

A Diary Study of Facebook

Executive Summary

Site evaluated:	Facebook http://www.facebook.com/
Goal:	To study user engagement on Facebook, what features they are using and how long they stay on the site, and to provide recommendations for further study.
Method:	The evaluation team consisted of three graduate school students enrolled in the Usability of Digital Information class at Pratt Institute. Four test users, also graduate students, filled out an online questionnaire after using Facebook for a period of two weeks. The evaluation team studied the data to provide conclusions on user behavior.

Findings and Recommendations:

We found the following results of interest:

- Participants were most likely to log onto Facebook from Home on a Laptop or from Work on a Laptop or Desktop computer. Only two of 15 sessions were on mobile devices.
- Almost half of the responses indicated morning login times.
- Two thirds of the visits lasted at least ten minutes, but none lasted more than fifteen.
- Participant response indicated casual use of Facebook, with Curiosity or Boredom the most frequent reason for visiting the site.
- Less than half of the participants indicated that they had a notification at the time they accessed Facebook. Of these, most responded that the notifications were at least of some interest. This result indicates that the notification feature, as a means of bringing users to the site, could use more study.
- The most common activities were commenting on a friend's or on one's own post and "Liking" newsfeed activity. It may be worth exploring functions that encourage people to post on Friend's wall to increase visits from the user's extended social network.
- Only one participant indicated a problem with the reported session, although two others reported issues or suggestions related to their experience with previous visits. These issues may be worth exploring further to determine if they are impeding use in some way.
- Six participants indicated that they use other social media platforms. All six participants use Twitter, and two of the six indicated Instagram, a photo upload program.
- Most of the participants indicated a satisfaction level of 5 or greater on a 7 point scale, where seven is the highest level of satisfaction. We feel this is a very good result, with some room for improvement.

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Introduction

We performed a diary study of Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com>, to explore how people are using various features of the site and suggest improvements. A diary study is an unmoderated, user research method in which participants are asked to log their activities over a period of time. According to Reiman, the most powerful, quantitative data from a diary study is the amount of time spent on a particular activity (Reiman, John. (1993), *The Diary Study: A Workplace-Oriented Research Tool to Guide Laboratory Efforts*). We were interested in not only how long users stay on the site, but also which features they are using and how it might compare to other social media platforms.

Methodology

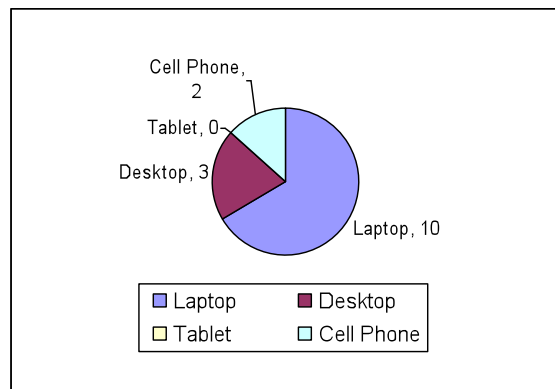
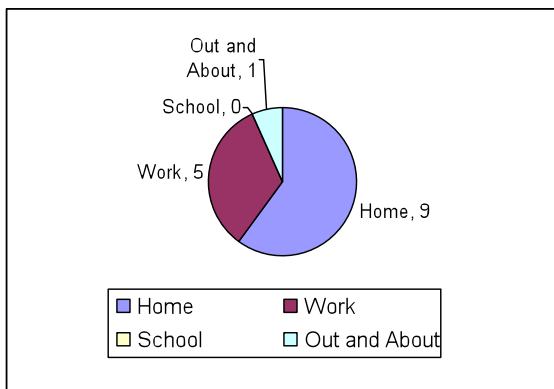
The diary study involved four participants who were asked to complete an online survey any time they completed a session on Facebook. The questionnaire was created in Google Docs. A sample of the questionnaire is included in Appendix I. The test was conducted over a period of two weeks. Originally, only one week was scheduled; however, Hurricane Sandy interrupted power for many people in New York City and an additional week was added to the study to make up for any inability to access the online forms. Reminders were delivered to participants via email three times during the first week of the data collection period.

