

SOCIAL MEDIA CRITICISM IN RESPECT TO AUDIENCE EXPOSURE

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Abstract

In the world of gadgets and progressive technology, we all have succumbed to social media platforms at least once. The choice wasn't particularly ours but we all somehow continue to be a part of this globally connected world of the internet. Every platform is serving more or less the same purpose of communication and expression with certain different elements according to the target audiences. Certainly, the two-way interaction has increased but it also comes with unclear negatives.

This paper showcases social media platforms in critical light, specifically pointing to the disadvantages of this addiction. From social validation to privacy issues, users have been through varied complications but certainly have been dedicated consumers. Highlighting the psychological disturbances and unnecessary content creation, this paper analyses how quickly users are habitual to these sites without realisation.

Audience exposure is taken into account with understanding of all aspects, from content creation on social media to its selling of information, generation of fake news to active political celebrities influencing millions through a single tweet. Paper will provide a picture as to how Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp and others are ruling our lives at the same time disseminating our private information and personal data to advertisers for easy money. Amidst the healthy discussions and two way communications, social media also risks our safety which has been clearly mentioned in the paper.

Keywords: Social Media, Audience Exposure, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp

Introduction

Social media has been an obsession in the 21st century and in this paper we will discuss the negatives of the same. From Facebook, Twitter, Instagram to Tumblr and Whatsapp all users estimated to be 2.46 billion users. Facebook tops the list with 2.2 billion monthly active users. With the rapid scaling and constantly adding members, all these platforms essentially focusing on communication, now are being used for various activities including advertising, business promotion and community development.

In 2017, Facebook had 2 billion monthly active users and its cousins, Facebook Messenger and Whatsapp to share 1 billion active users. According to Comscore (2011) about 90 percentages of U.S internet users visit a social media platform every month. Focus on social media seems unavoidable, as 73% teens are using it and research shows the attachment between children and screens will become impossible to break in next 20 years.

One of the defining phenomena of the present times reshaping the world as we know it, is the worldwide accessibility to the internet. The lovechild of the World Wide Web is social media, which comes in many forms, including blogs, forums, business networks, photo-sharing platforms, social gaming, micro blogs, chat apps, and last but not least social networks. The power of social networking is such that, the number of worldwide users is expected to reach some 2.95 billion by

2020, around a third of Earth's entire population. An estimated 650 million of these users are expected to be from China alone and approximately a third of a million from India. The region with the highest penetration rate of social networks is North America, where around 60 percentage of the population has at least one social account. As of 2016, 78 percentage of the United States population had a social networking profile.¹

Awareness about cybercrime, online harassment and stalking has been discussed several times but still 40 percent of users are unaware. Hacking of profiles, sharing misleading information, decanting your images and information can have long term adverse drawbacks. 27,482 cases of cybercrimes reported in 2017 as reported by Times of India and one attack in India every 10 minutes.

Although "online harassment" is often used interchangeably with the term "cyber bullying," it is actually a different entity. Current data suggest that online harassment is not as common as offline harassment, and participation in social networking sites does not put most children at risk of online harassment. On the other hand, cyber bullying is quite common, can occur to any young person online, and can cause profound psychosocial outcomes including depression, anxiety, severe isolation, and, tragically, suicide.²

As in 2012, scientists claim that 350 million people suffer from this condition. The study, "Facebook a more powerful addiction than alcohol, cigarettes" (2012) reveals that the pull of checking one's Facebook page can be more powerful than addiction to alcohol or cigarettes. As in 2012, scientists claim that 350 million people suffer from this condition. The reason cited by FB addicts has been:

- i) The urge of human interaction and the ease of it through FB/twitter;
- ii) Getting a message on FB/twitter is exciting since it feels like someone is interested in "me".

A study by University of Chicago Booth School of Business states the desire to frequently check your social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, among other social networking sites, can lead to a stronger addiction than those who are addicted to alcohol or cigarettes.³

Thousands of businesses engage into social networking to approach and communicate with potential clients, this can be a distraction for employees who are more focused on the postings by their peer groups rather than work. Wired.com carried out two studies which confirmed damage to efficiency and productivity of employees caused by social networking: Nucleus Research reports that Facebook shears 1.5% off office productivity while Morse appealed that British corporations lost 2.2 billion per year to the social networking phenomenon.

