

The Empowerment of Facebook

Patrick McGrath

Table of Contents

Facebook and the Effect on Self-Esteem	3
Facebook's Effect on Jealousy.....	4
Empowerment of the Diabetic Patient.....	5
Facebook Empowering Educators	8
Facebook is a Family Matter	10
Facebook and Government	11
Works Cited	14

The effect of Facebook's empowerment is much greater than the social networking service or the experiences on Facebook. The empowerment of a user is related to the principles and the success of the platform that provides a service for a user. Due to its success, Facebook serves as a platform with many possibilities for their users to enhance their social experience outside of online social networking.

Facebook and the Effect on Self-Esteem

Perhaps the key to empowering a Facebook user starts with enhancing that user's self esteem. As individuals we are all functioning as our own unique systems. Many of us may not be self-aware or objective about our social presence. What Facebook allows users to do is view their social presence regularly, but does this increase our self-esteem?

The social graph provided by Facebook has brought the social life of a user to an electronic representation they can see, interact with, and follow a trail of connections. In this trail of connections, the user is represented by their profile and this allows them to utilize objective self-awareness through the median of their representation in the social graph and their connections.

In a study of Objective Self-Awareness (OSA) from social psychology and the Hyperpersonal Model from computer-mediated communication, the results revealed that "in contrast to previous work on OSA, becoming self-aware by viewing one's own Facebook profile enhances self esteem rather than diminishes it" and that "these findings suggest that selective self-presentation in digital media, which leads

to intensified relationship formation, also influences impressions of the self” (Gonzales).

Objective Self-Awareness is brought to a focus for the user on Facebook, much like with MySpace and Friendster, due to the creation of an online presence in a social network. However, the principles and the success of Facebook created an environment with more exclusivity and social integrity, thus allowing for a more serious evaluation in Objective Self-Awareness. This is an example of how Facebook as a product empowers the user further than other products because of their principles. Their principles and success have created a social networking environment that has elevated the user’s Objective Self-Awareness.

Facebook’s Effect on Jealousy

Does elevated Objective Self-Awareness create an exposure to more information than necessary, thus creating unnecessary feelings in relationships? In a study of Facebook’s role in the experience of jealousy, evidence was found of Facebook’s “unique contributions to the experience of jealousy in romantic relationships” (Muisse).

Three hundred eight undergrad students were surveyed on demographic and personality factors and their Facebook use. “A hierarchical multiple regression analysis, controlling for individual, personality, and relationship factors, revealed that increased Facebook use significantly predicts Facebook-related jealousy” (Muisse). The study argues that “this effect may be the result of the feedback loops

whereby using Facebook exposes people to often ambiguous information about their partner that they may not otherwise have access to and that this new information incites further Facebook use” (Muisse).

While the findings concur that the greater exposure to other people in our social graph may elevate the potential for jealousy, it also concurs that “trust and self esteem have also been associated with the experience of jealousy, where lower levels of trust are related to more intense and frequent experiences of jealousy, and self esteem mediates the intensity of jealousy experience following a relationship threat” (Muisse).

This study claims Facebook elevates our exposure to our relationships and information about people we may not know, thus creating a higher risk for jealousy. The previous study of Objective Self-Awareness has shown an increased self-esteem for users. Both of these combine to show the elevated level of empowerment Facebook has created with exposure to our social graph. Again, this is due to the success of the platform (Facebook) and the principles applied that lead to success which were not a factor in the successes of MySpace and Friendster.

Empowerment of the Diabetic Patient

Living with a disease such as diabetes is a lifestyle many people manage on a daily basis. The individual responsibility of the person affected or the guardian monitoring a diabetic individual is a burden that is common but not commonly shared in society. Facebook has many groups and social networking tactics to link

people with a common interest or life experience. In a qualitative evaluation of communication between diabetes patients on Facebook, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard University and Harvard Medical School found conclusive results showing the success of social networking related to diabetes and the concern for authenticity.

“Patients with diabetes, family members, and their friends use Facebook to share personal clinical information, to request disease-specific guidance and feedback, and to receive emotional support” (Shrank). A positive affect of Facebook for these diabetic patients is “a forum for reporting personal experiences, asking questions, and receiving direct feedback for people living with diabetes” (Shrank). While the idea of users connecting through the Web to find other users with common interests is a practice that has existed well before Facebook, it is the social graph provided by Facebook that creates an unsolicited pool of potential users. These users are already on Facebook and have already committed to the social graph and their online social presence. While Facebook communities for diabetic patients are soliciting members for their existence, these members are not paying to join Facebook or a group. This is the freedom and free flowing methodology to the social graph that Facebook has created. The empowerment of the user is seen in their ability to discover and commit to the available resource of the diabetic support groups.

