

User Psychology & Social Media

A View from Social Interaction Design

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- “These two tendencies, that of the speaker to scale down his expressions and that of the listeners to scale up their interests, each in the light of the other’s capacities and demands, form the bridge that people build to one another, allowing them to meet for a moment of talk in a communion of reciprocally sustained involvement. It is this spark, not the more obvious kinds of love, that lights up the world.” Erving Goffman, Interaction Ritual



Why user *psychology*?

- Social media are user-centric and facilitate social practices
- It is not what the social media site or platform does, but what the user sees, feels, thinks, and anticipates, that matters most
- User experience is effectively the social media company's brand, identity, product, and service
- A social media site's ability to captivate, keep, and sustain user attention, and so serve its business needs, hangs on the user's own sense of his or her participation



I. Social media realities



Users are people

- People perceive
- People think
- People feel
- People act
- People react
- People expect and antic
- People communicate
- People relate
- People desire
- People acknowledge



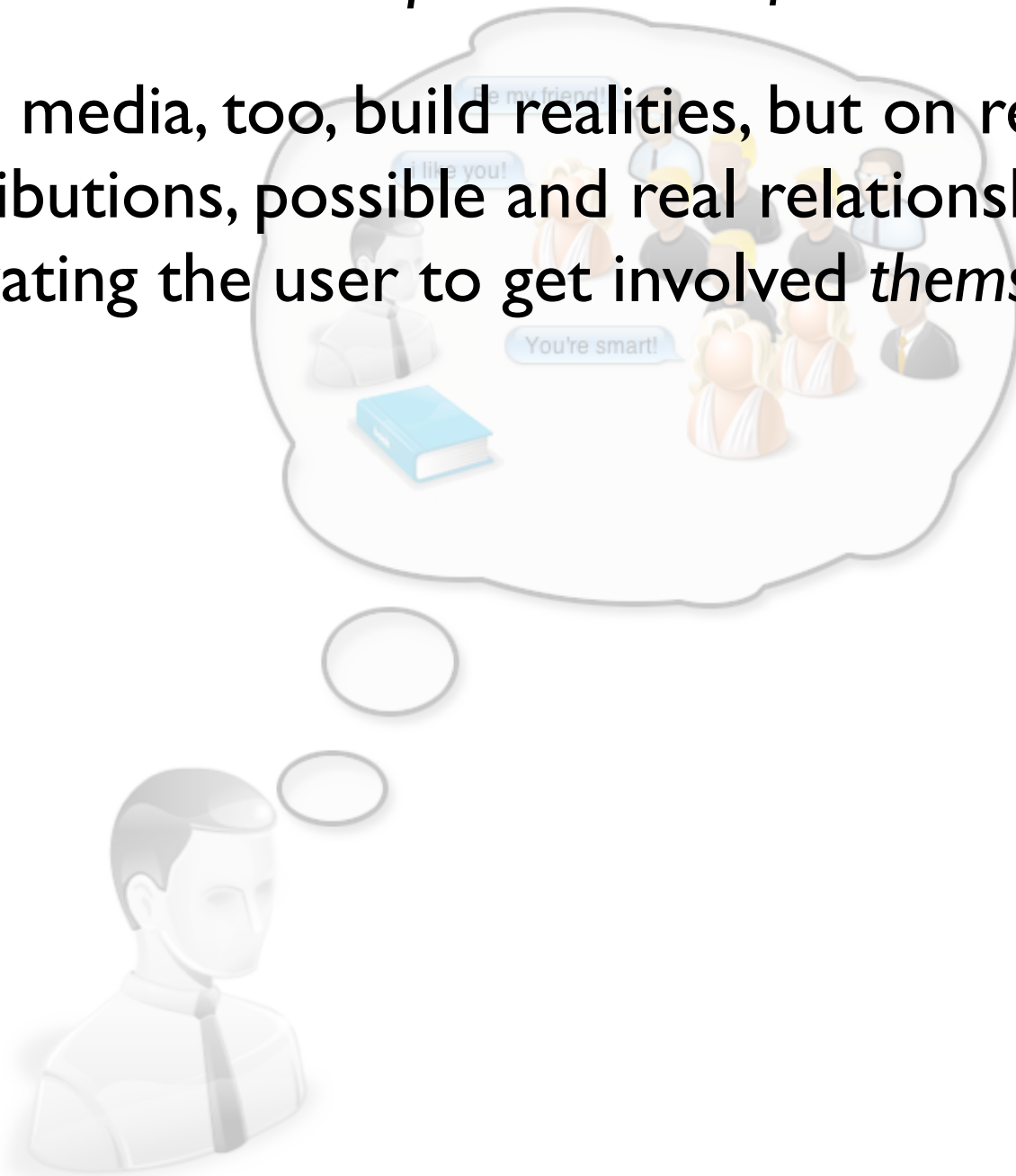
Social media realities

- *Non - interactive media do not involve the user in their production*
- Movies “suspend disbelief” and create a reality through sense-perceptions, out of moving pictures and sound (immersion, action, surprise, suspense, replacing thought with immediacy)
- Books captivate the reader’s imagination and allow him or her to build a reality through mental experience (fantasy, projection, logic, reasons and abstractions, distance)
- Music holds the listener’s attention in time, unfolding in the foreground or background, and has special impact when it is recognizable and familiar (recognition, memory, and recollection, “being there again”)



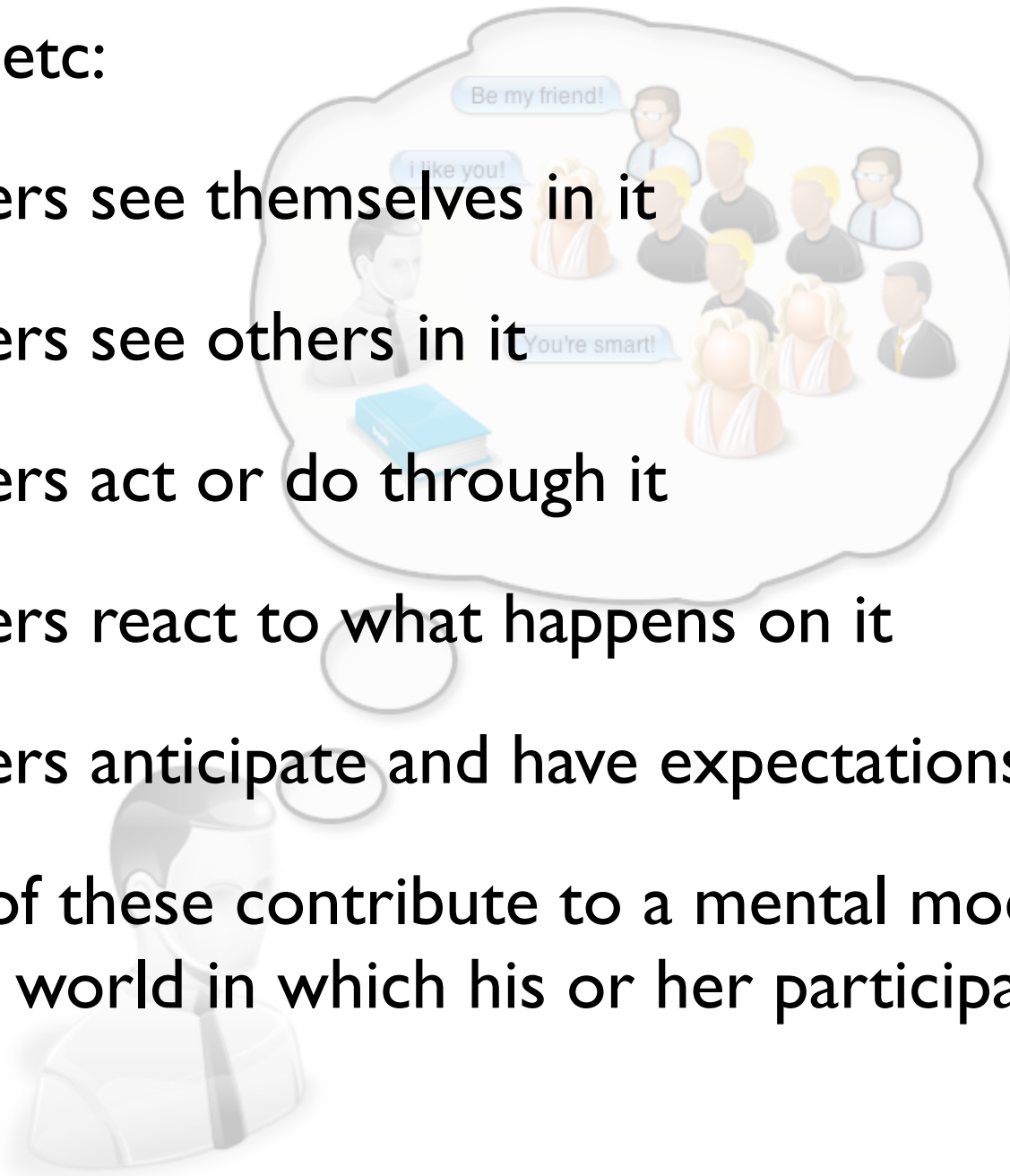
Social media realities

- *Social media are the productions of their users*
- Social media, too, build realities, but on real people, real contributions, possible and real relationships, and by motivating the user to get involved *themselves*



Social media realities

- Users have a mental model of what “it” is, who uses it, what it does, etc:
- users see themselves in it
- users see others in it
- users act or do through it
- users react to what happens on it
- users anticipate and have expectations for it
- ...All of these contribute to a mental model the user has of an social world in which his or her participation is *real*



