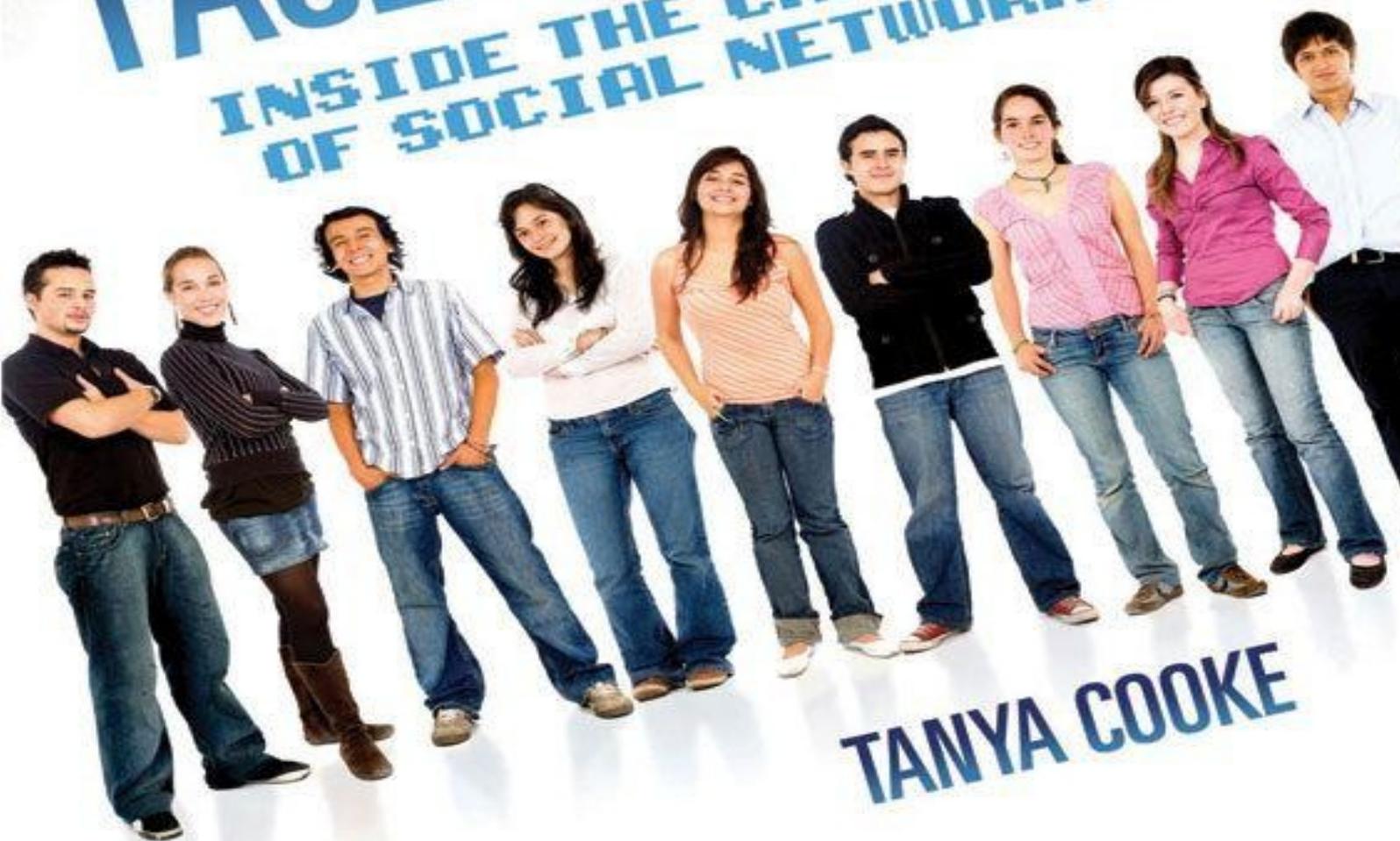




HELP! I'M A FACEBOOKAHOLIC

INSIDE THE CRAZY WORLD
OF SOCIAL NETWORKING



TANYA COOKE

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JOHN BLAKE

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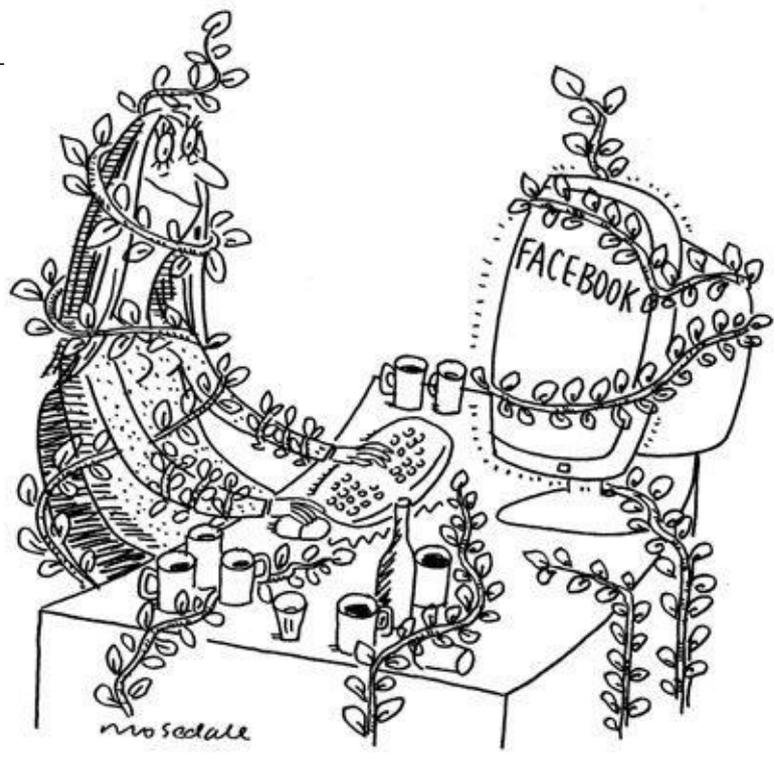
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Introduction

