

Impact Of Social Media On Society

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ABSTRACT

Social Media means websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Social media is a new forum that brings people to exchange ideas, connect with, relate to, and mobilize for a cause, seek advice, and offer guidance. Social media has removed communication barriers and created decentralized communication channel and open the door for all to have a voice and participate. Social media is a platform for public around the World to discuss their issues and opinions. The effects of social networking are twofold. On the positive side, social networks can act as invaluable tools for professionals. They achieve this by assisting young professionals to market their skills and seek business opportunities. Social networking sites may also be used to network efficiently. On the negative side, the internet is laden with a number of risks associated with online communities. Fake news rise corresponds with a growing distrust in the mainstream media. Fake news has now even slipped into traditional media outlets and is often circulated by prominent individuals. Hopefully, in times to come, people will learn to take more responsibility for what they share and social media platforms will regain their lost trust. The government should bring out a policy framework on possible harm due to internet messaging platforms to engage at a deeper level.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media plays an integral role in our lives today and has a huge bearing on society and individuals. Social media has revolutionized the way people communicate and socialize on the web. The presence of social media in our lives is highly complicated. While the birth of social media is based on the democratic principles of the Internet and its technological ability to be open and accessible to all, it has evolved to not only be inclusive and participative but also disruptive. The features of openness, obscurity, and anonymity that once gave strength to marginalized communities are now giving room for malicious intentions to grow. As we approach the end of the second decade of this century, social media and the Internet have drifted from their promise of closing distances and exposing us to the views of those who existed beyond our networks. We haven't only become consumers of information but creators as well, which gives us a misplaced sense of control. However, it is now increasingly being blamed for breeding toxicity, promoting polarisation, amplifying disinformation, birthing malicious intentions and swaying elections. World over concerns has been raised over social media being used for surveillance, election meddling, etc. Social media has become ubiquitous. As per a UN report, 47 % of the global population is online and among them, the percentage of social media users is rising steadily. It does not have a steep learning curve and compared to other traditional websites offers content in the local language. The barriers to entry are quite low and there is a large and well development ecosystem in place for users which is unavailable in traditional TV media.

2. WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social Media means websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Social media is a new forum that brings people to exchange ideas, connect with, relate to, and mobilize for a cause, seek advice, and offer guidance. Social media has removed communication barriers and created decentralized communication channel and open the door for all to have a voice and participate. It is a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas and information and the building of virtual networks and communities. By design, social media is internet based and offers users easy electronic communication of personal information and other content, such as videos and photos. Users engage with social media via computer, tablet or Smartphone via web-based software or web application, often utilizing it for messaging.

3. USERS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- Individuals- To keep in touch with friends and extended family, a network for career opportunities, find people from all over the globe who share a common interest, share content and more.
- Businesses- It is an indispensable tool for finding and engaging with customers, sales, advertising, and promotion, gauging trends and offering customer service.
- Governments and politicians to engage with constituents and voters.

4. HOW MUCH TIME DO WE SPEND ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

Globally, on average 1.49 billion people log onto Facebook daily; every second around 6,000 tweets are tweeted on Twitter; and since its inception, over 40 billion photographs have been posted on Instagram. In India, social media platforms have reached over 200 million people which makes India the second most populated country on the Internet, paradoxically, India also has the highest number of unconnected individuals since only about 30% of the country's population has experienced the Internet so far. India is now WhatsApp's biggest market, with approximately 250 million monthly users.

5. POSITIVE IMPACT

- Tool for empowerment and an enabler: It has enabled millions of people and communities to access their rights and voice their opinions. It has given thousands of artists an opportunity to showcase their art to a global audience, and given a platform to hundreds for news and other content. It has even provided citizens and governments a platform where they can engage in dialogue.
- A platform for free speech: Facebook is being blamed for fuelling the 'yellow vests' unrest in France. Facebook Live videos, local events, and constant updates turned unorganized outpouring into a national-level protest. But to blame social media for the unrest is as senseless as blaming pamphlets for the French Revolution. These platforms are designed to show you more of what you already engage with and thus increase your bias. While newer algorithms and artificial intelligence are being used to spot and stop fake news, the debate will continue about free speech. What is a

parody, what is humor and what is hate speech? Machine learning is in its infancy and we are a few years away from algorithms that can fight the evils of humanity.

