‘Friends are friends are friends’: A study of communication and meaning on Facebook

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Submitted for the completion of Master of Arts (Thesis only)

December 2016

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Abstract
As the impact and capacity of online technologies grows, we are increasingly spending much of our lives communicating using social networking sites such as Facebook. These novel ways of interacting with the world present many avenues for research that challenge the way we think about communication and the role it plays in our lives.

All communication is constructed and understood in relation to time and space, which are fused inseparably to form the context of social action. At the same time, online media are subject to a process of ‘context collapse’ (Marwick & boyd (2010) or ‘convergence’ (Rambe, 2013), where multiple and distinct contexts or audiences merge into a single group. These environments can and do destabilise traditional conceptualisations of time, space and the nature of communicative interactions. This study therefore, conceptualises Facebook primarily as a mediating artefact through which meanings can be created and communicated, rather than simply as a technological tool comprising a set of features or affordances.

The aim of this research is to explore how Facebook users communicate with their ‘friends’ in such unstable and ever-changing environments. The research adopted a mixed methods approach, which involved the analysis of data from 230 online surveys and 9 interviews. Findings indicated that Facebook ‘friends’ can and do inhabit multiple spaces simultaneously, in particular, those that are both personal and professional. Importantly, despite the fact that participants felt very strongly that Facebook should offer a personal space and should not encroach on their professional lives, this was a conviction that many struggled to reinforce. The destabilising nature of this interactive communication environment resulted in participants feeling dragged into multiple digital and physical spaces simultaneously.

This study concludes that Facebook is a source of tension: it creates a mediating and interactive environment that facilitates fluid and multimodal forms of communication between its users across multiple time-space zones simultaneously. It is also a site of struggle, in which participants attempt to resist a sense of ‘context collapse’ and ‘convergence’ within and between online and offline interactions. Further research into the nature of this struggle and how it is played out between other Facebook ‘friends’, and across other forms of technologically mediated communication environments, would be very valuable.
Declarations
This is to certify that:

I. This thesis comprises only my original work towards the completion of Master of Arts (Thesis only).
II. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.
III. This thesis is fewer than 30,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

____________________________                                           Date _________________

Lesley Champion
Acknowledgements

I would like to take this chance to thank all the people who helped shape this research and supported me in putting it together. Most of all I would like to acknowledge the effort, and patience, of my supervisors, Drs Celia Thompson and Barb Kelly. It has been a pleasure to work with both of you in discovering just where this study was heading. Thank you for your guidance, and your patience through the many drafts.

Thank you to the many people who participated in the study. The time you took to fill in surveys and chat to me was truly appreciated, and the results it yielded were always interesting. Especially to the interview participants, Rachel, Rebecca, Peter, Michael, Mary, Jessica, Lucy, Elizabeth and Erika. I sincerely enjoyed our conversations about the exciting and treacherous world of Facebook.

This degree was funded through the Australian Government Research Training Scheme.
## Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................................................... i

Declarations .................................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................................................... iii

Contents ....................................................................................................................................................... iv

1. Introduction ............................................................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 Facebook: context collapse and the imagined audience ................................................................. 1
   1.2 Aim ...................................................................................................................................................... 1
   1.3 Key concepts, definitions and problematic terms ............................................................................. 2
   1.4 Research questions ............................................................................................................................... 4
   1.5 Key findings ......................................................................................................................................... 4
   1. Summary ................................................................................................................................................ 5

2. Literature review ......................................................................................................................................... 6
   2.1 Nature of Facebook .............................................................................................................................. 6
      2.1.1 A set of features ............................................................................................................................... 7
      2.1.2 A set of meanings ............................................................................................................................ 9
   2.2 Destabilising space and time: A story of convergence ................................................................. 11
   2.3 Destabilising the audience ................................................................................................................. 14
      2.3.1 Audience as inclusion versus exclusion: but is this missing the point? ...... 15
   2.4 Summary ............................................................................................................................................. 16

3. Methodology ............................................................................................................................................... 17
   3.1 Rationale for research design .............................................................................................................. 17
   3.2 Research participant recruitment ....................................................................................................... 19
   3.3 Research participants ........................................................................................................................... 20
   3.4 Data sources and collection ............................................................................................................... 23
   3.5 Data analysis ........................................................................................................................................ 25
   3.6 Summary .............................................................................................................................................. 26

4. Facebook use and professional audiences: A Snapshot ................................................................... 27
   4.1 Separation of personal and professional identities on Facebook (RQ1) .............................. 28
   4.2 Management of audience (RQ2) ......................................................................................................... 29
   4.3 Management of content (RQ2) ......................................................................................................... 30
      4.3.1 Frequency of posting .................................................................................................................. 31
      4.3.2 Use of different Facebook features ......................................................................................... 32
      4.3.3 Types of content ....................................................................................................................... 33
   4.4 Summary ............................................................................................................................................. 34
5. The interpretation of space: Communicating with ‘friends’.........................36
  5.1. How is Facebook perceived by users?.............................................. 36
    5.1.1. Facebook as ‘Fun, friendly, happy, living life to the full’...............37
    5.1.2. ‘My Facebook friends are my friends’.....................................39
  5.2. How are colleagues represented by users of Facebook? ..................42
    5.2.1. Facebook for friends..................................................................42
    5.2.2. Facebook as casual and non-professional..................................53
  5.3. The contestation of context............................................................ 60
    5.3.1. Agreeing upon contexts.............................................................60
    5.3.2. Friendship requests and contested boundaries............................61
    5.3.3. Rejecting, unfriending and unfollowing: Visibility and not wanting to
            offend.......................................................................................63
    5.3.4. Summary....................................................................................67
  6. Conclusion...........................................................................................68
    6.1 Summary of findings.........................................................................68
    6.2 Collapsed contexts, convergence, and contested contexts..............69
    6.3 Reflections and avenues for further research..................................71
  References.............................................................................................74
  Appendices ...........................................................................................77
    Appendix 1: Online survey....................................................................77
    Appendix 2: Interview questions..........................................................80
1. Introduction

1.1 Facebook: context collapse and the imagined audience

In a busy world we often wish we could be in two places at once. It is the subject of science fiction, a dream we aspire to and strive to simulate. A recent television advertisement from online betting company Bet365 proclaims: ‘not a single moment goes past when I can’t immerse myself entirely in live sport. I can shout and scream, in a hundred different stadiums, all at the same time’ (Bet365, 2016). This is one of the marvels of the connectivity provided by the internet: the ability to immerse ourselves in wide-ranging and multiple spaces across time (Kramsch, 2009). The internet has revolutionised the way we live: the way we bet; the way we shop; and, fundamentally, the way we communicate with each other. But how do we manage these multiple spaces across the different facets of our lives, facets that we are often in contact with at the same time? Asking such questions destabilises our very conceptions of the nature of ‘space and time’ as a stable, physical phenomenon.

In an article titled What Not To Do On Facebook When You're Job Searching Alison Doyle advises employees to ‘avoid any comments that could be interpreted as racist, sexist or discriminatory in any way’ (Doyle, 2015). This piece of advice, given to today’s professionals, is painfully vague, yet all encompassing. But are such impossible tasks emblematic of an existence within the confused spaces of Facebook? Social actions, and interpretations of them, are contextually bound, fused inseparably with space and time (Blommaert, 2015). When we decide to ‘post’ and share a Facebook status update, our words are catapulted into the multitude of spaces occupied by the many people who will read them. How then can we navigate context, the time and space, into which we are speaking?

Media outlets and employment coaches such as the one quoted above alert the reader to the possibility of employees being dismissed as a result of ill-advised Facebook posts (Everett, 2011). Such outcomes suggest the need to maintain clear distinctions in online behaviour, especially between Facebook and our professional identities. But is this even possible? Or, in the same way that Facebook connects individuals, does it also connect the physical and digital landscapes of our lives, rendering them ever present, and us ever present in them? These are some of the questions raised through this research.

1.2 Aim

This study aims to better understand the ways that Facebook users interact with the network and each other to navigate the many time-space zones that Facebook can come to inhabit. At the same time, such a research agenda also must reconcile this fluidity with ideas, such as those endorsed by employment coaches, that certain spaces should be kept separate online. This research then becomes a study of the tension between the way that Facebook users conceptualise the platform (Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013), and their lived experiences where these notions become destabilised. In order to address this, it explores issues emergent in past literature and salient within the data collected: issues surrounding the role of Facebook; time and space; the audience; and the Facebook user themselves.
1.3 Key concepts, definitions and problematic terms

Such an investigation is made more difficult by deficiencies in the language which has been used to talk about Facebook, both as a tool for communication and a destabilising cultural phenomenon. This language has typically been grounded in binaries, many of which become unhelpful, and even distracting when faced with the destabilising forces of Facebook and online technologies. Binaries such as offline versus online for example are quickly becoming blurred in users’ interactions with Facebook, perhaps, for some, even losing their meaning (Rambe, 2013).

Ideas of space can provide a red herring within Facebook. It has been argued by many in the field that communication within Facebook destabilises conceptions, and perhaps the meaning, of time and space (Blommaert, 2015; boyd, 2007; Kramsch, 2009). The Facebook user’s relationship to space is multiple and fluid, a relationship that could be categorised as many-to-many, rather than the one-to-one relationships prized by conventional conceptualisations. As a result, it is tempting to think about Facebook communication as somehow being removed from and outside of space and time, but to do so would miss the complex ways in which Facebook is overlayed on physical space and time to interact with, inform, and inhabit these multiple spaces.

Although this research takes as one of its primary arguments the idea that online technologies such as Facebook destabilise existing categories (Blommaert, 2015; boyd, 2007), it also recognises the difficulty of producing a grounded, meaningful discussion without this language. For the purpose of this research, the following is a list of terms together with an explanation of how they will be used in this thesis.

**Facebook:** This research explores issues of space and time through the popular online social networking site, Facebook. Within Facebook, users are provided with tools to document their lives, while connecting and communicating with their friends and family. Communication through Facebook is largely asynchronous and visible to large numbers of people, with users able to post status updates and react, through ‘likes’ and ‘comments,’ to the posts of others.

From a technological standpoint, Facebook is often investigated as a set of features, or affordances, affordances which influence how the technology can be used, and therefore influence users’ behaviours (Baym & boyd, 2012). However, also of interest are the spatial and temporal meanings which are created around the technology: the ways that Facebook is appropriated and perceived by users (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). This study is particularly interested in these meanings, meanings which, like the spaces it interacts with, can be divergent and contested.

**Time-space:** The idea of space and time in this thesis is used as a tool to explore the role of context. It alludes to two important aspects of research around Facebook. The first of these being physical space, with which Facebook has an ambiguous relationship. Facebook destabilises traditional ideas of space and time (Blommaert, 2015; Kramsch, 2009), but, as a technology, it is also embedded in everyday lives (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). In this way, it can, and does, take on physical characteristics, the idea of Facebook being a ‘meeting place’ in which people can be present, with digital and physical landscapes being overlayed on each other at the level of individual users (Rambe, 2013). These are the multiple spaces that I am attempting to investigate.
Spaces are also connected to discourse, a connection made explicit by Blommaert (2015). The term time-space in this thesis also interacts with discourses and norms which exist in the spaces in question. Discourses shape identity, thus providing a link between the spaces that Facebook inhabits and the way that Facebook users think of themselves within their surroundings and the ways they communicate these identities to others.

**Facebook user:** This term within this study refers to the participant in relation to their Facebook experience or network in whichever capacity they are participating. This holds equally whether they are commenting on the experience of posting status updates themselves, or responding to the posts of others.

The issue of how to conceptualise users is one of the complications of online technologies. In relation to Facebook, it is tempting to differentiate where users disclose information: on ‘their Facebook page’; or on the pages of others. Indeed, distinctions have in the past been made between disclosed and entrusted data (Schneier, 2010). While I recognise this as a distinction of interest in relation to Facebook and issues of power, it is one that is ultimately not pursued in this particular study.

Such a distinction would bring about terms such as Facebook owner and Facebook participant. These are terms that may become problematic in the Facebook environment, where issues of ownership are destabilised. According to scholars such as Bakhtin, we never actually own any of the language that we use (Bakhtin, 1981), and this ownership becomes even more tenuous online where the production and dissemination of knowledge is further decentralised (Kramsch, 2009). The idea, then, of having ownership over a Facebook profile that one maintains is highly problematic.

Ultimately though, such a distinction according to whose ‘page’ the user is writing on is not within the focus this study. This study focusses on the construction of space through the lens of who might be watching, and how these watchers are conceptualised. Whether a Facebook user is writing their own status update or commenting on the posts of others, they are engaging in a process of identity construction by making their texts visible to an ‘audience.’ From this perspective, the distinction that is relevant is the one between the Facebook user and the other. I recognise that this distinction is problematic (see audience below), but the idea of audience served as a way of grounding the study. Therefore, where I discuss the Facebook user I will also discuss others in the user’s network, or the audience.

**Audience:** I have already discussed how Facebook communication can work to destabilise distinctions between the writer and the audience (Kramsch, 2009; Rambe, 2013). In addition, the invisible audience of Facebook makes it necessary to differentiate between the actual audience, the possible audience, and the audience that the Facebook user believes they are speaking to. Here I am concerned with the latter, and so, discussions of audience will follow Litt in referring to the imagined audience (Litt, 2012) rather than the actual audience.

It is important to acknowledge that this research is, to a large extent, grounded in potentially problematic binaries. It selects particular spaces, personal and professional, categories that are themselves always in flux, and investigates participants’ perceptions of them within their experience of Facebook. It does this partly for the sake of clarity, a
way into the issues at the heart of the thesis. However, by the end of this analysis I demonstrate how inadequate this language is. The language that we use to talk about Facebook is straining to contain users’ experiences of the multiple spaces surrounding the platform, and this strain is contributing to the tensions relating to its use.

In order to examine these issues, past research, such as that of Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013), has examined the way social media users communicate online and manage online audiences across personal and professional identities. However, the majority of this existing work has framed the question around separation of two identities (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). This provides little insight into the ways in which users of social media interact online to construct a multifaceted identity which can speak to both personal and professional domains. In contrast, this research examines how such binaries are drawn upon, supported, and destabilised through users’ interactions with Facebook and other users.

1.4 Research questions
This study aims to investigate the nature of Facebook interaction through the following questions:

1. What are Facebook users’ perceptions about the nature of friend-to-friend communication when using Facebook?
2. How do these perceptions manifest themselves in the ways in which users interact with their audiences on Facebook?
3. What do (1) and (2) reveal about the nature of friend-to-friend interactions using Facebook?

1.5 Key findings
This study utilised a mixed methods approach to explore how 230 survey respondents and 9 interviewees interacted with Facebook across multiple time-space zones, including both social and professional domains. Analysis of the survey data revealed what was to become one of the key findings of this study: the apparently contradictory nature of Facebook users self-reported behaviours. Respondents reported favouring separation, but the analysis found that this was often not borne out by the exclusion of colleagues from Facebook (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013).

Analysis of interviews and short answer questions from the survey then explored Facebook users’ experiences in more depth. Once all stages of data analysis had been completed, it became clear that the concept of ‘space’ and its connections to time, as multi-dimensional constructs, offered a rich lens through which to view and frame the nature of friend-to-friend communication on Facebook.

Analysis of this data revealed complexities in the ways that on occasions the time-space configurations afforded by Facebook destabilised and disrupted participants’ preconceptions of how they could effectively manipulate Facebook to suit their own purposes. Participants draw on notions of Facebook as a primarily personal space, constituted by personal communication with friends. Against this backdrop, they then selectively imagined the audience, in particular, professional contacts, in relation to these
notions. However, these ideas were also destabilised, frustrated, and reshaped in the environments fostered by Facebook. The analysis explored how participants imagined Facebook as a personal space, while also reporting feeling compelled to enter into and interact with multiple discursive, physical and digital time-space zones simultaneously.

1. Summary
This introductory chapter has provided a background and rationale for the study as well as setting out the research questions to be investigated. Chapter 2 explores some of the existing research around the nature of communication through Facebook, in particular, the way it interacts with multiple time-space zones and imagined audiences. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology of the study and an explanation of how the data sources were analysed. Chapters 4 and 5 consist of the presentation of the data, together with the analysis and discussion of the data in relation to the research questions and the past research discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 6 concludes the study and considers its contribution to research on the nature of communication through Facebook and other online mediums. This final chapter will reflect on the efficacy of the idea of collapsed contexts (boyd, 2007) as well as further research avenues.
2. Literature review

This chapter aims to outline how studies in the literature provide us with insights into Facebook communication as a multi-modal, fluid, destabilising force that is embedded into the everyday lives of users. In this way, while such technologies decentralise space and time, they also occupy multiple time-space zones, interacting with multiple identities simultaneously. Against this background, I explore the issue of professional contacts on Facebook, paying particular attention to audience as interconnected with space and identity. This leads to a fluid, complex notion of Facebook which destabilises space, time, audience, and identity, themes which will provide a framework for the exploration of the research questions.

2.1. Nature of Facebook

The purpose and user experience of new technology is always an area of great practical and philosophical interest. In the case of online technologies, it can be extremely difficult to pin down. Their uses and cultural meaning are constantly mobile, changing as quickly as users interact with them. Facebook, like many other technologies, has evolved since its conception, from an online source of information into a multimodal platform for interaction and identity construction across space and time. In the construction of these identities it inhabits both digital and physical spaces simultaneously.

According to Mark Zuckerberg, the creator of Facebook in a 2005 interview, the platform was originally designed in 2004 to act as an online directory (Franzese, 2010). Rather than creating a community, Zuckerberg envisaged the Facebook as online directory, a book of faces which mirrored the real community in real life (Franzese, 2010). Here users could type in a name and be presented with the relevant information about an individual, as well as information about their social connections. Facebook, then, was established with a premise of visibility, a privileging of visibility which remains one of the central issues around Facebook and identity.

What has changed, however, is the distinction between the real world and the Facebook environment. This intersection is at the heart of the investigation undertaken within this research. Rambe (2013) discusses the social convergence afforded by Facebook, commenting on the blurring of boundaries between online and offline. He draws on the concept of augmented reality to suggest that Facebook and other online technologies are being fused and overlayed with physical space in order to create a reality which can switch seamlessly between physical and digital landscapes (Rambe, 2013). It is important to note here the mutual relationship between these two dimensions rather than the privileging of the offline as emphasised by Zuckerberg. The idea that physical space and information cybernetics are superimposing and supporting each other is also supported by other authors (Casalegno, 2014). It is this blurring of boundaries which serves as the backdrop for an investigation of the meanings constructed around Facebook.

While it is accepted that internet technologies disrupt space and time (Blommaert, 2015; Kramsch, 2009), it is also important to remember that these technologies, in this case Facebook, are also spatialized, and come to be situated within space (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). This is not to say that the space or spaces which Facebook occupies or provides are stable. Rather, the technology is embedded in the everyday lives of users...
(Rambe, 2013). Here it acts as a prosthetic, an extension of the abilities and reach of the user (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). In this process, Facebook can, and does, come to inhabit various spaces existing across time as it interacts with the position, communicative intent, and desire of users, and in fact, with the very identities which are constructed through this interaction.

2.1.1. A set of features

At a fundamental level Facebook can a viewed as a tool or even a set of features. Facebook comes packaged with a range of behaviours it allows, some it does not, and a set of expectations, or discourses, around how it should be used. It is, after all, a technology, and all technology, including language itself, is inherently ideological, speaking to the ways that we access and control the world around us, and, in the process, ourselves (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). The mechanical structure of Facebook then should not be dismissed. The features which it provides establish the parameters for the interaction between Facebook and the identities of the user.

Facebook is an online social networking platform which was established in 2007, allowing users to communicate multi-modally with their networks. Facebook users are able to create networks in which they are connected to other users, generically termed ‘friends.’ Crucially for this study, such friendships are based on a model of reciprocity, formed through a process of friend requests and acceptances.¹ Users are then able to communicate with these networks by posting text, image, video and links to other content throughout the internet. For the purpose of this study this section will outline three different components of Facebook: the news feed; users’ profiles and walls; and the private message function that Facebook provides. Each of these components holds different implications for the formation and perception of space within the site.