Like cars and mobile phones, social-networking is one of those phenomena that have become so deeply ingrained so quickly that it's impossible to imagine what we did without them.

As well as being useful in a practical sense, social-networking satisfies all the basic human emotional needs – communication, continuity, support. What could be more utopian than an instantly accessible online community of interconnecting networks not limited by barriers of geography, finance or social class?

From the moment it first hit the mainstream, social-networking became the Brave New World. Through it, anyone, anywhere could gain access to information, friendship groups or even the favourite celebrities without having to put their hands in their pockets or even leave the house. No wonder we all signed up in our droves. First CompuServe and AOL, then MySpace, Friends Reunited and now Facebook and Twitter – all of them offering that holy grail of membership to an egalitarian yet seemingly exclusive club.

And our appetite has shown no sign of abating.

Figures from July 2010, show that 500 million people are now signed up to that Daddy of all social networking sites, Facebook, sharing more than three billion pictures every month and sixty million status updates a day. At last count, Twitter was boasting 145 million registered users.

A 2010 study by online PR and social media firm Simply Zesty, showed that 30 million UK residents have visited at least one social-networking site in the last four weeks and we spend an average of just over six hours a month on social media forums. Sixty-four per cent of us have our own profiles on a social network.

Quite simply, social-networking has become an integral part of the landscape of our lives.

Of course, as with any new and overwhelmingly popular phenomenon, the backlash hasn't been far behind. As social-networking has increasingly become a fixture in family lives, we worry about the effect on children, on relationships, on friendships. Divorce lawyers have warned of the dangers of hooking up with exes online, psychologists are concerned about the devaluation of friendship. As the social-networking bug has spread to the workplace, there have been questions raised about how much time employees are spending online, and how much they are inadvertently giving away to future employers.

The result is that many of us now maintain a love-hate relationship with social-networking. We're addicted to it, in the sense that checking our profiles is often the first thing we do in the morning and the last thing we do at night. Now that we can access our favourite sites from our phones, we update from the bus, from the toilet, even from the altar. We join political groups on it, we raise money on it, we share videos and photographs on it. We can't get enough of it, and yet at the same time, it scares us.

The facility to connect with the past, so we never quite leave anything, or anyone, behind, the window onto other people's lives, the feeling that everything we do is somehow on show – these things can all leave us feeling as if our lives no longer completely belong to us, that nothing is entirely private.

The sheer scale of the networks, the idea that every person and every page is another link in a never-ending chain of interconnecting links, can sometimes be overwhelming. Once we start, where on earth do we stop? Social networks offer to put the individual in touch with the world, but how do we, with our limited time and energies, handle those limitless possibilities without losing our way? And how do

we achieve a balance so that our virtual lives don't end up detracting from our real ones?

~~There is no sphere of our lives that hasn't been affected by social-networking.~~ Love, work, friendship, politics, music, language – sites like Facebook have infiltrated them all. Social-networking has influenced the way we interact with our children, the way we find romantic partners, the way we throw parties or stage exhibitions. It has forced us to re-evaluate the nature of celebrity, and our obsession and popular culture. It has changed how we do business, how we make friends and even how we care for our pets.

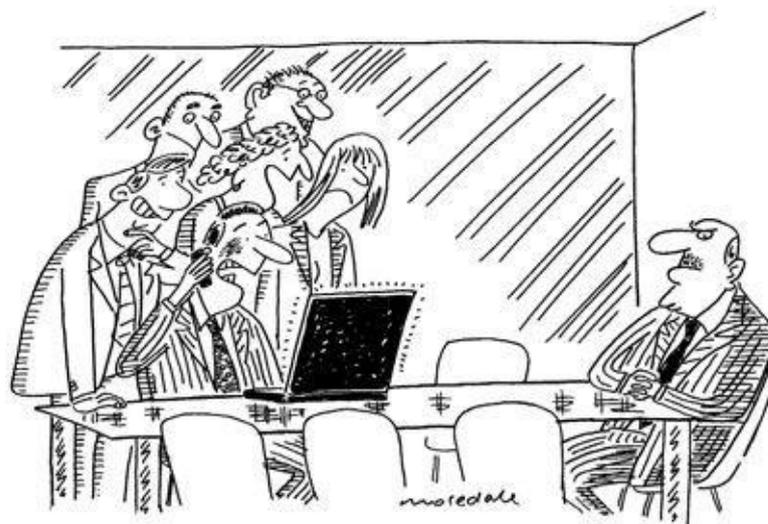
We cannot escape it. And yet we do not quite understand it.

