

CHAPTER 01

Society has unwittingly fallen into a machine-centered orientation to life, one that emphasizes the needs of technology over those of people. [This forces] people into a supporting role, one for which we are most unsuited. [...]

The same analytical methods that work so well for mechanical things do not apply to people. [...] As a result, the technology that is intended to aid human cognition and enjoyment more often interferes and confuses than aids and clarifies.

—Dr. Donald Norman, *Things That Make Us Smart*

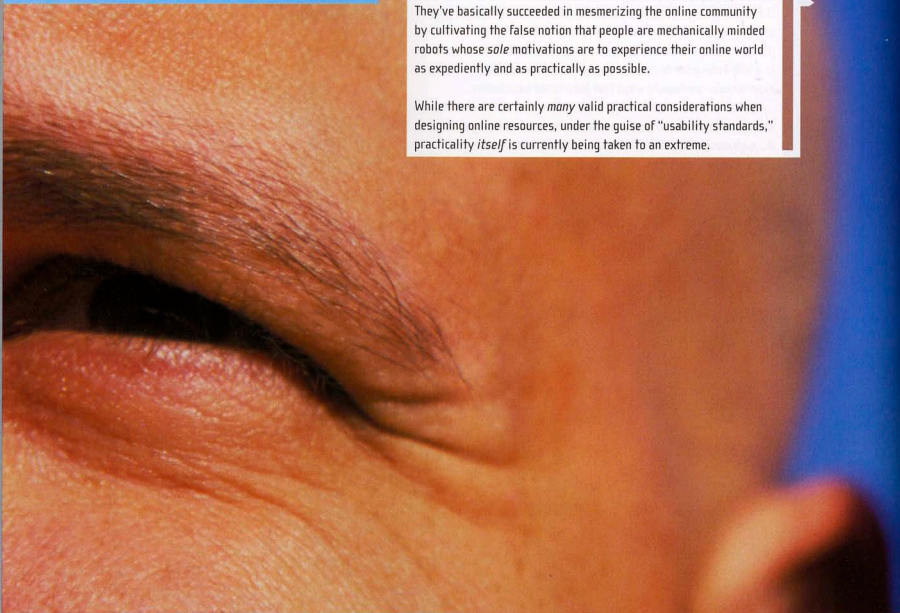
'Users' Versus People—

Understanding What Motivates Online Behavior

The people who interact with your Web enterprise through its online resources aren't users; that would make you—the person or organization responsible for the existence of these resources—a pusher. They're people and you function more like a facilitator. People don't merely use the information that they access; they perceive it, absorb it, try to comprehend it, are affected by it, and then decide how to respond to it.

With this guiding notion in mind, the intent of this chapter is to persuade you to stop listening to those Web usability consultants who recommend that you dull-down your online resources and focus solely on the practical aspects of experience design. These one-track-minded consultants are as much hypnotists as anything else. They've basically succeeded in mesmerizing the online community by cultivating the false notion that people are mechanically minded robots whose sole motivations are to experience their online world as expediently and as practically as possible.

While there are certainly many valid practical considerations when designing online resources, under the guise of "usability standards," practicality *itself* is currently being taken to an extreme.



01.00.02



01.00.01 Practicality is not an underlying human motivation.

Instead, people seek fulfillment through consumption, as well as through social interaction and emotional experiences. The Web can help us be more practical people, yes; but more importantly it has the capacity to help us become *better* people—to enhance our minds and our lives—to help us better understand each other, the world, and ourselves.

Although the appropriate application of practicality in the design of Web experiences can contribute to fulfilling our true human needs and desires, designing our online resources to be practical for the sake of being practical is a misguided and dangerously flawed idea. And most certainly—elevating practicality above all other design considerations goes far beyond necessity.

01.00.02 Journeying along a well-conceived experiential pathway is what makes interacting with a Web enterprise compelling.

Because people are multidimensional, an effective Web experience is successful on many different levels. Consequently, paving this “experiential pathway” involves employing varied sets of principles that address our multidimensionality. This holistic design perspective should draw from and synthesize principles that are related to psychology, ‘understandability’, and creativity.

