Abstract
Purpose – This study aims to understand the meaning of web site connectedness from the consumer’s point of view, and uncover the underlying meaning of emotional ties between visitors and web sites.
Design/methodology/approach – The study, conducted a netnography which uses three qualitative research methods: online interviews; diary analysis; and observation of web site usage and behaviour. Seven respondents were obtained for the depth interviews, and 12 respondents participated in the diary study. The length of interviews was approximately 1.5 hours/respondent; whereas the three-consecutive days of diary entries consist of three-four pages per day/respondent. Observation was undertaken by the lead researcher as an active member of several user groups.
Findings – The emic perspective illuminated here shows that web site connectedness consists of three major themes: relatability; dependency; and sense of community. The paper defines these constructs, and suggests that to transform the relationship from “just friends” to “soul mates” web site owners should focus on improving one or all of the connectedness components. Surprisingly, frequency of visit did not determine the depth of the relationship between web sites and their visitors, as is the common assumption in the literature.
Originality/value – This research study illuminates a new way to understand the emotional connection between consumers and web sites, and uncovers the three most important factors that lead toward three varying levels of emotional connectedness (just friends, good acquaintances and soul mates). The paper also suggests ways in which emotional connectedness can be enhanced.
Keywords Worldwide web, Internet, Consumer behaviour, Consumer psychology
Paper type Research paper

Introduction
Companies are increasingly recognizing the need to be visible in the virtual world. This has resulted in a considerable increase in the number of web sites representing companies or brands. Although having web sites is thought of as a positive action, companies are concerned with the soaring cost of creating and maintaining the web sites and want to justify the benefits derived. They question whether web sites are worth the investment, and how they can encourage more visitors in the long term. One way to accelerate web site use and acceptance is through word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. WOM communication intention is a direct function of customer satisfaction (Fornell et al., 1996; Oh and Parks, 1997; Oh, 1999; Ranaweera and Prabhu, 2003). In the web site context, there is evidence that satisfaction leads to brand loyalty and an emotional connection between the web site users with the web site (Maulana, 2006; Ha, 2006). However, there is still a limited understanding of what causes and
constitutes connectedness between visitors and web sites. This study aims to understand more deeply the meaning of connectedness from the consumer’s point of view, and uncover the underlying meaning and structure of emotional ties between visitor and web site.

**Literature review**

*Web site connectedness*

People use media because of the utility they derive from the medium (Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000). With the vast growth of the internet and web site technology, more people have shifted most of their daily activities from offline to online. Apart from information gathering, entertainment, social interaction, communication, and for purchasing products/services, as Kozinets (2002) has pointed out, web sites are used for sharing ideas, and building communities. Because of constant interaction with the web site and with the other visitors, a web site can become a solid part of their daily life.

Web site visitors differ in the degree of their preferences for and attachment to web sites; and these differences are captured in this study by connectedness construct. There is an analogy in the behaviour with which consumers approach web sites and the way they consume other resource media, such as television programs and specific interest magazines. Russell and Puto (1999), for example, evaluate connectedness between consumers and television programs. Connectedness as an indicator is richer and more enhanced compared with the other measurements of success because it better explains the intensity of a relationship between the audience and a communication vehicle (Russell and Puto, 1999).

The size of an audience measures the success of a web site, as does the loyalty of that audience – something that Gladwell (2000) labels as the “stickiness factor”. In the context of web sites, “stickiness” generally refers to a site’s capacity to retain the interest of a “web surfer” at the site (Demers and Lev, 2001). Stickiness is measured by the duration of the visit, how many pages are visited, et cetera. While stickiness is an important measurement, it does not sufficiently explain the extent of audience interest in repeating visits to the web site. An alternative would be to use the measurement of a TV program’s success in becoming a favourite program. This construct is known as “connectedness” which Russell and Puto (1999) discuss as “audience connectedness” or “program connectedness” (Russell et al., 2004).

Researchers have long recognized the relationship between consumers and products or brands in use, between the consumer and the firm, and amongst consumers (Fournier, 1998; McAlexander et al., 2002). Such a relationship is a good analogy to approach the link between visitors’ feeling and web sites. In the consumer-brand link, the relationship evolves over the course of time and is able to generate feelings of commitment, intimacy and affective attachments (Fournier, 1998). The same should be possible for a consumer-web site link.

