You Are What You Click
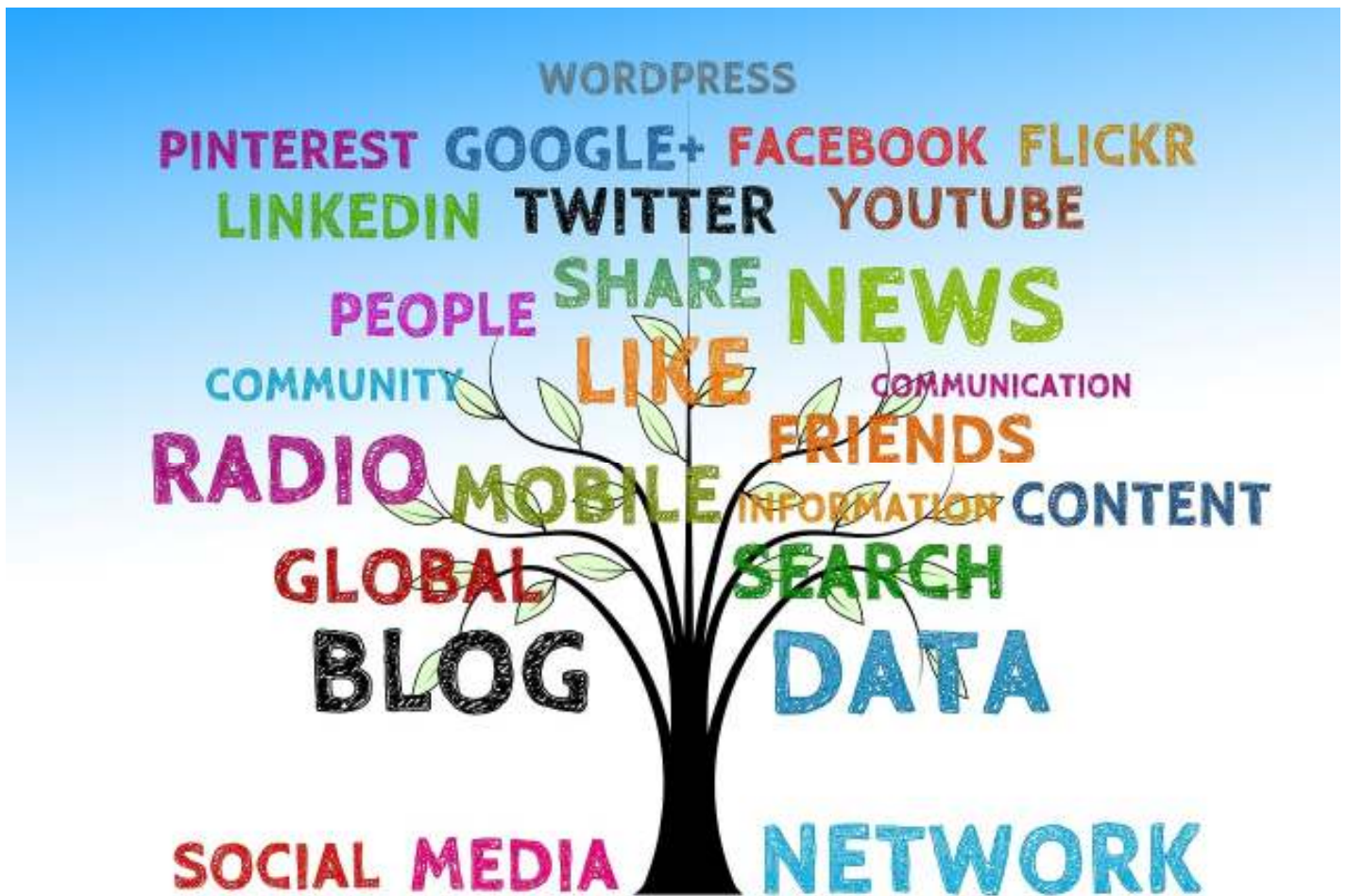
How Being Selective, Positive, and Creative Can Transform Your Social Media Experience

BRIAN A. PRIMACK, MD, PHD

Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn, Ph.D.

I started to write, "I'm the worst person to review a book on social media! I don't use it." Then, nearing the end of Dr Primack's book, I realized, I use it more than I think.