After the data collection period ended, evaluators analyzed the data. Findings and recommendations are reported below.

Findings and Recommendations

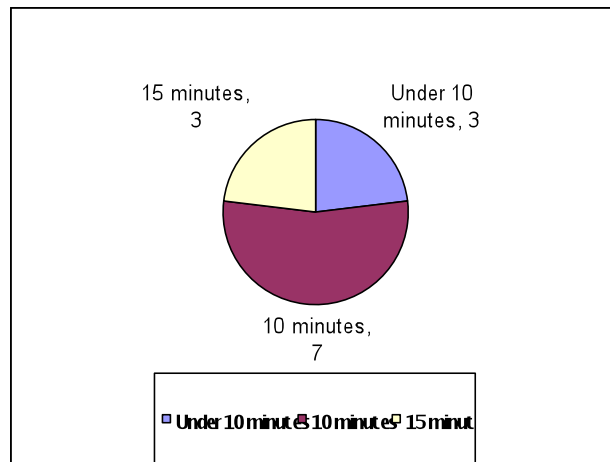
Location and Device

According to the diary reports, study participants most often visited Facebook at home and on a laptop computer. Nine of 15 responses indicated that Facebook was accessed at home. Of these 9 uses, 8 were completed on a laptop computer. The next most likely place where Facebook was accessed was at Work, but respondents were almost as likely to use a laptop (2) as a desktop (3) at Work.



Time and Duration

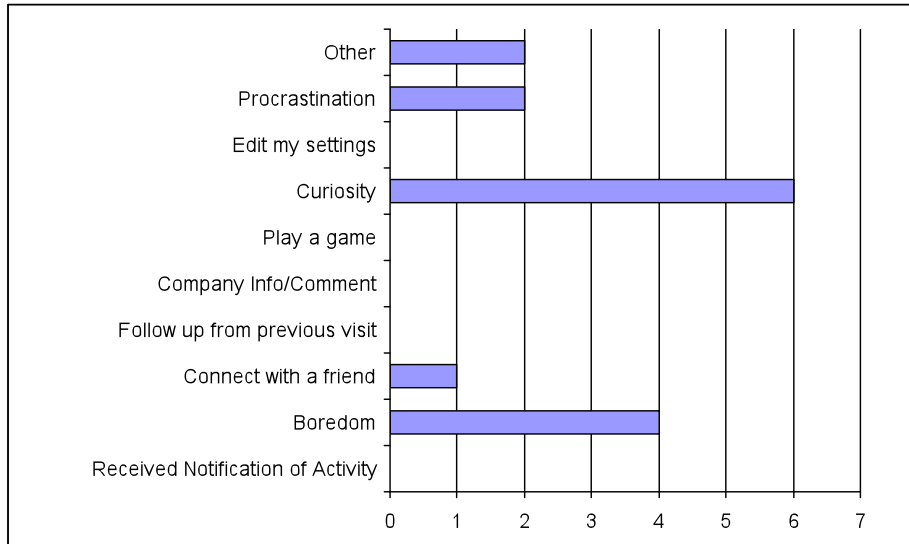
Most of the responses, 7 out of 15, occurred in the morning between 7:45AM and 10:00AM. The majority of sessions, 10 out of 15, lasted at least ten minutes. The hour indicated does not indicate a preference by any one person for any one time of day, however. Each respondent seemed as likely to check Facebook in the morning as they were in the afternoon or late evening.



Purpose

Next we asked participants why they visited Facebook for the session they just completed. The responses indicated that the most common reason for visiting Facebook was Curiosity (6) or Boredom (4). In addition, two responses indicated Procrastination as a reason to visit Facebook and the remaining three responses seemed to indicate a purpose: Connect with a friend, Check pictures, Find information about an event. Curiosity, Boredom and Procrastination suggest a casual, rather than purposeful, activity.

