause below, shall be settled by final binding arbitration, in accordance with the terms of this Section and to the extent permitted by law. Arbitration means that the Dispute will be resolved by a neutral arbitrator instead of in a court by a judge or jury. An arbitrator can award the same damages and relief on an individual basis that a court can award to an individual. You agree that the U.S. Federal Arbitration Act applies to this agreement.

Exclusions from Arbitration

YOU AND WE AGREE THAT ANY CLAIM FILED BY EITHER PARTY IN SMALL CLAIMS COURT IS NOT SUBJECT TO THE ARBITRATION TERMS CONTAINED

IN THIS SECTION. WE ALSO BOTH AGREE THAT YOU OR WE MAY BRING SUIT IN COURT TO ENJOIN INFRINGEMENT OR OTHER MISUSE OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS.

RIGHT TO OPT OUT OF BINDING ARBITRATION AND CLASS ACTION WAIVER

IF YOU DO NOT WISH TO BE BOUND BY THE BINDING ARBITRATION AND CLASS ACTION WAIVER IN THIS SECTION, YOU MUST NOTIFY US IN WRITING WITHIN 30 DAYS OF THE DATE THAT YOU ACCEPT THIS AGREEMENT. YOUR WRITTEN NOTIFICATION MUST BE MAILED TO LEGAL DEPARTMENT, XO GROUP INC., 195 BROADWAY, 25TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10007, BY CERTIFIED MAIL RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED AND MUST INCLUDE: (1) YOUR NAME, (2) YOUR ADDRESS, (3) YOUR ACCOUNT INFORMATION, IF YOU HAVE ONE, AND (4) A CLEAR STATEMENT THAT YOU DO NOT WISH TO RESOLVE DISPUTES WITH US THROUGH ARBITRATION.

Notice of Dispute; Negotiation

IF YOU HAVE A DISPUTE WITH US, YOU MUST SEND WRITTEN NOTICE TO LEGAL DEPARTMENT AT THE ADDRESS ABOVE TO GIVE US THE OPPORTUNITY TO RESOLVE THE DISPUTE INFORMALLY THROUGH NEGOTIATION.

You agree to negotiate resolution of the Dispute in good faith for no less than 60 days after you provide notice of the Dispute. If we do not resolve your Dispute within 60 days from receipt of notice of the Dispute, either party may pursue a claim in arbitration pursuant to the terms of this Section.

Initiation of Arbitration Proceeding

If you or we have a Dispute with such party elects to resolve through arbitration, the party initiating the arbitration proceeding shall initiate it with the American Arbitration Association ("AAA") under its rules and procedures, as modified by this Section. The AAA's rules are available at www.adr.org. A form for initiating arbitration proceedings is available on the AAA's site at <http://www.adr.org>. In addition to filing this form with the AAA in accordance with its rules and procedures, you must send a copy of the completed form to us at the following address to initiate arbitration proceedings: Legal Department, XO Group Inc., 195 Broadway, 25th Floor, New York, NY 10007.

You and we agree to treat the arbitration proceedings and any related discovery confidential. The terms of this Section govern in the event they conflict with the rules of the AAA.

Location of Arbitration

The arbitration proceedings shall be held in New York County, New York, unless you can demonstrate that arbitration in New York County would create an undue burden to you. If you can demonstrate that arbitration in New York County would create an undue burden to you, we may allow you to initiate the arbitration in your home state.

Class Action Waiver

YOU AND WE AGREE THAT EACH OF US MAY BRING CLAIMS AGAINST THE OTHER ONLY ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS AND NOT AS A PLAINTIFF OR CLASS MEMBER IN ANY PURPORTED CLASS OR REPRESENTATIVE ACTION OR PROCEEDING. UNLESS BOTH YOU AND WE SPECIFICALLY AGREE OTHERWISE, THE ARBITRATOR MAY NOT CONSOLIDATE OR JOIN MORE THAN ONE PERSON'S OR PARTY'S CLAIMS, AND MAY NOT OTHERWISE PRESIDE OVER ANY FORM OF A CONSOLIDATED, REPRESENTATIVE, OR CLASS PROCEEDING. ALSO, THE ARBITRATOR MAY AWARD RELIEF (INCLUDING MONETARY, INJUNCTIVE, AND DECLARATORY RELIEF) ONLY IN FAVOR OF THE INDIVIDUAL PARTY SEEKING RELIEF AND ONLY TO THE EXTENT NECESSARY TO PROVIDE RELIEF NECESSITATED BY THAT PARTY'S INDIVIDUAL CLAIM(S). ANY RELIEF AWARDED CANNOT AFFECT OTHER SITE USERS.

Severability

If any clause within this Section (other than the Class Action Waiver clause above) is found to be illegal or unenforceable, that clause will be severed from this Section, and the remainder of this Section will be given full force and effect. If the Class Action Waiver clause is found to be illegal or unenforceable, this entire Section will be unenforceable, the Dispute will be decided by a court, and you and we each agree to waive in that instance, to the fullest extent allowed by law, any trial by jury.

