

# Engaging Youth in Social Media: Is Facebook the New Media Frontier?

## A NewsCloud – University of Minnesota Research Report Executive Summary

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### Introduction

Counter to the decline in young people's (print-based) reading for pleasure and traditional media consumption is a noted *increase* in out-of-school online reading and writing through online fan fiction and social network sites.<sup>i,ii</sup> Yet, according to the Pew research institute, over one third of people under 25 get no news on a daily basis.<sup>iii</sup> However, teens spend many hours a week online ([a recent British study said 31](#)), particularly on Facebook -- the most-trafficked social media site in the world. [Facebook has more than 250 million active members](#).

Can youth be persuaded to critically engage in news and conversation -- on Facebook? Can they feel a sense of community? Furthermore, can their involvement translate into real-world actions, or will it consist solely of virtual activism? And, if we understood how young people prefer to manipulate, produce and talk through information online, would that move us closer to understanding how to develop successful media-rich and educational environments?

Answering such questions is critical. If we hope to inform, educate and mobilize an engaged citizenry — as the vision for not only the future of news industries but also for [full participation](#)<sup>iv</sup> in a [21<sup>st</sup> century](#)<sup>v</sup> democracy says we should — we need to make sharing news and experiences fit easily into teens' lives and be easily tracked and observed to ensure success.

### The Social Media Experiment

In 2008, [Jeff Reifman](#), founder of news aggregation company [NewsCloud](#), and University of Minnesota researcher [Dr. Christine Greenhow](#),<sup>vi</sup> were awarded a generous \$249,529 grant from the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#) to study how young people use and share news. To gather study data, two Facebook applications were developed to investigate how social networking sites engage youth in news and information.

Development on the project began in December 2008. "[Hot Dish](#)," a Facebook application for sharing articles about the environment and climate change, was launched in March 2009 and included an "Action Team" feature, which inspired 16- to 25-year-old users to take actions within the Hot Dish community in return for points redeemable for prizes. A second application, "[The Daily](#)," was launched in April 2009 for the student-run newspaper at the University of Minnesota. This research summary focuses on findings for Hot Dish only. Findings for The Daily will be released in September 2009.

## Research Goals

The Newscloud – University of Minnesota Youth and Social Media Study sought to investigate whether and how the Hot Dish social media application could do the following:

- 1) Engage youth in news and information
- 2) Build community
- 3) Develop users' knowledge about the topic
- 4) Generate real world impact
- 5) Promote reading and writing practices (e.g., new media literacy).

Hot Dish is an experiment in "[public media 2.0](#)," that is, the generation of *dynamic, networked publics around problems* that aim to inform, educate and mobilize users. Public media 2.0 ventures, such as Hot Dish, facilitate media for and by the people; they pair quality content with avenues for engagement, providing digital tools for media-sharing, and creating new opportunities for civic engagement. Finally, they seek to foster participatory user behaviors such as *choice, conversation, curation, creation, and collaboration*.<sup>vii</sup>

## Hot Dish Features: Overview

Hot Dish is a niche social network, designed to facilitate news and information-sharing, commentary and problem-solving challenges among young people interested in climate change and other environmental issues. Hot Dish features allow users to read, rank, annotate, post, create, share and discuss climate change topics. For example, users can *read* and *share* relevant news stories and articles; *post* their own articles; *vote* up others' stories; write *blog* entries and *comments*; and interact with other users via online discussion boards, chat and twitter functions. Seattle-based online magazine Grist.org provides environmental content daily which complements user-generated content.

The Hot Dish application can be spread to contacts in the user's existing social network, and existing contacts can be invited to join or view content within the Hot Dish community. That said, one of the greatest opportunities and challenges to working with the Facebook platform are unannounced changes. For instance, [changes to Facebook's stream technology](#) in the midst of Hot Dish may have dampened the viral impact of our application.

To aid in data collection and analysis, the software tracks, records and archives users' activities.

## Hot Dish Action Team Challenges and Competition

The Action Team feature within Hot Dish, gives users the opportunity to earn points for taking actions, both on- and off-line, that bolstered their involvement in the application and showcased how they are making environmental change. These *challenge* activities allowed Action Team members to earn points for local activism and civic engagement (such as writing a letter to the editor, writing lawmakers,

starting a recycling program, or recycling old electronics). Hot Dish Action Team members would submit a report of their completed activities through the application, providing text, digital photographs, and videos as documentation. The Hot Dish Community Coordinator would verify each submitted challenge before awarding points. In addition, some challenges – mostly those that had to do with taking action online (e.g., posting stories, sharing stories, inviting friends, etc.) – were awarded points automatically.