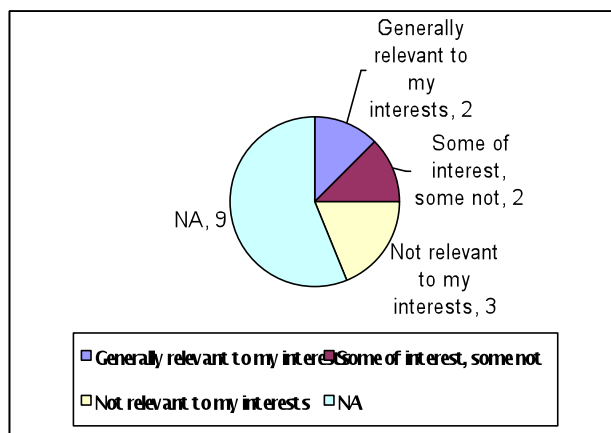
We checked this question against an open ended response to describe the visit in more detail and another to describe if anything new was learned. We found that many were curious to see how their friends were handling the hurricane and a few were interested in the election. Even though people accessed Facebook out of casual curiosity or boredom, they appear to have learned something from the visit.



Notifications

Facebook notifications indicate that something has been posted to a user’s newsfeed that may be of interest to the user. This can represent responses to a feed that the user has commented on or Liked, as well as certain items that are triggered by the user’s settings. Because notifications can be set to trigger an email to the user, it is an important way to bring people to the Facebook site.

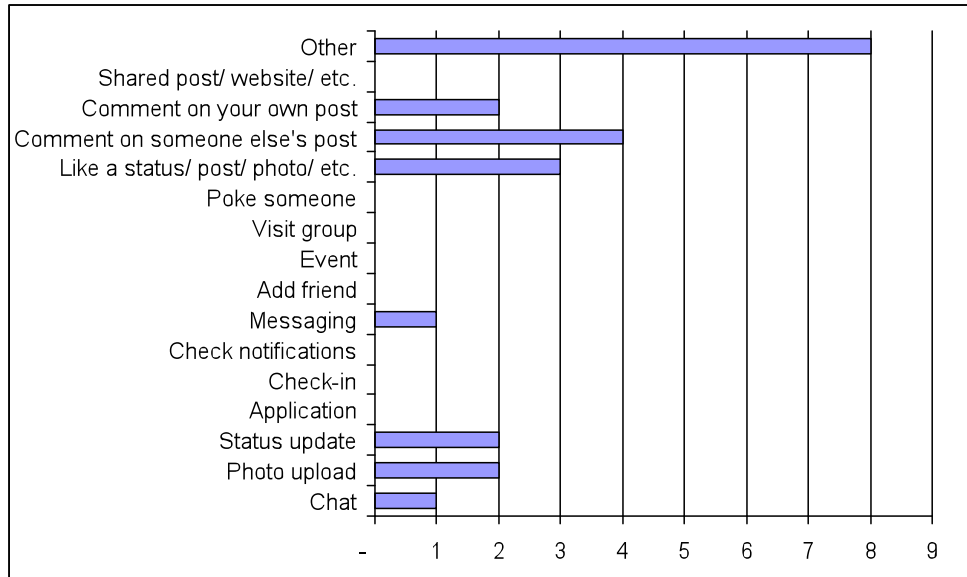
Eight of 15 responses indicated that there was no notification present when the participant visited Facebook. This indicates that users are not necessarily coming to Facebook because they have a notification. In fact, in the question about why the participant visited Facebook, none of the respondents indicated that they visited because they had a notification. For those that did have notifications, there was no clear indication of whether the notification was relevant to the user’s interests. This result is worth exploring further to understand whether the notifications feature could be leveraged in a better way.



