

Internet use and social media

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Extensive use has been made of Tim Chester's book 'Will you be my Facebook friend?' and Nick Carr's 'Is Google making us stupid?'

Some areas to consider

- Benefits of social media in church life
- Discerning how use of the internet and social media is changing the way we think and relate to others and the implications for:
 - communicating the gospel
 - teaching/preaching
 - Christian community
- Social media and the individual:
 - mental health
 - spiritual life
- Practical considerations and legal requirements for a church community

Introduction

- A new medium is often suspect within traditional/conservative communities
 - Paper was viewed as a work of the Devil when first introduced into Europe from the Muslim world
 - The printing press transformed the relationship between people and God, between church authority and individual conscience
 - Social media is doing the same
- French historian, Charles Peguy, said of the Church that at the turn of each age, *"she arrives a little late and a little breathless"**

Benefits of social media in church life



theDetails Chapter 3

YouTube

Their purpose:
YouTube is the number three search engine on the Web. People are using YouTube to search for ALL of different things. So, why are churches not using this medium to get their message out there and help people find what they are really searching for? YouTube is obviously a haven for videos, but there are a lot of things that can be recorded on video and placed on YouTube for people to see. One great thing about YouTube is that it is already mobile-friendly, so you do not have to worry about making your video content accessible on mobile devices. YouTube does the work for you.

The Best Practices:

- Have your own YouTube channel that people can subscribe to. Just like with the personal Facebook URL, if possible, give your YouTube channel the same name as your church's website.
- Post your entire worship service on YouTube every week. If you can, divide up the service from the sermon and post those all individually too. That way, if someone does a search on a certain topic, they will be able to pull up and view your pastor's sermon on that topic.
- To make things accessible, make sure to use tags and keywords so that people will find your content when doing searches.
- It is a great idea for members of your church leadership to do video blogs (vlogs) occasionally just to get their face and voice out there, and also to make them more accessible. Use YouTube to host them online, and then embed them in your blog as well.
- Upload video clips from church events—concerts, kids' camps, mission trips, youth events, etc. People will be able to see with their own eyes what kind of community your church has and the relationships available to them if they participate.

A Good Example: Westside Family Church in Lenexa, Kan. (www.WestsideFamilyChurch.com) has a stellar YouTube channel where they post everything from sermon clips to family resource videos to messages from the pastors to event details to leadership training sessions. Check it out at <http://www.YouTube.com/westsidefamilychurch>.

The medium and the message

- A medium can be used for good or ill
- The medium affects the communication



The need for discernment

"A technology wears its benefits on its sleeve – but the drawbacks are buried deep within"

Tim Challies*

"The medium is the message"

Marshall McLuhan

- How** we communicate changes **what** we communicate
- The technology we use to express our thoughts actually **changes** those thoughts
- It changes what we think is **important**

Social media and use of time

- Quantity of time spent on social media
 - 700 billion minutes a month are spent on Facebook
 - Half of FB users go on once a day
 - Nearly 50% of 18-34 yr old FB users have checked it within minutes of waking up
 - On average, users spend 20 hours a month on Facebook
- Disruption to other activities
 - Sleep
 - Study
 - Eating



Social media use affects how we read

Internet users 'skim' text rather than reading it

"Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words."

Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski"

Nick Carr

Internet users' minds now expect to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles



Social media affects how we express ourselves on-line

Social media users speak with brevity

- Twitter – 144 characters
- #tags offer comment on content in one word
 - Awkward
 - #Winning
 - #Sick
- Blogs
 - no more than 400 words . . . or it won't be read
- Facebook status updates – brief comments

Re-wiring the reading brain

**"We are not only *what* we read,
We are *how* we read."**

Maryanne Wolf, developmental psychologist, Tufts University
author of *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*

The **way** in which we read actually shapes the **way** we make **connections** in the brain



. . . and off-line

"At some point, a chasm emerges between those who use Twitter and those who do not. In other channels where Twitter users and other non-users are connected, for example email or text messaging, the culture of conversation becomes noticeably divergent. To begin with, Twitter users, like texters, are groomed to speak with brevity."

