

## Article 1:

# Is Peep Culture the New Pop Culture?

17 Jun 2011 / [No Comments](#)

Since I wrote my essay for the book 12 months ago, we have been working at Tribal DDB Amsterdam to find a better framework to explain social media campaigns (which these days means all advertising) to clients. We now tell them that for their campaigns to succeed and be peeped in on, they need two things:

- 1) Look what I found
- 2) Look what I did

Number 1, look what I found, is what Philip's Carousel was about and is what traditional agencies tend to be good at; creating pop culture that will get brands peeped in on. But it won't necessarily get you the depth of engagement the brand needs. There's also a risk that your content may be a bit message heavy, the brand may not be cool enough, the joke might not work – which can all mean that the campaign doesn't get spontaneously shared and fails to appear on everyone's Facebook wall and Twitter feed.

To help things along you need part 2; look what I did. This could be a simple pop-quiz, a game, a UGC film competition, a Dutch tile yourself app – there is no correct formula. It's a different kind of creativity for agencies to get their heads around and is probably closer to creating a TV format than it is a traditional ad. It's all about providing the audience with the tools they need to play, produce, pass on and get peeped on.

If you can get both parts working in one campaign, you're creating peep culture... Anyway hope you enjoy my original essay:

## Article #2:

When was the last time you spent an afternoon mooching around Facebook catching up on what your friends have been up to? I bet it was more frequently and recently than the time you watched a whole movie, sat in front of the TV for an evening, or watched so-called branded content online. As we dedicate more and more of our time to peeping in on other people across social media, is this just another form of competition for brands, or can brands use peep culture to connect with a disparate audience?

Here's another question for you. How many friends have you got on Facebook? How many followers on Twitter? Have you ever wondered how many friends are too many? According to anthropologist Richard Dunbar, the answer is anything over 150.

This number, known as Dunbar's number, is a theoretical limit to the number of people a person can maintain stable social relationships with, in relation to his or her brain size. Chimps have a Dunbar number around 50, and this number gets smaller as you descend down through various apes and their corresponding brain sizes. For us, with our large cortexes and other spongy bits, the number of people we can maintain meaningful relationships with is 150. This can be seen recurring across history and sociology; 150 was the basic unit size of professional armies in Roman times, and 150 is often cited as an appropriate size for a modern company. Actually, take a moment to think about it. Try and think of 150 people who you know and like. For some hypersocial people, the number will be bigger; for others it will be smaller.

Back to chimps. Picture a chimp doing chimp-like things – not wearing a bowler hat and drinking tea, but picking bits off another chimp while he in turn has bits picked off him. This communal grooming is important far beyond basic hygiene. Chimps groom much more than they actually need to because it's a way of being social, staying connected to the group, and sharing information.

As humans evolved, we replaced grooming with language, which is why gossip is actually very important to maintaining the social health of communities. This used to take place over the garden fence or at the water cooler. But as society has become more atomised, so has gossip over the garden fence fallen away. Who actually knows their neighbours anymore? The paradox is that we all have hundreds, if not thousands of contacts across online social networks – but we often don't know our neighbours.

So what's going on? First of all, it's easy to see that virtual gossip has replaced actual gossip. Sharing of photos, status updates, and GPS locations creates an ambient intimacy that could easily be looked upon as a new form of grooming. And as our lives have become broader and more global, information relevant to our social groups is not local information about Mrs. Miggins at number 30; it's whatever happens to be the social currency of our particular networks.

As an expat, I've found myself spending what is probably an inappropriate amount of time on social networking sites keeping up with old friends and acquaintances. I still like the fact that the bloke who I worked with couple of agencies ago who played really good music on the office stereo still shares the odd find on Facebook. I get to keep all the best bits of our relationship without any of the actual effort of meeting him for a drink regularly and picking his brains about

his latest music finds. However, I also miss out on a regular pint where we discuss music and perhaps other more meaningful things in life. But let's face it. Who has the time for more than a handful of "real" friends?