The basic understanding of commitment and self-identification has been explicitly or implicitly included in customer-brand interaction studies, such as para-social relationships (Gummesson, 2002), brand relationship (Fournier, 1998), and social relationships (Aggarwal, 2004). Gummesson (2002) used the term parasocial relationships to indicate the relationships between brands and objects. Fournier (1998, p. 344) puts more emphasis on the “brand-as-partner” whereby both partners “must collectively affect, define, and redefine the relationship”. The degree of relationship between the customer
and the brand becomes more salient, especially in relation to the potential creation of positive WOM or consumer advocacy (Almquist and Roberts, 2000; Kozinets, 2002). Corresponding with Fournier (1998), Russell and Puto (1999) and Russell et al. (2004), in the web site context, we define this relationship construct as “web site connectedness”.

In a different research domain, some researchers have tended to refer to the connectedness concept to explain the deep and rich relationship between individuals or between individuals and systems/objects: social connectedness (Timpone, 1998; Lee and Robbins, 2000; Hagerty et al., 1993), interpersonal connectedness (Newcomb, 1990), parent-child connectedness (Lezin et al., 2004), audience connectedness (Russell and Puto, 1999) and TV program connectedness (Russell et al., 2004). Most conceptualizations of connectedness include a self-in-relation-to-others element, and a more internally focused self-element (Townsend and Mc Whirter, 2005).

Research into connectedness has advanced substantially over recent years. Townsend and Mc Whirter (2005) have comprehensively reviewed most of the literature on this concept, including interpersonal connectedness, social connectedness, family connectedness, school connectedness, cultural connectedness, community connectedness, affective connectedness, emotional connectedness and empowered connectedness. As a construct, connectedness has a very broad meaning, but most definitions in the social studies include aspects of “emotional” elements.

Interestingly, in the information technology and telecommunication literatures, connectedness is mostly interpreted as a “physical” connection, either among users or between users and the virtual world (Dholakia et al., 2001; Townsend, 2001), or in a web site context, where Ha and James (1998) categorised connectedness as one of the physical interactivity dimensions. The intensity of relationships between brand and individual visitors through interactions between members of the brand communities have been discussed at length (Kozinets, 2002; McAlexander et al., 2002). However, only recently in the context of marketing and information technology have many researchers begun to explore the “emotional connection” between visitors and the web site as a media. Jung et al. (2004) introduced the internet connectedness index (ICI), which includes the measurement of the emotional dependency of a person to the internet.

This study aims to extend the knowledge of emotional connectedness created in the digital environment. We suggest that the “customer-brand relationship” concept and “program connectedness” are appropriate to be applied in the context of web site use. The relationship between web sites and visitors will grow over time, and the stronger the connection between visitor and the site, spreading the positive WOM about the web site will be more likely to happen.

Deriving from the above literature, we define web site connectedness as the intensity of emotional ties and relational proximity between a visitor and a web site. This study will elaborate on the web site connectedness concept from the consumer’s point of view, and uncover the underlying meaning and structure of emotional ties between visitor and the web site. The main theoretical contribution of this paper is to uncover the components that make up web site connectedness.

**Methodology**

A substantial number of studies on web site behaviour have been conducted, most of them using surveys and experiments. While these methods were found to be useful,
they are increasingly unsatisfactory in eliciting insight into fields as rich as web site behaviour (Maulana, 2006). Arnould and Price (1993) and Ehigie and Ehigie (2005) reported that researchers and managers alike have adopted supplementary and analytical procedures to complement surveys and/or experiments. To be able to have a more complete picture of this phenomenon and enrich academic knowledge, more studies have been done qualitatively. For example, Kozinets (2002) studied online communities using netnography, an ethnography method in the internet environment. These methods are especially suited to exploring meaning and illuminating the nature of relationships, which is what we investigate in this study.

In this study, we use three qualitative research methods:

1. online interviews;
2. diary analysis; and
3. observation of web site usage and behaviour.

These three types of data collection aim for triangulation across sources and methods, which enhance the trustworthiness of the information gathered. By utilizing these qualitative methods, we will contribute to the development of the web site connectedness construct from an emic perspective, whereby interpretation identifies emerging themes from the data gathered, and we can better understand the nature of connectedness.

