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# THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS TO FOSTER CONNECTIONS, COLLABORATION, AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING AMONG GEOGRAPHICALLY DISPERSED TEAMS

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THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS TO FOSTER CONNECTIONS,  
COLLABORATION, AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING AMONG  
GEOGRAPHICALLY DISPERSED TEAMS

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ABSTRACT

The Use of Social Media Within Organizations to Foster Connections, Collaboration, and Knowledge Sharing Among Geographically Dispersed Teams.

By

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DePaul University, 2015

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The study explores how internal social media platforms can help geographically dispersed colleagues become more connected, more collaborative, and more willing to share information. The study findings are based on the analysis of three social media/social networking community “teamsites” available online to three different groups within a global law firm: a Real Estate practice, a women’s affinity group, and a marketing department, in addition to interviews with six participants of such teamsites. Following an interpretive paradigm defined by Sarah Tracy (2013), this study considers Electronic Propinquity Theory, Media Richness Theory, and Social Information Processing Theory by evaluating social media as a communication medium for propinquity and self-disclosure. The findings demonstrate a correlation between heightened propinquity, self-disclosure, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among geographically dispersed teams using a shared teamsite platform.

*Keywords: social media; intra-organizational communication; globalization; collaboration; email; propinquity; computer-mediated communication.*

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In 2008, Pitney-Bowes successfully leveraged social media as an online digital community within the organization to solicit millions of dollars' worth of ideas from its employees. This \$5.4 billion technology services provider instituted a campaign to foster a culture of innovation among its 30,000 employees. Called "IdeaNet," the program encouraged employees to brainstorm ideas and solutions to a series of business challenges over social media. In its first two years, employees posted almost 3,000 ideas to 52 challenges, with 874 of those ideas adopted by the company. Two years later, 35 percent of employees with access to the intranet had participated (Dahl et al., 2011). The program took deliberate steps to implement a cultural change; it was led by the top executives; it involved senior and middle management to implement submitted ideas; it interviewed employees; it demonstrated quick wins; and it established an online platform for participants to share successes, results, ideas, and announcements. Its outcomes are credited with generating \$10 million in revenue, saving the company \$320,000, and increasing customer satisfaction scores by 10 percent. The IdeaNet community continues to contribute to the CEO's goal of improving employee engagement and promoting a culture of innovation. Given such results, why aren't more organizations using social media to foster more collaboration and exchange of information from their employees within organizations?

About 70-80 percent of organizations worldwide use social media to communicate with consumers, clients, and contacts (Diercksen et al., 2013; Chui et al., 2013). However, such prevalence has not extended within organizations, where only 25 percent of companies have incorporated social media into daily work flow because few organizations have determined how to apply social media in ways that could have a measurable influence on business (Chui et al.,

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2013). Much research has been done on the role of social media for external purposes, but not enough is known on the potential for using social media internally.

This thesis will explore the ways in which an internal social media platform can help geographically dispersed colleagues become more connected, more collaborative, and more willing to share information. It will examine multiple types of content, particularly self-disclosure, used on three social media/social networking community “teamsites” (henceforth referred to as social media) available online to three different groups within a global law firm: a Real Estate practice, a women’s affinity group, and a marketing department.

The primary goal of this study is to examine how social media used within organizations affects communicative behavior (e.g., amount and types of communication) and collaboration among geographically dispersed colleagues, particularly self-disclosure as a type of communication posted on social media.

Following an interpretive paradigm defined by Sarah Tracy (2013), findings of this study pertain to most modern organizations, as the future of business will be found in social media as a way to increase collaboration and foster innovation in increasingly global teams. The potential implications for social media are just beginning to be explored in the context of team collaboration. This study will build upon the knowledge of computer-mediated communication (CMC) by examining social media as another option for CMC. This study will also add to the understanding of the effects of social media on the communication, collaboration, and culture of organizations. Finally, it will add to the understanding of electronic propinquity theory (EPT), media richness theory, and social information processing (SIP) theory by evaluating social media as a communication medium for propinquity and self-disclosure.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Globalization and technology have changed the workplace landscape by dispersing organizational members and increasing the need for more computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Lauring, 2011; Tokunaga, 2009; Murphy, 2002). As colleagues participate from more diverse regions, they bring a greater range of cultural backgrounds. Such differences offer work teams the potential for greater creativity and innovation. At the same time, members are faced with a variety of challenges, including cultural stereotypes and mistrust of each other, which CMC users typically experience more than face-to-face (FtF) communicators do (Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Pena et al., 2007; Lauring, 2011). Although greater degrees of honesty can be found in anonymous online interactions (Baym, 2010), organizational CMC does not typically permit anonymity, but rather, identifies participants with name, title, and often a photo. By specifying participants, organizational CMC carries potential repercussions to one's career and professional standing beyond the virtual community. A lack of shared social context among global virtual teams affects members' ability to handle tasks (Jarvenpaa & Lardner, 1998; Sarker et al., 2011). Overcoming distrust by fostering stronger relationships between colleagues is important for global organizations because a united community is crucial to a remote team's success (Malik, 2012).

Technology provides a range of CMC options for remote employees to collaborate, each with different strengths and benefits. Email remains a predominant way that organizations provide asynchronous communication for recipients to conduct simple exchanges. Although email allows multiple participants, it can limit the interactivity between many participants that can lead to broader connectedness and collaboration. Social media expands interactivity from a few to hundreds of participants, allowing many more the opportunity to express themselves. As a

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result, social media is emerging as a more interactive, dynamic approach between many peers, across levels, and across geographies for information sharing (Sinha et al., 2012; Barker, 2008; Walaski, 2013; Diercksen et al., 2013). Social media has the potential to help remote colleagues forge stronger relationships, communicate better, and collaborate more by allowing dispersed teams to overcome distrust and to connect, particularly through self-disclosure (Ess & Sudweeks, 2006; Yum & Hara, 2006; Craig & Wright, 2012). In this thesis, I will explore how an online social networking community can help geographically dispersed colleagues to become more connected and collaborative.

The following pages will provide an overview of how globalization and technology have changed the traditional workplace, considering electronic propinquity theory (EPT), media richness theory, and social information processing (SIP) theory. It will also review how email compares to social media for intra-organizational communication and the effect of self-disclosure on computer mediated communication (CMC).

## **Globalization and Technologies**

Globalization and technology have changed the traditional workplace. Globalization has created an unending workday, as a global business is always operating somewhere in the world (Murphy, 2002). Globalization has required more remote collaboration as organizations are more geographically dispersed (Lauring, 2011; Tokunaga, 2009; Murphy, 2002). Additionally, technology has brought the intrusion of work into all areas of life as technologies monitor and engage employees (Ng, 2013) and allow for telecommuting, further dispersing colleagues located in the same city. Spatial boundaries therefore have shifted, as geographical location, such as one's office, no longer defines the boundaries of an organization (Murphy, 2002). Teams have become splintered as they are separated by geographic distance, time zones, and cultural

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differences, further increasing the virtual nature of each team (Cho & Lee, 2008). Increasingly, the office as a physical place has been replaced with a computer screen and online platforms.

Although physically separated, today's employees want to be connected (Ng, 2013) because establishing the sense of community is critical to the success of dispersed teams (Malik, 2012) and "cultural adaptation, communication quality, and trust have positive effects on the performance of virtual teams" (Chang et al., 2011, p. 305). Connection is increasingly important as teams are spread apart.

But connectivity is more difficult for geographically dispersed teams. Given the limited number of cues available to interpret others' meanings over CMC, situational factors and stereotypes have been found to have greater influence online than offline (Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Pena et al., 2007; Luring, 2011). Studies have found that participants bring offline cultural differences to the virtual boardroom (Barnett & Sung, 2006; Ess & Sudweeks, 2006; Tan, 1998; Cho & Lee, 2008; Pena et al., 2007; Wurtz, 2006) that can pose challenges to virtual communication. Individualism, collectivism, high- or low-context, and uncertainty avoidance affect how different cultures approach communication over the Internet (Barnett and Sung, 2006; Ess & Sudweeks, 2006; Tan, 1998; Wurtz, 2006). For example, such differences are demonstrated with high-context cultures being more likely to use imagery and less text than low-context cultures on websites (Ess & Sudweeks, 2006; Wurtz, 2006). When found in individuals, these cultural traits can affect what participants convey and how they interpret others' comments shared in CMC. Someone from an individualist culture may value personal goals and interests above group interests, while someone from a collectivist culture may value the extended organization more highly (Luring, 2011). Therefore, intercultural communication is hindered when culturally specific cues are not recognized because individuals are using values and norms



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of one culture that are not recognized by another (Lauring, 2011). Cultural and social differences can interfere with a virtual team's ability to overcome geographic and time barriers to fully relate online.

### **Theoretical Application**

Electronic Propinquity Theory (EPT), Media Richness Theory, and Social Information Processing Theory (SIP) help us better understand how geographically dispersed colleagues use CMC to become more connected. EPT considers how people may experience greater social connectivity via CMC, while SIP attempts to explain how that might happen with self-disclosure and other socio-emotional and identity cues, and Media Richness compares different types of CMC. These theories and their empirical research findings suggest that social media can increase the feeling of connectivity between members of an organization separated by geographical distance.