The news feed is what now constitutes entry into Facebook after logging in, and is arguably where Facebook users spend the most time interacting with Facebook and each other. From this page users are able to post a status to Facebook as well as being presented with a selection of status updates posted by their friends. They are also able to interact with their friends’ posts by either ‘liking,’ ‘commenting,’ or ‘sharing.’ These interactions then play a part in deciding which status updates users see on their feed in future, with Facebook using algorithms to determine which friends a user is interested in (Facebook, 2016).

The news feed is important in shaping users’ communication through Facebook firstly by disseminating status updates to users who otherwise may not actively seek out such updates through accessing the walls of individual users. This renders a user’s communication instantly visible to a large audience, including a subset of that audience which may not have been anticipated. Circling back to the idea of multiple spaces, the news feed immediately catapults a user’s post into the multitude of spaces occupied by members of the audience.

Perhaps a more important implication for perceptions of Facebook is the way that the news feed works to shape users’ conceptions of who their audience is. I will discuss

¹ This is unlike some other social networking sites, Twitter for example, which operates through a one-way model of ‘following’ where there is no requirement for both parties to follow each other.
elsewhere the importance of audience and context in determining the way the one conceptualises themselves (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; van den Berg & Leenes, 2010). The audience on Facebook is typically invisible and is difficult to imagine. Past research has found that Facebook users employ available information to arrive at an imagined audience: information such as ‘likes’ and ‘comments,’ and indeed, who is often represented in their news feed (Bernstein, Bakshy, Burke, & Karrer, 2013; Strater & Lipford, 2002). In other words, the contacts that a user sees the most will be more likely to be the audience they imagine.

Facebook communication also takes place through the user profile and wall. These are technically two separate sections, but the viewing of both involves the explicit action on the part of the viewer to access an individual profile, that is, these sections are only accessed through active and directed interest as opposed to the buffet of the news feed. In addition, these two sections are subject to similar privacy settings, which, according to some evidence, are poorly understood by Facebook users (Acquisti & Gross, 2006).

The profile section allows users to fill in a long list of basic details such as name, age, gender, relationship status, sexual orientation, education, occupation, phone number and interests. Facebook enables users to change privacy settings here in order to control who can see what information, which is usually visible to friends only, or visible to the public. However, past research has suggested that while Facebook users cite privacy as a concern when using the site, in practice they share large amounts of personal information in their profiles (Acquisti & Gross, 2006).

I discussed the news feed earlier. When a Facebook user posts a status update, in addition to appearing on their friends’ news feeds, it is also posted to their wall. The wall is the page on Facebook which houses the collection of status updates posted by the user. Where news feeds provide high levels of immediate, real-time visibility, the wall enables a visibility which is permanent (boyd, 2007; Gradinaru, 2013), presenting viewers with a back catalogue of a user’s updates. These posts remain visible on the wall until the user chooses to remove them. Communication here is highly asynchronous, meaning that posts are not only visible across many spaces, but also across large spans of time, resulting in communication which has been stretched from its context. Users are given some control, even fine grained control, over who can see each update as it is posted. However, it is important to note that the default setting here is that it can be seen by all friends, and any alteration to this requires extra effort on the part of the user.

All of the above leads to environments of heightened visibility, and it is this heightened visibility, along with the conflicting spaces occupied by users, that result in the types of tension which Facebook users reported in this research.

As well as these hyper-visible methods of communicating, Facebook also offers a private messaging function which can be used in a similar way to emailing or, if both parties are online at the same time, instant messaging. Past research (Pampek, Yermoleyeva, & Calvert, 2009) has found that this feature is quite popular among Facebook users. Here, Facebook users are provided with a more private, targeted medium of communication which allows them to escape the broad audiences of status updates. Private messaging may enable users to exercise greater control over the spaces in which they are interacting.
Having briefly outlined the features of Facebook and suggested some of the implications they have for visibility and space, it is now worthwhile mentioning the technologies that are used to access Facebook. With the rise of mobile technologies, the means of accessing Facebook have become enmeshed with what it means to be a Facebook user and how one shares their lives in such a digital medium (Rambe, 2013). Mobile phones are increasingly becoming a preferred way to access Facebook. Such a mobile device allows users to upload information online to Facebook quickly and easily as they are going about their daily lives, resulting in real-time visibility and a blurring of distinctions between online and offline. This has implications for the way that Facebook is embedded in the spaces of everyday life (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011).

2.1.2. A set of meanings
The previous section’s discussion highlighted the ways that visibility marks parameters of interaction with the network. However, in this research I am not interested primarily in Facebook as a set of features which enforce cultural effects. Rather, I am interested in the cultural meanings of the technology (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). According to Thurlow and Mroczek the impacts of technology come not merely from the structure and affordances of the technology, but in how the technology is embedded into the everyday lives of users. Within this way of thinking, relationships between Facebook and space-time come not from the features of Facebook itself, but from the meanings which emerge through users’ interactions with them.

In order to investigate these relationships, it is necessary to bear in mind the discourses and affordances of Facebook. They set the scene for the construction of meaning which is the ultimate focus of this research. This focus is borne out in Chapter 5, where I investigate the ways that Facebook users construct meaning from Facebook and the spaces which it comes to inhabit.

Worth noting here is the interactional nature of Facebook. While Facebook communication may have begun as a unidirectional call for information, it is increasingly becoming a process where the flow of information is cyclical. The process of interacting with Facebook is not one where the offline identity of the user is merely transposed into the template of Facebook. Rather, there exists a never-ending conversation between Facebook and the identity of the user, the effects of which flow seamlessly between the two across digital and physical landscapes and various domains.

If we believe in the validity of this conversation, then it becomes possible to suggest that the meanings constructed through this interaction can vary slightly between users. The remainder of this section will outline three further ways of conceptualising and investigating the Facebook experience. What I wish to emphasise here is not only the instability of space and time surrounding Facebook, but also the way that this space and time is open to interpretation by individual users who come to the platform with different identities and intents.

2.1.2.1. Facebook as personal or professional
The added layer to this study is a focus on what happens when professional and non-professional identities, spaces, and audiences coincide on Facebook. This provides somewhat of a lens through which to view and ground the investigation of Facebook as
operating in multiple, destabilised spaces. It is a lens that has been used by other research in order to provide a foundation for theoretical discussion (Jiang, Hughes, & Pulice-Farrow, 2014; Marwick & boyd, 2010; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005; Vitak, Lampe, Gray, & Ellison, 2012). Such a binary may be problematic in itself. Notions of personal and professional are constructed categories, and the distinction between them is often blurred (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). However, they provide a way into the investigation of multiple contexts, one that can be investigated, and ultimately challenged.

Social networking sites have become an important site for the investigation of identity because of the sheer amount of information that is shared through these environments. Facebook is used to construct and maintain personal identities (Livingstone & Brake, 2010), educational identities (Rambe, 2013), and professional identities (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013), often simultaneously. Here, the lines are blurred between private and public, as well as different types of publics (boyd, 2007). Users access social media remotely as individuals, but once accessed it is hard to imagine a more public domain. Acquisti and Gross illustrated the confusion between public and private finding no correlation between users’ privacy concerns and the amount of data shared on Facebook profiles (Acquisti & Gross, 2006).

Part of the appeal of Facebook amongst its huge numbers of users is the ability the platform affords for users to take the features and create their own stories and spaces with them. Rambe (2013) suggested that it is a platform used for personal, as well as educational and professional uses, while the findings of other studies have emphasised the imagining of Facebook as a network of friends (Acquisti & Gross, 2006). Ultimately, as will be explored in this study, the search for a universal role or function is futile; each user has a different experience of Facebook, and has different ideas about what it should be, the role it should play in their lives, and the type of interactions that should be acceptable within it. However, as a starting point, there are some general patterns in the way that Facebook is imagined by users. These will be discussed here.

Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) suggest that as far back as the industrial revolution there has existed a notion of keeping one’s professional life separate from their personal life. In popular culture, this idea has only strengthened in the presence of our increasingly digitised lives. News media shares the stories of employees who have been fired because of ill-advised Facebook statuses (Everett, 2011). Young professionals are being encouraged to remain mindful of how their personal social networking profiles can be interpreted by employers and other professional contacts (Doyle, 2015; Pegoraro, 2013).

Some sources would suggest that this preference is being borne out in actual Facebook use. In 2012, professional networking site, LinkedIn, partnered with the market research company, TNS, to investigate the driving forces behind the use of social networking sites and how these differed across different sites. In what they called The Mindset Divide they provided a snapshot of the different mindsets users were occupying when they were using so called personal and professional social networking sites. Broadly, they found that personal networks such as Facebook were used casually for entertainment purposes, while professional networks such as LinkedIn were associated with more purposeful intents, often towards ends of self-improvement (LinkedIn, 2012).
Firstly, this study found a difference in the way the use of the networks was characterised (LinkedIn, 2012). Users of personal networks tended to refer to ‘spending time’. Such networks often served as ways to pass the time and were associated with emotions around nostalgia, having fun, and distraction. On the other hand, professional networks tended to be associated with the ‘investment of time’. These networks were employed purposefully by users in order to improve themselves for the future and were most closely tied to emotions surrounding aspiration, achievement, and success (LinkedIn, 2012).

Following on from this divide, the activities that the platforms were used for and the expectations surrounding the types of content present were also different. Users of personal networks used them primarily to socialise, stay in touch, be entertained, and kill time. In line with these functions, they expected to see content surrounding the activities of family and friends, information on their personal interests, and general entertainment news. Professional networks were used to maintain a professional identity, make useful connections, search for job opportunities, and to stay in touch with professional contacts. While on these sites, users were most prepared to see content surrounding career related information, developments in their field, updates on brands, and current affairs (LinkedIn, 2012).

The above discussion illustrates that in relation to a particular focus on personal and professional identities, the spaces that Facebook works in can be multiple. It also serves as a backdrop for the destabilising factors to be discussed in the following sections.

2.2. Destabilising space and time: A story of convergence

In his discussion about the organisation of identity, Blommaert draws on Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope to capture how identity and performances of identity are contextually bound (Bakhtin, 1981; Blommaert, 2015). Bakhtin originally used this concept in the field of literary studies in order to explain genre. According to this theory, space and time are fused inseparably to form the context of a social action, and this social action in turn is inseparable from the space and time when it occurs. Our identities are then played out and situated within and across time-space zones.

The concept of the chronotope makes the link between context and behaviour, arguing that behaviour is contextually dependent. However, instead of placing the social actor as responding to the context, the idea of the chronotope makes use of a Foucaultian style idea of discourse in which the context works to sanction certain social actions (Foucault, 1980). In other words, some forms of behaviour make sense in a given context while others do not. It is the behaviours that respond to the context, that make sense within it, that are then recognisable in terms of existing frames of identity.

For his part, Foucault popularised this idea of discourse. Foucault recognised the importance of the socio-historical aspect of language, and indeed, the power inherent in it. As Foucault explains, the term ‘Discourse’ encapsulates ways of meaningfully talking, and thinking, about a subject in a given socio-historical context (Foucault, 1980). Foucault linked the notion of ‘Discourses’ to ‘regimes of truth,’ ‘general politics’ of truth; that is, the types of discourses which [a society] accepts and makes function as true’ (Foucault, 1980).
For Blommaert and Foucault then, context is something which manifests itself in discourse and the way we speak about ourselves and the world around us. So then, if the participants in this study wish to talk about identity, space, the Facebook experience, friendship, or professionalism, they must use the ways of speaking that are available to them through Discourse, or risk their talk being not culturally meaningful. This requires an awareness and understanding of the spaces into which one is speaking. Ideas around context, discourse, and chronotopes are key terms which shape the conceptual framework through which this study has been theorized.

However, within Facebook the time-space zones occupied at any given time are notoriously difficult to pin down. Facebook is used primarily to communicate with existing offline connections connected to offline contexts (Livingstone & Brake, 2010). Asynchronous communication and the permanence of online data makes connections to time even more tenuous. This thesis aims to explore the ways in which offline contexts inhabit online environments. In their blurring of physical and digital landscapes, the resulting environments are highly destabilising forces which may have the potential to skew chronotopic time-space bonds of social interaction.

Advances in technology associated with the internet create destabilisation of space and time within the online world (Kramsch, 2009). The internet is an amorphous web of connections with no fixed centre. It enables interaction between entities regardless of time or space; once uploaded to the web, information can be viewed by potentially anyone, anywhere, at any time. Kramsch talks about online space as a hyper-real space which collapses the physical dimensions of time and space through a computer screen (Kramsch, 2009). Such an environment provides users with instant access to wide range of information from any point in the web, but also results in the meeting of many different time-space zones.

boyd described the unique character of online environments, which she termed mediated publics, as being constituted by a heightened visibility (boyd, 2007). These are environments where people gather publicly through the use of mediating technology. Mediated publics differ from unmediated publics in a variety of crucial ways. The online world introduces a permanence into users’ communication, resulting in an archive of identity relevant information (Gradinaru, 2013) which can be searched and replicated (boyd, 2007), interpreted and situated by an invisible audience (boyd, 2007; Gradinaru, 2013; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013) across many spaces and times. Perhaps one of the most crucial differences however, and one that will be investigated in this research, is the fact that because mediated publics need not be bound by traditional conceptualisations of time or space (Kramsch, 2009), they often result in environments where multiple conflicting spaces and social norms can exist (boyd, 2007).

With these multiple spaces existing in, or being inhabited by, the one platform, it has been argued that boundaries between them are blurred, with many pointing to an idea of context collapse (Baym & boyd, 2012; Blommaert, 2015; Marwick & boyd, 2010; Vitak et al., 2012). Context collapse is one way of articulating the phenomenon, common on social

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2 Thurlow and Mroczek (2011) point out that the term mediation is problematic; all interaction is in fact mediated at a fundamental level, for communication is mediated by language.
media, constituted by the flattening of multiple distinct groups into a single group (Marwick & boyd, 2010). Most social media platforms, Facebook for instance, comprise a single large group of contacts, termed ‘friends,’ with very limited tools for separating them into groups or targeting shared information at specific groups. This convergence of multiple disparate social groups results in a loss of control with regard to the management of the self presentations that users give to their audiences (boyd, 2007). Put another way, the chronotopic links between time-space, time, discourse, and behaviour have become tangled.

In her discussion of privacy, Nissenbaum invokes the concept of contextual integrity (Nissenbaum, 2004). This is the idea that when individuals gather and distribute information about another, they must do so in accordance with the norms of the context of the information. For example, most people would think very differently about a doctor consuming alcohol in a bar after work to the way they would think about that same doctor drinking in the office of his surgery. In this way, to respect informational privacy is to respect the contextual boundedness of that information (Nissenbaum, 2004). This may become problematic when applied to the information shared on social networking sites. Information which appears on a Facebook user’s news feed has been made easily accessible and digestible, but has also been taken out of its original context, also being removed from its temporal place within the author’s archive, the succession of posts across time which builds identity.

The lack of audience segregation and, in the most part, targeted information sharing means that an individual’s social media contacts can see each other and everything the individual posts (van den Berg & Leenes, 2010). This results in the creation of an invisible audience. Unlike face-to-face offline conversation, where it is relatively easy to gauge the immediate audience of an utterance by who is present at the time, information shared in online environments can potentially be seen by an unlimited number of people over an extended period of time. In this way, users of social media never know precisely who their audience is.

In order to ground the Facebook audience as a vital component of study, several commentators have drawn a link between the invisible audience of social media and Foucault’s appropriation of the panopticon as a model of internalised surveillance (Brignall, 2002; Rayner, 2012). The panopticon, first described by 18th century philosopher and social theorist, Jeremy Bentham, as the ideal prison, consists of a central tower surrounded by cells whereby jailors could watch inmates while remaining unseen themselves. The social media user similarly is in a position where they can be visible at all times, but they cannot see their jailors to identify when they are being watched or who in fact is watching. In Foucault’s conception, this results in individuals internalising the gaze of those who may be watching and policing their own behaviours.

It may seem like a shift to move from discussing Facebook with reference to spaces to talking about audience. However, the way we interpret the spaces that we are in, and certainly how we interpret how this links to accepted behaviour, is impacted largely by who we think is watching.
2.3. Destabilising the audience

If the efficacy of the panopticon relies on individuals knowing they are being watched but not knowing when or by whom, the ways in which they imagine this audience is significant, especially in a non-face-to-face online environment. Notions of audience are central to the ways this research is theorised, as are relationships between the actual and imagined audience.

In talking about the audiences of written texts, Ong argued that the audience is a fiction that writers bring into being by writing to and for them (Ong, 1975). This can be extended further by distinguishing the audience invoked, the audience imagined by the author, from the audience addressed, the actual consumers of a text (Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Marwick & boyd, 2010). This distinction becomes particularly helpful when investigating the invisible audience. Facebook users are always unaware of the precise audience addressed, but they have a concept of the audience invoked, and it is this that shapes the ways they conceptualise space, and in turn, the ways they present themselves. This process of imagining becomes critical on Facebook (Litt, 2012), as it is discrepancies between the audience invoked and the audience addressed that result in the tensions between multiple spaces.

So who are Facebook users imagining when they post content online? Marwick and boyd found that when asked, most of the participants in their study invoked a vague concept of ‘friends’ as their audience (Marwick & boyd, 2010), linking back to the personal side of the Mindset Divide discussed above (LinkedIn, 2012). This, however, becomes problematic considering the multitude of connections that can be encompassed by such a broad term. Social media contact lists regularly contain a mixture of weak and strong ties, close friends and casual acquaintances. In fact, Livingstone and Brake found that many Facebook users, particularly teenagers, use the platform as a means of bridging social capital (Livingstone & Brake, 2010). These users are enabled by the wide contact networks fostered by social networking sites to construct and maintain extensive webs of weak ties. In such a network the term ‘friend’ can denote many different audiences and spaces.

This process of imagining is not a single, unilateral, fixed judgement. It is a co-constructed one. The Facebook audience is not a passive audience to be classified, but rather, a networked and active audience which works to interpret and negotiate meaning of space rather than passively consuming it (Marwick & boyd, 2010). These audiences consist of real and potential viewers within a larger social graph (Chen, 2013). Viewers are connected to the user and each other to form an active, collaborative audience taking turns to produce and consume. Thus, these networks operate on a model which promotes many-to-many communication. All imaginings of audience and space are therefore interconnected, and possibly in contest, with the imaginings of those who the Facebook user interacts with.

This is essentially the central investigation within this thesis. This Chapter has identified two spaces which are commonly thought of as opposed: personal; and professional. Past research suggests that these spaces typically collide on Facebook (Marwick & boyd, 2010; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Rambe, 2013). The next step is to investigate how
Facebook users represent their audiences, and ultimately the spaces that Facebook occupies.

Prior to doing so, I will discuss an approach to investigating audience that has been employed by several past studies: that of integration versus segregation. This will serve as a starting point for the analysis in this study, but is also an idea that will be challenged.

2.3.1. Audience as inclusion versus exclusion: but is this missing the point?
Much of the theory surrounding computer mediated communication unpacks the ways that social media technologies problematise such concepts as privacy, time and space, audience, and identity. These themes have emerged in the literature review above, yet, the studies that have explored issues of audience on Facebook reinforce existing binaries, friend versus colleague, personal versus professional, offline versus online, without doing much in the way of interrogating them.

Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard and Berg attempted to theorise online boundary management between personal and professional spheres. When conceptualising audience management, they set up a dichotomy between integration and segregation of contacts (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). Preferences for integration versus segregation were concerned with who was communicated with. Those who preferred integration were more likely to have work colleagues on their friend-lists. On the other hand, those who favoured segregation managed personal/professional boundaries by engaging in behaviours such as excluding work colleagues from social media (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013) or managing separate accounts for different audiences (Stutzman & Hartzog, 2012). Within this conceptualisation, a particular user typically fell on one side or the other.

A similar inclusion versus exclusion approach was taken by Jiang et al. (2014) in their study of how Facebook users dealt with multiple personal and professional spaces on Facebook. They found that while the majority of users were happy to accept colleagues as Facebook friends, they were much more reluctant to accept their boss. In this, they have already demonstrated the need for more nuanced categories than professional contact.