Dunbar states that most people have a core of around five real friends – people we are genuinely intimate with and would probably help us hide a body if push came to shove. From here, friends pan out in rings. As intimacy drops off, quantity and connectivity rises – until we end up connected to that girl from school we quite liked but who now lives in another city and we will never actually meet in real life. Dunbar questions the value of these contacts and states anything over 150 is simply voyeurism. But is it as simple as that?

What is the reason you're still connected to that guy you met at a conference three years ago or that person you were quite good friends with twenty years ago but would barely say hello to if you ran into her in the street? It's perhaps a symptom of what Alain de Botton calls "status anxiety." There is genuinely status to be had from how many people you are connected to on social networks. But is this just a sad number you can virtually wave in people's faces like a pack of Top Trumps, or is there some value in having lots of connections? The answer is a bit of both.

For example, if I were to hire a strategist within my agency, would I choose one who has 150 followers on Twitter or 1,500 followers? All other things being equal, including the freshness of their breath, I would hire the person with the most followers. The reason being is that we live in a connected society, and volume is influence. A strategist with a large network will be more tuned in to what's going on, and he can canvas opinion, change opinion, and even help recruit better people. Having a wide network actually has real value beyond the mere showing-off value of the number itself.

Let's turn this around. What makes a person worthy of connecting to? What makes somebody friend material on Facebook (whereas he or she may not be in real life), and what makes somebody worth following on Twitter? Or to boil it right down: why would I peep in on someone in the first place and carry on peeping?

The people worth peeping in on know something we don't or do something we can't. They have created some piece of content, albeit 140 characters, that we find interesting, entertaining, or relevant. Or they've gathered some piece of information first – a YouTube video, an app, a link – or perish the thought: a piece of branded content or branded utility.

But we need to include an important distinction here. People don't connect to share; they share to connect. We want to share popular culture to make us the centre of our networks and to gain influence, kudos, and status and bring us into contact with new networks – the joy of a re-tweet being the best example of this. Like chimps, we want to groom more than we need to. We want to spend as much time as possible around the water cooler gossiping, whether we like to think we do or not.

Different networks share different things, of course. Going back to Dunbar and his rings of friends, the reason we have rings of friends of varying social distance is that the more disparate people we know, the more networks we become a part of. So keeping in touch with the girl I went to school with or the guy I met at a conference is worthwhile because it opens up more

networks as these people act as interconnecting nodes. (It's worth dipping into the work of Clay Shirky if you want to brush up on your network theory.) Given that different networks will peep in on one another for different reasons and share different culture, this actually makes me quite influential if I am a node between groups; I will cross-pollinate culture from one network to another.

Peep culture isn't replacing pop culture; it's influencing it. Word of mouth is more immediate than ever when it comes to movies, TV, music, and new technology. As soon as a new piece of hardware comes out, we will all be following the trending topics on Twitter to see if it sinks (#fail) or swims. Google Wave, anyone? No, thought not.

But what about advertising? Shareability is now a common feature in most advertising briefs. Social seeders will become a new discipline in advertising agencies in much the same way as planners did in the 1970s. Planners were psychology students who abstracted the target audience into research, data, and insights. Seeders will be sociology students who DJ at the weekends and regularly hang out with the target audience or can network with and influence people who do connect with the target audience.

As agencies we are helping brands catch up with this thinking. I imagine we all regularly tell our clients that if they want to exist in this space, they must be relevant, interesting, useful, or entertaining – which in theory should make them likeable and therefore shareable. The other thing we try and tell them, in as nice a way as possible, is that no one wants their plonky advertising messages landed in the middle of our social networks. Not only will people not share the message, they will actually reject it out of hand and socially ostracise the brand responsible. People will not be peeping in on the brand, to say the least.

For me, one of the most interesting home pages on the internet is Flickr. It actually says on its home page, “Share your photos. Watch the world.” As one of the most successful brands online, their reason-for-being actually sums up the whole notion of peep culture: share and watch. Perhaps the only thing missing is rate and influence, but this is implied. What this ultimately means for brands is share or don't share, buy or don't buy. It's as simple as that. If you're not well liked and therefore not well shared, you may as well pack up and go home now. Simply being on a social network will not get you peeped on. You have to be so much more.

