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Influences of Online Social Networks

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Signature: *Ciara Lyles*

When used correctly, online social networks have numerous positive attributes; however, when used incorrectly or without compliance to standard rules and regulations, social networks have approximately the same number of negative attributes. Facebook, created in 2004, is a free social network which helps members identify each other and keep in contact with friends from various places around the world. According to Jeff Cain's article, since the birth of Facebook in 2004, it has captivated more than 22 million users (Cain, para.3). While 80%-90% of Facebook's 22 million users are college students (Cain, para.4), they are not the only ones utilizing this social network. Contrary to popular belief, Facebook has many other applicable services. Majority of Facebook's capabilities are obvious; ability to share comments, pictures, and videos, connect with and befriend hundreds of people around the world, develop relationships, as well as maintain previously established relationships with friends world wide, and learn and inform others of occurring public and personal events of interest. However, the less obvious uses of social networks, particularly Facebook, are the most influential. As a result of the large amount of social network users' ignorance regarding privacy polices, as well as an immense amount of carelessness, Facebook, and similar social networks, have the capability to serve as a reference site for prospective employers, law enforcement agencies, and school officials of all ranks and areas.

While 80%-90% of the 22 million users on Facebook are college students, 30% are not aware of the privacy controls they're able to utilize as it pertains to distributing their personal information (Cain, para. 15). Nor are they aware of the detrimental effects it can potentially have on their personal, academic, and professional careers. Consequently, a vast majority of students are not cautious of what they are posting on these websites for the publics viewing, nor are they aware of the potentially severe consequences. For instance, one student, receiving her degree in education, was refused the associated teaching certificate because a photo on her MySpace page was "deemed unprofessional" (Cain, para. 15). I'm sure she never dreamed a picture had the ability to affect the documentation on her degree that she undoubtedly worked hard for all throughout her academic career.

The possible negative effects of incorrectly or indiscreetly using a social network are also related to one's career. Studies show that not only are prospective employers becoming more open to using Facebook as a means of character judgment, some employers are using it, but they are also beginning to incorporate the character judgment received from the social networking cites into their hiring decisions.

> In a case study conducted at the University of Dayton, four different higher education institutions and employers were used to demonstrate the gap between what students and employers perceive as fair in regards to using Facebook in hiring decisions. Only 28% of employers felt that Facebook content should not be used in hiring decisions as opposed to 60% of students (Cain, para. 24).

School officials of all ranks and areas, as well as law enforcement agencies are beginning to use Facebook, as well as other online social networks as reliable way of obtaining information. The environment in which someone is surrounded, has the ability to alter his or her life completely. Hal Niedzviecki, the author of *The Peep Diaries,* recorded Jeff White, a high school senior living in South Dakota stating that while majority of his peers used Facebook, none of them looked at the privacy code or customized their profile page to limit access (Niedzvieki 246). Jeff went on to explain that while posting pictures of one's self at the "right party, waving a bright-red cup in front of one's bright-red face" had rapidly turned into something of a necessity. However, posting pictures of one's self and other people is a decision many high school and college students are quickly learning to regret. Jeff continued to talk to Niedzviecki about some of his peers who posted pictures of a beer party on their Facebook pages and shortly after were called into the principal's office and threatened with expulsion for under aged drinking (Niedzvieki, 247).

While posting your ideas, feelings, future plans and pictures on social networks seems harmless enough, the content and context of one's posting makes all the difference. Although Jeff's peers were merely threatened with the possibility of expulsion, students in Jeff Cain's article *Social Networking Issue*

within Academia and Pharmacy Education were suspended and expelled from respective universities because of crime threats and racially insensitive remarks posted on Facebook (Cain para.15). Officials have also used Facebook as a means to investigate campus fights, and identify students who allegedly committed crimes against the school (Cain, para.15); simply because they were not using discretion when posting personal images on social networks.

While some individuals have faced the negative consequences due to their careless incorrect use of social networks; there are also individuals who have the pleasure of relishing in the positive results when they think outside the box, correctly using social networks to accommodate their desires. According to Clara Shih, author of *the Facebook Era Tapping Online Social Networks to Build Better Products, Reach New Audiences, and Sell More Stuff*, Facebook has the ability to achieve personal, business, and professional goals (Shih 6).

One of the main attractions to social networks' users seeking more exposure and career opportunities is its ability to achieve individual and professional goals. According to Clara, social networks such as Facebook, MyListo, and MySpace possess social capital, the shared tendency that develops between social networks to do things for each other (Shih 43). Wise users of these social networks, take advantage of social capital, using it to further their careers by establishing relationships among individuals with high-ranking jobs, promoting themselves, as well as products, and advertising jobs. For instance hiring managers and recruiters seeking to fill open positions can easily sift through user profiles, on the social network of their choice, and find an individual with the desired qualifications and experience to fill their position (Shih 44).