**Electronic Propinquity Theory.** Technology has the potential to resolve geographic fragmentation between teams. In 1978, Korzenny introduced electronic propinquity theory (EPT), "as a continuum of the subjective perception an individual holds that he or she is functionally, if not physically, close to someone else" (Walther & Bazarova, 2008, p. 624). Associated with satisfaction, communication effectiveness, and task accomplishment, the theory asserts that less propinquity is felt from simpler information, but more is felt among participants with stronger communication skills, fewer rules, or fewer perceived choices for communicating. To compensate for a loss of physical closeness, technology is used to develop propinquity, or "the psychological feeling of nearness in organizational contexts" (Walther & Bazarova, 2008, p. 624). The Internet offers a context and channel for people to meet virtually, initiate meaningful conversations, and build relationships, similar to face-to-face (FtF) interactions (Walther &

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Burgoon, 1992). Text messaging improves social connectedness and team attitude with more communication (Lam, 2012), while CMC encourages better decisions, broader thinking, and creativity (Tan, 1998). If used correctly, CMC can help teams overcome physical distance and take full advantage of the benefits of different cultures and perspectives.

**Media Richness Theory.** Daft and Lengel's (1984) media richness theory assumes that rich media are equally higher in all of their attributes: media bandwidth or feedback speed, mutual directionality or the ability to convey more than one cue, natural language, and personalization or the ability to convey feelings (Walther & Bazarova, 2008; Baym, 2010). Used to describe a communication medium by its ability to reproduce information – or a medium's ability to deliver and reproduce information based on feedback, multiple cues, and other factors – media richness theory compares the available cues and information provided in various communication platforms such as phone calls, video conferencing, and email (Daft & Lengel, 1984). Since email cannot reproduce nonverbal gestures, it is a less rich communication medium than video conferencing, which allows participants to view and use gestures. According to media richness theory, the more ambiguous a task, the richer the media that suits the task or message. As team collaboration can be ambiguous, a richer medium such as social media can be more effective than email, according to this theory. While both are digital, social media allows for more feedback cues and “likes” from a greater range of participants.

In contrast, EPT considers the skills of the communicator as well as dimensions of the tool. For example, lean media such as email can be used effectively by co-workers with strong communication skills. In a study measuring the validity of EPT theory, Walther and Bazarova (2008) tested the inter-group decision making abilities of 211 undergraduates through teams using FtF, video conferencing, audio conferencing, and text-based chat mediums. They found

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that when all team members used the same medium, whether FtF or texting, propinquity ratings obtained were the same. But for team members using a mix of lean and rich media, such as video conferencing and email, propinquity of technology-mediated groups was lower than that of face-to-face groups. Therefore, the richness of the media mattered less if everyone was using the same tool. Similarly, in another study of 136 participants from 14 countries, media richness was found to have no effect for an initial short meeting of a group that subsequently worked together via asynchronous text communication (Han et al., 2011). Further, other research suggests that a leaner medium outperforms a richer one for better decision quality because it allows groups to better focus on their task (Burke & Chidambaram, 1999; Walther, 1996). The richness of the tool is therefore only one aspect of how effective a communications medium can be. How users apply the functionality of a tool also affects its effectiveness. For example, social media and email both allow for feedback, but the former is made richer by participants' use of greater feedback and approval cues, such as "likes."

**Social Information Processing Theory.** Social information processing (SIP) theory argues that CMC users may imbue text with socio-emotional and identity cues in order to make CMC as effective as FtF over time (Walther, 1992, 2006). SIP theory does not take communication skills into account, but rather, the depth of self-disclosure in online communication and the increased numbers of CMC exchanges (Attrill, 2012). SIP says that because online media lacks the same cues as FtF, participants use more self-disclosure (or socio-emotional and identity cues) to obtain closeness (Attrill, 2012). Walther (1996, 2007) even found that hyperpersonal CMC – which can be more socially satisfying due to more intimacy from sharing more personal information, idealizing perceptions of a co-communicator, optimizing

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self-presentation, and using more editable information – can allow for text-based CMC to exceed FtF interaction.

### **Social Media Versus Email**

Email remains the predominant way that organizations provide one-directional announcements or recipients conduct simple exchanges, but email limits the interactivity between large numbers of participants that can lead to broader connectedness and collaboration. And when recipients do respond to email, that can trigger an avalanche of email to manage. Email chains can splinter into multiple threads as multiple participants respond and add or remove other participants. By omitting some participants, email can restrict accessibility of information to everyone in a group.

In contrast, social media consolidates all responses in one central location for recipients to view when preferable to them. By not restricting access to those on the email recipient list, social media is emerging as a more interactive, dynamic approach for information sharing between peers, across levels, and across geography (Maciejewski, 2011; Park et al., 2012). Social media can help remote team members forge stronger relationships and communicate more (Huffaker, 2010; Riedl et al., 2013; Walther & Bazarova, 2008; Dierksen et al., 2003). Social media may also offer another way for diverse teams to overcome differences of function, age, race, and education to forge better relationships that lead to better communication and collaboration (Maciejewski, 2011; Huffaker, 2010). Considering Media Richness Theory, social media is richer than email because social media allows more interactivity, information archiving, and a greater sense of community than email.

As an alternative to email, social media fosters more interaction, information sharing and idea formulation (Barker, 2008). It also allows users greater autonomy to “pull” the information

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they want to read, rather than forcing them to passively receive what is “pushed” at them through email (Barker, 2008). An organization that pushes email news to its employees reflects a more controlling hierarchical culture, while an organization that allows information to be voluntarily selected and exchanged reflects a more flat or horizontal culture. Email use can be considered more hierarchical because even the “reply” function can be disabled, while social media has the potential to flatten the hierarchy and power structure to allow for participants at all positions to interact. Social media use requires a culture willing to share information across hierarchical levels (Chui et al., 2013), even if those higher in the pecking order use it to initiate comments more often than non-managerial employees, as was the case with microblogging used as a communications tool in an multinational organization (Maciejewski, 2011).

Emergency responders are also grappling with passive (email) versus active (social media) communications for disseminating emergency response information, struggling with whether to control the message (with email) or encourage real-time awareness to quickly deploy resources (with social media), although the latter allows for errors to be conveyed as a result of allowing more participants access to the platform (Walaski, 2013). Email allows for greater control of the message, while social media allows others to influence it. This concern is similar for business leaders deciding whether to share the communications microphone with employees.

Social media introduces a more interactive dynamic between peers, across levels, and across geographies. As noted when Sun Microsystems leveraged social media sites to boost innovation among its employees: “In the Participation Age, networks connect not only computers, but also the people behind them, and when people are connected, they share, they interact, and they solve problems” (Barker, 2008, pg. 7). Social media can forge strong bonds between co-workers by providing them with the ability to better understand each other

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(Diercksen et al., 2013). As social creatures, human beings like to connect with each other, and giving employees a way to satisfy this need makes them more creative and productive (Walaski, 2013). Social media allows for greater sharing, participation, and interaction among rank-and-file employees.

Executives have hesitated to allow social media's use internally due to intimidation (Chui et al., 2013), their inability to control its message (Dahl et al., 2011; Walaski, 2013), its "frivolous" distractions and effect on productivity (Quish, 2010; Diercksen et al., 2013), its privacy and security concerns (Quish, 2010; Walaski, 2013), and the potentially inaccurate messaging representing the company (Walaski, 2013). Organizations also do not seem to know how to use social media for business. But the business world has persevered with using social media for engaging with external audiences (Diercksen et al., 2013; Walaski, 2013), strengthening networks and external relationships (Barker, 2008; Quish, 2010; Dahl et al., 2011; Sinha et al., 2012; Houser et al., 2012; Zielinski, 2012; Ng, 2013; Diercksen et al., 2013), boosting innovation (Barker, 2008; Quish, 2010; Dahl et al., 2011; Diercksen et al., 2013; Ng, 2013), recruiting new employees (Zielinski, 2012; Diercksen et al., 2013), staying current with market trends (Diercksen et al., 2013), and cost-effective learning (Zielinski, 2012). Extensive research has been conducted on the role of social media for external purposes, but less is known on the implications of using social media within organizations.

## **Connecting Through Self-Disclosure**

As organizations seek ways to unite dispersed teams, one type of communication behavior is found to help enhance virtual relationships and bridge distances imposed by geography and cultural differences: self-disclosure (Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Ess & Sudweeks, 2006; Yum & Hara, 2006; Craig & Wright, 2012; Tokunaga, 2009; Attrill, 2012). Self-disclosure

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is credited with CMC's preferred relational qualities, and those who engaged in more CMC self-disclosure of personal information were more likely to enjoy personal relationships (Yum & Hara, 2006). Another study found that CMC users did more self-disclosing than unmediated (FtF) participants did, leading to more intimate exchanges and greater relational confidence (Tidwell & Walther, 2002), relationship development and closeness (Tokunaga, 2009). Further, relational closeness and interdependence are "contingent on the range and depth of self-disclosures exchanged" (Tokunaga, 2009, pg. 135). Essentially, these studies suggest that more self-disclosure leads to closer relationships. Interestingly, the types of disclosures matter, as perceptions of symmetry, attitude similarity, and social attraction were found to inspire greater attraction and group cohesion (Pena et al., 2007; Craig & Wright, 2012). Self-disclosure in the workplace may be one way for colleagues to get to know one another, overcome stereotypes, identify cultural differences, and reduce uncertainty about each other. This may lead to even greater self-disclosure, communication, and collaboration. But how does self-disclosure apply to social media?

Social media is outpacing other forms of CMC (such as blogs, multimedia sharing, microblogs like Twitter, and bulletin boards) in terms of popularity (Sinha et al., 2012). By exchanging social information about their personal views and personalities on social media, colleagues may grow closer (Yum & Hara, 2006). To help virtual teams overcome stereotypes, cultural differences, and uncertainty, social media may be the key to encouraging self-disclosure and more open communication. Defined as websites that "promote building relationships among people with similar interests and activities," (Walaski, 2013, pg. 41), social media already encourages self-disclosure. Thus, the social and interactive nature of social media may be the key to allowing dispersed colleagues to develop relationships that allow virtual teams, relationships,

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and collaboration to flourish. But the value of social media collaboration has not yet been fully realized. More needs to be done to understand this virtual community.

