The wider dangers of social networks

Filter bubble / the incredible shrinking world view

Content being customised to the viewer

"Social" principles — either formal established relationships, or looking at behaviours, building up profiles

Amazon

Amazon — seeing what is recommended to you. Recommending things that the site owner thinks you will click on — aim of drawing traffic, and encouraging sales.

Finding stuff you *like* to read is easy. Finding stuff which you *should* read is perhaps harder — end up looking elsewhere for recommendations.

LastFM

Suggesting tracks that you like. End up "discovering" new artists or albums, but gradually narrowing your musical tastes, since you lose the variety of a non-specific radio station.

Facebook

Customising your timeline / feed based on what Facebook thinks you will click on.

An interesting example, really, because one of the mechanisms for gauging what you like to see is the "Like" button.

"Like" button — seeing increasingly less important and serious things?

You may think that something is important — you might think that something is worthy of sharing / being seen, but is it necessarily something which you could want to "Like."

Are we going to see more fluffy cats, and fewer serious / important stories.

What about news sites?

What if the BBC started changing the news feed to show what it thought you wanted to see — is it important that you have access to a balanced world view?

What if you could not access the other content?

What to do about it?

Need to ensure that there is access to unfiltered content — should you be told that content is being filtered?

Should you have the option of switching it off?

Is there a market for sites which are *not* targeted?

"Dislike" button on Facebook?

Pressure

Pressure to post

Peer pressure

Private communications in a public context — pressure to be seen to be posting

Pressure to be seen to have people posting to you. It's not enough that you are seen to be talking to other people, other people need to be seen to be talking to you — a measure of your popularity

When private communication becomes public, everyone can see not only what you send, but what you receive — how popular you are is judged not by what you post, but what is posted to you

Self-pressure — addictive behaviour

Need to see if people have responded to you.

Pressure to be better

A lot of discussion about legal risk focusses on the worst of behaviours — the falling out of a pub drunk, the stupid university antics which become viewed by an interviewer and so on. Mostly fixed by context

But what about the best of behaviours? Many people's social network profiles represent the best of themselves — even a better picture than reality.

Measuring own perfectly normal life against the standards of some of those posting online, it's perhaps easy to get depressed, and to feel inferior

Pressure to merge online and offline lives

What happens when you've posted something on your dating profile, and you actually meet the person — how to you explain that, when you wrote "doctor," you actually meant painter?

Constant connectedness

No time to sit and think — every moment there is something to do

Particularly when things beep, and notify — and particularly when you feel the pressure to engage, and to receive messages

You realise that, rather than spending a few minutes gazing into space, letting your mind wander, you reach for your phone to check Facebook. What is your friend in Australia having for dinner.

This is not an entirely new phenomenon — email, push email, and the BlackBerry device in particular. And then people realised that they could work when not in the office — and, worse, that people realised that that, even though you were not in the office, they could send you an email.

Pass-the-buck / send-and-forget: An etiquette for contact — sending an email, or posting a message, passes the action. I've sent the mail, so now it's up to you to respond. And as the messages ping in, the expectation is of an immediate reaction. The phone call which says "I sent you an email, and just wanted to check that you've received it."

Pressure to be posting — now you can post from anywhere

Interrupting your holiday to check email? May keep on top of your workload, but do you ever switch off?

Loss of focus — constantly switching from one thing to another. Our brains gradually becoming rewired, to be used to reacting to the constant stimulation.

Able to connect whenever you want is not necessarily a bad thing, provided that you have self-control. However, if you *are* constantly connected, do you actually get anything done?

But not all bad

Many good things — ability to fit in, ability to try out new personae, ability to keep in contact with a wider group of friends.