On the contrary, the added empowerment and resources for the diabetic patient created by Facebook's social graph also entails risky and potentially negative

available resources. “Promotional activity and personal data collection are also common, with no accountability or checks for authenticity” (Shrank). Users will experience the good with the bad, “approximately two-thirds of posts included unsolicited sharing of diabetes management strategies, over 13% of posts provided specific feedback to information requested by other users, and almost 29% of posts featured an effort by the poster to provide emotional support to others as members of a community” (Shrank). In other words, the user must use caution and judgment when deciding if what they are viewing is a good source of information for a very important aspect of their life.

While Facebook has empowered the user by providing content through a social graph, the granularity of the social graph leaves uncertainty and a need for judgment of the unknown, and in some cases, the misleading: “Approximately 27% of the posts featured some type of promotional activity, generally presented as testimonials advertising non-FDA approved, ‘natural’ products. Clinically inaccurate recommendations were infrequent, but were usually associated with promotion of a specific product or service” (Shrank). The chart below is from this study and depicts the frequency of the posts that a diabetic patient will encounter.

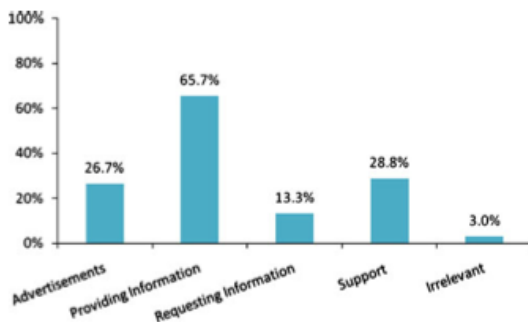


Figure 1. Relative frequencies of coding categories as percentages of total posts coded.

In comparison to MySpace and Friendster, Facebook has provided a more practical resource to achieve this empowerment due to the exclusivity and social graphing mentality that has defined Facebook's success. While diabetes pages exist on MySpace they are a replication of the cluttered and less user authentic environment that defines MySpace. Friendster completely lacked the ability to generate this empowerment, as it served more as a one-to-one communication tool.

Facebook Empowering Educators

The importance of accuracy and credibility on Facebook is also the concern of a study on Facebook serving as a powerful communication tool and a professional resource for educators. The Delta Kappa Gamma Society International conducted this study at a small college in Central Texas with the guiding question, "are popular social networks effective venues for introducing preservice teachers to resources and issues in education" (Pilgrim)?

Using teachers as participants in the research study to test the effectiveness of accessing professional organizations through traditional media (Web sites, library databases, journals) or Facebook, the pretest and posttest surveys found that "preservice teachers who followed professional organizations on Facebook were more knowledgeable about the educational organizations and resources than those who did not" (Pilgrim). In addition to these results, participants also "expressed enthusiasm regarding the Facebook assignment" (Pilgrim).

The added enthusiasm is due to the empowerment of Facebook and its status in society as opposed to other traditional media that may offer information for teachers. “I feel that these organizations give very good information for free, and that Facebook is a very good resource for both new and current educators” (Pilgrim), stated one participant. Many participants noted the easiness to keep up with these organizations on Facebook and one found a professional social graph inside the social network. “I became a fan of the International Reading Association to find that social networking is not only used to generate content for teachers, but is the process of initiating, developing, and maintaining friendships and collegial or professional relationships for mutual benefit” (Pilgrim). The information below tracks the growth of people that subscribe to a page of educational resource.

Number of People Liking a Page

Pages	# of people June 2009	# of people October 2009	# of people February 2010	# of people February 2011
IRA	1104	3239	4240	7719
RR	2895	4771	5775	8438
NEA	1610	3439	4615	9554
IDA	151	328	487	1323
NCTM	716	1262	2064	6233

In comparison to MySpace and Friendster, Facebook has created a platform to welcome professional activity. The example of a teacher finding a professional social graph shows the possibilities that Facebook with their philosophy and business model. With the ability to encompass many of the things offered on Myspace and Friendster (music, profiles, fan pages) and offer a professional social tool (like LinkedIn) while differentiating from each other, Facebook has set itself

apart from any other social networking service while empowering a profession of educators.

Facebook is a Family Matter

A great test of the versatility of a product is to take a look at not only what it does but also who is using that product. With over 500 million users in 2011, Facebook's popularity started to spread to the point that some people didn't consider when first signing up. "The fastest growing group of new users is your parents- people between the ages of 35 and 54. For adults, Facebook is a way to connect to friends, track down long-lost childhood buddies, even find job opportunities" (Scholastic), but also "a powerful parenting tool, one that an increasing number of experts are urging parents to use" (Scholastic). Facebook gives parents the ability to look into their child's social life and see how they present themselves online. While the social presence of a young child may not be vital to his future existence, parents' active involvement in this aspect of their child's life is a vital part of parenting in this day and age. Starting to teach children about the power and responsibility of social networking at a young age is an aspect of parenting that is so new the importance isn't yet realized. This is mostly due to the unprecedented effect Facebook has had on society.