With the online world changing every day, and social media changing right along with it, no one can ever claim to fully comprehend the possibilities of social-networking, nor be fully aware of its limitations.

This book certainly doesn't pretend to be a comprehensive guide through the uncharted maze that is social-networking, but it will give you an insight into how it has changed the everyday landscape of our lives, and some of the ways in which we can gain from this new virtual world, without losing sight of what's important in the real one.

As social-networking inveigles its way into the heart of everything we do and the debate rages about whether it's a wonderful tool for uniting individuals, or a sinister force by which big business can take over our lives, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that social-networking, above all things, is supposed to be fun.

So let's lighten up, and log on. The ride is just beginning.



'I told you never to phone, tweet, poke or superpoke me at work.'

Social-Networking Etiquette

Life was hard enough when all you had to worry about was how to tell if the guy at the bar fancied you, or whether a suit jacket with jeans would leave you feeling under-dressed. Social-networking has brought with it a whole new dimension of etiquette problems. What status update to post? How often to update it? Do you put up photos of a party that not everyone was invited to? How do you deal with a friend request from someone you just can't abide?

The new rules of social-networking are a minefield and because technology is constantly evolving they are always in a state of flux. No wonder so many of us feel like we're stumbling from one online faux pas to another.

One of the problems of social-networking is that it combines that casual informality of a coffee morning chat or a pub meet-up with the permanence of the written word. So while you can get up in the morning and delete the drunken message you found so hysterical the night before, you can't stop other people from having seen it or forwarding it on to all their mates. And once something is printed in black and white, you can't tell people they misheard, or misunderstood or even flat out deny it.

Another troubling feature is the fear that our social-networking profiles will come to define us and other people, so we invest a disproportionate amount of energy and anxiety in worrying about the image we're portraying. Without cheating (there exist applications such as Pimp My Profile for those suffering from extreme Profile Inadequacy Syndrome), we worry that our picture might not be attractive enough, our updates not witty enough, our friends not gushing enough to give out the right impression.

So it's essential to master the rudimentary rules of social-networking etiquette...

RULE ONE: Choose Your Profile Pic Wisely

You might think that choosing a photo to adorn your profile page is a question of just uploading the first picture to hand that (preferably) doesn't show you with three chins or looking like your eyes have been stolen. Well, you'd be wrong. Your profile picture is the first thing people look at when they navigate to your page, and like it or not they're going to make snap judgements about you depending on what they see. Don't want to be instantly pigeonholed? Well, make sure you avoid the stereotypical photo giveaways.

The Party Animal: Your photo will show you surrounded by mates, probably in the vicinity of a watering-hole of some kind, and almost certainly holding some sort of alcoholic beverage. You will be at the centre of the group, quite possibly striking a ridiculous pose, and almost definitely wearing a comedy hat. What you are saying to anyone who comes across your page is 'I'm popular, I'm fun and I already have tons of friends, which is why you will desperately want to join my list in the hope that you'll be invited to some of the fun parties I go to all the time, just like this one!'

The Eccentric: Your photo will be a starfish, or a fried egg, or perhaps your own knee made up to

look like a face. This will tell people that you are a) not interested in personal vanity, b) a quirky individual who refuses to be pigeonholed and/or c) deeply insecure about your looks.

The Narcissist: Your photo will feature a close-up of you (naturally), probably taken by you (naturally) on a mobile phone in the privacy of your own home so that no one else sees the amount of preparation that goes into giving your hair that casual messy look. You will be pouting, of course, and you'll be holding the camera at arm's length slightly above you, so there's no hint of a double chin (but more than a hint of cheeky cleavage). Your pose will immediately let people know that not only are you drop-dead gorgeous, but you actually have 'attitude'. All right?

The Adventurer: Standing on top of a rugged hillside, silhouetted against the blue sky, you'll have your arms outstretched and a radiant smile on your glowing, weather-tinted face. Or maybe you'll be in a canoe, holding a paddle aloft having just finished rowing the length of the Amazon. Or you might be halfway down a mountainside, your skis perfectly aligned and your tanned face in sharp contrast to the white of the snow and of your own teeth as you flash a blinding smile. Whatever action pose your photo captures, it will be sending out a very clear message: 'I believe life is for living. I might have a social-networking page, but don't expect me to check it very often as I have far better uses for my time.'

The Mid-Lifer: The photo will have been taken around twenty-five years ago and will feature a very young, ridiculously fresh-faced version of you, probably taken at university and wearing clothes from Oxfam in a stylish and individual way. It might even be in black and white. 'I could have put a recent picture of me up here – maybe that one standing next to my adult son with my receding hairline clearly on show. But that isn't the real me! I want people to see that inside the sad shell in the M&S raincoat and magnifying specs, there beats the heart of the cool young dude with the interesting asymmetric hairstyle and size 30 waist. That's why I've also listed on my profile page all fifty-five of my favourite albums from the 1980s!'

The Comedian: There you are dressed up as a giant chicken, or sporting a false moustache. Or maybe it's a picture of your favourite cartoon character – Bart Simpson, or Kenny from *South Park*. Whatever photo you choose, it SHOUTS 'I'm wacky and crazy, me, never a dull moment when I'm around!' What you're hoping is that people will see your zany photo and want to be your friend in the belief that you'll always keep them entertained and laughing – which is a cert once they find you can recite entire episodes of *The Office* from memory!