- As transforming the force to India: Over 80% of households have access to mobile phones and approximately 300 million Indians use smartphones. Bank account penetration has surged due to the Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana. About 1.1 billion Indians have a unique digital identity, Aadhaar. India has a large and low-cost set-up for electronic payments in place, including wallets, new payments banks, and Unified Payments Interface (UPI). National Payments Corp. of India (NPCI) processed 246 million digital payment transactions on its UPI platform in June 2018.
- Only a medium: Technology has always been blamed. The printing press was seen as trouble. The speed at which books could be printed and distributed aroused suspicion. Books were only a medium, just like social media. Banning books and blaming social media are results of the same flawed logic. If social media had an inherent bias towards evil, there would have been no #MeToo stories. There are many stories of lost children being found, dogs being adopted, and money being raised for various causes on social media. For much social media is divisive, but television is not. Due to the content is supposedly more controlled while everyone is a content creator on social media. According to the BI-2018 survey, the number of individuals with access to TV has gone up to 835 million; smartphone penetration in the country is at around 300 million. The number of daily active users on WhatsApp is 200 million; on Facebook, it is 194 million; and on Twitter, it is 7.83 million. By all accounts, social media in India is still a niche phenomenon.
- Social media offers a variety of entertainment that offers an escape from the conventional scripted entertainment industry funded by established studios. It offers people-to-people interaction that breaks barriers and forges a true human connection. It also has been instrumental in pro-democracy fights in many oppressive regimes.
- The Power of Social Media is that it forces Necessary Change. It helped in creating awareness about several issues, eg the fight for LGBTQ rights, etc.

- Social media has definitely made us closer to other parts of the world. WhatsApp is important for rural users, as it helps them cheaply connect to family members far away and send pictures of their products to clients across India.
- Social media platforms provide a platform to raise their voice against injustice and inequality. Voices previously excluded from conversations can now find a channel.
- Social media have increasingly been adopted by politicians, political activists, and social movements as a means to engage, organize and communicate with citizens.

6. NEGATIVE EFFECTS

- During the 1950s, social psychologist Solomon Asch conducted a series of psychological experiments called the Asch Conformity Experiments to determine the extent to which a person's opinion is influenced by a group. Although the means of communication and engagement have evolved since the 1950s, the human instinct to fit in hasn't changed. To some extent, this also explains the impact of fake news online, which is said to contribute to a polarised society.
- Narcissistic impulses: Social media sites are more than willing to play abettors. Twitter, for example, will routinely prompt you to follow people who hold a viewpoint that is similar to yours. Social media creates and services needs, which could be the narcissistic impulses encouraged by Instagram or the strengthening of deep-rooted biases on Twitter and Facebook.
- Not open to diverse Opinions: As per a study carried out by Aalto University, Finland, on increasing polarisation on social media found that factors like user homophily (users in a social system tend to bond more with ones who are similar to them than to ones who are dissimilar) and algorithmic filtering have created this cycle of enforcing and reinforcing belief systems and ensuring that we don't open our minds to diverse

opinions. The study suggests that algorithms must be created to identify trigger topics and find diverse opinions that might otherwise be kept out.

- Technology is double-edged. There are reasons to cheer as also to despair. Social media has various negative impacts like privacy issues, information overloads, and internet fraud. Researchers have found that hyper-networking leads to negative health behavior leading to laziness, obesity, depression, drug abuse, isolation or in the worst cases it may even lead to suicide.
- Social media has made the world a small space by allowing mass cultural exchange and intercultural communication. India being a secular country is a home for the people of various religious and cultural beliefs. When these beliefs clash the consequences are unpleasant. A mere comment or opinion on a certain belief on social media spreads like fire leading to riots and destructive rallies.
- Its heavy usage has ill effects on health issues and there is cyberbullying, online harassment and trolling. The trolling of women has brought to the fore the disturbing reality of online violence and abuse women face in India.

