

What Is The Future of Social Media?

If you have 900 friends that you talk to 140 characters at a time what does the word "friend" really mean? In July 2012, US users spent 121 BILLION minutes on social media. Now let me break that down for you. In one month, that's 231,000 YEARS worth of Bieber retweets, and Instagrams of what you had for lunch.

Now some people worry that this might be a bad thing. That we could actually be rewiring our children's brains so that Generation Z no longer has anyway of knowing how to interact in the "real" world. And they might even lose the ability to use sarcasm. Pfft. Yeah right. If social media is not a real interaction, what is? Is talking on the phone a real social interaction? Or is writing a letter with a quill pen a real social interaction? These are ways we have breached both space and time in order to communicate. So isn't social media just the next step?

I'd go so far as to say we shouldn't even call it social media anymore. This is next generation social life. Imagine you walk into a museum with your smart glasses. Now around you everyone's looking at famous works of art or naked sculptures. But you flip on the social filter on your glasses, and suddenly reality itself is annotated just like in your Facebook feed. You can see what people have to say about every work of art. Or you go next door to the restaurant and you take a look at the menu. There you can see what people in your network have liked. Now, just a couple of generations ago, once you graduated high school, you could expect to encounter those people and interact with them about as frequently as you would play tennis with a plutonium core. But today because of Twitter and Facebook I can't go a day without knowing that my old chem lab partner had yet another breakfast burrito. Seriously Victor, you have a problem. Could this be redefining the meaning of friendship? Anthropologists like Robin Dunbar believe that there are a finite number of real friendships any human being can keep. So your brain can maintain about 150 meaningful friendships, and that's it. So has social media blown this number into the stratosphere? Well, not yet. The average person on Facebook has about 190 friends. And the average person on Twitter interacts with between 100 and 200 people. So we haven't drastically altered the social landscape yet. But will we in the future? Social media changes through the emergence of behavior of literally billions of people from around the world all behaving under local rules, creating unpredictable mass patterns. So it's dictated by your niece who corrects everyone's grammar, or that coworker who absolutely insists on sharing every single photo of a cat in a cardboard box ever. But it's not all frivolous. We have actually used social media for real social change. I mean who would have thought the same thing that lets me tell you what I had for lunch helped topple a dictator? Or organize a protest? Or solve a

crime? So what if all of our social interactions are limited to 140 characters? I think we'll still be able to keep that social herd all together. Even if that herd does include a few LOLcats.