Through evidently engaging in social media activities, masses our losing their real-life conversations. A deceitful sense of connection and belongingness provided through these networks works against the reality and people are keener to develop relationships over the internet rather than

¹ Statista.com – Number of social network users in selected countries in 2017 and 2020, Nov 2017

² Hinduja S. & Patchin JW, Bullying, cyberbullying and suicide, 2010

³ Shivani Arora, Social Networking – A Study of Indian Youth

in real life. The likes, comments and various activities on these platforms provide a feeling of closeness to the online space and people are thus forgetting the real interactions. An HP Lab's scientists studied and claimed that mostly all users are likely to change their ideology and perception according to the majority amongst their online friends. Peer pressure constantly dominates an influence on users; people hesitate in establishing an opinion because of the criticism and harsh comments which might follow with them.

Women Health's online reveals some interesting facts of viewing social media content. After watching food related images and videos online, the women felt hungrier and were determined to overeat. This content triggers a part of your brain and compels you to indulge in the same activity.

A 2015 study conducted by the University of Missouri found regular use of Facebook could lead to depression if the site triggered envy in the user. One of the professors conducting the research said, "If it is used... to size up one's own accomplishments against others, it can have a negative effect." A 2010 Case Western Reserve School of Medicine study showed hyper-networking (more than three hours on social networks per day) and hyper texting (more than 120 text messages per day) correlated with unhealthy behaviours in teens, including drinking, smoking and sexual activity. Hyper-networking was also associated with depression, substance abuse, poor sleep patterns, suicide and poor academic performance.⁴

Criticism in respect to audience exposure

1. Social Media Addiction

The urge to constantly check your twitter or Facebook has been considered a problem but these actions are backed with psychological facts and many researches have been carried out to prove the same. Harvard University recently studied evidence on the popularity of social media and addictiveness. The results conclude demission of pleasure chemicals as one starts disclosing self-information online. This chemical is identical to the one we sense while eating food, involving in sexual activity or receiving money. This feeling is additive and self-rewarding which not only compels a person to share their information online but also agreeably wait for validation by group of friends and similar be interested in their lives as well.

Neuroimaging studies have clearly shown the portions of the brain that are involved when engaged in social media. Social media engagement has been found to trigger three key networks in the brain – the “mentalizing network”, the “the self-referential cognition network” and the “reward network”.

- The mentalizing network : Dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (DMPFC), temporoparietal junction (TPJ), anterior temporal lobe (ATL), inferior frontal gyrus (IFG), and the posterior cingulate cortex/precuneus (PCC);
- The self-referential cognition network: medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) and PCC;

⁴ Danielle Reed, socialnetworking.com – Negative Impact of Social Networking Sites, Mar 28, 2016

- The reward network (ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPFC), ventral striatum (VS), and ventral tegmental area (VTA)).⁵

Certain aspects of social media usage which indulge a person with the logic of mental wellbeing are:

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) – Dr. Stephaine Rutlege explains this phenomenon to be wired with our brain for collaboration, comprehension and managing shifting alliances. Major users of social media website belonging to age group under 30, still establishing career paths, personal identities focus on the necessity to be social. They notice people doing something excluding them and that's what triggers this social behaviour.

Social Validation – Validation is through a Twitter “Favourite” or Facebook “Reaction”. These social signs of our peers liking us not only boost confidence but leaves us craving for more attention. Humans intensify these activities in order to strike the right impression on their acquaintances.

Social media comparison in correlation to self-esteem: After the validation, one feels the necessity to improve their social profile each day. This is mainly due to comparison with peers which directly impacts a person's self-esteem.

Social media addiction is based on the number of time you feel the urge to check your phone for updates, time spent on these avenues and also how frequently you plan things for social media or track your moment. 72% adults using social media sites on an average spend 24 hours a week online.