So is having any more than 150 friends too many? I say the more, the merrier. Of course, you can hardly play the networking influence card when rummaging around in people's wedding photos online, but connections and internetworking give everyone a chance to influence all the peepers out there. A peep quickly becomes a share, which in turn becomes a moment of influence. The more influence, the more we eventually get what we want. Which is what?

Well, that's up to us to decide. If we want environmentally responsible companies, the influence of our networks will start outing the villains and praising the worthy. If we don't want another Pirates of the Caribbean movie, we hope that the highly social movie-going audience will force the franchise to walk the plank. There should be nowhere left to hide for modern brands as we peep in on them and share their good behaviour and bad in equal measure.

And of course, brands should be peeping in on us. Social networks should become brand listening stations. We should be defining the behaviour of some of the biggest corporations out

there; not just social, environmental, and commercial behaviour, but physical behaviour as well. It used to be the case that big beat small. Brands with the highest spends who could shout the loudest won the day with old-fashioned, frequency-based advertising – i.e., buy lots of media space and repeat. This is becoming increasingly irrelevant. Big no longer beats small; fast beats slow. The brands that will come out ahead will be the ones that respond the quickest to microtrends and shared memes and be the first to have a presence on the latest social networks.

We've all been trying to explain to our clients for some time that the rules of the game have changed. Some get it; some had it and have lost it. Quite a few are still trying to find the right change to hop aboard the magic bus. Peep culture will redefine popular culture. Everyone with a network will, whether they do it consciously or not, leverage their ability to rate and influence what we think of as the good, the bad, and the relevant.

*Taken from [Digital Advertising: Past, Present and Future](#)*

*Editor's Note: As it is Cannes next week (and we have a press pass!), we will be taking a break for a week from the book. Our next essay by James Cooper which is ab*

# University of Michigan study links social media and narcissism

June 11, 2013 | By Jenniffer Weigel | Tribune reporter

For those Americans unnerved by the popularity of [social media](#) sites such as Facebook and Twitter, a new study from the University of Michigan will come as little surprise. And it might even add some smugness.

The gist of the [study](#): Narcissists “like” Facebook and Twitter. A lot. And social media in general “reflect and amplify” our culture’s deepening narcissism.

The study, by University of Michigan researchers, Elliot Panek, Yioryos Nardis and Sara Konrath, was published online in the journal [Computers in Human Behavior](#).

The study found that narcissistic college students prefer Twitter, using it as “a megaphone” for their lives. Older adults, meanwhile, use Facebook more as a mirror, the researchers said. They curate their image, using frequent status updates and then gauging how people react to their updates, photos, etc.

“Twitter is [simple](#) and pared down and it’s about getting the message out to the world at large, so college students used this more,” Panek said in a telephone interview Tuesday. “Adults who have an established social circle use Facebook as a way of gaining the approval of others. They can also create their image and check how others respond to that image.”

“I was surprised that there was a difference between adults and college students in terms of the way they used Facebook and Twitter,” he said. “I thought they would relate the same way, but there was a very clear difference.”

According to the a University of Michigan, researchers recruited 486 college undergraduates. About 75 percent of them were young women, with 19 as the median age. White females made up most of the adults surveyed, meanwhile, with an average age of 35. The [survey](#) was done online.

“I think the next step would be to follow some people for a period of time to be able to look at the content of status updates and tweets, and see how they could be related to social issues or what you ate for dinner the night before,” Panek said. “This is definitely a burgeoning line of research.”

The researchers were unable to determine whether narcissism leads to increased use of social

media, or whether social media use promotes narcissism, or whether some other factors explain the relationship, according to a [news release](#) from the university.