Models of inclusion versus exclusion have obvious advantages: they provide a grounded measure which can be assessed relatively easily by quantitative analysis. However, when faced with the fluid, multiple spaces and co-constructed imaginings of Facebook, they can become a blunt instrument. While Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) and Jiang et al. (2014) treated professional contacts as discrete stable categories, I suggest that their representation can be more ambiguous. The dichotomy of inclusion versus exclusion suggests that these are the only options, standing opposed to each other. They tell us little, and may in fact obscure conceptualisation, of how Facebook users perceive, imagine, and represent their audiences, and the spaces which they inhabit.

On the basis of the above studies this research investigates how Facebook users conceptualise their audience, and by extension, the multiple time-spaces accessed and created through Facebook. In exploring the ways that Facebook users position their audience, we are a step closer to insights into the nature of Facebook as an environment of multi-modality, multiple spaces, and hybrid, fluid identities.
2.4. Summary
This chapter has discussed key research and theories that relate to the nature of context and context collapse in interactive online environments. It presented Facebook as part of a force which destabilises space and time, both decentralising it while also being embedded in it. In this way, Facebook comes to inhabit multiple time-space zones simultaneously. It highlighted the problematic nature of context and audience on Facebook as well as the importance of the imagined audience in navigating these issues. Lastly, it outlined the research questions for this research and how they will follow on from themes discussed here. The next chapter will set out the methods used in this research.
3. Methodology
This chapter reviews how a mixed methods approach was employed, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the complex ways in which Facebook users report utilising the tools available to them to imagine and navigate complex and multifaceted spaces and audiences through Facebook. It will describe, also, the participants and data sources used in the study, as well as outlining how the data is to be analysed.

3.1. Rationale for research design
The study of identity in online environments has become an important one due to the ability of such environments to destabilise conceptions of time and space, as well as notions of identity. Many previous studies have focussed on Facebook, identifying issues of context collapse which can complicate the spaces that users are interacting with (Baym & boyd, 2012; boyd, 2007; Marwick & boyd, 2010). In line with these studies, and due to my own familiarity with the platform, in this research I will examine questions of space and time within the context of Facebook.

In order to examine Facebook communication and the possible complications of context collapse, I elected to view them through the lens of potentially conflicting personal and professional contexts. Investigating how such spaces were problematized and navigated provided the clearest example of how context collapse manifested itself, and insight into how Facebook users experienced friend-to-friend communication through Facebook. The relationship between personal and professional identities is one which has been investigated in relation to Facebook due to its traditional separation and the possible high-stakes consequences of inappropriate identity presentations (Jiang et al., 2014; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Vitak et al., 2012).

This research employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate perceptions about Facebook communication and its implications for issues of audience and space. This research design aimed to explore the issues which emerged through engagement with the literature, as well as those which became apparent and salient through the data. These were the themes which then constituted the theoretical framework for the study. Surveys were initially analysed quantitatively to identify patterns in Facebook use among the participants, followed by qualitative analysis of short answer responses and interviews, allowing an in-depth image of the discourses behind Facebook use. The study flowed in this way from quantitative to qualitative analysis, with the quantitative elements serving as a foundation in which the qualitative analysis could be placed.

This mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis was valuable in that it enabled a greater level of confidence in the findings of a research agenda which explores complex issues of the sociocultural world (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Such a design enabled both breadth and depth in its analysis, the former being provided by quantitative analysis, and the latter coming from qualitative analysis of open ended questions coming from the survey and the interviews. Treating quantitative and qualitative methodologies as complementary rather than competing approaches allowed better compensation for any gaps that may be present in the methodologies of each approach individually (Gable,
The ability to compare different data sources also yielded a higher level of certainty that the findings of the research were reflective of the data rather than some deficiency in a single methodology (Jick, 1979).

This was particularly useful in the exploration of the complex issues at the heart of this study. Issues surrounding social media technologies and the perception and management of such spaces, so enmeshed in identity construction, are rarely treated satisfactorily by quantitative analysis alone; identity is multiple, fluid, and in-process (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Goffman, 1955; Rothbard et al., 2005), and the collapsed contexts of online spaces and social media technologies only make identity more complex (boyd, 2007; Kramsch, 2009; Turkle, 1995). They lend themselves to the in-depth questioning that qualitative approaches allow, and for this reason, the quantitative analysis in this study was not designed to stand alone. However, as complex as these issues are, we must not forget that they result in grounded decisions and behaviours which can be beneficially captured and organised quantitatively.

In the first stage of analysis, this study adopted a quantitative approach to obtain a broad picture of how the participants are using Facebook and a basic understanding of what the platform is used for. Quantitative approaches involve the evaluation of phenomenon by dealing with numbers and counting the instances of that phenomenon (Lee & Hubona, 2009; Myers & Avison, 2002). Such approaches are useful for grounding data, rendering it workable and enabling generalisation between comparable populations (Gable, 1994).

Surveys were a particularly useful way of collecting data because they allowed for the collection of a relatively large amount of data with relatively little effort. This made it possible to generate a broad picture of the Facebook behaviours of respondents. In this way, surveys are able to accurately measure the norm within a given population, describe the spread of data, and identify associations between variables (Gable, 1994).

A qualitative approach was chosen to complement the survey component of this study, enabling a more in-depth picture of the influences and ideologies that affect the ways that individuals perceive Facebook and manage their audiences and identities (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Mason, 1996). Qualitative methods allowed a focus not only on what people say, but how they say it, enabling investigation into the ways that available discourses were employed by participants in the representation of themselves and the world around them.

This is an important aspect to highlight within this methodology. Despite focussing on the ways that Facebook users navigate the platform and each other, this research does not analyse any actual interactions or connections. Rather, it accesses this information through the ways that participants discussed their experience of using Facebook. While this information can and will be used to make inferences about the nature of Facebook and communication, analysis relies on the narratives of participants and attention to the ways that their experiences align with themes discussed within the literature.

The survey in itself was designed to employ both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The qualitative analysis of the short answer responses given as part of the survey proved useful as they provided focussed data regarding the ways in which Facebook friends were perceived. The open-ended survey questions (see the auxiliary questions of Question...
Number 11) were designed to elicit more detailed comments from respondents, to build on quantitative responses, and to act as a bridge into the interview questions, which focused on eliciting in-depth responses from participants.

Lastly, the use of interviews with a relatively small group of participants afforded the opportunity to ask penetrating questions to capture the richness of users’ behaviour (Gable, 1994). Interviews allow greater opportunity for salient themes to emerge within participants’ own narratives. These narratives shaped the ultimate direction of this research: they explored firstly the role of Facebook across personal and professional contexts; secondly they linked issues of audience to these perceptions; and finally, they introduced a notion of tension.

The focus of this study was on the complex behaviours surrounding interaction with space. This included not only participants’ practices around Facebook, but also their perceptions of, and beliefs, about it as a social media platform. It required an investigation into the multiple roles that participants recognised that they adopted when interacting with Facebook, and into the ways that these roles interacted with management of audiences across personal and professional boundaries and multiple time-space zones. These are interactions which manifest themselves through varied Facebook participation, through creative use of many affordances. A multi-pronged approach allowed for a complex, nuanced account of these processes.

3.2. Research participant recruitment

This research employed purposeful sampling, with participants recruited using convenience and snowball sampling (Patton, 1990), beginning with the contacts available through the researcher’s existing social media network. The use of purposeful participant recruitment is established and acceptable in qualitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) discuss the tension within qualitative research surrounding the use of quantitative terms to describe qualitative methods. As such, in this study I elect to refer to research participants or respondents rather than the research sample. Respondents will be used in relation to the survey, while participants will be used when talking about the data coming from the interviews. These terms are more commonly used and appropriate within qualitative research.

In this case, participant recruitment was embedded in the method of distributing the survey itself. The first stage of this research consisted of an online survey which was distributed through the researcher’s Facebook network, as well as a notice on the University notice board. This means of participant recruitment was deemed beneficial for a number of reasons: first, the convenience of reaching large numbers of possible respondents; second, it allowed Facebook and the networks established there to become an integral part of the study. Having participants access the survey through a Facebook link ensures that they are users of the network, but also means that their interaction with Facebook is fresh in their minds when they are completing the survey.

I was aware that this method of participant recruitment could be limited by the fact that some of the individuals recruited would be existing contacts of the researcher, therefore raising ethical issues and concerns around generalisability. None of the participants of
this study were in a dependent relationship with the researcher, and as such, the possible use of personal contacts as participants was deemed acceptable. In order to obtain a broader range of participants, links in which the survey was distributed also included suggestions that participants re-share the link with their networks. This enabled the study to utilise the networks of Facebook itself to draw the research away from the researcher’s network and reach a wider audience. Recalling the wide-ranging and multiple audiences of social media (Baym & boyd, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2010; Sleeper et al., 2013), snowball sampling in this environment is likely to provide access to a reasonably broad range of participants. While it is difficult with anonymous responses to assess the success of this strategy, it added a further level of interaction with Facebook.

Interview participants self-selected by indicating at the conclusion of the survey their willingness to participate in an interview. The selection of these was then primarily based on convenience, although there was an attempt to include those who had indicated frequent use of Facebook.

3.3. Research participants

Survey participants

Over the course of the 4 months that the survey was live, it attracted 230 viable responses. A viable response was defined as a response that was relatively complete, only missing answers to a maximum of one or two questions, and from a respondent who was currently living in Australia.

The sample consisted of 179 females, 48 males, and 3 who did not specify their gender. The majority of these respondents were aged between 18 and 64, with varying levels of education and occupations, including students, those in education, sales, hospitality and healthcare.

Despite this variation though, the majority of respondents had either completed some university, graduated university, or had completed postgraduate studies. The sample skewed towards young female students. The following figures summarise the demographics of the respondents. The age of respondents, from 18-64+ is described in Figure 1 below.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The education level of respondents is outlined in Figure 2 below.

Figure 1: Age of respondents

Surprisingly however, there was skewing towards respondents who posted to Facebook relatively infrequently, as shown in Figure 3. This question specifically asked respondents how often the posted status updates to Facebook, so while these figures indicate infrequent posting, it is likely that respondents used Facebook much more regularly to
read, and even react to, the posts of others. It is also possible that respondents underreported their posting behaviours.

![How often do you post status updates to Facebook?](image)

**Figure 3: Frequency of posting among respondents**

As part of the survey, respondents were asked whether they wished to contribute further to the research by participating in an interview. Nine of these were selected for interviews based on convenience, availability, and willingness to participate.

**Interview participants**

Between September and December 2016 there was a total of nine interviews conducted. These interviews aimed to provide in-depth investigation of participants’ interaction with Facebook: who they felt their Facebook audience was; and how they managed it. The interviewees consisted of two males and seven females.

**Table 1: Summary of interview participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Field of occupation</th>
<th>Rate of posting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Education (Teacher)</td>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Community and social services</td>
<td>Once or twice a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Policy analyst</td>
<td>Several times a week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4. Data sources and collection
The two stages of data collection were implemented as follows

Survey

After reviewing the literature around Facebook communication and online identity, the picture that emerged was of a space where multiple and potentially conflicting spaces typically exist. The first stage of the study involved the analysis of survey data to assess whether these themes were relevant to research respondents. Respondents were asked to complete the initial survey, taking approximately 20 minutes. The survey contained sixteen multiple choice questions together with four embedded open ended short answer questions about Facebook use and the conceptualisation and management of audiences in relation to personal and professional boundaries\(^3\). The focus of this stage of the study was providing a broad image of respondents’ Facebook use and determining whether multiple spaces and identities were distinguished and/or salient for respondents.

The first six questions of the survey collected consent as well as basic demographic information such as age, gender, occupation, highest level of education and number of Facebook friends. The next 9 questions formed the body of the survey, targeting identity construction and boundary maintenance. These questions made use of multiple Likert scales. As Hatch and Lazaraton (1991, p. 57) state, Likert scales can vary from 4 to 9 points, depending on the level of discrimination required. The current study, therefore, employed both 4 and 5-point scales as these provided sufficient differentiation for frequency reporting. The 4-point scale was used for Questions 10 and 12 of the survey to capture frequency of Facebook practice ranging from ‘never’ to ‘often’. The 5-point scale was used for Questions 7 and 8 of the survey to capture levels of agreement ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’.

Questions 7 and 8 presented respondents with a series of statements targeting the concept of multiple social roles offline and online respectively. These questions allowed respondents to answer based on a 5 point Likert scale from ‘Strongly disagree’ to ‘Strongly agree.’ These questions were designed to assess whether respondents recognise

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\(^3\) See Appendix 1 for a copy of the survey used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erika</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Education (Student)</td>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jillian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Office and administrative support</td>
<td>Several times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Education (Student)</td>
<td>Several times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Education (Tutor)</td>
<td>Once or twice a month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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multiple roles in their lived experience (Farnham & Churchill, 2011; Rothbard et al., 2005), and their preferences for identity integration and segregation (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013) both offline and online.

Respondents were asked to give an indication of how often they post to Facebook in Question 9, with multiple choice answers ranging from ‘less than once a month’ to ‘daily.’ The question specifically asked about posting rather than using or accessing because I felt that actively posting and disclosing information required a greater consideration of identity presentation than did merely reading the posts of others.

At the same time, it is recognised that the construction of space can be achieved through the act of not posting (Sleeper et al., 2013) and acts other than posting (Wang et al., 2011). As such, in Question 10 respondents were asked how often they used the various features of Facebook, a list modified from Pampek et al. (2009). These features included reading others’ posts, commenting, tagging others in your posts, sending private messages and sharing links, with four answers based on a Likert scale ranging from ‘never’ to ‘often.’ This was designed to provide a broad outline of which Facebook were being frequently used.

Similarly, Question 12 asked how often respondents post on various topics, with the same four multiple choice answers ranging from ‘never’ to ‘often.’. Adapted from Sleeper et al. (2013), topics included entertainment, current affairs, personal updates, family related content, work related content and upcoming events. It was followed by an opportunity for respondents to write in their own words about what topics they will not discuss on Facebook. This question aimed to provide information on self-censorship (Das & Kramer, 2013; Sleeper et al., 2013) and the ways that this plays into the identity presentations respondents wished to make in various spaces (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013).

Question 11 once again targeted the audience and issues of identity integration and segregation. This question asked whether respondents accepted professional contacts on Facebook, and investigated whether respondents perceive a difference between different types of professional contacts, colleagues compared to an employer or employee (Jiang et al., 2014). Respondents were then prompted by the question ‘Why?’ to explain why they answered the way they did.

Having dealt with the survey data, we now turn to the collection of interview data.

*Interview*

The second stage of data collection was based on short structured interviews\(^4\), of approximately thirty minutes, with nine of the respondents. These interviews were conducted face-to-face. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain more detailed information about how participants posted, or did not post, to Facebook, how they reacted to the presence and content of the posts of others, and how the management of personal and professional audiences informed this interaction.

As such, participants were asked to discuss how they communicated online: how they portrayed themselves; how they conceptualised and managed their audience(s); and how

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\(^4\) See Appendix 2 for a list of questions used in the interviews
these factors influenced their identity presentations. Individual questions focussed on who they perceived their audience to be and how this affected their experience of Facebook.

3.5. Data analysis
Data analysis was completed in several stages. Initially, the survey data was focussed on, and this was analysed first quantitatively and then qualitatively. Following this, the interview data was subjected to a qualitative analysis.

Survey analysis
The design of the survey allowed the opportunity for a multipronged analysis, first providing a snapshot of how participants’ communicated using Facebook, before providing deeper insights into the audience of such communication. The initial quantitative analysis of survey responses aimed to broadly set the scene for further analysis of the role of Facebook, and the management of professional contacts within it (Research Questions (RQs) 1 and 2). Survey analysis initially aimed to measure self-reported practices relating to three broad areas:

1. Whether personal and professional spaces should be kept separate. (Survey Questions 7 and 8)
2. Audience management (Survey Question 11). Including:
   a. The inclusion of colleagues on Facebook
   b. The inclusion of employers on Facebook
3. Content management. Including:
   a. Rate of posting (Survey Question 9)
   b. Which Facebook features are used most (Survey Question 10)
   c. The content of posts (Survey Question 12)

These questions, with the exception of questions 10 and 12, were analysed individually using frequency counts. Responses from questions 10 and 12 were averaged across the respondents to allow for the inference of some ranking of most used features and most talked about content.

The second prong of the survey analysis came from the short answer responses to the question ‘Do you accept colleagues as friends on Facebook?’ These questions elicited responses from respondents about why professional contacts were or were not allowed on Facebook. The analysis looks at not only whether such contacts are accepted onto Facebook, but the ways that are positioned in relation to available discourses surrounding friendship and casualness in order to justify this decision, exploring RQ2.

Data was explored in order to investigate the ways in which respondents drew on the key themes which were identified in Chapter 2 of this study, including those relating to Facebook audiences, professional spaces and Facebook itself. This investigation explored how such representations drew on wider discourses surrounding Facebook.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Data was ordered and analysed broadly according to references to audience and space-time. Within these categories, responses were analysed according to whether the audience was identified as friends, colleagues or both, while references to space-time were interpreted through reference to casual spaces, professional spaces, or both. From these categories emerged the major theme of convergence (Saldana, 2013). This allowed for the construction of a framework for the ways that respondents referred to professional contacts on Facebook, one that went beyond their status as professional contacts.

*Interview analysis*

Interview data was analysed in order to fill in the image around these observations. The data was reread and analysed to determine, firstly, how these discourses were constructed around Facebook, and secondly, how they were problematised through Facebook use.

Due to the large amount of data recorded, only relevant sections of the interviews were transcribed. Sections which were transcribed were those which drew on three major themes: perceptions of the role of Facebook; personal and professional audiences; and tension or conflict. While I am aware that this sort of selective transcription runs the risk of self selecting categories brought to the study by the researcher rather than those that may be present in the data, this risk was acceptable within the limited scope of this study. Saldana (2013) suggests that it is inevitable that coding will be influenced by pre-existing theories, and sees this as acceptable provided that this is acknowledged. Close attention to the recorded data also sought to identify themes which were salient in the data. This lead to a focus not only on those themes emerging in the literature, the role of Facebook, audience, and time-space, but also on those emphasised by participants, themes such as visibility and reciprocity.

Data was organised and analysed thematically around references to the purpose of Facebook, allowing further exploration of RQ1, and then around references to any tension that occurred between these idealised purposes and their actual use of Facebook, in particular, interactions with professional contacts, RQ3. Such an analysis enabled insights into the perceived time-space zones and discursive contexts of Facebook, and a focus on the issues underlying the tensions that arise.

**3.6. Summary**

This chapter has given a detailed explanation of this study’s research design and methodological approach. It has given an overview of the stages involved in the collection and analysis of data. It shows how quantitative and qualitative approaches have complemented each other in the bringing together of themes from the literature to explore interaction through Facebook, and the management of potentially multiple time-space zones. The following chapters provide analysis of how different audiences and spaces were represented by Facebook users.
4. Facebook use and professional audiences: A Snapshot

Following on from the methodology in the previous chapter, this chapter will provide an overview of the results from the survey data. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of respondents’ beliefs about Facebook and their self-reported practices when engaging with this form of social media. These results will form the backdrop for further analysis and discussion of participants’ experiences of Facebook which are presented in the next Chapter (Chapter 5). The chapter will be divided into three main sections. The first will examine whether respondents feel that personal and professional identities should be kept separate on Facebook. The second will investigate whether respondents allow professional contacts on Facebook. The third will explore the reported posting behaviours of respondents. The first of these sections will provide insight into the perceived nature of Facebook through the lens of personal and professional identities. The second and third sections will provide information about how respondents engage with Facebook and other users.

Theories of identity (Blommaert, 2015) posit that each new time-space that individuals encounter comes with a set of culturally sanctioned behaviours from which recognisable identity presentations can be built. If, as these theories suggest, social action can be read in different ways in different spaces, then it is not unreasonable to think that a separation between, or at least consideration of, different contexts would be advantageous in social action. In the Literature Review I outlined some of the ways in which online environments such as Facebook can work to problematize such spaces. Issues such as context collapse and the invisible audience may have the potential to destabilise links between time-space, discourse and behaviour (Blommaert, 2015). The following section investigates how the respondents in this study navigate Facebook and the various professional and non-professional spaces it inhabits. This section draws heavily on binaries surrounding inclusion versus exclusion. Although such binaries are problematic, they offer a point of access into the data, and provide a contrast for the journey to be taken in later chapters.

