

The Aporia of Authenticity: A Deconstructive and Foucauldian Analysis of Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People

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Abstract: *Dale Carnegie's self-help classic How to Win Friends and Influence People (1936) is celebrated as a foundational blueprint for interpersonal politeness and self-reinvention. However, underneath its superficial promises of genuine connection lies an unresolved tension between authentic interaction and manipulative persuasion. This paper examines Carnegie's text through Jacques Derrida's framework of deconstruction and Michel Foucault's theories of power. By interrogating the text's internal linguistic operations, the first part of this study exposes how Carnegie's principles collapse into a state of aporia, where the ideal of authenticity is systematically subverted and reduced to a calculated, artificial performance. The second part applies a Foucauldian critique to demonstrate how the text's signifiers reinforce strategic behavioural compliance and subtle power dynamics optimised for a society driven by influence. Furthermore, the paper extends this theoretical analysis to the modern digital landscape, exploring how social media influencers deploy these same rhetorical strategies. By filling a significant gap in formal literary analysis of Carnegie's work, this study reveals how the text is destabilised by its own internal contradictions. Ultimately, this critique provides essential insights for re-evaluating language elements to foster genuinely supportive, non-exploitative relationships in contemporary personal and professional spheres.*

Keywords: Deconstruction, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Dale Carnegie, Aporia, Digital Discourse

INTRODUCTION

Dale Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (Carnegie, 1936/2010) has been in print since its first publication almost a century ago, which speaks volumes about its success. With millions of copies sold, it is a bestseller and a firm favourite among readers, considered a perennial

classic in the nonfiction self-help genre. The book's pages not only teem with anecdotes and analogies drawn from the bustling tapestry of early twentieth-century American society but also reflect the frantic pursuit of the American dream and ideals of self-reinvention. Filled with instructive and symbolic snapshots, it has almost become a symbol of politeness in human interactions. However, on closer inspection, the superficial meanings, the author's bold claims, and the underlying purpose become unclear, revealing layers of interpretation that often conflict with the author's intent. Several of Carnegie's maxims appear to be a subtle play of power, rationalising cajolery, manipulative persuasion, and assumptions that grow ambiguous under deconstructive microscopic scrutiny, subverting the very ideals they seek to establish.

This paper examines Dale Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* from Jacques Derrida's deconstructive perspective, asserting that a text possesses no fixed or ultimate meaning; rather, through a close interrogation of its internal linguistic operations, the inherent instability of language and the eventual collapse of binary oppositions emerge as a state of aporia. (Derrida 1967/1997). The study seeks to uncover the myriad conflicting meanings and internal contradictions that destabilise common assumptions within Carnegie's bestseller. To achieve this, the book is analysed in two parts. The first part examines the question of authenticity in Carnegie's advice and principles, noting that textual ambiguities undermine the actual outcome and expected impact of Carnegie's social agenda. What should fundamentally underpin these principles and human relationships is merely diminished to the artificiality of performance. The study identifies assumptions about social behaviour and relationships, critiquing them through the self-deconstructive nature of its arguments. The second part investigates Michel Foucault's (1976/1978) perspective to examine how the subtle play of power circulating through the text's signifiers reveals Carnegie's reinforcement of behavioural strategies aligned with a society prioritised by influence and success. (Foucault, 1976/1978)

The study goes beyond theoretical analysis to explore the modern implications of digitalised discourse, which involves a significant shift in rhetorical strategies. It enhances our understanding of the techniques social media personalities use to pursue personal motives in various situations. In the age of influencers and curated brand images, a deconstructive analysis of Carnegie's persuasion techniques, vocabulary, and expressions will show how even authentic interactions can be mere strategic performances, carefully planned and sometimes fabricated. This perspective allows society to see how texts may unintentionally expose their own flaws or biases while attempting to appear seamless. The widespread network culture, where every human action and interaction is driven by opportunistic self-interest and personal gain, can be managed to promote greater responsibility and accountability. Furthermore, examining power dynamics encourages us to analyse language elements that require re-evaluation, particularly to understand what constitutes healthy, non-exploitative, and genuinely supportive relationships in both personal and professional

contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dale Carnegie's 'How to Win Friends and Influence People' is widely popular and designed for a general audience, yet it has received limited formal academic scrutiny. Some researchers examine its psychological and sociological impacts. Gal Thani Parker explores the "problem of sincerity" within Carnegie's influential self-help book, analysing the tension between his manipulative, calculated techniques and genuine interaction. The analysis offers a detailed perspective on Carnegie's worldview, including insights into his early life, in which he is depicted as an introvert seeking validation through speaking and teaching, methods that contributed to his success. The book is viewed not as a positive self-help guide but as a cynical philosophy rooted in psychological denial, superficiality, and endurance. Parker portrays Carnegie's methods as cold and bureaucratic, implying his success arises from a deeply pessimistic outlook on life's challenges. (Parker, 1977)

Duke and Novicevic (2008) have a different take on Carnegie's classic. Their investigation sought to verify Carnegie's principles within the framework of modern academic perspectives on emotional intelligence and political skill. The study contended that Carnegie's fundamental ideas remain relevant today, despite numerous studies on human behaviour, networking, interpersonal communication, and business success. This underscores the enduring nature of his teachings.

Silma et al. (2024) reviewed the chapter "Fundamental Techniques in Handling People," the opening chapter of his influential book "How to Win Friends and Influence People." The review thoroughly explored the core principles, analysing key arguments, practical strategies, and the assumptions about human behaviour that underpin them. The paper assesses the effectiveness of these principles across different social contexts, particularly in educational environments, and concludes that Carnegie's principles can be adapted to various personal situations. The main aim was to synthesise the findings to evaluate the overall effectiveness of Carnegie's methods in fostering positive relationships and achieving personal goals.

Most research on Carnegie's masterpiece has evaluated the authenticity, effectiveness, and applicability of his strategies. However, a highly popular book such as this one has not been subjected to an in-depth literary analysis that reveals its linguistic choices and their connection to the meanings. This represents a significant gap in literary research regarding Carnegie's influential work. Therefore, this study conducts a deconstructive analysis to demonstrate how the text's linguistic choices and analogies subvert any singular intended meaning, thereby exposing the inherent contradictions and instabilities of meanings that allow multiple re-interpretations that cannot adhere to a singular meaning. Furthermore, examining the power dynamics of the language

elements will shed light on the Foucauldian power relations at play in the book, an area that is relatively underexplored.

Theoretical Pinning

Understanding Jacques Derrida's deconstruction is incomplete without first examining Structuralism. According to structuralism, the relationship between signifiers, that is, words, expressions, and sounds, and signifieds, which are the concepts tied to the signifier, is arbitrary. (Saussure, 1916/2011). Ferdinand de Saussure (1916/2011) introduced the idea of binaries, arguing that words derive meaning from their differences; Lévi-Strauss (1958/1963) later expanded this to include opposites. Although structuralists believe language and meaning are arbitrary, they also argue that, because of the complexity of language's structure and mechanisms, the meanings language produces are fixed and cannot be altered independently. Therefore, we are born into language and cultural systems, and our perspectives are internalised

through socialisation, yet they shape our worldview. In response, post-structuralist critics and philosophers Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan challenged the notion that meaning is fixed.

According to Barthes (1967/1977), once published, a text becomes an autonomous entity free from its author's aims and agenda. This theory empowered the reader's role and interpretation, leading to a deeper understanding of the text. Although controversial, the publication of his groundbreaking essay, "The Death of the Author," in 1967 elevated readers through its broad scope and democratic approach, thereby enabling them to confidently identify the text as their own by reconnecting it to their experiences (Barthes, 1967/1977). However, it was the French philosopher Jacques Derrida whose paper, *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, became the true flagbearer of post-structuralism. (Derrida, 1966/1978).