Continuation

This Section shall survive any termination of the provision of the associated services to you.

Governing Jurisdiction

ANY DISPUTE NOT SUBJECT TO ARBITRATION AND NOT INITIATED IN SMALL CLAIMS COURT WILL BE LITIGATED BY EITHER PARTY IN A COURT OF COMPETENT JURISDICTION ONLY IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK OR, IF SUCH COURT WOULD NOT HAVE JURISDICTION OVER THE MATTER, THEN ONLY IN A NEW YORK STATE COURT SITTING IN THE BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN, CITY OF NEW YORK. EACH PARTY SUBMITS TO THE EXCLUSIVE JURISDICTION OF THESE COURTS AND AGREES NOT TO COMMENCE ANY

LEGAL ACTION UNDER OR IN CONNECTION WITH THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THIS TERMS OF USE IN ANY OTHER COURT OR FORUM. EACH PARTY WAIVES ANY OBJECTION TO THE LAYING OF THE VENUE OF ANY LEGAL ACTION BROUGHT UNDER OR IN CONNECTION WITH THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THIS TERMS OF USE IN THE FEDERAL OR STATE COURTS SITTING IN THE BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN, CITY OF NEW YORK, AND AGREES NOT TO PLEAD OR CLAIM IN SUCH COURTS THAT ANY SUCH ACTION HAS BEEN BROUGHT IN AN INCONVENIENT FORUM.

Disclaimer of Warranties

THE SITE AND ITS CONTENT AND ANY SERVICES PROVIDED THEREIN ARE PROVIDED FOR ENTERTAINMENT, EDUCATIONAL AND PROMOTIONAL PURPOSES. WE PROVIDE THE SITE ON AN "AS IS" AND "AS AVAILABLE" BASIS, WITHOUT WARRANTY OF ANY KIND WHETHER EXPRESS OR IMPLIED (INCLUDING WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY, FITNESS FOR ANY PARTICULAR PURPOSE AND NON-INFRINGEMENT). THIS MEANS THAT WE MAKE NO PROMISES THAT:

THE SITE WILL BE AVAILABLE AT ANY PARTICULAR TIME,
THE SITE WILL MEET ANY PARTICULAR REQUIREMENTS OR PROVIDE ANY PARTICULAR RESULTS,

THE INFORMATION ON THE SITE WILL BE ACCURATE OR UP-TO-DATE,
THE SITE OR THE INFORMATION TRANSMITTED TO OR FROM IT OR STORED ON IT WILL BE SECURE FROM UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS,

INFORMATION AND MATERIALS THAT YOU STORE IN YOUR ACCOUNT OR ON THE SITE WILL REMAIN RETREIVABLE AND UNCORRUPTED (UNLESS WE PROMISE THIS IN A SEPARATE AGREEMENT WITH YOU), OR

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WE LIKEWISE MAKE NO WARRANTIES OR REPRESENTATIONS REGARDING ANY PRODUCTS OR SERVICES ORDERED OR PROVIDED VIA THE SITE. ANY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES ORDERED OR PROVIDED VIA THE SITE ARE PROVIDED "AS IS", EXCEPT TO THE EXTENT, IF AT ALL, OTHERWISE SET

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IF YOU PURCHASE A PRODUCT OR SERVICE FROM A THIRD PARTY AFTER FOLLOWING AN AD OR LINK ON THE SITE, THE TERMS OF SALE FOR YOUR PURCHASE ARE BETWEEN YOU AND THE THIRD PARTY FROM WHOM YOU MADE THE PURCHASE. WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR SUCH THIRD PARTY PRODUCTS OR SERVICES OR FOR DISPUTES BETWEEN YOU AND THEIR SELLERS.

YOU AGREE THAT USE OF THE SITE IS AT YOUR OWN RISK. ALTHOUGH WE TRY TO ENSURE THAT THE INFORMATION POSTED ON THE SITE IS ACCURATE AND UP-TO-DATE, WE RESERVE THE RIGHT TO CHANGE OR MAKE CORRECTIONS TO ANY OF THE INFORMATION (INCLUDING PRICING) AT ANY TIME. WE CANNOT, AND DO NOT, GUARANTEE THE CORRECTNESS, TIMELINESS, PRECISION, THOROUGHNESS OR COMPLETENESS OF ANY OF THE INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON THE SITE, NOR WILL WE BE LIABLE FOR ANY INACCURACY OR OMISSION CONCERNING ANY OF THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ON THE SITE. NO ADVICE, RESULTS OR INFORMATION, WHETHER ORAL OR WRITTEN, OBTAINED BY YOU FROM US OR THROUGH THE SITE SHALL CREATE ANY WARRANTY NOT EXPRESSLY MADE HEREIN. WE HEREBY DISCLAIM, AND YOU HEREBY WAIVE, ANY AND ALL WARRANTIES AND REPRESENTATIONS MADE IN PRODUCT OR SERVICES LITERATURE, FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS DOCUMENTS, SUPPORT DOCUMENTATION, BY OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUPPORT AGENTS, AND OTHERWISE ON THE SITE OR IN CORRESPONDENCE WITH US OR OUR AGENTS. WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY CONTENT OR MATERIALS POSTED TO THE SITE BY USERS, NOR FOR DISPUTES BETWEEN USERS, OR BETWEEN USERS AND THIRD PARTIES.