Before investigating the extent to which multiple time-spaces exist and are possibly distinguished on Facebook, it might be useful to establish a baseline as to how the boundaries between personal and professional were conceptualised offline. In this study 71% (n=164) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the roles they have at their place of employment are different from those outside of work, while only 7% (n=15) disagreed or strongly disagreed, with 22% (n=51) unsure.

The extent to which respondents reported an actual separation of these roles offline is less clear, with 42% (n=100) of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that their work and social circles overlap, and only 47% (n=107) agreeing or strongly agreeing that they try to keep these roles separate. These figures suggest that in everyday offline interaction the majority of respondents recognised a distinction between the professional and non-professional spaces that they interacted with, but a lesser number were concerned with keeping these spaces separate.

With this in mind we can now look at the data pertaining to audience management on Facebook itself. First whether respondents feel that personal and professional roles should
be kept separate on Facebook (RQ1). Secondly how this belief is borne out through questions of audience and content (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013) (RQ2).

4.1. Separation of personal and professional identities on Facebook (RQ1)
As we saw in Chapter 2, the majority of empirical work around Facebook and the ways it interacts with professional spaces have been based on a trend toward the belief that personal and professional should be separated online. We are told that this segregation has long been an ideal encouraged in professional discourse (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013), while anecdotal evidence suggests that Facebook users are conscious of the possible negative outcomes of blurring roles (Everett, 2011).

Drawing on the work discussed in the Literature Review, one would expect issues of space to be especially salient in online environments, environments where the ability to target communication to a particular audience, residing in a particular time-space, is lacking. When respondents in this study were asked whether personal and professional identities should be kept separate on Facebook, results were in line with these expectation, with 66% (n=151) either agreeing or strongly agreeing while only 17% (n=40) disagreed or strongly disagreed, with 17% unsure (n=40).

Importantly, what a person thinks they should do and what they do, or even try to do, can be different. In order to measure this, respondents were also asked whether they themselves tried to keep their personal and professional roles separate on Facebook. This question yielded almost identical results, suggesting interestingly that the weight of what they think they should do is strong enough that they try to implement it in their own behaviour. It is this second set of figures that are shown in Figure 4.

![Figure 4: Preferences for separation](image-url)

About 63% (n=145) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they try to keep their personal and professional roles separate on Facebook. This goes further to suggest that there is in fact an awareness of the different spaces that these identities are linked to and
a reluctance to blur the boundaries between them. Whether or not this distinction is ultimately played out in the actual behaviour of Facebook users will be elaborated upon in the remainder of this research. However, these results suggest that there is discursive strength in the nature of Facebook being one where personal and professional realms should remain separate, a position taken up further in Chapter 5.2.

It is worth highlighting that the percentage of respondents attempting to separate roles on Facebook, 63%, is significantly higher than the 47% we saw who strive for separation of roles offline. This result does not necessarily mean that Facebook identities are more segregated than offline identities, or even that Facebook users wish them to be. Rather, I speculate that it is Facebook’s destabilisation of chronotopic links (Blommaert, 2015), which makes it necessary to consider the management of multiple spaces in a way which may not be so explicit in every day offline life.

What does this mean for the way respondents interact with their audience on Facebook? Past literature has identified two areas where Facebook users can manage the spaces which they interact with online: audience (Jiang et al., 2014; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013) and content (Marwick & boyd, 2010; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Sleeper et al., 2013). Facebook users can manipulate who can see their posts, and they can alter the content of their posts. Both of these variables are manipulated and imagined in nuanced ways in an attempt to detangle chronotopic links, thereby enabling culturally appropriate communication.

4.2. Management of audience (RQ2)

One of the most straightforward, and previously utilised, ways of investigating respondents’ conceptualisations of personal and professional spaces is to ask whether they allow professional contacts on Facebook. This idea is further explored in Chapter 5.2. Past studies have identified a divide between Facebook users who preferred to integrate professional contacts and those who preferred to exclude them (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013), while others have pointed out the need to distinguish between different types of professional contacts, suggesting that people are more likely to accept colleagues than their boss as a Facebook friend (Jiang et al., 2014). This is reflected in the data shown in Figure 5.
Figure 5: Acceptance of colleagues as Facebook friends

Figure 5 illustrates that the majority of respondents accepted work colleagues as Facebook friends. This is, to some extent, contrary to the results of Figure 4 which suggested that respondents wished to keep these roles separate.

The majority of respondents, 78% (n=178), accepted colleagues as Facebook friends, while only a minority, 23% (n=49), accepted their boss as a Facebook friend. This is in accordance with Jiang et. al. who found that Facebook users enjoyed being friends with their colleagues, but viewed friend requests from supervisors with distrust (2014). Such a result is quite unsurprising given the asymmetric power dynamic that the relationship between employers and employees typically carries. With this power dynamic comes potentially problematic consequences: respect within this relationship can be beneficial to one’s career, while a breach in accepted behaviour has the potential to limit it.

This result also raises interesting questions about the importance of hierarchy in the ways that Facebook users manage their audience. Facebook collapses many time-spaces, but how many of these are of concern to Facebook users? We have just seen that many people are happy to include their colleagues (professional contacts) on Facebook (social networks), and there is evidence in the survey data, to be discussed in Chapter 5.2, that these contacts can be considered ‘peers’ and ‘friends’ despite their existence in a different, professional, space. This was not the case for bosses, who were much less likely to be positioned as friends. It would appear then that hierarchy plays a role in deciding which spaces are of concern for Facebook users.

4.3. Management of content (RQ2)

Facebook provides a multitude of opportunities for users to create and enter into multiple spaces. Simply by signing into the site and curating a network of connections, users are existing in multiple spaces. However posting is often the first to come to mind, and arguably the most powerful, and potentially damaging, as a means of navigating space
and identity. Posting refers to the publishing of short pieces of text, pictures or other media known as status updates. These status updates are then visible on the author’s wall and in their friends’ news feeds. Facebook is not merely a tool for documenting social ties, but, fundamentally, a platform for establishing and maintaining communication. Asking questions about posting behaviours allows us to return to questions about space, content and context collapse as fluid and ever-changing elements of the social networking experience. Such a reminder also allows for an analysis where communication is front and centre.

Next, I will present an overview of how respondents reported using Facebook. I will outline how often they post, which features of Facebook they use, and the type of content that they post. All of these decisions will have implications for the way users perceive the time-spaces which they are inhabiting on Facebook.

4.3.1. Frequency of posting

In order to situate discussion of the content of posts, this section will examine the frequency of posting. Posting is the fundamental method of maintaining a presence in the Facebook environment. Data concerning the frequency of posting provides us with a basic picture of how much information Facebook users are sharing. Figure 6 summarises the frequency of posting for the respondents in this study.

Figure 6: Frequency of posting

The majority of respondents in this study posted to Facebook rather infrequently, with 52% (n=118) posting less than once a month, 25% (n=57) posting once or twice a month, 13% (n=31) posting once a week, 7% (n=16) posting several times a week, and only 3% (n=7) posting daily. In other words, very few of these respondents were frequently utilising Facebook to make Facebook updates, which interact with multiple time-spaces and audiences simultaneously. This in itself may be viewed as a result of context collapse,
as it enables Facebook users to avoid the traditional pitfalls of multiple conflicting spaces while still enjoying a sense of connection with the people of their friend list.

In line with this, respondents reported an extensive use of Facebook to keep track of what their friends were doing even when they were not posting themselves. If many Facebook users are not reporting frequent posting, the next question to ask is how they are using the technology, and the implications this has on communication and their management of audience.

4.3.2. Use of different Facebook features

As part of the site, Facebook offers many different tools for interacting with the platform and one’s contacts. Past research has investigated to some extent the use of different tools to communicate with different contacts and to achieve different outcomes. Pampek et. al. suggested that private messaging may be more likely to be employed where content is controversial or where there are audiences with conflicting interests (Pampek et al., 2009). It has also been suggested that less visible behaviours involving watching or reading may be used by users to avoid conflict (Wang et al., 2011).

Figure 7 summarises the kinds of Facebook features respondents reported that they used. These ranged from posting of texts and images, reading, responding to and sharing other people’s posts, reading and sending private messages, adding or removing friends and respondents’ editing of their own Facebook profiles. It is important to note this is an account of respondents’ self-reported rather than actual Facebook practices. Survey Question 10, from where this data is drawn, utilises a 4 point Likert scale: 1 being never; 2 being rarely; 3 being sometimes; and 4 being often. Figures for each figure have been averaged across the respondents. The scale therefore is not consistent, but works to give an indication of which features are more commonly used.

![How often do you use Facebook to perform each of these activities?](image-url)
Chapter 4: Facebook use and professional audiences

Figure 7: Facebook features and frequency of use

With the exception of ‘editing your profile’ posting status updates is the least utilised tool of Facebook. The activities that scored the highest were either invisible activities, such as those involving reading other peoples’ posts, or sending and receiving private messages involving an explicitly targeted audience. Both of these types of activities avoid the use of highly visible written communication.

The exceptions here are the practices of ‘liking’ and ‘commenting’ on other peoples’ posts. These behaviours both had an elevated score, ‘liking’ higher than ‘commenting.’ While both involve a publicly visible action, they also involve a lesser level of disclosure of information. They require less commitment to a large-scale instance of communication, and given that they are a direct response to someone else’s text, it is possible that it may be easier in these situations to imagine the audience leading to a feeling of greater ease.

Given these patterns, I argue that the features that Facebook users utilise may therefore be influenced by the ways that they imagine, and are able to imagine, their audience. These figures demonstrate less interaction with the features of Facebook that promote communication with a user’s entire network. This may be symptomatic of the ways respondents navigate and manage these audiences, issues which will be explored further in Chapter 5.

4.3.3. Types of content

Content decisions are an important part of navigating multiple spaces. Communication is completely dependent upon the audience, what they already know, what we want them to know. The inclusion of colleagues on Facebook, or the mere knowledge that colleagues could potentially be in the audience, will have significant effects on how people present themselves.

Past research has found that social media users employ techniques of self-censorship in order to portray the desired self-image. Such studies have found that overly personal content, controversial content, and work related content are the most likely to be censored (Marwick & boyd, 2010; Sleeper et al., 2013). Figure 8 sets out how often respondents in this study reported posting about different topics. It utilises the same 4-point Likert scale as Figure 7 above.
Chapter 4: Facebook use and professional audiences

Figure 8: Frequency and content of posts

In accordance with Marwick and boyd (2010), respondents reported posting less content about family and work related content. They cited beliefs that these topics were not appropriate for the ‘fun’ environment of Facebook, and demonstrated awareness of the possible negative consequences of these types of posts. Of particular importance to this survey is the observation that work related content was the least talked-about topic, with respondents reporting the desire to maintain a separation between work and personal life even if they accepted colleagues as friends.

4.4. Summary

This chapter has summarised the major findings of the survey. Firstly, it showed that while respondents agreed that personal and professional spaces should be kept separate, this did not necessarily translate into exclusionist audience management strategies. Most were willing to accept colleagues on Facebook, but were unwilling to accept employers/bosses.

Secondly, the results revealed a lack of active, self-driven posting behaviours, with fewer behaviours that were visible to a broad audience. Behaviours such as reading the posts of others, and more targeted communication such as private messages were reported as being more common. These figures suggested a reluctance to engage with the features that involved broad audiences and multiple spaces, and when these audiences were engaged with, topics such as work and family were reported as being less common. The suggestion of tension here will be explored further in the remainder of the study.

This leaves the somewhat contradictory preliminary findings that Facebook users believe that professional spaces should be kept separate from the site, but that in practice this separation is not always enforced. In this study it appears that while users would like Facebook to exist in a solely social space, it is very often creeping into professional spaces. The next chapter turns to an analysis of the ways that Facebook and professional
contacts are represented by Facebook users. Such an analysis will provide further insights into how Facebook users conceptualise and navigate the multiple spaces which are integral to the platform.
5. The interpretation of space: Communicating with ‘friends’

Following on from the results of Chapter 4, this chapter investigates the ways the respondents in this study experienced communication across multiple time-spaces using Facebook. This involves further problematizing ways of discussing concepts such as ‘context collapse’; and binary terms such as personal versus professional, and inclusive compared with exclusive behavioural practices. Upon viewing the survey short answer responses and interviews, patterns emerged not in who was included on Facebook, but in how the Facebook user imagined these contacts and the time-space zones which these contacts were perceived to be occupying while on Facebook.

Chapter 5 addresses the three major research questions of this study. Firstly 5.1 discusses the ways that participants talked about Facebook, providing insights into the perceived role of Facebook (RQ1). Secondly, 5.2 discusses the ways that audiences are imagined in relation to these perceptions (RQ2). Lastly 5.3 suggests how these representations, and broader conceptions of space and time are destabilised by interaction with Facebook, positing some implications for the nature of friend-to-friend communication using Facebook (RQ3). This chapter contains examples drawn from two data sources: the short answer responses from the survey; and the transcribed interview data. Short answer responses are denoted by a Survey Response (SR) number, while interview data is identified by an Interview Extract (IE) number and the participant’s name. Throughout this chapter groups of extracts are placed together because of thematic similarities. They are not part of conversations and should be recognised as stand-alone comments.

5.1. How is Facebook perceived by users?

In order to investigate and understand the multiple time-space zones of Facebook, and the ways that users conceptualise and navigate these spaces, it is first necessary to consider the roles of Facebook more generally. The ways that users conceptualise and articulate the functions of Facebook will inform the types of spaces that they associate with it. This, in turn, will form a framework for how they feel about the place of professional contacts within that network. This section will discuss Facebook in relation to two salient themes to emerge from the data: Facebook as light, fun and social; and Facebook as a place for friends.

Chapter 2 summarised the idea of the mindset divide (LinkedIn, 2012). This LinkedIn study aimed to investigate differences between the way that people used social networking sites, like Facebook, and professional networking sites, such as LinkedIn. This study investigated primarily the mindsets that users brought to these platforms. Differences were found both in the types of interaction or information expected, and the emotions associated with these interactions.

Two key points to emerge from the mindset divide that are useful for this study are the casual, fun nature of social networking sites such as Facebook, and the social nature of the interactions which occurred there. This, to some extent was reflected in the interview data, and a large portion of survey data, of this study, in which respondents represented Facebook as a light, interesting and fun space, and as a space for friends.
These themes were among those that emerged through the interviews. In the following section I present them prior to an analysis of how colleagues are positioned in relation to these parameters.

5.1.1. Facebook as ‘Fun, friendly, happy, living life to the full’

When Rebecca used this phrase to describe how she would like her Facebook friends to see her on the site, she was at one level listing positive attributes that she wishes to be associated with, but at another level was providing an insight into her expectations of Facebook. The mindset divide emphasises the idea that Facebook is associated with entertainment; people use Facebook to fill in time in a fun, friendly, and happy space. But also being drawn upon in this comment is the idea that there are expectations surrounding the types of presentation that one can give on Facebook. Facebook users editorialise their lives, pick out certain parts of their everyday lives to showcase online (Cover, 2012). The edited nature of presentation on Facebook was something referred to openly by interview participants.

**Interview Extracts 1 & 2**

IE1 Michael: I only put good things up you know? Good photos, good statuses. I just try to represent the best of myself

IE2 Elizabeth: you post what’s interesting. You post what’s funny. It’s just the highlights

According to Michael and Elizabeth in Interview Extracts 1 and 2, existing on Facebook is a process of presenting yourself in the best light. Facebook here is a platform of positive impressions, whether it be representing the best of yourself or presenting the highlights of your experiences. In order to make this possible, choices must be made about what content is appropriate for such a space.

While it emerged from these interviews that Facebook is only a representation of part of the user’s life, the things he or she chooses to showcase, it was suggested that these choices are indeed ingrained in, and limited by, the platform. Jessica alluded to the inescapability of Facebook expectations in influencing exactly which parts could be highlighted. When asked about the way she presented herself on Facebook, she described her presentation as:

**Interview Extracts 3 & 4**

IE3 Jessica: happy. Even if I don’t feel great I’ll probably end up appearing happy

IE4 Jessica: you like something, means you’re happy

Emerging here is the idea of Facebook as a series of spaces which carry with them accepted forms of speaking and behaving. In constructions which seem to resurrect clear ties between Facebook and personal space, these participants are establishing Facebook as a frivolous space where frivolous behaviour is expected. In participating, Facebook

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5 This interview was conducted before the introduction of the additional reactions. It might be interesting to investigate whether this introduction of a widened set of options for responding to content will have any effect on the overall language surrounding Facebook.
users are encouraged to take up certain ideologies. In fact, in interview Extract 3 above Jessica suggests that such ways of presenting one’s self seem almost obligatory. For Jessica and other participants like her, the space, and, therefore, the accepted form of behaviour, is a ‘happy’ one.

For Jessica, this appearance of happiness is itself a product of meanings attached to the Facebook platform. In her account, to use Facebook is to appear happy. This is something that she associates closely with the architecture of the platform, citing the importance placed on ‘likes’ in Facebook environments. In Interview Extract 4 she seems to be suggesting that Facebook is not merely a platform which is typically and customarily used to achieve certain purposes and presentations, but that engagement with cultural meanings around the architecture of the platform itself contributes to making certain purposes and presentations more accessible and meaningful. In this case, the meaningful presentation is a fun, light and happy one.

Critically, in the case of the present study, representations of what Facebook should be, fun and light, were also at times contrasted with what Facebook should not be, a space of professional presentation.

**Interview Extracts 5 & 6**

IE5 Peter: Just kind of fun, light, recreational stuff. I don’t post any necessarily personal or any professional stuff

IE6 Mary: I don’t really care about looking professional most of the time. I use LinkedIn for that. But I don’t want to look like an idiot so I don’t put political stuff or get into debates. Everything’s very light. I don’t see Facebook as a space for heavy discussion. If people are getting into political arguments I won’t unfriend them, but I’ll unfollow them. It’s not what Facebook is for me

Both Interview Extracts 5 and 6 invoke a particular view of the space of Facebook, one which is light and recreational, while distancing it from professional space. Online professional presentation is validated by Mary, but, in line with the mindset divide, is relegated to other platforms. Both of these participants also used LinkedIn and preferred to keep professional content to that platform and others designed with professional identity in mind. Having multiple social media accounts across multiple platforms allowed participants to compartmentalise their identities and feel comfortable excluding certain aspects from Facebook. As we will see, in actual use, the boundaries are not so neat, but this section is focused on the ideas behind participants’ Facebook use, and for now they are able to enact strong links between Facebook and non-professional spaces.

Mary’s comments in Interview Extract 6 are particularly interesting as they highlight what is meaningful and relevant within the Facebook platform. She suggests that she maintains a light tone on Facebook for fear of ‘look[ing] like an idiot.’ In her experience then, to use Facebook in a way that is not light is to run the risk of stepping outside of the accepted and meaningful ways of talking and being within that environment (Foucault, 1980). In fact, she closes this extract with the assertion that Facebook is constituted not by ‘heavy
This is an association which she polices through the process of unfollowing contacts who do not meet her expectation of what Facebook is. In Chapter 5.3 the analysis will further discuss the relationships between unfriending and unfollowing, but here it suffices to say that some forms of talk are granted more meaning than others in the spaces where Facebook exists.

It is also noteworthy that users such as Mary are given the ability to further lessen the meaningfulness of others’ talk by unfollowing certain content. This gives them further opportunity to reinforce their conceptions of space and the expectations that are linked to it. The next section expands on the notion of Facebook as a social space to explore the ways that this space defines contacts as friends, and how, in turn, the spaces of Facebook are defined by the notion of friend.

5.1.2. ‘My Facebook friends are my friends’

With a platform that, to such a large extent, is built around the idea of friends, such as Facebook is, it is almost impossible to escape the terminology of friend. Past research has suggested that despite the fact the term remains vague and unproblematised in the experience of most Facebook users, they do in fact take up and embrace the idea of friends (Acquisti & Gross, 2006; Marwick & boyd, 2010). Despite the typically broad, diverse audiences of Facebook, this is often how they characterise their network of contacts: as friends (Bernstein et al., 2013; Marwick & boyd, 2010). I suggested in Chapter 2.1 how the affordances of Facebook may work together to foster a feeling of intimacy within networks and between the contacts that users see regularly through the site. The results of this can be seen in Interview Extracts 7, 8 and 9 below.

