



SOCIAL MEDIA & SOCIAL OUTCASTS

BY DAVE PLATTER

JIMMY HAS NO SHORT TERM MEMORY.

He sees a man in a white coat, beds in the room and a stethoscope lying on the desk. These visual clues lead him to guess that he must be in a hospital. “But I’m too young to be sick”, he reasons. Do I work here? I must work here. But, what’s my job? He looks around for further clues.

Suffering from Korsakov’s Psychosis, Jimmy has to continually create his world and self to replace what he continually forgets and loses.

Jimmy is a person without memory, without connections. He is simply a process of perceptions succeeding one another in a meaningless absence of context.

Most of us have an inner narrative founded on memory whose continuity is, in fact, our lives. Jimmy, by contrast, must make up himself and his world every single moment.

Reliant on social media, we are all Jimmy.

In Jimmy’s case, connectivity is the equivalent of meaning. For most of us the hyper-connectivity of social media can be as dangerous as an electric shock. It can destroy the ability to form a confident sense of being. It clouds the possibility of clear perceptions of what is happening around us, and it impedes us from acting effectively as persons and professionals.

Ceaseless Demands

The Web today is very different from the web of just a few years ago. It is no longer only a (possibly) endless collection of information. The Web today is more participatory and personal. It is more social.

The Internet is moving towards fulfilling its nomenclature: the world wide web. Eventually, everything of value will be connected via the Web. In the wired world, to be connected is to have value. To not be connected is to seem to lack value.

“This is no fantasy; this is simple logic. As more and more of our lives become connected, digitized, and computed, we will need navigation and context interfaces to cope. How might you find that photo of you and your lover on the beach in Greece from fifteen years ago? Either you scan it in, or you lose it to the moldering embrace of analog obscurity.”

JOHN BATTELLE

Digg, Myspace, Bebo, Twitter, Truemors: these examples of social media are currently the ultimate exercise of connectivity.

- They demand attention.
- They demand opinions.
- They demand activity.

They demand to know the top five things you would like to have on a desert island, who your current friends are and what aspects of your life have changed in the last three minutes.

Like the mouth through which a river of information flows into the ocean of data, they are never satisfied and never full. To keep this river rolling requires constant activity and constant connectivity.

In the Eyes of Others

The main origin of our self image and self-esteem is the reaction of others. We come to see ourselves as others categorize us.

- Do we have lots of “friends?” Then we are popular.
- Do people tune in to read our opinions? Then we are cool.
- Do the stories we “digg” obtain lots of other diggs? Then we are thought leaders.

Despite its evanescent quality, the interactions of social media can become a projection of our self image. It’s mildly flattering, empty affirmations are a crutch for our insecure sense of self to lean on.

In the worst case, we come to rely on vacuous digital feedback (“kewl!”) to enhance our self-esteem, and to construct or affirm our desired self-image. If other people accept the identity offered, even a pixilated 2D identity in an ether world, you’ll then believe more hopefully in it yourself.

I’m Not Here Right Now

Social media is designed to compete for our attention successfully against all other distractions, such as our life’s work and our loved ones’ affection.

The rapid-fire demands, even at times when actual responsibilities require our focus lead us to adopt a state of continuous partial attention. We are so busy keeping tabs on everything that we never actually focus on anything.

We can mistake this for a positive feeling. The constant pinging and posting makes us feel needed and desired. The stress of fulfilling electronic expectations lends us imagined importance. To reach

fifty, 500 or 5,000 people with your thoughts—or to have them as “friends”—is an egotistical thrill for those with low self-esteem.

Social media is hard to turn off because it seems to be about relationships—someone is calling out to us, or responding to our own call. It leaves us feeling both drained by its demands and exhilarated by the false sense of fulfillment.

Don't Be Jimmy.

Live for too long in this confusion and you will lose touch with your actual self. You will lose the ability to maintain a personal identity and self-esteem in the absence of constant virtual feedback.

When unplugged, you will feel undone. Like Jimmy, you will seem to float without connections and context, and be forced to recreate yourself and your world anew.

Yet, this is an important journey to make. It empowers you to create a true self-identity, based on actual actions, and interactions, in the physical world that your body inhabits. It enables you to develop true self-esteem on a foundation of activities and relationships requiring bodily commitment that are, in fact, worthy of value.

It allows us to be ourselves, rather than Jimmy. 📄

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Dave Platter has been dedicated to effective communications for 10 years. As chief communicator for the REA Group, Dave is instrumental in defining how the world's only global real estate advertising company is presented to staff, investors and media. He has been principal and partner in two New York City public relations agencies. He has spoken at seminars at the United Nations. He also organized a group dedicated to analyzing the threat of the avian flu to the New York real estate industry that received the support of a chief United Nations public health official, who called its work 'vital'.

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