Production of social objects



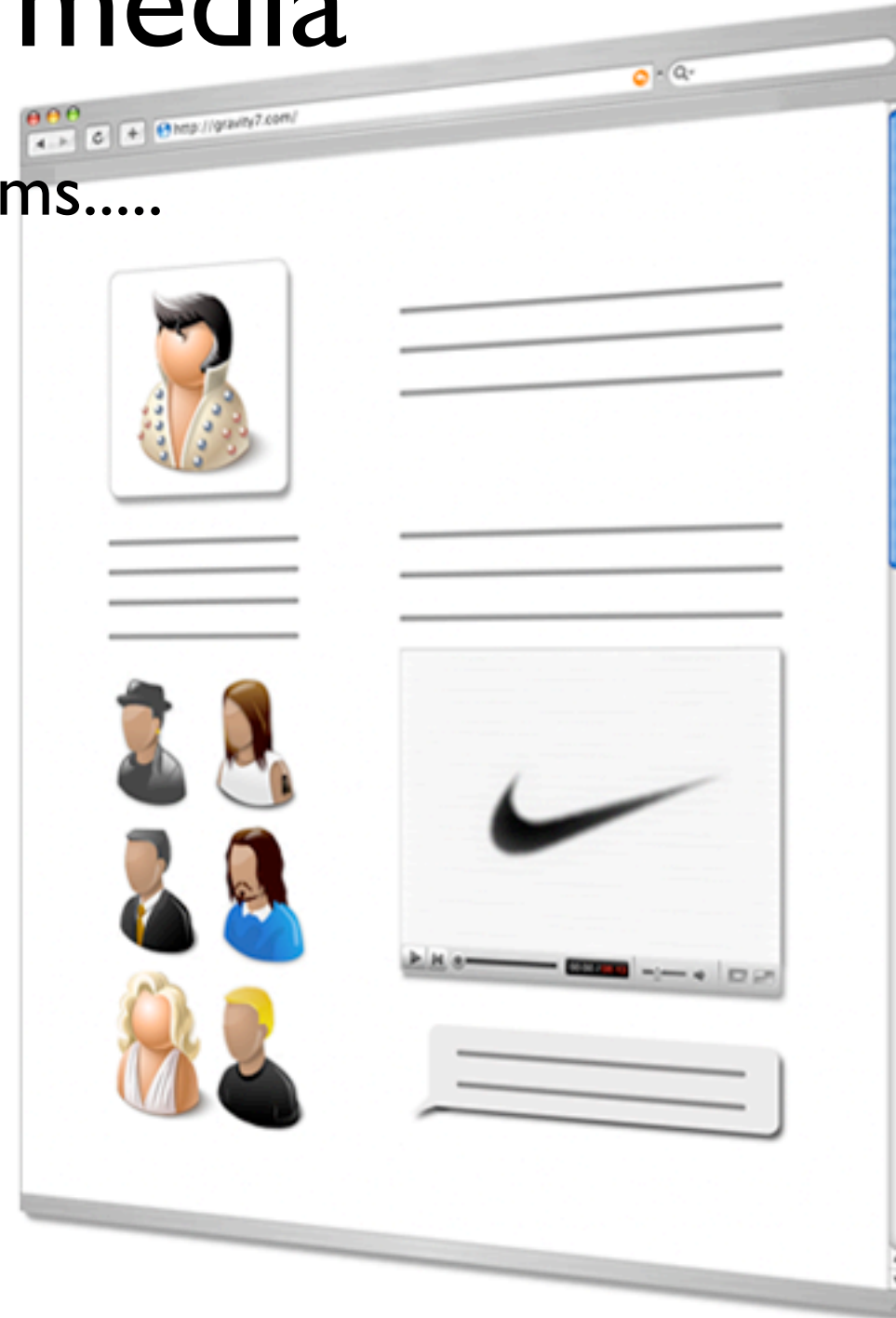
Successful social media

- From common media forms.....



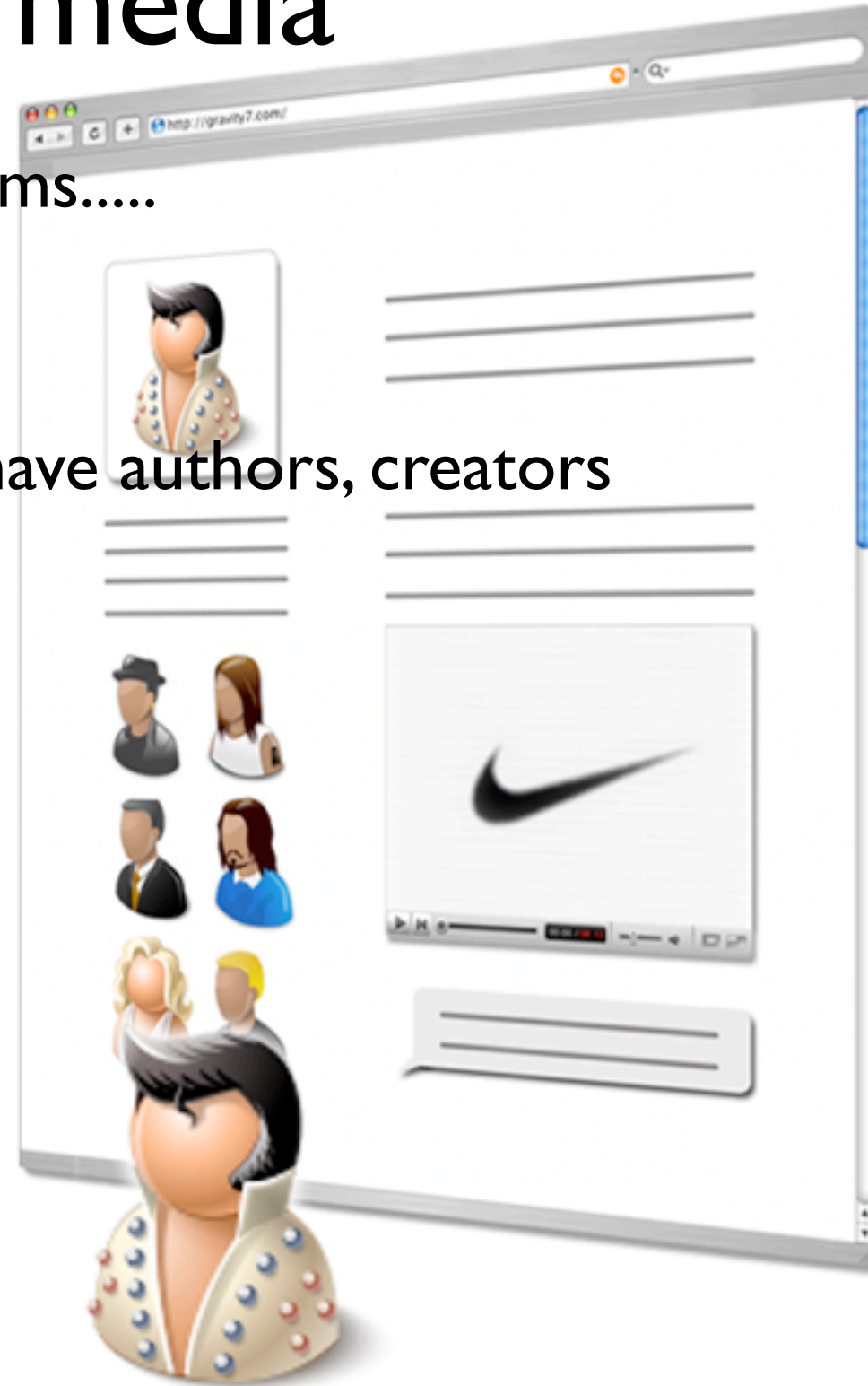
Successful social media

- From common media forms.....
- Create social objects...



Successful social media

- From common media forms.....
- Create social objects...
- Which are content that have authors, creators



Successful social media

- Leverage common media narratives and forms, to make content available to users for their own references and purposes
- These forms are social: they communicate and can be used to communicate, represent, identify, signify and so on
- Users bring media to life, media bring users to life
- Social media construct realities their users help to produce
- Users can believe in the reality of these social objects, and their significance to other users
- and can become interested in the objects *or* in their owners and creators



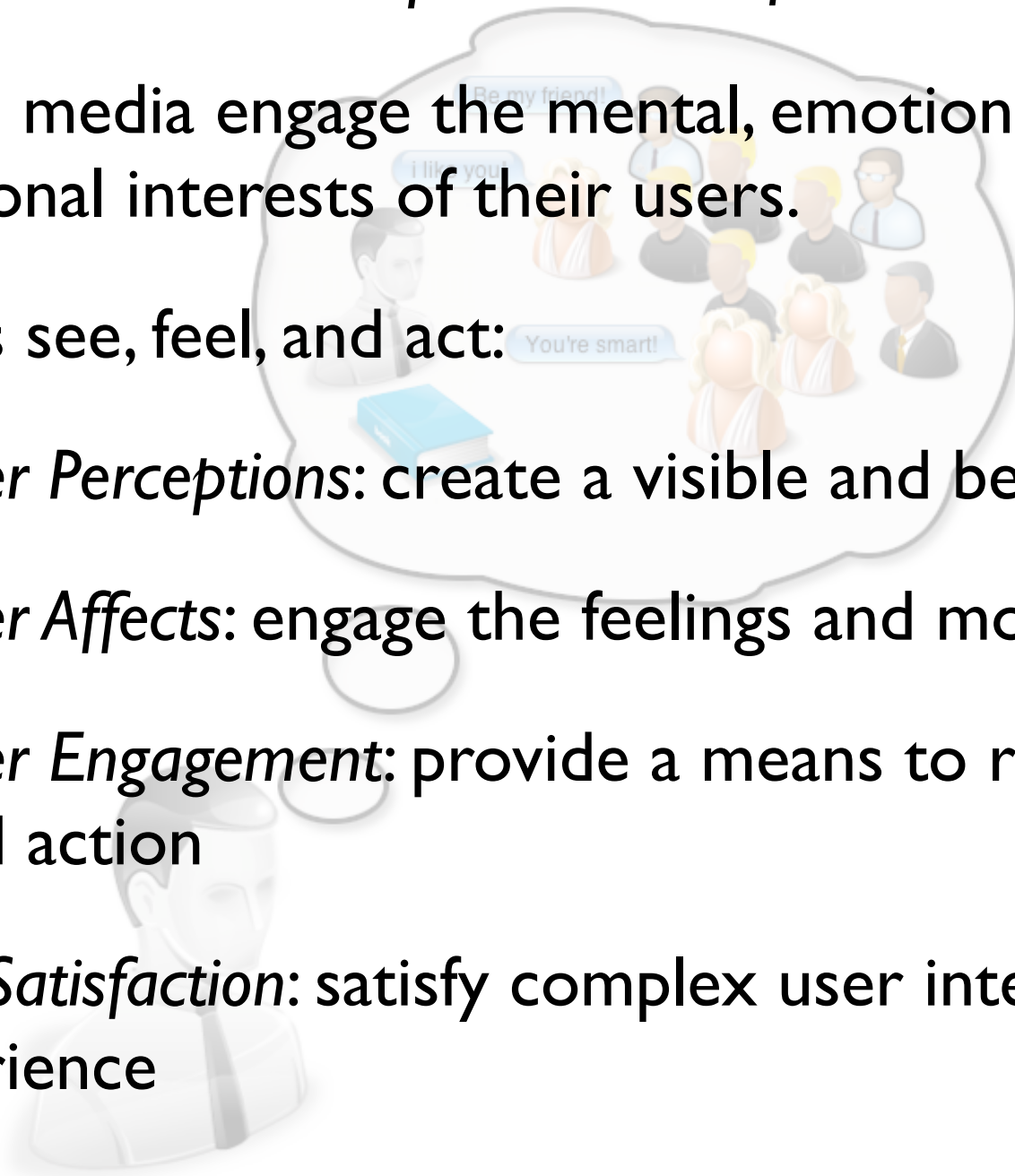
Successful social media

- Because social media depend on users to provide content as a byproduct of acting, doing, talking, sharing, asking, answering, and navigating, how they structure the user experience = user engagement
- Engaged users will participate, and their participation creates value: content, communication, profiles, connections, preferences and tastes, and so on
- Engaged users participate because they want to, are compelled to, interested to, in short, motivated to participate
- Users will put into a site, and expect from it, according to how it structures social interactions, objects, information: its World