To understand how the web site visitors feel about their relationship with the web site, we use a distant-near experience concept. Geertz (1975) discusses how psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut differentiated the experience-near to experience-distant concept. By using an experience-near concept, expressing themselves naturally about their own understanding of their behaviour, informants do not necessarily have to be stranded in abstractions and smothered in jargon. Using diary analysis helps the credibility of the experience-near data because the diaries are believable representations of the construction of reality studied.

Respondents were recruited from various mailing lists in which the lead researcher participated. As a result, seven respondents were obtained for the depth interviews, and 12 respondents participated in the diary study. The length of interviews was around 1.5 hours/respondent, resulting an average of 4 pages (font 12, 1 space); whereas the 3-consecutive days of diary entries consist of 3-4 pages (font 12, 1 space) per day/respondent.

The knowledge gained from the emerging themes and stories through interviews combined with the personal observations, and the knowledge gained from the literature review was used as the basis for designing the template questions for the respondent diary. To be able to express their natural web site visit experiences better, in both interviews and diary entries, respondents were free to select the web sites that they were familiar with.

The personal observations by the lead researcher were conducted in the web sites that were nominated by the respondents during interview and diary entries, and in some web sites that the lead researcher visited regularly, such as www.australianidol.bigpond.com.au, www.smh.com.au, and www.friendster.com. The aim of the observation is to understand the social world from the respondent’s point-of-view. To be able to experience events in the way the respondents experienced, the lead researcher joined the online forum available in the observed web sites.
To minimise bias and ensure "normal" behaviour, the lead researcher acted as a passive member of the forum.

All data collection took place on a home computer. All transcriptions were done by the facilities provided by Yahoo-messenger as well as Outlook Express mail and Microsoft word. The respondents consist of people with advanced education degrees (undergraduates and postgraduates), males and females; their ages are between 25 and 45 years of age. See Appendix 1 for detailed descriptions of the respondents, and Appendix 2 for the semi structured interview protocol. Full transcripts were available immediately after the discussion, and with 100 per cent accuracy, ready to be analyzed.

The analysis focused on identifying themes that emerged from the transcript, diary and observational data. The creation of themes was an iterative process. As suggested by Arnould and Wallendorf (1994), the interpretation of the data was built when a disjuncture existed between observed behaviour and the overgeneralizations, glosses, and claims of idiosyncracy projected. We summarize the sequential interpretive processes of coding and building layers of meaning through troping in more general terms.

In all three studies, the connectedness concept was untangled in many different ways. For example, in the interviews, a set of questions was asked of respondents to reveal their feelings about the web site, the importance of web site information to their daily life and the role of the web site in their relationships with their peers or social circle. Since, it was not easy to ask them to describe their feelings about the site, we used a projective technique to reify the web site (Belk, 1995). In keeping with this approach, each respondent reflected upon his/her assumptions and experience with the web site. We asked respondents to imagine that the web site was a person with a personality and human characteristics. The ways in which respondents described their feelings in this projective situation yielded rich insights in understanding the connectedness between the visitor and the web site.

Results

This section begins with the discussion about the various ways consumers can become intimate with web sites, and the reasons why. The different type of relationships between a web site and its visitors are naturally analogous to the relationship between two individuals or between customer and a brand. It is classified into three primary relationship types: just friends, good acquaintances, and soul mates.

The respondents are requested to label their relationships with the web site and describe the rational behind it. For example, Reno is a financial analyst in his early 30s, who has a number of clients in his circle who are collectors of luxury watches. As a result of his client’s interest, Reno developed a personal interest in any information about watches. We asked Reno to imagine that one of the web sites he visits regularly (www.watchfinder.com) was a person and to describe his relationship with this web site. Projected as an imaginary person, Reno revealed his special relationship with it.

This person is my soul mate because we share the same personality and hobby. We discuss many things about watches, the history, its value.

A different way to express such intimacy in the relationship with a web site can be observed from the comments of Maria, a young advertising agency copy-writer, who is also active as a moderator for many mailing lists, all in yahoogroups. She has strong feelings toward www.yahoo.com and describes it as follows:
I regard this person as my boyfriend. I can't eat and sleep properly if I don't see him every day”.