In his major work, *Of Grammatology*, Derrida (1967/1997) introduced deconstruction to reveal the fluid nature of meaning, which does not exist in a fixed state within language. While Western thought was obsessed with structures and fixed truths inherent in language systems, Derrida argued that the centre itself is decentered if the relationship between meaning and language is arbitrary (Derrida, 1966/1978). Because language is arbitrary, it cannot hold truth as its centre, and meaning becomes unstable as it shifts constantly. He calls this indeterminate yet immanent nature of meaning *différance*, a term he coined, suggesting that meaning differs (is relational) and defers (is never fully present) within the play of linguistic structures. Derrida (1967/1997)

Therefore, according to Tyson (2023), language is not the reliable tool of communication we believe it to be, but a fluid, ambiguous domain of complex experience in which ideologies program us without our awareness (Tyson). In literary and critical studies, Deconstruction is an effective

tool because it compels us to think critically and continually seek deeper and alternative meanings in the text, rather than fixating on a single meaning, thereby generating new perspectives and shaping new narratives. It enables us to decipher unique, at times contradictory analyses by scrutinising vocabulary use and its play, as well as sentence structure, which often reflects the author's assumptions, intentions, and biases. In a world full of conflicting narratives, multiple meanings at every juncture of discourse, and layers of meaning and hidden structures in texts, a deconstructive analysis compels us to ask questions, check for privileged choices, and necessitates a spirit of enquiry into what is expressed and what is missing. (Tyson,2023). Deconstruction is thus an effective tool for studying the underlying assumptions, power dynamics (who benefits), and cultural biases (which values are privileged) in Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

This paper not only examines the fluidity of meaning that emerges once the text's superficial layers are deconstructed but also investigates the Foucauldian power relations embedded in the fabric of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Drawing on Michel Foucault's poststructuralist perspective, power is conceptualised as dispersed and omnipresent, rather than as episodic or sovereign acts of domination and coercion that stagnate in the hands of those who concentrate it. As Foucault asserts, 'Power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere,' challenging traditional views that see power as centralised in agencies or structures (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 63). To Foucault, modern power operates primarily through subtle, pervasive disciplinary mechanisms and biopower. In addition, power and knowledge: *Savoir-Pouvoir*, are inseparable from each other. Power regulates what is knowable; thus, knowledge is not as free as one might think. Rather, those in control determine, control, and circulate it according to their restrictions and permissions. Thus, in hegemony, the oppressed class literally "gives" the oppressors permission to oppress them (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013). The analogies, anecdotes, and narratives in Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* feature people of power, position, and fame, used as illustrious benchmarks that scaffold behavioural dynamics and communicative strategies, subtly reinforce behavioural norms, and aim to impart lessons to readers. These facts show that Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* is a cultural critique of early-twentieth-century American society that uses rhetoric to persuade readers to "win over" others.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Part-1: Authenticity vs. Performance

Published in 1936, Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* appeared at the tail end of the Great Depression. Popular literature at that time focused on "Dream of Abundance" and ideals of "rags to riches", where qualifications or technical skills were no longer sufficient to win

people or success in modern corporate America (Watts, 2005). Amid high unemployment and a societal shift from rugged individualism to interpersonal effectiveness, Carnegie's book became a personal gospel of self-improvement and success. However, upon reading the book, we understand that the fundamental techniques for establishing genuine relationships, as taught in the book, are intended for use in various settings. Though the book's back cover notes that it seeks to advocate techniques to "make people like you", "win them over to your way of thinking", and "influence them without causing resentment", Dale Carnegie's text effectively deconstructs itself by undermining the very ideals it seeks to establish. It reveals the logocentric assumptions and hierarchies of both the author and Western thought that the book seeks to reinforce. The book serves as a self-help guide to social and business relationships, but its language subverts the ideas of authenticity and superficiality in human interaction, pushing us to a point where the meanings of genuine and artificial are endlessly deferred. We no longer clearly distinguish between these two supposedly opposite terms in the traditional sense; they have become interconnected and intertwined. The text then proposes a radical interpretation: authenticity may itself be composed of degrees of fakeness, thereby making meaning undecidable.

