

Socialcam's so sleazy, it's insightful

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By now you have heard of it, the scourge of civilization, the embarrassment of humanity, the evidence that America is going to hell on a handheld. Socialcam, the sharing app on Facebook that allows your friends to see what user-generated videos you've been watching, zoomed from fewer than 10 million active users in April to more than 40 million active users in May — though, as Web critics have pointed out, at least some of this rise can be attributed to vaguely sketchy practices and terribly trashy marketing techniques.

I rather like it.

Oh, it's unsettling, sure. Currently, Socialcam's "trending" videos read like a bunch of crossovers between the "American Pie" franchise and "Jackass." Top videos include titles like: "Hidden Camera: Girlfriend Swap," "#Drink #Drank #Drunk," "Snake Eats Cow in Southwest Sulawesi," and "BAPTISM GONE WRONG!!!!!!!"

Some of the lewdly labeled snippets aren't what they seem: "What My Husband Does With My Phone While I'm Showering" is actually 45 seconds of a cuddly lunk exuberantly jiggling around a bedroom, fully clothed. But some of them are exactly what they seem, which has led tech columnists to publish detailed instructions on how subscribers can change their privacy settings and stop embarrassing themselves already. (Links to Socialcam videos show up on the Facebook timelines of the subscribers, but in order to watch the whole video, curious friends must join the free service themselves.)

"Is Socialcam a Facebook virus?" a user recently asked on Q&A site Quora. "People in my timeline are posting that they are watching videos . . . that I just *know* they are not watching." Oh, but they are, Virginia. They are watching them all.

Apps that automatically broadcast reading and viewing habits are known as "frictionless." Obviously, though, they're not. The friction occurs when activities that were designed to be solitary are suddenly social, and when we are forced to explain the difference between our public and private selves. Facebook might be a bastion of oversharing, but traditionally it's been selective oversharing: We status-update that we enjoyed last night's "Mad Men," but neglect to mention the "Sister Wives" marathon we watched afterward. I wouldn't mind using Socialcam to tell my friends I'm perusing old TED lectures on YouTube, but that's never what I'm doing. (I'm watching videos where dogs knock over trash cans and then look embarrassed.)

"Frictionless" sharing represents the difference between controlled sharing and dashboard diarrhea. Which, I'd argue, could be good.

A few weeks ago, Megan Garber, a tech writer for the Atlantic, suggested that people displaying their blatant ignorance on Twitter was a positive thing: It reinforced the value in admitting when you do not know something.

What I like about Socialcam is its blatantness. Socialcam postings are often so garishly sleazy, so obviously tawdry that they become cheeky embraces of the lowbrow. When a friend shares that she is watching "Phat Booty White Girl," it stands out on my timeline. I notice it. What "Phat Booty White Girl" effectively says is, "I will not be ignored. I am the scum of the Internet — what you watch, read, listen to and look at when you think no one else is watching. But now everyone is watching. So stop pretending to be anything you're not."

Socialcam isn't awful because it makes us all look bad; it's defensible because it makes us appear as we actually are.

Congratulations, Internet. It took something over-the-top, but you finally became self-aware.

Fonte: The Washington Post, Washington, 5 June 2012, International.