As predicted, using imagery, respondents were able to differentiate which web site they considered to be “just a friend” as a “good acquaintance” and even as a “soul mate”. For example, although Maria described www.detik.com as a dynamic person, full of knowledge, she had a stronger connection with www.yahoo.com, and could describe her relationship with www.detik.com as “just friends”.

I appreciate his presence, his companionship, however I am not fully depending on him. In other words, I can survive without him.

Another example was from Linda, a postgraduate student in physics. She regarded www.smh.com.au as a “resourceful person”. However, in terms of quality of her relationship with this person, she claimed that this site was “just a friend” for her.

We are just friends. I like him, but we don’t have strong connection. I only talk seriously to him when I need it.

**Emerging themes**

The summary of the diary depicted in Table I indicates the significant differences in responses of “just friend” web sites, “good acquaintance” web sites and “soul mate” web sites. The key indicators that explain the strength of visitor relationship with the web site turned out to be:

- the duration of visit: how long in average does the visitor spent time with the site;
- how deep is their feeling of loss if one day the web site stopped appearing online;
- whether they visit the web site according to their usual daily patterns when circumstances change, (for example: if they were out of town, weekends, etc);
- the role of the site in their social life/circle of friends; and
- how easily replaceable the web site would be if it were no longer accessible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Just friends</th>
<th>Good acquaintances</th>
<th>Soul mates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of visit</td>
<td>Varied, no pattern</td>
<td>Varied, no pattern</td>
<td>Varied, no pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration per visit</td>
<td>Relatively short (10-15 min/visit)</td>
<td>Relatively short (10-15 min/visit)</td>
<td>Quite long, between 20 min to 3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit on weekend or out of town</td>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Most of the times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access point</td>
<td>Typing the URL, clicking from history</td>
<td>From history</td>
<td>From history or bookmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download/saving content and discuss/forward it to friends</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role in strengthening the relationship with friends</td>
<td>Does not have any role</td>
<td>Has some role</td>
<td>Has a significant role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will miss the site if it is no longer available</td>
<td>No effect</td>
<td>Will miss it</td>
<td>Will deeply miss it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the site replaceable?</td>
<td>Yes, many substitutes</td>
<td>Only few substitutes</td>
<td>No substitute; it is too unique</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table I. Summary of patterns of response in respondent diaries*
Surprisingly, frequency of visit did not determine the depth of the relationship between web sites and their visitors, as is the common assumption in the literature. Two web sites: www.detik.com and www.smh.com.au provide examples of this. Although they were frequently visited (more than three times a day) by our respondents, when they discussed their relationship with the web sites if the web sites were people, our respondents regarded these web sites as “just friends”. The “just friend” web sites were visited for around 10-15 minutes duration for each visit, while the “soul mate” web sites could hold the interest of visitors from between 20 minutes and three hours duration per visit.

The emic perspective that we have illuminated here shows us that web site connectedness consists of three major themes:

1. relatability;
2. dependency; and
3. sense of community, which are shown in Figure 1, and which we elaborate on at length below.

These correspond to many of the etic perspectives discussed in the psychology literature. These include the degree of liking an environment (Eisenberg et al., 2003), the quality of the emotional bond between one person and another (Lezin et al., 2004), and relatedness (Townsend and Mc Whirter, 2005). Beyers et al. (2003) describe close parent-adolescent relationships as having elements of mutual reciprocity, trust and dependency. Zeldin and Topitzes (2002) explain the existence of sense of community in neighborhood connectedness. IJsselsteijn et al. (2003) suggest that connectedness includes affective benefits such as a feeling of staying in touch, and a sense of belonging and intimacy.

**Relatability**
Lamb et al. (1998) describe “relating” as a familiar concept in psychological, developmental, sociological, and nursing theories (Belsky, 1984; Ricci, 1991; Kaplan, 1992). Lamb et al. (1998) define relating as “the mutual interaction between an individual and another individual, family, group, community, or environment characterized by communication and trust”. In this study, we adapt the relating term into “relatability” which means the ability of a web site visitor to relate to a web site through mutual interaction between him/her and that web site, characterized by communication and trust.

