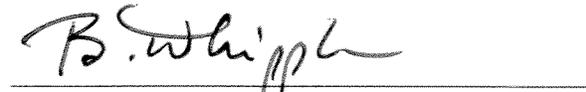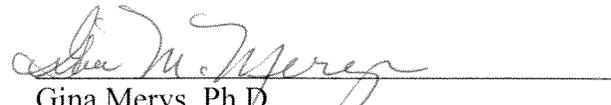THESIS APPROVED BY

14 April 2011
Date

Robert Dornsife, Ph.D., Chair

Bob Whipple, Ph.D.

Gina Merys, Ph.D.

Gail M. Jensen, Ph.D., Dean

LIKE, SHARE, OR CONTINUE SHOPPING: BRANDING IDENTITY AND

CONSUMERIZING ONLINE LITERACY

_____

BY

ERIN CARTAYA

_____

A THESIS

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of the Creighton University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of English.

_____

Omaha, NE

April 14, 2011

Abstract:

       The Internet today presents information consumable as a tangible good that is often used in exchange for something else. Technology eases our access to literacy while redefining it, making literacy a product aimed at consumers on a broader basis. No longer is literacy being defined by the limitations of academia. What was once considered a measurement of education and knowledge is now how easily we can access information needed, whether it be for academic purposes or social. Looking at literacy from a sociocultural perspective allows us to see how information is consumed, and how the influence of consumerism affects our idea of literacy. Because technology is everywhere and because it presents us with literacy events multiple times a day, the consumer-centered Internet and online branding have a similar impact on literature and literacy as it does in our lives.

To
Rob Dornsife

With whose help on this thesis and genuine concern for my vitamin intake and exercise regiment has gotten me through this ring of fire with minimal scars.

With a special thanks to Gina Merys and Bob Whipple, my secondary readers and positive reinforcements.

And finally, to Aunt Vici, whose hospitality and constant advice allowed me to perch myself on a tree instead of being ass deep in alligators.

Table of Contents

The days of contemplating and debating whether or not to incorporate computers/ technology into a broader definition of literacy are over. It is more difficult anymore to think about the days *before* technology was introduced into our daily lives than it is to think about finding new ways of using technology on a daily basis. As it stands, digital technology is the driving force of our world today. From computers in the classroom to smart phones to computerized heart monitors, how we have adapted to technology is in no way an inconvenience. Yet, when thinking of technology and its impact on literacy, the hesitation seems to have shifted from implementing such tools into the classroom (computers) to a more dynamic hesitation- what are these tools relaying about literacy? Within the last 10 years or so, it has been difficult to answer this, as scholars have cautiously steadied themselves on the fence of digital technology. In *Literacy Online: The Promise (and Peril) of Reading and Writing With Computers*, Myron Tuman described the immanent confrontation with online literacy as such: "The issue raised…collectively begin to unravel the cloth of literacy that for most of this century has remained largely untouched by revisionist critiques… might these activities lead to different but in key ways better forms of understanding? Or might these literate activities threaten the very notion of critical understanding by substituting manipulation for analysis or by undermining the stability of reality and hence the very possibility of critique?" (Tuman 14). Yet, in 1999, Cynthia Selfe brought up an interesting component to technological literacy:

> Government and corporate values and practices, moreover, help shape the officiated programs of technological literacy that the American educational system offers to students. Most schools, for example, now recognize an obligation to teach transactional and functional communication practices within electronic environments. The goal is to provide students with marketable skills and to produce a technologically skilled citizenry that can contribute to the national commonweal and to a healthy economy based on the production of increasingly sophisticated technological products and services (Selfe 14).

In the 7 years from Tuman's work to the assertion made by Selfe here, several important distinctions arise. First, Selfe looks at literacy through an already accepting lens. She begins with the assumption that literacy *has* a new meaning, and that it involves technology. Furthermore, she looks at literacy in terms of how it is implicated on a social level- beyond the boundaries of a classroom. It is from this very assumption and implication which I derive my project. In particular, I am going to focus on literacy from a consumer point of view, to see where and how corporate influences "shape…technological literacy" and how the said literacy functions within a business-minded online space. This notion adds a new level of meaning to literacy; a technological one. Ultimately, digital technology from a consumer standpoint not only alters the focus of the already complex definition(s) of literacy from reading and writing to a more communicative understanding, but it provides the opportunity to look at literacy beyond the classroom. Having moved beyond the fact that the Internet has affected our definition of literacy, I will be focusing on the definition of literacy as it exists outside of the classroom. Of course, this is not to say that online literacy is not important in the classroom. On the contrary, literacy (let alone online literacy) is hardly worth discussing if not somehow rooted in the foundations of a classroom.

As Selfe explains above, technological literacy, more specifically online literacy, is largely influenced by a corporate mindset, where information flow is seen as transactional, and where identity and knowledge are marketed to an audience of larger proportions than was possible without the Internet. The Internet introduces a critical jump in the study of literacy. Because literacy is only loosely attached to any definition, or set of definitions, it is open to expansion; which is my intention here. In many ways, the sociocultural influences introduced to literacy through the internet have astonishing affects on our understanding, our definition of, and

how we utilize literacy in a digital age. As Selfe implies, these sociocultural influences on literacy place educational value on online literacy, which is how it connects Internet use with literacy, and how it connects students with the rest of the world. In essence, the online literacy "practices and skills characterizing official schooling environments often affect technological literacy practices at home…and shape corporate practices" (Selfe 14). By interlacing educational implications of online literacy with those of a business dimension, we can not only draw connections between the two environments, but also look into the influence each has on the other. In other words, the reliance of these two entities on one another justifies the notion that beyond the classroom, literacy can exist in such a way that allows for students to interact as consumers in a business-centered online space and as individuals in an open public online community.

Though the Internet and technology are accepted as forms of literacy vehicles, there is still a resistance to accept either one at an educational level. Put another way, there is a struggle to accept online literacy as a part of education while simultaneously understanding literacy in a social context. The struggle to see these two different value systems interacting with one another becomes a major issue for many scholars. Mark Bauerlein, in *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*, goes so far as to say that social uses of the Internet actually "stupefies" younger generations: "It isn't enough to say that young people are uninterested in world realities. They are actively cut off from them. or a better way to put it is to say that they are encased in more immediate realities that shut out conditions beyond- friends, work, clothes, cars, pop music, sitcoms, Facebook" (Bauerlein 13). He makes several claims that laziness and loss of literacy (knowledge) are results of Internet use and therefore need to be kept out of the classroom/learning environment. In arguing that, Bauerlein shows how online literacy is met with resistance and the obstacles that make it impossible for

online literacy to take on a justified role in classrooms; but not how, if separate, online literacy *affects* classroom literacy in our current culture. Therefore, arguments against online literacy are necessary in this discussion to emphasize the importance of it *in* the classroom, via influences that are met *outside* the classroom. Once this resistance is extinguished, it is possible to see how online literacy is involved in other social contexts such as the workplace or on business websites.

This project looks at online literacy in several ways. First I will look at the changes that the Internet has made on our understanding of literacy. In chapter 1, I will use mainly RW Burniske's *Literacy in the Digital Age* to explore the re-definition of literacy as seen through a digital culture. In this book, Burniske emphasizes the critical importance of understanding literacy in a digital age. He brings up several discussions on the matter, which will help to clarify online literacy as it will be used in this project. In chapter 2, I will navigate away from Burniske's emphasis on bringing the new definition of literacy into new pedagogical implications by looking at it in contexts outside of the classroom. I am particularly interested in taking a business perspective, specifically a marketing standpoint. Information and content found online carry a certain level of marketable value; such as in brand recognition or identity development. My discussion entails an exploration in both of these aspects of literacy, looking at areas like social networks, advertisements, and in a general sense, everyday encounters with the new literacy. Looking specifically at how identity is formed through social networks, on the one hand, I will show how the process of forming a profile (and social networking in general) is, in essence, a marketing strategy on a social level. On the other hand, I will discuss online advertisements and how this type of online literacy influences literacy in the classroom and vice versa. Using branding as the foundation of marketing, I will show how branding, marketing and identity are a large part of online literacy both in and outside of the classroom. Because online literacy is so interwoven with marketing and business, we can look at the Internet as a consumer-

centered space that inevitably shows its implications in the classroom. A focus on marketing brings the consumer of information into play. Which leads to chapter 3, a more focused look at the consumption of information; both from a consumer standpoint as well as a user/student consuming information. In both cases, information being produced and consumed socially affects information as knowledge. Finally, in chapter 4, I will look further into information consumption as it pertains to everyday Internet users and how they are affected by this idea of consumption via identity, marketing, advertisements, etc. (and then how it ultimately affects online literacy in educational environments). The combination of marketing and education when looking at online literacy will have negative, positive, and indeed, blurred connotations; but all have a specific role in the definition of online literacy. Finally, to conclude, I will show how the marketing influences on the internet are not solely targeted at selling a product or service. Rather, through a marketing perspective, we can see the economy of online literacy as it flows from the classroom to the "real world" and then back again.

CHAPTER 1: Re-Inventing the Language of Literacy, Online

Literacy is no longer understood as a single entity. The word itself is defined by a mark; a descriptor or an additive that expands and re-focuses on the respective attribute of that mark. But adding a mark doesn't necessarily add to the meaning of Literacy. On the contrary, literacy acts as the mark for that descriptor; adding meaning to that word. This is not to say that it ties down a definition in either direction. To define literacy with the limitations of a marker would be doing just that; limiting the scope of literacy and its potential to possess larger value. For example, adult literacy pertains to a specific subject group, adults, in which literacy acts as the marker to describe a certain aspect of adults. Likewise, cultural literacy looks at literacy in a much broader way than simply within a culture. By explicating the term "cultural literacy," certain implications are implied both on a culture and how literacy is affected by culture. Because literacy carries no static meaning, understanding online literacy is not an attempt to define literacy, but to see how literacy exists online and how it has changed our understanding of literacy. The Internet has changed literacy and affected how we have come to define (used loosely) the field of study.

