

## **A Christian View of Social Media**

By 2017, Facebook had over 2 billion active users. Social media sites have not only become used by most people with Internet access, but the amount of social media platforms have increased exponentially: Twitter, Tumblr, Google+, Snapchat, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Reddit, Instagram.

The genius of social media is a platform to create and share content with others. Most often, social media will include a user account, a profile, a newsfeed, a network of 'friends'/ connections, a comments or feedback facility.

### **Five Ways Social Media Can Be a Useful Tool**

1. Announcements. For companies and organisations, social media provides a useful and cheap method to announce events, new products, or relevant information. As a form of promotion and marketing, social media has become an indispensable to companies.
2. Economically, it has become difficult to make connections, find job announcements, detect marketing shifts without it.
3. Sharing and storing ideas. The pooling of ideas for design, reviews of products and services, specialist advice.
4. Raising funds for worthy projects – social media has allowed crowd-sourced funding to fund projects which otherwise would not have seen the light of day.
5. Communication. In appropriate ways to people related to you in varying degrees.

The primary use of social media is mostly forms of entertainment, interacting with others, sharing content, and 'keeping up'.

### **The Traps and Idols of Social Media**

#### **1. Boasting and Self-Promotion**

Much of what goes on on social media is little more than boasting. Parading one's travels, purchases, children, grandchildren, spouse, all takes place routinely. Staged, and sometimes doctored pictures of oneself are supposed to support the glamour of Me. As the Tabloids follow celebrities, so Facebook provides tabloid news coverage for every person. Kevin Bauder: *"In other words, it allows every user a small sphere within which she or he can act like a celebrity. To some extent, the medium probably fosters this attitude by inviting users to state their likes and dislikes up front, and then to broadcast the trivia of their lives. Facebook is an opportunity to put one's self on display continually"*

This is simply known as narcissism: being in love with yourself. Many people, when using Facetime or Skype, are looking at themselves far more than the person they're supposed to be talking to. Many people upload pictures and info, mostly to see the reaction it will get from others. Social media offers you the opportunity to build and portray an image of yourself as near-perfect, so as to be fawned over, flattered and validated by a circle of friends. In polite conversation, talking about nothing except your own life would be considered rude. Social media, of course, demands that you

do that. The line between showing pictures of the children for Granny overseas and showing everyone how wonderful my life is is a fine one.

The difference between sharing and showing off is something the technology usually flattens out. Certain events are treasured memories to be shared with particular people. But when 'overheard' by everyone, the nature of the sharing changes.

Social media allows us to thinly veil our self-promotion under the guise of "good times!" "so thankful!" "feeling so blessed"

**Proverbs 16:18**—"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling."

**Proverbs 27:2**—"Let another man praise you and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips."

**Proverbs 30:2**—"If you have been foolish in exalting yourself . . . put your hand over your mouth."

## **2. Exhibitionism and Voyeurism**

Facebook encourages you to share personal, even intimate, details with 'friends', who may be little more than acquaintances. The fact that a 'friend' becomes a silent witness of your self-broadcasts creates a strange situation of exhibitionism and voyeurism. An exhibitionist is one with a compulsive desire to get other's attention, and display what should be hidden, while a voyeur is a prying observer, secretly watching what is private for the sordid or the scandalous. Facebook and social media creates unwitting exhibitionists and invited voyeurs.

*Kevin Bauder: It was fun to be able to see the doings of loved ones and old acquaintances. Even that, however, felt too much like prying. At the cognitive level I knew that these people posted only those things that they were willing to allow others to see. I also knew, however, that they rarely or never had me in particular in their minds when they posted these things. It just felt too much like reading somebody else's diary or mail. In short, I came to believe that Facebook diminished my ability to treat people with respect. The fact that they had consented to this disrespectful peering into their lives gave me little consolation. In my own mind and sensibilities, I was subjecting these people to degradation....The problem (for me) with Facebook is that it felt like putting the content of a very personal telephone call into a radio broadcast.*

Facebook encourages me to focus on sharing personal moments with the few who have some right to see, and to forget the many who do not. Facebook encourages me to peer into someone's life, and to forget that I have very little reason to do so with most.