This study explores whether applying self-disclosure on an internal social media platform can help geographically dispersed colleagues to become more connected, more collaborative, and more willing to share information. Applying electronic propinquity theory (EPT), social information processing (SIP) theory, and an interpretive methodology, this study asks:

1. How does social media affect communication and collaboration among geographically dispersed colleagues?
2. How does self-disclosure as a communication style influence the use of social media?
3. How does social media usage compare to email communication within organizations?



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Participants**

Data for this project was gathered from three “teamsites” available to three different groups within a global law firm: a Real Estate practice, a women’s affinity group, and a marketing department, involving the lawyers and staff who use these internal social media platforms for their groups. Data was also collected by interviewing six teamsite participants: two from each site, including three lawyers and three staff members.

This business law firm has more than 4,200 lawyers in more than 30 countries around the world. It was formed through a three-way merger in 2005 and has grown by merging with other firms or acquiring other groups since then. It serves large, global corporations with key practices of corporate, litigation, tax, real estate, intellectual property and technology (IPT) and government affairs. It is known for its geographical breadth. While being large has differentiated it in the marketplace, size has also made it more difficult for lawyers to know each other and the capabilities of other lawyers in the firm. Collaboration is critical to the business.

Law is a relationship-driven industry. Work is often awarded to those known and trusted. With so many lawyers in the firm, getting to know individual members well enough to confidently refer a prize client to them is a challenge. Efforts are being made within the firm to overcome this obstacle and help lawyers become more familiar with each other’s niche practices and skills by fostering diverse connections across races, regions, levels, and functions. Teamsites are a way to increase such communication and collaboration.

Law firm culture is much more hierarchical than many other organizational cultures. Here, committees, leadership roles, and one’s designated place in the pecking order heavily

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influences the merit of one's ideas, work, and willingness of others to work with you. Law firm culture emphasizes inflated egos, need for prestige, and an emphasis on one's reputation. In addition, time limitations are a real concern for lawyers; meeting the billable hour quota will affect a lawyer's annual compensation. These factors may be less relevant at other types of organizations, which may have more social media participation. With its emphasis on hierarchy, reputation, and time, law firms are a difficult place for social media, with its more democratic and unfocused approach, to take root.

My role in the firm is as Senior Manager of Internal Communications within the marketing department. I am a member of each of the teamsites mentioned above and have posted to each of them, which affords me a personal experience of using the resource that will add to my understanding of their effectiveness and use. This "complete participant" role, as described by Sarah Tracy (2013), affords me greater access to a range of data; it encourages study participants to offer more candor and openness with me; and it allows me to consider the culture's background more fully and deeply. Tracy also notes that disadvantages of such a role include ethics and deception, as participants may be unaware that a researcher is in their midst, and thus may "reveal sensitive information they would not purposefully volunteer for a published report" (Tracy, 2013, p. 107), and she advises weighing whether such disadvantages outweigh the advantages of discovering critical data that might otherwise not be heard. This approach is justified because internal communications would be difficult to access by its nature of being available within an organization; it is not public data. Therefore, to explore ways that social media can influence teams, insider access is needed.

These teamsites are not accessible to anyone outside the firm and are available only on the firm's intranet (internal) website. Within the firm, one must be an invited member of the

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teamsite to be able to view or receive its activity. Once accessed, teamsites function similarly to Facebook, with members posting microblog entries that others may comment on or “like.”

Members can view content on the intranet site or in a daily email digest of all activity the site has had in the past day. Teamsites differ from Facebook and Twitter in a very significant way:

Teamsites have the same members for everyone in that group, unlike Facebook, which allows each participant to have a different network based on individual connections selected. On Facebook, no two personal networks are the same, but on a teamsite, all members receive the same feed and see the same activity as others on that team because the network of participants is the same for each teamsite. This critical difference allows a teamsite member to see posts from other members they wouldn’t otherwise have connected to; this is how new offline connections are being made.

Each teamsite is different from another. Thinking of each of these internal social media sites as “virtual water coolers” or meeting rooms, is helpful to understanding how each of these rooms generates a different personality in its environment. Each site has differing degrees of formality and social interaction, as demonstrated with the following analysis. Such differences impact the amount of self-disclosure, engagement, and collaboration revealed on each site.

Therefore, it is helpful to begin with an overview of the personality of each site as demonstrated by its content and engagement.

**Marketing Teamsite.** For the Marketing Teamsite, its 70 members are spread out across 20 offices around the United States. The complete team has met in person only once every eight years. While in the same department, roles vary greatly from graphic design to public relations to business development. Therefore, while team members work together on cross-functional

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projects, there is less overlap of routine tasks. The informal tone of this forum mixes personal and professional topics.

**LAW Connect.** On the LAW Connect site, the emphasis is on recognizing and celebrating the achievements of the firm's women lawyers. Its members include all of the women lawyers across all practices throughout the United States, resulting in more than 430 members. This group has less in common about the work they do than about their shared experience as female lawyers trying to advance their careers. It follows that this site is characterized by sharing and celebrating the achievements of fellow women lawyers, as this is an affinity site for female lawyers.

**RE Live.** All of the 217 members of this site belong to the same practice group of Real Estate. However, the group includes 23 sub-groups, from Clean Tech to Retail Leasing, and many of its members do not know each other, as they are also dispersed geographically across the US. The content of this site is primarily about work and work-related topics, with an occasional personal post. It is primarily professional in nature.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

This study explores how an internal social media platform can help geographically dispersed colleagues to become more connected, more collaborative, or more willing to share information. First, I used content analysis to examine a variety of types of collaborative behavior in all three teamsites and compare the culture of each, particularly noting uses of self-disclosure. Second, I measured engagement levels to identify the success of each site. Third, I interviewed six participants to discuss their experiences and attitudes about the teamsites. Each of these approaches is further explained below.

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**Content analysis.** I coded and analyzed six months of postings and comments (from April-September, 2014), totaling about 100 pages of printed pages, from three social media websites, or “teamsites,” of three sub-groups within one organization: “RE Live” of the Real Estate practice group, “LAW Connect” of the Leadership Alliance for Women (LAW) affinity group for women lawyers, and the “Marketing Teamsite” of the marketing department.

I then categorized each post as those reporting about work, reporting about articles or other news made outside of the office, reporting about personnel, sharing personal self-disclosures, or posing questions to the group. I counted and determined the percentage of each type of post to help define the personality of each of the three teamsites under analysis and how they compared to one another. To interpret the data, I reviewed the total amounts of types of posts and engagement, as defined below. I compared these numbers to the language and style used as well as the messages within each post to confirm the personality, function, and outcomes of each site. I extracted examples of posts that best demonstrated the type of connectivity, collaboration, self-disclosure, and transition from email demonstrated. I drew results by comparing the amount of self-disclosure made on each site to the level of engagement and collaboration demonstrated by participants.

**Engagement analysis.** One way to approach the interactivity and communication levels within each site is by evaluating the levels of engagement that other site members give to it. To measure engagement levels, I tallied the number of “likes” and comments made to posts on each of the teamsites, allowing for another point of comparison between sites and types of posts. As questions posed and answered are another type of engagement, I also counted and compared those. I determined the top 30, top 10 most-engaged-with posts. These numbers further helped to identify the personality and success of each site, as well as the most successful types of posts

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through measuring engagement, connectivity, and collaboration fostered between participants on the site.

**Interviews.** I interviewed participants to gain greater depth of understanding about their experiences using the teamsites. I interviewed six participants, about 1% of the 600 teamsite members, (two from each teamsite, selected from a cross-section of levels and regions) in 30-minute segments to engage in a dialog about their experiences and attitudes about the resource. I used their answers to validate and augment my interpretation of the teamsite data. Interviewees include two from each of the three sites, varying from entry-level staff members to partners in six different offices across the US. They included entry-level and senior staff members from Boston, New York, and Chicago and junior and senior lawyers from Los Angeles, Miami, and Washington, DC. Ages of participants ranged from early 20s to 60s. Participants included four women and two men. For interview questions, see appendix 1.

## Chapter 4: Results

Content analysis of the teamsites shows how members from the three different teamsites use their particular site to communicate differently and similarly. Results will be presented on connectivity (facilitating new connections between people), collaboration (facilitating problem solving by multiple participants), sharing personal information (self-disclosures) about self and other, engagement, replacing email, and reporting new information not previously shared via email.

### **Increased Connectivity (Facilitating New Connections Between People)**

The RE Live site is used more predominantly for work issues and posing questions. The following example initiates a helpful answer and new connections. Note the direct style of communication that avoids wasting any time, which is a valuable commodity for these lawyers. Once the answer is provided, no other comments are added, which is typical of the terseness of most RE Live exchanges.

INITIAL POST:

“Do we have anyone that is fairly familiar with common terms of letters of credit used in connection with office leases as security? I am reviewing one and have a few questions. If you do, could you please contact me?”

REPOSE:

“Give me a call at your convenience.”

LAW Connect is also used to promote communication and networking beyond the site, shown in the following example. Note the announcement-style approach that invites (and receives) no interaction.

INITIAL POST:

“Dear Women Lawyers,  
“Please join one or more of our upcoming LAW Telepresence get-togethers. There is no preparation needed. The goal is to get to know each other better, build our internal networks and help each other grow our practices. Everyone from summer #associates on

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up to firm leaders have participated and are welcome. See the details below if you have not participated before.

“Current available dates are listed below. To attend, email [NAME] and indicate which date(s) work for you. You are welcome to attend more than one; just be sure to include the dates you want to participate.

“Upcoming Dates:

“Wednesday, August 13, 2014 9 am Pacific / noon Eastern

“Wednesday, August 20, 2014 9 am Pacific / noon Eastern

“Wednesday, September 17, 2014 9 am Pacific / noon Eastern

“Tuesday, September 30, 2014 9 am Pacific / noon Eastern

“I hope to see you on one of the LAW Telepresence events in August or September. Feel free to forward this to others who may be interested.”