Up until now, however, consultants who are more technically minded have **confused experience design with usability design**. Usability traditionally relates to a “user’s” ability to navigate through and find information quickly on the Web, and grapples with some, but not all issues relevant to understandability as I’ve framed it in this text. Although usability does try to help people avoid the detrimental emotions that accompany frustration, for the most part usability ignores broader issues related to the psychology of emotion, the cognition of perception and learning, as well as the very *real* human need for aesthetic gratification.

“When the ideas that we communicate through our online messages are understandable, they’re easy for people to attend to, comprehend, and remember.”



01.00.03 As arguably the most influential Web usability consultant, Jakob Nielsen has, through a narrow set of heuristics, succeeded in convincing Web enterprises to base their experience design policies on a single facet of people's experiential needs.

Dr. Nielsen has derived his heuristics—which are speculative formulations—largely from informal, context-specific Web usability testing. The conclusions drawn from years of conducting this testing have then been extrapolated by Nielsen and others to apply to all cases. The problem with this approach is that usability testing is geared toward determining the flaws in a specific interface through educated intuition rather than through empirical scientific testing.

Nielsen would himself likely be the first to admit that most Web usability testing lacks the rigor of scientific research. This makes the credence given to his Web usability heuristics as scientifically-proven fact all the more puzzling. It's frustrating for many Web experience designers who are trying to build inspiring online resources when they're blocked in their efforts by Nielsen's heuristics—which are accepted as absolute truths, when they're in fact only based on Nielsen's observations. The heuristics of Nielsen and others have taken on a glow of sanctified commandments—Thou Shalt Not Use Flash!—rather than being regarded as the potentially helpful but highly subjective design suggestions that they really are.

Usability experts rightly feel that if a person can't interact with an online resource easily, then that resource has likely failed. However the passionate conviction that makes them good advocates of interface logistics can sometimes blind them to the core purposes of an online resource. The most logistically predictable experience may not be the most engaging or the most persuasive or the most compelling one. Usability needs to support other design considerations, not replace them. A logistically appropriate, "practical" online resource that isn't at all compelling is just as big a failure as one that's compelling yet impractical.

Many of the design considerations that have traditionally fallen under the moniker of "usability" are important and should be considered when designing online resources. Some of Dr. Nielsen's observations can, when appropriately applied in a given situation, be quite helpful. Usability, however, is only one voice in the democracy of experience design, and therefore should only get one vote. There are many other types of observations, both subjective and scientific, that must be taken into account when settling on a particular experience design strategy for a given situation and needs [see Chapter Seven].

01.00.04 Poor usability isn't the primary reason why Web enterprises have experienced widespread failure.

They've experienced failure because the organizations behind these Web enterprises haven't understood and fulfilled the needs of the people in the online marketplace holistically. By the online market's rejection of the 1990s crop of dot-coms, people have made it clear that they're no longer willing to subject themselves to bland, incomprehensible, poorly stylized, marginally valuable, OR difficult-to-use online resources. There are two reasons for this.

The first reason is that other forms of media such as TV, movies, and interactive games have trained people to have increasingly sophisticated expectations in terms of the emotional and aesthetic dynamics of the media that they consume. These media do a really great job of reaching people deeply on social and emotional levels.

The second reason is that conventional sources of needs fulfillment are beginning to combine the inherent social and emotional powers of live people and environments with progressive implementations of technology. The combined benefit in many cases provides a more compelling value proposition than their online competitors can offer.

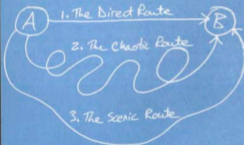
We've reached the point where people expect to be treated as well online as they're treated in physical consumptive settings. In light of this, we must stop extending all of our resources designing online experiences that, at best, try to be sensitive to navigational frustration and, at worst, ignore the broader body of people's experiential needs as a whole.

01.00.05 The core of an effective Web experience is NOT user-centered design but person-centered design.

Therefore, we must design every aspect of an online resource to align with a person's natural human needs and desires. Although one of our human desires is to avoid the frustrations of inefficiency and impediment, we also have very deep and primal needs to maintain a positive social and emotional relationship with our environment. When given a choice, people usually choose options that engender the most positive feeling [Reeves and Nass, *The Media Equation*].