Article#4:

# The Facebook Effect: Good or Bad for Your Health?

**News-grabbing headlines like "Facebook Linked to Depression" get all the attention, but other research shows that social networking can actually make you healthier. Read this report before you "like," "poke," or "friend" again.**

By [Ashley Day](#)

Is it us, or are news headlines about Facebook's impact on our [health](#) popping up more and more these days? Considering that 51 percent of Americans over age 12 now have profiles on the social networking site compared to 8 percent just three years ago, according to new data from Edison Research, it's no wonder there are entire scientific journals devoted to the psychology of social networking, and piles of studies analyzing such sites' effects on our moods, body image, friendships, and marriages.

Negative conditions such as "Facebook depression" or Facebook-fueled divorces bear the brunt of the media blitz, but much of the body of research actually points to positive perks from Facebook use. Here, a deeper look at how all those "likes," "pokes," and status updates are really affecting you and your family's well-being, and how you can outsmart some of the potentially negative side effects.

## Health Benefits of Facebook

Research shows that Facebook can:

1. **Fuel self-esteem.** In a Cornell University study, students felt better about themselves after they updated their Facebook profiles; a control group of students who didn't log onto the site didn't experience such a mood lift. The very act of posting something about yourself — regardless of what you write — can boost your self-confidence because you control the image you present to your network of friends, according to researchers.

Similarly, according to a Michigan State University study, students with low self-esteem and happiness levels who used Facebook more frequently felt more connected to friends and campus life than those who logged on less often.

2. **Strengthen friendship bonds.** In a small study of heavy Facebook-using young British adults between ages 21 and 29, Lancaster University researchers found that the site helped cement positive interactions among friends. Both private messages and wall posts allowed Facebook users to confide in their friends, surf down memory lane, and laugh out loud, promoting happy feelings.

3. **Stamp out shyness and loneliness.** In a soon-to-be-published Carnegie Mellon study, researchers who surveyed more than 1,100 avid Facebook-using adults found that receiving messages from friends and consuming info from friends' news feeds boosted feelings of connectedness, especially in people with self-described "low social skills." Authors say that for shy people, gleaning information from news feeds and profiles can help start conversations they otherwise might not be comfortable enough to strike up. "People who are uncomfortable chatting face to face gain more through their use of the site," says study co-author Moira Burke, a PhD candidate in the university's Human-Computer Interaction Institute.

Similar benefits hold true for tweens and teens: Australian researchers who studied more than 600 students between age 10 and 16 found that communicating online helped improve communication skills for lonely adolescents, giving them an outlet to talk more comfortably about personal topics.

## Health Risks of Facebook

Research also shows that Facebook can:

1. **Cause depression.** A recently published American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) paper made a major splash when it described [Facebook depression](#) — a condition said to result when tweens and teens spend too much time on social media, leading them to turn to "substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, or aggressive or self-destructive behaviors."

However, the phenomenon is more anecdotal than based on solid science, and some experts suggest that it's more of a correlation — that people who are depressed may simply be more likely to use Facebook. "People who are already feeling down or depressed might go online to talk to their friends, and try and be cheered up," wrote John M. Grohol, PsyD, founder and editor-in-chief of PsychCentral.com on his [blog](#). "This in no way suggests that by using more and more of Facebook, a person is going to get more depressed."

In one of the papers cited by the AAP report, researchers found that the more time first-time Internet users spent online, the more likely they were to experience loneliness and depression but a follow-up study showed such effects disappeared a year later, according to Dr. Grohol. "It may simply be something related to greater familiarity with the Internet," he wrote. In another paper referenced by the AAP report, the depression-Facebook link only held true among people with "low-quality" friendships; people with good pals did not experience depression with increasing Facebook use.

2. **Trigger eating disorders.** The more time adolescent girls spent on the social networking site, the more likely they were to develop [eating disorders](#) such as anorexia, bulimia, and extreme dieting, Israeli researchers recently found. Exposure to online fashion and music content, as well as watching TV shows like Gossip Girl, were also associated with an increased risk for eating disorders.

