

Facebook: Positively or Negatively Changing Our Lives

By Steve Yuen

Of the dozens of social networking websites navigated through each day, none of them impact the different quadrants of our lives quite like Facebook. Since its launch in February of 2004 as a social networking site for college students, Facebook has grown into a global phenomenon branching out to users of all ages. In fact, Facebook's current fastest growing demographic is women over the age of 55. Each day its website welcomes traffic from grandparents, parents and "children" and grandchildren alike. The business community too has begun utilizing Facebook to gain recognition for its products and services, which in turn creates new jobs and professional opportunities.

The bottom line is that *everyone* is using Facebook today. The debate therefore is whether this development is positive or negative. The one thing that is not up for debate however is whether Facebook is truly changing our lives. Here are four different areas in which this has happened or is underway:

1. Jobs

The process of hiring employees has gained a new component. Now, in addition to a resume and a job interview, employers typically investigate the personal Facebook pages of applicants. A common problem with this is that the Facebook content of many young contenders may be more fit for a fraternity or sorority rather than an office environment. Employers who

either have trouble relating to the college lifestyle or have long forgotten what their own experiences were like are turning away young talent solely due to their activities pictured on their Facebook pages.

In response to this, many people on Facebook have found a way to hide themselves within the Facebook community. By changing their username, for example, they may keep all their Facebook friends and photos while appearing under a different username. Many times this is not a drastic change, e.g., people using their middle names instead of their last names for identification, which works well as a disguise preventing potential employers from finding them when doing applicant research. This may cause small problems for friends when searching for someone but as a protection while job-hunting, it's probably worth the risk.

2. Intimate Relationships

Personal relationships have never been easy of course but since the birth of Facebook, they have gotten more complicated than ever. As a personal option, Facebook offers a variety of relationship statuses which means users will be listed as single, in a relationship, "it's complicated," married, engaged, etc. Due to the fact that Facebook has become such a large part of our lives, relationship status has likewise become important to many couples. In fact, a new term has even been coined to describe the import of a relationship: Couples are no longer going steady or dating but



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are instead tagged "Facebook Official."

Problems in relationships can arise for a variety of reasons. By making lots of information available to friends, problems now sometimes multiply due to the ease with which one might misinterpret communications and their intended meanings. Jealousy for example can be a major factor in a romantic relationship to which Facebook often only adds fuel to the fire. One of the members in a relationship viewing a wall post or a comment from someone about their significant other could be mistaken for flirting, igniting an argument or fight almost instantly! Facebook has thus now created a brand new outlet for trouble in paradise.

3. Events

Say goodbye to paper invitations because Facebook's event service had made them nearly extinct. Instead of waiting days for an RSVP that may never come, people are now

able to respond within seconds to an invitation to a party or business event. It's so simple to post an event on Facebook, and it's just as easy to scroll through your friends list when deciding whom to invite. The opportunities are endless in this area, as are the number of topics that can be covered. From college parties to baby showers and weddings and seminars and political gatherings, Facebook allows one to print out a guest list that makes it effortless to keep track of attendees.

4. Business

There was a time when Facebook was strictly for people to keep in touch with one another on a personal basis, but because more and more companies are starting to use Facebook to generate business, that time has passed. With Facebook's new "like" feature, people are able to

"like" a business's page, and add it to their friends list. The company is then able to promote for free to anyone who is the individual's friend. Though this vehicle is similar to an e-mail list, it exists on a much bigger scale, making it way easier to attract attention from people you have never even met. Restaurants, clubs, banks and more have begun to grasp this concept and use it to generate customer interest.

The growing involvement of businesses also means that new jobs have opened up for members of Generation Y. Most companies understand that social media in general and Facebook in particular have become essential to the business model. But those who run many businesses do not feel confident with their comprehension of social networking in general. So what many firms have done is create a new

position (or team) to maintain and update their Facebook pages. This allows for fresh innovative thinking emanating from someone fluent with social networking. In some ways, this also comes at a relatively low cost because, aside from salary, Facebook is free.

For better or worse, Facebook has changed us and will continue to do so. The debate as to whether this is good or bad remains in the air and for the most part is up for interpretation. But hate it or love it, not only Facebook but social networking as a whole is here to stay.