Because of the "online" marker, it is not so much a matter of defining a field of study as much as it is developing a practice. Developing an online literacy requires knowledge of both literacy and of the Internet. The Internet is constantly changing, so to "understand the Internet" is as impossible as it is to concretely define literacy. Yet understanding the *influence* of the Internet on a sociocultural level will help to place literacy (and online literacy) within the same context. It is useful here to begin with the notion that the Internet anymore is a social-based source of communication. With a more efficient way to connect to the world, information is more readily available and generates a greater sense of urgency in the day-to-day acquisition of information and knowledge. As a main source for this type of communication, it comes as no surprise that the need for information opens up the opportunity to turn that communication into a transaction.

From a consumer standpoint, then, the economy of communication comes into existence and information becomes valuable as it provides a convenient and efficient way to acquire information. Being centered around the consumer, information on the Internet is not only seen as transactional, but leads to more demand for information online.

Yet before looking at these aspects of online literacy, it is important to return to the very fundamentals of literacy as its own entity. It is important to recognize within the study of literacy what is involved in the communication of information and how it has evolved in, and into, online literacy. This chapter will particularly look at how identity is important in communicating with language, how we can set the foundations of online literacy developed through language with Derrida, and how it can still be relevant in online literacy and identity construction.

Language, Literacy, Identity: Now and Then

The best way to understand literacy in this day in age is to apply what we know today about the history of the study of literacy to how it is used in daily life on the Internet. The basic understanding of literacy extends beyond the ability to read and write. It stems from an understanding of the communication of language and how language has been used to generate meaning in words. Together, the study of literacy along with its role in society, both strengthen our foundations of online literacy while continuously broadening the meaning of literacy in society as it has always been understood. In order to do this, I will be focusing on Jacques Derrida; but take note that I am not out to prove him as a literacy scholar; his acute attention to language and writing help to establish the necessary groundwork that, when applied to online literacy, helps to broaden our overall understanding of literacy. Using only several of Derrida's theories on writing and language- the question of Being and the notion of absent presence (related to his definition of "trace") - these founding principles not only fit into online literacy,

but explain how those literacies are molded and shaped through our evolving understanding of online literacy.

Jacques Derrida was widely known for his discussions on the distinction of an identified self and a wholly other. When we talk about identity in the present age of the Internet, initial thoughts will likely tend toward our "identity construction" (Zhao, et al. 1832) on Facebook- an amalgamation of photos, interests, and random facts that communicate a certain self to the larger Facebook community- before turning to discussions of language fundamentals like those in Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. Yet, his discussions concerning identity actually allow us to look at literacy with a broader, more social perspective in order to draw in a tighter comparison between the self and community; to consider how technology (the Internet) affects our understanding of contemporary ideas of identity (via Facebook); and how a user's identity is defined by social networks (what is visible or hidden in profiles). When we think of our identity as it is constructed on Facebook, we are also becoming aware of the possibility that a part of that identity remains hidden. Though we have power to control what our identity consists of to specific audiences, we are also vulnerable to the collaborative efforts that also shape that identity. Thus, we can use the Internet to rethink the philosophy of Being as it affects our identity and how that identity is communicated.

Being, here, Derrida would argue, reflects identity in a simple way; it acknowledges that the individual is present; not in any specified moment necessarily, but surely at least identifiable. On Facebook, a Being is often identified through various random facts, updates and profile information displayed on a user's profile. These facts and instances are indeed granting that possibility of Being, affirming a specific identity and interpretation of who "I am," "she is," etc. based on the information provided. By sharing certain information with other Facebook users, we are fulfilling Derrida's expectations of giving "up the attempt to unite the private and the

public and instead consistently construe philosophy as a private project of individual self-creation" (Sandbothe 7). While Derrida does indeed seem less concerned about the reflection of the self to a public audience, we cannot let go of the fact that a majority of his philosophies reflect the importance of the trace; elements of an "other" that, though always absent, "is the mark of the absence of a presence" (Spivak xvii). A Facebook profile contains that very Being- an identity; full of information we choose to share. Meanwhile, the profile also reflects traces of information that are absently present; privacy settings that limit what certain people see or not. While the information is intentionally kept private, it is still marking our identity through the intention of hiding the information.

Mike Sandbothe claims that the use of the Internet as a medium for communication gives users control over their presence online: "In place of a prescribed presence, conveyed to passive recipients (by medium of, say, television) come in the Internet's communication services socially constructed times of presence, within which users constitute their identities on the bed-rock of writing-based interaction in a context of shared plans" (10). If we were to consider Sandbothe's social claims- that the Internet invites socially constructed events- this might cause a problem in his argument that Internet allows a person more control over their identity. On Facebook, for example, unless specifically blocked, a user is free to post and comment on other users' profiles. This inevitably changes the context of the person's overall profile and, thus, their identity. In each of these socially constructed events the audience is recreating the user's current self that others see. It would seem, then, that the Being that viewers are presented with, are traces of moments of communication and experiences of the user's interaction with the larger Facebook community. Though Derrida specifically does not speak of the Internet, he makes a similar argument as far as the experience of being present: "Experience has always designated the relationship with a presence, whether that relationship had the form of consciousness or

not'...Derrida's trace [crossed out] is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present" (Spivak xvii) and later saying that "an always already absent present… is the condition of thought and experience" (Spivak xvii). When thinking of a presence, especially as it appears on Facebook, we have to look at, then, how this identity is not only created, but received by the viewers of the particular profile.

Beyond Identity: Social Information Influx

In terms of identity, Derrida's theories with language help to explain the importance of online presence (identity creation and communication). But in addition to that, his philosophies can further help to explain how and why social networking online is not simply an outlet to communicate on a social level. His perception of time can tie together how the acquisition of information relates to the ideas mentioned earlier in this discussion- the efficiency time spent on the Internet. Derrida's theory on language brings in the notion of time as being counterproductive to meaning: "the concepts of *present, past, future*, everything in the concepts of time and history which implies evidence of them- the metaphysical concept of time in general- cannot adequately describe the structure of the trace" (Sandbothe 6). For Derrida, meaning within language was diachronic in that words never held a meaning at any given time. For signs to have a meaning even for a moment was to, in effect, cause death to the sign. Derrida suggests that once a word finds meaning, time has moved beyond that moment of signification. Once past that moment of signification, the word no longer means the same thing. Therefore, the idea of time in language from a diachronic sense relates to that same constant change in meaning for information on the Internet. As stated above with Facebook and identity, the addition of information on a profile and the participation and conversation among users shows further how meaning evolves and never holds any one meaning to a viewer at any given moment. And as a collection of moments come together to create portions of a user's identity, it is exactly those

moments that do not exist anymore that hold present meaning. As Sandbothe states: "In contrast, the Internet opens up possibilities for usage through which writing can be deployed as a medium permitting constant switched in position between sender and receiver in a flexible manner similar to that of spoken conversation" (Sandbothe 9). Time plays an important role in language, questioning how we create meaning; and for online literacy, how meaning is found, placed, or displaced.

The efficiency of the Internet and quickness with which one has access to information become an important topic for many. In his book *Literacy in the Digital Age,* Ron Burniske raises an important issue in online literacy, relating this efficiency to an influx of information found online: "when it comes to computer literacy, both the rights and responsibilities of those who acquire it must be considered" (7). In this instance ("it" being information), we are warned against the large amount of information that we have access to at any given moment on the Internet. This is a smart warning, as access does not automatically assume the validity of the information. Because of the convenience of the Internet, information is easily accessible, but at the same time that convenience carries with it implications on communication and literacy. In the case of the former, the immediacy of the information acquired keeps content relevant. The real-time access to information allows Internet users to communicate and to publish in order to maintain authority. In terms of the latter, it shifts information from a didactic approach to a collaborative practice. As literacy broadens its scope to establish a more social foundation, Internet users become more active in everyday literacy practices. This presents a problem for many scholars, as it questions their authority and relevancy in literacy acquisition. Scholars are still threatened by the immediacy of information, not to mention that the classroom is no longer the central focus for literacy. The little effort it takes to publish online causes insecurities among many scholars, like Mark Bauerlein, who especially raises questions concerning quality control.

To add to that, scholars like Bauerlein caution us about various online spaces, weary of what to consider valid content. Yet, to make generalizations of the entire online space seems irrational. For instance, scholars warn against social networks such as twitter and Facebook, claiming that the casual language used among users affects how information is acquired and/or valued. Yet, in his article *Shaping the Digital Pen: Media Literacy, Youth Culture & MySpace* David Kirkland looks at a student's MySpace profile; specifically, at the content published (posted) on the profile page. He shows that the language used by this student, though grammatically incorrect, was intended to be as such. He looks at misspelled words used on the page and notes that they are "not an error in spelling or a sign of cognitive underdevelopment. Rather, it signals a set of relationships between him and his texts" (191). As it turns out, the student intentionally spelt the words as he did in order to relay the message to his audience and that "he played with spellings to create a unique voice… he expanded the technology of writing in such a way that perspectives, which seldom find place in public transcripts gained voice, valor, and value" (193). The biggest take away from Kirkland's argument is that we are too quick to judge the language we see online. In fact, many assume that the language used in these social networks is reflective of a person's level of literacy. But even before our time, Derrida makes it a point to allow for language to fluctuate meaning, so as to exist within literacy without commitment to concrete definitions. Therefore, this line of reasoning that does not allow for the meaning of literacy to fluctuate, leads to the conclusion that the Internet is causing an increase in illiteracy. It is imperative that the definition of literacy be acclimated to fit within our social context if it is to have any relevancy or even meaning. If literacy had a static definition it would lose meaning and be left behind as time and technology continue to progress. Thinking back to the language that Kirkland discussed, we see how language, on and offline, has been simplified and shortened in current society communications; yet there is still a heightened level of vocabulary that is used. A

disparity arises between younger and older generations as younger generations use a new and evolved language that was not previously used, or even used in a different manner.