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR FACEBOOK PHOTO

If you're starting to worry that you might be sending out the wrong messages with your photo, don't despair. Here's some advice on improving your Facebook image from body language and behaviour expert, Judi James:

'Choosing your Facebook photo is about projecting your image in a positive way, so you have to start by thinking about exactly how you want to be seen by a large number of people, including people who may be linked to your working life or career.'

'You probably want to appear natural and normal, but you do have to bear in mind the fact that portraying yourself in a sexual way might not be very helpful in your working life, i.e. when it comes to getting a promotion, or if you're looking for a first job.'

'We might not be conscious of it, but there is a psychological "slant" to any photo we select or

ourselves to define the essence of “me”. There’s nothing new in this: Henry VIII chose portraits of himself that showed him as strong, virile and physical in order to intimidate his enemies and seduce women.

‘And his daughter, Elizabeth I used her image as “spin” in portraits an equally powerful way: the message she gave out in her images was “Yes, I might be a woman, but I’m strong. And I’m fertile (No one knows for sure if she was The Virgin Queen, anyway.)’

‘Even now, politicians will use carefully chosen images of themselves to project the right message: casual body language, sleeves rolled up, a very visible hand wearing a wedding ring. The message here? “I’m a regular, normal guy, someone loves me and I can have kids”.

‘So your choice of photo, ideally, should aim for a shot that says as much as possible about you but only the things that you want to say! Remember that when you are looking at the photo, you see the story behind it, but others won’t, so be conscious of how it looks at face value. Avoid irony too. Some over-posed shots might be intended to be ironic, but any new contacts are more likely to think you’re taking yourself far too seriously.’

If you really want to impress with your photo, Judi advises:

- PORTRAITS are good, but beware of coming across as vain or arrogant. Natural looking shots work best – but with a certain amount of modesty.
- HOLIDAY snaps can wind up looking smug or a bit naïve: ‘Ooh look at me, I’m rich enough to travel’.
- PARTY shots in a group might, you think, show you to be outgoing and bubbly. But the message is more likely to come across as ‘I have friends and we drink’.
- CHILDHOOD shots can look like a bid to show your more fragile or naughty self. In a way, with this type of photo you’re apologising in advance for any spontaneous, tactless comments.
- SEXY shots, as we’ve already seen, can give the wrong message, in fact they can appear rather sad, especially as they’ll be seen by a lot of people. So a sexy shot can just look like a sad advert: ‘Oh I’m up for it, me!’
- FUNNY photos can work sometimes, but, sadly, they can also be the signature of someone with no real sense of humour; dull people are desperate to prove how entertaining they are.
- KINKY photos, such as wearing dominatrix fancy dress are pseudo aggressive, aimed at stopping people in their tracks by shouting, ‘Hey! Don’t mess with me!’ Such photos are often confusing as they are rarely used by really angry people. So using such a shot could give out the message that your niceness is all a show.
- CELEBRITY photos can look like a bit of a ‘mask’, hinting that while others might be up for an open, friendly conversation, you’ll be at your own masked ball, playing your cards very close to your chest.
- PETS look cute. But using a puppy as a front for your persona can be a modesty ‘joke’ that is too much of a cliché.

The ideal Facebook shot, according to Judi is:

- 1 Black and white – it looks stylish and cool.
- 2 Something that looks spontaneously natural, i.e. you just happen to look up and smile at the camera – with hair that looks natural too, not too well groomed.
- 3 Simple in clothing terms. Plain colours, not patterns, just a simple plain tee shirt can do it.
- 4 Nothing like a formal, studio shot. If you are looking at a friend, you should be looking at the camera – but not ‘posing’ for the camera.

5 Grainy rather than soft focus. Soft focus is too vain; grainy is more flattering if it looks as if the shot has been captured by accident.

TOO UNATTRACTIVE FOR SOCIAL-NETWORKING

According to a March 2010 survey commissioned by weight loss company, LighterLife, one in ten of us decline to use a photo of ourselves as a profile picture, opting instead for an avatar or cartoon drawing or a photo of our dog because of insecurity in how we look. Ten per cent of us also put up out-of-date photos of ourselves so that people think we look younger. Incredibly, five per cent of the 2,000 people questioned even admitted to uploading pictures of a better-looking friend to attract more attention from the opposite sex.

MY STORY: 'SOMEBODY PUT THEIR PHOTO ON MY PROFILE PAGE!'

Will Skyrme, 22, Recent Graduate, Unemployed

'Only the other day something quite weird and sweet happened to me. I was in the Apple Store in Liverpool One, not really in the market for buying a brand new thousand-pound computer, more just to browse, check my emails, and have a quick glance at Facebook. The Apple stores are great for this as you can just slink in, use the computers and waltz off. The shop attendants know the game but because you're one of many they don't try and intimidate you into leaving the shop. Anyway, I did all I needed to do and wandered out, off to Boots to pick up a new toothbrush. Stupidly I'd left my Facebook account logged in. When I checked Facebook again later the next day, I was shocked to find a brand new profile picture on my page showing a couple of grinning strangers. When I'd left my account open these passing jokers must have snapped themselves with the laptop webcam and changed my profile picture! It was so bizarre and funny that I've left it up for the moment. Perhaps I'll bump into them around Liverpool one day, after all, now I know those big grins a mile off!'

