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Title **The Masonic Experience and the Irrational Exuberance of Social Networks**

Author **Bro A. Hontzeas - Canada**

Humans are by nature social beings. Communication, expression and an overall feeling of being connected is a necessary part of the human psyche.

Social networks such as *MySpace*™, *Facebook*™ and *Ecademy*™ *(a social network focussing on business subscribers)* increase geometrically their subscriber base by capitalizing on the basic human needs of belonging, socializing and networking. Their underlying business model is correlated to the amount of traffic generated on the social network platform and the information that can be inferred from this traffic (referred to as *data mining*). Because the stored information per subscriber includes the subscriber's personal information, their preferred friends/associations, as well as information about the duration and content of their online sessions, a strong model regarding the habits, tastes, lifestyle preferences (and other such attributes relating to personality traits) can be inferred and sold to market research firms, and the said firms can use the aggregated information for segmentation purposes. These segments can then be used as target markets to push specific products. Of course if this information falls into the wrong hands, then the consequences can be dire indeed.

The basic tenets of Freemasonry *Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth*, lead our order to focus on human evolution (both from a socio-economic and ethical standpoint), and result in fulfilling the higher order psychological aspirations that relate to the human need for self-actualization. While online social network relationships may sometimes be at best superficial and at most virtual, transient, and highly volatile (*or whatever facilitates the marketing of information*), the Masonic experience and its restless quest for knowledge, truth and personal improvement results in relationships that develop into a strong institutional bond over time. This bond permanently cements together the underlying fabric of social stability and humanity and eventually leads to the betterment of society in particular and mankind in general.

Why then are social networks blooming, and why is Masonic membership declining?
Clearly, the same basic social needs that led to the formation of our timeless order, still exist (if not more so) today. Perhaps the answer lies in the public's perception of the Masonic order, in the efficiency with which activities diffuse to our "target segment" (that is, humanity as a whole!!!), or perhaps we had been too successful in the past, and the present trend of events is nothing more than a "correction" returning to normal membership levels. Regardless, these questions can only be properly addressed by deep and thorough research, research that will lead to credible conclusions and successfully roadmap our order into the twenty first century, and beyond.

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