Social media experiences

- *Social media are the productions of their users*
- Social media engage the mental, emotional, psychological, and relational interests of their users.
- Users see, feel, and act:
 - *User Perceptions*: create a visible and believable world
 - *User Affects*: engage the feelings and motivations of users
 - *User Engagement*: provide a means to relate feelings to acts and action
- *User Satisfaction*: satisfy complex user interests through social experience

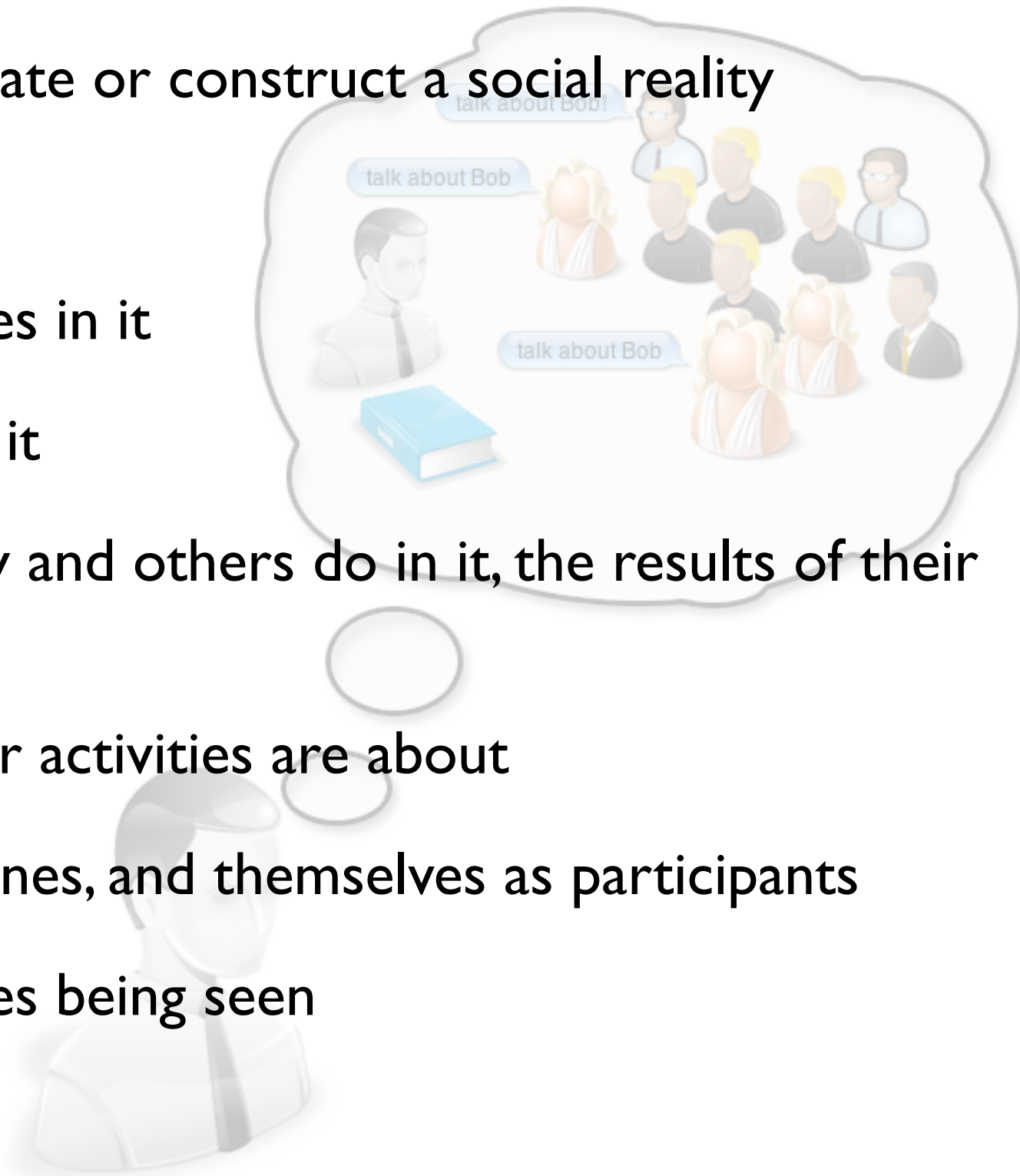


User Perceptions



User Perceptions

- Social media create or construct a social reality
- Users:
 - see themselves in it
 - see others in it
 - see what they and others do in it, the results of their actions
 - see what their activities are about
 - see social scenes, and themselves as participants
 - see themselves being seen



User Affects

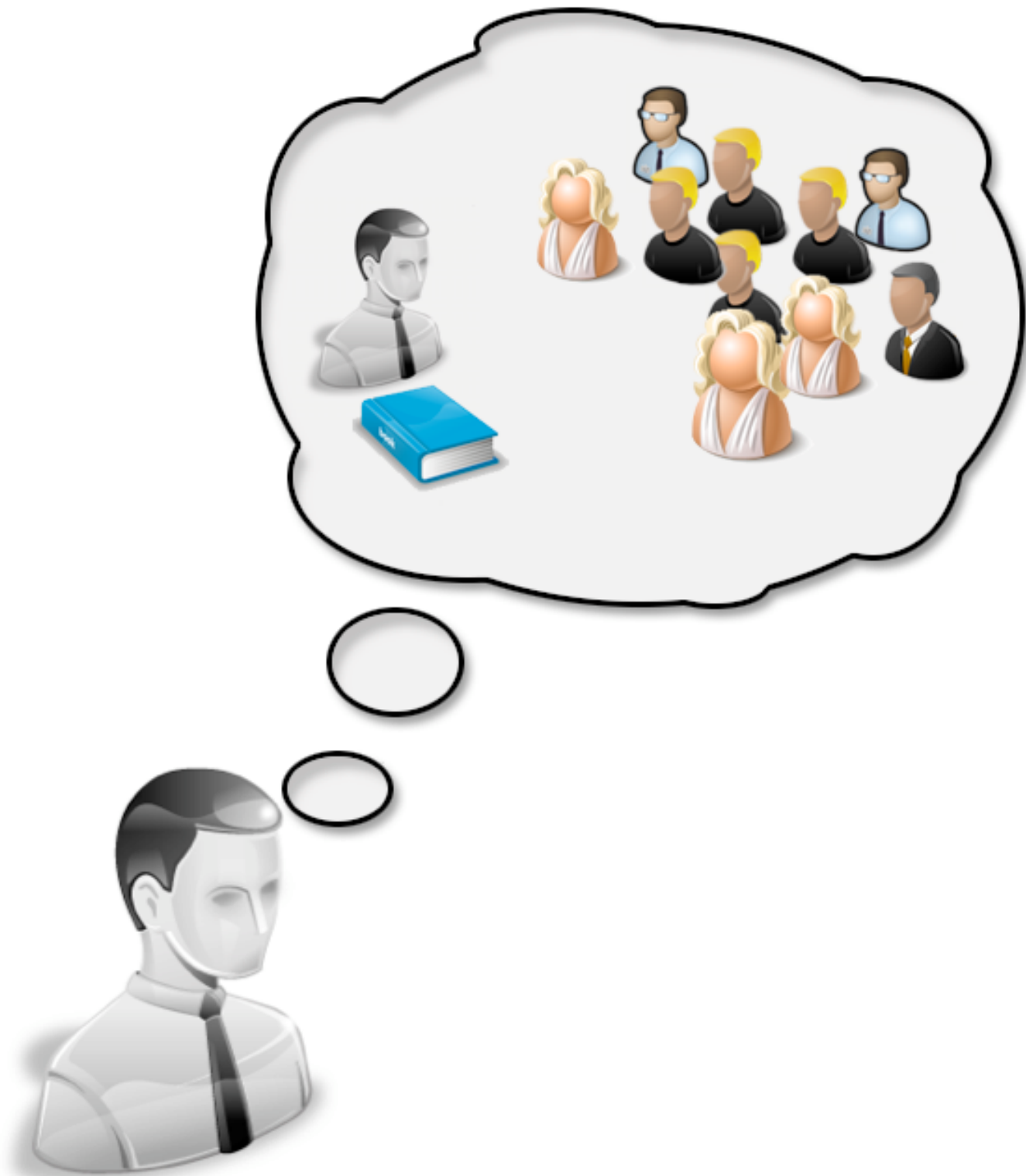


User Affects

- Users have affects, or feelings, moods, dispositions, attitudes, which are experienced “alone.” Because we are social beings, we experience affects even when interactions are mediated.
- Users experience affects:
 - such as inclinations, tendencies, interests, desires
 - curiosities, surprise, excitement, humor, comedy
 - trepidation, anxiety, hesitation, doubt
 - concern, caring, touch, recognition