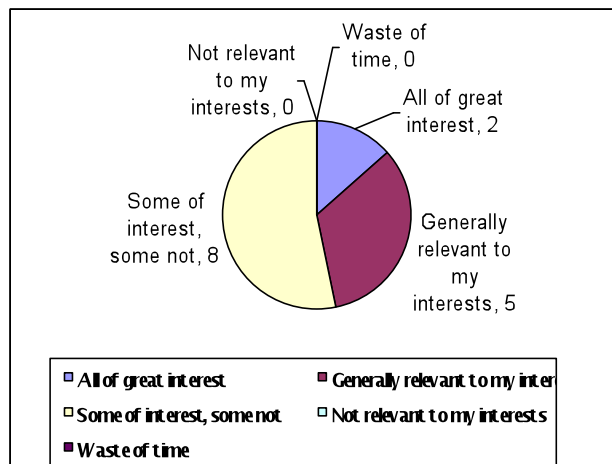
Engagement

Of the activities that the evaluation team listed, only a few items were listed, including Coment on someone else’s post, Like a status/post/photo, etc., Photo Upload, Status update and Comment on your own post. One person indicated that they used Chat and one person indicated they used Messaging.

The Other category had eight responses. Of these eight responses, seven indicated reading, scanning or viewing the newsfeed, clearly a category that should have been included on the questionnaire, and one indicated posting on someone’s wall.

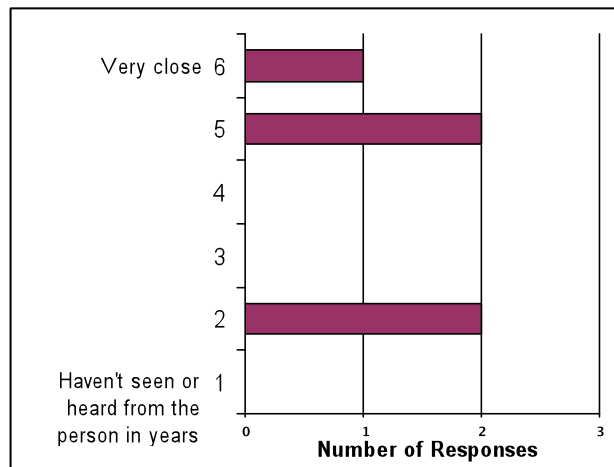


As for relevance of newsfeed items, all responses indicated that the posts had at least some relevance, though only two found the newsfeed posts to be of “great interest.” No one suggested that their Facebook session was a waste of time.



Were respondents engaged enough to click through to a friends page? Not really. Only a third of respondents actually clicked through to a friend's page based on a post in their newsfeed. Responses regarding how close the participant felt to those Friends on a scale from 1-“Haven't seen or heard from the person in years” to 6-“Very close” varied.

Given that Facebook is about getting people in touch with their friends, and that receiving a post on one's wall triggers a notification to explore the site, it may be worth exploring adding functionality that encourages friends to visit the site, such as a suggestion posting to a friend's page based on an upcoming birthday or popular topics.



Detailed Activity

We asked a few open ended questions to get additional detail about the participants' experiences and any problems they encountered. Generally, we learned that this group of participants was interested in learning about how their friends were handling the present storm situation, or simply logged in to scan through the newsfeed. One mentioned the 2012 election.

Those who indicated the reason for their visit to be Curiosity were just as likely to mention the hurricane or election as those who logged in out of Boredom. One person, who uploaded a picture of their cat, indicated Procrastination as their reason for logging in. Of the three people who did not indicate Curiosity, Boredom or Procrastination, two mentioned purposeful, detailed activities, including messaging a friend about dinner plans or checking on the time of a planned event.

Learning Experience

So what do people learn from their experience on Facebook. Regardless of the reason for logging in, participants did seem to learn something from the experience from birthdays and events to current news. Again, the storm situation represented much of the news. Still, a third did not appear to learn anything new, with two saying they learned nothing and three leaving the question blank.

Memorable Experience

Seven of fifteen entries had no response for the question asking what was most memorable. The rest included five references to the storm. (We are assuming the response regarding lines for the bus was related to the storm aftermath). One participant mentioned election coverage and one mentioned “just your basic updates,” indicating that it was not too memorable. Finally one person mentioned a friend’s “rant about a customer.” Clearly the hurricane was on a lot of people’s minds. We expect that had there not been an extreme weather event, the responses may have been more varied.