THESE DISCLAIMERS APPLY TO US AND OUR AFFILIATED AND RELATED COMPANIES AS WELL AS THIRD PARTIES THAT ARE INVOLVED IN THE CREATION, PRODUCTION OR DISTRIBUTION OF THE SITE, AND ANY OF THEIR EMPLOYEES AND AGENTS.

Limitations of Liability

IF YOU ARE DISSATISFIED WITH THE SITE, OR ANY MATERIALS, PRODUCTS, OR SERVICES ON THE SITE, OR WITH ANY OF THE SITE'S TERMS OF USE, YOUR SOLE AND EXCLUSIVE REMEDY IS TO DISCONTINUE USING THE SITE.

IN NO EVENT WILL WE OR ANY OF OUR AFFILIATES, OR ANY OF OUR OR THEIR DIRECTORS, OFFICERS, EMPLOYEES, AGENTS OR CONTENT OR SERVICE PROVIDERS, BE LIABLE FOR ANY DAMAGES (INCLUDING, WITHOUT LIMITATION, DIRECT, INDIRECT, SPECIAL, INCIDENTAL,

CONSEQUENTIAL, EXEMPLARY OR PUNITIVE DAMAGES) ARISING FROM, OR DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY RELATED TO, THE USE OF, OR THE INABILITY TO USE, THE SITE (OR THE CONTENT, MATERIALS AND FUNCTIONS PROVIDED AS PART OF THE SITE), WHETHER IN AN ACTION OF CONTRACT, NEGLIGENCE, OR STRICT LIABILITY, EVEN IF WE KNEW, SHOULD HAVE KNOWN OR HAD BEEN ADVISED OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGES. NOTWITHSTANDING AND WITHOUT LIMITING THE FOREGOING, YOU AGREE THAT OUR LIABILITY AND THE LIABILITY OF OUR AFFILIATES, AND OF ANY OF OUR OR THEIR DIRECTORS, OFFICERS, EMPLOYEES, AGENTS OR CONTENT OR SERVICE PROVIDERS, IF ANY, ARISING OUT OF ANY KIND OF LEGAL CLAIM IN ANY WAY RELATING TO THE USE OF THE SITE, WILL NOT EXCEED THE AMOUNT YOU HAVE ACTUALLY PAID TO US, IF ANY, FOR USE OF THE SITE, OR, IF APPLICABLE, FOR USE OF THE SPECIFIC SITE FEATURE OR SERVICE FROM WHICH THE CLAIM IN QUESTION FIRST AROSE. BECAUSE SOME STATES DO NOT ALLOW THE EXCLUSION OR LIMITATION OF CERTAIN CATEGORIES OF DAMAGES, THE ABOVE LIMITATIONS MAY NOT APPLY TO YOU. IN SUCH STATES, OUR LIABILITY AND THE LIABILITY OF OUR AFFILIATES, AND OUR AND THEIR DIRECTORS, OFFICERS, EMPLOYEES, AGENTS OR CONTENT OR SERVICE PROVIDERS, IS LIMITED TO THE FULLEST EXTENT PERMITTED BY SUCH STATE LAW.

Other

These Terms of Use and any additional terms and conditions that are referenced herein or otherwise may apply to specific areas of the Site, constitute the entire agreement between us and you with respect to the Site. This agreement is personal to you and you may not assign it to anyone.

If any provision of these Terms of Use is found to be unlawful, void, or for any reason unenforceable, then that provision will be deemed severable from these Terms of Use and will not affect the validity and enforceability of any remaining provisions. These Terms of Use are not intended to benefit any third party, and do not create any third party beneficiaries. Accordingly, these Terms of Use may only be invoked or enforced by you or us.

YOU AGREE THAT REGARDLESS OF ANY LAW TO THE CONTRARY (INCLUDING ANY RELEVANT STATUTES OF LIMITATION), ANY CLAIM OR CAUSE OF ACTION THAT YOU MAY HAVE ARISING OUT OF OR RELATED TO USE OF THE SITE, OR THESE TERMS OF USE, MUST BE FILED BY YOU WITHIN ONE YEAR AFTER SUCH CLAIM OR CAUSE OF ACTION ACCRUED OR BE PERMANENTLY BARRED.

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