RESPONSE:

No responses

The Marketing Teamsite takes the most collaborative approach to providing answers and connections. Even when one answer will suffice, other members chime in to validate and add to others' comments:

INITIAL POST:

“We have a proposal to the [CLIENT NAME] that needs to be translated into French. Does anyone have a translation service they can recommend?”

COMMENT 1:

“Transperfect is a great resource. Our IPT team uses them for Japanese translation.”

COMMENT 2:

“I've got a file of translators and have used TransExperts in my last three jobs—reasonably priced and terrific service.”

COMMENT 3:

“IPT uses Transperfect mostly for layout of Japanese/Korean documents in US. Our experience with their translation of legal marketing docs (like IPT News) from English to Japanese wasn't as good, so we went in-house for translation. (However, some of our lawyers have had good experiences with them on some Japanese legal docs). We have found that when possible, a bilingual paralegal in US, or someone in local country office, has worked the best.”

COMMENT 4:



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“I sent you info on some firms we’ve used in the past.”

While these examples commonly illustrate how members make new connections in all three teamsites, they also show different styles of communication demonstrated on each site. The same teamsite tool, in the same organization, is applied in three different ways: from terse replies, to announcements about offline meetings, to a rich exchange of useful information. Such differences may be explained by the different norms of each group. Baym (2010) reports that members of social network sites often feel pressured to conform to their groups’ norms and that “mediated groups develop strong communicative norms that drive behavior” (Baym, 2010, pg. 56). Because teamsite activity does not occur in a social vacuum, but rather, is driven by and influences offline behavior, participants may have less freedom to deviate from the norms of their group.

However, despite their teamsites’ different styles, nearly all of the six interviewees in this study agreed that their teamsite helped them make connections – to differing degrees. “Social media can be a big time suck,” said an associate. “LAW Connect is the most useful social media I’ve employed. It introduces you to the more senior professional women in the organization who are doing things to inspire you. That gives me something to say when reaching out to them. It opens the door to internal networking and career development. I’m slightly better connected than before [having LAW Connect]. I would feel more comfortable reaching out to partners about a client need now. It allows for a moment of connection that doesn’t seem feigned.” A partner using LAW Connect said: “I have looked up women who post something on LAW Connect to see what they do, and when I need that type of work, I will send her the work. The more you know about people, you gain insight into them. I’ll meet someone at a conference and not see them again for a year. LAW Connect keeps the relationship more relevant.”

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This trend was also found on the RE Live site. A Real Estate partner said, “People I don’t know post information. It’s helpful to see and get a feel for who they are. Once in a while, I will reach out to someone new based on a post.” The site is also helping those in smaller offices learn about and connect with lawyers in other offices. “For example: an associate in a small office works on a related area of investment trust. He reaches out on RE Live because he wants to do marketing,” said another interviewee. “It means a lot to him to have the info stream. It means a lot to associates in small offices because it makes them feel more involved. People are realizing that connecting that way with work helps them to speak intelligently about work. It’s a tool. It’s helping smaller offices feel more engaged. They have more ways to connect than through a monthly department lunch.”

The two interviewees using the Marketing Teamsite said they did not make new connections on their site, possibly because this group is already fairly small, and most members already know each other. “I haven’t made any new connections,” said one interviewee who uses this site. “But I use the site to interact with some people I don’t speak with frequently. They like seeing what we do; even though we don’t speak, they can see our [design] work.” The second interviewee who uses the Marketing Teamsite referenced such graphic designs that she sees on the teamsite and says she reviews them for ideas for her own projects. In this way, increased sharing of work examples leads to better awareness of options available, resulting in better team performance.

As these examples show, teamsites allow participants to become better connected and more willing to reach out to other colleagues based on insights gained from their posts. They may even forge new relationships that they would not have otherwise pursued, as “people communicating in different locations, relying on textual and digital cues, are more likely to form

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relationships that blur the social boundaries between groups” (Baym, 2010, p. 104). As noted above, teamsites involve and connect members of smaller offices who have fewer FtF opportunities than those in large offices. Teamsites also encourage junior lawyers to reach out to senior lawyers, thus blurring social boundaries between groups. In addition, teamsites allow participants to interact more frequently and exchange more ideas. All interviewees agree that reading teamsite posts helps members learn more about each other, thus overcoming distrust, which CMC users typically experience (Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Pena et al., 2007; Luring, 2011). By fostering stronger relationships between colleagues, teamsites assist in the success of a geographically dispersed team (Malik, 2012).

### **More Collaboration (Facilitating Problem Solving By Multiple Participants)**

Continuing the demonstration of different norms and styles shown on each of the three teamsites studied here, the Marketing Teamsite seems to offer more collaboration than new connections among members who are already connected. Members often report about new resources available. This becomes collaborative when leaders jump in with recommendations that others use the resource. For example:

#### INITIAL POST:

“I created the attached compilation of ‘value added’ resources to include in a recent pitch to a prospect seeking legal counsel in connection with tax, employment, data privacy and international expansion. It is focused on these areas, but could easily be modified/edited for any focus. I will have marketing central upload to our system as well. Wanted to share in case you could use this in future pitching efforts.”

#### RESPONSE:

7 “likes”

#### COMMENT 1:

[From the department’s leader] “This is fantastic! [NAMES] – something to consider for the sector pilots.”

#### COMMENT 2:

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“I have uploaded this document to the ‘US Value Added Services’ folder on Desksite/Proposal Generator. It is titled ‘Value Added Resources.’”

Also on the Marketing Teamsite, posing questions leads to multiple members jumping in to offer suggestions. This interaction can resemble a virtual meeting – that is spread out among five different offices. For example:

INITIAL POST:

“Does anyone have a list of all the Practice Group retreats this Fall? Trying to plan around them!”

RESPONSE:

COMMENT 1:

“Litigation is October 24-26 in Dallas. Yeehaw!”  
(Initial poster liked comment.)

COMMENT 2:

“[NAME] has that info.”  
(Initial poster liked comment.)

COMMENT 3:

“Also in the Partner Update ‘Upcoming Events’ section – new issue coming out today.”  
(Initial poster and one more liked comment.)

COMMENT 4:

“Corporate is November 14-16”  
(Initial poster liked comment.)

COMMENT 5:

“Thanks everyone!”

Teamsites also allow members to poll the group, reaching a broad range of people asynchronously and without disruption from the initial questioner and responders, as a broadcast email would do. An example of this on the Marketing Teamsite allows members to collaborate on a solution to a problem:

INITIAL POST:

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We are running low on our thick capacity folders. We are running a poll to see how frequently these get used to help us schedule a reprint. Please vote if you are a Marketing Manager or if you ever use folders. Thanks!

- I use them occasionally (once a month or less) – 9 votes
- I never use them – 1 vote
- I use them all the time (several times a month) – 0 votes

### RESPONSES:

10 votes, listed above, plus 4 comments:

#### COMMENT 1: (from initial poster)

Here is a picture of the capacity folders.



#### COMMENT 2:

Twice a month.

#### COMMENT 3:

We have approximately 100 of these in storage here in Tampa

#### COMMENT 4:

I think we still have a few boxes here in Chicago.

This approach to problem solving involved members who rarely meet from multiple cities. But it allowed them to easily collaborate on resources available without interrupting all 70 members with a series of emails. And it helped the team avoid groupthink, as various answers were volunteered from a range of participants, leading to better decisions and encouraging broader thinking and creativity (Tan, 1998). In this way, social media helped this team overcome physical distance and take full advantage of the benefits of its regional diversity. The member

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who posted this initial question, also interviewed for this study, said that he would have been reluctant to send this query as an email due to the permissions and extra time that such an approach would have required.

An interviewee who uses both RE Live and the Marketing Teamsite noted: “We don’t do a lot of collaboration on RE Live. It’s not as collaborative as Marketing.” However, another user of the RE Live site found that site to be collaborative, saying: “I’ve asked lawyers on RE Live to send me things, and they actually have.” Another user of RE Live agrees, saying: “People from different offices will chime in. We are problem solving by using it.” But on the LAW Connect site, a partner who says the site is “positive, makes you proud of the firm,” acknowledges that it “hasn’t got there yet” in teams of collaboration. “There’s not enough connection for collaboration,” she added and recognized that no questions have been answered on the site yet.

A partner interviewee using LAW Connect said: “I want more women to participate. The same people are doing all the talking. It doesn’t have the same draw when the same people are always talking. Women partners should get associates to post.” But an associate interviewee explained her reluctance to post, saying: “As an associate, I would need to be doing something very impressive to warrant posting. I know the LAW group is encouraging associate participation, but as an associate, I would not want to put myself out there. When you’ve got the leaders of the firm listening to what you’re saying, it had better be worthwhile. You don’t want to dilute content with less appropriate content, like taking a client to dinner. You don’t want to waste everyone’s time with content that’s not really important.” Similar to LAW Connect, most of the lawyers who post to RE Live are partners. “It’s not unusual to get the highest level of engagement from partners,” observed an interviewee. “One of the most senior partners posted the most last year. The lack of participation by associates is fear based. They don’t want to lose

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an opportunity to work on a great deal or to advance their careers by saying the wrong thing. Can be intimidating.”

It is interesting to note the more relaxed tone and enthusiasm demonstrated on the Marketing Teamsite. This may suggest a less professional approach, but if the goal is to increase collaboration, this casual approach appears to garner more engagement among members. The informal tone of the Marketing Teamsite is more like a pub at Happy Hour, mixing personal and professional topics. Language choices include words such as “Yeehaw!,” “Adorable!,” “Wonderful!!!,” and “PaHAhaha great!” Exclamation points are frequently used. As one interviewee noted about this site: “It’s more Facebook than LinkedIn – a little bit more personal. Photos of people’s kids’ birthday parties. That’s not bad – that makes it feel like I belong to this family. In comparison, I’d rather that than be so formal. It’s nice, especially because we’re all over the country. A cold and professional teamsite would have lost some of that.”