Brian Solis, Digital Anthropologist

"I've started praying in status updates" #

Reading a book or article

Encourages a reading style that make us:

- interpret text
- reflect on its meaning
- make rich mental connections between ideas

Previous generations of readers could read long and complex texts without distraction

They were '**deep readers**'.



Reading on the Net

Forces us into a reading style that prioritises:

- efficiency
- immediacy



We become

'mere decoders of information'
delivered in bite-size snippets

'The people of the (on-line) Book'

Reading the Bible on a smart-phone is a different experience from reading it in bound book form

- Unbounded – able to look up:
 - references and background information
 - commentaries
 - other people's thoughts
- The capacity to publish is now available to anyone with access to the internet
 - On the internet, anyone can be an authority
 - The voice of the preacher is only one voice among many competing influences
 - The authority of office is giving way to the ability to influence and persuade

Deep reading . . .

We may be in the midst of a major change in the way we read **and think**

A study suggests that online researchers are not reading in the traditional deep way



Internet use affects how we think

*"The Net seems to be chipping away my capacity for **concentration** and **contemplation**"*

I have sacrificed

the sharpness and clarity of my **linear, calm, focused and undistracted** thought processes for . . .

easy access to
more information produced by
anyone (with internet access)

*Nick Carr**

The loss of grammatical sentence structure in texts and tweets
→ the loss of ability to construct or analyse arguments

. . . vs. skim reading

They are 'power-browsing' horizontally, looking at:

- titles
- contents pages
- short summaries

They do not stay long enough on a page to read it in depth.

They seem to be looking for an information 'quick fix'

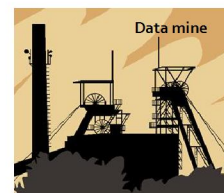


Google's view of information

Information is a commodity that can be mined and processed with industrial efficiency

The **more** pieces of information we can access and the **faster** we can extract their gist

the more **productive** we are as thinkers



The vision of Google's creators

"Certainly if you had all the world's information directly attached to your brain, or an artificial brain that was smarter than your brain, you'd be better off."

Sergey Brin, Newsweek, 2004

The commercial driver

- Google's world-view fits well with the business aims of on-line companies.
- The faster we surf across the Web
clicking on different pages
the more information Google collects about us
which they use to target advertisements at us
- Google and other businesses do not want us to read leisurely or think in a slow, concentrated way
- **It is in their economic interest to drive us to distraction!**

What is the world view behind this?

- Intelligence is the output of a **mechanical process**
- The human desire to know and understand can be boiled down to a series of discrete steps that can be isolated, measured, and optimised
- The human brain is just an **outdated computer** that needs a bigger hard drive and a faster processor

Addicted to social media?

- Do you check your Facebook page more than once or twice a day?
- Do you spend more than twenty minutes a day on Facebook?
- Do you find it difficult to imagine a day without technology?
- Have you ever read a text or gone online during a church gathering?
- Have you stayed up beyond your normal bedtime because you were on Facebook or playing online games?
- Do you use your mobile phone during meals or keep it in the bedroom?

In Google's world . . .

there is little place for
contemplation
or wisdom
or revelation



What is the attraction of social media?

You can recreate your world through your own words and images to gain approval

- Facebook, Twitter and blogging allow us all to become celebrities with our lives on show
 - The public and the private become blurred
- On Facebook you do not have a conversation, you have an audience
 - The world becomes your audience
- Your life takes place on a stage and you are your own playwright, creating or recreating yourself through your words



Cyberspace, my space, my world

- In cyberspace, we can bring everyone we know together in one space
- But this is 'my space'
 - A space over which I have dominion.
- The genius of Facebook is that all your friends come to you and all their friends come to them.
 - So we simultaneously all inhabit our own little worlds, each with me at the centre.
- These people are by definition my 'chosen people'.