In light of this fact, it's essential that in addition to designing our online resources to be efficient, we design them—whether austere or flamboyant—to be compelling as well. In a sense, the role of an experience design team is to pave the way for people to enjoy themselves as they make unimpeded progress in their quest for consumption, meaning, enjoyment, or—whatever. And although people are often most interested in the direct route, it's important that we don't barricade the scenic route for those who feel that "half the fun is in getting there."

01.00.05



1. Many usability consultants claim that the direct route is always the best.
2. They often assume that the alternative to the direct route is the route of chaos.
3. A non-direct route (scenic route) can often times be appreciated, however, as long as it's contributing to the meaning and value of the experience.



01.00.06 As consumers of online experiences are becoming more sophisticated and demanding, understanding and applying psychological and sociological principles in the design of online resources is becoming increasingly critical.

Psychologists and sociologists are becoming increasingly interested in why people go online and how they engage emotionally with Web enterprises. Some of the factors that these studies consider are whether people:

- > are aroused by an online resource and find it interesting
- > feel understood by a Web enterprise
- > identify areas of personal interest
- > make sense of the content
- > remember the ideas being presented
- > are invoked to respond to online messages
- > find a Web enterprise cumulatively helpful and engaging over time

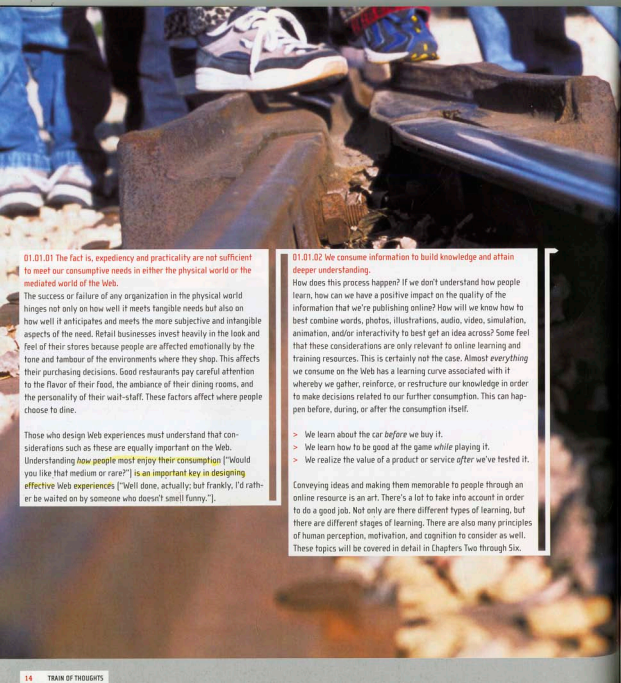
Online resources that are designed to address these factors will be successful not only in helping people *find* what they're looking for, but also in helping them attend to, understand, and relate emotionally to the content that these Web enterprises have to offer. Furthermore, when online resources meet basic human needs for consumptive, social, and emotional relevance, people will be more motivated to interact with them. Helping people be successful in this way will maximize a Web enterprise's chances of being successful in the online marketplace.



01.01 People Go Online to Consume

- > A researcher is writing a report for work and needs to gather appropriate information.
- > An accountant just met a big deadline and wants to "get mindless" playing a game for a while.
- > A teenager wants to customize his own tennis shoes or find a really "cool" new skateboard.
- > That same teenager wants to find a great place to wear those tennis shoes or ride that skateboard (<http://www.3rdlair.com>).
- > A couple wants to find a more progressive pediatrician.
- > That same couple wants to find a reliable financial advisor that can help them plan for their children's education.

We don't always think about it this way, but these examples all relate to various forms of consumption. When we think about what we can "get out of" the Web, these are the types of things that typically come to mind. We're **consumers of information, entertainment, products, and services**. It seems really simple—cut-and-dried and very practical. But how cut-and-dried is it really? Is the role of an effective online resource to provide the most expedient, most practical way to get people from point A to point B? If you listen to some usability consultants, you get that distinct impression. They represent the group of experts who try to understand *what* people want while ignoring *why* people want.



01.01.01 The fact is, expediency and practicality are not sufficient to meet our consumptive needs in either the physical world or the mediated world of the Web.

The success or failure of any organization in the physical world hinges not only on how well it meets tangible needs but also on how well it anticipates and meets the more subjective and intangible aspects of the need. Retail businesses invest heavily in the look and feel of their stores because people are affected emotionally by the tone and ambience of the environments where they shop. This affects their purchasing decisions. Good restaurants pay careful attention to the flavor of their food, the ambience of their dining rooms, and the personality of their wait-staff. These factors affect where people choose to dine.