While the LAW Connect site is also positive and encouraging, the tone of this forum is more like a formal banquet hall, with most posts presented as if giving a toast before a hushed room. For example, common language includes: “I was honored to attend,” “We look forward to working with such a dynamic and impressive group of women,” and “Please join me in congratulating....” This level of formality may discourage casual participation from some of the more junior members. Most of the women using LAW Connect do not work together – or even know each other. This lack of familiarity may also contribute to the formality of the overall tone, resulting in an environment that, while positive and encouraging, is more formal and professional in its style of interactivity, with announcements more appropriate for an official meeting or presentation than a casual work group.

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On the RE Live site, the tone is more professional than the Marketing Teamsite, yet less formal than LAW Connect. One interviewee compared it to LinkedIn regarding its professional focus. Another participant said, “The tone is very collaborative. Very open, informative. More professional.” The overall tone of the RE Live site may be similar to a large country club of exclusive members with similar interests and an established hierarchy and sub-groups. It is collegial, while professional and exclusive, which may discourage junior participation.

While all of the teamsites are intended to be supportive and collegial, differing degrees of collaboration are demonstrated, raising the question of why some group members participate and others don't. Generational stereotypes (of younger participants being more tech savvy) are not reflected here, as junior associates typically post less, while the most senior partners are posting the most on RE Live. Given that cultural differences, situational factors and stereotypes have greater influence online than offline (Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Pena et al., 2007; Luring, 2011), collaboration may be impeded by self-censoring among those with more junior roles who have more to lose by participating. Comments are not anonymous, but inversely, can have offline consequences, especially in this professional setting, as noted by the interviewee who said: “They don't want to lose an opportunity to work on a great deal or to advance their careers by saying the wrong thing.” More vulnerable members are more reluctant to post, despite their expressed interest in reading others' posts. Baym (2010) found the social identity of the “lurker” to be common across most social networking sites. On one message board, only 100 of a board's 30,000 members ever left comments or contributed, while another site found that only four percent of a mailing list wrote half of its messages. Reasons for lurking include feeling shy, feeling they have nothing to offer, not liking the group's dynamics, or fearing aggressive



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responses (Baym, 2010). Many teamsite members continue to “lurk,” despite the potential for teamsites to aid in team development and productivity.

As shown above, collaboration on the Marketing Teamsite has led to sharing resources and problem solving across distances, which would have been unlikely with email, according to interviewees. As prior examples and interviews demonstrate, some factors appear to overcome lurking tendencies and encourage participation on the Marketing Teamsite. These include public affirmation from a department leader, casual language that reduces the formality of a site, and family news and pictures that increase feelings of collegiality and propinquity between members. As shown in the next section, self-disclosure can also create a more casual space that is safer for self-expression, for as Baym (2010) found, “we can’t get to know one another well and build trust without self-disclosure” (pg. 128).

### **Self-Disclosures**

Following the more casual emphasis of the Marketing Teamsite, self-disclosures, a more casual type of post, garner the most attention on this site. At 17% of the content on this site analyzed in this study, there are far more personal self-disclosures here than on the other two sites in this study.

On the Marketing site, 41% (72) of the posts report about work; 22% (39) report about externals; 17% (30) are personal self-disclosures; 10% (17) report about other personnel; and 10% (17) are questions posed to the group.

On the LAW Connect site, 44% (39) of the posts report about personnel; 30% (26) report about externals; 26% (23) report about work; and no questions or self-disclosures are posted (but three comments respond to posts with varying levels of self-disclosure).

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On the RE Live site, 46% (97) of the posts report about work; 26% (54) are questions posed to the group; 17% (35) report about personnel (3 of these posts profile personal details about other members, offering a more formal venue for self-disclosure); 11% (24) report about externals; and no self-disclosures are self-posted.

While a professional site in a workplace setting, the Marketing Teamsite emphasizes self-disclosures about family, specifically members' children. Participants post photos of their children going back to school, during vacations, having birthdays, going to prom, or graduating. Such posts are encouraged by leaders in the department. The employees who post these are often congratulated by other members for their children's accomplishments and appearances. A Mother's Day card was posted in May by one of the leaders of the department, and in this example, two other department leaders requested another member to post more photos of her children.

### INITIAL POST:

Safe travels to [NAME] today as she jet-sets to Hong Kong for the INTA conference and several related events in the next few days. Hopefully if enough people "like" this post, she'll be persuaded to post some pics from the road! :)

### RESPONSE:

14 "likes"

### COMMENT 1:

And if we get enough likes [INITIAL POSTER] will post a pic of [HER CHILDREN].

### COMMENTS 2:

Safe travels [NAME]! And [INITIAL POSTER] - we would like to see [CHILDREN] regardless!

This level of casual interaction is typical of exchanges on the Marketing Teamsite. Comments and "likes" about children typically surpass those about team awards or work accomplishments, activity not seen in the other two sites. Even though self-disclosure is only

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17% of total posts on the Marketing Teamsite, it stands out among interviewees as a dominant definition of the site. As another interviewee said: “You see kids pics all the time. It’s a nice reminder that we have a life outside of the office. I feel more connected to people because I see their personal information. No one else from marketing is in my office. I typically don’t talk to someone unless I have a reason to call them. Then when I do call, I can reference a conversation from the teamsite and feel closer and more connected.” Of the top 10 posts for engagement (determined by counting the number of “likes” and comments) on the Marketing Teamsite, 50% were self-disclosures. The most engaged post was not surprisingly a self-disclosure sharing photos of an employee’s recent beach wedding, reiterating the ongoing popularity of self-disclosure-style posts for the Marketing Teamsite.

This amount of self-disclosure leads to a feeling of propinquity, or “the psychological feeling of nearness in organizational contexts” (Walther & Bazarova, 2008, pg. 624) as the site aids team members in building relationships and overcoming uncertainty about fellow members – or hesitation about sharing something in return. It is interesting to note the correlation between heightened propinquity, self-disclosure, and collaboration on the Marketing Teamsite. This also follows the theory that propinquity will be stronger among those with better communication skills and fewer rules, which potentially applies to the Marketing members more than the other two groups with teamsites analyzed here. This also follows social information processing theory (SIP) that says that online communication uses more self-disclosure to reach the same – or greater – levels of interpersonal cues than FtF would provide to obtain closeness (Attrill, 2012). Hyperpersonal communication, such as sharing family photos, can be more socially satisfying and allow text-based CMC to exceed FtF interaction for fostering closeness among members (Walther, 1996, 2007).

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In addition, the type of self-disclosures influence the propinquity developed. Perceptions of symmetry, attitude similarity and social attraction were found to inspire greater attraction and group cohesion (Pena et al., 2007; Craig & Wright, 2012). On the Marketing Teamsite, similar attitudes about family and the appealing quality of members' children were repeatedly emphasized and received the most engagement from members.

Inversely, there are few self-disclosures or collaborative exchanges on LAW Connect, a more formal site with more perceived rules for participating. But as one interviewee noted, "Self-disclosure about families would be a turnoff. I don't have time to read about that. I hope everyone in their families are doing well. But I want to read about professional women doing professional things. I also want those without kids to feel welcome and included. Work-life balance should be part of the conversation, but not all."

Taking a moderate approach to both self-disclosure and collaboration, RE Live members have participated in profile articles about them in three instances during the six months of activity reviewed in this study. These articles are then posted by others, allowing the subject to be in the limelight without self-promoting too blatantly. One example:

INITIAL POST:

"60 Seconds with [NAME]"

Q: What five famous people would you invite to a dinner party?

A: The five famous people I would invite to a dinner party would be:

- Martin Luther King
- Abraham Lincoln
- Elvis Presley
- Bob Knight
- Chelsea Handler

It is a mix of historical people, celebrities (past and present) and a crazy basketball coach. It would definitely be a random dinner party but it should be very interesting.

Q: When I grew up I wanted to be a...

A: An astronaut until the Challenger blew up when I was 6 years old. I did many things to work towards that dream, which included owning an astronaut Barbie.

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After that, I always wanted to be an attorney. I am not sure why because I did not really know anything about what attorneys do, but it seemed like a good idea. In 5th grade, I had to write a research paper about a profession we were interested in, and I interviewed a family friend who was an attorney. My parents still have that beautiful piece of writing!

Q: What is your favorite holiday destination?

For Christmas, I always look forward to going home to Indiana. Christmas day is the only day of the year I see all of my siblings (2 sisters and a brother) and my parents at the same time because we live so far apart.

For vacation, I like going to the beach. My favorite destination is Kauai – I think it is obvious why I love it there!

[It continues for eight more questions and answers]

RESPONSE:

4 “likes”

No comments

Additionally, members occasionally disclose personal challenges and beliefs when responding to others’ posts. This example of a comment on LAW Connect reveals perhaps too much self-disclosure, as it received no response. Baym (2010) explains that self-disclosure “can backfire if one shares too much too soon or shares something the other person finds unappealing” (pg. 128).

INITIAL POST:

“Big CONGRATS to [NAME] for sitting on the LAW 360 Product Liability Editorial Board! Way to go [NAME]!!  
(link to external article)

RESPONSE:

7 “likes”

COMMENT 1:

[FROM SUBJECT] Thank you, [NAME OF POSTER]!

COMMENT 2:

“Not sure how different it is in large law firms vs life.

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“The work women do is marginalized and devalued wherever we do it. Yet we are willing to accept that in disproportionate numbers. And when we do go after the high reward work and/or demand same pay and recognition for good work or talent, the resistance we encounter is gale force.