Interview Extracts 7-9

| IE7  | Rachel: I’ll send friend requests to people who I feel are good friends in normal life |
| IE8  | Elizabeth: [My Facebook is] solely to keep in touch with my friends. I’ve made a very clear decision not to let it creep into my work life because I want them to be separate. |
| IE9  | Elizabeth: I don’t think there’s much on my Facebook that my boss would be shocked or horrified by. I just don’t want that relationship to extend |

Here there is a very strong adherence to the idea of Facebook contacts as friends. In fact, the majority of qualitative data collected in all stages of this research was strewn with references to friends and friendship. This is partly lexical, with Facebook making the term a standard point of reference, and one that is inescapable within Facebook use, but there was also a level of intimacy which users invoked along with the term. Facebook friends, for some at least, were associated with closeness and emotional ties, even if it is with an expectation that interaction will remain light and fun. Rebecca for example described her Facebook friends as ‘sharing the moments of my life with me.’ This is an expression of intimacy which she offered as explanation for the conviction that she only accepts ‘real life friends’ as Facebook friends.

So, for these participants, a requirement of Facebook friendship was an offline friendship, but for a number of participants this invocation of friend was also associated with a denial
of professional contacts. This idea was introduced by Peter and Mary in Interview Extracts 5 and 6. They suggested that they attempt to keep their professional identities separate from their personal ones. Elizabeth continues on this idea in Interview Extract 8, reinforcing a separation between recreational and professional spaces. For her the two should be separate.

Elizabeth’s comments place ‘friend’ and ‘professional contact’ in binary opposition. She refers in Interview Extract 9 to her belief that there would most likely be no negative consequences from her boss seeing her Facebook posts, and elsewhere she states that she ‘actually quite likes [her] colleagues.’ She simply does not ‘want that relationship to extend.’ In this way of thinking, friend and professional contact are mutually exclusive, and there is something inherent in the category of professional contact which precludes the possibility of friendship.

This is a very clear cut way of formulating the segregation between friend and professional contact, and one that, even in this study, is far from universal. Nonetheless, it is an idea that will emerge again in later analysis, and could be argued to underpin, or at least inform, a large portion of the data relating to the positioning of colleagues on Facebook.

The other point to note here is the references to ‘normal life’ and ‘real life’ in Interview Extract 7 for example. Here participants reference the relationship between offline and online. This is a relationship that will be discussed in the next section, but here, such references beg the question: if Facebook is not ‘real’ and ‘normal’ life, what is it? I argue that this is evidence that the processes of convergence between online and offline lives set in motion by internet technologies is incomplete. Ramb (2013) argues that Facebook breaks down the boundaries between online and offline. While these effects are certainly visible, the participants in this study maintain, at least partially, a distinction. In what is perhaps the last generation to do so, these participants recognise a distinction between offline and offline, and this in itself is exacerbating tensions in spaces where this boundary is blurred by Facebook.

**If I know them, I’ll add them**

Not only is Facebook constructed as a space for friends, but that it is used to connect with known friends. Livingstone and Brake (2010) found that the majority of Facebook use was in the maintenance of existing social ties rather than the formation of new ones.

This is an important aspect to remember when considering the nature of Facebook and its implications for communication. An online network in which all members are known offline means that the two concepts and sets of spaces, offline and online, are necessarily entangled. Even if the two remain conceptually distinct, as suggested above, Facebook is necessarily tied to the offline world, and each has consequences for the other. In fact, it is this very blurring that makes it relevant to investigate tensions between Facebook and (a traditionally offline) professional identity.

This trend of Facebook friends being existing offline contacts was also played out in the data within this study. With the exception of Michael, who said he often added unknown people that he met on Facebook’s interest-based groups, the rest of the participants in this study reported only accepting known contacts as Facebook friends. The motivation for
this was often imbued with a sense of meaningful connection or intimacy, as seen in Interview Extracts 10-13 below.

**Interview Extracts 10-13**

IE10 Erika: If I make a friend on Facebook I’d like to be able to say that I know them outside of Facebook, that I’ve had a meaningful conversation with them at some point

IE11 Rebecca: Friends on Facebook have to be there for me on Facebook, but also in real life. That’s why they’re friends. I trust them

IE12 Lucy: If I wouldn’t speak to someone in real life, then I wouldn’t accept them, no matter who they are, even if they’d be a good contact or something. It’s someone I would approach in real … face to face, and someone I believe would approach me more importantly

IE13 Elizabeth: My Facebook friends are my friends. You know, people who I’ve met and talked with and like. Not just people I meet once at a party

In these comments, the requirement for Facebook friendship lies in ‘real life:’ whether the Facebook user would spend time with the friend offline, or, in many cases, whether they have spent that time together. In Interview Extract 12 Lucy introduces the added idea that this should be based on reciprocity, giving the first suggestion that it is important for both parties of a Facebook friendship to feel the same way. The importance of this is a reflection not only of the reciprocal nature of friendship formation on Facebook, the process of requesting and accepting, but also of the reciprocal and co-constructed nature of friendship maintenance. This is an idea that will be returned to later in Section 5.3, but it is worth pointing out that the underpinnings of that later analysis are present here. These ideas, ways of talking about Facebook, set the parameters for how Facebook users can navigate and imagine multiple spaces on Facebook.
5.2. How are colleagues represented by users of Facebook?
The previous section discussed the ways that the participants in this study imagined the, ideally personal, spaces that Facebook exists in. This section builds on such themes to address Research Question 2 by providing an analysis of how Facebook users draw on these perceptions in making decisions about whether colleagues are acceptable as Facebook friends. Gaining an image of who is acceptable as a Facebook friend, and how this audience is represented, presents an insight into how Facebook users conceptualise their audience and, in turn, how this imagined audience interacts with both professional and non-professional spaces.

The survey results reviewed in Chapter 4 of this study, highlighted the potential interaction between professional and non-professional spaces online by exploring whether Facebook users admit professional contacts into personal social media networks. This work has suggested that although Facebook users are conscious of the need to keep personal and professional lives separate, they are often happy to accept co-workers as Facebook friends provided they are not an employer (Jiang et al., 2014; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). Although this is a useful starting point, it tells nothing of the ways that relationships, identities and spaces, the crux of chronotopic links, are managed at a more nuanced level than merely acceptance versus rejection, integration versus segregation.

The data discussed in this forthcoming section demonstrate instead how reactions to professional contacts and identities can be investigated in terms of how they are imagined within the multiple time-space zones of Facebook. These imaginings exist in relation to established ways of talking about Facebook itself. Previous studies (Litt, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2010) have established that the imagined audience plays a vital role in identity and interaction with space. Thus, insights into how users imagine their audience on Facebook are important in understanding how they manage their identities across multiple spaces through Facebook.

This is where this research begins to diverge from its foundations in the idea of context collapse. It is agreed that the environment of Facebook is one where contexts are unclear (Blommaert, 2015; Marwick & boyd, 2010; Vitak et al., 2012). However, instead of examining the contexts present in the Facebook audience, I wish to focus on users’ interpretations of these contexts. Colleagues on Facebook are necessarily contacts which can be categorised in multiple ways: as professional contacts who are co-workers; and/or as personal contacts, being acquaintances or friends. The examples analysed in the subsections of 5.2 below are taken from Question 11 of the online survey. This question asked whether respondents accepted colleagues as friends on Facebook before providing space to explain why or why not. It is these short answers that provide the basis of this section.

5.2.1. Facebook for friends
In discussing whether they accept professional contacts as friends on Facebook participants drew heavily on themes of friendship. Friendship was generally positioned by users as a prerequisite for being friends on Facebook.

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6 Refer to Appendix 1 for survey questions
Many responses contained explicit mention of ‘friend’ as a way of categorising potential contacts. Instances of this term were often positioned in competition with ‘colleagues’ or ‘co-workers.’ Such instances provide information on the conceptualisation of the Facebook environment as a space for friends, and on the ways that professional spaces are managed, foregrounded or backgrounded, within it. Much of this is information that is not present in investigations of whether contacts are accepted or not, and is not communicated by labels of ‘integration’ or ‘segregation’.

Professional contacts as non-friends

A number of respondents, albeit a minority, 22% as seen in Chapter 4, stated that they did not accept colleagues as Facebook friends, following what Ollier-Malaterre et al. would describe as a model of segregation (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). When these respondents invoked the category ‘friends’, it was to deny the role of professional contacts as friends. In line with Ollier-Malaterre et al., these respondents constructed a clear line between friends and colleagues, with the two being seen in opposition. The Survey Responses below illustrate this opposition.

**Survey Responses 1-4**

SR1  They aren't my friends

SR2  they're work people they're not friends, would be like adding a stranger

SR3  I work in a small accounting firm of only a handful and we are not really friends, no reason to share. Also doubt that they have Facebook.

SR4  I usually don't and only add them after they left the work group or except for a few close work colleagues.

Survey Responses 1, 2 and 3 all contain explicit statements that the contacts in question are not friends. Survey Response 2 places work people in a direct binary opposition to friends. When taken in context as the explanation for why they do not accept colleagues as Facebook friends, this denial of friendship provides information not only about the separation between colleagues and friends, but also about the meaning and role of Facebook itself. For these respondents, Facebook is a space strictly for friends, a reinforcement of perceptions seen in Chapter 5.1. The acceptable forms of connection within the site are personal rather than professional. It is an environment where work colleagues, and the contexts that they bring, do not belong.

The contextual nature of knowledge and identity is also alluded to in Survey Response 2. When this respondent declares that adding a work person would be like adding a stranger, they do not mean that they do not know the contact, but rather, they are acknowledging the lack of knowledge within the friend-driven personal environment of Facebook. The respondent knows these contacts as work people, and presumably shares the resources needed to interact in this context. However, they become an unknown quantity when
transferred to a personal space. Introducing this unknown quantity into the Facebook audience makes it more difficult to accurately imagine one’s audience (Marwick & boyd, 2010) and construct a stable conception of space.

Survey Response 4 is slightly different in that it does not contain the explicit use of the word ‘friend.’ Nevertheless, it continues to enforce the opposition between friend and colleague, at least in its first half. Interestingly, where Survey Responses 1, 2 and 3 pointed to a lack a friendship as the root of unacceptability, this Survey Response takes exception to something inherent in the role of colleague, suggesting that when a colleague ceases being a colleague they may be suitable for integration into the spaces of Facebook.

In these examples, Facebook is a space for friends, a personal space, kept separate from professional spaces, and, therefore, professional audiences. This clear distinction is then destabilised in Survey Response 4 by the admission that not only can a select few colleagues be accepted on Facebook, but that they can be accepted onto Facebook as work colleagues without reference to friendship. This is significant in that it bypasses the Facebook-for-friends connection. This will be elaborated upon in the following two sections.

Professional contacts as friends

The majority, 78%, of survey respondents chose to accept co-workers as Facebook friends, a pattern that Ollier-Malaterre et al. would have described as integration (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). In this case, users described and categorised professional contacts as friends, following the accepted association between Facebook and friendship. For these respondents colleagues were acceptable as Facebook friends only when they could be categorised as friends. However, there was some variation in the strength of this categorisation. For some, ‘friend’ was the primary, even sole category, while others left room for other possible categorisations as well. Below are examples of the first set.

Survey Responses 5-14

SR5 Only very close friends
SR6 Only if they are my friends
SR7 [not] Unless they are also established friends
SR8 depends on the friend
SR9 You can't always choose where you meet a friend.
SR10 Friends are friends are friends friends.
SR11 Sometimes, when they have become personal friends.
SR12 My workplace is very social, we become real life friends.
SR13 Only after I have a friendship outside the work environment

SR14 Only those work colleagues who I think of as more frirnds(sic) than colleagues.

Respondents behind Survey Responses 5 to 11 state very clearly that only friends can be accepted onto the Facebook network, and in fact, these responses mention no other membership categories. Within such representations, the existence of colleagues on Facebook has nothing to do with their professional identity; they are either friends or they are not. Colleagues can be accepted onto Facebook if they fit into the personal space which is being invoked.

Survey Response 7 draws upon the idea of an established friend, invoking connotations of a connection that has existed previously or separately from their role as a colleague. Even in Survey Response 8 where it depends on the contact, presumably the qualities and characteristics of that contact, they are categorised as a friend; Facebook acceptance ‘depends on the friend’ rather than ‘the colleague.’

Although in the final example, Survey Response 14, there is somewhat of an admission that there may be different types of friends, this set of examples tends to invoke the problematic idea of a single category of friends, at least in opposition to that of colleagues. The respondent in Survey Response 9 positions the category of friends as one which overrides the context from which the contact comes. Here, it does not matter which other roles the contact has, if they are friends, they are friends. Similarly, Survey Response 10 renders friends as consistent, one being equivalent to the next. For these respondents, issues of imagined audience are resolved by the denial of multiple audiences and spaces. This is a strategy which allows them a clear image of their audience, and the ability to target their communication to this audience within a clearly defined space.

So far the picture has been clear. Respondents discussed thus far have aligned their explanations with representations of Facebook as a personal space where only friends belong. Colleagues are either excluded as contacts who are necessarily not friends, or they are accepted only when they attain categorisation as friends and this categorisation overrides any other. However, imagined spaces, especially those online, are never particularly clearly defined’ (Blommaert, 2015), they spill from one to the next, and any attempt to circumscribe them definitively becomes theoretically problematic. This is especially so in the presence of contexts which are being contested, a process which is so ingrained and integral to the Facebook environment (Marwick & boyd, 2010).

Unlike the respondents in Survey Responses 5 to 11, the final three, 12 to 14 make reference to aspects of professional identity, whether the workplace or the category of colleague. This is where multiple spaces begin to enter into the user’s conceptualisation of who and what these contacts are, and, by extension, what the role played by Facebook is in this environment. However, in Survey Responses 12 and 13 the mention of the workplaces serves only as a contrast to the categorisation of contacts as friends in ‘real life’ or ‘outside the work environment.’
Survey Response 14 differs somewhat from the previous examples in that it characterises contacts as both friends and colleagues. This respondent explains that they will only add colleagues who they think of ‘as more friends than colleagues.’ In this respect, it could be placed in the section below. However, the words ‘more than’ are quite significant here. Despite the fact that the role of colleague is retained, it is positioned as being less important than the role of friend. The role of friend here is the primary characterisation, and is the deciding factor in the decision in whether to add the contact to Facebook.

Professional contacts as friends as well as colleagues

As already alluded to, there was another group of respondents who accepted colleagues as friends on Facebook, but did not affirm them solely as friends. In these constructions friendship does play a major part, but there is room left for contacts to exist in multiple spaces, personal and professional simultaneously. Professional contacts here are characterised as ‘friends as well as colleagues,’ as opposed to the ‘friends rather than colleagues’ constructions seen above.

This is important when viewed with respect to previous studies (Jiang et al., 2014; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013) that worked primarily with a model of inclusion versus exclusion, or in the language of Ollier-Malaterre et al., integration versus segregation. People who chose segregation excluded professional contacts from Facebook, while those who chose integration included such contacts. However, the concept of Facebook connection may be more complex than a single preference for inclusion. It can be experienced differently depending on how Facebook users carve meaning from the audience that they choose. It seems to me that the act of integration is a different one regarding the construction and representation of friends who happen to be colleagues, as opposed to colleagues who are also friends. This is the strength of analysing the nature of Facebook, and Facebook audiences, in terms of (perceived) spaces rather than static labels. It allows more in-depth examination into the ideas and experiences behind audience management rather than fitting them into simplified binaries.

This notion of dynamicity is evident in the way that respondents report drawing on multiple spaces. In the Survey Responses below, respondents have acknowledged the complexity of the audience, with contacts imagined as belonging to multiple categories.

Survey Responses 15-21

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SR15</td>
<td>They also are my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR16</td>
<td>Because they are usually also friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR17</td>
<td>Only if we start hanging out as friends IRL too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR18</td>
<td>We have a lot in common and get along as friends as well as colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR19</td>
<td>Small work place so also friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR20</td>
<td>My work is casual and we're friends at work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SR21  I want them to be my friends, and a part of my network

While respondents in Survey Responses 15 to 17 only explicitly mention friends, they differ subtly from the examples seen before in their use of the words ‘also’ and ‘too.’ Survey Responses 15 and 16 state that the colleagues accepted on Facebook are also friends, while Survey Response 17 explains that they hang out as friends too. Compare these to the type of construction seen earlier in Section 5.2.1: ‘they are my friends’. This representation labels contacts concretely as one thing, friends. Here, in Survey Responses 15 to 17 the words ‘also’ and ‘too’ allow for other categorisations, and existence in other, professional, spaces.

Survey Response 18 is one where the Facebook user explicitly names professional contacts as both friends and colleagues. Here, the respondent uses ideas associated with personal relationships, ‘we have a lot in common,’ before adding that they get along as friends ‘as well as’ colleagues. This is in contrast to the example discussed above, where contacts were positioned as ‘more friends than colleagues.’ The difference between the two examples lies in the weight given to the two categories named in each; Survey Response 14 heavily prioritises the role of friend, while Survey Response 18 presents them as being of equal weight.

In Survey Responses 19 and 20, while the respondents do not mention colleagues, they contain representations that invoke the idea of the workplace. These respondents argue that because their workplace is small or casual, they are friends with colleagues. Survey Response 19 once again makes use of the word ‘also’ to invoke multiple categories.

The phrase ‘friends at work’ in Survey Response 20 is interesting in that while this example does not actually make mention of colleagues, the phrase can be seen as destabilising the idea of friend as constructed earlier in this section. In these earlier sections the category of friends was often constructed through a separation from the professional context: ‘they’re work people, not friends’ and ‘they are friends outside of work.’ This separation of friends versus colleagues and personal versus professional spaces was used as a way of managing the audience, even when the audience could have been viewed of as multiple. In contrast to this, the phrase ‘friends at work’ brings together the two spaces, providing an early reflection of the direction taken in this thesis.

This destabilisation of friend and colleague is tempered slightly when it is matched with the destabilisation of the idea of work early in the example, achieved by the description of the work as casual. There is a suggestion here of a distinction between casual versus professional, and that under more professional circumstances, such a subversion of friend versus colleague would not be acceptable. This is in fact an idea that is identified by a number of respondents later in this analysis.

However, the respondent in Survey Response 21 also brings together the ideas of friendship and professional space in the assertion that they want contacts to be both friends and part of their network. The inclusion of the word ‘want’ here is interesting. It suggests that the bringing together of the two spaces is not merely an unavoidable situation which must be managed, an idea that is the basis for the majority of research in
this area. Rather, there is the suggestion here that the collision is intentional, and perhaps even held up as an ideal. This is perhaps a reflection of shifts in the way we understand space, brought about partly by online technologies. Perhaps going into the era of online social networks, the bringing together of multiple spaces will be less of an aberration, and more of the norm.

It is important also to notice here that while multiple spaces are being brought together here, they are not necessarily being ‘collapsed.’ Respondents are able to imagine their audience as existing in multiple spaces. This is something that will be returned to in the Conclusion within a discussion of whether the existing language of context collapse (boyd, 2007) remains useful.

5.2.1.1. Intimacy and knowledge

While they did not explicitly mention friends or colleagues the majority of the other survey respondents continued to invoke the friend versus colleague framework. They also followed similar patterns to those just discussed. Respondents who did not accept colleagues as Facebook friends distanced the two concepts, while those who accepted either emphasised the personal to the exclusion of the professional, or acknowledged the multiple spaces. While these patterns are almost identical to those in Section 5.1.1. above, the following are included here as evidence that even when respondents do not explicitly use the word ‘friend’ they continue to draw on themes of friendship or non-friendship in the construction of space within Facebook.

Professional contacts as not applicable to friendship

Once again, when respondents reported that they did not accept colleagues as Facebook friends, they justified this choice by positioning them as being unsuitable for a personal friendship. Their explanations draw on attributes that may be considered to signal or foster a friendship, similar interests and ages, while denying the presence of these attributes in their relationships with colleagues.

Survey Responses 22 & 23

SR22 Theyre not the kind of people I would normally interact with outside of work due to different ages/interests/etc

SR23 Don't really know them.