According to a new study from UCLA, when we need a mental break, that's our brains craving social interaction. “The social nature of our brains is biologically based,” said lead researcher Matthew Lieberman, Ph.D., a UCLA professor of psychology and of psychiatry and bio behavioral sciences. “When I want to take a break from work, the brain network that comes on is the same network we use when we're looking through our Facebook timeline and seeing what our friends are up to.”⁶

The researchers displayed photographs of varied people to participants, similar to those regularly posted on social media. Every picture had a caption related to physical attributes of the person or expressing the feelings of the person at that particular moment. Participants who were looking at the pictures with emotional captions experienced numerous activities in their prefrontal cortex, implying creation of a social connection with the person just by gazing at the photograph. They found similar pattern of brain behaviour of people on a mental break, leading them to the conclusion that we're wired to pursue other people whenever sitting idle.

⁵SurenRamsbhu, Huffingtonpost.com – Biological & Psychological Reasons for Social Media Addiction, 13th Mar, 2017

⁶ Rebecca Danielle Schenider, What's the Science Behind Social Media Addiction, Sept 15 2015

2. Advent of Social Media Content and Companies

Business and click bait systems need no introduction to the social media platforms. Various online portals like BuzzFeed, Huffington post, Scoopwhoop, Story pick and others are relying on social media attention. They develop varied content keeping in mind the online audiences and earn simply through advertisement on the websites.

Regardless of the positive reporting content seldom posted by these sites, there is a clear picture of entertainment news and listicles which aren't benefitting audiences largely. Few examples of such articles: ABC actor is currently vacating in Prague, 10 points proving if your boyfriend is into you, 10 tricks to gain social media followers to state some. All these soft articles are for engaging young audiences and providing small moments gratification.

Former Facebook executive Chamath Palihapitiya told business students at Stanford last month that he feels "tremendous guilt" for his role in developing the global social network. "We . . . created tools that are ripping apart the social fabric of how society works," he said. "The short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops that we have created are destroying how society works. No civil discourse; no cooperation; misinformation; mistruth."

"Fifteen years ago," writes Taylor University professor Zack Carter in Psychology Today, "if you were to take your Nikon CoolPix camera . . . and begin taking photographs of yourself, sending them to your friends and family every day, you'd be labeled some sort of a lunatic." But with the spread of smartphones, selfie culture has become ubiquitous. The obsessive posting of self-images has turned millions of internet users into the paparazzi of their own celebrity.⁷

It connects us to the people who matter to us and at the same time also fills our newsfeeds for us to be aware of the happenings in our environment. Moreover, it also allows us to give voice to our opinions and share them with others who might hold the same view and appreciate it. Up to this point, things seem to be fine. But things went awry when people started the trend of trolling users who did not share their opinion.

Now it has grown so much that people seem to think it is alright to threaten someone, scare them if they raise their voice, and not only be abusive, but attach to them a tag or a label that is assumed to be right. But why do people have to be ashamed of the sides they take, irrespective of how wrong their opinions may appear to us? What probably started with the online trolling of celebrities and public figures, has changed tremendously with people now able to target a whole university through it.⁸

Amidst all these articles, social media trolling is trending like never before. The world of *memes* has created a massive impact on the users and these "relatable quotes" apparently share no information and substantial content, it is mere personal jokes. Such activities have somewhere decreased the

⁷ Jeff Jacob, Bostonglobe.com – Social Media Turns Us into the Paparazzi of Our Own Celebrity, Dec 16, 2017

⁸ Rekha Rani, Youthkiawaaz.com – How Abusive Trolls are Ruining An Otherwise Great Tool – Social Media, July 28, 2016

availability and readership of better content in terms of knowledge. Users enjoy these scandalizing and soft content and so the publishers.

3. Privacy Concern

The number of people constantly sharing their personal information over the internet through social media platform is in billions. With professional sites like LinkedIn, where in your hirer is requesting a decent LinkedIn profile, it is mandatory in today's day and age. These markets are surviving on the data provided by us, through various modes of communication, analysing it to study markets, building new business models and approaches.