Social media and self-worth

- Social media provides an index for measuring yourself by other people's view of you:
 - How many Facebook friends or Twitter followers
 - The number of 'Likes' on my FaceBook wall
 - The number of 'Comments' my blog post receives
- You are defined by other people's gaze
 - What they make of my 'face'
- You can conduct visual assessments of yourself by comparing photos and comments on them
- You also bestow approval (or not) on others as you register your 'Likes' and comments



My chosen people or God's chosen people

- The local church is a concrete expression of God's chosen people
 - God fits us together so we can grow together towards maturity in Christ (Eph. 4:11-16)
 - God has chosen the people in your church to help one another come to maturity
- Social media allows us to play God and create our own chosen people.
- And we are at the centre of this chosen circle



Social media and spin

- Facebook is geared to project positivity
 - People upload pictures of themselves having a good time
 - Not pictures showing them miserable and looking wretched
 - Compared to all these photos, my day just seems dull or sad
 - People can 'Like' something you have written
 - But there is no option to 'Dislike'
 - So to get a response you have to phrase things in positive terms.
 - 'Had a miserable day at work' becomes 'Looking forward to watching a movie with a tub of ice cream.' 'Like'!
 - 'My rabbit died yesterday' becomes 'Fluffy was a brave little bunny until the very end.' 'Like'!
- On Facebook, we are all spin doctors presenting upbeat propaganda versions of our lives

Social media and narcissism

There seems to be a significant correlation between the use of FaceBook and narcissism

- FaceBook users have higher levels of total narcissism and exhibitionism than Facebook non-users
- "In fact, it could be argued that Facebook specifically gratifies the narcissistic individual's need to engage in self-promoting and superficial behaviour"*

"Who uses Facebook", Australian study

Local psychotherapist has expressed concern about the rise in mental health issues fostered by social media use

Spinning into depression

Alex Jordan of Stanford University revealed the process that leaves some people feeling depressed after spending time on Facebook

- Up-beat spinners
 - You go onto Facebook
 - Everyone you know appears happy
 - So you feel a loser
- Messengers of misery
 - You use Facebook to bemoan how difficult your life is
 - Eg anorexic on-line communities where people compete to be the thinnest
- Both types of spin promote self-obsession, which provides an ideal breeding ground for depression



The social media gospel

- On social media, I am **recreating** my image and my world through my words so that I find **approval** or **justify** myself
 - This is the language of salvation
- Used in this way, social media like Facebook are offering another kind of gospel
- The social media project of self-justification is doomed to fail because we cannot justify ourselves
- It is exhausting trying to appear relentless happy

FakeBook test

- Is your FaceBook self more attractive or successful than your real-world self?
- Are you trying to create your own self-identity or are you finding identity in Christ?
- Are you looking for approval from others through your words, or approval from God through His word?
- If you were told you had to give up social media for a month, could you do it?

The gospel of Jesus

- Jesus is recreating me in the image of God
 - I am not a self-made person
 - It is not about my image
- Jesus is recreating the world
 - I am not the centre of the world
- The world is created and re-created by the Word of God
 - Not my words
 - Not other people's words

These truths enable us to be truly human

They liberate us from self-obsession

They enable us to enjoy the goodness and grace of God in the land of the living

Social media and self-discipline

'For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age' (Titus 2:11,12)

Biblical source of self-worth

'Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ' (Gal. 1:10)

'I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me' (1 Cor. 4:3,4)

Social media and community

- The internet promises omniscience and omnipresence
 - It can connect us with everyone, everywhere, at any time
- But omniscience and omnipresence are attributes of God
 - Humans are finite
- So social media cannot deliver on its promises
 - Unless we have connections with our 'friends' in the real world, we are in danger of surface friendships

Relationships without responsibility

- Social media tempts people to say things they would hesitate to say in the flesh
 - Increasing numbers of employees have been disciplined or even fired because of their posts or tweets
 - 1 in 10 younger people have been rejected for a job because of something they have posted on social media*
 - More than a third of UK divorce filings in 2011 contained the word 'Facebook'†
 - Facebook connects us with old flames and passing contacts whom we might otherwise forget

