

Facebook talk more valuable than we think

October 18 2010

Superficial contacts on Facebook, apparently unnecessary comments, and banal status updates may be more worthwhile than we think. This is shown in a new report from the National IT User Center. The report also predicts the new social media will ultimately lead to more individual entrepreneurs.

Many people are critical of those who collect hundreds of so-called friends on [Facebook](#). Often the majority of these “friends” are old classmates, acquaintances of acquaintances, and the like, relationships that are fundamentally weak. The comments and updates of relatively banal nature that appear on Facebook have also generated a great number of snide remarks, not least in the media, in recent times. But a report compiled by Håkan Selg, a doctoral candidate at the Department of Information Technology, Uppsala University, reveals that these contacts in fact constitute highly useful networks, networks that make use of the ostensibly meaningless comments and updates.

"The portrait, comments, and updates provide constant reminders of the existence of ‘friends.’ The content is not all that important, but the effect is that we perceive our Facebook friends as closer than other acquaintances who are not on Facebook," says Håkan Selg.

Something else highlighted in the report is how today’s use of [social media](#) runs counter to a major trend in our information society.

Previously companies and public authorities have been the first to use new channels for communication. This was the case with mobile phones, e-mail, and Web pages. Households have followed suit later. But social

media have developed primarily in the private sphere. This gives the advantage to private individuals with contact nets and user experience that companies and authorities want to get at.

Through the use of social media individuals are also less dependent on major actors, as they can use networks on their own to get tips about jobs, housing, or, as business people, help with practical problems and new contacts. They also provide opportunities for individuals without large economic resources to reach out to more people, to publish something free of charge, and establish foundations for their own activities.

"A realistic effect of social media is that many costs of running operations will decline in the long run. This will probably enable more people to start their own businesses in the future, thus successively altering working life," says Hakan Selg.

More information: The study constitutes an independent continuation of a series of investigations about new user patterns on the Internet and is intended to identify impacts of strategic importance to business and society. See: www.internetexplorers.se

Provided by Uppsala University

Citation: Facebook talk more valuable than we think (2010, October 18) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-10-facebook-valuable.html>

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