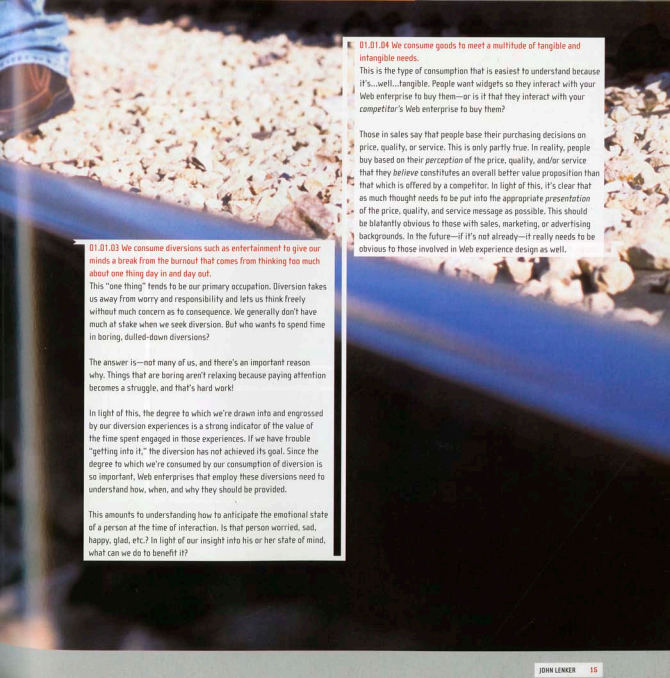
Those who design Web experiences must understand that considerations such as these are equally important on the Web. Understanding **how people most enjoy their consumption** ["Would you like that medium or rare?"] **is an important key in designing effective Web experiences** ["Well done, actually; but frankly, I'd rather be waited on by someone who doesn't smell funny."].

01.01.02 We consume information to build knowledge and attain deeper understanding.

How does this process happen? If we don't understand how people learn, how can we have a positive impact on the quality of the information that we're publishing online? How will we know how to best combine words, photos, illustrations, audio, video, simulation, animation, and/or interactivity to best get an idea across? Some feel that these considerations are only relevant to online learning and training resources. This is certainly not the case. Almost *everything* we consume on the Web has a learning curve associated with it whereby we gather, reinforce, or restructure our knowledge in order to make decisions related to our further consumption. This can happen before, during, or after the consumption itself.

- > We learn about the car *before* we buy it.
- > We learn *how* to be good at the game *while* playing it.
- > We realize the value of a product or service *after* we've tested it.

Conveying ideas and making them memorable to people through an online resource is an art. There's a lot to take into account in order to do a good job. Not only are there different types of learning, but there are different stages of learning. There are also many principles of human perception, motivation, and cognition to consider as well. These topics will be covered in detail in Chapters Two through Six.



01.01.03 We consume diversions such as entertainment to give our minds a break from the burnout that comes from thinking too much about one thing day in and day out.

This “one thing” tends to be our primary occupation. Diversion takes us away from worry and responsibility and lets us think freely without much concern as to consequence. We generally don’t have much at stake when we seek diversion. But who wants to spend time in boring, dulled-down diversions?

The answer is—not many of us, and there’s an important reason why. Things that are boring aren’t relaxing because paying attention becomes a struggle, and that’s hard work!

In light of this, the degree to which we’re drawn into and engrossed by our diversion experiences is a strong indicator of the value of the time spent engaged in those experiences. If we have trouble “getting into it,” the diversion has not achieved its goal. Since the degree to which we’re consumed by our consumption of diversion is so important, Web enterprises that employ these diversions need to understand how, when, and why they should be provided.

This amounts to understanding how to anticipate the emotional state of a person at the time of interaction. Is that person worried, sad, happy, glad, etc.? In light of our insight into his or her state of mind, what can we do to benefit it?

01.01.04 We consume goods to meet a multitude of tangible and intangible needs.

This is the type of consumption that is easiest to understand because it’s...well...tangible. People want widgets so they interact with your Web enterprise to buy them—or is it that they interact with your competitor’s Web enterprise to buy them?

