Facebook changed my life?

The decision made by Time magazine to announce Mark Zuckerberg as the “Person of the Year - 2010” has raised the public awareness to the impact that social networks had on our life. Avantgarde asked four IDC students one question: How did Facebook change your life?

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Our generation is probably the last to remember how life was before the Internet, and perhaps with paramount significance, will probably be the last to remember how it was before a social network of some type (“will Facebook ever be replaced?” and “by who?” are the billion dollar questions on the NASDAQ stock exchange). The generation after ours will probably never understand why we used computers when we could have done it all using our phones. “They were so primitive, lol” they will probably chat/transmit/send to each other.

As this social network revolution takes hold, Mark Zuckerberg has gotten Time magazine’s “Person of the Year - 2010”, a book and movie on his story, and a lot of attention. IDC students were asked to answer one question: How did Facebook change your life? The answers were divided. Some cannot see their social life without it, and see it as the necessary social platform of our times. Others are using it to educate and communicate with their peers. And there are a few who just don’t use it (and didn’t want to be interviewed about it as well).

Any first year communications student can tell you that in the era of technology, there are no more secrets. Through our entire life, our parents tried to protect us: first from foul language, then came the television, and then they were climbing on walls on how exactly they can protect us from the world of the Internet. As children, we always used to test the limits, and see how far we can push the boundaries. The secrets were there, and we wanted to know them.

Facebook changed this order. Now it’s the children that are trying to keep secrets from their parents, or as one IDC student put it: “my mom knows better than me what are my friends doing, she tells me who to date, and she “Likes” the photos which I never wanted her to see.” This new situation brings new questions such as: “Should I refuse my parents’ Friend request?” “Should I block their access to my photos and wall options?” And “should there be social privacy rules as for which photos we tag or should we ask permission before those photos are tagged?”

But did Facebook really kill privacy? According to Arik Kotkowski, a third year Government Student at the RRIS, the answer is no, as it up for the person to chose what will be exposed and what not. “You put up what you want to show the world in
order to portray yourself the way you want people to see you, if you want to keep something private, well...don't put it online”.

With Facebook the loss of privacy is a mutual process. Two people who are on another’s lists can see what the other person wants him to see. If there are rules as to who we approve to see our profile, how are they decided? And how much exposure do we really want or need? Some have an account which is composed of no more than a few “real” friends. Others have accounts which can build a small to a medium town in Israel. Some “Friends” don’t even like each other in real life, while for others Facebook is a vital way to communicate with their close friends. For them Facebook made their non virtual life better by having the platform needed to exchange messages, publish events, and even educate. For some, like **Shlomie Singer**, a third year Government student at the RRIS, the “friend list” is an open one, his lists composed even of those he “randomly met and spoke to for only five minutes...”. Yet there are those who prefer to keep the list as short as possible, thus keeping their profile a bit more private.

Facebook is also the best way to find out the “relationship status”. Some are using it as a tool to find out what the situation is before making a first move, or even sometimes, it is used as the platform for the first move. Yet this can cause some confusion. What does a person’s profile stating that he’s “single” really mean? Is the person is looking for a relationship? Does a person dating and not changing its status means the relationship is not a serious level yet? And what does “it’s complicated” actually mean? For those who are already in a relationship, Facebook, can help, but it also can cause problems. According for Arik, “Facebook can make relationships more complicated; sometimes it is best not to know everything that happens in everybody’s life”.

For Arik, “Facebook is one of the great tools of the 21st century. It made it much more convenient to keep in touch with people, especially since I have been all over the place, and it’s impossible to maintain communication with so many people in so many places”. For **Hadar Segal** a second year student at the Radzyner School of Law and at the Lauder School of Government, diplomacy and Strategy, it “helps to preserve relationships with people, making it possible to get to know new people. It is also a way to become more creative, as you put effort into status, links and other things. As for privacy, people have a choice as for what they want to put and what they like other people to see. It’s a people choice - not Facebook.”

For **Raphel Frankel**, a third year Government student at the RRIS, Facebook is a platform to educate, and express his ideas, as it “helps in sharing information and archives it in a public way and is a great way to keep in touch for free. I used it to read what...
other posted and would then put it on my own posts. I use my space on Facebook as kind of a tool to educate people and share my knowledge with them”.

Facebook changed our lives. As this social network revolution continues to grow, the IDC students interviewed are just a small sample of the half a billion people (in more than seventy languages) who are making the third most populated “country” in the world. Some live in this virtual world as an extension to their social circles, while others create a whole new world there. So, although Mark Zuckerberg may never read this article (although a copy and a link were sent to his inbox), it can be said that he changed the way we live. Whether it is for good or bad, for that alone I would press “Like” on him being Time Magazine’s “Person of the Year”.