

Where egos dare

There's money in narcissism — just ask Mark Zuckerberg

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'You people spend more time every day on Facebook than Zuckerberg took to invent it,' I posted today on my Facebook page. It was the first thing I've done on there in about a week. I have about 700 'friends' — none of whom will offer to help me move, or buy me birthday presents when I create and link a 'Wish List' from Amazon.com. They will, however, collectively send me automated greeting cards, and about 50 requests each day to help them maintain some sort of fake farm or to become their 'fan'.

I've noticed that 'friend' pages sometimes morph into 'fan' pages. Someone whom I 'friended' out of pity somehow becomes my idol. That's when I defriend. Anyone who loves himself that much doesn't need me or anyone else.

This is what social media is really about: Self-love, self-promotion, and a total lack of self-awareness. Facebook isn't the biggest culprit, either. That honour is reserved for Twitter: a constant, indiscriminate, masturbatory discharging of ego into public domain at the expense of someone else's bandwidth. Before social media, if someone stood on the street corner doing the same thing — yelling, 'I JUST HAD EGGS WITH TABASCO SAUCE AND NOW I HAVE THE RUNS HAHAAAAHA' — they were considered mentally ill.

Social media hasn't brought us closer together. It has cheapened the definition of personal connection and what it really means. Interacting with someone on a computer is not a relationship, and it's not meaningful. It's a way for people who don't understand real human interaction to fake it and appear normal.

The most dynamic, interesting people on the planet, including those in my own life, either don't have any social media presence, or they are largely absent to the point of appearing cyber-comatose. Inversely, the most interesting people in social media have been the biggest duds in face-to-face meetings. I've found that their social media dynamism hides either a social dysfunction or personality disorder that's controlled online through the medium's inherent lack of spontaneity. Invite them to dinner and they're likely to pull out the iPhone and dive right back into the Matrix at the table, abandoning the other guests in favour of their 5,000 besties, with a pit stop to give a shout out to their 20,000 fans on Twitter along the way. Conversing is difficult and much less ego-boosting. No

one is going to shout, 'LIKE!' after everything you say. No one is going to 're-tweet' your witty sentence. You're not going to feel famous hanging around real people in real-life situations.

Well, guess what? You're not going to get famous from Twitter or Facebook either. In fact, if you have any sort of fame at all, Twitter and Facebook will dilute it. Demi Moore used to be a movie star. Now she's just another 40-something chick screwing around on Twitter. Why would I pay to see Demi Moore act in a movie when I can watch her act like herself for free online, in her own reality show, every minute of every day?

You won't get more actual friends through social media — people who will attend to your bedside if you ever land in the hospital (probably from walking into oncoming traffic while updating your Twitter feed). They may, however, make a page on Facebook for you, which a few

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thousand people will then 'like'. This will feed your gaping insecurity and make you self-conscious about whether they actually like you, or just the idea of you being hospitalised.

One real-life friend recently experienced a professional catastrophe and posted about it on Facebook. Only a few of the responses were constructive or helpful. Most consisted of people using the opportunity that this friend's misery and trauma presented to show how clever and witty they could be.

Perhaps the hardest hit by social media are humanitarian causes. Well, productivity is probably the hardest hit. China doesn't have Facebook and they're taking over the world. Coincidence? But humanitarian causes are a close second-place victim to social media. Kids in Africa are waiting for you to bring them their rice, medicine, and free condoms for mum and dad. You're sitting at your keyboard licking the Cheetos crumbs off your fingers and making a page for them, mainly to promote yourself as a good guy.

Let's get one thing clear: social media never saved any third-worlders, or got anyone elected, or overthrew any governments. Social media isn't about them, it's about

you. And there's no way these things of secondary importance to your own ego could ever compete. The only hope for the world being saved through social media is for egotistical pricks to be struck with a Mother Teresa complex, realise saving the world is good personal branding, and actually get their behind on a plane to Calcutta.

Social media won't make anyone rich, either. Why would anyone pay you for things you're willing to give away for free? There's the odd exception: people who are offered book or TV deals based on a personality they create and market online, or those who use social media to unobtrusively promote an actual product (other than themselves). But the product has to be there, beyond the self-flagellating rhetoric.

WikiLeaks' Julian Assange finally got a book deal thanks to traditional media exposure related to the classified document dump. But if social media had been at all lucrative, he wouldn't have spent years previously as the Big Kahuna of couch surfing and ultimately struggling to pay his legal bills.

So what is social media good for, then? Gags. My largely ignored Twitter profile features a photo of my breasts under a dress, so users can be assured in knowing exactly where their 'tweets' are directed. My Facebook profile is maximised to get the most interesting sidebar ads. I speak 17 languages, including Russian Sign Language and Old English. I've worked for the KGB, NSA, CIA, NASA, DGSE, FSB and every other shadowy alphabetical agency I can think of. I currently work for the Bilderberg Group. And I was born in the Vatican, which prompted a 'friend' to ask whether I still work at the Vatican and if I appreciate St Peter's Square as much as he did when he was there recently. I was too busy helping Pope Benedict shop for some new Pradas at Zappos.com to respond.

If you're trying to do some research into whether you're being two-timed by a lover or lied to by someone, social media is the place to go. You'll likely not only find out if your significant other is cheating on you, but also what they had for breakfast the morning after. While they may be discreet, it's pretty much guaranteed that at least one of their 2,000 friends won't be. And if you're lucky, you may even score a Twitpic or tagged photo of the occasion.

My sister was able to repair a blown fuse by posting a photo of the fuse panel on her Facebook page and crowdsourcing for the solution. But even then, one single person was helpful while everyone else cracked wise to make themselves look cool.

Mark Zuckerberg isn't just a Facebook creator. He's the most ingenious social scientist on the planet. He figured out how to monetise human narcissism: the only industry likely to experience growth, even in the event of an economic depression.