“Sometimes resistance is open and hostile but usually it is subtle, couched in ‘gender neutral’ practices and vague standards that, in reality, reflect real biases and double standards about how we look, speak or behave, including how we manage our time and organize our affairs. Or our files.

“And the resistance exists whether we mimic men or not- we are, after all, not men. Few of us pull off our tightrope acts in a manner that pleases the mostly male decision makers, whether internal or external clients.

“But, the saddest thing is when we women become decision makers and unwittingly adopt the same biases just to become the most unforgiving and harshest critics and micromanagers of other women. And the legal profession is full of women suspicious of other women, self-anointed to be guardians and judges of the standards by which other women perform. We are part of the resistance.

“We talk about this stuff a lot. Especially lately. Yet, we women (and people we work for) continually examine and blame ourselves for our every failure at a very micro level - seeming to ignore the bigger picture that we continually talk about. It's as if we see the big picture but refuse to recognize it on individual cases. I am as guilty of this as anyone.

“We seem to believe that Institutionalized sexism, lack of support and a bias for alikeness keeps others down, or us as a group, down. But, individually, we are quick to find a million faults with ourselves and our closest female colleagues that explain very well our own or their lack of progress or failure as individuals. As if penises and the people born with them don't come with faults. They do. But they also come with an extraordinary sense of entitlement and support (empathy, compassion, etc) for other penis-bearing creatures. We don't give ourselves and each other those same gifts.

“The reality is, if you lean in to that gale force resistance, 8 or 9 times out of 10, you get blown away. I think most of the discussion around this topic is bullshit. Perceptions are skewed. Accordingly, practices are skewed. The results are entirely predictable amongst rational actors. Most of us (including most men) can only stand to get blown away a couple of times, if at all. And the odds for survival are not good.

“If you are going to lean in, I hope you have a sufficiently heavy anchor and armor to keep you grounded and safe. Good luck to all of you women on this list, in all your roles and endeavors. I think the best you can be is your true self and a compassionate person willing to help others.

“And , if you read this whole post, sorry for its length.”

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### RESPONSE:

No “likes” or comments

As noted above, self-disclosure can encourage collaboration and propinquity, demonstrated with the correlation found for both on the Marketing Teamsite and the member who said: “I feel more connected to people because I see their personal information.” But where self-disclosure is not the norm, and propinquity has not been established, such as on LAW Connect, too much self-disclosure can shut down further comments, as shown above. In the examples of RE Live, a few safe examples of socially appropriate, solicited self-disclosure match the similarly moderate levels of participation, but received little response. This cautious and measured style of CMC reflects the style of the RE Live site. Overall, the levels of self-disclosure and collaboration appear to match those of each site. The Marketing Teamsite has the most self-disclosure and most collaboration. RE Live has a moderate level of self-disclosure and collaboration, and LAW Connect has the least amount of self-disclosure and collaboration.

### **Engagement**

RE Live’s 210 posts from the six-month period in the study received a total of 297 “likes” and comments, for an average of 1.4 responses per post. In comparison, LAW Connect’s 88 posts have 481 total “likes” and comments, for an average of 5.5 responses per post. The Marketing Teamsite’s 175 posts have 1,217 “likes” and comments, for an average of 7 responses per post. Even though RE Live has the most posts, it also has the least amount of measurable engagement, counted by the number of “likes” and comments. Despite having the fewest members, the Marketing Teamsite has by far the most measurable engagement, followed by LAW Connect, and then RE Live.

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Similarly, reviewing the top 30 most-engaged posts continues this trend of RE Live showing the least amount of measurable engagement, followed by LAW Connect and then the Marketing Teamsite with the most engagement. RE Live's top 30 most-engaged posts have 176 "likes" and comments, for an average of 6 responses per post. In comparison, LAW Connect's top 30 most-engaged posts have 338 "likes" and comments, for an average of 11 responses per post. The Marketing Teamsite's top 30 most-engaged posts have 572 "likes" and comments, for an average of 19 responses per post – again, the most engagement among all three sites.

Engagement levels cannot be attributed to group size because the RE Live group has the second-smallest group size but the smallest measurable engagement levels of the three sites. LAW Connect has the largest group but the second-most level of engagement. This same trend is found when reviewing all posts as well as the top 30 most-engaged posts.

Group size also does not predict the amount of initial posts made to a site. With about 430 members (all of the women lawyers in the firm in the US), the LAW Connect site has the least amount of posts (88). The second-largest group, RE Live (of all of the Real Estate lawyers in the firm in the US), has the most posts with 210, and the smallest group, the Marketing Teamsite (consisting of all of the Marketing department members in the firm in the US) has the second-most posts of 175. The numbers alone may not explain what inspires the most engagement among teamsite members.

Reviewing the types of comments provides another perspective. Some comments require more thought and risk than others. For example, many comments of "Congratulations!" are given in the Marketing Teamsite and LAW Connect sites following announcements about awards, promotions, or other achievements. Saying "congrats" takes about three seconds longer than clicking "like" and conveys essentially the same idea. In comparison, thoughtfully answering a



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question or commenting on an article requires more time and risk of exposing one's ideas for the rest of a peer group to read and potentially judge (for example from the Marketing Teamsite: "Thanks for sharing. Kredible's Engage phase sounds similar to product we are looking into called ClearView ((link)). Also, the 'basic mistake lawyers make is listing their title and firm,' is the same reason why we removed similar information from the first sentence of our .com bio narratives. We want our readers to see experience first; not redundant info such as title, office and practice group"). Some comments require more thought and effort than others.

The RE Live site doesn't foster many congratulatory comments because its content includes fewer achievement-related announcements. However, RE Live does lead the pack with the most questions asked (54, or 26% of its posts), which is another form of engagement with the site and its members. In comparison, LAW Connect has no Q&A-type posts, and the Marketing Teamsite has only 17 (10% of its total posts). The relative volume of Q&As on the RE Live site reveals a different kind of engagement among its members, who may not use many "likes" or express "congratulations" often, but do use the site to solve problems for clients.

Interestingly, once a question is answered on RE Live, no further comments are given, thus ending the dialog; 88% (59) of RE Live posts with comments include just one comment; the RE Live site is not used for much back-and-forth. In comparison, only 23% (18) of the LAW Connect posts and 11% (36) of Marketing Teamsite posts conclude with just one comment; more comments are usually given. Therefore, the RE Live group may not be chatty or congratulatory, but it is engaged.

RE Live uses far more questions than other sites do, reflecting a more practical use of the site for solving problems with an extended network. While 26% of this site's posts pose questions, only 10% of the Marketing Teamsite's posts pose questions, and none of the LAW

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Connect's posts do. The heavy use of questions on RE Live suggests overall engagement, despite the fact that the RE Live site has far fewer "likes" and comments than the other sites, as noted above. While answers to work questions are usually answered, other forms of interaction are applied less often on RE Live, emphasizing the time-focus of participants who bill for their time and have thousands of billable hours to account for annually.

But in terms of measureable engagement, the Marketing Teamsite has the most activity, despite its being the smallest group. One reason for this could be the greater amount of self-disclosure that fosters propinquity, which leads to more information sharing. Other reasons, noted above, could include the more casual language used, leadership affirmation for sharing information, fewer perceived rules, and better communication skills among those in the marketing department (Walther and Bazarova, 2008). This does not explain why LAW Connect, which has nearly no self-disclosure, has the second-most level of measurable engagement, although the quality of engagement is weaker on LAW Connect because it lacks the socio-emotional and identity cues that, according to Social information processing (SIP) theory, can make CMC as effective as FtF (Walther, 1992, 2006).

### **Replacing email to report information**

Teamsites are preferable to email for a few reasons provided by interviewees. One participant noted the value of having all teamsite responses aggregated in one post, rather than emailed individually to recipients. "When something is being posted, you don't get 17 emails with people congratulating someone," she said. Another concurred, saying, "I'm more comfortable posting to a teamsite than emailing the group. Teamsites don't interrupt everyone's day. I find emails are distracting." Another agreed: "RE Live doesn't clutter up your inbox. Email is annoying and intrusive."

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Another noted advantage of teamsites over email is its broader distribution and access. “Before, you might email something cool to your 10 closest friends,” an interviewee said. “Now, everyone can participate without being awkward about an email blast.” This suggests a broader reach of personal information that allows for propinquity and information to be spread to a larger segment of the team. Less self-censoring is occurring. Another interviewee concurred, saying: “I’m getting more notification of awards and articles than before.” Another explained this, saying, “In the past, a lawyer would send an email to a small group asking for specific expertise. Usually he would turn off the ‘reply all’ function, so only the sender would get the response. It was a lost opportunity to share this knowledge with everyone in the department. With RE Live, everyone can see the questions and answers being shared. The same info is shared with everyone. I see more as a Marketing Manager than I would have otherwise (I am not on the list to receive All Lawyer emails). I can then make more connections between people in my role in business development.” Therefore, more connections are being made as more information is made available on the teamsites versus on email.

As a result of the teamsites, information is being posted that were sent (and hidden) via email previously. One interviewee posts a portfolio of his team’s work to the teamsite now instead of sending it to the department over email. “The teamsite is the best way to share it,” he said. “I’m not sending it with email because I don’t want to disturb people. I get comments that people like seeing the work; I know people are looking at it and like it. We used to send the portfolio via email. There are fewer problems now than with email, which can’t send large files. It’s easier to post it to the teamsite. I can also tag the post with a hashtag which helps me search for prior postings.”

