



e-ISSN: 2319-8753 | p-ISSN: 2347-6710

IJIRSET

International Journal of Innovative Research in
SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

IN SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY

Volume 13, Issue 11, November 2024

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 8.524

9940 572 462

6381 907 438

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A Role and an Impact of Social Media in the Society – A Critical Survey

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ABSTRACT: Social Media refers to various online social networking sites like Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. In the last decade or so, all these social media sites have become a crucial part of a significant section of the world's population. In the digital age, social media has become an integral part of our daily lives, influencing the way we connect, communicate, and consume information. While it has undoubtedly brought about unprecedented connectivity, the impact of social media on society is a subject of growing concern and interest. This article aims to provide a critical analysis of the multifaceted effects that social media has on individuals, communities, and broader societal dynamics. The impact of social media on mental health is a subject of ongoing research and debate. While social media can offer support networks and resources for those facing mental health challenges, it also contributes to issues such as social comparison, anxiety, and the fear of missing out (FOMO). The curated nature of social media feeds can create unrealistic expectations and foster feelings of inadequacy, affecting users' self-esteem and overall well-being. Social media has become a cornerstone of modern communication, fundamentally reshaping how societies interact, share information, and engage with the world. While it offers significant opportunities, its influence is both complex and multifaceted, presenting benefits and challenges that warrant a critical examination.

KEYWORD: Social Media, Social Dynamics, Mental Health Challenges.

I. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

The earliest known method of communication for long distances was handwritten correspondence, known as a "letter". The beginning of postal services dates back to the 550 century B.C. In this centuries to come, this primitive method of communication became more widespread. During colonial rule, The east india company after establishing its hold, started developing various modes of contact for their convenience. In this regard they opened the first post office in 1727 and in 1774 Calcutta GPO was established. Globally telegraph was invented in 1792. This proved to be a catalyst as it significantly reduced the message delivery time. However rapid changes in technology began in the 20th century.

This paper examines the history of social media. The plan was to approach this work from its historical development to its modern day perspective. The authors also looked at the definition of social media, its concept and application in the 21st century. In the decade of information systems, social media has played a vital role in transforming business and communications. We believe that the fastest way to grow a business entity is through social media and networking. In 2000, many social networking sites emerged to ease interaction with people that share common interest in music, education, movies and so on.

Social media as a space to share the ordeal: Me too Movement

Social media provide a common platform to public to speak about social injustice and put grievances about the polices. They also unite and act against crimes. Social Media has been instrumental in the propagation of gender inequality protests around the world. This purpose study is to assess the influence of "#Me Too movement" on intention to control sexual harassment against women and further to suggest a framework using mass communication as a tool to create

awareness and control sexual harassment against women. Multivariate data analysis was conducted through Partial Least Squares Path Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the data. The questionnaire was circulated through WhatsApp and emails to 800 Indian participants. The results suggested that social media movement like “#Me Too movement” has a positive influence on the intention to control sexual harassment against women. This research showed that awareness about the sex-based crimes could be increased with the participation in these kinds of social movements which in turn leads to formation of intention to control sexual harassment against women.

Me Too movement in India The “#Me Too movement” was initiated in 2018 September in India when Tanushree Dutta accused Nana Patekar for his inappropriate behavior on film set of film 'Horn Ok Pleassss' (Roy,2019). Later, a list of females came forward to discuss sexual assault incidents happened to them through “#Me Too movement”. All of them are very famous personalities and keep a very powerful position in Indian Society after the sexual allegations Mr. MJ Akbar has resigned from his post and Sajid Khan must step down from his upcoming big budget venture Housefull part 4. Indian women have shared their painful stories. They have also mentioned the detailed accounts of alleged attention (Loiseau & Nowacka, 2015). Easy access and low in cost, online participation in protests is a preference for many young women, especially the ones who lack of resources, furthermore, this option enables a choice regarding how much of their identity will be exposed (Schuster, 2013). In Brazil, political movements in 2013 were marked by a strong online engagement and participation, which brought a different way of making protests in the country (Queiroz, 2017).

Social media: Providing a Voice to the voiceless

Social media is simply a means of mass communication that creates a platform for social interaction. It has more or less benefits for most people of the world, but its effect on the lives of so many has made it quite impressive. Virtually everything is affected by social media, including our freedom of speech. Trying to understand Jon Ronson when he said “the great thing about social media was how it gave a voice to voiceless people”, I think he was trying to say that it has given a voice to those who are unable to speak out, a voice to those who have been caged by silence, a voice to certain individuals who are unable to express their opinion or are scared of airing their views and showing the world what they have to say and what they can offer. These are some various ways in which social media has raised a voice for the voiceless people. Conventional media have remained biased towards the interest of the social elites. However, not withstanding this a petite but influential section among the Dalit and backwards has come to occupy the status of an aspiring middle class in the country urban centers. It is this section of the middle class of these communities that are now utilizing social media to raise the concern and issues of their communities.

Firstly was giving those who are unfairly judged a view or rather an open opinion, some citizens who are sometimes referred to as the ‘low class citizens’ are deprived of the opportunity to express their views when there is an injustice done unto them or when there are arising matters in society. Many times on the news we see different noble citizens and people who are considered as very prominent people in the society. Most times they are there to give their thoughts about a certain issue or to speak on behalf of society. Speaking of times when they come on the news on behalf of society, they do not always, however, speak the minds of those being represented but rather express their own opinions, neglecting the fact that this issue is not his or her personal matters and therefore the rights and the views of both the high class and low class citizens should be highly considered to avoid a biased justice later on. You know that feeling when the teacher calls only the class prefect to fix a date of his choice for a test and at the end the date is an inconvenient date for you but you still cannot do anything about it, that is the same feeling many people have when their representative is not able to consider their opinions. They feel neglected, disregarded, and disenfranchised. What do you think these people will do when an opportunity like social media is created for them? Of course, they will grab it immediately and post articles where they can publicize their expressions and opinions concerning matters surrounding them.