Problems

We asked participants to describe any problems that they encountered. Twelve of 15 entries indicated non problems. Of the three who entered a response, two said that it was not a problem with the current session, but indicated concerns about being unable to access Facebook messaging from a phone. It appears that sometimes a message is indicated when in fact there is none. The second response indicated that they were unable to share another person’s status. The participant wondered if it was related to privacy settings.

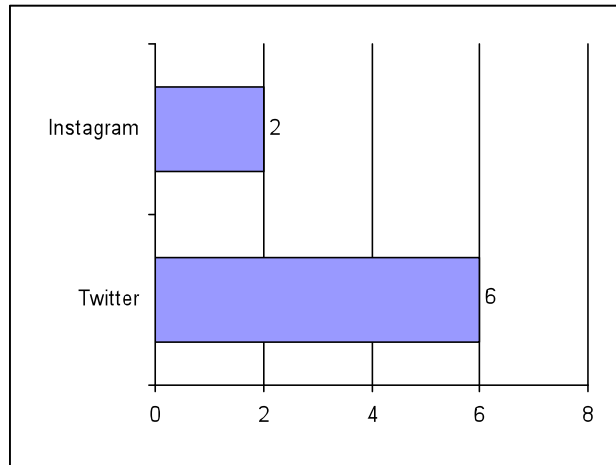
The one participant who did fill out the question about problems with the current session reported two problems. First, every time she logs in, she has to change her newsfeed settings to show the most recent posts, rather than the most popular. She noted that she finds that frustrating, as she would prefer to have the most recent posts shown in the newsfeed. She also indicated that she had banner asking her to verify my cell phone number. She was not sure why this should have appeared, because she has already set her privacy settings.

Improvements

Three of 15 participants responded to our request for suggestions on improvements to Facebook. The improvements included requests for an easier way to look through recently uploaded pictures. This suggestion did not indicate whether these would be pictures on one’s own or on a Friend’s page. A second suggestion was to add trending topics, similar to the way Twitter reports popular topics. The third suggestion was to prompt users to change their settings for applications, messages and other settings to private rather than defaulting to public. Finally, a participant asked for less prominent advertisements.

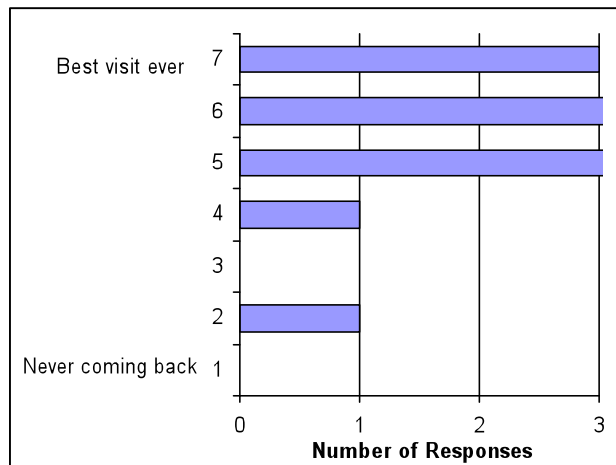
Other Social Media Platforms

We asked participants if they use other social media platforms. Nine selected “No” and six selected “Yes.” We left an open-ended response asking which other social media platforms were used. All six indicated Twitter, and two of the six indicated Instagram, a photo upload program.



Overall Satisfaction

On a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 meant “Never coming back” and 7 meant “Best visit ever,” Responses indicated that participants were generally satisfied. Thirteen indicated a rating of 5 or better and 3 rated the visit a 7, or “Best visit ever.” One person indicated an unfavorable rating of 2 and the same person indicated a neutral rating of 4 for another session. Her third session was rated a six, indicating that this person’s individual experience with Facebook was varied. The other three participants rated the experience on each of their visits a 5 or greater, indicating that those users are more satisfied with Facebook, individually.