7. CONSEQUENCES

A study was conducted to determine the extent to which a person's opinion is influenced by a group. According to it, an individual was willing to give a wrong answer just to conform to the majority view. This also explains the impact of fake news online, which is said to contribute to a polarised society. A study found that factors like user homophily and algorithmic filtering have created the cycle of enforcing and reinforcing belief systems. This ensures that we don't open our minds to diverse opinions. User homophily means users in a social system tend to bond more with ones who are similar to them than to ones who are dissimilar. We are getting trapped in narrower world views that are seeping into not only voter behavior but everyday personal interactions. WhatsApp faced severe criticism as lynching incidents flared up by the free flow of fake news on the platform. Twitter along with Facebook came under the intense scrutiny of policymakers in the US for its failure to stop the spread of misinformation during the 2016 election. It has led to anonymous trolls who attack

the reputation of an individual. Women face cyber rape and threats that affect their dignity severely. Fake news and communal venom also spread like wildfire on the media. Fake news about a child abduction gang was spread by teenagers as a prank and this led to a few people being attacked. This is encouraged by the fact that internet anonymity offers a disconnect from reality. So its users feel that they are not going to face any consequence of their actions. Social media bubbles or echo chambers are created where one finds only opinions that conform to one's world view (confirmation bias). This strengthens already existing biases and prejudices. It also creates false notions about beauty and physical standards and strengthens narcissism in some and weakens self-esteem in others. Very structured, deep psychometric analyses have been used to influence elections and incite violence.

8. SPREAD OF FAKE NEWS

Fake news rise corresponds with a growing distrust in the mainstream media. Fake news has now even slipped into traditional media outlets and is often circulated by prominent individuals. This has contributed to the echo chamber phenomenon. People seek “informed” opinions through filters only from people they trust and look for news that confirms their world view. This results in people cultivating rigid opinions of issues that they would have probably been more willing to discuss in the past. We live in a world where we aren't only consumers of information but creators as well. Free service has given access to everyone to post whatever they want and thus create a trend in fake news spreading like wildfire. Competition among websites and social media platforms has sometimes resulted in the generation of fake news. Everyone is in a hurry to LIKE/SHARE/COMMENT rather than checking the authenticity of the news. The most common fake stories revolve around politics and the attempt is to polarise society, particularly during political events. Experts have warned that the Indian elections are at risk too with fake news. There is no regulator on the social media platform as we have in Print or Television media.

9. RECENT CAMPAIGNS BY SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

WhatsApp launched a nationwide campaign called “Share Joy, Not Rumours” to help prevent the spread of rumors and fake news. Facebook launched the #Socialforgood campaign to address issues such as cyberbullying, mental wellbeing, and entrepreneurship and was targeted primarily at young users. Twitter launched the #PowerOf18 campaign to encourage

youth to contribute to public debate and participate in civic engagement in the upcoming election season. These campaigns are a way to take ownership of what's happening on these platforms and find ways to weed out negative content.

10. CONCLUSION

Despite all its evils, social media is a tool for expression, equality, and empowerment, especially for a country like India where 70% of the population is yet to get online and leverage the opportunities it has to offer. While social media is facing the global challenges of information bombardment (both factual and fake), it is also enabling communities to access their rights and voice their opinion. Hopefully, in times to come, people will learn to take more responsibility for what they share and social media platforms will regain their lost trust. The government should bring out a policy framework on possible harm due to internet messaging platforms to engage at a deeper level. The need of the hour is to tackle the gendered aspect of online abuse and uphold the rights of women in India. There have been calls to regulate social media or ban it altogether. A ban might be an extreme step. However, a digitally literate country is the need of the hour. Responsible social media use must be taught at every school and college in the country.

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