The Denial of Death in the Digital Age:
Can Facebook Help Us Manage Death- Related Terror?

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ABSTRACT In *The Denial of Death* (1973), Ernest Becker proposed that one of the most problematic features of the human condition is our awareness of our own mortality. He further suggested that all culture and society is an elaborate fiction of significance, created by humans to imbue our lives with structure and meaning. In death we are survived by artifacts of our valuable adherence to our culture; the words, the work, the wealth and the family that constitute our legacy afford us a sense of symbolic immortality. Today, Becker's thoughts underlie investigation into Terror Management Theory (TMT), which sees our awareness of our own mortality as the primary motivation behind human behaviour.

The present paper explores the potential for Facebook, a social networking service with more than 800 million members to date, to imbue our experience of reality with meaning, to afford us a sense of self-worth, and to offer the hope of symbolic immortality.

A theoretical analysis and synthesis of research and theory into both TMT and Facebook is presented. Specifically, research into Facebook since 2008 is interpreted in relation to two major components of TMT: the self and the cultural worldview. Based on this research, it is suggested that Facebook allows users to extend themselves symbolically through their online presence. The capacity of Facebook use to bolster self-esteem is advanced as evidence for the hope of symbolic immortality possibly offered by this extension of the symbolic self online.

It is further suggested that, as well as having the capacity to accurately represent and reinforce our cultural worldviews, Facebook can become a constituent of and influence on our cultural worldviews, enhancing its capacity to afford users a feeling of self-worth and the hope of symbolic immortality.

Finally, it is argued that Facebook is just the most recent example in a long line of technologies progressing towards the ultimate goal of attaining human immortality.

Directions for future research into the terror management capacity of Facebook are outlined.