There are many different aspects in the web site that will influence visitors to visit more frequently; but to keep them and to engage them longer at each visitation, this

![Figure 1.](image-url)
Three key components of web site connectedness
study indicates that the web site must have the high relatability factor. The visit duration leads to the interpretation of engagement, and this engagement indicates a relatability theme for the connectedness with the site, as showed in Figure 2.

Another example is exerted from Sony’s diary. Sony is a postgraduate student who is a Formula-1 car racing enthusiast. He revealed that he spent many hours at his computer checking on the F-1 racing results from Montreal, and also read stories about Formula-1 racing. He regards www.formula1.com as his “soul mate”. He also downloads and saves on his computer some of the Formula-1 car photos for his own interest and subsequent reference. These types of activities are evidence of aspects of relatability in Sony’s case.

Relatability was found to be unconnected with the frequency of visit. For example, in the in-depth interview, food consultant Hana expressed her appreciation of www.kompas.com and www.detik.com because their “food column” sections are highly relevant. Although these particular columns were not updated everyday, they enriched her knowledge about food and recipes. Thus, visits to the web sites once or twice a week were sufficient for her.

Dependency
The dependency theme was derived from a series of interpretations in relation to the questions:

• how deep was the visitors’ feeling of loss when the web site was no longer available;
• how difficult would it be for the respondent to get a replacement;
• how unique is the web site service; and
• whether a substitute could be easily obtained when needed.

Dependency is shown in Figure 3.

Dependency is defined as “incapable of being separated into two or more closed disjoint subsets” (Meriam Webster Dictionary). Bornstein (1992) stated that the dependency concept is closely related to affiliative behaviour and help-seeking. In this study, affiliative behaviour is demonstrated at the level of involvement by respondents with the product category supported by the web site. For example, both Sony and Reno, who reveal high dependency towards www.formula1.com and www.watchfinder.com, respectively, are both involved with the product category supported by the web sites. Sony describes himself as a supporter of car racing, and Reno is interested in luxurious watches.

![Figure 2.](image-url)
The link between feeling of loss and the type of relationships was expressed consistently both in the interview and diary entries. The stronger the relationship, the deeper the feeling of loss, or in this case, translated to the higher dependency level towards the web site.

If I can’t see him anymore, I am going to be sad missing him. It is because we have a special relationship. If he is not around anymore, It is a very unfortunate situation for me (quoted from Andy’s diary, on www.dynamicconsulting.com).

The characteristic of a soul mate is a trustable someone who is always available be there in any situations. The help seeking aspect was found in both the in-depth interview (with Hana, the food consultant) and the diary entry (by Tommy, the reader of www.republika.co.id, a newspaper web site that has many religious sections).

Definitely I will miss the site. How am I going to get the daily advice and the celebrity preacher column? These are important to me (quoted from the interview with Tommy, visitor to www.republika.co.id site).

Well, I am particularly going to miss the food column. I get used to it, and do not know which other site will give me the same benefits (quoted from interview with Hana on www.kompas.com and www.detik.com).

**Sense of community**

Sense of community as a concept is well known in many literatures. In network marketing, for example, the only way to be successful in business is through network building. McMillan and Chavis (1986, p. 9) define community as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together.” Westheimer and Kahne (1993) define it as a result of interaction and deliberation by people brought together by similar interests and common goals.

In our research, sense of community was derived from questions such as:

*RQ1.* The role of the web site in their relationships with peers or social circle.

*RQ2.* How they regard people who visited the same web site as they do.

*RQ3.* Any similarities in characteristics or interests.

*RQ4.* Did they send or forward articles to friends, or download articles from the sites?

There is evidence of a community theme from all three methods used in this study. This is shown in Figure 4.
The closeness of community of website visitors emerges through sharing, including the needs and interests among site visitors. In other words, the site visitors feel that they belong to a community. The sense of belonging to a community is strongly displayed in web sites with a particular niche target audience, such as the Australian Idol web site (www.australianidol.bigpond.com.au). On this web site, visitors who are Australian Idol fans share their comments, their views and passions about the contestants, the judges and every aspect of the Australian Idol TV program. The following comments are taken from its online chatting forum.

Posted by Blackwidow: “I think Natalie has an incredible voice, but I must admit I would rather listen to some of the others with slightly less ability but more personality and individuality. She is another Mariah Carey/Whitney Houston to me. Both superb voices but they bore me to tears”.