Those in sales say that people base their purchasing decisions on price, quality, or service. This is only partly true. In reality, people buy based on their *perception* of the price, quality, and/or service that they *believe* constitutes an overall better value proposition than that which is offered by a competitor. In light of this, it’s clear that as much thought needs to be put into the appropriate *presentation* of the price, quality, and service message as possible. This should be blatantly obvious to those with sales, marketing, or advertising backgrounds. In the future—if it’s not already—it really needs to be obvious to those involved in Web experience design as well.

CASE STUDY 1A

Express Fashion

Address: <http://www.expressfashion.com>

Client: The Limited, Inc.—Express

Experience Designers: Ten/Resource

Expressfashion.com is not a Web “site;” it is a Web Experience.

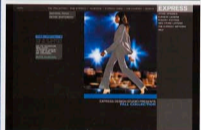
Expressfashion.com, as part of The Limited, Inc. retail clothing store group, is the Web presence for Express stores. The marketing focus behind Express is geared to the modern woman—a brand loyalist who is fashion-forward and techno-savvy. For the redevelopment of their design, the goal was to allow customers to LIVE the high-energy, fashion-forward brand, not just shop it. According to their outstanding and “high-energy” design team:

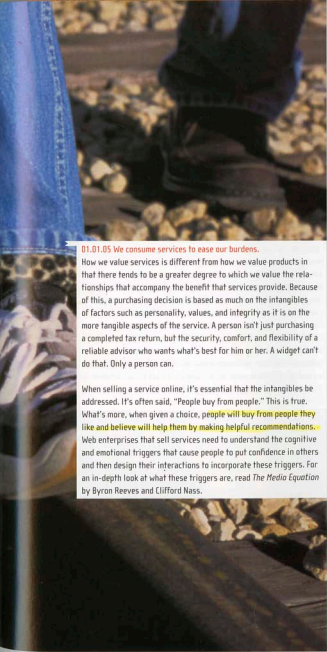
“The design of the site is critical in connecting the total brand picture. It captures the electricity of the brand through the visuals, the motion, and the music, and then it offers interactive tools that create a virile energy that gets people spreading the word and talking about fashion and EXPRESS. The fact that people have included Expressfashion.com as a must see site on their own personal web pages seems to say it all.”

The creative team at Ten/Resource worked hard to develop creative, interactive ways for customers to become part of the Express experience. Through consumer research, they found that increased interaction and engagement with a Web enterprise will create a deeper emotional connection to a brand. The team designed Expressfashion.com to capture the emotion of the Express brand online through the use of motion, music, and interactivity. Features include the Groove Music Box, offering six music samples from the retail store, customized menu configuration, and QuickTime runway videos.

Read our interview with Ten/Resource online at:

<http://www.trainofthoughts.com>





01.01.05 We consume services to ease our burdens.

How we value services is different from how we value products in that there tends to be a greater degree to which we value the relationships that accompany the benefit that services provide. Because of this, a purchasing decision is based as much on the intangibles of factors such as personality, values, and integrity as it is on the more tangible aspects of the service. A person isn't just purchasing a completed tax return, but the security, comfort, and flexibility of a reliable advisor who wants what's best for him or her. A widget can't do that. Only a person can.

When selling a service online, it's essential that the intangibles be addressed. It's often said, "People buy from people." This is true. What's more, when given a choice, **people will buy from people they like and believe will help them by making helpful recommendations.** Web enterprises that sell services need to understand the cognitive and emotional triggers that cause people to put confidence in others and then design their interactions to incorporate these triggers. For an in-depth look at what these triggers are, read *The Media Equation* by Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass.



01.02 People Go Online for Social Reasons

It was once said, "We read to know that we're not alone." I believe that this is the primary social motivation that draws people online. We want to know that we're not alone. Before the Internet, an individual was but an indistinguishable drop in the sea of humanity. It was rare that a sole individual would ever be noticed, let alone have a voice that could be heard across the continents. What's more, social mores have caused many people to feel socially stifled. Most people have had very few opportunities to express their most real and uninhibited thoughts, perspectives, and feelings within their existing social network because of fear of misunderstanding or outright rejection. Because of the Internet, this is not the case today.