Limitations

A diary study has some limitations. First, it requires dedication and commitment from participants. Since the evaluators do not have control over when or how often the test users complete an activity on the site, they must send gentle reminders to ensure that the participants complete the survey. In this case, the participants did complete the survey for the recommended, minimum number of times.

A diary study also requires time and energy by the evaluators to train and keep track of participants and to collect and analyze data. The extra time required to perform these evaluation activities and interpret the results means that only a small number of test users can be evaluated, relative to other user tests that utilize automated tracking.

Another limitation is that the evaluators are not present when the participants are using the interface. This makes interpreting responses somewhat difficult. We included open ended questions to elicit explanations for any problems or notable experiences to help interpret the responses; however, the method does not allow for additional follow up.

Finally, a limitation of this particular study is that it is difficult to generalize the experience of a small sample size and a small number of entries to a larger population. Because so few participants indicated problems, our recommendations should be evaluated alongside other user tests as a means to provide support and/or clarification for those findings.

Conclusion

Of the users who participated in this Facebook diary study, it seems that most are satisfied with their experience. Few participants indicated problems. In fact it seemed that although most logged in with rather casual intentions, most found that they learned something by the experience, were engaged with the content of feeds (if not with notifications of activity) and rated their visit with high level of satisfaction.

Appendix I – Sample Questionnaire

Diary Entry

Please fill out information with as much detail as possible. Fields do not need to be filled in order.

* Required

This diary entry is for:
*enter your name here

Where are you logging in from?

- Home
- Work
- School
- Out and About
- Other:

What device are you using?

- Laptop
- Tablet
- Cell Phone
- Desktop
- Other:

Start Time?

What time did you go onto Facebook?

Duration?

How long were you logged onto Facebook? (Please estimate in minutes)

Activities

Tell us about your activity on the site.

Why did you visit Facebook today?

- Received notification of activity
- Boredom
- Connect with a friend
- Follow up from previous visit
- Find information about or post a comment to a company
- Play a game
- Curiosity
- Edit my settings
- Procrastination
- Other:

How many notifications did you have when you logged on?

My notifications were:

- All of great interest
- Generally relevant to my interests
- Some of interest, some not
- Not relevant to my interests
- A waste of time

Which of these activities did you engage in? *Please check all that apply for this visit.

- Chat
- Photo upload
- Status update
- Application
- Check-in
- Check notifications
- Messaging
- Add friend
- Event
- Visit group
- Poke someone
- Like a status/ post/ photo/ etc.
- Comment on someone else's post
- Comment on your own post
- Shared post/ website/ etc.
- Other:

The posts in my newsfeed were: *

- All of great interest
- Generally relevant to my interests
- Some of interest, some not
- Not relevant to my interests
- A waste of time

Did you click through to a friend's page based on a post in your newsfeed?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how close are you to that person?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Haven't see or heard from the person in years	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very close

Describe your activity today in more detail.

An empty rectangular text input field with a thin grey border. It features a vertical scrollbar on the right side and a horizontal scrollbar at the bottom, both with a black and white checkered pattern. The field is currently empty.

Did you learn anything new during your visit?

An empty rectangular text input field with a thin grey border. It features a vertical scrollbar on the right side and a horizontal scrollbar at the bottom, both with a black and white checkered pattern. The field is currently empty.

What was most memorable about your visit?

An empty rectangular text input field with a thin grey border. It features a vertical scrollbar on the right side and a horizontal scrollbar at the bottom, both with a black and white checkered pattern. The field is currently empty.

Did you encounter any problems today?

An empty rectangular text input field with a thin grey border. It features a vertical scrollbar on the right side and a horizontal scrollbar at the bottom, both with a black and white checkered pattern. The field is currently empty.

Are there any improvements you would suggest to Facebook?

An empty rectangular text input field with a thin grey border. It features a vertical scrollbar on the right side and a horizontal scrollbar at the bottom, both with a black and white checkered pattern. The field is currently empty.

Did you use any other social media platforms before or after your session today?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what was it? How long were you on it, compared to Facebook?