RULE TWO: Adopt a Status Style

Your status style says as much about you as the photo you choose to present to the social-networking world. Are you going to be mysterious or chatty, a regular updater, or sporadic, inspiring or homely? Everyone likes to think their updating style is unique and will entertain, inform or enrich their friends' lives. However, there are certain basic updating mistakes that are guaranteed to get social-networking hackles up. Here is a list of what NOT to do with your status updates:

1. MOUNT A RUNNING COMMENTARY ON YOUR MUNDANE LIFE

'Joe Bloggs just finished breakfast', 'Joe Bloggs is contemplating a mid-morning snack', 'Joe Bloggs is thinking "Only two hours until lunch"'... See the fatal flaw in this line of updating? It's mind-numbingly, paint-dryingly boring. No one wants to know that you popped to Tesco after work, or that you're tweeting while at the checkout. We are just not interested. Geddit? And even more than being boring, it monopolises everyone's news feed to the extent that you'll probably find 99.99 per cent of your 'friends' have in fact opted to 'hide' your updates (and the 0.01 who didn't – well that's your mother, and she's only kept you because you account for 50 per cent of her friends list).

2. USE QUOTES FROM FAMOUS WRITERS AND PHILOSOPHERS

No, no, no, no, nooooooooh! We don't need to know that Eliot thought April was the cruellest month or John-Paul Sartre's take on death, or rather we might need to know that, but not on a social networking page that also tells you that someone just bought you a Sex on the Beach and your friend urgently needs farrowing. Quoting great thinkers doesn't turn you into a great thinker, it turns you into a someone with nothing original to say.

3. TRY TO CREATE AN AIR OF MYSTERY

'Jane Doe thinks it's overrated', 'Jane Doe hopes she makes the right decision', 'Jane Doe wondering why'. Yes, and Jane Doe should stop thinking she can make her life sound more interesting than it is by being deliberately ambiguous.

4. BIG YOURSELF UP

'Bob Bighead just got hit on by a top model!', 'Bob Bighead has ordered in the champagne after making the deal of a lifetime', 'Bob Bighead is wondering how to spend his bonus. Weekend in Vegas anyone?' Even if all your boasts are true (and let's face it, not many actually believe you), no one wants to have your achievements and good fortune shoved down their throats every time they log in to their Facebook account. When are you going to realise, no one likes a bragger. Far more effective to have understated status updates accompanied by photos that tell their own story (Bob in flash car, Bob with gaggle of gorgeous girls). That way, not only does everyone know what a great life you have, they also think you're endearingly modest about it. Win-win!

5. CARRY OUT PERSONAL VENDETTAS

'Vikki Viper thinks Suzy should repay the £100 she owes', 'Vikki Viper can't understand why her mum is acting so mean', 'Vikki Viper wishes her boss would lighten up'. If your status updates are constantly used as a vehicle for lambasting anyone who winds you up, you'll soon find your friend list rapidly depleting. No one wants to hear you complain about other people if there's a good chance that tomorrow or the next day, they themselves might be on the receiving end of your online scorn. Use your status updates for being positive (and save your bitching for your private messages).

6. MAKE SOCIAL PLANS

'Polly Popular says meet up at 7.30, usual place, I'm buying', 'Polly Popular needs a lift to Kelly's party – can't go on public transport dressed as a Vampire Bride!', 'Polly Popular is exhausted after the weekend of excess – who wants to veg out with a pizza and the box set of *Mad Men*?' Yes, it might be a quick way of making sure your social life runs like clockwork, but don't kid yourself that's the motivation behind your status style. Really, what you're saying is 'Look how full my life is! Look how many friends I have! I don't have a second to sit around being bored or lonely!' By making sure everyone knows what a whirlwind your social life is, you're ensuring that many of your 'friends' will feel excluded. Your updates will be like a window onto your marvellous world, against which they're expected to press their noses up and gaze longingly. No one wants their news feed to make them feel inadequate about their own lives, or excluded from someone else's.

DO OTHER PEOPLE'S STATUS UPDATES MAKE US FEEL INADEQUATE? THE EXPERTS SPEAK...

YES SAYS PSYCHOLOGIST DR ARIC SIGMAN

'People are very likely to present an idealised image. There's a lot of one-upmanship going on and it's creating a lot of competitive anxiety and unhappiness. There's an instinct in humans to compare and compete based on what we really know, such as that the people next door have a better sofa.'

'But once you get into the virtual world with unnatural "friends" you have a much larger group to compare yourself with so in many ways you are forced to big yourself up, because that's the way the comparison economy goes – otherwise you're left as a little fish in the big pond.'

'Though many of these descriptions may be fake, what seems to happen is that young people might feel a sense of failure in not measuring up. If they're still developing their identity and the feedback they are getting is distorted, then this is not going to make them happy or secure. Nor is it good for their self-esteem.'

YES SAYS SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGIST DR ARTHUR CASSIDY

'We always want to create a more positive image of who we are, so there's a bias towards exaggerating certain features of our lives. We all buy into this because we socially compare ourselves every day of our lives to others: "She's got nicer hair", "He's got a great body". Yet clearly this can be destructive, because it makes us feel worse about ourselves.'