01.02.01 We go online to fulfill the social desire to find people, places, and things with which we can identify.

The reason is that we as people have a strong internal need to reinforce our sense of self. We feel drawn to things that we can identify with because it makes us feel like we're okay and that somehow we fit into the bigger picture. In their book *The Media Equation*, Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass state:

"People like to interact with personalities that resemble their own. In psychology, this is known as the 'law of similarity-attraction.' Despite the folk wisdom that opposites attract, there is strong empirical support for attraction based on similarity."

In his book *A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication*, Richard Harris sheds further light:

"The emotional involvement that we have [interacting with media] depends in part on **how much we identify with the character**. [I.e., mentally compare ourselves to and imagine ourselves to be the lead character]. It is easier to identify with characters with whom we have more in common.

"When we have the ability to understand and feel what another feels, we experience empathy. Empathy may be seen as emotional identification, and it is a **very important factor in the enjoyment of [our consumption of] media.**"

The desire we have to identify with others has *intellectual, ideological, and emotional dimensions*.

01.02.02 We seek intellectual identification in a quest to answer these questions: "Is there anyone out there who thinks the way I do? Am I intellectually alone?"

The intellect has to do with our rational mind, our self-directed thinking. This is the part of our mind that seeks to define reality. It wants to know what the facts are by reasoning with the evidence. Part of how we develop our intellect is by absorbing the ideas of others and by reflecting upon and restructuring what we understand those ideas to be. By doing this we channel the original thinking of others through our own experiential filters and reformulate our perception of their thoughts into our own knowledge structures. This process happens throughout our lives as we observe our parents, our friends, our teachers, and even the media.

Our exposure to the input of others is what stimulates our thinking the most. Until the Internet came along, however, we were very restricted in terms of the times, places, and ways that we were able to expose ourselves to the thinking of people outside our everyday circles. Even though books and other printed literature have always been available to us in modern times, discovering material that has deep personal significance was often a lengthy and frustrating process. Most of us often didn't have a clue as to what material to look for in pursuit of expanding our intellectual identity or where to look for it, if in fact we had an inkling as to what our undiscovered interests were. In many instances, our success with finding these influences has been the result of chance. Consequently, society has by and large taken the role of choosing when and how our intellectual frameworks were to be cultivated by default:

- > We went to school at a certain time and learned what the school board decided we should learn.
- > We watched the programming on TV that the networks decided we should watch and when they decided we should watch it.
- > We learned the values that our parents wanted us to believe.

Although we chose some of our own friends and would sometimes have "deep" conversations, those discussions were limited to the combined knowledge of people who were from similar circles and who had similar experiences. This is not the case today.

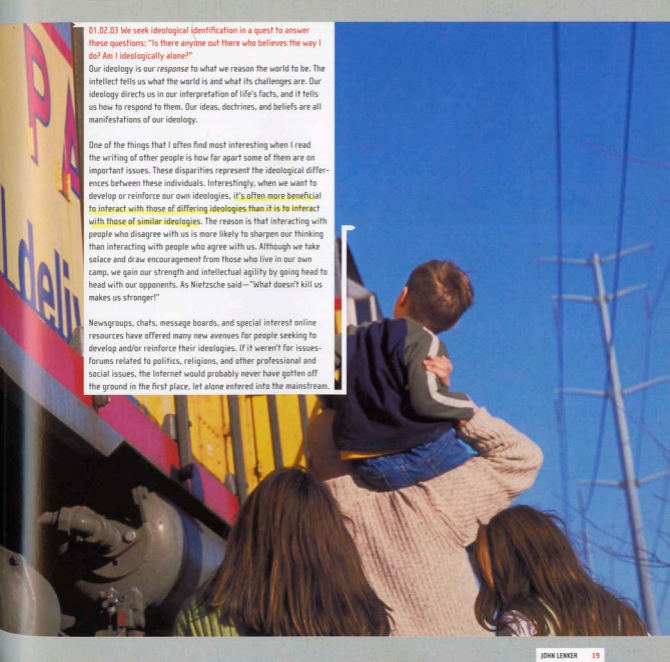
The Web has given people the opportunity to dig deep into their thoughts and interests at any time, any place, and in an almost limitless fashion—and this within the safe confines of anonymity, which the Web affords them. Even a very young person—and this most certainly can be a danger—can take the initiative to learn about advanced topics in a self-directed and self-paced manner. Those people who learn to take advantage of these unlimited opportunities gain exposure to some of the greatest thinking on any subject.