Through May 3, 2009, Hot Dish gave away more than \$25,000 worth of eco-friendly prizes to eligible 16-25 year-old users who participated. Top point earners won eco-friendly prizes ranging from organic cotton T-shirts and gift certificates to an Amazon Kindle 2 and new “green” Apple MacBook computer. The grand prize was a trip for two to the Arctic, courtesy of leading polar exploration provider [Quark Expeditions](#). To expand participation beyond the study group, all participants received free downloadable endangered species ringtones from the [Center for Biological Diversity](#) and free shipping from fair trade coffee leader [Equal Exchange](#).

By the end of the competition, the two most popular actions were recycling old electronics and taking online civic action (via internet petitions), which reflect the interesting online-offline dichotomy in activism Hot Dish encourages and which is a reality in the climate movement today.

## Hot Dish Study Sample

Teens and twenty-somethings constitute about one fourth of the U.S. population (72.5 million people).<sup>viii</sup> Understanding how this group connects (or doesn’t) with news and with each other is essential to our economic, cultural and educational futures.

To be eligible for participation in our research study, Hot Dish users had to meet five criteria, including: be 16-25 years of age; be a U.S. resident; have completed the registration form on the Facebook application; have authorized the Facebook application to access their profile; and have opted into the research study. Hot Dish members not in the study did not complete all of these steps.

Moreover, a short, two-month time frame for data collection, kept the sample size small. A more longitudinal approach to data collection and analysis would allow further insights and confirmation/disconfirmation of the following themes.

In all, Hot Dish attracted ~5,016 monthly active users (at peak); 2,174 total users, including nearly 150 Facebook fans -- impressive numbers for a site studied so quickly after its launch.

346 participants completed the requirements to be included in the research study. During the two month study and contest period, users completed the following activities:

- 2153 stories read (64% of the total possible)
- 1557 stories posted
- 4589 stories shared
- 4320 votes
- 2353 comments written

- 110 blog entries written
- 1197 eco-challenges completed
- 20,409 total challenges completed (automatic and submitted)
- 3498 friends invited
- 345 friends invited signed up (10%)

## Summary of Findings

### 1. The design of the Hot Dish Facebook application seemed very effective at strengthening news consumption and online interaction habits.

Despite the fact that Hot Dish had only been in existence for two months, our analysis suggests it was becoming integrated into young people's regular news consumption and online interaction habits. As illustrated and discussed in the full report, Hot Dish was successful in attracting a base of users who actively participated in reading, posting and commenting on stories. The design of the Facebook application seemed very effective at providing young people with a daily *scannable* view of current events and, perhaps most importantly, at stimulating their response in one form or another.

[According to a 2009 study](#) from the Newspaper Association of America,<sup>ix</sup> teenagers want information in manageable and illustrated chunks rather than in long, uninterrupted blocks of text with too many details that make the stories difficult to understand. They'd like to understand the issues better, to understand the basics of what people are talking about and to be able to form their own opinions and to talk about the news.

The Hot Dish layout aligned with these preferences. One or two illustrated story nuggets were prominently featured at the top left, occupying two-thirds of the screen real estate (i.e., bolded headline, short story summary with a clickable link to "more" information and an accompanying illustration or video). Ten or fewer "Top" stories were featured below these articles. Story placement changed as the editorial team updated the site and as users voted stories up or down, thus indicating that viewer preferences influenced the content displayed. Surrounding each ranked story were tools to express opinions and talk about the news (e.g., "vote it up," "post a comment," "share it").

[With over 65% of U.S. teens](#)— and [85% of U.S. college students](#)—maintaining profiles on social network sites (mostly Facebook) and accessing these sites regularly,<sup>x</sup> results from this short term investigation of Hot Dish suggest that perhaps Facebook is an effective way to get young people a daily dose of news and stimulate dynamic interaction and knowledge-sharing around important issues/problems.