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The transition from using email to teamsites for announcements has also begun. Another interviewee said: “Instead of sending more emails, announcements get posted on the teamsite. I see it especially on RE Live. The practice group leader doesn’t send department-wide emails anymore. He forces people to check RE Live for news. It drives people to the site. Marketing is moving in that direction. Contest winners were recently announced there.” RE Live has replaced email to such a degree that “the lawyers who continue to ping (email) ‘All Lawyers’ are seen as outliers,” said an interviewee. “The reaction is like, ‘Why are you doing that? Don’t you know about RE Live?’ It’s replacing email for broad calls for information.” As teamsites replace email, they allow for more connections to be made, information to be shared, collaborations to be initiated, and comments to be expressed among team members, creating a richer experience and environment for users.

While teamsites are not yet replacing all email communication, teamsite posts are replacing some announcements that were previously sent through email. Here are examples of personnel announcements on each of the sites:

### INITIAL POST ON RE LIVE:

“Our Colleague [NAME] who has been with us nearly 25 years recently re-located to Los Angeles. We all know what a wonderful colleague and terrific lawyer he is. Please be on the look out for opportunities for him. He could benefit from our resources/referrals and we could benefit from his expertise and availability. If we could, let’s be sure to keep him in mind as opportunities arise.”

### NO RESPONSE

The Marketing Teamsite recently began posting individual announcements about staff promotions, which were emailed just a year before. An example:

### INITIAL POST:

“Congratulations to [NAME] on her promotion to Digital Communications Manager. For all who know [NAME] and have worked with her over the years, you know that she has been the backbone of our digital comms efforts for some time and is a delight all around.

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She's been an integral part of the new website and its ongoing maintenance and roll out, not to mention the myriad other projects, tasks and crazy requests she handles with aplomb on a regular basis.

### RESPONSE:

15 “likes”

22 comments of congratulations

The LAW Connect site also posts similar personnel announcements that receive enthusiastic support. An example:

### INITIAL POST:

Welcome to our women summer associates and summer law clerks! We're thrilled to have you all join us and hope you have a great experience during the next several weeks. [27 NAMES FOLLOW]

### RESPONSE:

21 “likes”

7 comments of welcome

A complete shift from teamsites to email has not occurred, but it has started, perhaps because of the richer media, which encourages photos and comments to enrich users' experience of the information.

But for as much as email is disliked, it is still a common way that teamsite information is distributed, as daily email recaps are sent with all of the teamsite activity of the day. As one interviewee said, “I don't go every day [to the teamsite]. I sometimes read the report on email.” This was reiterated by other interviewees. Therefore, a dual approach of email and teamsite is still needed to distribute and receive information broadly.

Teamsites also allow and encourage the sharing of information not previously conveyed over email – or anywhere else. For example, the Marketing Teamsite is used to convey instructions that would not have otherwise been widely shared in the past. For example:

### INITIAL POST:

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“Printing Instructions from #DesignTeam for New Proposal Templates:

“For pitch from Proposal Generator (Make sure to add a back cover to the document)

“Print Cover (first page) and back cover (last page) on 80lb Hammermill paper

“Print the rest of the document on 28 lb. Hammermill paper

“Color

“Single sided

“Flip the back cover so it's facing outwards

“Silver wire-o spiral bound

“Frosted cover and back

“Please note that the blue card stock covers are eventually going to be discontinued so it's important that the document has a back cover page per the above. These instructions have also been shared with #MarketingCentral but wanted the whole team to also note.”

RESPONSE:

3 “likes”

The Marketing Teamsite is also used by senior leaders to recognize staff for minor victories that would otherwise have gone unrecognized: daily successes that would not warrant a broad email or callout during a department meeting, but add to the propinquity and engagement of the group. This example also allowed for more staff to continue to be recognized in the comments section.

INITIAL POST:

Congratulations and thanks to [NAME], with mighty assistance from [3 NAMES], for pulling off two significant client events yesterday in Chicago for the Global Board. The day started with breakfast for 140 with former Spanish President Aznar, Senator Mitchell and Ambassador Nick Burns. Then last night, the firm hosted 90 guests for dinner with Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel. We are receiving a lot of great feedback about both events, including a very gracious note from the Chicago OMP, all resulting from the highest standards of excellence that [NAME] and the events team set for every event. Kudos!

RESPONSE:

9 “likes”

COMMENT 1 (from the head of the department):

Congratulations and a big thank you to all!!

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### COMMENT 2:

Great job!!! I also want to give kudos to my InterAction team [NAMES] for their support on these events. :)

### COMMENT 3:

Can't wait to see pics!

As shown in this section, social media was preferable to email for teamsite users for a few reasons, including aggregating and archiving all comments, reducing interruptions, reducing email inbox clutter, fewer technical and permission hurdles, and allowing broader access to and distribution of information, leading to more connections and collaborations. Social media is gradually replacing email for broadcast announcements, encouraging a broader range of posts to be shared and more expressions of congratulations and other comments.

The “push versus pull” aspect of email versus social media could explain why email is viewed as an interruption. When email is pushed to recipients, it implies an insistence to view its contents that gives more significance to its content (Barker, 2008). If multiple recipients reply to everyone in the chain, an avalanche of email can be triggered that causes information overload that recipients find intrusive and annoying. Because social media is optional and accessed when a reader is ready to read it, participants are more willing to share because they are not pushing their information at others. And as this study has shown, sharing more information leads to more connections to be made and greater collaboration between team members.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Today social media is prevalent for personal communication, but its professional application is still new for many organizations and employees. This paper explores whether an internal social media platform can help geographically dispersed colleagues become more connected, more collaborative and more willing to share information. It examines the types of content, specifically self-disclosure, used on three social media teamsites available to three different groups within a global law firm: a Real Estate practice, a women's affinity group, and a Marketing department.

My methodology included three components: I first analyzed posts to determine the personality of each of the three teamsites and how they compared to one another, particularly noting uses of self-disclosure. Second, I measured engagement levels. Third, I interviewed teamsite participants to learn more about their experiences with the teamsites. The findings of the current study offer several important practical and theoretical implications for the use of social media in the intra-organizational context.

### Practical Implications

**Internal social media allows for geographically dispersed colleagues to connect and collaborate.** As shown in this study, social media allows team members to communicate with each other more, leading to better connectivity and collaboration between members. Participants from all sites agreed that reading comments from fellow team members led to new connections or better understanding of existing connections, allowing for greater propinquity within teams. The correlation between heightened propinquity, self-disclosure, more collaboration, and greater engagement on the Marketing Teamsite supports the theory that self-disclosure encourages engagement, which leads to collaboration and propinquity. This closeness translated to a greater



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willingness to call senior team members, and once on the phone, it allowed for casual, “ice breaker” topics that relaxed the conversation and encouraged stronger relationships between members. When employees have the opportunity to learn more about their colleagues, they are more willing to reach out to them to learn even more information and develop new and stronger relationships across distances.

**Self-disclosure fosters greater engagement among members, leading to more information shared on social media platforms.** Lack of confidence and comfort by junior members to post on sites results in less participation, connection-making and collaboration. As this study revealed, teamsites with the most self-disclosure shared by members are less formal and less intimidating for everyone for participate. This leads to a more collaborative environment with higher levels of engagement. On the Marketing Teamsite, which demonstrates the most casual environment as well as the most collaboration and engagement levels, even when one answer will suffice, other members chime in to supplement a prior comment. In addition, the type of self-disclosure appears to matter most when increasing feelings of propinquity among members, as shown with the Marketing Teamsite emphasizing self-disclosures about family and children. As noted by a member of LAW Connect, she would not value disclosures about family on her teamsite. Leaders wanting to leverage self-disclosure may benefit from analyzing the values and interests of their team members as a group to determine what types of personal interests would generate the most engagement among members.

**More self-disclosure is volunteered in a more casual environment with fewer perceived restrictions.** While the abundance of self-disclosures and exclamation points of the Marketing Teamsite may suggest a less productive or professional site at first glance, after this analysis, it is clear that the sites with the most self-disclosure garner the most collaboration and

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engagement exhibited by site members. If engagement and collaboration is a goal, encouraging participation with self-disclosures by fostering a less formal atmosphere is one way to get there. But as shown with the lengthy comment on LAW Connect that received no responses, too much self-disclosure (or more than is typically shared in that environment) may discourage engagement. To advance a site beyond one-directional announcements and get more members actively participating, sites may need to reduce the formality of the platform with more self-disclosures that help to relax the atmosphere and facilitate a tone more conducive to casual exchange and collaborative problem solving. Such behavior can be best modeled by team leaders to establish the tone of a new resource and make it “okay” to participate, especially in a more hierarchical culture.

**Social media offers more advantages and risks than email.** Social media was preferable to email for teamsite users for a few reasons, including aggregating and archiving all comments, reducing interruptions, reducing email inbox clutter, fewer technical and permission hurdles, and allowing broader access to and distribution of information, thus fostering more connections, collaborations, and knowledge sharing. Social media is gradually replacing email for broadcast announcements, allowing team members to express their congratulations and other comments to news. However, email is still used as a way to keep up with social media activity, which demonstrates its continued pervasiveness and ongoing place in professional communication and as a way to “push” information to employees. As in the example with emergency responders, social media also allows for potentially erroneous or inappropriate information to be shared, versus a more controllable email. This is a risk leaders need to consider when allowing a broader platform, such as social media, to be available for members to express themselves to the rest of the team. Some leaders may resist giving such a megaphone to their

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employees, but this risk is necessary to elicit more ideas from employees and to allow them to interact more with each other, especially across distances. Given the formal, announcement-style tone of email sent to large groups, information such as casual updates, kudos, best practices, and instructions are typically not broadcast via email. This is another advantage of social media: allowing for new types of information to be shared that was previously limited, lost, or overlooked.