Posted by punk_em: "I love Marcia, she’s gorgeous! She can say what she thinks without being totally horrible”

Although the availability of an e-community in the web site was found to stir the feeling of intimacy and affective attachments with the web site, the sense of community could come from the e-community provided or moderated by the web site. The manner in which the web site helps to develop a community and enable members to keep in touch with each other in a virtual social circle is a significant factor to interpreting the sense of community of its visitors and the role of the web site in strengthening the relationship among its visitors. One example is indicated by Reno, who visits www.watchfinder.com. He regards the information in www.watchfinder.com as useful for him in his relationships with his clients, enabling him to use information from this site as an icebreaker. He realizes that the web site enables him to make a strong connection with his clients.

This web site helps as an ice breaker in any discussion with my clients; it has a significant role in the relationship in our circles (Reno, on www.watchfinder.com).

Conclusions
While connectedness is discussed at length in the psychology and education literatures, very few scholars discuss connectedness in the context of marketing or consumer behavior. Our contribution to the consumer research and marketing literature is delineating the nature of and the influence of connectedness from an emic perspective in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Link to friends/Read by friends/</th>
<th>“I like telling funny stories and jokes I read from <a href="http://www.ketawa.com">www.ketawa.com</a> to my friends.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussed by friends</td>
<td>(Keanne on <a href="http://www.ketawa.com">www.ketawa.com</a>, a humorous site)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>“This site is so useful, and through its community, I got more networks. Sometimes we contact offline”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Hana, on the e-forum in <a href="http://www.kompas.com">www.kompas.com</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Community</td>
<td>“I regard people who visit my favorite website as people who share the same interest.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Keanne on <a href="http://www.ketawa.com">www.ketawa.com</a>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.
the context of web site use. Additionally, interpretation of the triangulated data gathered in this study (through in-depth interview, diary entries and observations) shows thematic patterns that help to explain the importance of web site connectedness.

We argue that connectedness in a web site context needs to be seen from different perspectives. We consider that it is not merely a physical connection between the visitor and the virtual world as suggested by Dholakia et al. (2001). Further, connectedness is not only about the virtual connection between people in the mobile phone or telecommunication environment (Townsend, 2001). We argue that the connectedness concept in this context corresponds to the psychology and education literatures, which place greater emphasis on emotional bonding developed over time. As claimed by Russell et al. (2004), this type of connectedness reveals the intensity of emotional ties as well as the proximity between audience/visitor and the media. The stronger the emotional connection, the more likely the visitor will stay tuned in a longer period of time, and positive word-of-mouth about the web site/company who owns it, can be spread. We build on Russell et al.’s (2004) conceptualization in that we outline three ways in which the emotional connection is built in the online environment.

Building an emotional connection between the visitor and the web site (captured by web site connectedness) should be interpreted as the need to increase the relatability factor, to increase the dependency factor and/or to increase the community feelings. In other words, in order to transform the relationship between visitor and web site from “just friends” to “soul mate” web site owners should focus on improving one or all of the relatability, dependency and sense of community components.

It is probably easier to develop a high relatability factor for web sites that have a niche segment audience because the visitors share the same passion. In this case, creating relatability is just a matter of researching what relevant aspects of the web site the audience likes the most and build around them. For the broadly targeted audience web site, relatability is a challenge because of its heterogeneous interests. One suggestion may be to provide links to different but aligned webpages and external web sites, to capture the broader interests of the audience.

A quicker and more direct way to build a sense of community is through the creation of an e-community or discussion forum. However, an e-community is not the only way. Another alternative would be updating the relevant information more frequently. This way, the visitors will always have fresh topics to talk about, something to share and discuss with people in their circle, and to enhance their ability to network with others. Both face-to-face and email networking among web site visitors will help to build the sense of community.

The goal of maintaining a web site is all about building an emotional connection between the visitors and the web site. The connected visitors could be the most important group of customers in the referral process, and to create positive word-of-mouth communication. This research study gives a different and new perspective to web site performance measurements, providing a means of detecting whether a transformation from “just friends” to “soul mates” has been made in the relationship between visitors and web site.