Social Media as a possible platform to counter sensation

Social media can have both positive and negative effects on mental health. While it can be a way to connect with others, it can also be a source of anxiety, depression, and other health issues. Here are some tips for using social media in a healthy way. Socializing is a vital part of our lives — it helps us feel more connected and create community. When we’re apart, using social media makes it easier to stay in touch and maintain those connections. It has other benefits, too, such as allowing us to practice social skills in a low-stakes environment, find new friends through shared interests, and preserve memories. But we all know that social media isn’t without its downsides.

Sensationalism in media has long been a tool to attract attention, often prioritizing exaggerated, emotional, or controversial content over factual and balanced reporting. While social media has been criticized for amplifying sensational content due to algorithms that reward high engagement, it also holds the potential to counter this trend. With strategic use and awareness, social media can become a platform for promoting accurate, thoughtful, and balanced discourse. Social media algorithms are designed to prioritize content that generates engagement, such as likes, shares, and comments. Sensationalized posts, which often provoke strong emotional reactions, tend to perform better. False or exaggerated stories spread quickly on social media, often outpacing factual corrections. Studies show that misinformation is more likely to be shared than truth because it is crafted to be provocative. Users are often exposed to content that aligns with their existing beliefs, creating echo chambers that reinforce sensational narratives. This can deepen polarization and reduce exposure to balanced perspectives.

The rise of social media marks one of the most significant technological revolutions of the 21st century. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn have penetrated every aspect of daily life. Social media's ubiquity has brought unparalleled opportunities for interaction and engagement, but its influence also comes with challenges that require careful examination. This paper critically reviews the impact of social media, highlighting both its positive and negative aspects to provide a balanced perspective.

Positive Impacts of Social Media

Social media bridges geographical divides, enabling individuals to maintain relationships and form global networks. Platforms facilitate community building, allowing like-minded people to connect and collaborate. Social media empowers individuals by providing platforms to voice their opinions and advocate for social causes. Campaigns such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter demonstrate its ability to mobilize grassroots movements and challenge systemic injustices. Platforms like YouTube, LinkedIn, and Reddit provide accessible learning resources, democratizing education. They offer tutorials, lectures, and forums for knowledge exchange, supporting both formal and informal learning. Social media drives economic activity by enabling businesses to reach wider audiences and facilitating new career paths such as influencers and digital marketers. E-commerce thrives on social media platforms, which act as powerful marketing tools.

Negative Impacts of Social Media

The rapid dissemination of unverified content has led to a proliferation of fake news. Misinformation on social media has influenced public opinion, swayed elections, and fueled panic during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Excessive use of social media is linked to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. The pressure to present an idealized self-image often exacerbates feelings of inadequacy, particularly among young users. Algorithms prioritize content that maximizes engagement, often creating echo chambers that reinforce existing beliefs and deepen divisions. This polarization affects political discourse and social cohesion. Social media platforms collect vast amounts of personal data, raising concerns about user privacy and data misuse. Scandals like the Cambridge Analytica case highlight the risks of exploitation and surveillance.

The design of social media platforms, including features like infinite scrolling and notifications, encourages addictive behaviors. Users often spend excessive time online, detracting from real-life relationships and productivity.

II. THE ROLE OF ALGORITHMS IN SHAPING IMPACT

Social media platforms rely on algorithms to personalize user experiences. While this enhances engagement, it also has unintended consequences:

- **Filter Bubbles:** Users are exposed to content aligned with their interests, limiting diverse perspectives.
- **Amplification of Extremism:** Provocative content often gains more visibility, potentially promoting divisive ideologies.

Case Studies

1. Political Influence: The 2016 U.S. Election

Social media played a pivotal role in shaping voter perceptions during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Targeted advertisements and the spread of misinformation influenced public opinion, raising concerns about the integrity of democratic processes.

2. Social Media and Mental Health: Instagram's Impact on Teens

Studies reveal that Instagram significantly affects teenage mental health, with curated images and influencer culture contributing to body image issues and anxiety.

3. Crisis Communication: COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media served as a double-edged sword. It provided vital information but also became a breeding ground for misinformation about treatments, vaccines, and the virus itself.

III. FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**1. Improved Regulation**

Governments and platforms must collaborate to regulate harmful content, protect user data, and prevent the spread of misinformation. Clear policies and enforcement mechanisms are essential.

2. Algorithm Transparency

Platforms should make their algorithms more transparent, allowing users to understand how content is prioritized and take control of their online experiences.

3. Promoting Media Literacy

Educational initiatives should focus on teaching users how to critically evaluate information, recognize biases, and avoid sharing unverified content.

4. Fostering Healthy Usage Habits

Encouraging digital well-being through features like screen time trackers and reminders to take breaks can mitigate the negative effects of excessive use.

IV. CONCLUSION

Social media is a transformative force with profound implications for society. Its benefits, such as enhanced connectivity and empowerment, coexist with challenges like misinformation, mental health issues, and polarization. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-stakeholder approach, involving platforms, policymakers, educators, and users. By fostering a more ethical and inclusive digital ecosystem, social media can become a tool for positive change while minimizing its adverse effects.

This critical review underscores the need for ongoing research and proactive measures to harness the potential of social media while mitigating its risks, ensuring it contributes constructively to society in the years to come.

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