User Engagement



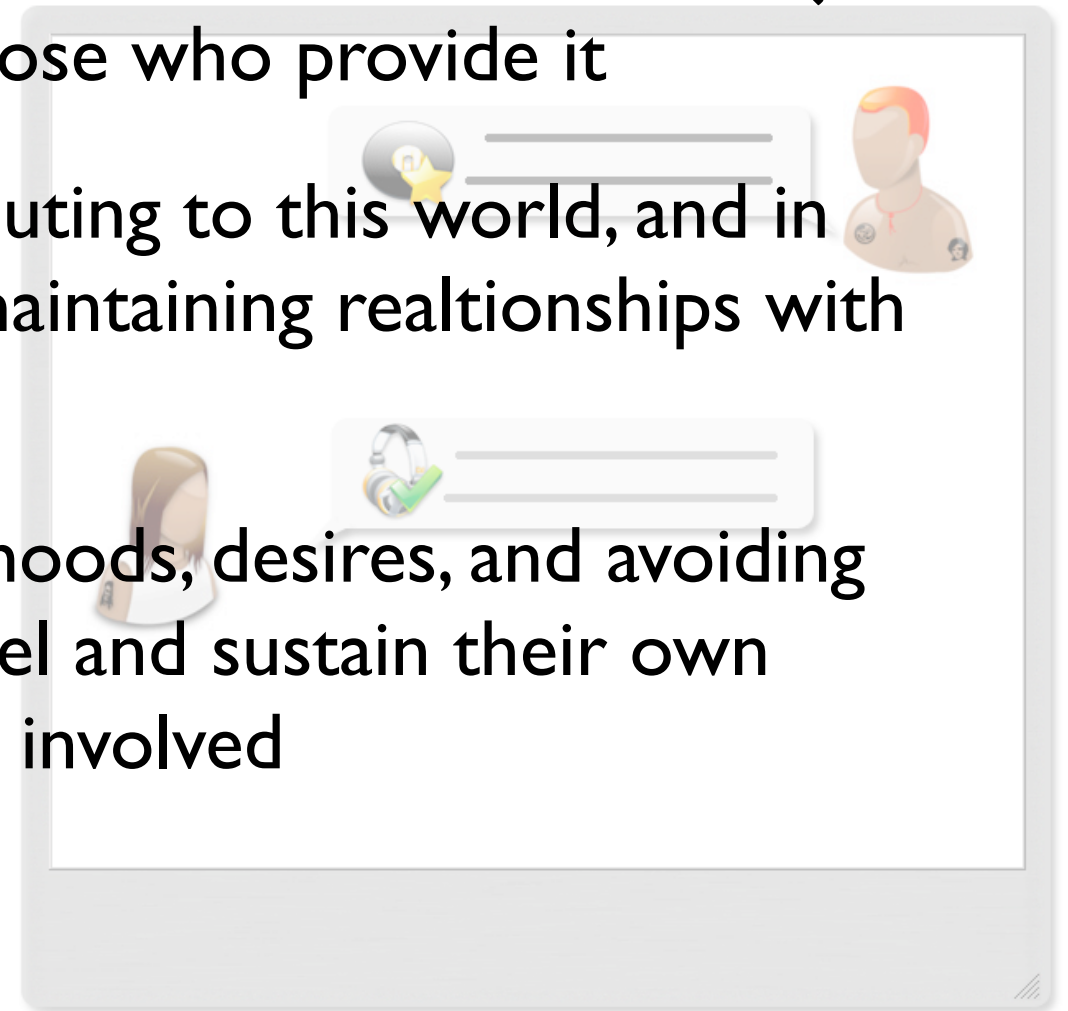
User Engagement

- Users cannot be made to participate or engage
- They must become self-engaged, must see in the social media what engages them, and believe in it
- Social structure in social media must appeal to the variety of user interests that users have for what they do there



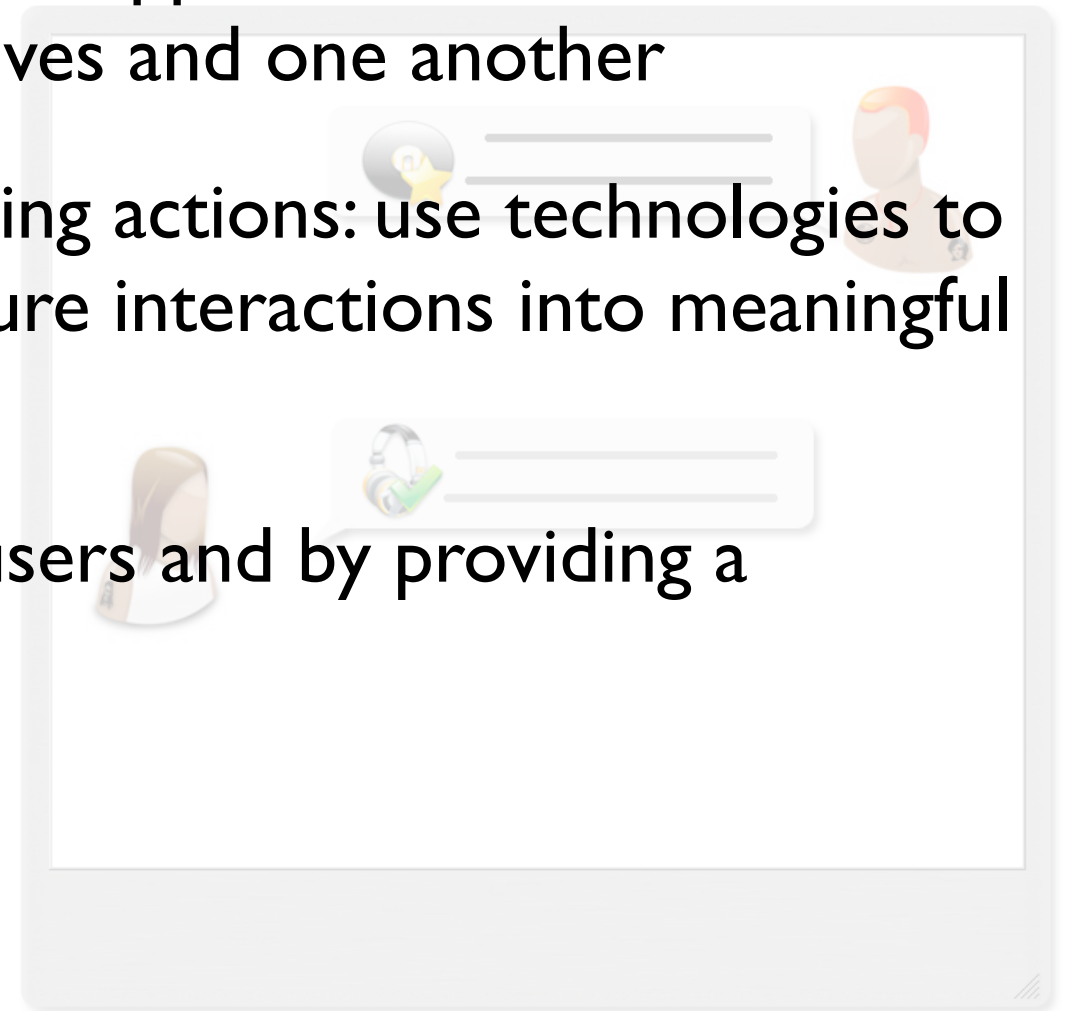
Producing social realities

- Social media socialize the web
 - by showing a world of information, content, value, objects, and signs that is made by those who provide it
 - by engaging users in contributing to this world, and in exploring, developing, and maintaining relationships with other users
 - by capturing users' affects moods, desires, and avoiding fears and anxieties to compel and sustain their own interests in being active and involved



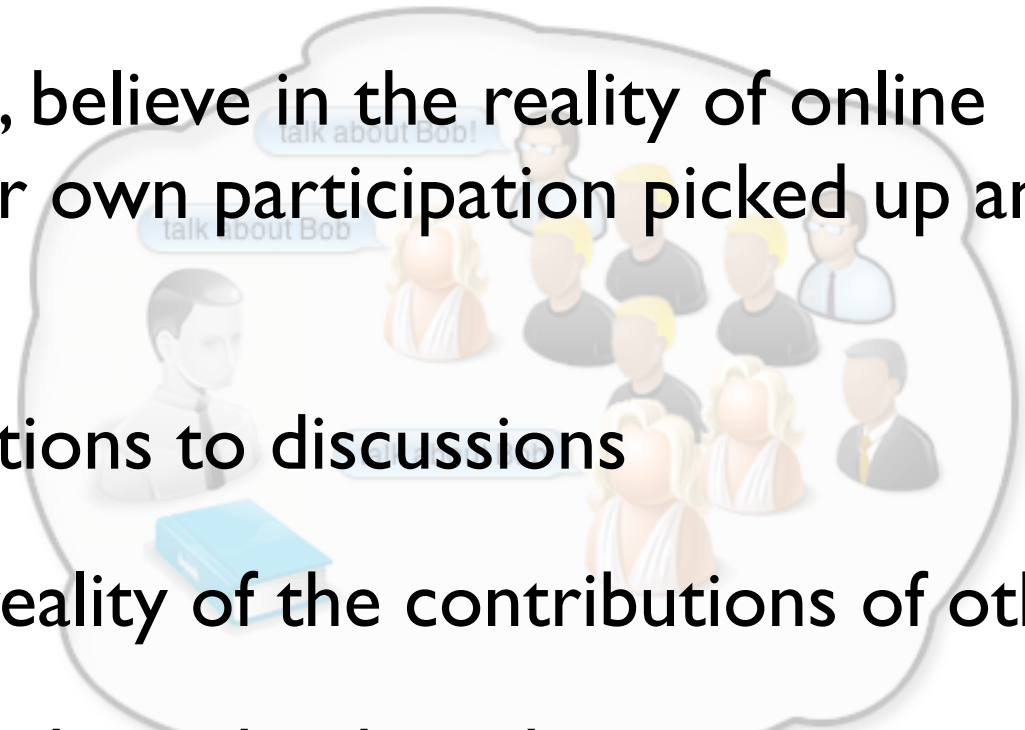
Producing social realities

- Social media socialize
 - user perceptions and produce appearances: make other users look good, to themselves and one another
 - user engagement by facilitating actions: use technologies to capture user actions, structure interactions into meaningful activities
 - user affects: by compelling users and by providing a dynamic and social world



Socializing User Perceptions

- Users must see the world, believe in the reality of online social scenes, and see their own participation picked up and reflected
- see their own contributions to discussions
- see and believe in the reality of the contributions of others
- see that there is follow-through when they participate
- see who has contributed and see that others find it interesting
- see contributions and participation as belonging to social scenes, in which they themselves participate
- see themselves being seen by others, shown on pages as views, links, comments, and other references