In addition to the differences in the language between generations, many scholars fail to recognize the change in the context in which language is used. Though much of the online spaces that younger generations gravitate towards are based on a social foundation, this does not mean that it is a social language. Long gone are the days where a distinct boundary between "social" and "academic" language exists. Because of the public atmosphere of the Internet, these once distinct lines are now blurred into a common space and interchangeable- social and academic no longer carry individual weight, but a shared value. This should be helpful to scholars and to teachers. When thinking about the implications of online literacy in the classroom, the indistinguishable boundaries between academic and social language should be nothing short of beneficial.

In the chapter "Media Literacy" of *Literacy in the Digital Age,* Burniske states that "rhetoric at the heart of computer literacy not only broadens the definition of the latter but also helps students cultivate critical literacy while engaged in recreational computer use" (13). What he means by this, is not only that online literacy provides a new means of information acquisition through converging value systems, but also that students are thinking critically about the information that is gathered while "recreationally" surfing the Internet. This challenges scholars, teachers, and even students to recognize when the Internet is being used recreationally and when there are academic objectives.

Therefore, and for our purposes, we have to look at recreational use and academic use separately. The reason a person is online in the first place is one thing. Additionally, the information that a person encounters while online, for whatever reason that leads them to it, is another point to take into consideration. The best way to go about this is to look the Internet as a

creative industry, where information is produced and consumed with intention of both parties having something to gain. In this manner, it is helpful to look at content online having some sort of value placed on it. The intention of the content produced is valued by the consumer of the information, is valued by its ability to interact with an audience, and valued by the validity it is given for its role in the online interaction. Therefore, information that is presented online is both meaningful and quite useful. As information is created then, it is important to consider the audience of the online space.

An Audience of… Intention.

Audience, at least on the Internet, cannot be defined by the readers of any piece of particular content. In fact, to do that would diminish the whole purpose of having anything published online. There is certainly an intended audience, but due to the public nature of the Internet and its open model, the intended audience is limiting. This is another problem that arises among scholars. As we have known from previous knowledge of literacy, and in communication, audience has been a significant consideration only as far as creating a rhetorical objective to direct an argument at. The presence of the audience shapes the intention of the information that an author presents. Yet even in its most traditional understanding, the audience within the study of literacy can never be specified. Likewise, this is the case for online literacy. With the Internet, there is an automatic assumption of the audience being anyone who can access the Internet. Therefore, most (though clearly not all) information found on the Internet is posted with the knowledge that it is open for public access. In the same way, everyone is directly or indirectly a part of the audience, and so have to expect to encounter irrelevant information. But does it make it meaningless? On the contrary; it simply means that the producer of the content has to take this consideration into account. Not that everything should be tailored to every audience in every

situation. Anything published online will be met on the one hand, with a receptive audience, and, on the other, a resistant audience. It is at this point that Burniske warns that

> Students who randomly pluck information from the Internet may not realize they have fallen prey to the salesmanship of pathos, which disarms their critical judgment by appealing to their emotions, distracts them with faulty logos, and leads them into temptations that damage their ethos. One may teach this lesson through the rhetorical strategies of daily life, since their prevalence alone helps students realize the importance of interpreting signs and symbols to develop media literacy skills. To emphasize a point, as well as start an argument, some rhetoricians claim 'everything's an argument' (Burniske 13).

The risk of intention presents itself to the average Internet user. The Internet is targeted for mass audiences, which means a bulk of the audience of any piece of content will have not actively been searching for that particular information. Therefore, content is published to appeal to potential viewers in hopes of drawing in a connection with the viewer. And even more interesting, as pointed out in the above quote, is that "daily life" plays an important role for many producers of content. It is insinuated above that information is best learned when it can be easily put into social context. Therefore, it seems logical that most information/content online will be published to a public audience; an audience that relates to the producer in one way or another outside of the piece of content. This leads us to question the notion that everything is an argument. To say that everything (on the Internet for this purpose) is an argument would imply specific audiences. But because of open public access, a more appropriate assumption would be to claim that everything is sold. By that, I mean to say that information is consumed on a daily basis; even without it having to retain any meaning for the consumer, it is given a certain amount of value as information (whether in the form of photos, content, etc.). Used in certain ways, an argument is made with the intention of persuading an audience towards a specific reaction. In the same way, content as a transaction is used with the intention of also persuading a reader towards a certain reaction. Both works to interact with the reader, but an argument still exists with too

narrow an audience with a specific outcome. Content used as a transaction loosens the boundaries of the intended audience while also loosening the intended meaning being consumed. Where they begin to differ is in how information is consumed. Often when on the internet, information that is consumed and that invokes a reaction is effective in its purpose.

In today's world, there are several things that we cannot deny about technology; that it eases our access to literacy while redefining it, and that literacy is aimed at consumers on a broader basis. No longer is literacy being defined by the limitations of academia. What was once considered a measurement of education and knowledge is now how easily we can access information needed, whether it is for academic purposes or social. In the next chapter, I will discuss online literacy as it is driven by marketing and consumption of information. But in order to get there, it is important to see how online literacy functions in environments outside of the classroom. Several points have been established already in bringing up online literacy.

First, the assumption and consideration of a larger audience is important in that it doesn't necessarily have to change the intention of a message according to this audience, but in considering a larger and somewhat unintended audience, will affect the meaning of the ultimate published information. Further, the audience becomes active in the collaborative efforts that online literacy encourages. The influx of readily accessible information will lead to unintended information acquisition which may or may not be significant, but it will be relevant.

Secondly, online literacy places a large emphasis on identity; both of the author and the audience and how identity creates meaning in online literacy. As I have already pointed out, identity is constructed online, whether through social networks or other online spaces, is seen from two perspectives. When constructing an identity, we have a certain level of control over what is portrayed to viewers. In the same manner, viewers of an online identity are able to make meaning out of the information presented to them. That being said, there are certain aspects of an

online profile that are accessible to the public, but also information that is kept private. The implications of this lead one to question the intention of the information being presented to the audience.

Yet, with the Internet as expansive as it is, online literacy goes beyond the parameters framed by the fundamentals of literacy within a classroom setting. In our everyday lives, we are exposed to different kinds of literacy on the Internet, and it has the same effects on us as it would in the classroom. By looking at these different types of everyday literacies, it shows how influential online literacy is on a sociocultural level, in addition to emphasizing the "real world" literacies that need to be brought into the classroom.

Chapter 2: Awaiting Confirmation: Identity Brand

In the article *An English Teacher Looks at Branding* James Twitchell draws a parallel between literature and consumer branding. Showing the qualities in both that in essentially represent the whole, he shows how literature has its own "brand" in various ways. An important take away from this is to see how a scholar draws together two separate contextual instances. In converging these two ideas, Twitchell helps us to see not only how branding parallels works of literature, but how influential branding is in our everyday lives. Because it is everywhere and because it presents us with literacy events multiple times a day, it would naturally follow that online branding would have a similar impact on literature and literacy as it does in our lives.

In its most literal form, branding and online marketing present literacy events to consumers on a continuous basis. From a consumer standpoint, searching a search engine for information will inevitably lead to information on products or services that are related to that information. Though it may or may not be the intent of the initial search, there is a process evolving in the train of thought of the Internet user that will lead to the consumption of information as a transaction. From there, it may or may not lead to a product or service that is also exchanged in this interaction. For advertisements themselves, the mere encounter with them presents a transaction of words, a product, and the potential for a reaction from the viewer. Linda Scott presents this interaction as an ad-as-text in her article, *The Bridge from Text to Mind: Adapting Reader-Response Theory to Consumer Research* saying

> Readers learn from them, know them, and eventually become
> bored with them. Therefore, advertisers devise new ways of luring
> readers into listening to their appeals. The advertising discourse
> becomes one of the most dynamic in culture- another reason that
> rigid formal categories are unlikely to have predictive power (Scott
> 464).

As a text, readers interact with advertisements, and the fact that they are either inspired to react to the ad or are bored insinuates that there was a transaction with the literacy moment of reading the text. For this reason, advertisements create an economic value for online literacy- as it appears in advertisements. Scott further states that "advertising is the literature of economic exchange. The very act of reading advertisements can be related to reading online in that when we read as consumers, we understand the text as an effort to sell (Scott 464).

Identity as Literacy

To reiterate earlier points concerning Derrida and identity, much of those relate to this section. While earlier, the focus was placed on how language is used online, this section is particularly focused on identity as it is socially perceived online. As we've noted previously identity formation on the Internet has important implications on literacy. In the article *Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships* by Shanyang Zhao, Sherri Grasmuck, and Jason Martin, interesting claims are made about literacy, specifically about identity formation on Facebook similar to those I brought up previously. According to these scholars, "Facebook users predominantly claim their identities implicitly rather than explicitly; they 'show rather than tell' and stress group and consumer identities over personally narrated ones" (1816). As reflection of our society as a whole, the implications of the Internet have caused a redefinition of our understanding of literacy (as we have seen in chapter 1). And as also stated before, by increasing communication capabilities on the Internet, the time it takes to access information and to communicate with others has nearly diminished. This creates a sense of urgency in conversation in online public spheres (social networks, email, instant messenger, etc). Specifically in social networks, the increase in information access has dramatically changed the process of identity development (e.g. profile creation). Remembering from earlier, literacy in the digital age is changing not only the way that information is relayed from one entity to

another, but it also creates an impression of the author. Looking at any one profile on Facebook, users will see collections of photos, lists of friends, and various interests that ultimately build the identity of that user's profile. Rather than merely interpreting information being handed to them, audiences (the profile viewers) now look at how the author is identified and interpreted through the information that they choose to look at on the profile. This has many social implications which will be discussed later, but for now it is important to note the inclusion of identity in online literacy. No matter how the author is being identified on their profile for example, we can see how literacy has shifted into a larger social context through the interpretation of identity. Once didactically given to a reader, identity is now interpreted. With that, however, several issues are raised, one being that identity is just that, interpreted, but also that these interpretations are based off of the information chosen to be displayed by the author. As Zhao et al. point out,

> Disembodied online encounters enable people to hide their
> undesired physical features, and anonymity allows individuals
> to re-create their biography and personality. In other words,
> the disembodied and anonymous online environment makes it
> possible for people to reinvent themselves through the production
> of new identities (1818).