This collapse of the binary between authenticity and performance is inscribed in the very title of Carnegie's book's first section, "Fundamental Techniques in Handling People." It clearly exemplifies the collapse of authenticity into performance. As is generally accepted, genuine human and business relationships are based on the virtues of truth and honesty, and the only way to achieve them is through ethical and moral uprightness. However, the titles of the first section and the first chapter imply that relationship techniques or methods can be learned or adopted, which appears unrealistic. Another title, "If you want to gather honey, don't kick over the beehive," (p. 3) clearly suggests people are like bees that need to be treated cautiously to gain from them: a presumption that undermines the very foundation of relationships.

To clarify, the term 'handling' raises concerns in this context, leading to confusion and introducing a profound aporia. As an epistemological concept in philosophy and literary studies, handling implies that knowledge is gained through active manipulation. In a broader sense, handling typically refers to commodities or situations. However, the author's use of the term to describe engaging with people reveals that authenticity and performance are vital; neither can fully exist without the other. Consequently, the reader remains uncertain about the true nature of honesty in relationships, whether it is a moral obligation or a strategic tool, and whether it is ethically acceptable to see people as targets. This analogy exposes an inconsistency in attitude within the text. If the maxims are presented as ethically valid, the text's promotion of 'handling' others as a means to an end effectively undermines its own moral position. Therefore, by emphasising relationships and social interactions and employing strategic manipulation to manage them, the text ultimately subverts itself.

The ambiguity of thought becomes even more visible in the first chapter of the book, “If You Want to Gather Honey, Don’t Kick Over the Beehive,” (p.3), where we see warring ideas juxtaposed together. We notice the binaries of criminality and morality as illustrated by the examples and analogies provided. The chapter begins with examples of criminals to illustrate that judgment is pointless and that no one likes admitting their faults. This use of perpetrators to deliver a moral lesson in itself blurs the line between the two ideas. Carnegie asserts that criticism is futile, dangerous, and tends to provoke resentment when expressed. People become defensive because their pride is hurt. However, the examples of Two-Gun Crowley, Al Capone, and Dutch Schultz (p. 4), along with the descriptions used of them, destabilise his claims. By advocating kindness and then referring to these criminals derogatorily as “two-gun desperado,” (p.3) “killer,” (p.3) “America’s most notorious public Enemy,” (p.4) “the most sinister gang leader,” (p.4) and “one of New York’s most notorious rats,(p.4) Carnegie reveals an inconsistency in his attitude. He employs their words in the text, words that actually evoke compassion for the offenders. Two-Gun’s remark, “Under my coat is a weary heart, but a kind one,”(p.4) and the self-descriptions of Capone and Schultz as public benefactors resonate with readers, prompting us to learn more about the lives of these offenders and the circumstances that led to their downfall. The author’s own judgment and critique demonstrate that he himself cannot avoid criticism altogether. The distinction between criminality and morality diminishes through the examples that attempt to separate them.