According to Consumer Reports' 2010 State of the Net analysis more than half of social network users share private information about themselves online, opening themselves up to a variety of online dangers. The key findings of the report include the following:

- 25 percent of households with a Facebook account don't use the site's privacy controls or weren't aware of them.
- 40 percent of social network users posted their full date of birth online, opening themselves up to identity theft.
- 9 percent of social network users dealt with a form of abuse within the past year (e.g., malware, online scams, identity theft or harassment).

Nowadays, hackers prowl the social media networks looking for victims. They tend to use the shortened URLs like those which are created with bit.ly. They use these shortened URLs to trick their victims into visiting harmful sites or to inject viruses into their computers or mobile phones. Hackers also use spyware which they can easily install on your mobile phone, laptop, iPad or/and computer remotely via downloads, emails, shortened URLs or instant messages. The spyware gives the hacker information about the passwords you use on your social media networks and other accounts which you access online. The simplest way to avoid being a victim is to never click on links unless you're sure of the actual source.⁹

"People giving contact lists, they're not doing anything wrong," he says. "You are their friend. You gave them the e-mail address and phone number." Most of the time, you probably want to stay in touch with the person, possibly even via the social media site. But the social network then has that information — whether or not the owner of it wanted it shared. Social platforms' ability to collect and curate this extra information into what are called shadow profiles first came to light with a Facebook bug in 2013. The bug inadvertently shared the e-mail addresses and phone numbers of some 6 million users with all of their friends, even when the information wasn't public.¹⁰

According a research in 2010 North-eastern University, researchers formed an algorithm to determine an individual's confidential attributes by scrutinizing the one information which people tend to leave unprotected even after strong privacy concerns: friend list. Evaluating the algorithm,

⁹ Sam Cohen, huffingtonpost.com – Privacy Risk with Social Media, Nov 17, 2017

¹⁰ Bethany Brookshire, sciencenews.com – On Social Media, Privacy is no longer a personal choice, August 24, 2017

researchers were able to conclude numerous personal qualities merely from friend lists, ranging institutions of graduation, schooling, hometown and other relevant data.

Facebook is clearly the company most affected by the Cambridge Analytica data sharing scandal, but that doesn't leave other social networks completely unscathed. Twitter has confirmed to Bloomberg that it sold public data access to researcher Aleksandr Kogan's GSR, the firm whose quiz app collected data from millions of Facebook users without their consent. GSR paid for one day of access in 2015, Twitter said, and scooped up a "random sample" of public tweets covering a period between December 2014 and April 2015. Twitter added that it "did not find any access" to private information.¹¹

The concept of third party sourcing has evolved through social media. Our information from communication with friends and families to location is all shared by media sites to third parties to advertise better and target the right products. Advertising is harmless but understanding that your personal information is being monitored can create unknown problems. Google utilizes information uploaded on Gmail, your search history to advertise and make money. Facebook sells your friend list, likes and dislikes, age and other relevant data to simply surplus its profit.

4. Fake and Duplication of news

Whatsapp journalism is an emerging term in the world of fake news. These news can be different things at once, a simple mistake, an intentional agenda or just a deviation from the actual news. Social media is famous for creating such rumours and apparently are taken seriously by the eminent media houses and debates are happening of "how was this news created". Despite being fake news, they somehow grab the attention and are created into real news. It is a twisted concept but is charged with propaganda.

When U.S. President Donald Trump began crying "fake news," and prime time news slots in India began to hold debates on photo shopped WhatsApp forwards, we knew post-truth times had truly arrived. But as is the nature of governments, it took some time for the arrival of fake news to register with the government of India. On April 2, India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) woke up to the "increasing instances of fake news in electronic and print media" in the country, and released a circular announcing amendments to guidelines that the Press Information Bureau (PIB) follows while granting accreditation to journalists. In less than a day's time, the circular was withdrawn at the direction of Narendra Modi's Prime Minister's Office.¹²

Scandalised websites creating sensational headlines and are desperate for clicks in order to generate click bait money. People clogging up internet with "good morning" messages on Whatsapp are the ones who mistakably peddling fake news and start sharing it without properly checking the facts and sources.

