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One hundred years from now—after global warming melts the polar icecaps; World War III confirms America’s cultural, economic, and military demise; and China slurps up the planet’s few remaining gas reserves—historians may refer to today’s young people in America as the MySpace generation. Indeed, the ubiquitous social networking website myspace.com, which allows people to maintain their own web pages with personal profiles of themselves while also linking to their friends on the site, is beginning to do nothing less than define today’s fifteen- to thirty-year-old age group.

If you think this is an exaggeration, let’s consider the numbers. After a mere three years, the website, launched in 2004 by two Gen-X entrepreneurs, has approximately seventy million members (that’s nearly one quarter of the American population), and 130,000 new members are signing up every day. The average user, who is twenty years old, spends three hours a day on MySpace and has sixty-eight other friends on the site. More famous MySpace users, Madonna for instance,

have upward of 45,000 “friends.” Coming soon are a record label, a satellite radio station, and a film production company emblazoned with the MySpace brand.

Considering its target demographic, it’s not surprising that the website’s popularity exploded largely off the adult radar screen. That is, until seventy-five-year-old Republican

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media mogul Rupert Murdoch bought the lucrative three-year-old website for 580 million dollars, making international headlines in the process. The phenomenon that MySpace is creating among young people is only really beginning to gain serious attention and study by media theorists and sociologists. But already, there’s no doubt that the website and smaller-scale social networking sites like it—LifeJournal, Xanga, tribe.net, and

Friendster—are laying down new forms of social behavior among young people that often blur real-life and online interactions. Nonetheless, they enable today’s postmodern offspring to identify with each other via a virtual interface and belong to a larger community, something that often isolated young people are hard-pressed to find in their everyday experience.

The problem is that no one—apart from Howard Dean, who, in his 2004 bid for the Democratic presidential nomination, teamed with friendster.com to network thousands of young supporters into active cells around the country—has really tapped in to this new social medium as a tool for positive political, cultural, or spiritual change. On the contrary, if you spend a couple of hours on any of these websites, you’ll quickly find that they all sorely lack any deeper purpose or higher vision for themselves. And without these, they easily morph into glorified dating forums or convenient outlets for teen angst or exhibitionism. Indeed, by providing a vast platform for daily blogs, photographs, preferred music, and background options—all of it public—social

networking sites appear to energize Gen-Y's proclivity for unparalleled self-reflection and self-absorption.

This is the vacuum into which thirty-one-year-old entrepreneur Brian Johnson is leaping with his newly launched website, *zaadz.com*. Just six months old, the website's structure is not unlike MySpace, allowing users to update their own profiles and blogs and link to their friends on the site. But Zaadz also comes with a serious mission. What is it? "That's easy," Johnson writes on *zaadz.com*. "We're gonna change the world." Audacious as it sounds, Zaadz has an explicit vision as well as a terms of use policy that clearly states that anyone not on board will be deleted—their profile, that is. In fact, when Zaadz's membership was really beginning to soar in February, nearly thirteen hundred people were erased from the site when they wouldn't sign the terms of use agreement.

So, how is Zaadz going to change the world? By building, according to Johnson, the "most inspired community of people in the world . . . a community of seekers and conscious entrepreneurs." The logic is that if you, the user, "give your greatest strengths to the world moment to moment to moment," and Zaadz "does everything in our power to help you succeed and you inspire and empower everyone you know to do the same," and "we team up with millions like us," then "we just affected billions," and "we [together] changed the world."

It's a wildly idealistic plan that will perhaps come off as naïve to some. But this sort of unharnessed enthusiasm appears to be captivating people, as attested to by Zaadz's speedy popularity. Within four weeks of launching the *test* version of the website, intended for fifty or so of Johnson's friends, over one thousand people had become members. This is no small thing, in

part because becoming a member of Zaadz isn't just a matter of signing up—there's actually an application and review process, something unheard of in the "free democracy" of the internet.

"The fact of the matter is that we're trying to create something unique," Johnson wrote in a letter to shareholders and staff. "Whereas most social networking sites seem to devolve into a Jerry Springer show, we want to create something that has integrity to its stated purpose. . . . Our site simply isn't 'about' [giving] radical free expression [to everyone]. It's about striving to live at your highest potential, serving the world and creating positive change in the process." In order to ensure that applicants understand this, they are asked to answer questions like, "How are you committed to creating positive change in the world?" and "What do you wish to share with the Zaadz community?"

Currently, the website is fully functional but still largely under development. Coming soon are Zaadz pods, a place for discussion on focused topics; Zaadz Events, where you can search for all the interesting things happening in your ZIP code; Zaadz Match, which will allow you to bypass nightclubs to meet potential love interests; Zaadz Pro Local, a kind of "conscious" yellow pages; and Zaadz Grow, a group of "REALLY cool tools" designed to help members define who they are and what they're here to do, as well as to set goals in various areas of their lives to help them get down to the business of changing the world. And, hey, you never know. If Zaadz members really do set their minds to it, maybe the polar icecaps won't melt. Maybe a hundred years from now, historians won't be calling today's young people the MySpace generation but the Zaadz generation.

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