For instance, in August 2008, The Pew Research Center for the People and The Press reported from its biennial news consumption survey, that social networking sites are very popular with young people, but they have not become a major source of news. Pew reported just 10% of those with social networking profiles say they regularly get news from these sites.<sup>xi</sup>

Although true comparisons to the Pew data are not possible, in our study, almost half of the Hot Dish users (46%) reported getting news regularly (3 or more times per week) from their online social network site and over one-third (36%) reported integrating Hot Dish into this routine. Roughly 75% of those studied reported getting news from Hot Dish at least once in the last week (compared to 93%

reported getting news from other news Web sites). Moreover, as the number of visits to news sites increased so did the number of visits to Hot Dish.

Furthermore, comparing active users' perceptions of Hot Dish (as reported on the survey) with what they actually did within the site (as recorded in points-for-activities values), it appears that as their engagement in Hot Dish activities increased (i.e., number of points increased), so did their perceived frequency of getting news from Hot Dish. Anecdotal data from interviews and focus groups revealed that active users found Hot Dish easy to check into because it overlapped with their pre-existing habits of logging into, reading, and contributing to the Facebook environment.

Moreover, in analyzing Hot Dish engagement among various types of users, it appears **non-college graduates, or the younger segments of our sample, were significantly more motivated** than their older, college-graduated peers, **to use Hot Dish for reading news stories in full and for identifying issues or problems in the community**. A series of chi-square tests revealed that there are not statistically significant differences in gender and race in motivation to use *Hot Dish*. However, when comparing education level (survey takers who had graduated from college compared with survey takers who had not yet graduated from college) there was a statistically significant difference on two of the motivation items: **1) read news stories all the way through** ( $X^2=5.84$ ,  $p=.02$ ), and **2) identify issues or problems in the community** ( $X^2= 4.53$ ,  $p=.03$ ). The proportion of those in agreement with the first statement was higher for non-college graduates (63.8%) than for college graduates (39.6%) with a p-value of .02. The proportion of those in agreement with the second statement was also higher for non-college graduates (91.5%) than for college graduates (75.5%) with a p-value of .03.

This finding aligns with our goals of cultivating a belief among younger generations in the value of news and knowledge-sharing. It also aligns with our goals of stimulating greater awareness of the issues or problems of our time.

## **2. Interest in Hot Dish's focal topic increased, especially among low users. Anecdotal evidence also suggested growth in environmental knowledge, another top goal.**

Time and interest were two factors most affecting Hot Dish engagement, as reported in the surveys. Therefore, it is promising that interest in the topical focus for Hot Dish – environmental and climate change issues – increased for the overall population of Hot Dish users. The biggest increase in interest occurred within the low user population. Thirty-three percent of low users increased in interest, with a mean interest increase of .73 (Interest was rated on a 7-point scale).

Regarding the development of environmental knowledge, Hot Dish users already had a higher *baseline* environmental knowledgeable than the national average. Almost three-quarters of respondents (71%) got 4 or more knowledge questions correct (out of 5 total questions) on the survey. Questions were drawn from the national EETF/Roper surveys of environmental attitudes and knowledge. Interview and focus group data confirmed our hunches that most participants wanted to participate in Hot Dish to enrich their already substantive knowledge of environmental issues and to express their opinions or strategies for addressing related issues/problems within a space they perceived as receptive.

**Interestingly, Hot Dish users felt they *learned* information in Hot Dish through reading stories, browsing headlines and reading others comments.** Of Hot Dish survey respondents, the majority (> 50%

agreed with statement) that they learned in Hot Dish by *reading stories, browsing headlines, and reading comments* by other users. In addition, most survey respondents (> 50% agreed with the statement) that they enjoyed **connecting** with others through *reading other people's stories, reading comments, and completing challenges with others*. Thus, survey responses suggest that **user-generated content** in the form of posted stories and comments **was perceived as contributing to users' overall learning experience and sense of forging connections to others in Hot Dish**.

Moreover, user statistics, focus group and interview data suggest that users may have learned or deepened in five areas of environmental knowledge: (1) practical applied knowledge (e.g., understanding of how to apply strategies learned to personal choices or local problems), (2) knowledge of local environmental issues (e.g., solar power in Arizona), (3) environmental science knowledge (e.g., understanding of latest research findings); and (4) environmental policy/law knowledge. Articles addressing these first two categories were those most commented upon within Hot Dish. Articles addressing the latter two categories were those most posted. Fifty-five percent of all stories posted were in the categories of environmental science/research (22%) and environmental policies/law (22.7%).

