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AVOIDING SHALLOW VALIDATION AND TAKING DEEP MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES FROM PHUKET

Large percentages of our global population have knowingly and unknowingly had their mindset and life changed by the acceleration of cheap validation through low level dopamine hits. Those that don't wish to live in toxic environments like this are forced to by attrition and volume. Like lesser versions of monkeys (and I actually really like monkeys), humans have been trained to constantly check if people like their made-up personas and images and have prioritised their cheap dopamine addictions above moral principles and values that would make society better for the majority.

Instead of committing to maintaining a relationship, spouses with or without families will turn to secretive Tinder or other dating app and cheap thrills behind their long-term partner's back, seeking validation from their friends that their behaviour is justifiable so they can be 'more free and valued' in a cheap thrill society. It is easier to cheat and steal than to fix and evolve. Moral fabric has been broken by 'ready supply'.

Loyalty, integrity, commitment and honour have become more 'scarce resources' and the same people that denigrate and disrespect such values later rue the lack of the same in their lives. I, and I think many others, believe that 'karma' or something similar at play, will settle up that score at some point.

Instead of developing and educating children – in Phuket and further afield – bad parents will leave the children they chose to bring into the world staring for hours and hours at two-minute or less revolving algorithm addiction driven by scarily worthless 'reels' that the same parent uses to get poorly thought out relationship advice or tips on 'how to steal money from the partner you don't love anymore'. They will choose to advance themselves into Barbie and Ken doll versions of the 'celebrity heroes and heroines' they worship on Instagram feeds or admire for their seemingly 'perfect' lives and health. Once they reach a certain shallow level of achievement, there will always be the 'what's next' problem and the uncomfortable truth that deep and meaningful people simply don't care or acknowledge the importance of those swimming in the shallowest waters possible.

So, Phuket as a creature of society and modernisation also has some ongoing imbalances which are noticeable in terms of shallowness and depth. The path we choose to embrace individually will reflect overall as an average across Phuket's society and future.

Phuket has its fair share of shallow validatory behaviour. Whilst beach clubs are much welcomed in terms of adding a layer of musical, cultured dance or just hedonistic indulgence, the proliferation of them does have an impact on the 'me, me, me. I am the hero of my story and you are all just B-support actors validating my existence' attitude.

Whilst there has been a very welcome turnaround from the perception and reality of foreign visitors mostly stewing in a bath of alcohol and seedy bars, the arrival of different sets and waves of tourists and new foreign residents has created a sense of interest in sporting achievements, wellness and health that simply wasn't in Phuket one or two decades ago.

This has inevitably created the 'gym and fitness rat' culture that Tom Brady, one of the most famous and well-respected American football quarterbacks, found to his detriment can result in a superstar model wife having an affair with her yoga instructor and running off for good for a 'change in lifestyle'. Fortunately, the offset balance to this is the arrival of very well qualified and skilled health and wellness coaches and professionals who shape and tailor programmes to actually suit the profiles of their individual clients and are not cookie cutter driven 'ab-making' machines.

When we visit a shopping mall, an entertainment event or just a simple restaurant, people can be seen over-exaggerating their enjoyment making funny shaped 'pouts' with their lips to signal 'availability to the market' to increase their chances of a 'direct message' to their social media account or some shallow excitement procured out of a very ordinary event painted as somehow 'amazing'. Gone and diluted are the 'sharing' which is designed simply to let others know that something was quite good and worth experiencing. Here instead is a battle for 'look-at-me-supremacy'.

The countermeasures to this can be seen in the traditional and modern establishments that are truly delivering something different to a sweet smoothie with an orchid petal stuffed in it for decoration. We are fortunate to have in Phuket eateries and establishments that represent the cultural side and history of Phuket and its people both in traditional and modern formats – fusion and classic cuisines and artisanal ice cream shops with flavours as bold as 'Tom Yam' and 'Tamarind' (my favourite).

If you check the Google Reviews of certain Phuket establishments, you will see owners and their friends, posting fake over-hyped reviews of food and drink in restaurants you would normally barely notice for their mediocrity and dullness. Every photo has a 'colour' print just in the same way bad rental properties have the brightest pillows on the bed, matching bright towels and the heavily filtered floating flamingo in the swimming pool to entice the dim-witted uninitiated to spend their money.

Real quality experiences, backed by substance and depth, can become invisible amidst the never-ending cascade of hyped-up basicness.

Fortunately, Phuket still has gleaming diamond substance that those with values are shaping for the betterment of themselves and others. We have amazing communal recovery centres, community exercises and 'farmer/local produce' markets. We have repurposing of unused items into useful ones, support of the less fortunate with sincere non validatory social responsibility projects. Among us are many committed to the care of downtrodden animals, the improvement of Phuket's environment and ecosystem. Like shining beacons and pillars of morality, strong minded people will speak out against the deliberate hurt of others including through fraud, cheating and deception instead of simply embracing the 'cash' and 'attention'. Sports groups, running clubs, wellness trips, mindfulness experiences, good information sharing seminars and well informed business and lifestyle seminars are now all in abundance on this busy high season island.



Desmond Hughes

The next time we hear someone boast of their shallow prowess, we could all, me included, take a deep meaningful breath, and consider whether we are prepared to endorse or promote that aspect of our Phuket society, or whether we can together nudge our lives to more purposeful engagement.

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