Posting a picture of my wife for everyone to comment on is not that far from setting up a screen outside my wall and live-streaming what goes on in my house.

The essence of modesty is to understand that what is not for other's consumption is to be kept veiled. Shamelessness has taken over when we are comfortable to be gawked at, or to gawk at others.

The nature of loving relationships is a voluntary, mutual, progressive self-disclosure.

### 3. Superficial and Unclear Relationships

*Writing for the Harvard Business Review, Haque notes, “Despite all the excitement surrounding social media, the Internet isn’t connecting us as much as we think it is. It’s largely home to weak, artificial connections, what I call thin relationships. . . . Thin relationships are the illusion of real relationships.” He goes on to explain that, thanks to the explosion of so-called friendships in the world of social networking, the very word “relationship” has lost its value. “It used to mean someone you could count on. Today, it means someone you can swap bits with.*

*Researcher Mark Vernon, writing in USA Today, agrees: “While social networking sites and the like have grown exponentially, the element that is crucial, and harder to investigate, is the quality of the connections they nurture. . . . A connection may only be a click away, but cultivating a good friendship takes more. It seems common sense to conclude that ‘friending’ online nurtures shallow relationships.”<sup>6</sup> His advice for maintaining real friendships is simple: “Put down the device; engage the person.” Source: <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B101110>*

Social media can give us the artificial sense of a busy social life with much fellowship when we have 1500 Facebook 'friends' or 500 'followers'. Genuine relationships require patience, forbearance, forgiveness, time in one another's presence, shared loves.

Blurriness. Even though Social media has progressed to where 'friends' can be classified as “Family”, “Close Friends”, “Acquaintances” etc, it hasn't much changed the blurriness that digital relationships have produced.

Is it unkind or rude to ignore or refuse Friend Requests?

Is it acceptable to “friend” an ex-boyfriend/ girlfriend if you are married?

Should married men and women have a host of friends from the opposite sex?

How should Christians deal with someone who has been disciplined by a church of like faith? Should they all un-friend? Should they refuse to 'like' or comment on posts? Should they remove the person from the newsfeed? Or should they keep him or her to find out if there is any repentance/ or of others are interacting?

### 4. Ungodly Speech

**Reviling, rudeness:** The unkind, aggressive and vicious language which takes place on social media has caused some psychologists to coin the term *online disinhibition effect*. This simply means that behaviour which would be considered unacceptable face-to-face becomes common when people are behind screens, particularly if they are anonymous.

There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, But the tongue of the wise *promotes* health. (Prov. 12:18)

**Slander, lies.** It has become possible to destroy a person's reputation by posting a video, photo, or comment, and waiting for it to 'go viral'.

**Gossip** Much of what is shared on Social media, whether by permission or not, is simply gossip. To learn details of another's life, when you are not a part of the problem or a part of the solution, constitutes feasting on 'tasty morsels'.

The words of a talebearer *are* like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body. (Prov. 18:8)

**Careless words:** Every 60 seconds on Facebook: 510,000 comments are posted, 293,000 statuses are updated, and 136,000 photos are uploaded.

"Every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it" (Matthew 12:36).

Proverbs 17:28: "Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent."

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## 5. Time Wasting

In a Time Magazine article entitled "It's Time to Confront Your Facebook Addiction," Kayla Webley shares some startling statistics. "One-third of women ages 18 to 34 check Facebook first thing in the morning. . . . Of the 1,605 adults surveyed on their social media habits, 39% are self-described 'Facebook addicts.' It gets worse. Fifty-seven percent of women in the 18 to 34 age range say they talk to people online more than they have face-to-face conversations. Another 21% admit to checking Facebook in the middle of the night." <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B101110>

Some Facebook "addicts," like Maria Garcia of Philadelphia, spend as much as 56 hours a week on the site. Reporting on her story, ABC News recounted the concern of those in the medical community: "The popularity and social acceptance of networking sites is one of the reasons Dr. Joseph Garbley says Facebook addiction is becoming a very real problem. . . . Garbley says unlike alcohol or drugs, social networking addiction is psychological not physical.