Interview data reveals that Hot Dish users enjoyed connecting with others around strategies for environmental activism and around others' reports of how general trends were being manifested locally. Informants said that they learned more about what was happening in different pockets around the nation from the stories Hot Dish users posted on the site and from reading others' written reflections on the issues.

Longitudinal research is needed to determine whether and how young people, in using Hot Dish, grew in their awareness and understanding of the focal topic (environmental issues and climate change) along a continuum of categories (e.g., environmental science, policy, consumerism/economics, etc.). A pre- and post- test on selected dimensions of knowledge we hoped to impact would yield such insights. In addition, longer term research on whether and how young people, in using Hot Dish, contributed to the learning of others would help us understand more about how knowledge is advanced and distributed through the network. Such findings might shed light on how to inform, educate and mobilize young people through technologies that are already integrated into a majority of their lives.

### **3. The Hot Dish Action Team competition seemed EXTREMELY effective at creating a highly engaged segment of active participants online and especially offline activism.**

Hot Dish users in the study group completed ~1200 submitted challenges (1800 completions of submitted challenges in the overall population). The majority of active users completed at least 1 challenge as part of the action team. Categorization of these challenges and examples of their implementation is discussed in the full report; however, the two most performed challenges were taking action online through media production (e.g., sharing a story, posting a blog entry, creating a video, sharing your thoughts/ideas in comments, tweets, chats, etc.) and activism in the local community (e.g., volunteering, composting, taking part in an environmental event, recycling, etc.). Popular challenges required users to identify and devise ways to solve environmental problems within their home or community.

The Action Team competition was a good motivator for engagement, both online and in offline activist-oriented activities. Interviews and focus groups suggested that medium and high users, especially, enjoyed the competitive, public aspect of the Action Team and earning points toward prizes. The extrinsic motivation of the points system catalyzed a flurry of initial online activity for a core group of active users, and these activities, in turn, helped members get to know one another and contribute to a growing sense that Hot Dish was a receptive place for posting, sharing, inviting, commenting and overall self-expression. Users commented in focus groups and interviews that over the course of the study, their initial motivation to accrue the most points grew into or was complemented by a more intrinsic motivation to connect with like-minded peers in what they perceived as a supportive online space. In these ways, the socio-technical aspects of Hot Dish worked together to sow the seeds of community.

The Hot Dish community/Action Team aspects catalyzed offline-online activism that would not otherwise have been realized. For example, focus groups and interviews revealed that opportunities for civic involvement which would have gone unrealized, such as signing an online petition or contacting a congressman/woman, were completed during the young person's involvement in Hot Dish because the site provided a public forum for recognizing and rewording activism. To more clearly illustrate the nature of challenge activities and their real-world impact, we have included a few short summaries of those undertaken by Hot Dish users:

- Arizona State University senior Allison C. raked in over 47,000 points of green karma, clinching her spot as the grand prize winner of the Hot Dish Action Team. A few of her most notable completed challenges included persuading her gym to start recycling plastic bottles, having three letters to the editor published (see [her letter to the Arizona Republic on hydropower here](#)), and recycling her old washing machine. As the grand prize winner of the Hot Dish contest, she has won a trip to Greenland with [Quark Expeditions](#) and is expected to report back here on the green-to-glacier ratio.
- Other top Hot Dish leaders were Inna L., who ditched her car for an electric bike and started an environmental committee in her condominium complex, and Dave S., who convinced his parents to purchase renewable energy credits and implemented a recycling program at his father's workplace.
- Another Hot Dish action team member, JamieNicole B., walked into a gently used clothing store seeking some easy-on-the-planet fashion and walked out having signed up to volunteer in the store, which donates proceeds to Save the Children. JamieNicole B. has also put media-production to work for an environmentally educative purpose, creating various video tips on [greener driving](#), [sustainable traveling](#), and [energy-efficient computing](#).
- Other real-world actions inspired by Hot Dish were people writing to politicians in support of healthy oceans legislation, attending a [Focus the Nation](#) gathering on clean energy, making jam from local strawberries, creating a college composting proposal in the form of a Captain Planet episode, and creating a community service-based environmental club on a college campus.