The author says:

“Instead of condemning people, let’s try to understand them. Let’s try to figure out why they do what they do. That’s a lot more profitable and intriguing than criticism, and it breeds sympathy, tolerance and kindness. “To know all is to forgive all.” (p.17)

These statements also expose a paradox in his attitude towards the earlier examples. It advocates a total suspension of judgment but presents a calculated social outcome in the examples above, with no mention of kindness toward the criminals or any hint of how they could be treated differently to achieve a healthier outcome. Thus, the text is silent about this crucial detail. One would argue that criminal examples serve the context. Indeed, the author wants us to believe that even such criminals defend themselves, but this raises the question: if the criminals won’t admit their mistakes, is it entirely pointless or unnecessary to criticise? Not all criticism is negative or condemning; rather, it often leads to positivity and productivity. Later in the book, we encounter strategies the author suggests for criticising when absolutely necessary, without being hated, and indirectly. If the author himself provides a way to do it, then he admits that a complete absence of criticism is impossible, thereby contradicting himself. Thus, the text contradicts itself, as the author does believe criticism may be necessary, even if it is given indirectly or through appreciation.

We encounter the absurdity of thought and contradiction in yet another example of the book. In

the second chapter of the book, Carnegie clearly distinguishes between sincere appreciation and insincere flattery. He calls one from “heart out”, the other from “teeth out” and “selfish”, one “universally admired”, and the other “universally condemned”. Indeed, the reader accepts this verdict, but the statements in the next section violate the understanding that distinguishes appreciation from flattery. Carnegie says in the chapter “Do This, and You’ll be Welcome Anywhere”:

“A show of interest, as with every other principle of human relations, must be sincere. It must pay off not only for the person showing interest but also for the person receiving the attention. It is a two-way street - both parties benefit.” (p.64)

The section concludes by saying: “Become genuinely interested in other people.” (p.65)

The purity of appreciation is indeed far from the impurity of flattery, as the text explicitly mentions. However, the expression “a show of interest” is far from pure intention. The added condition that “it must pay off” (p. 64) reveals the transactional nature of interaction, in which both parties experience a win-win outcome. Evidently, one may not have a genuine interest, but, as the text claims, acting is necessary to achieve what we want. There is an additional requirement for this act of showing interest: “it must appear sincere.” (p.64) This renders sincerity a signifier to be manipulated rather than a signified truth. The use of economic words to explain moral ideas reintroduces selfishness, which was condemned earlier. Consequently, an aporia emerges as the lines between genuineness and pretence blur, leaving the reader unable to distinguish a moral act from a strategic one. This distinction leads to the belief that even appreciation can be fabricated or staged. Readers start to wonder whether sincere pretence is essential to benefit both parties; perhaps it involves expressing genuine-fake appreciation to get what one desires. But is it not “selfish” and universally condemned “flattery”? (p.31) We return to the conflict between authenticity and performance - one genuine, the other superficial, thereby undermining itself.

One of the striking and contentious statements in the book is Carnegie’s proposition to avoid arguments at all costs. He says in the book:

“You can’t win an argument. You can’t, because if you lose it, you lose it; and if you win it, you lose it. Why? Well, suppose you triumph over the other man and shoot his argument full of holes and prove that he is *non compos mentis*. Then what? You will feel fine. But what about him? You have made him feel inferior. You have hurt his pride.” (p.117)

He concludes the section with this advice: “The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it.”(p.122)

The idea presented in this section advocates for a strategic approach to an idealised goal, yet it overlooks the importance of honesty in genuine relationships. While the aim is to foster better

relationships, the emphasis on avoiding arguments implicitly promotes the suppression of truth. Arguments are crucial, as they reveal independence of thought and understanding and offer different perspectives on issues. Respecting individuality and otherness have always been valued across cultures and time periods, but today's urgent need is not for superficial harmony, but for open dialogue and acceptance of differing opinions, recognizing that each person's worldview, shaped by unique experiences, knowledge, and values, enriches the collective understanding. Dismissing conflicts and encouraging the erasure of personality traits merely maintains surface-level peace, which ultimately weakens authentic connection. The text's silence on channelling disagreements reveals that its version of 'Harmony' is not a positive presence, but a manufactured absence of conflict. This 'peace' is structurally dependent on the very suppression of truth it claims to transcend. Pretending to agree with an idea when fundamentally opposed to it undermines honesty, a core virtue in human interactions. If honesty is essential, then practising it is imperative, even in conflict, rather than resorting to dishonesty. Contrarily, with the text's emphasis on performance, we encounter yet another example of the question of whether honesty exists without dishonesty. The suggestion that friendships can be constructed on deferred truths is confusing. One is forced to wonder if genuine bonds require dishonesty to foster trust and authenticity.

