

Marianne DeMarco

COMM

Media & Culture

Social Networking: the New Hubs of Socialization

There has been a paradigm shift in the way we socialize. A fundamental change in our attitude and our belief system...a belief system where individuals acquire their personal identity and learn the norms, behaviors and appropriate skills to their social position.

(dictionary.com) Social networking has opened the doors for a new way of interaction.

Sites like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn have become everyday part of our lives...for the better, and for the worse. Social networking sites have inundated all aspects of our society including education, business as well as the media. Students are joining Facebook fan pages and using them to interact with current college students and using social networking to decide which college is best for them. Small businesses no longer have to compete with the advertising budgets of major corporations, they are using social networking to help market their business, locally and globally. Media clips are no longer just available to viewers of the 5 and 11 o'clock news; Today, media clips become "viral" and spread over the internet on sites like YouTube.

But just like with anything, social media is not all good. Social networking opens up the arena for all types of things. Twenty years ago, your worst fear at school was maybe getting picked on by the local bully in the privacy of the lunchroom. Today, cyber-bullying is a real problem that is a direct result of social networking. Today's students are not afraid

to openly publish information on the Internet. They don't see or even fear the consequences. Cyber bullying has become such a problem that it has even driven some children as far as suicide. We thought we had it bad as kids but how would you like your dirty laundry spread around your entire school in the matter of mere minutes.

I think the biggest problem is that most of us don't view it as "publishing" on the Internet. We are just "posting a video" or "writing on someone's wall." But we are in fact publishing information for the world to see. And we have to be careful what we publish to the Internet. Social networking is also affecting us in ways we could not predict. Now when student are applying to colleges or people are looking for jobs. No longer are the interviewers just able to base their decisions on your resume, application or interview. Some companies now do their own form of a "background check" via the Internet. And, they are not just checking out your Linked In profile. Everyone should take a moment to "Google" themselves. You will be surprised what information about yourself is stored on the Internet.

Stored. That is exactly what is what is happening. The internet is a series of interconnected computer networks. Many people take social networking sites at their face value. What they are not realizing that when you post to any site, you are storing your information on a server that is owned by these various companies. Recently Facebook changed their companies' privacy settings. The Facebook community was in quite an uproar. But that did not stop most of us. Users didn't start deleting their accounts. They simply accepted the new terms (literally by clicking a button) and moved on....continuing to publish on their Facebook pages.

And why did we all do that? We accepted the terms presented to us, because Facebook has become a part of our everyday lives. It has become almost as routine as checking our email. Facebook was founded by a couple of college roommates at Harvard University. They developed it as a sort of directory of students at their University. They then expanded it to other universities and then eventually anyone over the age of 13. Now it has developed into a whole other entity. Allowing us to keep in touch with old classmates, keep track of friends and relatives birthdays, and play various interactive games with people we haven't seen in years. It's no wonder why most businesses and even several countries block the site from their networks.

Facebook has changed the way we socialize. No longer do we have to gather together everyone's postal address and send invitations to our "Oscar Night Party," instead we just create an event on Facebook and invite 213 of our closest friends and family. And just because I didn't go to my 5, 10, or 15 year high school reunions, doesn't mean that I won't accept their friend request on Facebook. And now, instead of just seeing them one random night at a banquet hall, I get to see their status posts everyday letting me know what they had for breakfast or when they are going to the gym today or see a photo that they were tagged in from last Saturday night.

All kidding aside, Facebook has over 400 million users. And it does have its benefits. Businesses create their own pages and interact with their customers. The business / customer relationship is no longer one-sided. Business use social networking sites, like Facebook, to receive feedback from their customers...good and bad. In the realm of education, some teachers are using Facebook to socialize and communicate with their

students and student's parents. They post announcements, homework assignments, and even create class blogs.

Social networking is an open forum where everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute. There are no barriers stopping users from contributing. Personality traits or language barrier can often hinder individuals from socializing in traditional social interaction settings. Social networking has opened the doors to many opportunities but we, as socially conscious individuals, need to be aware of our travels on social networking sites. And, approach it with a discerning eye and know that we are responsible for each and every thing that is "posted" on the web. Social networking has created a fundamental change in the way that social with our friends, families, co-workers, and I can't wait to see what the future has in store.