MAYBE SAYS DR KAROL SZLICHINSKI, A PSYCHOLOGIST

SPECIALISING IN NEW TECHNOLOGY

'Some people use their status updates to present an idealised image to the world, in the same way that you used to send out those circular Christmas letters. But others may well be quite honest about some aspects of their lives. As for it making us feel inferior in some way, while some people will always feel that everyone else is having a better life, most of us are fairly immune to it and don't react that way.'

'However, if you're feeling particularly insecure and have stayed home all weekend, and see photos of friends partying and having a good time, it will only add to your feelings of vulnerability.'

STATUS UPDATE

This is like your own personal soap box. You can use it for sounding off about a burning political issue of the day, or commenting on the latest episode of *EastEnders*, or just bemoaning the fact that all your socks are in the wash at the same time. But while it can be a great way of disseminating information or making your views known, or just letting off steam, it pays to recognise that it has its limitations.

ALWAYS REMEMBER

DON'T think that tweeting or Facebooking is the same thing as personal contact. 'There's a problem when people use status updates as a substitute for communication, such as finding out you've been dumped when a partner upgrades their status to "single",' says Dr Karol Szlichinski.

DO be discreet. ‘Normally, we are very circumspect about what we give away about ourselves to others, but social-network sites encourage us to disclose information,’ says independent addiction counsellor and psychotherapist Dr David Smallwood. ‘That isn’t necessarily a bad thing – transparency in life is better than hiding things. But if you’re fifteen and you’ve just told the world via Facebook, that your mother is having breast implants, she’s not going to be too pleased!’

RULE THREE: Think before you Upload.

Been to a kicking party? Just come back from two weeks in Ibiza? Seen your sister get married, your nephew turn twenty-one? What’s the first thing you’re going to want to do the second you get home? Upload your photos onto your social-networking profile page. And what’s the second thing you’re going to want to do? Delete all the ones in which you a) have bad hair, b) have multiple children or c) are making one of those self-conscious faces we all pull when we see a camera lens pointed in our direction. According to the March 2010 LighterLife survey, nearly half of us remove pictures which don’t show us in the very best light. Fourteen per cent of women also admit to de-tagging photos so they don’t show up on their profile page, while one in ten claimed to feel ‘sick’ when looking at photos of themselves online.

The paradox of photo-culling, though, is that while we’re ruthless when it comes to pictures that show us in a less-than-flattering light, we fail to apply the same judicious editing to other areas. For example, we rarely stop to consider whether it’s entirely wise to post photos of last night’s marathon drinking session when we’ve just cried off from meeting Mum for lunch, claiming overwork (who would have thought that ridiculous idea was it anyway to ‘friend’ a parent? Of which more later). Most of us operate a very lax vetting procedure when it comes to uploading photos. Basically, if there’s a choice between publishing and be damned, and going through every one of those 1,000-plus photos one by one, which are you going to choose?

That’s why, for many of us, the photo gallery on our social-networking page becomes the equivalent of a photo-diary, recording in pictures the progress of our daily (and nightly lives). And what could possibly be wrong with that?

Well, quite a lot of things actually. Such as:

- Inevitably, some people are going to feel left out. Even if the photos just show you and your mate lying on the sofa the morning after the night before, wearing big fluffy slippers and pained expressions, somebody somewhere is going to be thinking, ‘A sleepover? Why wasn’t I invited?’
- Once a photo goes up, it’s in the public domain. Even if, after a few hours of sober reflection, you decide it’s not such a good idea to share that hilarious photo of you balancing on a traffic bollard in the middle of the A1 wearing a paper crown and pretending to be the Statue of Liberty, and delete it from your gallery, it’s too late to stop other people from seeing it, and even passing it on. Your friends will think it amusing. Your boss, on the other hand, might have other ideas.
- While you may have given your photos a clean bill of health after a cursory once-over to make sure you’re not doing anything untoward, you may not have given all the people in the pictures similar consideration. Should your married colleague really have been giving the new intern such an intensive debriefing in those after-work pub photos? Will your sister appreciate that shot of her wearing the necklace she then wrapped up and gave to your mum as a birthday gift?

RULE FOUR: Don’t Overdo It

~~FarmVille, quizzes, honesty boxes, poking, superpoking, buying drinks/pets/Christmas trees...~~ Why your friends will doubtless be thrilled to know they're in your thoughts, do they really need to know you've sent them a flowery heart, or watered their crops, or slung some dog poo at them, or nominated them as Person Most Likely To Wear Out a Pair of FlipFlops?

As with many things in life, when it comes to social-networking, less is often more. Unless you're under the age of 12, deluging your nearest and dearest with unwanted virtual gifts and invitations to applications they would have uploaded themselves if they'd been the teensiest bit interested is not going to make them feel special. It's more likely to make them feel highly irritated. Oh, and it might also give them the impression that you have very little else of importance in your rather sad, empty life.

If your friends log onto their Facebook page in the evening to find the results of 25 different quizzes you've taken that day, from which *Friends* character you most resemble to what your native American Indian name might be, they're not going to think 'Wow, I'd never have guessed XX would be that kind of serial killer'; they're going to think, 'I wish XX would get a life and stop clogging up my news feed'. See the difference?

Similarly, if they wake up on their birthday to a list of birthday greetings from various friends they're probably going to be chuffed. But if they wake up to a list of birthday greetings plus virtual hugs, virtual champagne cocktails, a whole host of presents to unwrap, a cuddly teddy holding a message, a snow globe, fairy wishes and the news that you've nominated them to receive daily inspirational quotes direct to their home page, they're going to feel just a little bit overwhelmed.