Such findings may be very interesting to advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations who are trying to determine how to get members (and potential members) engaged in humanitarian roles, advisories, or political involvement at the community or national level via the Web.

#### 4. **The design of Hot Dish provided avenues of participation that facilitated various engagement levels for different groups of users.**

As with other online communities, a core group of high and regular users tended to set the tone for the space and contribute the majority of its content. Time and interest were two factors most affecting Hot Dish users' engagement, as reported in the surveys.

Engagement in Hot Dish was characterized by high, low, and medium levels of activity with each group displaying somewhat different characteristics. Multiple routes to engagement and communication within Hot Dish allowed users to become involved in the site at a level that best fit their time and interest.

For example, *inviting* Facebook Friends to the application, *voting* on articles, and *reading articles* were the three most popular activities in which **low** users engaged. This is not surprising given that, other than reading, votes and invites take only simply clicks to execute while still indicating a users' online presence and preferences and earning points. In comparison, *sharing* articles, *voting* and *commenting* on them were the three most popular activities in which **high** users engaged; the extent to which high users performed these and all other activities Hot Dish far exceeded that evidenced by low users.

However, in studying user activity over such a short time period, we do not yet know what the levers are between the disparate categories (high, medium, low, inactive), and in particular, what might move an inactive or low user to high engagement over time. For example, it would be interesting to study those users who reported an *increased interest* in the central topic of Hot Dish (see #2 above) to determine whether and how their engagement might also be advanced over time.

It might also be interesting to see whether or not targeted periodic contact with 'inactive' and 'low' users converts more of them to active and higher users, especially if such contact were tied to the motivational value of points, peer interaction, and their other stated preferences on interim surveys.

#### 5. **The topical focus of Hot Dish, and its emphasis on linkages between people within a social network, motivated participants to express ideas and interact with others in ways different from traditional online news sites.**

We noticed several differences between young people's reported motivation to participate in traditional online news sites and their motivation to participate in Hot Dish.

For instance, young people surveyed agreed that they were motivated to use Hot Dish in order to **interact with like-minded people** (71.2%) as compared with only 32.4% of survey takers who were motivated to use general online news sites to interact with like-minded people. This suggests that the content-specific nature of Hot Dish may be motivating to young people because of their ability to communicate with and/or interact with people interested in similar issues. Moreover, it suggests that the potential for interactions with others and for contribution (e.g., through Hot Dish's socio-technical features) were also important motivators for usage.

Survey respondents did not appear to be motivated primarily to participate in either Hot Dish or online news sites in order to persuade others to change their beliefs or opinions. However, ***motivation to persuade others was slightly higher*** for Hot Dish than for online news sites as reported in the surveys. Moreover, other data (i.e., focus groups/interviews) and the number and type of challenges Hot Dish users participated in, suggest that users were interested to some degree in influencing people through their actions, both online and offline.

Participants agreed that they were motivated to use Hot Dish in order to ***express their opinion*** (62.2%) as compared with only 42.3% of survey takers who were motivated to use general online news sites to express their opinion. This suggests that the submission-oriented nature of Hot Dish may motivate people to express an opinion on a site that is focused on issues in which they are interested. It may also be that a corresponding emphasis on the *people* (versus content) constituting the site encourages an orientation toward self-expression (e.g., features such as My Profile and overt linking of people with their actions are dominant within Hot Dish but either absent or visibly reduced in traditional online news sites).

**As a Facebook application, Hot Dish effectively motivated participants to spread awareness of the publication to friends.** This observation points to value of being *inside* not outside of a social networking platform. Active users utilized the application's unique ability to spread itself to their existing social network of Friends within Facebook (e.g., through the *Invite Friends* feature); 41.5% invited 10 or more friends to join Hot Dish.

A caveat to this last point, however, is that a large percentage of the inviting activities were influenced by the competition organizer, who incrementally increased invitation challenges and the point values that could be earned from them to ramp up our user-base in the two-month window for the purposes of the study. Therefore, new invitation-orientated challenges were increasingly created with higher and higher point incentives such as receiving bonus points for encouraging five and ten friends to complete registration.