The question of identity becomes a main focus of any online literacy. As we move into a social space on the Internet to understand literacy and identity construction, we have to take into consideration just what information is given. Rather than making judgments on identity based off of information alone, the Internet invites a personal aspect to identity construction. As the above quote points out, this does bring along the risk of how that identity is constructed and how it differs from traditional views on identity. By looking at identities being shaped through social networks like Facebook, this allows us to make observations on how the change from traditional print to collaborative technology has affected how we look at and define literacy. Moving from textual to more visual mediums, the Internet and social networks cause literacy to shift into a

more social environment from a traditional educational setting. Particularly taking identity into consideration, technology (specifically social networks on the Internet) has created an emphasis on including an author-self in literacy events, and placing extreme importance and consequence on how that self is portrayed to specific and general audiences. With a social identity, network identities (Facebook in this case) converge with a literacy identity. Information being transferred now has a face. The transfer of information, or communication, is changing into a collaborative experience rather than didactic one. That being said, we can move beyond the limitations of defining a person's literacies through textual information. But while we can move from text to social literacies, that does carry along with it the author and an interpretation of their identity in addition to any interpretation of their literacies.

In their study of identity construction, Zhao et al. illustrate the levels in which an author can construct their identity:

Implicit <---> Explicit

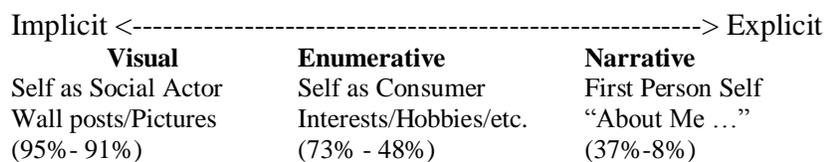| **Visual**	**Enumerative**	**Narrative**
Self as Social Actor	Self as Consumer	First Person Self
Wall posts/Pictures	Interests/Hobbies/etc.	"About Me …"
(95%- 91%)	(73% - 48%)	(37%-8%)

Fig. 2. The continuum of implicit and explicit identity claims on Facebook.

From this illustration, these scholars explain how identity is constructed on Facebook and how information is either implicit or explicit. This is an important observation, as it shows the continuum of control an author has over their identity as well as the literacies involved in that construction. Yet, to take this a step further, it is important to see how information is affected by technology. As we have already established, the Internet has invited and encouraged an open and public space for transfer of information. As the figure shows, this creates an implicit transfer of knowledge in addition to explicated text. In terms of Facebook particularly, other users have the opportunity to contribute to the overall identity of the user in addition to the collaborative effort

in communicating and sharing information. So with the help of developing technologies, we are perhaps not being forced, but strongly encouraged to find new means for identifying literacies in our everyday lives. What was once measured by education is now viewed in context of a wider variety of ways which blurs the line that literacy was once defined by. In addition, the social implications of online literacy are critical in seeing how literacy is changing and its influence on society.

Included in our public identities is the inclusion of visual cues that contribute to our overall person. Specifically in terms of Facebook, we can take into consideration the photos that a user selects to share as a part of their overall depiction to viewers. These photos not only contribute to the identity of the user, but the various moments depicted in them place the individual into a specific context. From that particular moment, the viewer is given a glimpse of insight into the user's life. One ramification of this is presented when the viewer views these photos with the responsibility of making certain assumptions about that person. At this point, it will help us to relate this back to Derrida; in his discussion on experience. In a nutshell, Derrida views experience as a moment, not defined in time, but rather defined by the absence of moments surrounding the moment. That being said, a Facebook picture is a moment that exists only because of the moments that lead up to it. What the viewer observes is not the particular experience, but the absence of the experience, which are not pictured.

The Author of the Audience of... Intention

When thinking about identity on an online social network, it is important to take into consideration the type of network in which this identity will be a part of. This goes back to the control over the information which is portrayed to the audience. In certain networks it is more beneficial to have certain aspects of your identity known to the public audience as much as it is

to have information withheld. In this manner then, it calls to question the issue of attributing

oneself to a certain level of one's identity. As stated in Zhao et. al.'s article,

> Because of the presence of nonymity, Internet dating sites provide an opportunity for users to make public ''identity statements" (Walker, 2000) that they normally would not do offline. Identity statements are public announcements of one's identity claims, which can be made either explicitly or implicitly. While explicit identity statements often take the form of autobiographic descriptions given by the users, implicit identity statements can be found in the impressions ''given off" by the users. Unlike the anonymous setting in which individuals feel free to be whatever they want to, the nonymous environment places constraints on the freedom of identity claims. (1817)

I mentioned earlier the idea of content produced on line being attached to an author of that

content. Looking at YouTube's homepage, for example, there is an immediate call to action in

the heading: "Broadcast Yourself," and in fact, that is exactly what the site is intended for.

Publishing content on various social networks allows us to reflect our own identity to other users.

These sites become user-generated, in that the information being transferred from producer to

user are created by users within that network. But how do we deal with content that is self-

published that is open for the entire Internet public to see and potentially interact with? Because

we are essentially creating a reflection of ourselves, we want the information transferred to be

relevant to us, while also proving a relevancy to the larger audience. But on a more simple level,

we are also attempting to reflect ourselves through our content. But the same problem arises- the

audience. Though we can filter our identity to certain audiences, this certainly does not eliminate

the possibility of others seeing our self-made identity.

As social networks continue to evolve and become more involved in our daily lives, the

information that we produce becomes more of who we are to our readers than we may even

intend. What is also important to take note of, is the different networks in which we are creating

this identity. In *Building Online Learning Communities* Rena Palloff and Keith Pratt bring up the

element of a social presence. They make the point that "social presence depends to a varying degree on how well participants fail to acknowledge or are able to ignore the presence of the medium. Instead of media, it is participant behavior online that appears to have greater impact on the development of presence" (30). When taking the specific social network into consideration, it is possible to cater our identity to a certain audience. Thus, the content that we provide will reflect those intentions. Yet, does this cause a tension between our identities in different networks? And what about those users that exist in multiple networks? Networks allow us to have a certain level of control over the information produced as well as who sees it, but to a certain extent these limitations are bound to be skewed at some point, especially between networks. Thus we have to question the level of visibility we intend to reflect to audiences. In this manner, our intention to create a certain identity reflects similarly the information that is transacted to the audience; thus creating a brand of ourselves. Being a product of the information that is presented, information is created to reflect some connectivity to ourselves while affecting different audiences in different ways. In this manner, social networks can be extremely effective in providing useful information to audiences and brand.

Identity as a Brand

What I have been leading to up with the repetition of identity is that identity becomes an image; a brand. When thinking of branding in terms of online literacy, it is best to look at it from a socio-cultural perspective. Literacy implies a transaction between people and as a socially constituted practice (Wallendorf 507). Therefore, when thinking about branding as a transaction, we can look at how products interact with consumers. In a way, the product is experienced by the consumer, creating meaning for individual based on their personal experiences. In this same way, content and information presented on the Internet is read to mean something to people based on their experiences. But this has always been the case with written pieces of work. The reader takes

meaning from those parts of the work that connect with them on a personal or emotional level. In terms of product branding, when we speak of ideas such as product loyalty, we can begin to realize how these moments of signification come together to create meaning for a person.

Another way to look at branding as we have said before, especially in terms of literacy, is to see a brand as a story attached to a manufactured object (Twitchell 484). In this manner, we can connect products and consumers, and content and readers. In both of these situations, the aim is to deliver "that emotional punch" (Twitchell 484). By drawing in on the connection with the reader, with the consumer, certain brands will have more effectiveness in delivering meaning/ a product to the intended audience/consumer. Once this message is delivered, the content itself is given an author as well as an audience. The brand message/meaning has ownership; an owner that is now reflected in that message. This reflection is like the brand logo; the recognition of the brand by consumers. Recognition is important; and it is important, at this point, to consider along with this idea of recognition, the recognition of the producer, the author (owner) of the content to recognize the audience. In knowing who the audience, or intended consumers are, certain reactions can be drawn out of the audience. This is how "genre" or "tone" is created in certain content (Twitchell 485). The reciprocal expectation of the audience and author will help to keep the brand consistent while keeping consumer expectations satisfied. If the audience wants to cry, the audience will know to look for a certain genre, etc. This very idea is carried over to products. Those brands which we know their genre or tone emit certain expectations or reactions out of us. The more effective brands, those larger brands in which most consumers gravitate towards, know how to reach out to those expectations of consumers in order to draw them in time and again- building brand loyalty. When speaking of these larger more trusted brands, for example, it is interesting to see how it was that these brands were able to create their "story" and their brand narrative. According to Twitchell, to understand how stories got attached to branding,

> We need to appreciate two seemingly unrelated cultural transformations that occurred during the nineteenth century. These crucial shifts in perception are (1) the common acceptance of the pathetic fallacy and (2) the rise of impressionism as a narrative and pictorial device. From a marketing point of view, both innovations transformed not just how stories got told but how the audience would actively participate in the consumption of, first, fictions, and secondarily, material goods. (485)

Essentially, what Twitchell is claiming to be responsible for modern branding, is the fact that impressionism gave human characteristics to inanimate objects. In doing this, we are able to take something unknown to us and place significance into its being. Looking at it from this historical point of view, it seems that branding began as an attempt to not just make things, but to make meanings for things (Twitchell 487). He further carries this on to say that consumers desperately want meaning, and since things cannot install it themselves, we install meaning into them; we create the brand of the object.

Yet, as we look at current social context of the Internet and the amount of available means for building a brand, scholar Douglas B Holt suggests the rising issue of the "anti-brand" and the rise of the "destructive consumer counter culture" (Holt 70). In his article, *Why do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding* Holt raises the issue of a current global anti-branding movement, centered on "concerns such as environmental issues, human rights, and cultural degradation" (70). If we consider the immediacy of information on the Internet, this will come as no surprise. The amount of information that is passed is just as quickly consumed by readers. In this way, then, the influence of any type of branding story that is transferred from an author to readers is high. Culture, as we have already established, is a largely influential force that holds a lot of weight, especially in terms of

branding. In a business centered online space, every brand has a story, and every piece of information (or product) has a story for audiences.