But researchers aren't saying that social networking sites necessarily cause eating disorders; as with Facebook depression, it may be that people prone to eating disorders spend more time online. What's more, the researchers found that parents can help protect their daughters from harmful effects of media: The children of parents who were aware of



what their daughters were viewing online — and talked to them about what they saw and how much time they spent — were less prone to develop eating disorders, according to study authors.

3. **Split up marriages.** Facebook was referenced in 20 percent of divorce petitions processed in 2009 by Divorce-Online, a British law firm. *Time* magazine reported that feuding spouses use their Facebook pages to air dirty laundry, while their lawyers use posts as evidence in divorce proceedings. [Sexual health](#) expert Ian Kerner, PhD, recently blogged on CNN that he's seen many relationships destroyed by "Facebook bombs" — people reconnecting with high school sweethearts or other blasts from the past that can lead to emotional, if not actual, cheating.

"The mistake I often see is when someone gets friended or messaged by an ex and doesn't tell their partner," Kerner told *Everyday Health*. "It's a slippery slope from the moment you don't disclose information."

He warns that it's easy to over-romanticize the past, which can cause people to check out of their current relationship. Kerner advises couples to not keep secrets about whom they're chatting with on Facebook. And while the site certainly makes it easy to reconnect with old flames and flirt behind the façade of your computer, the potential damage it can do depends on the stability of your relationship in the first place. "It all depends on your level of trust in your spouse," says Kerner. "Have a dialogue, set some rules. The key is transparency."

**Bottom line:** For most people, how or whether Facebook affects your mood, your health, or your marriage probably depends far more on your off-line well-being, activities, and influences than what you do when you log on.

Article #5:

# The Negative Effect of Social Media on Society and Individuals

*by Brian Jung, Demand Media*



Social networking allows users to easily meet and communicate.

Social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace allow you to find and connect with just about anyone, from a coworker in a neighboring cube to the girl who played Emily in your high school production of "Our Town" thirty years ago. Browsing these sites can make you feel connected to a larger community, but such easy, casual connection in an electronic environment can also have its downside.

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## **A False Sense of Connection**

According to Cornell University's Steven Strogatz, social media sites can make it more difficult for us to distinguish between the meaningful relationships we foster in the real world, and the numerous casual relationships formed through social media. By focusing so much of our time and psychic energy on these less meaningful relationships, our most important connections, he fears, will weaken.

## **Cyber-bullying**

The immediacy provided by social media is available to predators as well as friends. Kids especially are vulnerable to the practice of cyber-bullying in which the perpetrators, anonymously or even posing as people their victims trust, terrorize individuals in front of their peers. The devastation of these online attacks can leave deep mental scars. In several well-publicized cases, victims have even been driven to suicide. The anonymity afforded online can bring out dark impulses that might otherwise be suppressed. Cyber-bullying has spread widely among youth, with 42% reporting that they have been victims, according to a 2010 CBS News report.

## **Decreased Productivity**

While many businesses use social networking sites to find and communicate with clients, the sites can also prove a great distraction to employees who may show more interest in what their friends are posting than in their work tasks. Wired.com posted two studies which demonstrated damage to productivity caused by social networking: Nucleus Research reported that Facebook shaves 1.5% off office productivity while Morse claimed that British companies lost 2.2 billion a year to the social phenomenon. New technology products have become available that allow social networks to be blocked, but their effectiveness remains spotty.

## **Privacy**

Social networking sites encourage people to be more public about their personal lives. Because intimate details of our lives can be posted so easily, users are prone to bypass the filters they might normally employ when talking about their private lives. What's more, the things they post remain available indefinitely. While at one moment a photo of friends doing shots at a party may seem harmless, the image may appear less attractive in the context of an employer doing a background check. While most sites allow their users to control who sees the things they've posted, such limitations are often forgotten, can be difficult to control or don't work as well as advertised.

Article #6:

# The Positive Impact of Social Networking Sites on Society

by Dave Parrack

Social networking isn't for everyone, but it's now such a massive part of all our lives, whether we embrace or reject the notion, that it can no longer be ignored. But are social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and [Google+](#) a force for good or evil? As with most questions there are multiple angles to approach this quandary from.