Companies and individuals all around the world use social networks' exposure to their advantage. While self- employed, entrepreneurs, use social networks to publicize themselves and their businesses, companies such as Red Bull, use them to market their product and splatter their slogan all over social networks. Corporate companies also take advantage of the accessible targeting techniques enabling them

to promote merchandise more directly. According to Clara, advertisers also take advantage of features like hypertargeting to focus campaigns on very specific audience segments and feeds to promote word-of-mouth marketing (Shih 214). Whereas famous artists and up and coming rappers and singers use social networks to gain more exposure and freely advertise the releases of their upcoming CD's, movies, or television shows. As seen from the previous examples, when used correctly, social networks have the ability to yield positive results.

Trevor Hughes a senior studying Civil Engineering informed me, the benefits of having a Facebook is first, being able to keep in contact with one another, second, staying up to date with friends, and third the networking and scheduling capabilities (personal communication, October 3, 2010). When asked his opinion of the connection between Information Technology and Facebook, he responded saying with the sped and user friendly settings (personal communication, October 3, 2010). While Trevor is correct to an extent about the ability of a social network to strengthen social bonds between, he like most middle school, high school, and college students did not think about Facebook's capability to serve as a reference site for prospective employers, law enforcement agencies, and school officials of all ranks and areas. Trevor did not think about companies, individuals, and small businesses around the world using social networks' exposure to their advantage. He did not think about the entrepreneurs publicizing themselves and their businesses, nor did he think about major companies and manufacturers such as Red Bull, using the site to market their product. No Trevor Hughes like so many other teenagers and young adults only views Facebook and other social networks as a staying in touch with friends, learning who broke up with who, and who pulled the craziest stunt and lived to tell about it. This is the reason teenagers and young adults are getting expelled from school and universities.

We must change our view on social networks; we must view social network sites, and their influences, for what they really are; positive and negative. When used correctly, social network sites are a way of establishing, preserving, and amplifying social ties, which can be beneficial in social, academic, and work settings. Social network sites have the ability to produce great exposure, job opportunities, and

excellent marketing and advertising opportunities for entrepreneurs as well as corporate companies. However, we must also keep in mind negative impacts these same social networks can have on us when used incorrectly, such as expulsion, academic regression, and disqualification of employment opportunities; the necessary precautions we can take to avoid them.

Reference List/Works Cited

Cain, J.. (2008). Online Social Networking Issues Within Academia and Pharmacy
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to   *Build Better Products, Reach new Audiences, and Sell More Stuff.* Boston, MA:Pearson
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Niedzviecki, H. (2009). *The Peep Diaries: How We're Learning to Love Watching Ourselves and our*
    Neighbors. San Francisco, CA:City Lights Books.

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Cain, J.. (2008). Online Social Networking Issues Within Academia and Pharmacy
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      In this article the author discusses the popularity of social networks such as, MySpace and Facebook among teenagers, young adults, and college students. He also discusses the attraction young people have to social networks such as MySpace and Facebook and what exactly it allows people to do. He then goes on to talk about the negative aspects and critiques these social networks have received and why. I found this source to be relatively current and accurate due to numerous amount of credible sources quoted. I used this source to talk about the negative effects of social networks when used incorrectly.

Shih, C. Taub, M.,& MacDonald, T., (Eds.). (2009). *The Facebook Era: Taping Online Social Networks to Build Better Products, Reach new Audiences, and Sell More Stuff.* Boston, MA:Pearson Education.

      This book included topics on: A Brief History of Social Media, the Evolution of Digital Media, Social Capital from Networking Online, Transforming the Way We Do Business, Social Sales, Social Network Marketing, Social Innovation, Social Recruiting, Engage Your Customers, Get your Message Across, Build and Manage Your Relationships, Corporate Governance and Strategy, and The Future of Social Business. I found this source to be relatively current and accurate due to the numerous amount of credible sources used, as well as the use of statistics, charts, and graphs. I used this book to discuss the positive results of using online social networks correctly and provide examples of the targeting techniques used my companies to promote merchandise.

Niedzviecki, H. (2009). *The Peep Diaries: How We're Learning to Love Watching Ourselves and our Neighbors.* San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books.

      This book included topics on: Introducing Peep Culture, Becoming a Peep (Product) Person, Faking the Real: Everyday Secrets and the Rise of Peep TV, Breaking the Seal: Gossip, Grooming and the (Secret) Allure of Peep, Watching the Detectives Watching the neighbors in the Golden Age of Surveillance, Escape from the Castle: Privacy in the Age of Peep, and Future Peep: Why No One Came to My Party and Other Semi-Transparent Conclusions. I found this source to be relatively current and accurate due to the diverse and numerous amounts of sources. I used this book to discuss and give examples of teenager's point of view of online social networks, I also used it to give examples of the consequences of using the social networks negatively.