Holt considers the power of branding from a framework that orients peoples' understandings and interaction with a market's offerings. He further believes that this is dominated by the cultural authority narrative (71). Because of this dominance, markets organize how people think and feel through branded commercial products (71). As consumers continue to search for meaning in products and information, the larger corporations are able to create sophisticated and convincing brand stories (cultural authority) to gain that brand loyalty from consumers. It should be noted here, that this does not automatically assume a malicious intention from large corporations. A majority of larger corporations or brands are automatically marked with this connotation; which is a large reason for the push for anti-branding. Yet Holt also points out that "while most people fall prey to thee marketing techniques, some are able to resist and take control of the meanings and uses of commodities" (71). What this means, essentially, is that without the power of large brands that influence much of our society, there would be no existence of those few individual entities that "rebel" (used loosely) and that push towards the anti-branding, or counter culture. As far as consumption in general, this is important to note, as it shows resistance that is present in any culture.

One of the assumptions made by Holt in terms of anti-branding is that he bases his argument off of the idea that marketing and branding are authoritatively run by corporations. He gives no power to the consumer, or at least no compromise: "Marketing is a form of distorted communication in that marketers control the information that is exchanged. Marketers organize the code and we as consumers have no choice but to participate" (72). As it stands in current culture, this is not the case. In fact, much of the marketing industry online caters to the needs and trends set forth by consumers. Marketers are constantly researching to find the best language,

trends, and styles, in order to market in those parameters. This is not to say that Holt does not acknowledge the fact that there is and always will be a resistance in the general consumer world. In fact, he does make several notes of this. Yet, he maintains that marketers have all of the control, even despite that fact. He says this with the belief that marketers are smarter than most would want to believe. He explains that marketers are aware of this consistent resistance. Therefore, they pay particular attention to these particular resisting consumers. He offers the explanation that marketers and larger brands "hinge upon the notion that the increasingly diverse and producerly forms of consumption in post modernity threaten the marketers' dominance" (72) but neither he nor those corporations take this seriously. It actually can be argued that it fuels their branding efforts towards these new strategies. In fact, we could be so bold as to say that the anti brand, or the counter culture, *is* the new branding strategy. Some still believe, however, that this push for resistance is innovative and effective in "sticking it to the man" so to speak. Holt lists several theorists who believe (believed?) that "consumers are beginning to break down marketers' dominance by seeking out social spaces in which they produce their own culture, apart from that which is foisted on them by the market" (72). This is a troubling assumption to make. If we think about the reality of this being true, would it really be possible to break down a market? A brand? Holt follows this by saying that as consumers break down a market trend, that it allows people to continually reform their identities (72). But what is meant by "break down"? And if an individual is changing their own identity, are they not being controlled by the particular brand in which they are resisting? A better way to think of this is to look at resistance simply as an evolution, or a change. We should recall from before Barton's idea of looking at evolution as a slow change, a progression or improvement. Looking at it in this way, then, we can see the back and forth change that the culture/society as a whole goes through. Rather than focusing the authority on large brands, or corporations, it's better to see that at times this is true,

but in order for the brand to maintain authority, it has to cater to the changes occurring in society. And those changes are occurring out of resistance to large brands. This vicious cycle keeps brands alive while giving individuals the "space" to resist and to create a separate brand.

In his article, *An English Teacher Looks at Branding*, James Twitchell makes an observation that culture is built on a commercial foundation in which branding is equivalent to storytelling and that a brand is a story attached to a manufactured object (Twitchell 484). There are different ways in which we compose or "tell stories" online. Whether we are telling the story of a product, of ourselves on a networking site, contributing to a blog, or providing information on a scholarly end- these literacy events are all aimed at achieving a profit by consumption of a story. Through the process of branding- as Twitchell says is creating a recognizable story- we can make online literacy tangible, or measurable, by creating a space for transactional communication. As we have already established, the Internet provides the opportunity to look at literacy beyond a viewpoint of understanding communication through reading and writing. Online literacy invites another dynamic into the understanding of literacy. Rather than simply looking at whether one can read or write or possesses certain skill sets to communicate in certain ways, we are now looking at *how* we are relaying information, and ourselves (identity) as well, to our audience; and not only that, but we are looking for *something* in return. That *something* will vary depending on the situation, but it is what essentially allows us to look at online literacy as a process of consumption. The following chapter looks at online literacy through the process of branding and discusses how branding affects *how* information is consumed online.

Chapter 3: Marketing to Your Literacy

In addition to product branding, identity formation in social networks helps to show how identity (also a form of branding) contributes to online literacy as a consumable entity. Looking at literacy from a sociocultural perspective will allow us to see how information is consumed and how the influence of consumerism further affects our idea of literacy.

When Literacy Meets Consumption Meets Technology

A recent iPad advertisement shows an interesting convergence of technology and literacy. In one specific ad, the word literacy is portrayed by itself on a white screen which is then followed by the highly recognized apple hands showing the ease at which technology allows us to read literature without a book. In a similar advertisement on a "smart phone" the advertisement shows the flow of a conversation being had beginning with Moby Dick and ending up with a sailing trip being planned. While these advertisements show how technology can inspire (or be inspired by) literacy, they also share another interesting trait with one another; they are advertisements.

In the book *The Uses of Digital Literacy*, by John Hartley, a large emphasis is placed on the significant presence of literacy in society. By showing how everyday encounters with literacy are seen on a political, economic, and social scale, Hartley is able to draw attention to the fact that each of these aspects of life are intertwined through literacy, and through the communication of language between these systems. In a general description of how this related to literacy, Hartley writes:

> Media literacy is the ability to read and understand a communications medium by looking *through* the processes it enables, interpreting its signs and symbols, while also looking *at* the medium's effect on an author, audience, and message…one way to help students develop media literacy is by asking them to apply rhetorical analysis to another kind of advertising" (Burniske 12-13)

What interestingly stands out here is "rhetorical analysis through advertising;" particularly in the sense that literacy makes itself apparent in our daily lives, more today than it once did. Of course, literacy opportunities were much harder to come by, just as it was a much more limited and controlled term to define. As generations continue to evolve, and means of attaining any type of literacy are passed down, the presence of our past experience will be everywhere (Brandt 94). As we work to evolve our definition of literacy to meet our technological developments, it raises the question of how this is received by society. As it is now, literacy is a much more accessible entity to acquire. In many ways, this not only broadens our understanding, but it also generalizes how we can look at literacy. Even in the past several generations, we have had to make significant social, technological, and economic transitions and now have to realize that our changing generation means that we have to participate in these transitions in a more complex culture of literacy than our predecessors. The sorts of knowledge that we use to work, to access information, raise children participate in civic life are being made up of the innovations of the respective generations and several previous decades (Brandt 93). Therefore, to attach value to meaning as Hartley has done above makes logical sense. The Internet today presents us with information that is consumed- as a tangible good that is often used in exchange for something else. What this means for us today, though, could be any possible thing. But to stick to Hartley's work in *The Uses of Digital Literacy*, he uses this idea of consumption to mean something deeper than a piece of "goods." In fact, he says that "media content is not a 'good'; consumption is not what media audiences do. 'Consumption' is in fact pre-industrial, agricultural metaphor, appropriate to foodstuffs that are literally consumed. Cultural or symbolic 'goods', like music, screen narratives or printed stones, remain alive for indefinite re-consumption" (45). While we can generalize information on the Internet as a good that is transferred from one entity to

another, to say that it is consumed is how Hartley says, it's processed in one direction and it has an end. Yet, it can still exist as a "good" should we allow it to remain transcendent of any didactic existence. Hartley introduces the notion of a "creative industry" that he uses throughout his book to describe the technological spaces that keep information from that didacticism. Thus we are led to the "consumption" of information online as it exists in a creative industry.

Targeting the Audience: Information as Consumption

To understand online literacy in the process of consumption, it is important to first understand how business comprises much of the information that is encountered on the internet. On a day to day basis, an Internet user will encounter a business in several ways. Indirectly, they will see advertisements on any website they visit. The more sites they visit, the more relevant those ads will become to their specific experience. In other words, businesses capture the history of a user's Internet experience to dish out ads that might pertain to specific websites that were visited. This initiates interaction, though indirectly, with the user, and sets the foundation for future transactions (whether it is informational or a tangible entity). In more direct ways, an Internet consumer will come across websites specifically for that business or product. Or it will fall within the parameters of the business' market, providing information that the user is specifically looking for. Information acquisition both directly and indirectly has implications on online literacy as it does on business. It blurs the boundaries previously set forth by literacy, allowing for businesses to enter into a broader and more active role in literacy. By broader, I mean that understanding literacy anymore means recognizing the various influences and interpretations that technology (namely the Internet) induces- business advertisements and product information in addition to those fundamentals that were described earlier. In her article *Literally Literacy,* Melanie Wallendorf attempts to re-conceptualize literacy as a "continuous,

multidimensional indicator of proficiency in using written language, with its higher levels reflecting an ability to draw logical inferences and think critically" (Wallendorf 505). What she directs us to do when encountering information, is to look at it for its business endeavors. She encourages Internet users to utilize information on the Internet in a beneficial way. How is this done? By recognizing that information on the Internet has some aspect of branding or business foundation, we can still utilize the information by "thinking critically" about what it is intending to do and continuing to consume it for whatever purpose that led us to the information in the first place. In this manner, we can see how literacy is a process of consumption. In fact, the very fact that communication is closer than arms length away makes it necessary to expand our notion of literacy beyond a comprehension of reading and writing into a more communicative understanding. And in order to understand online literacy in a communicative way, it is necessary to return us to where this is most relevant online; social networks.