Having already looked at [the negative impact](#) of social networking sites on society, I thought it only fair to redress the balance. Every ying has its yang, after all. Using the previous article as a loose template it's clear to see that what some people would conceive as negatives can also be positives. I guess there are no hard and fast rules when it comes to the effect social networks are having on us all in this day and age.

## Friends!

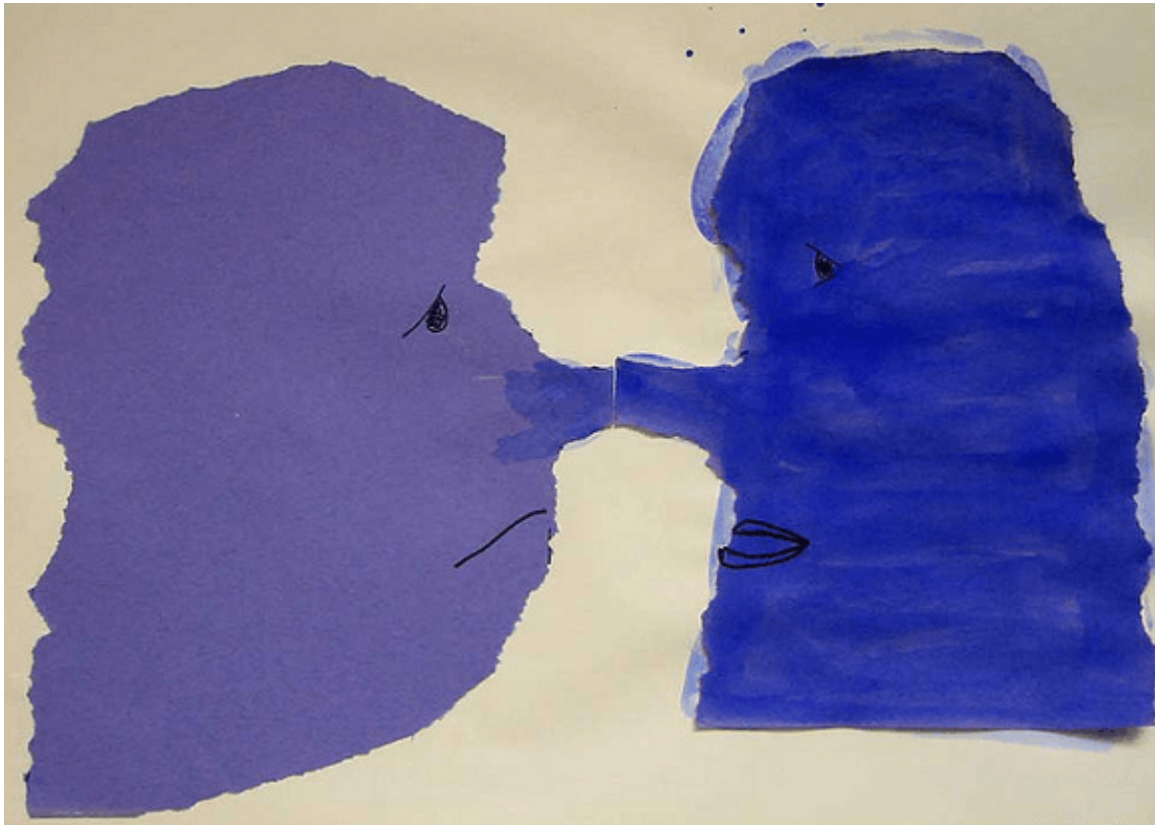


It has never been easier to make friends than it is right now, mainly thanks to social networking sites. Just a few decades ago it was pretty tough to connect with people, unless you were the overly outgoing type able to make conversation with anyone at a party. The rise of [mobile phones](#) helped change this, connecting people in a new way, but then social networks sprang up and the whole idea of friendship changed once more and for ever.