The respondent in Survey Response 22 expresses the opinion that their colleagues are completely distinct from the people that they would interact with ‘outside of work.’ While outside of work could potentially encompass a large number of contexts, not all of them inherently social, the meaning of the phrase here is somewhat defined by the mentioning of different ages and interests. By defining the people they interact with outside of work in terms of being the same age, they are imagining them as peers, and the suggestion of the same interests is one that is typically associated with friendship.

Even if the representation of a friendly space here is hazy, the representation of a non-professional one is clearer. The premise is that the people interacted outside of work are
the ones who would be allowed on Facebook. In this way, Facebook is constructed as a non-professional space, a space where professional interactions and identities do not belong. This will be returned to in Section 5.2.2.

In Survey Response 23, ‘I don’t really know them,’ there is a return of the idea of knowledge seen in Survey Response 2. Not only does the idea of knowing someone invoke connotations of an intimate relationship, but it also draws on concerns surrounding the tailoring of communication to the audience, and the invisible, unknowable audience of Facebook. Once again, the colleagues being discussed are not objectively unknown of course, but rather, are unknown within the necessarily non-professional context of Facebook.

Professional contacts as subject to friendship

Of course, it was only a small percentage of respondents who said that they did not accept colleagues as Facebook friends, and as has been seen, those who accepted colleagues often draw on similar discourses of friendship. In identifying whether colleagues are acceptable as Facebook friends, they merely positioned colleagues differently in relation to these discourses. The following responses are those which mark the acceptability of colleagues by aligning them solely with personal spaces. These responses draw on ideas of knowledge, familiarity, trust and affection.

Survey Responses 24-31

SR24 I accept anyone I know.
SR25 Because I know them
SR26 I personally know them anyways.
SR27 Only a very select few that I trust - I have found it gets weird and can start unnecessary drama.
SR28 If they are the same age as me then yes.
SR29 if I don't work directly with them
SR30 Depends on whether I like them in person
SR31 But I only accept as friends on Facebook people who I socialise with in real life

The idea of knowledge discussed in Survey Response 23 is continued in Survey Responses 24, 25 and 26. The difference is where colleagues were positioned as unknown in 23, they are now positioned as known, and are therefore allowed on Facebook. The respondent in Survey Response 26 makes explicit the personal context of this knowledge, ‘I personally know them’.

Similarly, respondents in Survey Responses 27 and 28 draw on other aspects of personal relationships. Survey Response 27 suggests that they will accept the people that they trust,
trust again being a term that invokes connotations of an intimate relationship. It also draws on the same themes as ‘knowledge,’ that is, a confidence in one’s ability to know an individual as an audience member in the spaces of Facebook. The second part of this comment reflects what can happen when this knowledge is absent or misjudged; the ability to tailor communication to one’s audience is compromised, and according to the respondent, can make the relationship ‘weird’ and cause ‘unnecessary drama.’

Survey Response 29 introduces an idea of distance. This respondent explains that they will accept colleagues provided they do not work directly with them. Additionally, it suggests that there are multiple levels of ‘colleagues,’ a fact that has been largely ignored in past literature except for the occasional distinction between ‘colleague’ and ‘employer’ (Jiang et al., 2014). This is an interesting point that has yet to be examined beyond the suggestion that the difference lies in the spaces which different levels of colleague are able to inhabit, and how fluid these spaces are.

This example draws connections between professional relationships, distance, and suitability for personal relationships. It suggests that a close professional relationship requires an element of distancing, not allowing for interaction in a personal space. Conversely, a greater distance professionally speaking allows for a closer relationship away from work, or at least on Facebook. It is important to note that the distance being talked about here is a horizontal one, not a vertical one as is the relationship between employer and employee.

Survey Responses 30 and 31 continue the trend of emphasising the personal relationship, Survey Response 30 establishing the need to like the contacts allowed on Facebook, and Survey Response 31 citing the need to socialise with them. However, these examples are also significant in that they draw on the online/offline divide, ‘like them in person’ and ‘socialise with them in real life.’ It is slightly ambiguous here whether in person and in real life are being juxtaposed to the work context or the Facebook context. Regardless of what these constructions are in opposition to, they are invoking connotations of a space of relative surety where connections be assessed with confidence, away from the blurred boundaries of either the workplace or Facebook. In these constructions, it is in this space of ‘in person’ and ‘real life’ where personal relationships can be constructed and assessed as known.

In these examples the idea of knowing someone is used often to signal the person’s acceptability as a Facebook friend. The reporting of these instances typically carried connotations of closeness and trust. It is assumed here that the idea of knowing is used to invoke themes of friendship, and that, further, it may be relevant in stabilising representations of space by providing a level of confidence in one’s interpretations. Such concepts were reflected in the interviews that were conducted in the second stage of this research. Although this data is to be analysed in section 5.3, I think it would be beneficial here to look at a singular extract from the interviews which deals with the idea of knowledge on Facebook. In Interview Extract 14 below, Erika is providing an explanation for why she only accepts people that she knows on Facebook. Her comments provide insight into the importance of knowing on Facebook.
Chapter 5: The interpretation of space

Interview Extract 14

IE14 Erika: You’re sharing your content with them, and you’re sharing your opinions. You don’t want someone to take something the wrong way because they don’t know you all that well

Here Erika is touching on ideas of meaning, and the co-constructed nature of meaning. Many theorists have emphasised the role of others in the creation of intelligible speech and impression management. Blommaert (2015) promotes the chronotope to theorise links between space, time, discourse and behaviour. What we do and say is only meaningful within a given space, in relation to the discourses which circulate in that space. All of this is dependent on a knowledge of the space one is speaking into.

This can be examined by drawing on the work of Foucault (Foucault, 1980). Foucault’s work largely focuses on issues of knowledge and power, and for him, this was connected to the co-constructed nature of meaning, the formation of meaning, and the regulation of meaning. He argues that speech, and ways of talking, is only vested with meaning within a given socio-historical context. Meaning here is socially constructed through discourse, and those with access to this legitimised meaning were imbued with greater power. Failure to understand and draw on shared discourses, where contexts are conflicting or contested, can result in a loss of meaningfulness, an increased risk of the audience ‘taking something the wrong way.’ In attempting to restrict her Facebook audience to those that she knows well, and therefore, spaces that she understands, Erika is attempting to ensure that her ‘content’ and ‘opinions’ retain their accepted and appropriate meaning.

Such a reading of Interview Extract 14 can help us to explain why participants in both stages of the study put such an emphasis on friendship and knowing their audience. However, as will be seen in later sections below, it is also a recognition of how this knowledge is often destabilised on Facebook.

Professional contacts as subject to friendship and professional relationship

Just like in Section 5.2.1. there was a distinction between those who positioned colleagues as solely aligned with friendship and those that positioned them as friends and professional contacts. However, as these did not explicitly use the term ‘friends,’ the personal relationships in these examples was mainly denoted by references to friendly or social relationships. Like in the sections above, the significance of these responses lies in the ways that contacts can be imagined as existing in multiple spaces simultaneously.

Survey Responses 32-35

SR32 If I have developed a good working relationship with a coworker, then yes. I don't just accept anyone, there has to be a base level of friendship

SR33 I accept people I work with because we are quite a social workplace and we see each other outside work but usually put them on a limited profile setting.
Chapter 5: The interpretation of space

SR34  i work at a pub/bistro so my colleagues are similar age as me and we all get along at work well, don't have kitchen staff as facebook friends however as they are older

SR35  We have a very friendly environment where I work (a cafe). My work relationships are very casual.

These responses contain affirmations of a good or friendly working relationship, while also establishing a social relationship. Survey Response 32 begins by citing a good working relationship as a prerequisite for Facebook acceptance. This is a suggestion that colleagues can be accepted onto Facebook on the merits of their working relationship. The respondent tempers this slightly in the second part of their answer, stating that there also needs to be a base level of friendship. The remaining examples above contain similar elements, a mention of a workplace where colleagues get along well, as well as a signifier of friendship, seeing each other away from work, or a reference to similar ages.

The way that the workplace is characterised in Survey Responses 33 and 35 reflect the mixing of social and professional spaces in themselves. Survey Response 33 describes ‘quite a social workplace’ while Survey Response 34 cites ‘a very friendly environment where I work.’ These do not conform completely to a formal, professional idea of the workplace. In fact, Survey Response 35 does not even construct a workplace at all, rather a ‘friendly environment’ where they happen to work.

In section 5.2.1, a casual or informal workplace was used to justify the acceptability of colleagues as Facebook friends. Survey Responses 33 and 35 suggest another continuum within possible workplaces, with formal or professional being at one end, and casual at the other. In these responses, relationships formed at workplaces on the casual end of the scale are positioned by respondents as being more akin to social relationships, and are acceptable for inclusion on Facebook. Interestingly, in Survey Response 33, despite being in a social workplace where colleagues were seen outside of work, the respondent still feels the need to limit what colleagues can see on Facebook. This suggests that while such casual professional relationships can approach the status of personal ones, there is still a distance which is introduced with any professional space.

While these responses contain representations of colleagues who are described as acceptable for Facebook, it is worth making explicit that their place in Facebook continues to hinge on their role as friends; they are personal contacts as well as professional ones. In this way, the positioning of Facebook as a place for friends remains here. In the examples discussed so far Facebook has been conceptualised as a solely, or, at least, a primarily, personal. Interactions with professional spaces have been either completely denied by users, or pushed to the background, their involvement limited. In the language of collapsed contexts colleagues have been collapsed in the category of friends. This is something that will be problematised by the conclusion of the next section.
5.2.2. Facebook as casual and non-professional

Respondents also framed their audience by referring to the types of interactions that they have with contacts and the types of activities they perform with contacts on Facebook. Here too, they draw on the notions seen in Chapter 5.1. to position Facebook as a fun, casual, personal space, and to position certain interactions, and ultimately certain contacts, as acceptable or unacceptable within this space. Similarly to the representation of friendship, there are various patterns which Facebook users employ: the distancing of professional from social spaces; a process of foregrounding the social aspects of the interaction; and the mixing of social and professional spaces.

However, here, a further pattern emerges, one where the respondent makes reference only to professional spaces, one which disrupts the overall pattern of previous examples which have been depended on a construction of personal space. Together, these patterns of talking about colleagues complicate the integration versus segregation binaries that have been present in previous quantitative analyses which relied on stable and one-dimensional categorisations of space (Jiang et al., 2014; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013).

Professional content as non-recreational

Respondents who disallowed colleagues as Facebook connections again generally justified this choice by drawing a distinction between recreational and professional spaces. In this way, users reinforced the recreational interactions which characterise Facebook as inherently non-professional, and professional identity became something to keep separate from one’s personal identity. In many ways, this parallels with Section 5.2.1 discussing the representation of friendship; in both, respondents enact a separation between recreational and professional. The difference here is that the examples discussed earlier were referring to characteristics of professional contacts, whereas, the following comments are more reflective statements about the ways that they themselves interact with Facebook and the world.

Survey Responses 36-42

SR36 Profesional(sic) and personal lives should be kept separate (sic)

SR37 Try not to - my private life is separate from work

SR38 Because, there are some aspects of me that I don't show on my work place and I want to keep it that way.

SR39 Because I am not interested in making friends at work

SR40 Could potentially make views restrictive.

SR41 I generally link articles that would indicate a political/social justice stance on controversial subjects. Most people I work
with don't care for such conversations or have bigoted viewpoints that I don't care to see.

SR42 Privacy

Respondents in Survey Responses 36 and 76 provide clear illustrations of the notions which underlie the extracts in this section, as well as echoing some of the survey questions explored in Chapter 4. For some Facebook users it is in fact important that personal and professional spaces remain separate. These Survey Responses, along with Survey Responses 38 and 39, construct binaries between personal and professional, juxtaposing the two to enforce a model of segregation.

In these examples, given their focus on the exclusion of professional contacts from Facebook, respondents are suggesting that the ‘workplace’ itself may not be as spatially defined as one may first imagine. In these responses, the workplace may be constituted by professional contacts rather than a physical space as such. Despite the fact that Facebook exists in a different physical, virtual, space to the workplace, for these respondents a Facebook audience which includes professional contacts has the ability to impact interactions within the workplace. In effect then, such a Facebook audience can become an extension of the workplace. This is highlighted in Survey Response 38, where the respondent suggests that showing these aspects of herself to colleagues on Facebook is linked to showing such aspects of herself in a professional space. This is an interesting example of the ability of Facebook to transcend physical space and time (Baym & boyd, 2012; Blommaert, 2015; boyd, 2007; Rambe, 2013), the result of invisible audiences and communication which lacks the mechanisms to be targeted and tailored to specific audiences. In this case, such difficulties are addressed by restricting who can be part of the audience.

So far, the respondents discussed in this section have been objecting to colleagues as Facebook friends on the basis that the personal interactions of Facebook should not be shown as part of professional identity. This fits in with the popular discourse that such interactions can negatively affect professional lives (Doyle, 2015; Everett, 2011; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). However, the next two Survey Responses, 40 and 41, express alternative concerns. Respondents still see Facebook as personal, but they suggest that having professional contacts as part of the Facebook audience may affect the personal interactions that they can have within the site. Both of these examples talk about personal opinions or views which in some way may be ‘restricted’ by the presence of a professional audience. In this way, these personal views are represented as incompatible with their professional identities, and at the same time, are aligned with Facebook.

The last Survey Response here, 42, stating ‘privacy,’ while being too short to be juxtaposing personal and professional discourses explicitly, continues to draw on the binary between private and public, discussed by boyd (2007). This respondent invokes privacy as a justification for excluding colleagues from their Facebook network. Privacy is then constructed as a personal entity, being aligned with the exclusion of professional contacts.
Chapter 5: The interpretation of space

Facebook interactions positioned as recreational

Some respondents allowed colleagues on Facebook by aligning them with exclusively recreational activities in order to justify their position as appropriate Facebook friends. Within these examples, the colleagues that are allowed on Facebook are represented solely through social interactions.

Survey Responses 43-51

SR43  I'd be selective about this - I would only choose to be friends with those I talk about my personal life to
SR44  I do, because for me Facebook is one method of publicizing myself and what I do
SR45  Because my Facebook page is an adequate representation of who I am
SR46  Because I like to use Facebook as a way to connect with all the people I know as it is very easy to contact people via it.
SR47  It makes it easier to keep in contact and organise to meet up outside of work.
SR48  It is a way of getting to know them better, finding out about their other interests and what they are like.
SR49  It's nice to see what they're like outside of work.
SR50  I think it's good to get know people outside of a work context.
SR51  It is another way to know each other.

In the above Survey Responses three major themes emerge: Facebook as a space for personal expression; Facebook as a means of keeping in contact; and Facebook as a way of knowing contacts on a social level. In their inclusion into this social space, colleagues are being represented in personal light.

Respondents in Survey Responses 43, 44 and 45 all draw on the idea of personal expression, linking this expression to the Facebook network. The respondent in Survey Response 43 states that they will only add colleagues with whom they ‘talk about [their] personal life,’ while the respondents in Survey Responses 44 and 45 describe Facebook as a good representation of ‘what I do’ and ‘who I am.’ Here, Facebook is represented as a reflection of the personal identity of the Facebook user. Each of these examples contains the word my: ‘my personal life;’ ‘myself;’ ‘my Facebook page.’ This is asserting a further
sense of personal ownership over the subject of discussion on Facebook, the Facebook space itself, and the respondent’s interpretation of this space.

Survey Responses 46 and 47 focus on connection and keeping in contact. The respondent in Survey Response 46 states Facebook’s use in ‘connect[ing] with all the people I know,’ reinforcing Parsell’s (2012) assertion that a sense of connection to other people is extremely important for personal wellbeing, and is vital in the formation of a stable sense of self and personal identity. Survey Response 47 continues this theme by explaining that Facebook makes it easy to ‘keep in contact.’ This contact is then further recreationalised by its function: organising to meet up outside of work. Here Facebook is represented as a tool of social inclusion.

Survey Responses 48, 49, 50 and 51 revolve around the idea of knowledge, specifically in these examples, a knowledge of the social realm, interests and activities outside of work. These examples differ significantly from where knowledge appeared earlier in this chapter. Those earlier references to knowledge, or knowing, constructed this knowledge as a prerequisite for Facebook acceptance, whereas here Facebook is constructed as a way of accessing and forming this knowledge. It is interesting to note that to some extent, these examples do presuppose a professional relationship, talking about ‘other interests’ ‘outside work,’ and ‘another way of knowing.’ Survey Response 50 even suggests this is a ‘good’ thing, possibly positing this as an advantage professionally speaking. However, while the presupposition of professional knowledge may be present here, in these examples Facebook is constructed as supporting only personal knowledge. This changes in the next section.

Facebook interaction with colleagues as recreational and professional

The next group of examples justify colleagues as acceptable Facebook friends by referring to both recreational and professional uses of Facebook. Here, Facebook is constructed as a space for carrying out both social and professional tasks. The colleagues that are accepted onto these networks are acknowledged as professional contacts as well as social ones.

**Survey Responses 52-55**

SR52 my work is me so I feel compelled

SR53 It is the easiest way to keep in contact with them and to ask about work related matters.

SR54 to tag each other in work related cat videos, and we often catch up outside of work

SR55 This enables me to understand more about them on a personal level. This helps me in bonding better with them during work

Interestingly, these examples contain the same themes that emerged in the last section: expression; connection; and knowledge.
Survey Response 52 draws a familiar connection between ‘me’ and Facebook. In this response colleagues are constructed as connected to ‘me’, so the author is ‘compelled’ to accept them on Facebook. However, in contrast to the last group of examples, here, the usually personal ‘me’ is rendered somewhat professional by its place in the phrase ‘my work is me.’ This phrase in itself is a destabilisation of supposed binaries between personal and professional, splicing personal and professional themes. As discussed in the last section, the ‘my’ asserts a sense of personal ownership over ‘work’ which is then equated back to ‘me.’ It is interesting to note that despite the apparent fluidity here, there is a sense that the author is not entirely comfortable with this fluidity, suggested by the use of the word ‘compelled,’ one which invokes a lack of volition.

Survey Responses 53 and 54 both emphasise the usefulness of Facebook in generally ‘keeping in contact’ while also allowing them to connect over work related matters, ‘asking about work’ and ‘tagging each other in work related cat videos.’ The phrase ‘work related cat videos’ is again an interesting one, bringing a work related aspect into the typically personal activity of watching and sharing popular online videos.

The respondent in Survey Response 55 is presenting Facebook once again as a route to gaining personal knowledge of one’s colleagues. However, while earlier examples contained only a presupposition of a professional relation, and possible benefits to it, Survey Response 55 makes this connection clear. Facebook is constructed not only as a space which provides personal knowledge, but one which also aids in ‘bonding at work.’

While these examples show Facebook existing in multiple spaces, the inclusion of a professional space to the Facebook relationship so far has not disturbed the connection between Facebook and the recreational. Even where Facebook is found to be useful in a professional space, this usefulness is constructed in conjunction with, and on the back of, its role as a personal space. This would seem to be an overarching pattern. However, there were exceptions to this pattern.

Facebook interaction with colleagues as professional

The final cluster of examples to be discussed is one which had no equivalent in the earlier discussion of friendship-driven responses. This from previous patterns is why I chose to present this category last. A number of respondents who said that they accepted colleagues as Facebook friends justified this answer by explaining that it made their work lives easier. These responses abandon the Facebook-for-friends and Facebook-as-recreational frameworks that have been present up until this point. Previous examples, whether or not they accepted colleagues as suitable friends, positioned Facebook itself as a space where friendship was a requirement. The following examples break this connection.

**Survey Responses 56-65**

SR56 To create a positive workspace when someone sends me a request. To make sure you don't get left out of things and excluded
Chapter 5: The interpretation of space

SR57  It helps to maintain communication and relationship.
SR58  Get connected and informed about news and events
SR59  To keep in contact outside of work hours so that I know what is happening in and around the workplace.
SR60  It is convenient for working in groups to keep updated by a Facebook group. I usually block them after we have finished working together. I don't keep them as friends
SR61  It's important to network. My profile is responsible and respectful.
SR62  For creative work (Film) its important for networking and organizing, for office job definitely not
SR63  At one of my jobs, because it's generally expected and it's a good way to organize shift swaps
SR64  because it allows me to communicate with them in a less personal way than texting
SR65  Work uses Facebook

These examples range from describing Facebook as a space which supports the interpersonal relationships present in the workplace, to descriptions of Facebook as necessary for the actual tasks of professional life. In the first examples, Survey Responses 56-59 there is a desire to create and maintain a positive workspace and to maintain communication about news and events. While these desires work at a more interpersonal level and are geared towards maintaining at least somewhat friendly, positive relationships, the contacts invoked in these responses are ultimately characterised as colleagues rather than friends. In the latter of these examples, 60-65, there are descriptions of Facebook as being important for the actual activities that individuals complete as part of their professional identity. For these respondents, Facebook has become incorporated into a professional space, being used for work related tasks such as networking, the completion of group projects, and for organising shift changes.