I don't Twitter, nor Instagram. I don't TicToK or Messenger. I post articles on LinkedIn and use Facebook for the magazine. But a sense of who? me? reached out and grabbed me when Dr Primack discussed Facebook and canned birthday wishes: how people, like me, are reminded of "friends" birthdays so we can offer a greeting, an emoji. What truly tripped me was his discussion on our own take away. I rarely post on my personal page, but I do look forward to my birthday and to reading all the greetings from people I don't connect with the rest of the year. It's like some sense of *I matter* because all these acquaintances are sending me an online birthday card. Strange? Scary? Sick? Flabbergasted is the best term for me. And this is only one of the many areas that Dr Primack, Brian, delves into in his recent publication, *You Are What You Click: How Being Selective, Positive, and Creative Can Transform Your Social Media Experience.*

Dr Primack's text is organized into five parts; part one lays the foundation for the following four: Why we need a "Food Pyramid" for Social Media; Be Selective; Be Positive; Be Creative; and How To Live Now. Part one includes a personal anecdote about Brian's use of social media during a grim time in his and his family's life: a terrorist rampage left numerous friends dead and others injured in their synagogue. He offers data from studies, his and others, to support his premise that we need to develop a healthy relationship with social media—it's not all or none but rather we need skills that enable us to be selective, positive, and creative in our approach to and use of social media. When we learn how to analyze, evaluate, and critically think about ourselves, we have the chance to discover how we spend our time and energy in life and online, which in turn may trigger changes that might ultimately improve our lives.

Parts two, three, and four are each focused on the three attributes that he wants readers to acquire. Overall, he offers strategies to help readers make positive changes when and where needed. In Part two, readers are invited to think consciously about how much time they spend online, how frequently they engage, which platforms work best, and how to schedule breaks, aka holidays, from online time. Part three investigates positivity, from the perspective of positive psychology to one's predetermined attitudes, and ways to reflect on toxicity and positivity in regard to social media. Part four focuses on creativity and how we need to tailor our online use to fit our personality and lifestyle as well as our needs and wants. Rather than being a lemming following trends off the edge of some virtual cliff, we need to look inward and find places that nourish and nurture our inner being, that bring joy to our lives not deplete and depress us. Dr Primack is clear, by reading his book we can:

- Tailor social media use to our personality
- Select positive relationships over toxic ones
- Overcome the comparison syndrome and the fear of missing out
- Fill our feed with meaningful and uplifting content
- Manage our news intake, stop doomscrolling and more

The content within each section builds from the basic of why, to how to consider, and then what to do. He notes that he offers "short actionable chapters" with "innovative science" and "immediate strategies" to enlighten and engage readers.

FIGURE 2: The Social Media Pyramid
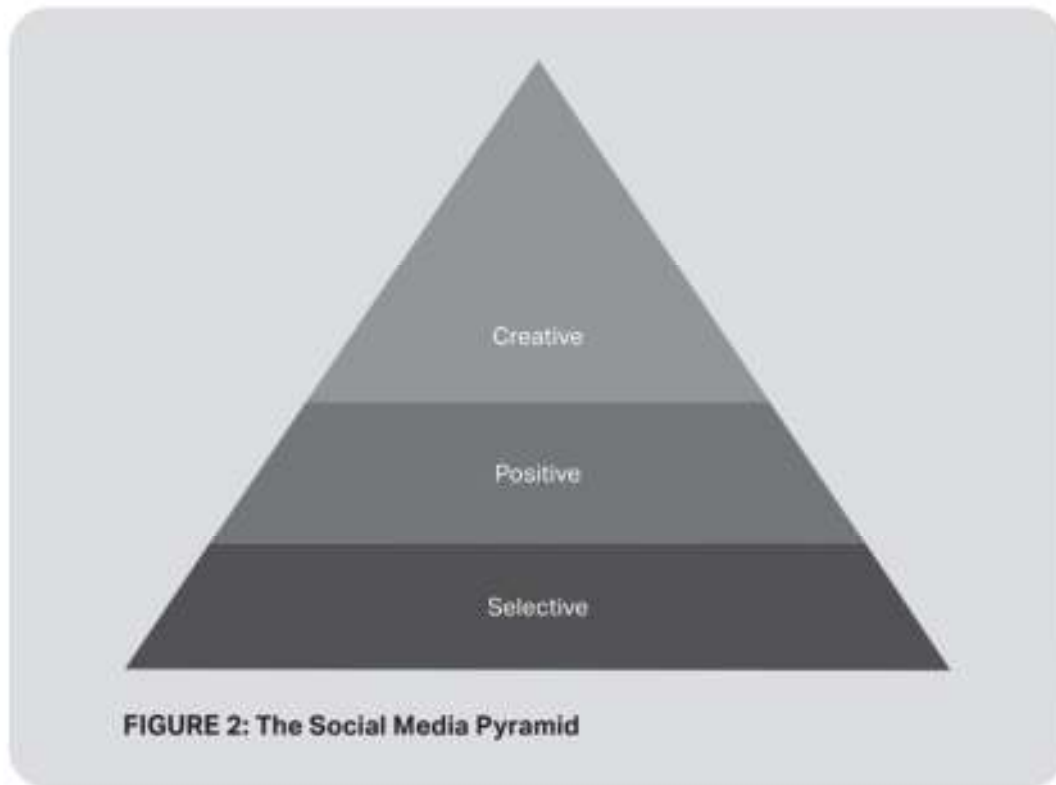
Reading this book with the initial attitude of *it's not about me* gave me the space to consider who might benefit. Friends? Family? Clients? Several names came to mind. But then I thought I might offend someone, might make a statement they disagree with and potentially hurt or anger them.