When it comes to social-networking extras, it definitely pays to go for quality rather than quantity.

THE HIDDEN MEANING OF EMOTICONS

Those little faces you can add to your text on social-networking sites to emphasise your meaning in the absence of physical gestures and body language, may sound like a great idea, but as with all the other gimmicks, overuse can sometimes lead to trouble. According to body language and behaviour expert Judi James, there's a hidden message behind every emoticon. And it can say quite a lot about the person using it...

- **SMILE:** You use this because you want to appear positive, upbeat and optimistic. But remember this symbol is often used by people who are either apologising for a criticism or those who are lacking in genuine humour. If you have to show people you're being funny, your communication skills might need a re-boot!
- **FROWN:** You think you're saying you're stressed or under pressure. But are you so full of disapproval of so many things you're using this to illustrate it?
- **GASP:** How often, in real life, do we really gasp? Why are you pretending it's common for you? Using this is infantile and ditzzy. You're trying to 'up' the drama of the most everyday situations by appearing to be shocked.
- **GRIN:** Ah, the cool, knowing, rather sexy dude. At least, that's how the user likes to see themselves. Using this indicates you're sharing the joke – but in a slightly sly way, suggesting a gossip. Or rumour-monger.
- **SUNGLASSES:** In a word, why? You probably don't know why, meaning you're both confused and a tad pretentious. Unless there's bright light around, we wear shades to look remote and/or famous. With this emoticon, you are the internet version of Bono.
- **PENGUIN:** Top of the 'Well it seems like a good idea but I can't tell you why' list, a blend of

remote, cute, untouchable, funny, even glacial. In other words, you're so hard to get to know, you don't even know yourself very well!

- **CONFUSED:** You really do want to come across as cute, in a Hugh Grant kind of way. People using this, however, are only playing at being confused. In reality, they're sharp as a tack. But very strategic.
- **SHARK:** Predatory, competitive. Someone who tries, year in, year out, to get onto *The Apprentice*.
- **PACMAN:** A traditionalist with retrospective tastes and values. Hoping to be seen as ironic and cool.
- **ROBOT:** No logical, intellectual thinker would use this. This is someone pretending to be clever.
- **WINK:** A gesture of collusion, aimed at doing some subliminal bonding, by getting the other person in on the joke.
- **KISS:** A cross signoff turns into a kiss. A non-sexual kiss, though – more like a kiss for you annoying, embarrassing auntie.
- **GRUMPY:** Take this at face value, it's not ironic. This person is mean, miserable, moody and grumpy, but hoping others will somehow find their curmudgeonliness appealing, just because they've 'fessed up' to it.
- **ANGEL/DEVIL:** Like a bluff in poker. Whichever one is used, you can assume the opposite.
- **CRY:** Whatever happened to the British stiff upper lip? At least it's a warning what the main thrust of communication is going to be, i.e. 'me, me, poor me, etc.' A good candidate for Piers Morgan.
- **HEART:** Advertising your nurturing qualities to the world is deeply suspicious. If you're genuinely in love and sending these you're not cute, just sappy.

Twitterquette

Twitter prides itself on being different from Facebook and other social-networking sites, so the complicated rules of Twitterdom deserve singling out. Many Twitter virgins sign up to the site but take one look at it and run screaming (or virtually screaming) back to the familiarity of Facebook, but actually Twitter is very straightforward once you've mastered the basic rules.

10 BASIC RULES OF TWITTER

- 1 People who are interested in you and sign up to read your tweets are called 'followers'.
- 2 If you are interested in someone, you can 'follow' them.
- 3 You have 140 characters or less to record your thoughts or actions.
- 4 You can either 'tweet' people you know, or find people who interest you to follow and tweet.
- 5 You reply to tweets using the @ symbol followed by the username.
- 6 You share other people's tweets using RT followed by the @ symbol and their user name.
- 7 You can tweet via mobile using SMS or your Wi-Fi.
- 8 You can send private messages to your followers.
- 9 Shy Twitterers can protect their updates so that only approved followers can read them.
- 10 Typing a hash key before a word or phrase will create a link taking followers to other recent tweets on that subject.

HOW TO JOIN THE TWITTERATI

- Choose wisely when it comes to the profile pic. Basically the photo on your Twitter page is very

small so KEEP IT SIMPLE. Head shot = good. Group shot of you and your friends in front of the Taj Mahal = rubbish.

- Twitter gives you the additional option of choosing a background design for your page. You can either go for one of the generic options supplied by Twitter, or upload an image of your own. Again, it pays to keep it simple and stylish. Let your words do the talking, not your background images.
- The great thing about the Twitter biography is you have a maximum limit of 140 characters, so you can't waffle on about how you got your cycling proficiency or go into detail about your philosophy on life, the universe and everything.