In the article *Shaping the Digital Pen: Media Literacy, Youth Culture & MySpace*, David Kirkland examines composition and consumption of text on a social networking site, seeking to "broaden notions of literacy, situating them in the current culture of technology where youth media literacies thrive" (Kirkland 189). This invites a social aspect to the consumption of information online. Though stating that the notion of literacy needs to be broadened, he is essentially arguing that it is already the case. He is fusing together the reality of our culture- that we thrive on online communication and information consumption- to our previous understanding of literacy. He brings up important points in this article, specifically that while most scholarship dealing with literacy in online space maintains a negative connotation of online literacy, there needs to be a shift towards shaping literacy around those tools and technologies that are currently being used. In other words, rather than defining technology within the limitations of previously held notions of literacy, we need to instead look at literacy as it pertains to our current world- by

defining it through the technology that is currently defining it. He begins by observing that youth compose text on a variety of cultural and technological tools that are readily available to them, i.e. the Internet (Kirkland 189). With this in mind, it becomes a question of how literacy functions in our world, rather than how it hinders our literacies. As we pointed out before, our culture relies on branding in order to communicate. And as such, we are called to recognize that online literacy exists through our everyday encounters on the Internet.

When thinking of online literacy and the consumption of information, it comes down to a level of comfort that younger generations have with online communication that help to gear literacy towards the business of information acquisition and the transactional qualities that drive us toward broader definitions of online literacy. As Kirkland articulates throughout his article, if we were to extend our understanding of what counts as literacy, we would allow students to communicate and interact with those who would listen to them, from groups of peers to a much larger audience. Furthermore, by inviting businesses and branding into a broader notion of literacy, we are supporting youth "voice, creativity, and visibility to enter a world that is not only authentic, but also critical" (190). The social interactions open to users online help individuals to create a voice, an identity in which to relate to the larger audience. Identity becomes a method of branding, and that branding becomes a consumable piece of information that is important not only in online literacy, but in online communication as well.

At this point, upon recognizing that online literacy is a communicative practice in addition to a consumable transaction, it becomes necessary to see how this process occurs. This transaction involves looking at it from both perspectives; not only in how the branding or "story got told, but how the audience could actively participate in the consumption of… material goods" (Twitchell 485). It is first important to consider "audience actively participating" in the transaction of information consumption and brand recognition. Online specifically, consumption

of information and brands are mostly concentrated in those spaces that function on a collaborative level. Most obviously, social networks are the easiest place for information to get passed around. As users relay information to their respective networks, it is only a matter of time before that information has gone from one to thousands to millions. In this manner, brands become brands through this participation, and information gets consumed through networking participation. Continuing to think of the business foundation on online literacy, information is consumed with the inadvertent recognition of a particular brand- or story. From a business perspective, the active role that users play in passing along a brand help to increase the amount of information that gets found on that particular brand. The benefit of this is becoming more recognizable and thus more profitable. In return, more information will want to be transferred, creating an ongoing process of information acquisition and consumption. This brings in the "active participation" between this information transaction; thus creating social networks.

Consumption as Communication

One of the more important features of social networks is the collaborative quality that they possess. Information on social networks is no doubt user-generated, meaning it is shared information, placing a large reliance on the validity of the producer of the content. The implications of this are astonishing. As John Hartley puts it in his book, *The Uses of Digital Literacy,*

> Knowledge, culture, communication and consumption are dynamic fields of evolutionary adaptation. They concern the growth of human relationships, values, identities and desires, in complex interaction with the forces of political power, economic and institutional organization, market coordination and technological invention. Meanings interact with money, economic values with cultural values, and the political with the personal (15).

Technological literacy and the Internet have had profound impacts on our culture. In rethinking what implications it has on online literacy, it is important to understand, as Hartley points out, the convergence of worlds; politics, humanities, even our understanding of economics have been largely affected by the Internet. While this convergence of humanity and culture reiterates the long time held notion that culture affects literacy and literacy affects culture (Brandt 181, Barton 212) it also generates a new environment in which the world now had immediate access to knowledge, money, politics, and each other. This space, the Internet, now becomes active in our culture on a daily basis. And as such, it is active in our literacy; in our communication with, our development of, and in our definitions of literacy as it evolves into online literacy. Barton converges these facets of life (politics, economy, humanities) in what he calls a "creative industry," as a space for online literacy to be active in day-to-day dealings. He shows the impact of the Internet on communication, as well as the change in communication on online literacy. In terms of his "creative industry," he emphasizes the notion of information and knowledge as a transaction, as consumption of information being the motive of online literacy: "Individual agents can navigate large-scale networks for their own purposes, while simultaneously contributing to the growth of knowledge and the archive of the possible. The Internet has rapidly evolved into a new 'enabling social technology' *for knowledge*" (109). Emphasizing the idea of information as a consumable entity, it is no surprise that Hartley creates the industrious environment necessary for interaction to take place.

Because the Internet is so network-based, it has become a medium for interactive composition in social settings and through interactive efforts. Hartley looks at it in an interesting way, using YouTube as an example. In essence, he looks at the content being produced in various social networks as the source for information retrieval: "With technologically enabled social networks using digital media, productivity can now be expected from consumers as well

as from producers, as users extend the growth of knowledge far beyond what can be achieved by professionals publishing in print" (107). Interesting here is Hartley's implicit argument that blurs the distinction between academic and social communication. In blurring the boundaries between these two types of communications, he provides the opportunity for continuous conversations and interaction to have informal benefits on our developing literacy. He looks at the interaction between producers and consumers of "new media" content, specifically the material made by groups of peers. In doing this, he is able to make online literacy play an active role in society, by showing its fluidity and constant change. Through social interactions on sites like YouTube, communication is constant and information is endlessly transferred from user to user with availability for the entire community to participate in, or to read and observe.

Hartley invites us to look at the content being produced online and to create meaning from its ability to extend knowledge beyond printed information (107). As stated above, he suggests the possibility of viewing the Internet (namely social networks) as a place to grow knowledge. Though informal in practice and language (abbreviated conversational inflections- i.e. "text speak"), Hartley is not suggesting that social networks are valued *more* than formal sources of information acquisition. He is simply offering a sociocultural way to value literacy, via online literacy. Even from an economic standpoint, the interaction on various social networks allows users to share knowledge with other users and to interact with that knowledge given to them. We have heard the term before, "user-generated," so it comes as no surprise that information being passed around these sites is indeed shared. Yet, many still associate this with a lower level of value than any information that is passed from one party to another (didactically). Because users now have control over the information they give and receive, there is an automatic assumption that the intention of the interaction is purely socially-based. But even so, this allows for more meaningful information transfer in a conversation as it is directly relevant to the user.

Taking into consideration what we noted before-- how the internet inherently leans towards the consumer— information is thought to be consumed as a good which inspires more discussion and interaction with the information being posted.

This is not to say that all conversations and all information produced and presented in these networks and online spaces are completely relevant and informative. In fact, the basis of these sites is founded with social intentions. Therefore, the conversations will largely reflect information as an informal interaction. But Hartley invites us to make the following consideration: "Can we imagine a hybrid formal/informal (expert/amateur; public/private) mode of propagation for learning 'digital literacy'…?" (103). He further asks us: "Do new media of communication like YouTube and other internet affordances (open source programming, wikis, blogging, social networks, social bookmark folksonomies and the rest) require investment (public and private) in teaching whole populations how to use them?" (103). What he is doing here, and what we should be doing in our daily interaction within these different networks, is viewing the information presented to us as a means of a transaction. In terms of a transaction, we can assume that there is a value in the information being exchanged. But in doing so, we have to take into consideration any formal understanding of how to produce and consume information.

There is an interesting relationship between social networks and the formality of how information is presented online. It seems, as Hartley will attest to, that in order for the information to hold value on social networks (or even just online in general) we have to have an understanding of digital literacy in a formal sense. Meanwhile, in order for us to develop this understanding of digital literacy and its purpose in our daily interaction with, and development of, literacy in general, we have to rely on continuous interactions with these sites. Simply put, he wants online literacy to entail both formal and informal means for acquiring information and knowledge. This emphasizes his argument that social networks do in fact have a value in

literacy. Additionally, it allows the technology that is already prevalent in our daily lives (social networks, shopping carts, etc) to be a part of our knowledge base. Just understanding the basic technical operation of, say, YouTube helps to increase the scope of digital literacy and in turn, our confidence in allowing for a broad social understanding of online literacy. Being an open network (meaning user-generated, user-controlled, and transparent to the public) teaches us, Hartley says, that the openness is "more important than anything else; that success comes from being in the right place at the right time; and that simplicity, ease of use and accessibility are more important than functionality, control, or purposive direction" (102). These qualities of the Internet allow online literacy to be shaped by the present social contexts that are defined by users and further attribute the importance of recognition and branding as it pertains to the consumer.

Chapter 4: The Consumer Audience, the Real World

All of a sudden we are not merely concerned with the process of passing information

down the line of production to a certain audience. Now, we are much more interested in the

author/creator of information. In fact, we are much more concerned because we are more of a

part of the information that we acquire than we had been previously. That said it is given to us in

comfortable and approachable ways, further connecting the producer and consumer:

> With Web 2.0, more people are asking whether creativity itself
> and also entrepreneurship are well served by filtering consumer
> demand through such lumbering metaphors [of industry and
> consumption of information], or whether it might be possible to
> reconfigure the relationship between producer and consumer
> on more equal terms. (46)

In order to make a closer connection between producer and consumer, we have to consider the

spaces in which these information transactions are taking place. In many ways, online literacy

today, whether we academically accept it or not, is mostly being defined from a social

standpoint. Internet users are glued to sites that encourage community interaction such as, (but

not limited to), Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. As literacy moves into a more popular culture

definition, we can utilize this to bring closer together the process of informing an audience.

