

Why Students Use Social Networking Sites After Crisis Situations

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Abstract

Communities respond to tragedy by making virtuous use of social networking sites for a variety of purposes. We asked students to describe why they used a social networking site after the tragic shootings at Virginia Tech, then evaluated their responses using content analysis. Students went predominately to Facebook (99%). Most (59%) of the 426 students that responded went there because their friends were already there, and to find out if their friends were OK (28%) (and to let them know they were OK).

Methods

- ❖ Online Survey
- ❖ Content Analysis
- ❖ Keyword co-occurrence

Findings

- ❖ 426 participants
- ❖ 27% response rate
- ❖ 99% used Facebook
- ❖ 13 keywords from content analysis
- ❖ Good inter-rater reliability
- ❖ Keyword types
 - ❖ Relationship: related to family and friends
 - ❖ Mechanistic: related to using features of Facebook
- ❖ Keyword frequency
- ❖ Keyword Co-occurrence
 - ❖ 268 responses were coded with multiple keywords by 2 of 3 coders
 - ❖ 23 keyword pairs obtained significant Chi Square values.

Table 1: Coding keywords, definition, inter-rater agreement, and frequency of occurrence.

Keyword	Definition/Idea Represented	Fleiss' Kappa	Percent of Responses
Relationship Centric Keywords			
Friends	Friends and other peers use this particular social networking website, must have thought that friends are on this site. The reference to "everyone" means their friends.	0.73	59%
OK	Idea that they went to the site for the purpose of letting others know they were OK or checking if others were OK.	0.90	28%
Belong	This is the only social networking website where the respondent has a page or they say that they had an account at the time.	0.85	28%
Mass Comm	Wanted to reach many people at once, must have the intent to contact many people. Not make a direct connection with individual.	0.51	10%
Networks	Wanted to reach friends in different networks (i.e., high school network, college networks, etc.)	0.36	7%
GetInfo	Went to the site to get information or provide information. Mention the site was the best way to give information.	0.11	4%
Mechanistic Keywords			
Easy	Easy (and/or quick) way to contact people or saying I know how to use Facebook.	0.85	22%
Status	Indicates that they used the public status feature to provide or receive updates.	0.94	11%
Personal	Personal messages to or from individuals were utilized.	0.68	10%
Reliability	Cell phone or other services were unreliable; however, the internet and social networking websites were online the entire time.	0.95	8%
Groups	Joined groups to connect with others.	0.94	5%
Wall	A general post could be left on one's own "wall" indicating they were OK. Ability to post single message for all friends to see. Anytime posting is mentioned. Includes writing on people's profiles.	0.68	5%
Only Way	For some who lost touch with friends, this was the only method of communication available.	0.65	2%



Figure 1: Percent of responses that included each keyword.

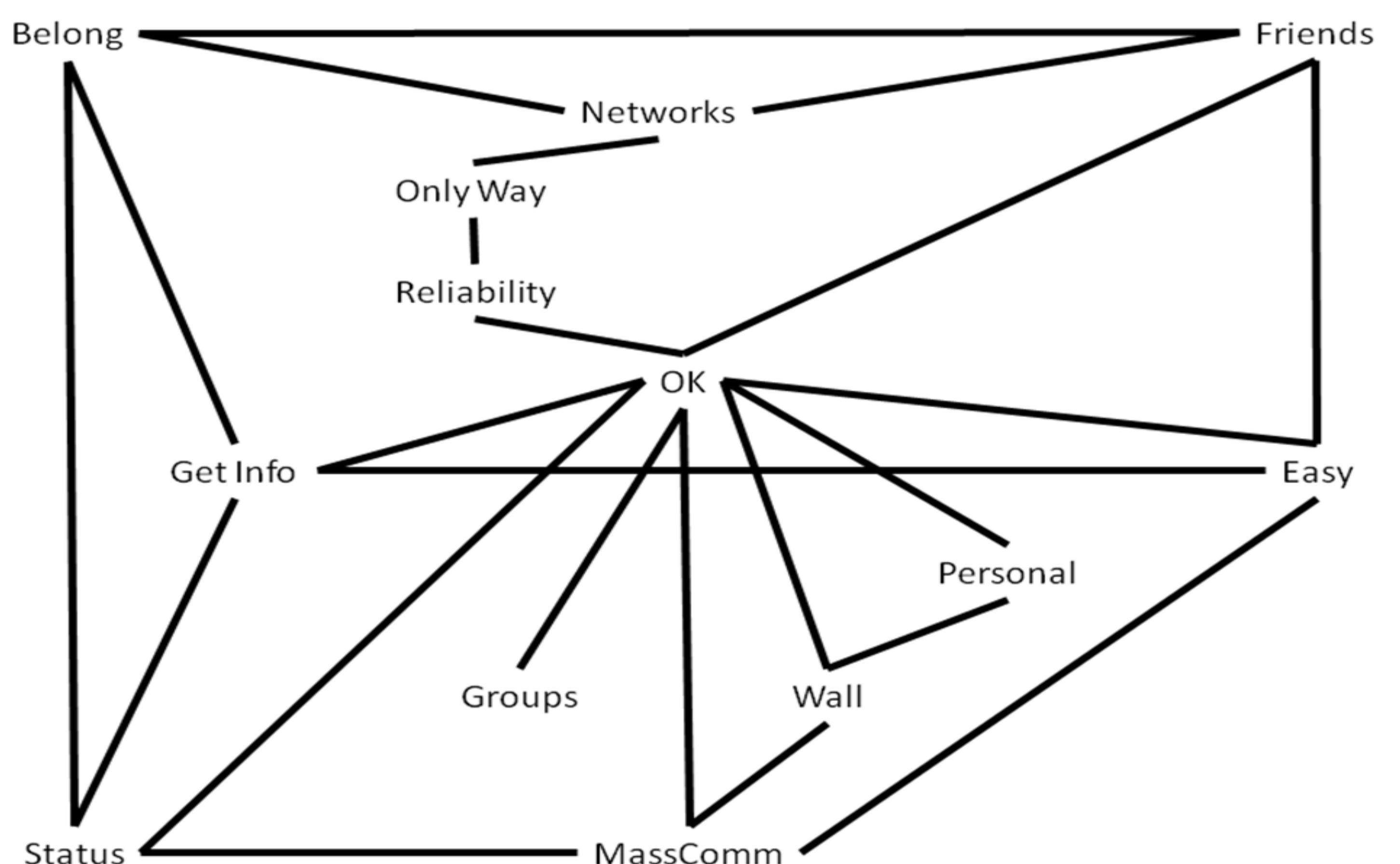


Figure 2: Significant Keyword co-occurrences