### **Transitioning an organization from email to social media takes time and training.**

This study shows that despite the potential for comments and feedback to be shared on social media, some posts may still discourage responses from others. Users may unwittingly post announcements that discourage responses because they continue to be written like a one-directional email announcement, a more familiar way of communicating professionally in a hierarchical environment. To reduce this tendency, one approach may be to train a core group of those posting initially to write posts in ways that encourage others to respond and provide meaningful feedback, such as by asking open-ended questions with casual language. Teamsite leaders may also want to recruit other members to post responses and comments, thereby reducing the intimidation factor among the rest of the team of being the first to post. In other words, some behind-the-scenes development of participants may help establish a foundation of engagement that encourages others to voluntarily participate. Leaders can also publicly foster use of teamsites by referencing them in team meetings and asking speakers to post related materials, such as PowerPoint presentations, on the teamsite. Leaders can foster an environment that encourages teamsite participation, just as Pitney Bowes posted a series of business challenges for its employees to solve through IdeaNet.

### **Theoretical Implications**

**Media users affect the richness of the tool.** Media Richness Theory considers a medium's ability to deliver and reproduce information based on feedback, multiple cues, and other factors, but as this study showed, how users apply the tool also affects how rich it can be. In this study, three teams within one organization used the same tool with different results – and differing levels of richness in their exchanges. By comparing the same tool used three different ways, the variable is found not in the media, but in the user and norms of the group and individuals using each one. This study included RE Live, which used few “likes” or comments, but asked and answered numerous work questions. It also showed a range of collaboration levels and how the same canvas with the same color palette can wield an entirely different painting – from casual and collaborative, as shown on the Marketing Teamsite, to formal and non-collaborative, as shown with LAW Connect. This extends the theory by suggesting another dimension to consider – that of the norms of a user group and its participants and how they apply the medium. This study expands on this theory by demonstrating that media richness is relative to the application of those using it; it is not a static quality.

**More self-disclosure is not always better.** Social Information Processing Theory says that because online media lacks the same cues as FtF, participants use more self-disclosure to obtain closeness (Attrill, 2012). The Marketing Teamsite members used the most self-disclosure and reported feeling closer to their teammates because of it, supporting this theory. But self-disclosure did not bring members of LAW Connect closer. There, when one participant disclosed her strong opinions about gender stereotypes in the workplace, other participants distanced themselves from her with no further comments or “likes,” rather than being drawn by the disclosure to add more of their own. This suggests a continuum of self-disclosure effectiveness, and that some disclosures bring people together, while others repel them. More self-disclosure is

not always better. This supports the findings that the *types* of disclosures matter, as perceptions of symmetry, attitude similarity, and social attraction were found to inspire greater attraction and group cohesion (Pena et al., 2007; Craig & Wright, 2012). Depth and relevance are factors that encourage intimacy between members. This theory could be expanded to consider the types of disclosures that are most appropriate for the participants to make CMC as effective as FtF.

**Physical and virtual realities influence each other.** Electronic Propinquity Theory asserts that to compensate for a loss of physical closeness, technology is used to develop propinquity, or “the psychological feeling of nearness in organizational contexts” (Walther & Bazarova, 2008, p. 624). It says that the Internet allows people to meet virtually, initiate conversations, and build relationships, just as they do with FtF interactions (Walther & Burgoon, 1992). This study supported this theory by showing how social media allows geographically dispersed co-workers to meet virtually, converse, connect, and collaborate. Co-workers must be able to function together, even if they are not physically in the same room; this theory speaks to that very situation. The theory also says that less propinquity is felt from simpler information, but more is felt among participants with stronger communication skills and fewer rules. This study also supports this element of the theory as well, if we again compare the results of the Marketing Teamsite to the LAW Connect site. The former experienced more propinquity along with a greater range of communication styles and relaxed rules and optionally casual language. In comparison, the LAW Connect site displayed more formality, simpler/safer language, and less propinquity. It is difficult to accurately compare the level of communication skills between the members of each group without devoting more analysis to that variable. Other factors that could expand this theory include offline group norms that would affect virtual activity. In other words, the physical world cannot be divorced entirely from the virtual one, as participants still live in a

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physical world, complete with career repercussions for bad choices made online. As noted by participants of this study, comments are not anonymous, but inversely, can have offline consequences. Awareness of such pitfalls influences willingness of members to participate or merely “lurk” without commenting, as noted by interviewees in this study. This theory needs to recognize the influence of participants’ physical circumstances, even as it attempts to find ways to overcome physical limitations with technology, because participants continue to have both physical and virtual experiences. One cannot divorce offline repercussions from virtual ones made within the context of an organization, such as an employer.

### **Limitations**

Although this study revealed many important findings, it has limitations in terms of its scope. First, interviewing more members would provide greater understanding of how the teamsites are used. Second, reviewing more than six months of data would show how the use of teamsites has evolved over time. Third, the culture of a law firm, the context of this study, may not apply to all organizations. Law firm culture is much more hierarchical than cultures found in other sectors and industries. It emphasizes inflated egos, need for prestige, and an emphasis on one’s reputation, which would explain why junior lawyers see social media as a risk to their careers; their yet-undetermined reputations could be permanently hurt by a misplaced comment or inappropriate post. In addition, time limitations are a real concern for lawyers; meeting your billable hour quote will affect your annual compensation – across all levels of lawyers. These factors are less relevant at other types of organizations, which may have more social media participation – with less fear and intimidation – as a result. Law firm culture may represent an extreme of a hierarchical and intimidating culture, and if social media can succeed here, it can potentially succeed anywhere.

### **Future Directions**

The current study examined social media used within organizations. However, there are many other factors that can influence or be influenced by the use of social media. Further study could examine how using social media versus email reflects a hierarchical or horizontal-style of organizational leadership and culture.

This study compared three social media sites to identify why some have more engagement than others. Further study could also evaluate the characteristics of who is participating on each site to determine why some sites have greater participation than others as well as why some members feel more comfortable posting than others. Further study could also explore gender differences in online self-disclosure. This could reveal more about the dynamics of each team and overall organization.

This study examined the use of self-disclosure in social media. Further study could also analyze of the use of humor and casual banter to create a collaborative environment online to see how these factors compare to self-disclosures in fostering propinquity, engagement, knowledge sharing, and collaboration.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This study explores whether applying self-disclosure on an internal social media platform can help geographically dispersed colleagues to become more connected, more collaborative, and more willing to share information. Applying Media Richness Theory, Electronic Propinquity Theory, Social Information Processing theory, and an interpretive methodology, this study asks how social media affects communication and collaboration among geographically dispersed colleagues.

This study found that internal social media allows for geographically dispersed colleagues to connect and collaborate. As shown in this study, social media allows co-workers to communicate with each other more, leading to better connectivity, knowledge sharing, and collaboration. Participants from all sites agreed that reading comments from fellow team members led to new connections or better understanding existing connections, allowing for greater propinquity within teams.

This study also asks how self-disclosure as a communication style influences the use of social media. It found that self-disclosure fosters greater engagement among members, leading to more information shared on social media platforms. Lack of confidence and comfort by junior members to post on sites results in less participation, connection-making and collaboration. As this study revealed, teamsites with the most self-disclosure have an environment that is less formal and less intimidating, which encourages everyone for participate. This leads to a more collaborative space with higher levels of engagement.

This study also asks how social media usage compares to email communication within organizations. It found that social media encourages more participation by avoiding the “pushy” interruptions of email. Social media was preferable to email for aggregating and archiving all



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comments, reducing interruptions, reducing emails received, fewer technical and permission hurdles, and allowing broader access to and distribution of information, thus fostering more connections, collaborations, and knowledge sharing. Social media is gradually replacing email for broadcast announcements, allowing team members to express their congratulations and other comments in response to news. In this way, social media encourages more of an interactive exchange between colleagues.

As social media pervades more aspects of our personal lives, it can also have an effective, useful place in business, which has been slower to use the tool within organizations. Rather than distracting employees from their work, social media can help co-workers collaborate to solve problems across distances. Meetings do not need to be held in the same room, or even at the same time, to answer questions with input from a range of participants. Because social media allows participants to obtain information when they choose to do so, it causes fewer “pushy” interruptions than email does, which encourages participants to share more information with their colleagues while fostering greater propinquity between members. This paper adds to the study of CMC by demonstrating the potential value of social media used within organizations as well as the correlation between heightened propinquity, self-disclosure, knowledge sharing, and collaboration.

As this study shows, one size does not fit all for social media solutions. Social media’s use will be affected by group characteristics such as formality, hierarchical nature, and willingness of members to disclose (and welcome) personal details with the rest of the group. Leaders need to understand the culture and norms of their teams because such traits will influence how those same members perform on social media. Likewise, social media can serve to reveal the culture and norms of a team’s culture in microcosm, allowing opportunity to adjust it

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both online and offline. With the right leadership and guidance, social media has the ability to unify geographically dispersed teams and encourage greater knowledge sharing, connectivity, and collaboration.

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## **Appendix 1**

In my interviews, I asked the following questions:

1. What do you read on the teamsite?
2. How would you describe your level of activity, and why have you opted for that level?
3. Do you ever “like” something? Why or why not?
4. How would you describe the overall tone/personality of the teamsite? (formality?)
5. How does our site compare to others you’ve posted on?
6. Are you ever hesitant to post? Why? What do you consider before posting?
7. How much time do you spend following the teamsite?
8. How comfortable do you feel with sharing something on a teamsite versus email?
9. Are teamsite posts replacing some email?
10. Do you access the teamsite online, in email, or both? Why?
11. Are you more connected to individuals or your group more than you were before?
12. Have you made any new connections over teamsite posts?
13. Do you communicate more with co-workers through the teamsite than you did prior to its availability?
14. Has the teamsite made it easier for you to seek and/or provide assistance to fellow co-workers? (i.e. collaborate)
15. Have your views of the teamsites changed over the course of their existence?