

How Social Media Impacts our Daily Lives

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Executive Summary

In this paper we analyze the possible effects of social media on both, individuals and the society as a whole. First, we illustrate the current situation of social media in terms of facts and figures before we deepen selected aspects of new forms of virtual interaction. With a specific focus on recent neuroscience research findings the following main research question is to be answered: How does our brain deal with these new forms of information technologies and what are the possible consequences for our social behavior? There is a broad range of diverse interpretations related to the usefulness of social media as a powerful source of communication and learning. Through examining several advantages and disadvantages we will highlight the circumstances for responsible handling of social media. The examination takes place on two levels - the global form of information and expressing opinions via social media and its impact on social systems & the individual form of participating and the specific influence of social media on the own social behavior. Subsequently the effects of social media on the two levels above will be integrated into an overall picture. As main results of this study we can state that social media does have an impact on human brain and in consequence on the quality of our life, emotions play a crucial role in human communication, besides the generally known benefits there are serious threats for individuals and society and thus a need for a sensible social media interaction.

Introduction

Knowledge is power. We all recognize this saying, but few understand the empowering role social media has played. Through social media, anyone online is empowered by an unrestricted flow of information to add to their knowledge bank. In today's world, it is undeniable that social media plays an important role in impacting our culture, our economy and our overall view of the world. Social media is a new forum that brings people to exchange idea, 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 in a democratic fashion including people in repressive countries. This media outlet accommodates a wide variety spontaneous, formal, informal, scholarly and unscholarly writings to flourish. It enables common interest-based groups such as students to work in a collaborative group projects outside of their class. It fosters creativity and collaboration with a wide range of commentators on a number of issues such as education, the economy, politics, race, health, relationships...etc.

Although it has brought about many benefits, allowing us to easily connect with friends and family around the globe, allowing us to break down international borders and cultural barriers, social media has come at a price. Social media has a negative impact on our lives because the combination of isolation and global reach has eroded our culture. Social media is robbing us of trust and comfort we once placed in one another, replacing the human fellowship, physical and emotional support we once drew from each other with virtual connection. It robs us from self-control and from the ability to think independently and instead makes us gullible to join any group that posts perverse messages that tickle our ear and amuse our senses without evaluating the consequences

Positive Influence of Social Media

Accessing News

Come morning, before you hit the newspapers, check the TV or brood over the weather, do you ever do a round of Facebook or Twitter? If you do, then you belong to a growing tribe of people who have turned to social media for information. Social psychologists have said more and more people are turning to social media for their daily dose of information. They are more likely to get it from online groups and friends, who share their likes and interests. This way you can regulate some of the information you read every day.

Ease of Conducting Business

Social media has come as a boon for marketers and salespeople. It is easy to find focused groups, potential partners and even employees on social media networks. More importantly, it gives businesses with time to spare but not the money, the chance to engage people and promote their offerings. In the past, business was conducted in neighborhoods, but social media has opened up worldwide opportunities and new possibilities.

Ease of Connecting with People

People still meet in social gatherings, in pubs and discotheques, but it has become easier to find people who share your interests and likes on social media sites. People are also expanding these online interactions to meetings. First introduction is made through social media platforms, then they develop them through phone calls and meetings. In other words, the role of social media has become bigger and more complex.

Revelations

Before social media, people would reveal little of their doubts and fears. But now the onus is on being more transparent. More and more people are shedding their inhibitions and opening up. They are expressing thoughts and ideas more openly and becoming more social!

Negative Influence of Social Media

Social Media & Facebook Depression

Several researchers have proposed a new phenomenon called 'Facebook depression', which is defined as depression that develops when individuals spend an excessive amount of time on social media sites, such as Facebook, and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression. Seeking acceptance and staying connected with peers is an important element of social life. However, the intensity of the online world, which requires constant engagement, creates a factor of self-awareness that may trigger depression in some people. As with offline depression, people who suffer from Facebook depression are at risk for social isolation and sometimes turn to risky Internet sites and blogs for 'help' that may promote substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, aggressive and self-destructive behaviors. Depression is one of the inadvertent consequences of excessive social media usage. For clarity, Facebook depression is not just limited to Facebook, but also refers to the impact of other social networking sites causing psychological problems. Because Facebook is currently the largest and most widely used social medium, the phenomenon of social media caused depression has taken its name.

Social Media & Anxiety

In addition to being a source of depression and anxiety, social media is also a common source of stress to its users. Another survey performed on 7,000 mothers, found that 42% of mothers using the photo-sharing site Pinterest, reported occasionally suffering from Pinterest Stress. Obviously, social media causes depression anxiety, but how? How social media causes depression anxiety, occurs in two ways. Chronic stress causes depression anxiety. Being constantly alert for new social media messages, to your instinctive fight or flight limbic system, is the same as being on continuous alert for predators, which causes a release of the stress hormone cortisol. The second way social media causes depression anxiety is from the stress produced from constantly trying to project an unrealistic and unachievable perception of perfection within your social network. The social anxiety of stress is associated with trying to project a perfect self at all times. The constant stress from constantly trying to project an image of perfection, a perfect career, perfect marriage, etc. leads to the constant release of the stress hormone cortisol, and just like social media usage, leads to depression anxiety. The constant release of the stress hormone cortisol, from heavy social media usage, over time causes damage to your gastrointestinal tract (gut), which opens the door to an immunoinflammatory response in the body and brain, leading to depression anxiety

Social Media & Catfishing

When people focus so much time on social media networks that real life relationships begin to suffer. In doing this our more important relationships with our loved ones and close family members suffer because more of our time and effort is put into the

illusion of social media. MTV's show, Catfish based off a documentary film, is a good example showcasing the illusion of social media connections. The term Catfish describes people who create fake social networking profiles, and "catfishing" is the process of befriending strangers online while using a fake or stolen identity. It is a deceptive act and it has ruined marriages, relationships and the emotional well-being of many people.

Social Media & Criminal Activities

Besides the emotional problems, social media is one of the prime enablers of criminal activities. With the increased use of social media, malicious and irresponsible people benefit themselves of the freedom of social media platforms to scam and hurt others in several ways. Many criminals have taken advantage of social media to hide their identity and commit several crimes such as cyber bullying, cyber terrorism, human trafficking, drug dealing, etc.

Conclusion

Social Media is widely used and boon and bane at the same time. It facilitates global communication in seconds, connects deserted areas with the civilization, plays an important role in e-commerce and above all in the participation and democratization process. But the list of disadvantages and threats is also long. To summarize, despite the positive benefit of rapid information sharing, social media enables people to create false identities and superficial connections, causes depression and is a primary recruiting tool of criminals and terrorists. Finally, I feel as though the advantages of social media are emphasized quite often, as opposed to its negative aspects which are very rarely discussed. This trend must change, and users should be better informed of both sides of the argument. Although change is good, necessary, and inevitable, it always comes at a price. Discounting positive impacts does not hurt in the long run, nearly as much as negative ones do. In this paper we have explored the harms posed by this uncensored and unmonitored new medium of communication which exposes us all to a gradual breakdown of social cohesion and the destruction of our traditional value systems, unless we take responsibility to ensure that our understanding of social media and its impacts are constantly evaluated with what's happening in the world.