Though we cannot deny the change in the kind of information being presented in these

communities and networks, it goes without saying, however, that there is indeed a larger

influence on the desire to participate and to "consume" the information more personally. In the

business world, this is called good customer service. For a company to spend time online in these

popular sites, they are able to relate more closely with customers, making themselves better

known and increasing their brand image. Much in the same way, the producer of any type of

content online has the opportunity to connect with the audience, and even gives the audience the

opportunity to participate in the acquisition of this information. In literature, there are certain

aspects of an author's writing that a reader is able to relate to on a deeper level. Thus, creating meaning in these various moments, there is a connection with the author, the reader, and the story itself: "'the increasing array of new and exciting ways to access creative content clearly demonstrates that industry is responding to the needs and expectations of consumers" (Hartley 58). Though not equally, the efforts of both consumer and producer combined create the basis for the creation of meaning of any content online. Thus, as content is "consumed" by one consumer, the content maintains an everlasting presence within the creative industry, allowing for consumers to create meaning over and over again.

Information online, in creating an identity of the author, also places certain connotations on who the audience might be and how the information will be consumed. Having expectations of the audience will help to shape the information, but the audience itself will be the one to consume what is individually relevant in the moment it is consumed. In *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organization,* Clay Shirky relates the intention of information to readers who may have been indirectly presented certain information: "Most user-generated content isn't 'content' at all, in the sense of being created for general consumption, any more than a phone call between you and a relative is a 'family-generated content'" (Shirky 85). As I've already pointed out, the problem here is that the Internet carries with it implications of both an intended and unintended audience. Publishing anything comes with the assumption that an unintended audience is going to at some point come across the content. But where before, I led to the implications on the producer of content, it is also important to see the implications that are involved with the audience. When received by the right audience, the information and "content" presented is not only relevant, but will incite the intended reaction out of the intended audience. The problem typically arises in discussions about online literacy when the consideration of the larger audience is brought up. It's an easy assumption to discredit an author or a piece of writing

based on this. Because of the public space in which this content is published, the very idea of that information being immediately accessible to anyone creates an apprehension to its validity. This stems from the tendency of a user to assume the role of the audience. As Shirky states, "because we assume that if something is out where we can find it, it must have been written for us" (87). From a social standpoint, this is no issue. In fact, many relationships are based off of communication online. However, in trying to define what literacy is, especially online, that very communication confuses any sort of separation between the creator and audience. Even though an online conversation can be seen by many, it only becomes an issue when it can be considered informative or useful from a literacy standpoint. This also puts into question how the information is filtered to the audience. Rather than a published piece of writing being the final product of a long process of creation, the internet allows for the continual manipulating of the piece making the final piece of writing just one more step in an ongoing and continuous process. In this way, then, it is not just the process of writing that is changing. The roles in the once didactic author audience relationship are also morphed to become one and the same role: "The idea of user-generated content is actually not just a personal theory of creative capabilities but a social theory of media relations" (Shirky 84). The internet has spawned this new idea of content creation as being "user-generated" to imply a collaborative effort in any piece of writing. In terms of a finished product, it becomes a questionable entity as Internet users can continue to contribute to the overall piece. When a reader comments on any given piece of content, a conversation is started. Soon, there are a number of "contributors" to this overall content. At this point, we have to ask if it is possible to consider the audience of an online piece of writing as contributors to the piece, or better yet, if the conversation is in any way a part of the finished piece of writing.

While the question of the audience is an important one, it also needs to be noted that there are different forms of audience on the Internet. Audiences can range from a blog community to a

social network audience to an online classroom. Though these different audiences act and react to content in different ways, they all share the common fact that they are able to participate and interact with the content presented to them more quickly, making it easier for information to flow. Yet as an attempt to continue to discredit the validity of online literacy, scholars (specifically Mark Bauerlein) argue against the notion of distinct audiences, blurring together social and academic audiences. In doing this, they *create* a difficulty of maintaining value in the meaning of literacy. It is through his book, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupifies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future,* that Mark Bauerlein makes several attempts to discredit the validity of Internet use in and out of class. From the start of the technology boom, he says, there seems to have been a large insinuation that "students don't seek, find, and manage information very well. They play complex games and hit the social networking sites for hours, but they don't always cite pertinent sources and compose organized responses to complete class assignments" (113). He argues that students lack a certain type of literacy that "includes the ability to conduct research, evaluate sources, communicate data, and understand ethical/legal issues of access and use" (113). His goal is to alarm us on how poorly students filter through various sites and information on the Internet. And while his intention is to show how student's literacy is affected by recreational Internet use, it really only confuses us on how to define "literacy." What Bauerlein wants to demonstrate, is that a student is unable to follow the instructions of the assignment or that students were unable to create an objective argument. Yet he skips over the possibilities that students would actually have an impressive showing for how students are able to easily navigate through the Internet, how they are able to determine which sites are intended for which purposes, and can probably find something useful in attempting to decipher meaning from any of these sites. There is a difference in how a student uses the Internet

and how they perform in class. But Bauerlein leaves this out, and hurriedly attributes it to a student's literacy level; and to discredit it at that.

In trying to degrade the credibility of technology, Bauerlein also attempts to differentiate web content and a student's analysis of it:

> 'While college age students can use technology, they don't necessarily know what to do with the content the technology provides.' Fans of digital behaviors believe in a carry-over effect, that gaming, blogging, IM, and wikis yield cognitive habits and critical-thinking skills that make for an intelligent, informed citizen. The energetic forms of thought inspired by those practices produce more discerning minds, they say, and while the content of games and blogs slips into adolescent trivia, when young Americans do encounter serious content, they'll possess the acumen to digest it… however, they failed. It seems the judgment of Web content involves mental faculties different from the faculties cultivated by standard Web consumptions by young Americans (116).

Interesting here, Bauerlein implies through his use of "consumption" that there are different means of encountering content. Yet, the very fact that he creates more than one means for attaining information makes it clear to us that there are different levels of literacy. And while there is a good point in the above quotation that the carry-over effect is ineffective in how a student carries over critical thinking skills, there is a question of relevancy that needs to be addressed. In order for this statement to be true, both the information being processed for critical thinking and content being merely consumed, would have to be observed within the same context. But as it is, the Internet is constantly moving, forever changing, and almost always moving from one context to another. Therefore, it will be impossible for any one person to be able to judge and consume content under the same content. The notion of relevancy plays an important part in evaluating how information is processed. In addition, we have to consider the difference in *how* information is consumed. When presented information in a social setting, can we really expect students to be able to filter through the content to determine its sources or to

judge their writing and analyzing skills from it? Likewise, are we really able to use the lack of citation skills to generalize a student's technological literacy? He brings this up, pointing out an article that states "'technology is both a facilitator of literacy and a medium of literacy'" to which he immediately disagrees with, saying, "Nowhere does it consider how technology in the lives of adolescents promotes or retards the development of verbal skills- technology as actually used by them, not ideal visions of what technology might do best" (118). Before he even allows one to consider technology as a facilitator and medium of literacy, he sets parameters for which he is able to disagree- in this case by reducing literacy to an equivalent to verbal skills. By doing this, he is able to create a situation in which technology is a facilitator and a means for literacy, and thus unsuccessful.

Bauerlein's point in arguing against technology rests in the argument that students are exposed to common language too often, and so will not develop the proper vocabulary. His reasoning is that children who are exposed to new or "rare" words are likely to retain those words, which in turn increases their memory bank and their vocabulary. By exposing them to informal writing and content, "a child's vocabulary grows mainly through informal exposure" (Bauerlein 127).Therefore, they are not increasing this knowledge of rare words, and are thus being led towards a defeating fate.

Of course, he also brings up the issue of the community on the Internet. He warns of the risk of "peer absorption" that consists of the social pressures from peers; not from teachers and potential professional figures. It is interesting how Bauerlein sees peer interaction and accessibility as a threat to a student's intellectual development. He notes how the pressures that students face in face to face relationships with one another are in a way exacerbated with the convenience of the Internet. He says that for many students, "good standing with classmates is the only way to secure a safe identity, and so they spend hours on the channels of adolescent fare

searching out the latest in clothes, slang, music, sports, celebrities, school gossip, and one another" (133). But again, what he is doing is wrongly associating the social uses of the Internet with literacy. Not that this isn't necessary, but he chooses to use very narrow and specific parameters in which to define literacy, one in which the Internet obviously doesn't fit. While Bauerlein wants to try and bend digital technology into a traditional and non malleable definition of literacy, he refuses to let our understanding of literacy evolve into a new and broader understanding of the Internet. On the other hand, Barton's *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Writing*, he emphasizes an important point in literacy in relation to its social surroundings, saying that, "One might replace the term evolution with the words 'development' or 'change'…the use of the term implies something more than development or change. It implies a certain sort of change: it brings along a whole set of notions, ideas such that change in unidirectional, natural, and inevitable…also carries with it the notions of improvement, superiority and progress" (121). This is an important consideration to think about, especially as our understanding of technology, computers, and the classroom is changing. The change is inevitable, so rather than fighting it as Bauerlein does, we need to make progress in how it can help us to develop new understandings of what we already know. The resistance of technology is getting old. The former fear that the Internet would die out before long was ample enough to warrant these types of arguments. But anymore, bringing social context into a non malleable understanding of literacy will only hinder our progress towards making the two worlds exist in peace. Bauerlein would benefit from possibly making more positive connections between a student's literacy and their social surroundings. There is much to be learned from this relationship, and it would benefit educators more so to try and adapt to the social world in which we ALL live in (not just our students).