In addition to the fusion of professional space, there is also a dismissal of personal space evident in some respondent’s comments. In Survey Responses 60 and 64, not only is the professional relationship prioritised, but the personal relationship is actively pushed aside. In Survey Response 60, the respondent explains that while they will add colleagues on Facebook for group assignments, they will not keep them as friends afterwards. Once the
professional relationship has ended these contacts are excluded from Facebook without the possibility of transitioning to a more relaxed social relationship.

So too is Survey Response 64 an interesting characterisation of Facebook as a ‘less personal’ way of communicating with colleagues. These examples are extraordinary in that they challenge the idea of Facebook as a casual social space, as seen in Chapter 5.1. For the respondents here, colleagues may be added to Facebook as long as their categorisation is clear; they are professional contacts serving a professional purpose rather than a personal one.

In these examples then, the segregation between personal and professional is actually fairly dominant. This is another example of where models of integration versus segregation such as that used by Ollier-Malaterre et. al. (2013) becomes problematic. Following this model these respondents would clearly be identified as exhibiting integrationist preferences; they allow colleagues onto Facebook. However, on closer inspection, these responses in fact consist of very strong binary oppositions between personal and professional contacts. This is a surprising dynamic that, in merely labelling their behaviour as integrationist, would be completely missed.

I am not suggesting that for these respondents Facebook itself has become a solely professional space. What I am suggesting is that here, when professional contacts are allowed onto the Facebook network, they have been characterised primarily as professional contacts rather than personal ones, dismissing the Facebook-for-friends alignment that characterised responses in the earlier sections.

This is the strength of investigating reactions to professional contacts in relation to the ways that spaces are imagined. Such an approach allows us to see the discourses behind Facebook use, and the ways in which professional contacts are shaped by users to fit into such discourses, and, in this situation, where they do not. It also enables us to more easily and usefully think about overlap and blurring between different categories. It is this overlap which will become integral in studies of the multiple spaces inhabited by Facebook. Where abstract concepts such as context collapse (boyd, 2007) and convergence (Rambe, 2013) encourage a focus on contexts and spaces themselves, this section has highlighted the active role that Facebook users play in building their own conceptions of the spaces in which they exist. However, it has also highlighted that these interpretations are highly are highly contested and divergent.
5.3. The contestation of context
The previous section suggests that in Facebook, space is multiple and subjective. The focus of this study is not in the actual spaces being interacted with, but rather, the Facebook user’s interpretation of them. This is how there can exist such a variety in the ways in which colleagues are represented, and, in fact, such a variety in the ways that Facebook itself is represented as a personal or professional space. This section will turn to how these interpretations of space are supported by fellow users, as well as how they can be contested by them, a contestation which I argue is more tension-inducing than any qualities inherent in the contexts. This discussion also encompasses an image of how Facebook users work to maintain their interpretations in the face of this contestation. The data examples discussed herein will be drawn from the interviews and the survey short answer responses.

5.3.1. Agreeing upon contexts
Facebook is an environment which encompasses many different ways of speaking and behaving. Different users imagine the space differently. But in order to interact with each other there are shared understandings which exist, and in turn, help to guide the ways that users imagine Facebook.

Interview Extract 15
IE15 Michael: I think Facebook has a bit of leeway. You expect people to have a bit of fun, so I don’t think you can judge people too much

In Interview Extract 15 above, Michael provides insight into how Facebook users successfully navigate audiences from different spaces. For Michael, Facebook comes with a set of expectations by which users judge the interactions which happen there. Inherent in this idea are connotations of a type of implicit agreement which people enter into when interacting on Facebook. These agreements cover the ways that the Facebook user will behave, as well as the ways that they will interpret the behaviour of others. These are then reflected in the ways that users represent the role of Facebook as a light, fun space to be populated by friends.

However, Chapter 5.2 illustrated that these spaces are open to interpretation, and are fitted into the templates of Facebook in a variety of different ways. Some believe that Facebook should be a space for friends and therefore exclude professional contacts, others include such contacts by embracing them as friends, while still others accept the role of professional contacts on Facebook. Such imaginings can be seen as an efficient way of untangling links between Facebook and accepted spaces, and navigating what could potentially constitute multiple contexts. These ways of imagining space work well while they remain unchallenged. This is evident in Mary’s comment in Interview Extract 16 below:

Interview Extract 16
IE16 Mary: not that it’s unprofessional, everyone goes out, but…

As this comment suggests, the interviews were characterised by a tension between the Facebook user’s expectations of the role of Facebook, and other possible expectations, especially those of professional contacts. Most participants agreed that Facebook was not
a space for professional presentation, but at the same time, expressed the fear that their Facebook content could be interpreted in relation to professional spaces. The tension for most participants like Mary was this contradiction between engaging with time-space zones which they had constructed as outside professional contexts while at the same time knowing that they could be dragged into professional spaces by the expectations of others. The tension here comes not from concerns about who the audience is or the contexts they come from, but rather, they way they interpret the context of Facebook. This is an important distinction which will run through the latter part of this research, and will be further explored within a broader discussion in the Conclusion.

Such tension is evident in Mary’s comment above. Here she is explaining why she tries not to post content referring to alcohol consumption. She explains that she feels uncomfortable with posting this sort of content, not because the behaviour itself is unacceptable, but because she is unsure how members of the audience would interpret it. This is a reminder of why time-space has had such a major role in thinking around social media technologies; different events will be interpreted differently in different perceived spaces and times, and the range of ways that Facebook users can position the role of the platform can make this interpretation problematic.

In the way that Mary positions Facebook, as light and fun, the consumption of alcohol on a night out is not unprofessional. However, there is the possibility that someone else, who positions Facebook differently, could interpret it as unprofessional. Importantly, this causes Mary to change her behaviour in refraining from posting the content. Mary is interacting in a space that she positions as outside professional contexts, but knows that her behaviour could be read through a professional context, so caters to that possible interpretation. Here, a presentation of ‘personal’ identity can very quickly be reshaped into a professional one.

5.3.2. Friendship requests and contested boundaries

To expand on this I return to examine further examples from the short answer section of the survey. So far, analysis of these short answers has demonstrated that the Facebook audience is an ambiguous audience and it is possible to position potential friends in multiple ways. The place of professional contacts on Facebook is dependent on how the Facebook user imagines such potential contacts and the medium of Facebook itself.

In this analysis these ways of talking have been represented as relatively stable. Contacts have been aligned in particular ways with friends or colleagues, and their acceptability on Facebook has stemmed from this. Facebook has been imagined by users as a primarily personal space. Even where professional spaces have been mixed in, there has been relatively little tension apparent. This way of presenting the data is in some ways mirroring problematic past approaches where participants were labelled as either accepting or rejecting professional contacts (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). In fact, we know that interpretation of space and our place in it are always dynamic and liable to be imagined in different ways.

The introduction to this section suggests that the way Facebook users interpret Facebook is not always without tension. Here, categories are not just constructed, but are co-constructed. Friendships are not unilaterally declared and professionalism is not unilaterally negotiated. Facebook too is a medium which is based on reciprocity. The
potential friend also has a hand in constructing the spaces that are interacted in: what it means to be friends on Facebook; and in the interactions which constitute the relationship. Up until now, the examples discussed have presented users’ imagined audiences as relatively unchallenged. They cited their relationship with the colleague and the situation, and this was what informed their choices. But what happens when these categorisations are challenged by the potential friend?

A number of survey respondents reported that they were friends with professional contacts because the contact had requested the friendship. These responses expressed concern about accepting the contact on Facebook, but also reported feeling compelled to do so in order to maintain the relationship.

These examples indicate how Facebook becomes a site for the enactment of professional space despite the suggestion of inappropriateness. Respondents would not add these contacts, usually their boss, because they feel uncomfortable forming a personal relationship, but once added, they felt that rejecting the request would cause damage to the relationship. In this way, Facebook acceptance becomes a site for the maintenance of professional relationships even while respondents resist this connection.

**Survey Responses 66-70**

SR66  She added me and I felt obliged to accept

SR67  Yes, because they friended me, and it could be uncomfortable/awkward if they realised I did not accept them

SR68  I don't want to be judged as arrogant or picky by the boss if I don't accept them

SR69  She added me. I hated it. She is on a limited profile view.

SR70  Everyone in my office added her so I think it would be weird if I did not add her at my Facebook account. She would know that

The first four of these examples illustrate situations where professional contacts added the respondent. In all but Survey Response 67 the contact in question was a boss. As suggested in research by Jiang et al. (2014), the respondents here were uncomfortable with this connection. This is itself is not surprising. Most people feel that including their boss on Facebook crosses too many boundaries, and involves too many power dynamics. Such a connection can leave the Facebook user feeling vulnerable.

The interesting element of these examples is the suggestion of coercion and the compulsion respondents felt to accept the contact. In Survey Response 69 it is clearly stated that the respondent does not see their boss as an acceptable Facebook friend; they
‘hated’ the connection, and took steps to minimise it by limiting what their boss could see. In the other examples, such a judgement, positive or negative, is absent, only inferred as negative by the suggestion of compulsion.

Survey Response 66 does not reveal why the respondent feels obliged to accept, but this fact does once again suggest that there is a difference in social status which is reflected in the request. Survey Response 67 cites a desire to maintain functional relationships with colleagues, that is, to prevent them from becoming ‘uncomfortable [or] awkward.’ In Survey Response 68, the emphasis is on making a good impression on the boss, or at least not making a bad one. In these cases, the reasons cited for accepting Facebook requests relate to the maintenance of professional spaces rather than personal ones.

Survey Response 70 takes these themes a step further by changing the directionality of the request. Here, instead of the boss being the person who added, it was the respondent who took the step to add their boss. Whether or not this meant that the respondent made the initial request is unclear, but it remains meaningful that the respondent framed the experience as a positive action of adding as opposed to accepting. However, despite the active expression, there still remains a feeling of compulsion, a fear that not doing so would be ‘weird,’ and that the boss would recognise it as such. Also important here is the fact that the respondent mentions that their colleagues had also added the employer as a friend. The action of adding in this example became an activity of the workplace, condoned and expected.

These examples highlight the influence of others in interpreting the space in which Facebook exists. Users imagine Facebook in certain ways, but this is not a definitive interpretation. There are suggestions respondents in these examples constructed the professional contacts in question as unacceptable for Facebook. The boss may not have met the friendship requirement, or respondents may simply have rejected a connection between Facebook and professional space. Either way, the friendship request signals disagreement on the part of the professional contact, who felt that the connection was appropriate for Facebook, and then possessed the power to enforce their expectations onto the relationship.

This is why I argue that the tension here comes not merely from the collision of multiple contexts (boyd, 2007); it is a collision which causes little discomfort for some of the Facebook users we have discussed. Rather, it is the challenge to the way that these users interpret the spaces of Facebook that they find uncomfortable. Importantly, this challenge also pushes them into multiple spaces. The way that the Facebook user has imagined the spaces of Facebook becomes reluctantly reframed through this contestation. Facebook comes to inhabit a perceived professional space in spite of the Facebook user’s reluctance.

5.3.3. Rejecting, unfriending and unfollowing: Visibility and not wanting to offend
The last section discussed the pressures that can be placed on Facebook users when constructing their networks and navigating the resulting interpretations of space. While users may position Facebook and professional contacts in certain ways, contesting expectations can mean that they feel ‘obliged’ to accept certain contacts and enter into certain spaces.
Throughout the interviews, such themes were raised relating to a desire not to offend people or hurt their feelings. Facebook was presented as a space where rejection could be felt acutely, and was liable to lead to an impression of rudeness or arrogance. Within a platform which so prizes connection, participants framed Facebook as a space for presenting and maintaining good impressions. As part of this, they expressed a reluctance to both reject friend requests and unfriend contacts already accepted.

Where such reluctance resulted in conflict in terms of undesired relationships and content, participants favoured ‘invisible’ means of controlling both what they saw and what the objectionable contact saw. This invoked questions of visibility, discussed in Chapter 2 as one of the defining features created by the environment of Facebook. Issues of visibility are present at multiple levels here. Firstly there is the process of controlling what content is visible to oneself as the Facebook user, and one’s contacts, achieved by means of accepting, rejecting, unfriending, unfollowing, or subjecting contacts to a limited view. But on top of this, Facebook users must also consider the visibility of such actions. Both of these levels affect the ability of the Facebook user to carve out conceptions of space which work to construct meaning out of their experience with the platform.

5.3.3.1. Pressure to accept friend requests
The data above and below suggests that Facebook users can feel pressured to accept friend requests. The Facebook friendship, in the first instance at least, is an all-or-nothing indicator of connection, and increasingly, good will. Discussed earlier were examples where survey respondents feared that not accepting contacts would make them appear rude or arrogant. This was also reflected in several of the interviews conducted, with participants reporting that they felt compelled to accept requests ‘because it would be a bit rude to keep them in my requests.’

To understand this avoidance of rejection, it is important to consider the stakes of these connections. Facebook is a contradictory platform. On the one hand it is imagined as a space of casual, light fun. But at the same time, this is contrasted with the seriousness with which Facebook users talk about their close friends on Facebook. Users construct their Facebook presence as an extension of themselves, and feel any rejection to this presence keenly (Vitak et al., 2012). Jessica’s comment below, even if she is not talking about her rejection of other people, establishes issues of rejection and the fear of rejection as an element which is salient around Facebook friendships.

**Interview Extract 17**

IE17 Jessica: A good friend, we’d done a lot, and hung out, but we weren’t Facebook friends because I didn’t want to broach it, even though I’d say we were real friends outside of Facebook. It’s just hard to ask and be rejected on Facebook

In Interview Extract 17 Jessica is explaining why she feels inhibited to request Facebook friendships. She uses the example of a colleague with whom she had established an offline friendship. Notice here, the return to ideas of ‘real friends,’ one of the discourses we saw relating to the role of Facebook in Research Question 1. She represents this figure of ‘a good friend’ by pointing to shared activities, and suggests that this means that they should be Facebook friends. However, despite these indicators of friendship, she is reluctant to
request a Facebook connection in case she is rejected, saying that she does not ‘want to feel that feeling.’ Perhaps it is empathy with that feeling of social rejection which makes Facebook users reluctant to reject requests; doing so is felt as a complete rejection of the person rather than a rejection of the online connection.

However, there is another part of Jessica’s explanation which is important for our thinking around visibility: ‘It’s just hard to ask and be rejected on Facebook.’ To request a friendship requires an active, directed action, one that makes the user visible and makes their assessment of, and desire for, friendship visible. It also makes the rejection visible, if only to the two parties involved, heightening the negative feelings associated. This idea was also present in Rachel’s comment in Interview Extract 18 below, where an ‘effort’ in the form of a friend request encouraged acceptance of that request.

**Interview Extract 18**

IE18 Rachel: I have a general rule to accept people if they’ve made the effort to be friends with me and I know them

Once again, this effort is a visible action, one that becomes difficult to reject. Rachel’s comment also harks back to the multi-directionality and co-constructedness of Facebook friendships. Here, instead of adding the people that she wishes to be friends with, the contacts accepted are people who have imagined her as a friend. This is not to say that she, in turn, does not view these contacts as friends. In fact, even here she continues to draw on the discourse of known friends.

Interview Extract 18 is an example of how the environment of Facebook is contested and interpreted by multiple sources. Facebook users are not in control of the interpretations of space which exist within their networks. They construct their own conceptualisations of space in relation to accepted notions, but can find themselves unable to maintain these spaces due to competing discourses of inclusion and acceptance.

5.3.3.2. Reluctance to unfriend

The reluctance to reject people on Facebook follows on to a reluctance to delete, or unfriend people already accepted on Facebook. Facebook users find that once they have connected with someone on Facebook, it is awkward to disconnect. Even when participants found themselves in an undesired space, the discourses introduced above can prevent them from extricating themselves. Users wish to avoid a visible rejection of the contact, one that could result in offence and hurt feelings. However, also present in Interview Excerpts 19 and 20 below is an awareness of the binary nature of Facebook friendship. Both comments express a feeling of discomfort around this binary.

**Interview Excerpts 19 & 20**

IE19 Lucy: I’m not a fan of their Facebook posts, but I can’t delete them because I know them. It would cause drama

IE20 Rachel: I don’t want to offend them, I don’t want to hurt them, in case they feel that I don’t want to be their friends anymore. And it’s not even that I don’t want to be their friends anymore, I just don’t want to read their stuff
Both Lucy and Rachel refer to situations where they are uncomfortable with the content posted by Facebook contacts, but where they feel unable to break expectations by unfriending them. In these comments there is a return to the idea that rejecting the connection could result in negative impressions. In Interview Extract 19, Lucy suggests that it would cause drama while Rachel fears that the contact will take offence.

Perhaps more interesting here is a return to the issue of why such high stakes are placed on these rejections. It was suggested earlier, looking at Jessica’s comment, in Interview Extract 17, that rejections on Facebook can be felt as rejections of the individual rather than rejections of the Facebook connection itself. It can also be seen as a challenge to the way that the person requesting the friendship has interpreted the space of Facebook. The comments of Lucy and Rachel also seem to be drawing on these concepts. Lucy feels that she is unable to unfriend people because she ‘know[s] them.’ Facebook, by default without privacy settings, lists, or limited views, operates with an all-or-nothing model of friendship, and this lack of space for connections between ‘unknown’ and ‘friend’ is reflected in Lucy’s comment. Inherent in her comment is the idea that to be known is to be on Facebook, and to unfriend someone is to denounce this knowledge.

In Interview Extract 20 Rachel too questions the space between being a friend and wanting to read one’s Facebook posts. She also refers to the idea that a Facebook rejection can be felt as an offline rejection, worrying that people may feel that she does not want to be friends if she unfriends them on Facebook. This is another example of the strength of the connection between online and offline, and the potential blurring of the boundaries between the two.

If users wish to avoid the visible rejection of connection, the visible challenge to interpretations of space, that unfriending constitutes, how then do they work to maintain their perceptions around what Facebook should be? What measures does Facebook provide for users like Rachel who want to retain the connection of friendship, but ‘don’t want to read their stuff’?

5.3.3.3. Unfollowing as a means of maintenance

Unfollowing became a strategy that was used by participants to navigate this tension. The act of unfollowing allows a Facebook user to stop receiving the posts of a particular contact in their news feed. The contact does not know that the user has unfollowed them, avoiding the issues of a visible rejection and challenge to interpretation discussed above. Unfollowing also allows Facebook users to shape what they see through their interaction with the site. In this way participants were able to effectively render invisible content that contravenes their ideas of Facebook.

Interview Extracts 21 & 22

IE21 Rachel: I do have some [contacts] that I have silenced, as in I haven’t unfriended them, but I’ve stopped following them, either because they put so much stuff on there that it’s completely clogging up my Facebook page, or sometimes, I do have a couple of friends who have put stuff on there that I disagree with, or, that’s not the right word, stuff that I find almost offensive, so I don’t really want to
read it. So there’s a couple that I’ve decided to not follow because of that

IE22 Erika:  [I unfollow] just stuff that I’d rather just not acknowledge exists. So it’s easier for me

In Interview Extracts 21 and 22 both Rachel and Erika talk about selectively making invisible content that they do not wish to see. The decision to unfollow was presented in both cases as an alternative to unfriending and was described as the more beneficial option. It is an action which in Erika’s words, makes interacting with Facebook ‘easier.’

But why does shielding this content from one’s own view, and only one’s own view, make things easier? These comments make it clear that it is an attempt to avoid conflict. In Interview Extract 21 Rachel talks about unfollowing content that she disagrees with or finds offensive while in Interview Extract 22 Erika refers to content that she would ‘rather just not acknowledge exists.’ For these participants it seems that there is a preference for having a Facebook news feed filled with content that the user likes. This does seem like an obvious point, but is relevant where users could simply ignore what they dislike.