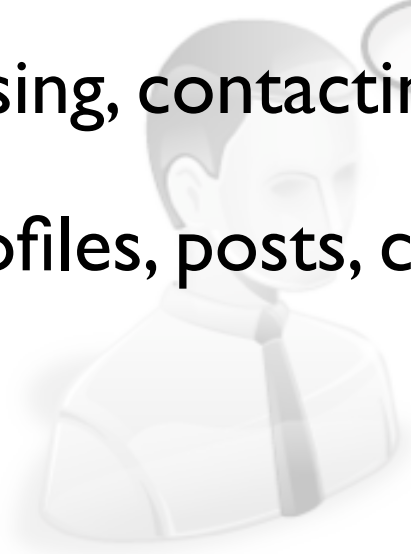
Affects are socialized

- The affects that engage, or become engaged often through social media are socialized: affects having to do with self-image, face, relations, recognition, pride, shame, and so on. *These are the aspects of user experience our social media satisfy or disappoint*
- These affects, because they are experienced even through a technology, motivate users to:
 - perceive, feel, act
 - reason causes and effects
 - assign responsibilities
 - expect and anticipate consequences
 - project into, wish for, anticipate the future



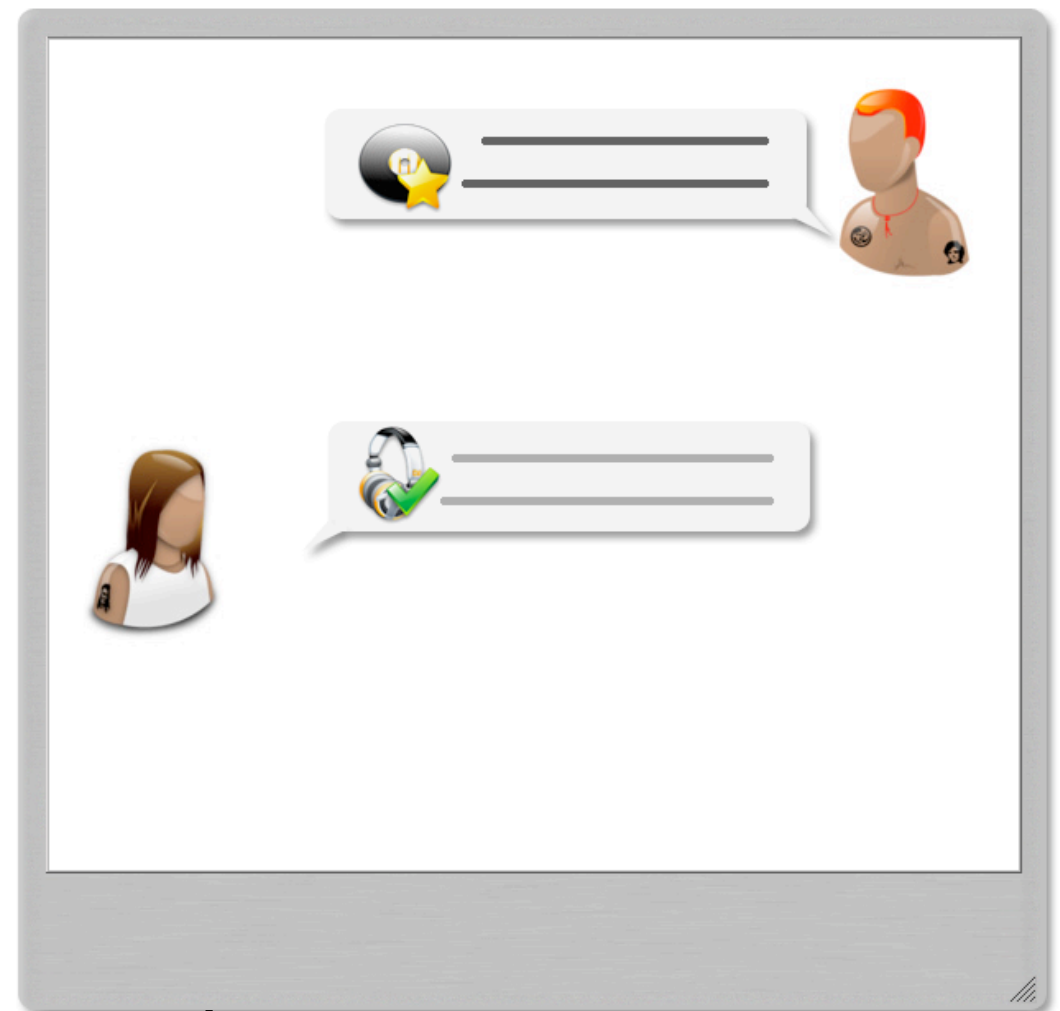
Socializing User Engagement

- Users cannot be made to participate or engage
- They must become self-engaged, must see in the social media what engages them
- Social structure in social media must appeal to the variety of user interests that users have for what they do there:
 - activities: doing, contributing, interacting
 - information: finding, connecting, learning, exploring
 - people: browsing, contacting, talking, sharing, inviting
 - appearing: profiles, posts, comments, being seen



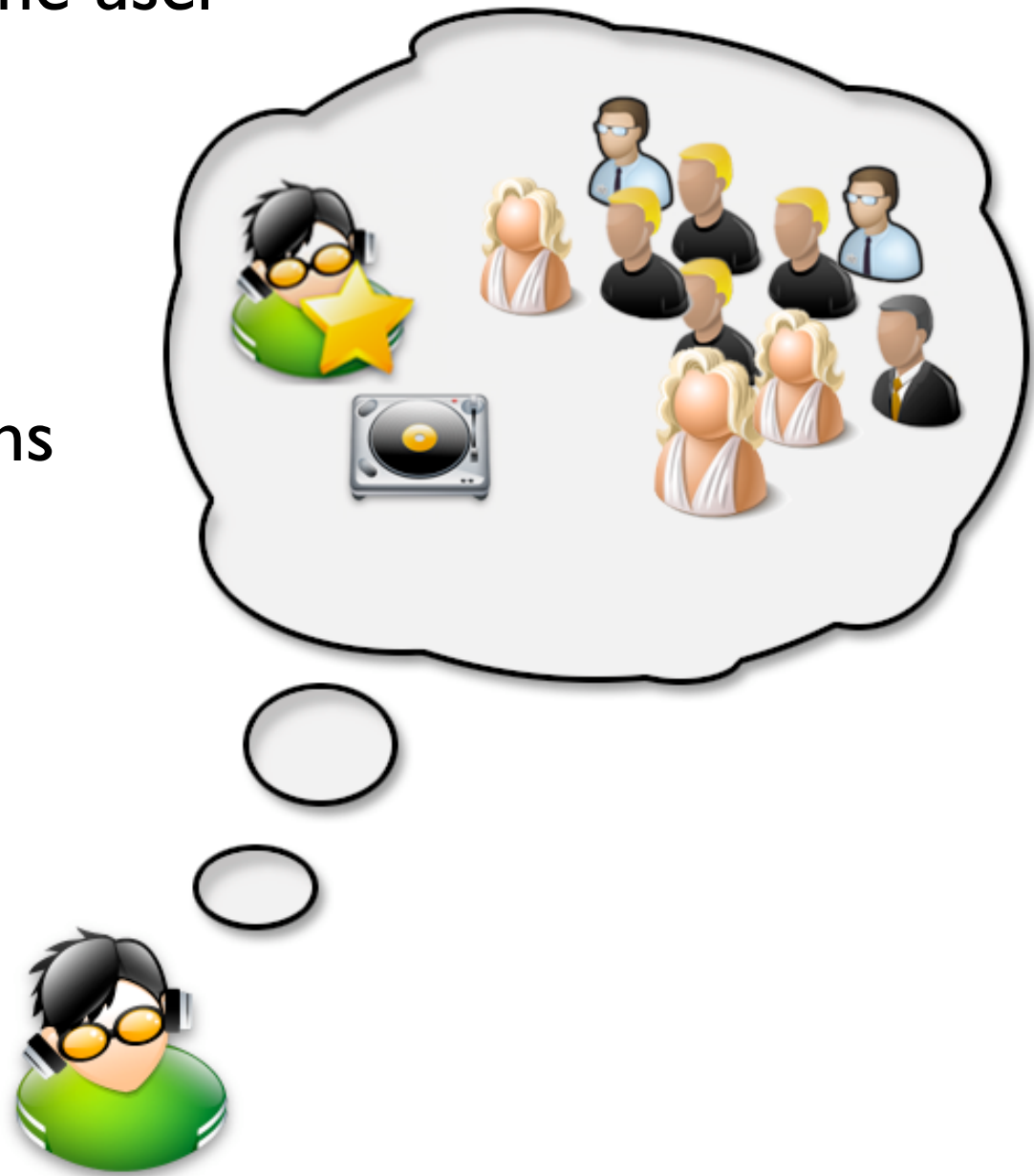
Producing social realities

- Socializing media means successfully producing the world in which users believe the reality of audiences and relationships... enough to become active participants
- presence can be felt
- action can be organized
- activities can be structured
- talk can be perceived
- personality can be effective
- knowledge can be known
- communication can be reciprocated
- recognition can be seen



User satisfaction

- Social media succeed or fail in meeting the needs of users when they fail to interest the user
- Users are interested in
 - seeing themselves
 - seeing their contributions
 - seeing social interaction and engagement that includes them, reflects well on them, solicits more from them
- they must see it, feel it, and act in it