Part 2: Foucauldian Perspective of Disciplinary Power:

According to Michel Foucault (1975/1995), we are surrounded by a disciplinary environment in which everyone is both observing and being observed. Surveillance not only exists in society but is also normalised as part of everyday routines by institutions such as hospitals, schools, and other organisational bodies, including families at the micro level. Adhering to the set norms is considered normal and even expected, whereas deviating from these norms is criticised and seen as a failure. From a Foucauldian perspective, no one escapes the power of power because it is productive; it creates realities, acceptances, and a key to success, which makes power inescapable and reinforced. Thus, power does not exist in a vertical, top-down manner as traditionally believed, but rather horizontally in everyday interactions. Therefore, we live in a society amid our relations with self-panopticism. The power to judge, or to be constantly judged, and the power to measure success in terms of adherence to prevailing notions of success create a body of knowledge that compels us to adhere to manufactured normalcy, thus creating docile bodies. Therefore, the meaning of power is in a state of continuous flux, making it difficult to identify who the subject or the oppressor is.

In *'How to Win Friends and Influence People,'* Carnegie creates a widespread system of influence. Throughout the book, he shares stories of well-known figures like Theodore Roosevelt, Albert B. Fall, Abraham Lincoln, Sigmund Freud, Mark Twain, Benjamin Franklin, John Dewey, and Lloyd George. These stories serve as vivid examples to illustrate ideas about success and appropriate behaviour, encouraging a compliant attitude. Suggestions such as avoiding arguments and criticism, showing appreciation, smiling, expressing genuine interest, and remembering names form a framework for what is accepted as normal, thereby normalising disciplinary power. The stories of famous individuals are presented in a way that emphasises their social behaviours, often overlooking the complexities of their personalities. Readers are encouraged to adopt a calm, obedient attitude, viewing these maxims as scientific truths rather than just tips. Carnegie's

anecdotes serve as a guide, motivating readers to compare their own behaviour with the idealised success of these great figures.

Carnegie's quotation of the great psychologist Hans Selye, "As much as we thirst for approval, we dread condemnation" (p.6), is a compelling point in suggesting that we are trapped in the prison of the self-panopticon. We have so normalised judgments that the guard's gaze is internalised. To support his point, the text presents the example of safety coordinator George B. Johnston of Enid, who, to make his workers wear hard safety hats despite repeated warnings, adopts a "pleasant tone" (p.6) and reminds them of safety and protection in a friendly manner, thereby gaining compliance. Thus, Carnegie's soft tone is a soft form of power which reveals not its absence but refinement. The book states: "The result was increased compliance with the regulation with no resentment or emotional upset." (p.6) The example clearly indicates that using a friendly and compassionate tone is imperative if we want to subjugate and win people over to our side. The book thus advocates that constantly regulating ourselves is more profitable than trying to improve others, as is explicit in the text below:

"Do you know someone you would like to change, regulate, and improve? Good! That is fine. I am all in favour of it, but why not begin with yourself? From a purely selfish standpoint, that is a lot more profitable than trying to improve others - yes, and a lot less dangerous." (p.13)