TWITTER DO'S AND DON'TS

- **DO** tweet regularly but pithily – leave it too long between tweets and your followers will give up and go away. Then again, treat them to a minute-by-minute account of your progression through the roadworks on the M25 and they might decide to follow someone more exciting instead, like [@watchpaintdry](#).
 - **DON'T** tweet yourself up. Modestly mentioning a special achievement is one thing, but tweeting your own trumpet constantly, even if it's just bragging about how many Twitter followers you have, is not going to endear you to anyone. **DO** tweet rather than just lurk – it's meant to be an interactive site, not a voyeuristic one.
 - **DON'T** tweet mundane comments about meet-up times and arrangements, save the personal stuff for private messages otherwise the majority of your followers are going to start to feel excluded.
 - **DO** stop confusing 'following' with 'stalking'. It's okay to follow celebrities you don't know, but if they didn't want that, they wouldn't be on Twitter in the first place.
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MY STORY: 'A STRANGER PICKED A FIGHT WITH ME ON TWITTER!'

Katy Parry, 23, PA

'I never thought it would happen to me, but I'm finally starting to see the point of Twitter. For years I've been trying to get myself into the world of blogging and twitter and flickr and all those things but there's been a little something holding me back – perhaps it just feels all too contrived, or at least I did. Recently though, I've been starting to get quite into Twitter and following loads of people. But the weird thing is that you often get the most random people following you. I once tweeted something about *The X Factor*, nothing controversial, but this random follower from Norwich got completely outraged and started tweeting angrily at me left, right and centre. I couldn't understand what I'd done to provoke her but when I went on her page I realised she'd done it to loads of people, in fact she seemed to make a hobby of starting fights with complete strangers! Bizarre!'

MY STORY: 'MY TWITTER PEST TURNED OUT TO BE MY EX-TEACHER!'

Emily Doyle, 24, Shop Assistant

'I started a Twitter account, not in my own name but as a place to post music reviews. I go to a lot of gigs and review things on the side occasionally so I figured why not have a running Twitter account that I can tweet my musical musings on? It did quite well, got listed by a couple of people and now it's got a good few followers. Anyway, I guess it's just the nature of Twitter but quite a lot of my followers often regularly tweet back to me with their thoughts on what I've said. There is one follow

in particular that really annoys me. Now I know I shouldn't say that but this particular guy just seemed to have the worst taste. He's always suggesting rubbish tracks for me to listen to, and never quite gets it when I say something, always semi-misinterpreting my point. Anyway, I tweeted I was going to the gig and much to my dismay he retweeted it seconds later and said he was going as well. I knew there could be a possibility that he knew what I looked like because I'd put photos up occasionally if they happened to fit in or be really good, but I wasn't going to let this ruin a gig I was really looking forward to. The night rolled around and the gig was great and I'd completely forgotten about this guy until as I was leaving someone grabbed my arm. I turned around and froze. 'Hi,' he said, 'are you the music savvy who I follow on Twitter?' I just stood there dumbfounded. It was my Year Four teacher from primary school! Amazingly, he didn't recognise me, he just knew me as the music blogger on Twitter. Excruciatingly embarrassed I denied it was me, and legged it. The worst thing was that he'd been one of my favourite teachers!



'O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou?... Not on facebook!'

Love – When It All Goes Right

Love is a many-splendoured thing. Especially when it's shared with seven or eight hundred of your very closest online friends.

If there had been Facebook when Romeo was wooing Juliet, how different would things have been? No need for Juliet to shiver on a balcony when she could be tucked up on her sofa in one of those blankets-with-sleeves chatting with her beau on her laptop.

Juliet Capulet: Romeo where4 art u?

Romeo Montague: Hanging wiv da Montague bruvvas. Wassup babes? (*sent by Facebook mobile*)

And if Cleopatra had been able to tweet to Anthony that she wasn't dead after all (@queencleopatra OMG, still alive!), if he could have followed the link to her updated-every-minute blog (<http://cleo4eva.com>) would he have been so quick to fall on his sword?

Love in the time of social-networking is a complicated affair.

On the one hand, Bebo, Facebook, MySpace etc. have broadened our romantic horizons to the extent that it's possible to hook up with Mr Right on the other side of the world with one click of a mouse just because he happens to be your friend's brother's boss's cousin (*Wow! Such a coincidence. It's fate!*). But the downside is that when Mr Right turns out to be Mr Very, Very Wrong and proves it by posting photos of you on his profile page, passed out after the Christmas party and wearing little more than a paper hat and a slack expression, it's a horribly public kind of humiliation.

Finding Love

It's hard to believe that just a generation ago, looking for love entailed actually (gasp) leaving the house. Now thanks to the wonders of social-networking, we no longer need to go searching; instead love arrives fully uploaded and tagged directly into our news feed. A survey conducted in July 2010 by Light Speed Research for Oxygen Media found that 65 per cent of men and 50 per cent of women use Facebook to find romance.

A separate 2009 survey of 3,000 people aged between 20 and 40, conducted by internet marketing research company www.OnePoll.com, revealed some further surprising statistics about romance in the era of social-networking:

- 75 per cent of us believe there are fewer stigmas attached to meeting a love-match via Facebook Friends Reunited or Bebo than normal internet-dating websites like match.com.
- One in four were dating – or had dated – someone they met through online community websites and over a third had got back in touch with an old flame through the sites.
- 10 per cent had embarked on an affair or a one-night stand with someone they met via a social networking site.
- 46 per cent believed it was easier to meet someone through social-networking sites than in the flesh. Of these, 57 per cent admitted they were more confident communicating with a potential suit online, with more than a third saying it enabled them to get to know someone before meeting them

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