II. Capturing Interests



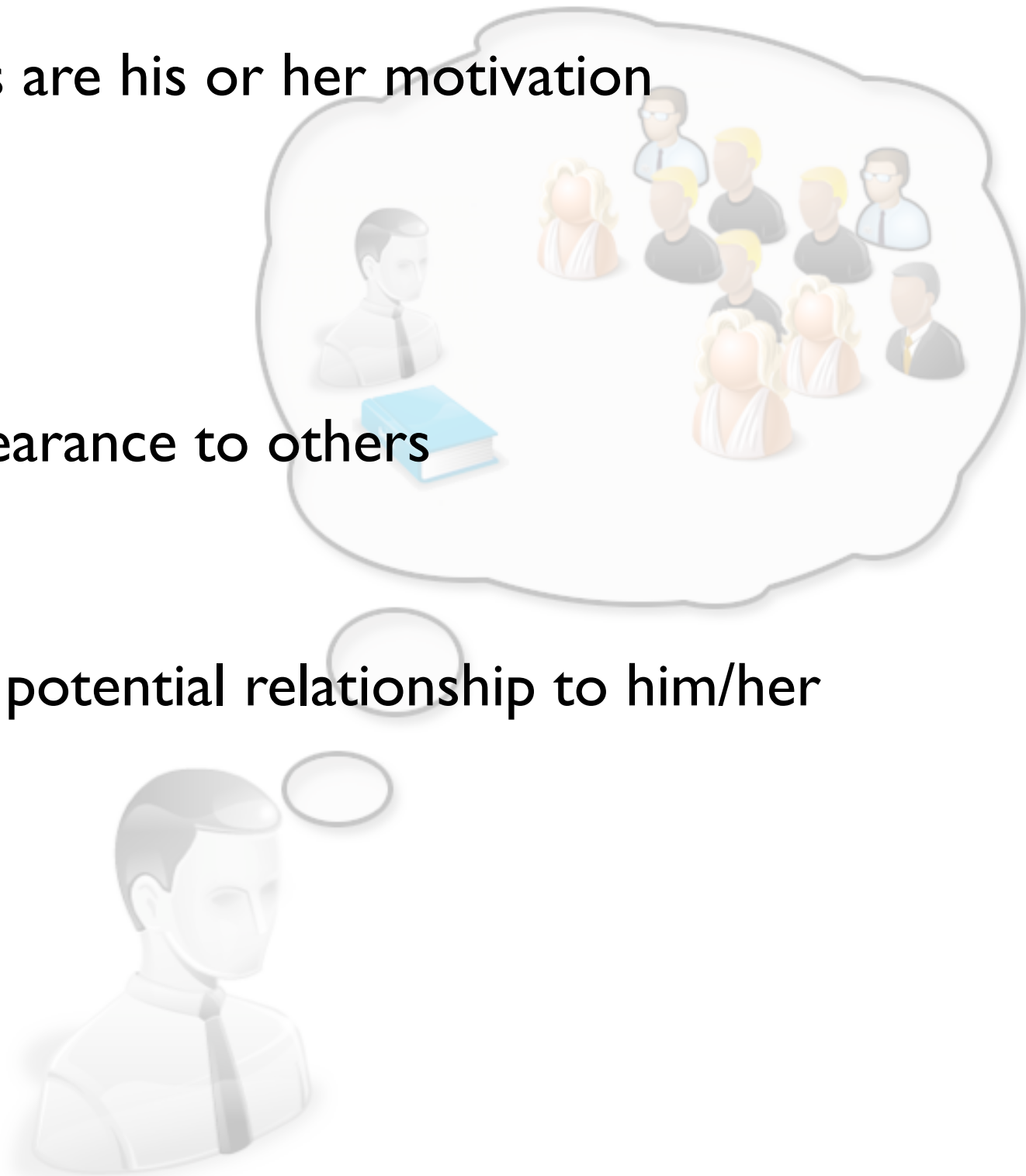
Capturing interest

- Social media realities engage user interests, to varying degrees, and in various modes, according to the activity and social practice they facilitate
- This means not just making something interesting, but captivating the user's own interests
- Furthermore, users come to a social media site or service with their own interests *already*
- A well-structured social media brand permits the user to see into it, to involve him or herself, to become interested in others, and to take pleasure in their own involvement
- A social media site succeeds when its users invest in it as they would in any social practice, which means that its technology, features, functionality, and design *become transparent*



Capturing interest

- The user's interests are his or her motivation
- User has interests:
 - in him or herself
 - in his or her appearance to others
 - in others
 - in their actual or potential relationship to him/her



Capturing interest

- These interests can be grouped and categorized in terms of:
 - *self-image and self-perception*
 - *face*
 - *perceptions of others*
 - *relations and relationships*



Interest: Self-image, Self-perception



Interest: Self-image, Self-perception

- Users have a self-image: an idea of who they are, and how they are seen by others
- User's self-image is his or her sense of self
- Can vary in whether s/he is sensitive to or responds to perceptions of others
- May be an image she controls, expresses, improves
- May be an image she sees picked up by others in conversation
- Self image varies in the degree to which it reflects perceptions of others



Interest: Face



Interest: Face

- Users have a face, which is how they present themselves
- Face on social media is a production, a combination of competence with social media tools and a sense of the user's social presence
- Faces are to be looked at, and extend the user's self-image
- Face is seen, and unlike the user's private or personal self-image, is public
- Face is viewed, acknowledged, accepted, rejected, confirmed
- The user's interest in his or her appearance to others is separate from his or her sense of self
- Face is invested insofar as the user she is sensitive to, and interested in, the perceptions of others