Ultimately, the text advocates for self-regulation as a 'profitable' alternative to changing others, mirroring Foucault's (1988) 'technologies of the self,' where the individual becomes the primary agent of their own discipline. Another example that illustrates this point is Carnegie's Socratic "yes-technique." According to the text, if a person says no at the beginning of a conversation, his entire being supports this rejection - his ego and psychological pattern. Therefore, Carnegie advises securing "yes" responses at the beginning of a conversation. This "propels" the conversation into a more favourable direction and requires considerable energy to oppose it later (p. 152). This concept aligns with the microphysics of power that exists in the capillaries of conversation: the tiny moments of linguistic choices. By obtaining an affirmative response, the speaker utilises a subtle rhetorical strategy to tap into the listener's psychological momentum, thereby fostering a more constructive and positive outcome. Thus, the book is filled with numerous such examples where self-disciplinary actions are recommended as techniques, even if it means merely performing them to secure a profitable end. This reveals an aporia where self-regulatory techniques are actually micro-tactics, turning relationships into a strategic battlefield of influence and submission.

Implication to Research and Practice:

Through the Foucauldian lens, Carnegie's advice reveals itself as the foundation of modern influencer culture and social networking algorithms. When we deconstruct the friendly, warm

language used by influencers, we notice traces of structured performances designed to build audiences and attract subscribers. For instance, the Socratic Yes-Technique taught by Carnegie - such as eliciting a series of affirmative responses before securing final approval- are reflected in digital personalities asking, "Who else agrees with me?" or encouraging users to double-tap if they agree, or press like, share, and follow buttons, or send hearts if they enjoy the content. The productive power of influencers can be seen in brand promotions or in curating a glimpse of a lifestyle that people aspire to emulate, thereby creating in them an "eager want," (p.50) in Carnegie's terms. Another example of the power play of individualisation is the micro tactic of using names, as Carnegie suggests. Tagging people, mentions, and hashtags on social feeds today personalises and targets brands, other influencers, or powerful figures to generate views, increase reach, and perform well with algorithms, which aligns with Foucault's ideas on surveillance and normalisation. Carnegie's rule of "Don't criticise" (p.17) is evident in brand-safe expressions used in advertisements and in influencers' endorsements to remain marketable and avoid being cancelled from PR lists or profile bans. All these techniques are contemporary digital practices of curated control and performance, aimed at building social profiles for personal, social, and professional goals on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Finally, the extensive use of beauty filters by modern digital users to appear likeable and presentable is also in tandem with Carnegie's principle of smiling and belief in appearances linking verbal performance with visual performances. Thus, influencers in the modern era deconstruct their own privacy by sharing their inner and outer struggles, intimate spaces, and thought processes to create "an eager want" (p. 50) among their viewers. This is a strategic move to achieve personal and public gains. Carnegie's rules for being likeable, influential, and successful have now become the codes for algorithmic and economic success.

CONCLUSION

Early in the century after its release, Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* remains more than just a bestseller; it has become the unspoken blueprint for navigating the modern world. However, when we look past its friendly anecdotes, we find a troubling paradox. Carnegie promises us "sincerity," yet he teaches it as a "technique." By turning genuine human connection into a calculated strategy, the book accidentally proves that in our pursuit of success, the line between what is "real" and what is "performed" has completely blurred.

This shift from the boardroom to the smartphone screen shows that Carnegie's 1930s tactics have effectively become the "source code" for today's digital life. We see this in the influencer who uses beauty filters as a digital "smile," or the content creator who carefully scripts their "vulnerability" to gain followers. These aren't just social choices; they are survival tactics in a world governed by algorithms that reward "brand-safe" behaviour and punish anything that doesn't fit the mould. We have reached a point where we "deconstruct" our own privacy, sharing our most

intimate struggles not for connection, but for "engagement."

Ultimately, Carnegie's work serves as a wake-up call. It forces us to ask: if every interaction is guided by "what I can get out of this," what happens to the human soul? By exposing the power plays and "fakeness" hidden within these classic rules for success, we can finally start to move toward something better. Real responsibility and accountability in the digital age start with recognising when we are being "handled"—and choosing to build relationships that aren't based on influence, but on actual, unscripted support. In a world of "engineered" likability, the most radical thing we can do is find a way to be truly, messy, and unprofitably human.

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