How satisfied were you with your visit to Facebook?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Never coming back Best visit ever

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Appendix II – Detailed Results

Where are you logging in from?		
	Number of Responses	Response Rate
	15	100%
Home	9	
Work	5	
School	0	
Out and About	1	

What device are you using?		
	Number of Responses	Response Rate
	15	100%
Laptop	10	
Desktop	3	
Tablet	0	
Cell Phone	2	

Most frequent Combinations		
	Number of Responses	
Home+Laptop	8	
Work+Laptop	2	
Work+Desktop	3	

Start Time?		
	Number of Responses	Response Rate
	15	100%
1:12:00 AM		
1:50:00 AM		
4:30:00 AM		
7:45:00 AM		
9:00:00 AM		
9:00:00 AM		
9:00:00 AM		
9:10:00 AM		
10:25:00 AM		
10:30:00 AM		
1:30:00 PM		
5:00:00 PM		
5:20:00 PM		
5:30:00 PM		
9:41:00 PM		

Duration?		
	Number of Responses	Response Rate
	15	100%
5 Minutes		
3 Minutes		
10 Minutes		
10 Minutes		
10 Minutes		
10 Minutes		
10 Minutes		
10 Minutes		
10 Minutes		
10 Minutes		
10 Minutes		
5-10 Minutes		
15 Minutes		
15 Minutes		
15 Minutes		
< 10 minutes	3	
10 minutes	7	
15 minutes	3	
At least 10 minutes	10	

Why did you visit Facebook today?		
	Number of Responses	Response Rate
	15	100%
Received Notification of Activity	0	
Boredom	4	
Connect with a friend	1	
Follow up from previous visit	0	
Company Info/Comment	0	
Play a game	0	
Curiosity	6	
Edit my settings	0	
Procrastination	2	
Other	2	
Checked pictures		
Info about an event		

How many notifications did you have when you logged on?		
	Number of Responses	Response Rate
	15	100%
0	8	
1	2	
2	3	
3	1	
4	0	
5	1	

My notifications were:		
	Number of Responses	Response Rate
	9	60%
Generally relevant to my interests	2	
Some of interest, some not	2	
Not relevant to my interests	3	
NA	9	

Which of these activities did you engage in?		
	Number of Responses	Response Rate
	15	100%
Chat	1	
Photo upload	2	
Status update	2	
Application	0	
Check-in	0	
Check notifications	0	
Messaging	1	
Add friend	0	
Event	0	
Visit group	0	
Poke someone	0	
Like a status/post/ photo/ etc.	3	
Comment on someone else's post	4	
Comment on your own post	2	
Shared post/ website/ etc.	0	
Other	8	

The posts in my newsfeed were:		
	Number of Responses	Response Rate
	15	100%
All of great interest	2	
Generally relevant to my interests	5	
Some of interest, some not	8	
Not relevant to my interests	0	
Waste of time	0	

Did you click through to a friend's page based on a post in your newsfeed?		
	Number of Responses	Response Rate
	15	100%
Yes	5	
No	10	

	Number of Responses	Response Rate
If yes, how close are you to that person?	5	33%
1 – Haven't seen this person in years	0	
2	2	
3	0	
4	0	
5	2	
6 – Very close	1	

Describe your activity today in more detail.
Number of Responses: 14
Response Rate: 93%
1. I was looking on my newsfeed to see posts about the hurricane
2. Checked my news feed to learn about commuting conditions to the city
3. I just scanned through the newsfeed to check recent updates
4. <i>No Response</i>
5. Basically just checked my newsfeed.
6. I logged on to message a friend about dinner plans as this is the primary way this person communicates. Normally I would have done through my regular email not facebook.
7. Because of the hurricane I've pretty much had FB open all day to check out what people are posting, and also to post a couple hurricane-related items myself. Definitely spending more time on it today than normal.
8. Checked in on hurricane sandy coverage.
9. Just checking my newsfeed. Mostly to see people post election stuff!
10. just checking in to see what my friends were up to today.
11. Checking in with friends and family after losing power during the hurricane
12. just touching base with the facebook world
13. Logged in to check on an event time & address; ended up looking at pictures from a high school friend's wedding
14. General browsing through status updates
15. I uploaded a photo of my cat & checked for status updates.

