

The Impact of Social Media on Society

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Abstract – Almost a quarter of the world's population is now on Facebook. In the USA nearly 80% of all internet users are on this platform. Because social networks feed off interactions among people, they become more powerful as they grow.

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INTRODUCTION

Thanks to the internet, each person with marginal views can see that he's not alone. And when these people find one another via social media, they can do things - create memes, publications and entire online worlds that bolster their worldview, and then break into the mainstream.

Without social media, social, ethical, environmental and political ills would have minimal visibility. Increased visibility of issues has shifted the balance of power from the hands of a few to the masses.

Social media is slowly killing real activism and replacing it with 'slacktivism'

While social media activism brings an increased awareness about societal issues, questions remain as to whether this awareness is translating into real change.

Some argue that social sharing has encouraged people to use computers and mobile phones to express their concerns on social issues without actually having to engage actively with campaigns in real life. Their support is limited to pressing the 'Like' button or sharing content.

By now, we are all aware that social media has had a tremendous impact on our culture, in business, on the world-at-large. Social media websites are some of the most popular haunts on the Internet. They have revolutionized the way people communicate and socialize on the Web.

However, aside from seeing your friends' new baby on Facebook, or reading about Justin Bieber's latest brush with the law on Twitter, what are some of the real impacts, both positive and negative, that social media has had on our society?

Here is a closer look at the effect of social media on politics, business, socialization as well as some of the negative effects such as cyber bullying and privacy.

Impact on Politics

Every politician worth his salt needs to jump on the social media bandwagon. This is because social websites have played an important role in many elections around the world, including in the U.S., Iran, and India. They have also served to rally people for a cause, and have inspired mass movements and political unrests in many countries.

Impact on Business

Net savvy companies are using social media to advertise their products, build customer loyalty and many other functions. Interactions and feedback from customers help businesses to understand the market, and fine-tune their products and strategies. Many firms organize contests and give away prizes to enthruse consumers to visit their social website page more often. Compared to television advertisements and other expensive forms of marketing, social media presence is a cheap and effective means to enhance brand image and popularity.

Effect on Socialization

Social networks offer the opportunity for people to re-connect with their old friends and acquaintances, make new friends, trade ideas, share content and pictures, and many other activities. Users can stay abreast of the latest global and local developments, and participate in campaigns and activities of their choice. Professionals use social media sites like LinkedIn to enhance their career and business prospects. Students can collaborate with their peers to

improve their academic proficiency and communication skills. You can learn about different cultures and societies by connecting with people in other countries.

Negative Effects of Social Media

Unfortunately, there are a few downsides too to social networking. Many introverts and socially reclusive users place too much emphasis on virtual interaction, and ignore the real world outside. Read on to learn about a few more negative repercussions of social media.

Cyber Bullying and Online Harassment

If you are not careful, unscrupulous people can target you for cyber bullying and harassment on social sites. School children, young girls, and women can fall prey to online attacks which can create tension and distress. If you are a victim of cyber bullying, do not take it lying down, but try to take appropriate legal action against the attacker.

Impact on Productivity

Many companies have blocked social networks on their office Internet as addicted employees can distract themselves on such sites, instead of focusing on work. In fact, studies show that British companies have lost billions of dollars per year in productivity because of social media addiction among employees.

Impact on Privacy

If you are not careful, what you post on the Net can come back to haunt you. Revealing personal information on social sites can make users vulnerable to crimes like identity theft, stalking, etc. Many companies perform a background check on the Internet before hiring an employee. If a prospective employee has posted something embarrassing on social media, it can drastically affect their chances of getting the job. The same holds true for our relationships too, as our loved ones and friends may get to know if we post something undesirable on social networks.

The Harmful Impact of Fake News

In some cases, false information can have a strong impact on society. During the previous election, for example, many questionable or fake news stories circulated. One example of this occurred close to the election, when a story that tied Hillary Clinton to a pedophilia and human trafficking ring was widely shared on Facebook. It turned out that this originated with a single unsubstantiated post on a conspiracy forum and was then reposted on thousands of other websites.

Social media stories, whether true or not, often go viral. The more outrageous and newsworthy something is, the more likely that many people will share it. During a highly-polarized election, people are motivated to share anything that supports their candidate or, more likely, attacks the opposing candidate. This can result in false stories widely circulating. Even if false stories are discredited and recanted, the damage is already done. By the time a retraction is published, millions of people may have already seen the story.

The Rise of Fake News Sites

Social media has made it very easy to spread information quickly. Because Facebook and Twitter timelines move so quickly, viewers don't often verify what they've seen. A great deal of content is also spread through images and memes, which may or may not be based on valid information. Of course, many memes are created to be funny, cute or outrageous. Others, however, are intended to influence our thinking. Even links to real articles can be misleading. It's safe to say that most people who see a headline and link never read the whole article.

CONCLUSION

Social media has its advantages and drawbacks as revealed in this article. It is up to each user to use social sites wisely to enhance their professional and social life, and exercise caution to ensure they do not fall victim to online dangers.

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