Mark Zuckerberg's notion that "a more transparent world will necessarily be better governed and fairer" (Kirkpatrick, 288) may be applied to the less granular governing of parenting. The effect of a more transparent view of your child's social life may help create a better relationship for parents and their children due to the

openness that is one of Zuckerberg's missions. In this sense, Facebook has used the openness and transparency of a child's social presence to eliminate the private norm that usually existed in relation to parents. While children may not be glad to include their parents on their social graph, the strengthening of the relationship with their parents (even if just to govern) will empower their lives. "Amanda, 12, of Connecticut, says having her mom as a Facebook friend actually helped her. A few months ago, Amanda posted on her best friend's wall, calling the friend a mildly rude nickname they'd shared for years" (Scholastic). The preteen was guided by her mother to be more careful about what she writes and realized that "some people might think I was being really mean" (Scholastic).

Facebook and Government

Alarmingly, Mark Zuckerberg's notion that "a more transparent world will necessarily be better governed and fairer" (Kirkpatrick, 288) cannot be accounted for with the same success as seen in parenting. Professor Junichi P. Semitsu from the University of San Diego School of Law stated that "Facebook's own interpretations of federal privacy laws, a warrant is only necessary to compel disclosure of inbox and outbox messages less than 181 days old. Everything else can be obtained with subpoenas that do not even require reasonable suspicion. Accordingly, over the last six years, government agents have 'worked the beat' by mining the treasure trove of personal and confidential information on Facebook" (Semitsu).

What Professor Semitsu depicts is that while Facebook may empower our social lives, its rapid growth has been received by a society that in some ways is not ready for it. “Even if Facebook adopted the strongest and clearest policies possible, it’s users would still lack reasonable expectations of privacy under federal law” (Semitsu). This is due to the federal courts failing to “adapt the Fourth Amendment law to the realities of the Internet architecture” (Semitsu). The precedent of the law requires that at least one third party to be exposed to content on Facebook in order for inquiring parties to be allowed carte blanche to search for evidence.

This is perhaps one of the greatest examples of Facebook’s power and reach. The reach of Facebook is now so relevant that it is vulnerable to a lack of protection. While the empowerment of Facebook on individuals is reaching many aspects of life, it is also reaching into the dangers of society and how people want to use that empowerment. Professor Semitsu stresses that “the Facebook generation accept the choice it currently faces: either live life off the grid or accept that using modern communications technologies means the possibility of unwarranted government surveillance” (Semitsu).

This example of empowerment creates a greater responsibility for Facebook users to treat the social tool as you would a conversation that anyone can see. Perhaps this is why Mark Zuckerberg, a known visionary ready for the future, has embraced transparency and that we should not be afraid to be the same person online as we are at work. Zuckerberg may see that this will lead to a better society and a better consideration for each other, but are we ready for that? Will people

embrace that the same way they have embraced Facebook (with much diversity)? Perhaps in this regard Mark Zuckerberg is playing his cards politically to meet his goals. Without speculation, it is safe to say that Facebook has had a profound effect on our lives and has changed some of the norms in society. Whether by empowerment of the user or by improving communication for society, it has still empowered the negatives of society.

President Barack Obama, when asked by a pupil in a group of 14 and 15 year old students about how to become the President, stated “I want everybody here to be careful about what you post on Facebook, because in the YouTube age, whatever you do, it will be pulled up again later somewhere in your life” (Reuters).

Is it possible that President Obama would not be the President if advanced Social Networking Tools existed much earlier in his life? “Obama referred several times to “mistakes” he had made when he was at school but offered no specifics. He has previously admitted to drug use when he was younger” (Reuters).

This is a question that involves too much speculation to answer fairly, but will be tested for many generations after the emergence of the Social Networking generation. Will there be a factual answer? Perhaps we need to look no further than our perception of how we view people and the standards we hold them to. Perhaps we will find more definitive answers and reasoning by examining how we judge our self and the standards we are held to.

Is that what Mark Zuckerberg intended for when he predicted that “a more transparent world will necessarily be better governed and fairer” (Kirkpatrick,

288)? Perhaps we will all be forced to view every aspect of our lives with more transparency and honesty due to the relation of our self in that world. With most certainty, Zuckerberg has left a lot of unanswered questions about a changing world. In this sense, he has empowered much more than Facebook users by accelerating our society's need to grow and keep up with technology because it is now integrated socially into the world.

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