Brian addresses this fear of response, not in my particular instance but in all situations related to posting social media content and how the medium affects other people. Discussing the concept of what he calls our negativity threshold, Brian asks readers to consider the following questions before posting something:

- How willing are you to offend people?

- What is your negativity threshold?

- How willing are you to post something to brighten someone else's day knowing it may be potentially irritating to others?

As a writer and an avid reader, I know words impact readers. I know I cannot control how my words land on someone else, their experience of my words is entirely their own. But I also know that certain words can inflict pain and cause permanent ruptures in relationships. Images can be just as, if not more, devastating. And social media is filled with both. What we do and how we do it matters not only for ourselves but those we interact with.

One tool that comes near the end of the book is the Social Media Checklist. It includes all that Brian discussed thus far and offers a way to organize and guide reflection and change. Each section includes a drop-down list to consider, terms/situations he has explored in depth, for instance:

Personalize engagement

◊ Amount of daily time I'm aiming for
◊ Daily frequency I'm aiming for
◊ Targe number of platforms
◊ Specific platforms that fit me best
◊ Which apps to keep alerts and notifications on

The bulk of his research shared in this book addresses depression, anxiety, loneliness, and social isolation associated with social media use—the more time online, the more time down in the dumps. Seeing all these images, reading fascinating stories of grand accomplishments and adventures can send people reeling downward into the *I'm not good enough* void. Time becomes overwhelming as one feed leads to another. People scroll without a clear purpose.

While Brian covers expected areas such as body and self-image, bullying, and missing out, he also brings in fresh ideas to stimulate one's thoughts about online use including extroversion versus introversion, one's visual quotient, the impact of neuroticism, the double-edged sword of agreeableness and the many meanings of openness.

The stark reality that marketers are manipulating viewers was scary for me—not so much new information but the depth and reach of their tentacles stunned me. Brian's' example of a teenage woman's father upset that Target was sending her ads for pregnancy and childbirth items when she was not pregnant, only to learn that she was indeed pregnant and hiding it from him but Target surmised based on her online use was appalling. These people track every single thing we do online and use it for marketing purposes. After I've bought my mother's incontinence pads online, I received adds for diapers and women's hygiene. They may have the item right but the person wrong. But the truth is, they are watching and recording and what we post online may come back to haunt us.

I shudder when I think about my extended family and some of their online postings. The pictures are sensuous, sexy, tantalizing. These girls are in high school, yet they have 800 plus people looking at pictures reminiscent to me of pin up girls. Other relatives post every thing they do from the mundane to the magnificent. It honestly care less about what they had for lunch. I haven't checked my "family" page since my mother's stage 4 cancer in 2011, which was the only reason I created it, to share what was happening with our extended family. And when I get a notification in my email folder, I check some, delete others. I just don't have time nor the care to see it all. I don't feel like I'm missing out, that's for sure.

But I have friends who are constantly on their phones. I've had to ask them to put them away while we're having dinner so we can focus on one another. I carry my phone for emergencies; I live with elderly parents with health issues. But I turned off notifications. And when I'm hiking, I'm in airplane mode, relying on my phone for GPS tracks and photographs but nothing more.

I'm not sure why some people are more into it than others. The newest users cramming the field are people in their 60s. Younger ages seem to trend more toward images, i.e., Instagram, than words. It's not my arena to surmise who or why but Dr Primack clearly has a keen sense of what's happening, the pros and the cons. In this book, he offers readers useful strategies to make substantial changes if they so desire.

Just an aside. One personal anecdote Brian shared involved his wife and daughter and some guinea pigs. I appreciated his acknowledgement at the end of the book:

"As for Ellie the dog and Bella and Zoey the guinea pigs, I must acknowledge that they have no idea that there even is a book. And yet, they somehow still know how to make me feel good about it. Go figure."

His humanness radiates throughout the book.

Dr. Brian A. Primack, MD, Ph.D. is internationally known for his research in the complex interrelationships between media, technology, and health. He has degrees in English, Mathematics, Educational Psychology and Human Development. He graduated with an M.D. first in his class from Emory Medical School and received his second master's degree and Ph.D. in Social and Behavioral Science from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

He has obtained over $10 million to research media, technology, and health. His discoveries have been published in several medical and social science journals, such NPRs All Things Considered, The New York Times, Washington Post, US News and World Report and CBS Sunday Morning with Jane Pauley.

Dr. Primack joined the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine faculty in 2002 and has served as the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Research on Health and Society, the founding director of the Center for Research on Media, Technology, and Health, and the Dean of the Pitt Honors College.

He currently works for the University of Arkansas as the Dean of the College of Education and Health Professions while serving as the Henry G. Hotz Endowed Chair in Educational Innovations and a Professor of Public Health and Medicine. In this role he is responsible for 6000 students, staff, and faculty involved in the "caring professions," including public health, education, nursing, counseling, occupational and speech therapy, and much more.

Dr. Primack lives in Fayetteville, Arkansas, with his wife, two children, mother-in-law, family dog, and two pet guinea pigs.
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