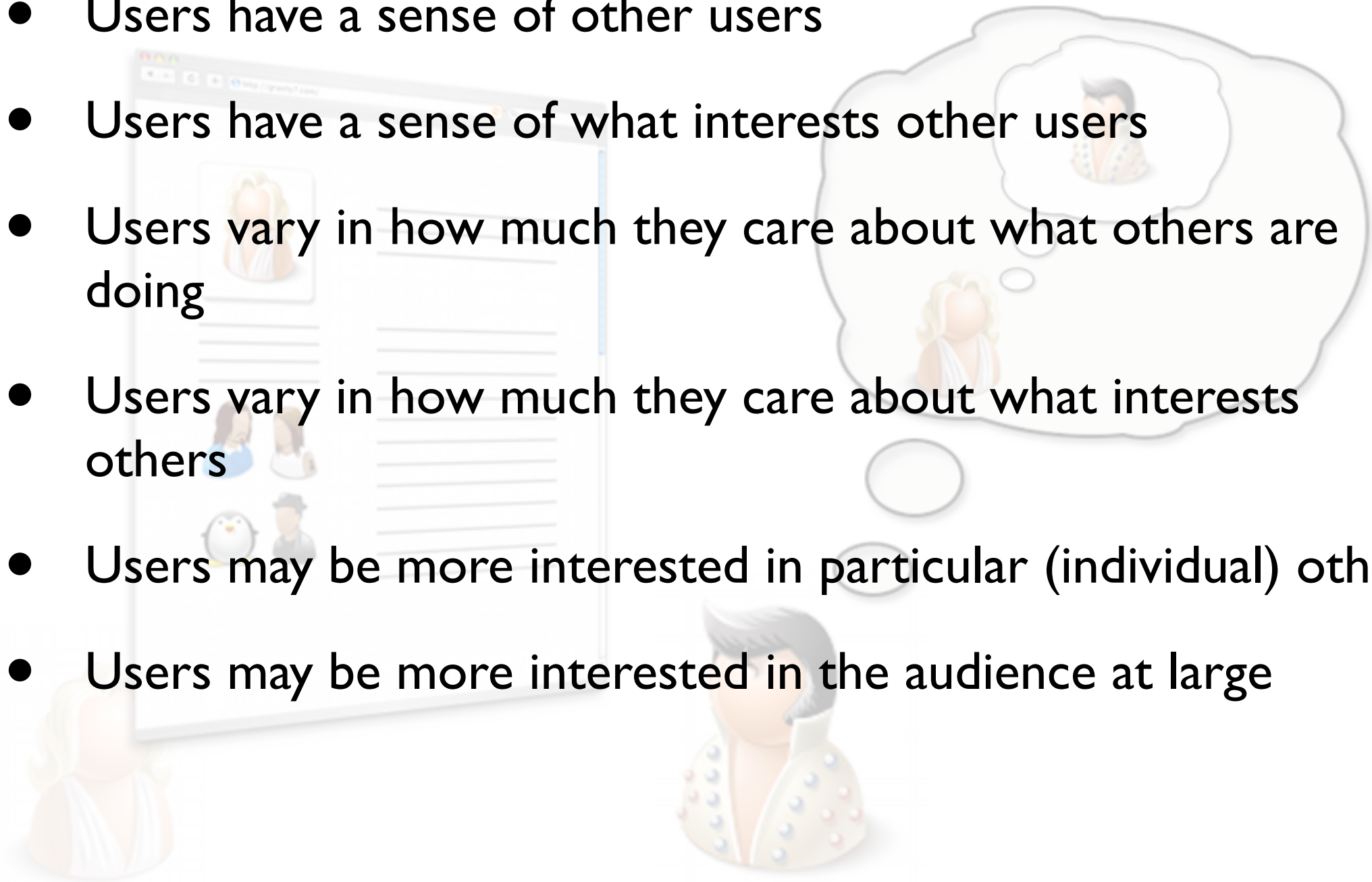


Interest: Perceptions of Others

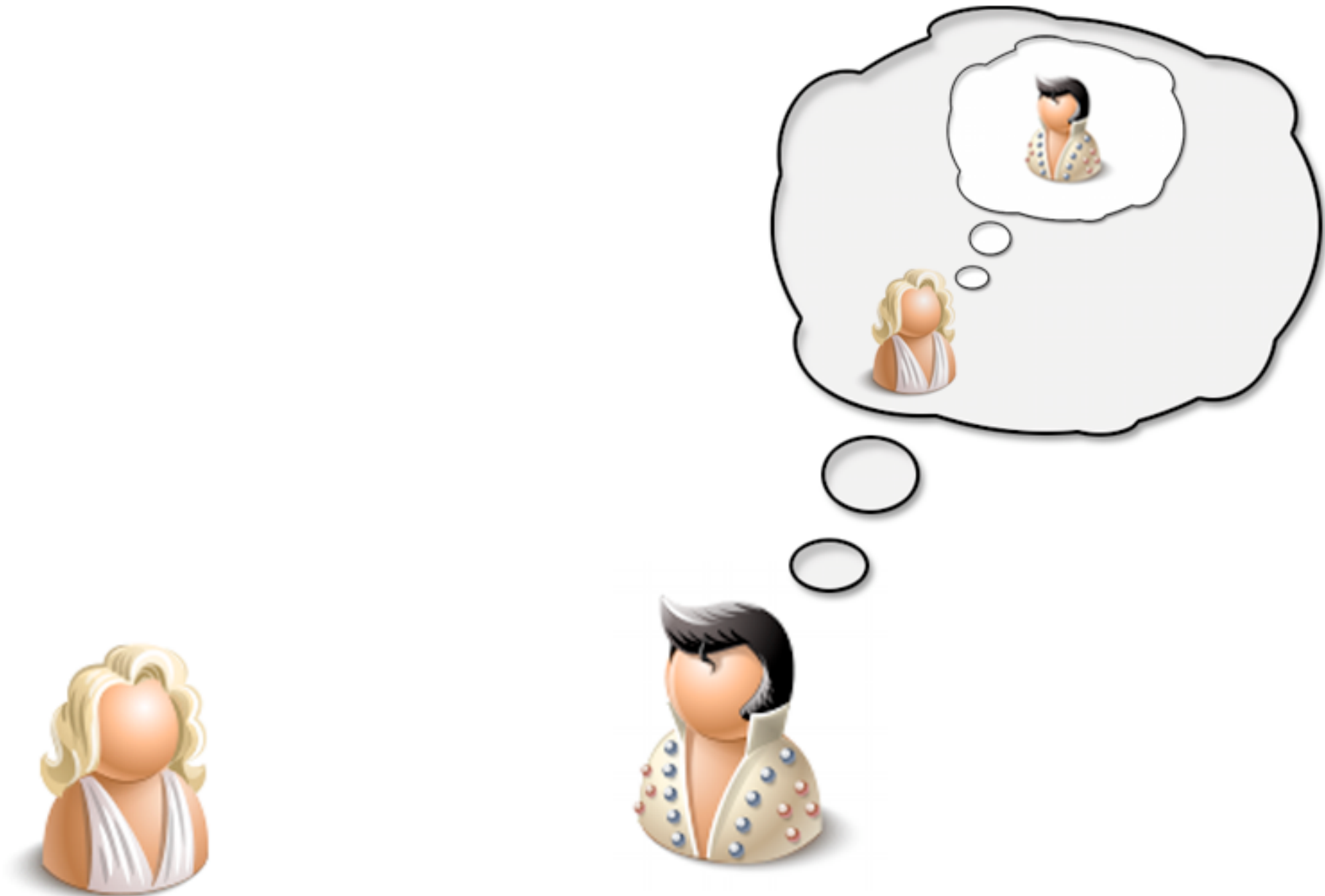


Interest: Perceptions of Others

- Users have a sense of other users
- Users have a sense of what interests other users
- Users vary in how much they care about what others are doing
- Users vary in how much they care about what interests others
- Users may be more interested in particular (individual) others
- Users may be more interested in the audience at large



Interest: Relations



Interest: Relations

- We now have a view of the user as an interested participant
- We have recognized that the user experience is a mediation of social interaction
- That the user has interests in his or her own Self, in the perceptions of or impressions made on others
- And interests in Others, and their actual or possible interest in him or herself
- All of this amounts to a description of social media user practices as interested, self-aware, self-reflexive, other-aware, and relational
- Interested user actions, communication, and participation can now be understood as unfolding against a background of meaningful social activity



Remark: Splitting and Doubling

- We commonly talk about Self and Other, but if we are to acknowledge the psychological dimension of interacting without being face to face with others, and through a medium that creates presentations and representations, we have to *split* the Self in two.
- There are two aspects of Self, and two aspects of the Other:
 - Users have a self-image, *and* a face shown in public
 - Other users also appear as faces, *and* have an actual or possible relationship to the user



Remark: Splitting and Doubling

- In face to face interaction, a participant tends to “lose” him or herself in the social encounter, and take an interest in others as present (real, authentic people)
- In mediated interaction (social media), a participant can be self-reflective and self-focused (introspective) *and/or* self-presenting, facing others (extroverted)
- In mediated interaction, a participant can take others at “face value,” *and/or* can take them for who they are (in relation) to him or herself (philosophically, the Other is “for itself” and “for me”)
- Splitting of the Self, and Doubling of the other, multiply the psychological dimensions of the user experience



A Four-part view

- Our four-part view of the user experience (Self Image, Face, Face of the Other, Relation to other) explains user behaviors on social media:
 - Introspective involvements: being oneself
 - Extroverted involvements: being oneself for others
 - Social involvements: seeing others
 - Relational involvements: relating to others



Characteristics

- Introspective involvements: being oneself
 - browsing, posting, sharing, contributing: simply “doing stuff” on social media without need for response
- Extroverted involvements: being oneself for others
 - positioning, checking, updating status, commenting, rating: doing stuff while aware of how it may be perceived
- Social involvements: seeing others
 - browsing, lurking, reading, viewing: becoming interested in other users, in groups, and communities
- Relational involvements: relating to others
 - winking, poking, commenting: doing stuff that is noticed by others and which solicits attention and response



A summary of uses

- We have a view of the user as psychologically interested
- As self involved, aware of others, and capable of reflecting on perceptions, impressions, appearances, and relations
- We have an understanding of the motivating power of social media, on the basis of the user's experience as an individual who is self aware, who cares about his or her appearance, who is interested in others, and who is in relationship to them (whether real or not)
- These psychological dynamics form the basis of common social practices and fuel the social engine that drives social media
- We can now cover some common dimensions of the user experience on social media

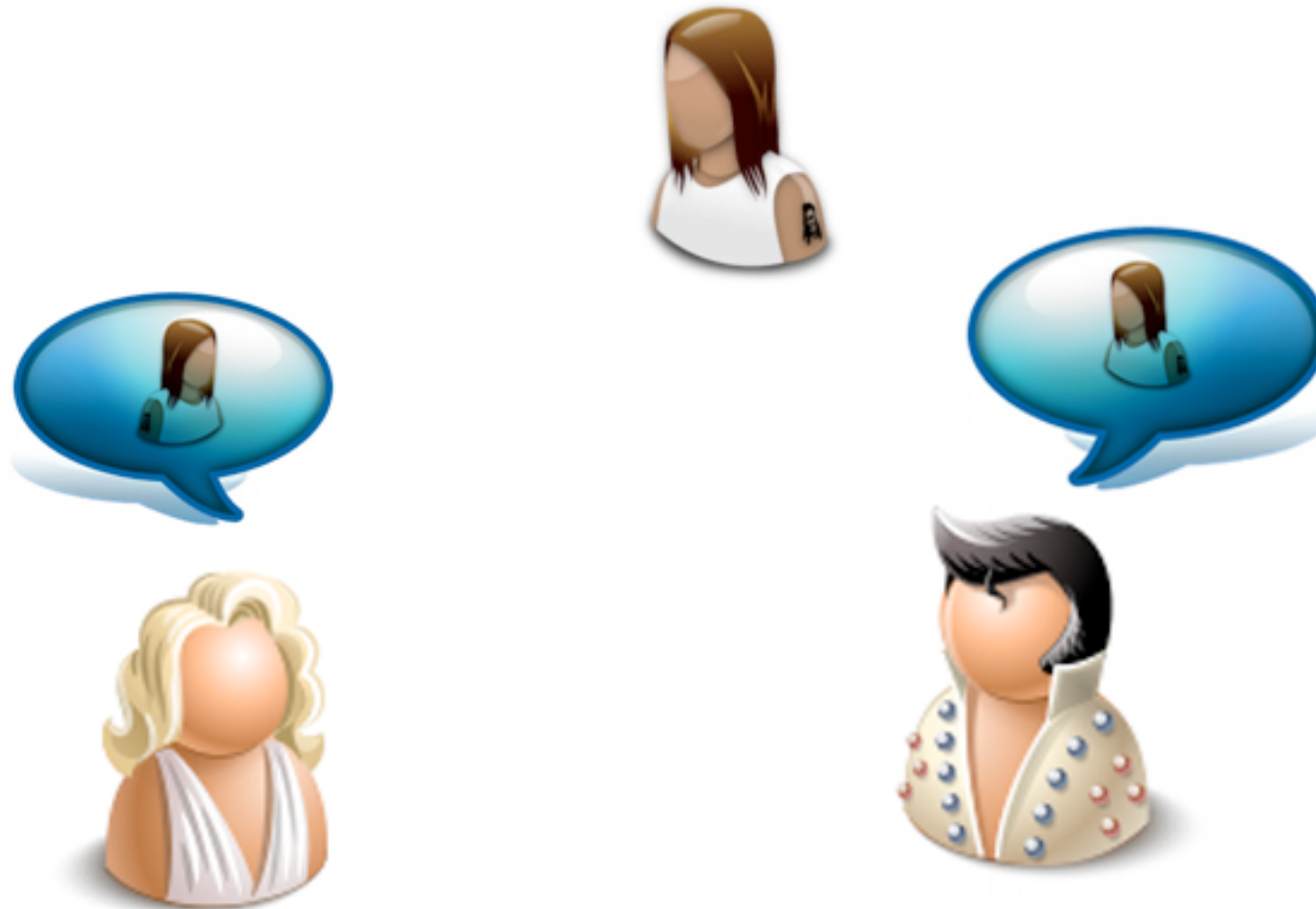


III. The User Experience

- These are some common dimensions of the user experience, but are not exhaustive and are not specific to any platform
 - Relationships
 - Motives
 - Communication
 - Being seen
 - Like-ability
 - Authenticity
 - Belonging
 - Individuality



Relationships



Relationships

- Users vary in their awareness of/sensitivity to relationships with friends
- Users vary in their awareness of/sensitivity to relations between their friends, and to how they are implicated in or affected by those relationships
- Users vary in what matters to a relationship
- Users vary in whether relationships are an extension of past history and in the degree to which they set up expectations for the future (e.g. loyalty)
- *Examples:* Twitter's early "followers" and "friends" nomenclature engaged participation because users were confused over who read and paid attention, how to respond, and what the purpose of talking was in the first place



Motives



Motives

- Users differ in how relationships motivate them
 - changes in relationships and dynamics
 - status and influence in social networks
 - inclusion/exclusion from social networks, groups, tribes, etc
 - status, rank, hierarchy and knowing who's who
 - state, activity, harmony of relationships
 - debts, obligations, reciprocity in relationship transactions
- *Examples:* Friend(ship)-based social media like Facebook, or MySpace (which is creates a social scene around each member) drive traffic around socializing and maintaining relationships



Communication



Communication

- Users communicate directly to friends (messages are addressed to somebody)
- Users communicate indirectly by posting, commenting on friends and in front of friends (messages are not addressed to somebody, or are but are posted publicly)
- Users vary in degree to which they care about being seen, accepted, agreed with, confirmed, quoted, cited, responded to; and impressions they make on others, such as being smart, funny, happening, cool, helpful
- *Examples:* Facebook applications are viral because they communicate twice: once with their message, content, action (etc); and again by their being accepted, installed, and shared — apps help communication