6. **The Hot Dish social media site within Facebook provided the occasion and impetus for young people's reading and writing practices. For educators and others who care about promoting the literacy and public engagement of youth today, results suggest there may be advantages to locating niche media-sharing communities within existing online social networks.**

Our short-term investigation of online reading and writing practices — also referred to as 'digital' or 'new media' literacies — within Hot Dish suggests that there may be advantages to locating niche media-sharing communities within existing social networks and that niche social media may be uniquely ahead of other sites and forms of online community in catalyzing youth-initiated conversation.

Interestingly, within a very short study period, Hot Dish users contributed **over two-thirds (69%)** of the content (i.e., posted stories, comments and blog entries) available on the Hot Dish site. This finding lends further evidence to the idea that young people are motivated to compose or create media by: a topic that is relevant and interesting, an interested audience (i.e., peer feedback and points accrual), and an opportunity to be creative.<sup>xii</sup> Within Hot Dish, young people wrote to share their opinions on

issues they cared about, promote their work and ideas, and to a lesser extent, influence the opinions or behaviors of others.

Summary statistics reveal that 2153 articles, or 64% of the total possible (n=3365 not including blog entries) were read within Hot Dish, and 42% of the articles were shared at least one time. Not surprisingly, the most engaging subjects (as reported in user surveys and confirmed in site statistics) were those that participants had an initial interest in, and these tended to be articles that instructed them about how they or their communities could affect change toward resolving environmental/climate change issues (e.g., changing consumer behavior). These were the articles most read, voted on, discussed, and shared.

However, the subjects or categories that received the *second* highest activity levels (i.e., local interest stories and user-generated blog entries) were not those originally identified by participants as preferred reading. This suggests that the *people* who made up Hot Dish, including their unique mix of geographic locales and self-expressions, also influenced what was read in Hot Dish. Qualitative data from focus groups and interviews confirms this. Informants talked about following certain Hot Dish members who they knew (from reading previous comments, entries or posted stories) would post exceptionally thoughtful or provocative comments, blog entries, or articles. Thus, within a short period of time, we began to see *network effects* in Hot Dish, such that users' identities within the community influenced its activity.

Furthermore, Hot Dish attracted a base of users who wrote 2353 comments and 110 blog entries within a two-month period. When asked what factors were likely to influence their decision to comment in Hot Dish, the majority (>50% of respondents) felt that **strong feelings toward the story topic and interest in the topic or issue** were *highly likely* to influence their decision to comment.

It may also be that the Hot Dish social media site design, especially its multiple channels for users' communication and self-expression, accommodated the forms and functions of online writing that participants already practiced and had integrated into their daily routines. For instance, participants reported on surveys that they are performing a variety of online reading and multimedia writing activities outside of Hot Dish, mostly through their social network sites (i.e., sending or reading email, sending messages through a social network site, viewing videos on a computer and sending instant messages), and most of these activities are being performed more frequently than are their offline reading and writing activities. Sixty percent of Hot Dish respondents reported sending messages through a social network site 5 or more times per week, with 44% reporting sending messages through a social network site daily.

The research team is still in the process of qualitatively coding young people's writing activities within Hot Dish (e.g., comment strings, blog entries, and multimedia submissions documenting challenge completions) to further understand the nature and quality of their online multimedia contributions. For example, we are interested in whether and how young people display their knowledge of the topic being discussed and whether and how they contribute to the knowledge development of other members within the community.

## Conclusions, Questions & Suggested Next Steps

[With over 65% of U.S. teens](#)— and [85% of U.S. college students](#)—maintaining profiles on social network sites (mostly Facebook) and accessing these sites regularly, existing global networks like Facebook seem to provide an effective way to get young people a daily dose of news and stimulate dynamic interaction and youth-initiated contributions around important issues/problems.

Unlike most social network sites that are largely devoid of rich content, and unlike most content rich sites that are typically controlled by a small base of ‘expert’-providers with add-on community features, the Hot Dish social media site appears to be a promising blend of the best features of both.