Of the 3.4 billion people with access to the internet, 42% live in countries where governments employ armies of "opinion shapers" to spread government views and counter government critics on

¹¹ Jon Fingas, engadget.com – Twitter Sold Data Access to researcher in Cambridge Analytica Scandal, April 30, 2018

¹² Alisha Sachdeva, thediplomat.com – How Fake News Spread in India, April 09, 2018

social media, as per the Freedom on the Net 2017 report. So far, the only solution to prevent rumour mongering in “sensitive” areas in India has been blocking social media sites and suspending internet services. There have been nearly 40 information communication technology (ICT) shutdowns ordered by local authorities, some lasting several months in Jammu and Kashmir, as per the Freedom on the Net 2017 report.¹³

In addition to this, journalism is counting on Twitter for content. From the US President Donald Trump to PM Narendra Modi, every celebrity is intelligently utilizing social media to not only advance their public relations but providing national and international news. The case of Donald Trump boycotting media right after winning the elections is exceptionally famous. Besides this, he started taking out personal vendetta against various organisations and journalist over his tweets. Being at an influential position and utilising social media can have a negative impact on the audiences. Certainly, there is no proof of anything just a public figure ranting out on media which causes conflicts in the users head. It is a propagandistic approach which viewers might fail to realise.

5. Social Reality

Social media provides us a platform to create an image for ourselves for the people. We have the ability to edit or manipulate it for varied reasons. This creates a false image or reality of ourselves and because it is a better version of our original self, we tend to believe it. It increases our feelings of self-worthiness depending on the number of likes and followers.

Bob Sorokainch believes “Ultimately, Facebook is a narcissistic playground where the best, the funniest, the most charming aspects of our lives are publicized and the boring stuff, the beige that is most of our daily grind almost never gets posted.”

Social media has become extremely relevant in promoting yourself and your brand which requires creating and maintaining an online image which is attractive. In today's world of impression, not only platforms like Facebook and Twitter but professional sites like LinkedIn are crucial for maximizing career opportunities. Thus, the idea of promoting an ideal image in comparison to the real image is more acceptable to the online world. The ideal version of a person is “how they feel they should be” and the real version is “who they really are” and their online profile is a conflict between the two. In order to constantly portray a side of their lives, not only people fade out of reality but soon start developing a habit to showcase more often to the public which can have a mentally negative impact.

Impact on Physical Health

Social media can directly impact physical health. This is usually associated with the way you use it. For example:

- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome: If you do too much keying, you may experience problems that affect your hands or wrists. There are also specific problems associated with keying on

¹³Nilesh Christopher, enonomictimes.indiatimes.com – Is There a Case for Penalizing Fake News, March 07, 2018

mobile phones, which can strain the tendons of your fingers. These problems aren't all caused by social media. It can just as easily be caused by having to type term papers for school or reports at work.

- Eye problems: You can get eyestrain from staring at screens for too long.
- Fatigue: This is another symptom of overusing social media. If you're staying up too late posting on Twitter or Facebook, you may be losing valuable sleep.
- Lack of exercise: Social media can cut into time you might otherwise be spending outdoors or exercising.
- Distraction: One of the most dangerous potential consequences of social media addiction is driving while being distracted. As recent stories have confirmed, you can even get hurt texting and walking.

The above are harmful effects that aren't caused by social media per se, but by overdoing it or being online or texting while you should be concentrating on something else. Some of these, of course, also apply to activities other than social media, such as texting on the phone, writing emails or browsing internet sites.¹⁴

Conclusion

Social media has been and will continue to evidently impact our lives in various ways. One has to distinguish between the reality and constructive reality. It is important to understand these key issues to utilize the maximum out of these networks and not be a mere puppet in their hands. For better privacy, one is recommended to not provide their full name to any sites for cutting down duplication of profile and sharing of personal information.

Definitely, these online social spaces have demerits but if used careful, they can be helpful in the overall growth of the person. Social media addiction is a massive problem and according to researchers it will expand itself over the years. We need to aware ourselves and our coming generations to use it as a medium for connection and not obsession.

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