The nature of Social media is to absorb your interest with continual curiosity, until you have literally lost hours at a time. Catching up with a long lost friend, leads you to another friend, going through all his posts and photos, till you come back and see the links and videos shared by others. If you have hundreds of friends, that may be hundreds of items in your newsfeed everyday, enough to keep you absorbed for hours.

<sup>10</sup> The days of our lives *are* seventy years; And if by reason of strength *they are* eighty years, Yet their boast *is* only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away. <sup>11</sup> Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, *so is* Your wrath. <sup>12</sup> So teach *us* to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom. (Ps. 90:10-12)

<sup>15</sup> See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, <sup>16</sup> redeeming the time, because the days are evil. (Eph. 5:15-16)

## 6. Envy

Social media works like advertising: look at my life – the one you don't have! Look at the places I have been to, the food I eat, how good I look, how cute my children are. Look at the food I cook, the clothes I wear, the house I live in, the car I drive. My life is all at once glamorous and homely, exotic

and cosy, extravagant and normal, fun and meaningful. Keep clicking through my life, and keep getting angrier.

Social media can feed one of the darkest sins – the sin of comparing. Social media is entirely an exercise in comparing another's life to your own. Singles comparing boyfriends or girlfriends, mothers comparing their children's success with others; people comparing their material success with their peers; people comparing how they have aged in comparison to others.

<sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. <sup>15</sup> This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. (Jas. 3:14-16)

Now I cannot control the envy in someone else's heart. But I can do two things:

- 1) I can refuse to flaunt God's good gifts in ways that will tempt others to envy.
- 2) I can refuse to spend too much time thinking about what others have. What would happen to your heart if every time you visited a friend, you were taken on a tour to see his most expensive possessions, and he showed you videos of his exotic holiday?

## **7. Adultery**

Sadly, social media has opened another temptation in man's heart: the temptation to cheat and be unfaithful to one's spouse. This can be an actual adulterous relationship which social media's enables through contact with members of opposite sex that otherwise would not occur. Flirtatious comments and flattery easily becomes something more. It can be adultery of the heart, by peering at pictures and updates of someone who is not your spouse.

## **8. Privacy and Surveillance**

In his book *Terms of Service*, Jacob Silverman shows that what seems like a 'free service' is really a massive commercial machine. Information about our likes, dislikes, age, income, movements, connections is being continually harvested, and sold to advertisers. The more information we volunteer, the more we make ourselves into a commodity to be bought and sold.

Social media profiles can be used by Governments, intelligence agencies, terrorists, sexual predators, hackers and ransomware criminals, for identity theft and fraud, or for individuals seeking to harm.

### **Seven Ways to Use Social Media Wisely.**

1. Have a clear goal for your use, particularly one or more of the first five mentioned.
2. If you are using it for social sharing, reduce your 'network' to those you would show a family album to in the privacy of your home.
3. Do not put anything private, that you would not want shared, on the web. Regardless of your privacy settings, once it is in cyberspace, it can be found and used by others. Tighten up your security settings. If your job requires a Facebook or Social media profile, you might want to consider a separate one for work.

4. Time yourself when you go on social media. Set a limit for how long you will be on it. For every half-hour you spend on social media, spend an hour in the actual presence of family and fellow believers.
5. Whatever is tempting you to envy, lust, or to peer into another's life, cut it off. Whether that means unfollowing, unfriending, deleting, do not make provision to sin (Rom 13:14), and be willing to cut off what causes you to sin.
6. Be hesitant to comment: weigh your words, reactions, and comments before you post them. Digital words will still be judged by God. If you really need to say it, and the person is close enough to you for you to influence, pick up the phone.
7. Cultivate contentment, and repent of the need to show off or find validation through social media.