Did you learn anything new during your visit?
Number of Responses: 12
Response Rate: 80%
1. yes, i learned that nj shore is under water
2. the city is a mess
3. A lot of people were voting
4. About facebook? no, however i learned about what my facebook friends were doing?
5. Today is an old coworker's birthday.
6. <i>No response</i>
7. Just a lot of new hurricane updates.
8. <i>No response</i>
9. not really.
10. Yes, I learned how much people are worried about the upcoming storm next week. Something I wasn't very worried about.
11. much more damage than I had originally thought. Been without power for 2 days, with cell service sporadic, haven't been able to touch base with some people
12. power is slowly but surely returning to the people of new jersey
13. Someone I knew in high school got married!
14. No
15. <i>No response</i>

What was most memorable about your visit?
Number of Responses: 8
Response Rate: 53%
1. pictures of the flooding in nj
2. the pictures of the lines for the bus
3. there was a lot of election coverage
4. <i>No Response</i>
5. Nothing too memorable---just your basic updates from friends and liked pages.
6. <i>No Response</i>
7. It was interesting to see people comment on the hurricane from different parts of the US.
8. <i>No Response</i>
9. <i>No Response</i>
10. Lots of storm posts
11. How many people were affected by the storm
12. one of my friends rant about a customer they encountered this morning
13. <i>No Response</i>
14. <i>No Response</i>
15. <i>No Response</i>

Did you encounter any problems today?
Number of Responses: 10
Response Rate: 67%
1. no
2. no
3. no
4. <i>No Response</i>
5. No problems.
6. Not today however sometimes when messaging on my phone from FB it will look like there is an unread message when in fact there isn't. I dont know i this is an FB thing or a 3G thing.
7. No problems.
8. <i>No Response</i>
9. It wasn't necessarily a problem but I really liked someone's status and wanted to share it, and I realized that this isn't an option(other than to copy and paste). It might have something to do with privacy issues?
10. Everytime I log in I have to change the settings on my newsfeed to show up the most recent posts instead of the most popular. It doesn't stay organized by most recent. This can be quite frustrating. Today - when I logged in there was a banner at the top of the screen asking me to verify my cell phone number of my privacy settings on who could see my cell number. Since I have this set completely to private, and I've already set my privacy settings, I don't know why this message came up. But I don't want to change my settings, and I don't want to make my information more accessible.
11. no
12. nope
13. <i>No Response</i>
14. <i>No Response</i>
15. <i>No Response</i>

Are there any improvements you would suggest to Facebook?	
Number of Responses: 12	
Response Rate: 80%	
1. an easier way to look through recently uploaded pictures	
2. <i>No Response</i>	
3. With the election coverage so prominent, facebook may want to think of adding things that are trending like twitter	
4. <i>No Response</i>	
5. <i>No Response</i>	
6. <i>No Response</i>	
7. <i>No Response</i>	
8. <i>No Response</i>	
9. <i>No Response</i>	
10. Allow users to not have all of their apps, messages, and settings generally set the public view, or prompt them to change their settings when they are set to private.	
11. <i>No Response</i>	
12. <i>No Response</i>	
13. Less prominent ads	
14. <i>No Response</i>	
15. <i>No Response</i>	

Did you use any other social media platforms before or after your session today?		
	Number of Responses	Response Rate
	15	100%
Yes	6	
No	9	

If yes, what was it? How long were you on it, compared to Facebook?		
	Number of Responses	Response Rate
	6	40%
Twitter	6	
Instagram	2	

How satisfied were you with your visit to Facebook?		
	Number of Responses	Response Rate
	15	100%
1 – Never coming back	0	
2	1	
3	0	
4	1	
5	5	
6	5	
7 – Best visit ever	3	