It's entirely possible to have hundreds of friends on Facebook. They may not be friends you know on a personal level and spend time with in the real world on a weekly basis. But they're friends nevertheless. There are several people I consider friends who I have never met – indeed, I may never meet them – but that doesn't lessen the connection we have thanks to social networks.

[Social networking sites can help you make and keep friends.](#)

## Empathy



Each of us spends a little too long talking about ourselves on social networking sites. Which is perfectly natural. We're sharing our lives – the ups and downs, the twists and turns – with people we think will care. They generally do care, and will tell you so. They will listen to what you have to say, and help you deal with any problems you may be facing. If this isn't the case then you may want to find new friends.

The point is that by all of us sharing our experiences, both good and bad, on social networking sites, we're able to empathize with each other. A friend may have gone through a similar ordeal that you now are, and they will be able to inform you how they got through it. You'll also be able to see for yourself that they made it out the other side, that this issue didn't derail them, and they're perhaps better for the experience.

Social networking sites can act as a kind of group therapy session.



## Speedy Communication



Our time is being stretched thinner and thinner by work and family commitments, but social networking sites offer a chance to communicate in a speedy and efficient manner. Writing an update for Twitter takes all of 20 seconds, and with cross-posting over other social networks switched on, that update reaches everyone you want it to reach (and probably more besides) in an instant.

One of the reasons I dislike making phone calls is the unnecessary banter they necessitate. You can't just say what you want to say and then hang up. Doing so is seen as downright rude. Instead you have to swap pleasantries before saying what you want to say, and then make swap more pleasantries before the conversation comes to a natural conclusion.

Social networking sites allow you to live a life unhindered by small talk.

## In Touch With The World



It isn't just your inner circle of close friends and even closer family members that social networking sites allow you to communicate with easily and effectively, either. They open the world up to you, making it a smaller place than it has ever been before. So much so that I actually haven't a clue where many of my contacts reside. When it comes to social networks everyone is equal, regardless of location.

Family living abroad can be kept abreast of the latest happenings in your world as quickly as those living next door. Friends who you haven't seen since school, and who have since moved away, are able to keep in touch. Location-based services such as Foursquare and Gowalla emphasize your location but social networking as a whole means it has become a lot less important.

Social networking sites have made the world a smaller place. And then some.



## **Building Relationships**



There is no doubting that social networking sites can lead to the breaking up of relationships. But there is another side to the tale, which is that people are moving onto other, perhaps better, relationships at the same time. Social networks can put you (back) in touch with those you have lots in common with, and that common ground is often the starting point for long-lasting relationships.

As painful as break-ups can be, they can sometimes be the right thing for all concerned. What's to say that the new relationship, founded on the steps of Facebook, isn't THE one that will last? Even if it doesn't turn into a spectacular coupling, it could be the friendship that is needed at the time. Which has to be a positive.

Social networking sites can help foster friendships and perhaps more besides.

## Finding Common Ground In An Open Society



As previously mentioned, social networking sites can help you find people you share interests with. Facebook, for example, asks you to list who and what you are into right from the start, meaning common ground with others is much easier to find. On Twitter you will follow those who have something to say that you're interested in, making connections with like-minded individuals much easier than is possible offline.

This does require sharing information, and giving up a certain amount of privacy in order to do so. Which is enough for some people to reject social networking outright. Keeping key personal information private is necessary, but likes and dislikes, interests and obsessions, thought and views, isn't. And actually contributes to an open society.

Social networking sites make fitting in easier, as long as you open up a little.

## Conclusions

As with most things in life there are positive and negative sides to social networking, both of which we have now explored. My ultimate belief is that when done in moderation, with checks and balances on how younger people in particular are using them, and with a firm grasp being kept on reality at all time, social networking sites are neither evil or a Godsend. They're somewhere in between.

Does this make you feel better about social networking sites and the effect they could be having on society? Or will you remain wary in spite of these examples of the positive impact of social networking sites on society? Whatever your thoughts on the subject, we'd like to hear them in the comments section below.