Business and Online Literacy

One point that Bauerlein makes that is useful for our discussion (though he did not intend it this way) is that the online world needs to cater to the minds and practices of today's youth. He points out research from Nielson Norman that asks: "Given the routine behavior of ordinary users, what must businesses do to survive in online environments?" (149). What Nielsen and Bauerlein are *trying* to get across is that young Internet users are not being molded into an archetype user that adapts to these new technologies. Yet, what they *really* are saying instead is that the content presented by these businesses and by adults needs to adapt to the interests and "impatience" of youths. While trying to make this argument condescending to many, he goes on to say that a simple and easy to navigate web pages will gain more user response than a difficult or unfamiliar site. In the end, Nielsen and Bauerlein submit to the notion that "the Web is a consumer habitat, not an educational one" (149). But yet again, we run into problems just as we were coming to agreement, with one simple point that Bauerlein makes. Though we can applaud him for coming to this agreeable point, he still aims it toward a conclusion that the Internet is bad for education. It seems that he, along with many other scholars still reluctant to submit to the Internet, have fallen into a vicious cycle of using the Internet to define literacy. Because much of what young Americans do on the Internet is social, scholars automatically assume that this is happening exclusively. Taking one instance of Internet use-- socializing on Facebook-- scholars are quick to analyze a user's language and socializing skills, but rather than keeping it within the context of that use, they will assume that this is how a user acts all the time on the Internet. And with that, they converge these separate types of experiences, which degrade the user's critical skills, and lowers their level of literacy to a purely social one. Furthermore, this creates limitations on literacy in general, making it difficult to show the evolutionary influences that literacy has on various generations of thinkers (students, Internet users, and so on).

The Selling Point: Why Consumers are Imperative to Online Literacy

Even going back to the basic understanding of literacy, taking the aspect of technology and the Internet out, there is an apparent necessity for the acquisition of literacy to take place through a socializing process. In Barton's *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language* he goes through the social practices that a child experiences when acquiring language. He speaks about literacy as an activity, making a more complex way to learn. In particular, he identifies four types of learning involved in socialization: "'First skills, habits...are learned…Second parents and others provide models for roles and behavior…Third the child identifies with both parents…more powerful than imitation… Fourth, there is the part played by the growing individuals themselves. They actively seek to structure the world, to make sense and order of the environment'" (133). What is interesting in all of this is that Barton directly points to the importance of social context in learning language. He specifically notes the complexity of learning language in the various contributions of both individual and social aspects that go into literacy. According to Barton, "Literacy is a social activity and it often involves children changing the ways they participate in an event" (133).

Bringing this back to Bauerlein who tries to expose the impediments that technology presents in literacy, it seems as though it is on the contrary, a necessity for our younger generations to have these technological and social experiences. In fact, when we see kids with mobile devices constantly connected to the world and to their peers, we have to think about the literacy events that are taking place; in something as simple as a text message. In a way, these events are demonstrating how social events influence and help younger generations work with language. Despite the informality of the writing, these kids are working with words, manipulating them, in order to create meaning, and communicating. They are not only creating new words, but in playing with language, they are interacting with literacy. When it comes down

to language learning, it is interesting to see the change in the technologies that make this possible. It was different generations ago, and will likely change in coming generations. Nevertheless, it is important that in learning how to use language, especially in social ways, we take notice in the tools that make this learning possible. It emphasizes the importance of having these social events around us and to expose them to young children in order for them to contextualize these events with their own experiences. This, in turn, helps them to develop a better understanding for language and for literacy. In essence, and as Barton points out, learning is a social event, meaning that our younger counterparts are adapting their own language practices to the world in which we are presenting them. Technology is already here, which is why our young kids are learning to communicate through text messages and social networks. It is nothing that we need to introduce to them. They are learning to be a part of our world- and these tools already exist.

On that note, Barton also makes an important note in this process of language learning. As Barton puts it: "Any person learning gradually builds upon existing knowledge and abilities which become transformed by the new learning…the inner dialogue of reasoning is a reflection of the outer communicative interaction…if we put together these various parts, the participants, the situation, the activity, a mechanism and ways of participation, we have the requirements for learning" (135). In this way, then, it would seem necessary to expose students to the Internet in a social manner. It would seem necessary to allow them "countless hours" in order to communicate with peers, to find importance in their image to their friends, etc. Unlike what Bauerlein says, it seems pretty important that kids are exposed to and allowed time to use the Internet informally. In fact, it is through these informal experiences that they are able to internalize and criticize the experiences in order to utilize them for academic or formal purposes.

Consumers and Online Literacy

The reality of the Web is that "the Web is a consumer habitat, not an educational one" (149). Again, this is an easy statement to agree with. Nielsen takes this idea of the consumer-based and as such, the Internet is geared towards consumption which goes to show the competitive nature of the Internet (especially from a business/consumer standpoint) and how sites are designed to grab the attention of the Internet user. There is a certain unspoken knowledge of how users interact with websites. This is especially important to consider from a business perspective. The internet has created a socially convenient environment that users have taken to very quickly. What I mean to say is that the Internet has changed the pace of the world. Convenience and efficiency are critical in a successful online business, and for successful interaction on various other websites. In this fast pace lifestyle that we consider normal, convenience means easy to use, efficient, and accessible. Consequently, many online businesses aim at being a one-stop-shop, where a consumer can find various products and services, and can interact in various different ways. Because of this mentality, the Internet has to now accommodate to the world. Likewise, as we learn more and more about the Internet, we have to change its existence to fit in with our lifestyle. Therefore, conscientious web designers will design for a specific audience, not based on their reason for being online, but based on the fact that they were searching for this particular type of information. Therefore, site design and usability are extremely important. This is why social networks are designed in certain ways; why online shopping carts are designed with a specific usability and limited content; why blogs are unique to the type of content it produces; and so on.

The Internet provides the opportunity for designers to become producers, and for producers to become designers. In the user-generated emphasis that is present in online spaces, it becomes more imperative for us that we understand online literacy as seen through this

perspective. Not only are we creating content for a specific intended audience, but we are creating an image for the public to access at the click of a mouse. Because of this, information is demanded and valued as such. Though scholars are still hesitant to accept the accessibility of information on the Internet, it remains a fact that the Internet has something to do with our understanding of online literacy. As our current society pushes to introduce more technology into more facets of our lives, and to generate innovative new ways to utilize those that are already in place, we as consumers are challenged to develop and to understand how these technologies affect our lives.

In our day to day lives online literacy is consciously and unconsciously encountered; whether on a social or academic level. This adds to our understanding of literacy, in ways that make it more efficient and functional. In this manner, online literacy becomes knowledge of not only understanding the communicative value of the Internet, but also the functional qualities that the Internet implies. When communicating online, it is critical that users knowhow to create their identity in addition to building on the medium itself. Furthermore, in being able to generate this identity online, the technology used will become apparent in whom this person portrays to viewers. Thus, portraying our identity online, as intentional as it might begin, is not merely presented to our audience. Rather, it is sold to the public, and picked up by the market in which it belongs. Therefore, in order to market ourselves to the online world, we must understand the language required to do that. This is where the broadening definition of online literacy enters. As information is passed between networks and communities in social transactions and otherwise, knowing where our literacies come from is important. That being said, we must begin to use the Internet in ways that will develop our literacies to accommodate to our lives as they are used on a daily basis. Any attempt to fit our lives into a limiting definition of literacy will only make it more difficult for it to evolve. Just as Hartley shows how knowledge and literacy are capable of

evolving: "[YouTube] took off… [Not knowing] what the broadcast-yourself generation might want to use this newfound capability *for;* how it night be shaped towards imaginative, instrumental or intellectual ends. It simply…evolved" (Hartley 102); it is up to us, the users of these communities that will allow online literacy to evolve as a steady field of understanding. Thus, it is through the continuous implementation of our everyday experiences with literacy, whether they be social or academic, that will ultimately lead us to understand the consumerization of online literacy.

Works Cited

Baron, Dennis (2007). *A Better Pencil: Readers. Writers, and the Digital Revolution.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Barton, David (2007) *Literacy.* Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing.

Bauerlein, Mark (2008). *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupifies Young Americans.* New York: Penguin Books.

----. "Online Literacy Is a Lesser Kind." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 55.4 (2008): B10-B11. *Academic Search Premier.* EBSCO. Web. 31 Aug 2010.

Bean, Tom, and Harper, Helen (2008). Literacy Education in New Times: In These Times. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy.* 52(1), 4-6.

Brandt, Deborah (2001). *Literacy in American Lives.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Burniske, R.W. (2008) *Literacy in the Digital Age*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

Derrida, Jacques (1997). Translator's Preface. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. GC Spivak. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

--- (1982). Différance. *Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

Holt, Douglas (2002). Why do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding. *Journal of Consumer Research.* 29(1), 70-90. Retrieved on 29 September 2010 from, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3131961.

Johnson, Steven (2005). *Everything Bad is Good for You*. New York: Penguin.

Kirkland, David (2008). Shaping the Digital Pen: Media Literacy, Youth Culture, and MySpace. *Youth Media Reporter.* X(X) 188-200.

Lewis, C. and Fabes, B (2005). Instant Messaging, Literacies, and Social Identities. *Reading Research Quarterly.* 40(4), 470-501.

Paloff, Rena M., and Pratt, Keith (2007). *Building Online Learning Communities.* San Francisco: Jossey- Bass.

Sandbothe, Mike (1998). Media Temporalities in the Internet: Philosophy of Time and Media with Derrida and Rorty. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 4(2): 1-18. Retrieved on 19 September 2010 from,

http://www.ascucs.org./jcmc/vol4/issue2/sandbothe.html

Scott, Linda (1994). The Bridge from Text to Mind: Adapting Reader-Response Theory to Consumer Research. *The Journal of Consumer Research.* 21(3), 461-480. Retrieved on 29 September 2010 from, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2489686.

Shirky, Clay (2008). *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organization.* New York: Penguin Press.

Sullivan, Patricia (1993). Remapping Curricular Geography: Professional Writing in/and English. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication.* 7(4), 389-422.

Twitchell, James B (2004). An English Teacher Looks at Branding. *Journal of Consumer Research.* 31(2), 484-489. Retrieved on 29 September 2010 from, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3692706.

Wallendorf, Melanie (2001). Literally Literacy. *Journal of Consumer Research.* 27(4), 505-511. Retrieved on 29 September 2010 from, http://www.jstor.org/stable/254342.

Williams, Brownwyn, and Zenger, Amy (2007). *Popular Culture and Representations of Literacy.* New York: Routledge.

Zhao, Shanyang, and Sherri Grasmuck, and Jason Martin (2008). Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored relationships. *Computers in Human Behavior* 24(1): 1816-1836.