The art of being seen

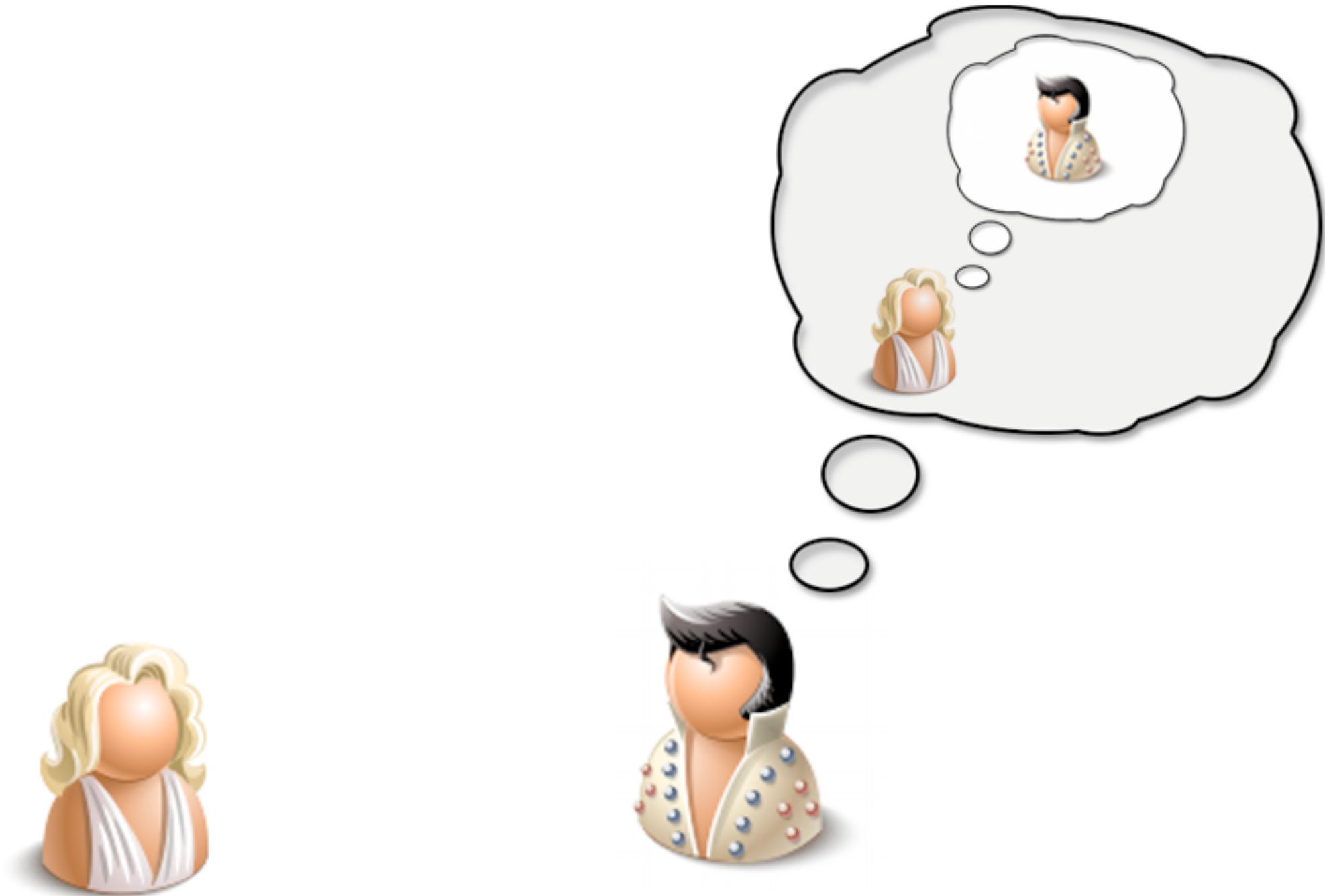


The art of being seen

- Social media create competition for attention, and structure the user's ability to be present, to participate, and be seen
- Being seen is as important as seeing. Social interaction is a dynamic: taking turns in getting and giving attention
- Users will seek to belong and stand out in a community
- Membership within a group or community is a prerequisite for visibility
- Individuality is a means to stand out, identify oneself, and get acknowledgment and recognition
- *Examples:* Profile-based social media (Facebook, MySpace) channel attention through user profiles, and structure and organize interaction around the Face



Like-ability



Like-ability

- Users generally want to be liked and will be like-able (friendly): being liked is validation
- Validation can be sought, earned, borrowed, purchased, won
 - may be earned by their actions
 - may be given by friends
 - may be shown by membership
 - may be earned through participation
- *Examples:* Social status and rank, number of friends, profile views, ratings, diggs, links and so on all quantify like-ability, making it incremental, meaningful, and providing the user with the sense that it can be regulated, managed



Authenticity



Authenticity

- Honest, sincere, authentic, credible participation by users who are being themselves
- Users can participate honestly or not:
 - authentic users participate as themselves
 - personality, reputation, credibility, are real and at stake
 - authenticity pays off
 - inauthentic users may hide behind anonymity
 - online persona is an opportunity to behave without consequences for their real selves
- *Examples:* Ebay, Yelp, Amazon, imdb.com, and other review sites depend on authenticity of members and honesty in transactions and recommendations



Belonging

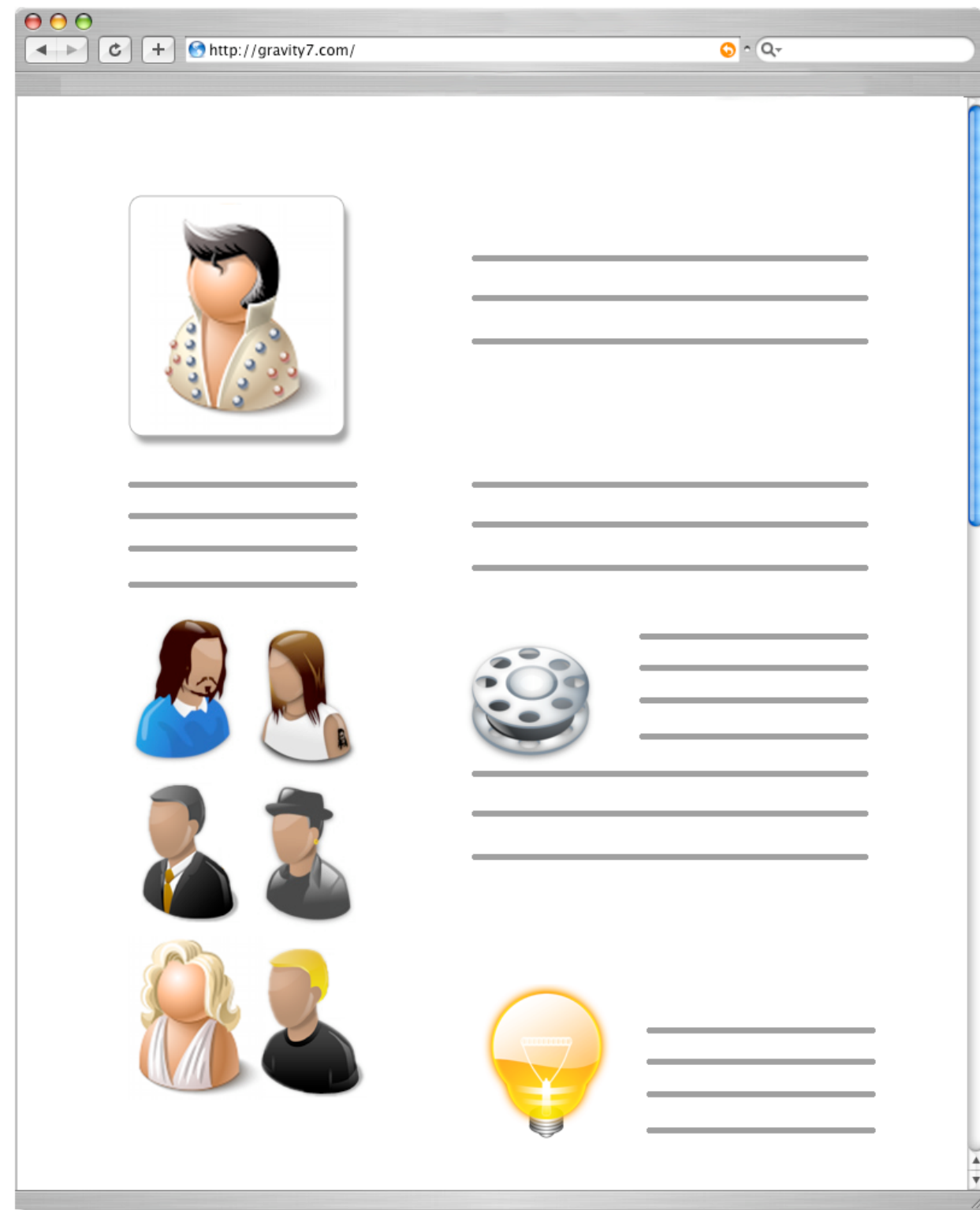


Belonging

- Users seek membership and belonging, maintaining personal relationships and coordinate collegial/peer interactions out of commitment, loyalty, and group integration
- users contribute cultural references, using terms, language, people, stories, images, and news that speaks to the group
- users share common friends and care for these relationships
- *Examples:* Evite, upcoming.org, Tribe, Twitter and other social media that create social presence and whose content are everyday social engagements can demonstrate high degrees of social commitment and care-taking



Individuality



Individuality

- Individuality is achieved by distinction, and individual recognition is a matter of getting attention
- Users demonstrate their individuality by their face (personality, looks, character), by their communication, by their contributions and sharing, by their attention to others
- Users are interested in distinguishing themselves
 - individuality by means of member profiles
 - style and character can be displayed through participation
- *Examples:* review sites such as Yelp permit users to express tastes, interests, skills, knowledge by means of recommendations and reviews. Furthermore, personal traits can be spotlighted with badges, icons, compliments, ;-)



Summary: Characteristics

- We can summarize the four-fold view, and its role in social media:
 - users who develop who they are (self image)
 - users who regulate their appearance (face)
 - users who take interest in others (faces of others)
 - users who respond to relationships (relations)
- Social media engage users on the basis of a modeled social reality, in which each user participates, sees the results of his or her participation, confirms the presence and activity of others, and falls into relation with other users



Implications: social media



Implications: social media

- It's not what the platform or site does, but what users do with it
- Social media service the user's interests
- Self and face must be respected and care for
- Tools should facilitate, not disrupt, communication
- Interaction tools should seek transparency
- Communities should foster a sense of belonging and yet permit users to distinguish themselves