**Limitation and future research**

As our study is interpretive in nature, and thus focused on understanding the process of how web site connectedness is created, our study is by definition not generalizable to
the web site using population at large due to our small sample size. Thus, future research can explore the boundaries of our web site connectedness model. Moreover, this study is positioned as an exploratory study, therefore further research (both qualitative and quantitative) is recommended to further our understanding of web site connectedness. Further investigation is recommended to delineate the relationship between web site connectedness and word-of-mouth behaviour, especially in the context of viral marketing communication. It would also be illuminating to compare results between transactional and non-transactional web sites. The present study could also be a guide into scale development to measure the web site connectedness construct. Given that web site connectedness was found to be critical as one of the web site success indicators, we need to continue exploring to what extent and under what conditions visitors are closely connected to a web site.

References


**Further reading**


**Appendix 1. List of respondents (diary and depth interviews)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Social class</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Post-grad student</td>
<td>Master degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>College graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>College graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Young executive</td>
<td>College graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Copy writer</td>
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Table AI.  
**Note:** A and B correspond roughly to upper middle and middle class, respectively
Appendix 2. Semi structured interview guide
(Note: As the interviews were semi structured, interview questions varied depending on individual responses)

- Introduction: background of study, etc.
- Frequency of visit to the site.
- Likes about the site? Why?
- Dislikes about the site? Why?
- Did you bookmark the site? Did you type the address in each visit? Or click from the history?
- Tell me what are the benefits of visiting the site that you cannot get from other sites?
- Do you use any of what you read from the site for discussion with friends? Did you forward the content site to colleagues or friends?
- Mention the top three web sites that you visited often.
- From top ten web sites that are regularly visited, what is the position of this web site (rank)? Which one is the No. 1 web site? Why?
- What makes a web site worth it to visit every day?
- Can you describe the characteristics of the web site reader in general? What type of person would visit that web site every day? Do you think you are that type of person? Do you think by visiting the site, you belong to a community?
- Imagine the web site as a person, and s/he is alive. Could you describe the personality of that site? What kind of relationship do you want to have with this person? Why?
- When you were out of town, and only have a limited time to access the internet, did you access this site? Why? Why not?
- Say, tomorrow, the web site announced that it will no longer provide services for the readers (closing down). How do you feel? Can you describe whether you will miss it or not? In what way?
- Any suggestion for the web site for improvement?
- Closing: respondent demographic profile.

About the authors
Amalia E. Maulana obtained her PhD from the School of Marketing, University of New South Wales, Australia in 2006, as an AusAID scholar. Her doctoral thesis is entitled: “Revisitation Behaviour in Non-transactional Web site Context”. Her MBA was earned from IPMI/Monash Mt.Eliza Business School in 1995 with distinction. Her teaching and research interests focus on brand management and strategy; in particular issues relating to advertising/communication, consumer behaviour and internet-related aspects of marketing. She has over 12 years experience as a marketing practitioner in several multinational consumer goods companies, including PT Friesche Vlag Indonesia and PT Unilever Indonesia. Her teaching experience began in 1998 as a Faculty Member at IPMI Business school, Jakarta. While doing her PhD program, she worked as an Associate Lecturer at the School of Marketing, UNSW, Australia (2001-2004). Currently she is the head of MM-Strategic Marketing, at Binus Business School, Jakarta, Indonesia.

Giana M. Eckhardt, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Suffolk University. She was formerly on the faculty at the Australian Graduate School of Management. She received her BS in Marketing from the University of Connecticut and her PhD in Marketing from the
University of Minnesota. Professor Eckhardt has published widely on issues related to consumer behavior in China, branding and culture in Asia, and globalization in publications such as *Journal of International Marketing, Journal of Macromarketing, Consumption, Markets and Culture, International Marketing Review* and *Asian Journal of Marketing*. Her research has won awards from the Sheth Foundation and the Marketing Science Institute. She teaches global marketing and brand management to MBA students, and has been widely quoted in media such as *Asiaweek* and *Asia, Inc.* on global branding issues. Professor Eckhardt has conducted extended fieldwork in both the Chinese and Indian marketplaces, and recently conducted a large-scale study on branding in Asia in conjunction with McKinsey Consulting. She has also worked in marketing and advertising in the ski industry. Giana M. Eckhardt is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: geekhardt@suffolk.edu