Perhaps the action of unfollowing can be explained by returning to the first research question in this study, where it was found that Facebook users construct their own ideas of Facebook and the space it should inhabit. By making sure that they can only see certain content on Facebook, content that pleases them, and fits in with the way they imagine Facebook, users like Rachel and Erika are perhaps attempting to protect the chronotopic links (Blommaert, 2015) that they have erected to interpret the multiple spaces of Facebook. This is how Erika is making her interactions with Facebook ‘easier.’

These comments suggest a type of curatorship that in the past has only been considered in relation to what Facebook users choose to post. Past researchers have agreed that Facebook users editorialise their content to either fit in with, or create, a narrative around themselves (Cover, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2010). However, Interview Extracts 21 and 22 are suggestions that participants performed similar processes of editing what they see from other people in order to maintain these self-guiding narratives. Litt (2012) suggests that a Facebook user’s conceptions of audience, and space, are based on the content they see. In editing the content they see on their news feed, they need not have to see content that challenges their interpretations of Facebook. Unfollowing then becomes a way of protecting one’s own interpretations of space without visibly challenging the interpretations of others.

5.3.4. Summary
This Chapter has explored how the ways that users think of Facebook is multiple and individual within certain parameters set by shared notions of the role of Facebook. At the same time it is contingent upon, and co-constructed by their audience. For many of the participants in this study, Facebook represents a casual social space for friends. However, because of issues surrounding visibility, these interpretations are often challenged. As a result, participants often felt they were pulled into multiple spaces, sometimes professional ones. However, as well as destabilising space, issues of visibility also add another level to the ways that users imagine spaces, providing them with the tools to curate and reinforce their conceptions of audience and space.
6. Conclusion

This thesis began by discussing past research that has suggested that the affordances of Facebook, along with other online technologies, have the capacity to destabilise the ways people think about space and time and their interactions with these concepts (Blommaert, 2015; boyd, 2007; Kramsch, 2009). The results discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this study suggest that, in fact, the Facebook users in this research do experience and acknowledge this destabilisation and uncertainty in their interactions with the site. This study has revealed that Facebook provides an environment where speech is decontextualised and recontextualised, and where context itself is very much dependent on the interaction of an invisible unknown audience. While the Facebook users in this study draw on popular discourse to forge ideas about their audience and desirable identity presentations, the complex and multiple nature of Facebook means that they are forced to continually consider their presentations in relation to multiple contexts existing in multiple time-space zones.

6.1 Summary of findings

Thurlow and Mroczek remind us that ‘[technologies] are usually embedded in complex ways into the banal practices of everyday lives’ (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011, p. xxiv). For them, and for this study, the interest of technology lies not in the way that it changes peoples’ behaviours, but in how it is appropriated into and is transformative of existing structures. Following on from this, this research set out to examine how meanings are constructed in Facebook interactions across multiple time-space zones.

The first research question of this study was designed to gain insight into the ways in which participants perceived Facebook. Findings indicate that participants drew very clear distinctions between professional and personal spaces, especially in relation to the potentially transgressive environments of Facebook. Notably in Chapter 5.1, participants marked the platform as an almost exclusively personal one. In this way they imagined a space where they could present non-professional identities to family and friends within the site. Professional identity, at this stage in users’ representations had no place within the personal space of Facebook.

So far, this aligned with the traditional view of Facebook, drawing heavily on the modernist binary between personal and professional, and implicating this as the source of tension surrounding professional audiences on Facebook. However, this study found, along with past research (Jiang et al., 2014), that a high number of Facebook users accepted colleagues as friends. Where had the strong divisions between personal and professional gone? If Facebook users felt so strongly that Facebook was a personal domain, it seemed contradictory that they would then accept colleagues. This highlights the tension inherent in Facebook as a site of interaction.

The second research question sought to highlight the role played by the notion of ‘audience’ within Facebook by investigating the ways that professional contacts were represented in participants’ responses. The thematic analysis discussed in Chapter 5.2 demonstrated that for the most part, the distinctions between friend and colleague, personal and professional, remained salient. However, while past research, Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) and Jiang et al. (2014) treated professional contacts as discrete stable categories, the present study found that the ways these contacts were imagined
were more ambiguous. Professional contacts were positioned, and often repositioned, in relation to participants’ understandings about the role of Facebook.

In particular, many respondents who reported accepting colleagues on Facebook, actually represented them as friends rather than colleagues. In these representations the status of these audience members as professional was downplayed, evident in these examples discussed in Chapter 5; ‘they are my friends;’ and ‘friends are friends are friends.’ This allowed for a continuation of the discursive connection between Facebook and the concept of friendship. Such ways of imagining enabled participants to maintain a view of Facebook where non-professional identities are dominant. The ability to conceptualise and reposition one’s audience is the ability to cultivate a self-conception which is coherent and manageable.

However, and leading into the third research question of this research, this ability was often circumvented by the expectations of others in one’s Facebook network. Mary’s comment (IE16) ‘it’s not that it’s unprofessional … but’ seems to capture the sense of tension and ambiguity that was pervasive in participants’ responses and reactions, especially through the interviews in Chapter 5.3. In many cases, participants felt that professional identities should be separate from Facebook, but because of the expectations of members of their network, they felt obligated to maintain a professional presentation for fear of being judged as ‘rude,’ ‘arrogant’ or ‘weird’ as discussed in Chapter 5.3. In these situations the participants in this study were forced to consider and regulate their behaviour from multiple perspectives, maintaining at the same time a non-professional identity and a presentation congruent with their professional identities. In a world where the first port of call for information is increasingly electronic, a Facebook page may have to perform both. Communication in these environments is subject to interpretation within many time-space zones, and Facebook users are under pressure be acceptable across these time-space zones.

It is the source of this pressure which now becomes an interesting theoretical question. Throughout the analysis I have flagged doubts about the appropriateness of the idea of collapsed contexts. The following section elaborates on these issues.

### 6.2 Collapsed contexts, convergence, and contested contexts

At the heart of this thesis is the finding that Facebook brings together multiple contexts that in offline life would not necessarily be in contact. It is from this bringing together that we can hypothesise possible conflicts and tensions. However, the nature of the bringing together in itself is worthy of further exploration. Here, I will return to two conceptual tools which were employed in this study, collapsed contexts and convergence, before proposing a third, contested contexts, which may offer another way in which Facebook interactions can be theorized.

Marwick and boyd’s (2010) notion of collapsed contexts, the idea of many groups being flattened into one, is one that motivated the theoretical direction of this research. It has been useful in that it indexes the capacity of Facebook to bring together audiences which do not typically meet. At the same time, it captures the imperative faced by Facebook users to ‘present a verifiable, singular identity’ (Marwick & boyd, 2010, p. 122).
It may be in its attempt to convey these two somewhat contradictory points where the idea of \textit{collapsed contexts} becomes problematic. It works commendably to capture the actual, functional singular nature of Facebook’s ‘friends’ lists, combined with the limited scope of tools to limit one’s Facebook audience. However, the notion of collapse carries with it connotations of making distinctions between categories and spaces irrelevant. It becomes problematic then to talk about the multiple audiences which occupy Facebook while also talking about \textit{collapsed contexts}.

Even Marwick and boyd themselves go on to argue that ‘context collapse creates an audience that is often imagined as its most sensitive members: parents, partners, and bosses’ (Marwick & boyd, 2010, p. 125). They suggest that Facebook users can only make a singular presentation, and these audience members are the most important to impress, so communication is formulated with these people in mind and then distributed to everyone else at the same time. But are contexts really being ‘collapsed’ here? They are certainly being placed in the same virtual space, and, certainly, they are being navigated in order to find a presentation which will be acceptable to the majority of audience members, but this is not the same as being made irrelevant. In using the image of parents, partners, and bosses to craft their posts, the Facebook users in this study show that they are not rendering their entire audience as being equal to these members, but rather, they are identifying these members as important, and are prioritising communication with these contacts.

Facebook users are typically constrained to communicating with all of their contacts simultaneously. However, the findings of this study indicate that the differences between contexts into which they communicate have not been made irrelevant. In fact, in such a situation, differences become more meaningful to Facebook users. Respondents in section 5.2 of this study were able to imagine their audience in ways that allowed for their existence in multiple spaces, personal as well as professional. A move away from \textit{context collapse} also shifts the focus of the investigation, away from how Facebook works to create an environment where differences in contexts are irrelevant, and towards an account of how Facebook users actively navigate multiple time-space zones.

Rambe (2013) uses the term \textit{convergence} to characterise Facebook, and especially the ways that Facebook is being used in conjunction with mobile technologies. For him, convergence is a complex idea which works at multiple levels to capture the ability of Facebook and mobile internet technologies to bring together multiple contexts and blur the boundaries between established binaries, such as the ones between personal and professional, friend and colleague discussed in Chapter 5 above. At one level, he talks about \textit{social convergence} which can encompass the bringing together of disparate social groups discussed above, but convergence can also work at more theoretical levels.

Also encompassed by this concept is the idea of \textit{technological convergence}. This is the idea that new ways of using Facebook are presenting users with experiences which combine different mediums and platforms. At the moment, the focus of this convergence is on mobile phones and other mobile technologies. Such technologies allow users to switch seamlessly between Facebook, text messaging, google and voice, creating a fluid, multi-modal, and on-the-go experience.
All this leads us to another type of convergence fostered by Facebook: the blurring of offline and online contexts. The prevalence of Facebook enabled devices in everyday life has destabilised the distinction between online and offline, creating users who dwell in both contexts simultaneously (boyd, 2007), resulting in the tensions I discussed in Chapter 5.3. Actions in either context can spill over into the other, resulting in ‘the overlaying of online activities on offline interaction … a typical incarnation of the seamless integration of cyberspace and physical spaces’ (Rambe, 2013, p. 328).

These two concepts formed the framework through which this study was conceptualised. The data in Chapter 5 of this research showed that multiple personal and professional contexts were indeed brought together through interaction on Facebook. However, employing the notion of collapsed contexts became problematic for the reasons discussed above. Indeed, boundaries between professional and personal contexts were blurred, but not completely dismantled, and respondents retained a strong distinction between online and offline. Rather, instead of a collapsing of contexts, brought about by the environment of Facebook, the data suggested a manipulation of contexts on the part of Facebook users. In the examples discussed in Chapter 5.2 contexts were foregrounded, backgrounded, essentialised and dismissed by Facebook users in order to construct an (imagined) audience, which fit in with the desired image of Facebook. Within these examples there were shown to be many different ways of representing colleagues and Facebook.

The data suggested a tension arising from these divergent interpretations and the reciprocal nature of Facebook friendships, something that has been largely ignored in past models of collapsed or conflicting contexts, where contacts from a context could either be included or excluded by Facebook users. These past approaches almost imagine a Facebook relationship that is unilaterally constructed by the user. As this study has demonstrated, friendships are co-constructed by the user and the potential friend. Within Chapter 5.3, participants became uncomfortable where Facebook requests challenged their interpretations of context: interpretations concerning the nature of the friendship; whether friendship existed at all; whether it was an appropriate relationship for Facebook.

Departing from notions of collapsed contexts disrupts not only the question of what happens to multiple contexts – whether they stay intact or become collapsed – but also the fundamental source of the tension which occurs. Within the theory of collapsed contexts, Facebook mandates that all contacts are put together to form one audience. The supposed tension arises here from the very nature of the contacts and the contexts that they originate from. This conflict of the collapsed contexts are inevitable. On the other hand, considering contested contexts, contestation arises from inconsistencies in its multiplicities of connotations and meanings. Immediately there is a shift in the source of the tension. It no longer comes from the existence of professional contacts in one’s Facebook friends list, but from the expectations that this contact brings with them; the negotiation, or failure in negotiation, of a reciprocal Facebook friendship.

6.3 Reflections and avenues for further research
Despite attempts to shape a sound research design, I recognise several limitations within this study which could beneficially be examined in further research. One of the major limitations for any study is the extent to which it can be generalised to a population outside of its sample. Although steps were taken to diversify the sample through the use
of online notice boards and snowball sampling, the ultimate sample used in this research was skewed in several ways.

The research participants skewed heavily towards young, highly educated women. Out of the 230 survey responses, 179 identified themselves as female, 48 as male, and 3 as other. This continued with the interviews, with 7 females and 2 males. Similarly, 60% of respondents were aged below 25 years, 68% were students, and 87% had completed at least some university study. This decreases the ability to generalise the findings of the study to populations outside of the participants, to Facebook users more broadly. It would be worthwhile to investigate these issues within a broader sample.

One of the surprising, and slightly puzzling, findings to come out of this study was the relative lack of participants who claimed to post to Facebook regularly. In this study, 52% of respondents reported posting to Facebook less than once a month. This raised questions about whether Facebook actually possessed the kind of cultural significance that it has been claimed to have (Acquisti & Gross, 2006; boyd, 2007; Livingstone & Brake, 2010), or whether the choice of a different network may have yielded a more active group of participants. Both of these questions could be pursued in further research. It is also possible, and suggested in this research, that the infrequency of posting may in itself be a way of navigating the Facebook experience. This could have better been evaluated with a survey question asking respondents how much time they spent on Facebook rather than just how often they posted or by including Facebook posts as a key data source to avoid some of the potential problems of self-reported data.

There is also a risk with any study that relies on self-reporting that participants can distort accounts of their behaviour. The analysis within this research draws upon Facebook users’ behaviours to make connections between audiences, content and communication. Given the limited scope and resources of this project, I only have access to data regarding what participants say they do. The behaviours that they report may be different from their actual behaviours.

However, as I described early in this thesis, the current research focused more on the meanings that users ascribe to the platform, potentially more so than features of the platform itself or users actual behaviours. Self-reporting is effective for providing important insights into what participants think and how they feel about their own behaviours.

Lastly, this research was limited by the scope of investigation. The study was launched with a particular focus on the boundary between professional and non-professional domains, and it remained anchored to this boundary at the expense of other boundaries and audiences, which may have been of interest. One might ask, for instance, how Facebook users treat family within the site. Further research could investigate whether these connections to family and friends show more or less destabilisation than professional ones.

The discussion of potentially contested contexts earlier in this chapter suggested a subtle shift in the way that context can be conceptualised within Facebook. This is perhaps where the contribution of this research lies; not in a radically new understanding of communication on Facebook, but in the recognition of the tension between users’
experiences and existing ways of thinking about the technology. Online technologies such as Facebook are constantly evolving, and are steadily becoming the medium for larger portions of our communication. It is a communication technology which demands our continued research. Facebook is a platform which inhabits many different time-space zones. This study has only explored the tip of these issues. Further research is needed, research that focusses not on Facebook as a collapsed environment which enforces certain means of communication, but as a destabilising and transformative time-space environment which users traverse as they interpret and navigate their interactions with one another. Friends may be friends, but in our world of Facebook what this means is evolving with every status update.
References


References


Appendices

Appendix 1: Online survey

This is a plain text version of the survey questions in this research. Blue text given in parentheses represents the Likert Scale style answer options that respondents have available in the SurveyMonkly version of the survey.

The aim of this research is to further our understanding about how people construct their identity using social media. You have been asked to participate in this project by completing the survey below because you are a user of Facebook. It is estimated that this will take you approximately 20 minutes.

Questions about the completion of this survey may be directed to Lesley Champion (l.champion@student.unimelb.edu.au)

1. I consent to participating in responding to the survey □ yes □ no

(please tick)

2. What is your age?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your occupation?
5. What is the highest level of education you completed?
6. How many friends do you have on Facebook?

7. To what extent do you agree with each of these statements in relation to your life offline? (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree)
   a. The roles I have at my place of employment are different to the roles that I have outside of work
   b. Different groups of people in my life know different things about me
   c. It is important to keep track of and maintain who knows what about me
   d. Offline, my work and social circles overlap
   e. In an offline setting, I try to keep my different roles separate
   f. I find this hard to achieve

8. To what extent do you agree with each of these statements in relation to the way you use Facebook (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree)
   a. I think that Facebook provides a good space to express myself
   b. I think my Facebook profile and wall is an accurate representation of me
   c. I believe that an individual’s personal and professional identities should be kept separate on social media
   d. When using Facebook, I try to keep my different personal and professional roles separate
   e. I find this difficult to achieve
   f. I am often surprised by who responds to what I post
g. My Facebook profile would make a good impression to employers or potential employers
h. This is important to me

9. How often do you post status updates to Facebook?
   a. Less than once a month
   b. Once or twice a month
   c. Once a week
   d. Several times a week
   e. Daily

10. How often do you use Facebook to perform each of these activities? (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often)
    a. Posting status updates
    b. Posting photos
    c. Tagging other people in your posts
    d. Tagging other people in your photos
    e. Reading your news feed
    f. Reading posts on your wall
    g. Reading posts on other peoples’ walls
    h. Posting on other peoples’ walls
    i. Commenting on other peoples’ posts
    j. Liking other peoples’ posts
    k. Sharing other peoples’ posts
    l. Posting your own links to external content, e.g. YouTube videos, articles, etc.
    m. Reading private messages sent to you by others
    n. Sending private messages to others
    o. Adding or removing friends
    p. Editing your profile

11. Thinking about your Facebook friends: (No Yes)
    a. Do you accept work colleagues as Facebook friends?
       1. Why?
    b. Are you a friend of your boss on Facebook?
       1. Why?

12. How often do you use Facebook to post (through status updates or commenting) content about each of the following topics? (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often)
    a. Entertainment
    b. Current affairs
    c. Personal update
    d. Family related content
    e. Work related content
    f. Upcoming events
       1. What influences what you will not say on Facebook?

13. Thinking about the audience of your posts: (No Yes)
    a. Do you maintain multiple social media accounts?
Appendix

b. Are you aware of the feature on Facebook which allows you to customise the audience of each post?
c. Do you use the feature on Facebook which allows you to customise the audience of each post?
d. Do you use the list feature which allows you to put contacts into different lists?
e. Does your place of employment have any guidelines for conduct on social media?

14. When using Facebook, how important are these actions to you? (Not at all important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Important, Very Important)
   a. Keeping up with friends
   b. Expressing yourself
   c. Making a good impression
   d. Letting friends know what you’re doing
   e. Documenting memories
   f. Completing the ‘About me’ section in your Facebook profile
   g. Posting regular status updates and comments

15. Which of these devices do you use to access Facebook? (Check all that apply)
   a. Computer
   b. Tablet
   c. Mobile phone
   d. Smart watch

Are you interested in participating in a follow-up interview to assist in this research? if you agree, you will be asked to participate in an interview (either audio-Visually recorded using Skype or audio recorded in person) and to allow the researchers to collect your Facebook posts for analysis. It is estimated that the interview would take between 30 and 60 minutes. Please provide your email address below if you agree to an interview and to allowing the researchers to collect and analyze your Facebook posts.

I consent to participate in an interview □ yes □ no

I consent to allow the researchers to collect and analyze my posts on Facebook □ yes □ no

My email address is: …………………………………………………………………………

□ yes □ no (please tick)
Appendix 2: Interview questions

1. What is your Facebook profile like?
2. How would you describe your audience on Facebook?
3. How would you like people to see you on Facebook?
4. Would you say that you have a wide range of Facebook friends?
5. What sort of groups of people are on there?
6. Do you think that Facebook is a good real-time account of your life?
7. Are you comfortable with your colleagues seeing your Facebook posts?
8. When does a colleague become a friend?
9. Are you comfortable with your boss seeing your Facebook posts? Is this a different answer? Why?
10. Do the different people you have on Facebook change the way you want to present yourself? Do you think about the audience when you post?
11. Do you separate these different audiences on Facebook, or is your friends list one big group? Why?
12. In a professional context, have you ever regretted something you’ve said on Facebook?
13. How do you make sure you don’t say the wrong thing?
14. How do you decide who to have as a friend? What is a Facebook friend?
15. What is the relationship between online and offline behaviour? To what extent do you think Facebook behaviour has an effect offline? Do you think that online and offline behaviour is different?
16. Do you think social networking sites such as Facebook blur the boundaries between our personal and professional lives?
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Title:
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