"Affairs happen with a lightning speed on Facebook. It puts temptation in the path of people who would never in a million years risk having an affair." K Jason Krafsky, *Facebook and Your Marriage*†

An embodied life

- The Christian gospel affirms the body
- It encourages us to engage in embodied life and embodied relationships

'We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us' (1 Thess. 2:8)

'But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavoured the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face' (1 Thess. 2:17)

What is said and what is not said

Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. James 3: 5

When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise." Pro 10:19

- Social media does not cause sin
- It can accelerate it because it liberates it from the constraints of the body
- Facebook can be a place to hide from the challenges of real-world relationships
 - Most of us praise in public and rebuke in private
 - Facebook is a public medium, so challenges to our behaviour may left unsaid

On-line and off-line communication

- The more people engage online, the less able they are to engage offline*
- Over half of young women spend more time talking to people online than face to face.
- For every hour we spend on our computers, face-to-face interaction falls by thirty minutes



A new gnosticism?

- Is 'salvation by social media' the latest manifestation of the ancient heresy of Gnosticism
 - Gnosticism saw the spiritual or mental as good and the body as evil and limiting
 - Salvation was an escape from the constraints of the body
- Cyberspace offers an escape from the limitations of the body through digital 'disincarnation' in on-line fantasy worlds
 - Our avatars can be beautiful, powerful and successful
 - Endless beautiful people offer themselves to us



Social media and loneliness

- The greater the proportion of face-to-face interactions, the less lonely you are
- The greater the proportion of online interactions, the lonelier you are
- It is not that Facebook inevitably makes you lonelier
 - "If you use Facebook to increase face-to-face contact it increases social capital"

John Cacioppo, University of Chicago*

- Lonely people spend more time on Facebook
 - "One of the most noteworthy findings [of our study] was the tendency for neurotic and lonely individuals to spend greater amounts of time on Facebook per day than non-lonely individuals."

Australian study, 'Who Uses Facebook?'

FaceBook or face-to-face

"Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete"

(2 John 12)

"I have much to write to you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face"

(3 John 13,14)

Some personal guidelines for using social media

8. Don't let children have unsupervised Internet access or accept as online friends people you don't know offline.
9. Set limits to the time you spend online and ask someone to hold you accountable to these.
10. Set aside a day a week as a technology 'Sabbath' or 'fast'.
11. Avoid alerts (emails, tweets, texts and so on) that interrupt other activities, especially reading, praying, worshipping and relating.
12. Ban mobiles from the meal table and the bedroom.
13. Look for opportunities to replace disembodied (online or phone) communication with embodied (face-to-face) communication.

Social media and mission

- How many young men in our churches are playing CoD instead of serving God?
 - Pseudo-machismo of the virtual warrior rather than warriors in the real spiritual battle
 - They are remaining boys instead of becoming men
- Are you building a new city on Sims when you can be the city of God set on a hill with your Christian community?
- Are you tending your animals on Farmville when you could be helping a rescue centre with real cats and dogs?

Social media policy for churches

- Several churches and denominations have developed social media policies
 - http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf_social_media_guidelines_part2_0710.pdf
 - <http://www.childrenandyouth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Social-Media-Guidelines-for-workers.pdf>

Some personal guidelines for using social media

1. Don't say anything online that you wouldn't say were the people concerned in the room
2. Don't say anything online that you wouldn't share publicly with your Christian community
3. Ensure your online world is visible to your offline Christian community
4. Challenge one another if you think someone's online self reflects a self-created identity rather than identity in Christ
5. Challenge one another if you think someone's online self doesn't match their offline self
6. Use social networking to enhance real-world relationships, not to replace them

Acknowledgements

Extensive use has been made of:

Tim Chester, [Will you be my Facebook friend? Social Media and the Gospel](#), 10 Publishing, 2013

Nick Carr, 'Is Google making us stupid? What the internet is doing to our brains', [The Atlantic](#), 1 July 2008

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