01.02.03 We seek ideological identification in a quest to answer these questions: "Is there anyone out there who believes the way I do? Am I ideologically alone?"

Our ideology is our response to what we reason the world to be. The intellect tells us what the world is and what its challenges are. Our ideology directs us in our interpretation of life's facts, and it tells us how to respond to them. Our ideas, doctrines, and beliefs are all manifestations of our ideology.

One of the things that I often find most interesting when I read the writing of other people is how far apart some of them are on important issues. These disparities represent the ideological differences between these individuals. Interestingly, when we want to develop or reinforce our own ideologies, it's often more beneficial to interact with those of differing ideologies than it is to interact with those of similar ideologies. The reason is that interacting with people who disagree with us is more likely to sharpen our thinking than interacting with people who agree with us. Although we take solace and draw encouragement from those who live in our own camp, we gain our strength and intellectual agility by going head to head with our opponents. As Nietzsche said—"What doesn't kill us makes us stronger!"

News groups, chats, message boards, and special interest online resources have offered many new avenues for people seeking to develop and/or reinforce their ideologies. If it weren't for issues-forums related to politics, religions, and other professional and social issues, the Internet would probably never have gotten off the ground in the first place, let alone entered into the mainstream.





01.02.04 We seek emotional identification in a quest to answer these questions: "Is there anyone out there who feels the way I do? Am I emotionally alone?"

Emotion is our spontaneous, involuntary combination of physiological and cognitive responses that are automatically activated when we're confronted with a stimulus. When we're seeking to emotionally identify with others, what we're seeking is the people "out there" who are similarly affected by what they think about or believe in.

When Princess Diana died on August 31, 1997, thousands of people flocked online to chat about and deal with their emotions related to her death. Many people had developed a parasocial relationship with her and felt as if they had lost a member of their own family. The Web provided an outlet for emotions that, at least in non-Western European cultures, would not have been fully received or understood.

The Internet offered an alternative way for people to seek out others with whom they could emotionally identify and with whom they could go through the grieving process in ways that circumvented the disinterested social mores of non-Western European cultures. In this sense, the Internet was offering a social outlet and a release that otherwise would not have been possible for these individuals. A Web enterprise that succeeds in helping its patrons relate to itself and to each other on an emotional level in this way goes a long way toward winning their loyalty.

01.02.05 We seek social interaction and acceptance in a quest to answer this question: "How will the world embrace my intellectual, ideological, and emotional uniqueness?"

We all seek acceptance. Acceptance occurs as a result of being embraced by those with whom we identify. People don't generally care if someone outside their group doesn't care for them, but if the people inside their group don't care for them, this becomes a really big problem. This is further complicated by a dynamic known as group-think.

Group-think is the process by which a group of people come to a common equilibrium that tends to represent a moderate overall averaging of opinions among its members. The problem is that the outliers of the group—those who don't fit within the norm—can often feel unable to express their true feelings for fear of social rejection and isolation. Not surprisingly, we all have a sense of being on the outside of the norm in some area of our lives. These are the areas that we are most likely to repress our feelings in. The need to release these feelings is something that applies to everybody.

One of the motivations that people have in going online is to find opportunities where they can identify with others while at the same time maintain their own sense of identity. Specifically, because of the inherent anonymity of the Internet, people are willing to take more risks in terms of expressing their true inner feelings within the membership of an online community. The cost of social faux pas seems low enough to the average person that they're willing to accept social failure more often than in "real life." What's often gained in the online community is a sense of social interaction and acceptance that's unmatched in unmediated social equivalents.



01.03 People Go Online for Emotional Reasons

When a person's mind opens to an experience, it's like a floodgate opens—a river of meaning begins to flow into the mind. This meaning appeals not only to our cognitive sensibilities (how we think about things) but also to our emotional sensibilities (how we feel about things). In *A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication*, Dr. Richard Harris describes emotion:

"There are two components of emotion, the physiological, and the cognitive. When we are aroused, there are certain changes in our bodies, such as increased heart rate, sweating, and changes in electrodermal [skin] measures. We also think about our feelings and attribute causes and interpretations to them. The emotions we feel are a product of both our bodily state and our cognitive appraisal of that state."

