

Social Media – A Brave Old World

Time for Some Clarity

Our ability to assimilate and normalise so rapidly a world where social media is integral to a lot of people's lives, has been seen as surprising. But the more we work in this area the less surprising it appears.

It has required two steps to achieve this that have almost worked in tandem. Learning how to use fundamentally new technology so well that it becomes second nature and the willingness to open up and share more of your life with a wide circle of friends, but mostly acquaintances.

The second part seems to be the most surprising. Learning new, highly intuitive technology is merely functional and as long as there are clearly perceived benefits the motivation is there. But why would you let so many people into your life, losing some (or for the extrovert, most) of your privacy?

A Brief Aberration

The answer seems to be that people are simply behaving normally. In fact for a brief while in the history of the western world it looks like people behaved abnormally. Privacy could be described as an unusual construct. We know we are very social beings, but for a while we have lived in a world where privacy was almost the default, primarily because of the environment we created.

The Impact of Industrialisation

Three hundred years ago people lived in close communities, whether in towns or villages. In 1700 the biggest city in the world was London, yet its population was only 600,000. The norm was to live closely with the same people all your life, rarely venturing far. People knew each other's business very well, perhaps oppressively so. There was little privacy as we might conceive it.

Industrialisation changed all that and the anonymous urban environment was created. People could go to the new cities and virtually disappear.

Of course people still lived in communities, but over time the urban ethos and the wealth to be able to live in homes that are more private and often far removed from

someone's upbringing, led to a type of isolation or even enforced privacy. Particularly in the UK, this type of privacy could be cloaked with a virtuousness that justified this way of life.

It's a New Old Life

Over the last ten years we have seen this way of living re-modelled. People have found a way to be naturally sociable within their village. Still, they might not know their neighbours, but for many they live in a wide community now and meeting is around the 'digital pump'.

So the next time someone tells you what a revolution social media has been, please agree with them and then point out that all we have done is gone back to living like our great, great, great, great grandparents.

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