However, this study occurred within a very short time frame. Allowing the user base to accrue and mature over a longer time horizon would likely contribute to a larger sample size and alleviate the need to manipulate points’ values toward spreading the application. Specifically, longer term research is needed to confirm/disconfirm and elaborate on the trends reported here and to address the following questions this work raises:

1. What is the right balance of incentives (e.g., extrinsic motivators like points) and more intrinsic, self-sustaining motivators (e.g., peer sharing and dynamic contribution) to build the consumption and production practices we’d hope to see over time?
2. We found that interest in the focal topic was a key factor in site participation, but what are the levers between the disparate categories of users (high, medium, low, inactive)? What might move an inactive or low user to high engagement over time. It would be useful to study those participants who reported an *increased interest* in the central topic of Hot Dish to see if indeed they move up (or not) in activity levels.
3. How does interest, knowledge, civic participation, and a sense of community develop over time? If we hope to generate dynamic, networked publics around important problems like climate change and educate a more informed and engaged citizenry, answering this question is critical but merits pre- and post measures and comparison on intended and actual activities within the site over a longer time period.
4. How might design variations improve the amount and depth of online reading and multimedia writing practices? How might future iterations of Hot Dish or similar sites encourage more dialogue, debate, and problem solving? For instance, the Hot Dish Facebook application was designed in a certain way with some limitations; story pages (level I read) presented comment threads, the poster’s bio, related articles, and a chat opportunity. To read the Full article on the Web site of origin (level II read) required a second click. Changes to this approach might yield significantly different findings. Future improvements to the social media publication might offer publishers (or licensees of syndication services) the ability to show the full text of an article within Facebook.
5. How might insights from youth-initiated public dialogue and debate be fed back into the framing of the issues as well as into the design and implementation of media to make it more engaging for this demographic?

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## Endnotes

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<sup>ii</sup> Rich, M. (2008, July 27). Literacy debate: Online, R U really reading? *New York Times*, pp. 1, 14-15.

<sup>iii</sup> See the August 2008 report, "Audience Segments in a Changing News Environment: Key News Audiences Now Blend Online and Traditional Sources" issued on August 17, 2008 from the Pew Research Center Biennial News Consumption Survey. Available online at: <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/444.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> See the vision for full online participation in Clarke, J. & Aufderheide, P. (2009, February). *Public Media 2.0: Dynamic, Engaged Publics*. Washington, D.C. Center for Center for Social Media, American University. <http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/documents/whitepaper.pdf>

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<sup>vi</sup> Greenhow's previous work ([www.cgreenhow.org](http://www.cgreenhow.org)) has focused on young people's learning, literacies, citizenship demonstration, and identity formation within social network sites. See for example: Greenhow, C. & Robelia, E. (2008). [Old communication, new literacies: Social network sites as social learning resources](#). *Journal of Computer-mediated Communication*, 14(4), 1130-1161. Greenhow, C. & Robelia, E. (2009). [Informal learning and identity formation in online social networks](#). *Learning, Media and Technology*, 34(2), 119-140. Greenhow, C., Robelia, E., & Hughes, J. (2009). [Web 2.0 and classroom research: What path should we take now?](#) *Educational Researcher*, 38 (4), 246-259.

<sup>vii</sup> See the vision for full online participation in Clarke, J. & Aufderheide, P. (2009, February). *Public Media 2.0: Dynamic, Engaged Publics*. Washington, D.C. Center for Center for Social Media, American University. <http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/documents/whitepaper.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates as of November 2008 as reported on page 3 in the 2009 *Teens Know What they Want from Online News: Do You?* from News Paper Association of America and Media Management Center, Northwestern University. Available online at: <http://www.mediamanagementcenter.org/research/teensknow.pdf>

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>x</sup> According to a January 2009 Memo on *Adults and Social Network Sites* prepared by Amanda Lenhart for the Pew Internet & American Life Project, a full 65% of online American teenagers (ages 12-17) have a profile on a social network site. For data on college students' use of social network sites, see Chapter 2 in Salaway, G., Borreson, J., Nelson, M.R., (2008). *The ECAR study of undergraduate students and information technology*, 2008: Vol 8. (Educause Center for Applied Research). Boulder, CO: Educause.

<sup>xi</sup> See "Audience Segments in a Changing News Environment: Key News Audiences Now Blend Online and Traditional Sources" a report issued on August 17, 2008 from the Pew Research Center Biennial News Consumption Survey. Available online at: <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/444.pdf>

<sup>xii</sup> See the discussion of writing motivators in Lenhart, A., Arafeh, S., Smith, A., & Macgill, A. R. (2008, April). *Writing, Technology and Teens*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet & American Life Project.