



THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON OUR LIVES



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The advent of Mobile Telephony which started with a bulky high cost wireless instrument, gradually but rapidly transitioned into smaller and smaller pocket-sized instruments. Then came the smart phone which brought in the additional dimension of video capabilities combined with all manner of applications, making the compact mobile phone, a complicated minicomputer.

Being able to communicate with family, friends, colleagues and business associates, access information and even, engage in digital transactions, have all made life much easier for the common man.

Many applications are available for playing solo games and providing platforms for many social and professional activities. Learning and teaching is being done online through these platforms. Consultations services are being provided which bridge distance barriers.

There are many applications available for entertainment in the form of music, dance, movies and serious podcasts on almost every imaginable topic from politics to religion, culture, history, science, defence and general knowledge. Groups can be formed for social interaction which may start with a few known like-minded friends and expand over time to include interstate and international contacts. These allow for individual inputs by each member and thus widen our networking base. Many social media platforms exist and information is often shared on several platforms, causing a ripple effect in the dissemination of both information and opinion. Opinions sometimes merge with information, creating an illusion of factual reality. This tends to spread in the social media platforms and can have many repercussions as rumors and opinions get confused for factual data giving rise to discussions, debates or even heated arguments which may end up causing stress due to emotional volatility. What started as a friendly group exchange of ideas and thoughts thus becomes a divisive force.

Technology has advanced at a rapid speed. Every second spent on the mobile phone or personal computer for any reason is available as user data. Online purchasing preferences to online viewing of movies, podcasts, music channels and investment activities provide a database for interested parties to influence people in the direction of their interest. If one has browsed for information on a topic, then one continues to receive many notifications regarding every aspect of that topic from many sources.

Advertisers use the available database to sell their products while opinion makers and political outfits use it their advantage to spread both information and misinformation, depending on their vested interest.

The great danger is that this availability of data has given an array of opportunities for unscrupulous tech savvy individuals to use it for scamming. Unsuspecting and naive individuals get convinced by them and may share vital personal data. Bank accounts are commonly hacked and used for money laundering. Artificial

Intelligence is being used to mimic the voice of family and friends to obtain information that would otherwise not be shared. Hacking of Social media accounts, professional work, personal emails and every type of communication is becoming common. The individuals need to be extra cautious in order to remain safe. Cybercrime has in itself become a major cause for concern for safety. Media pressure, gaming addiction and excessive screen time consequences are making life stressful for many. Social media activities provide entertainment and pleasure but they also ultimately decrease focus and attention span. Hence unlimited access to social media activities in children ultimately decreases their attention span, concentration power and creative thinking abilities thus diminishing their capabilities of learning and nurturing intellectual growth. Time spent on social media replaces healthy outdoor exercise, field games, active body movements and real time and place social interactions which are essential for all round development of the personality and character.

Information, rumors and opinions shared on social media platforms like WhatsApp, Face Book, Instagram and You Tube are heard and watched by innumerable people across the world and play a pivotal role in shaping one's own thinking, opinion and even behavior pattern. Impressions get created which may have no basis and information is imbibed which is sometimes factually incorrect. Social media should therefore not be the main or only source of our knowledge.

Social media is a powerful tool in garnering support from the general public by engaging in the spread of information towards this goal. Politicians often employ this method to enhance their own support by creating story lines that show them in good light. Many reputations are built and destroyed on the basis of social media exchanges. So each of us must be circumspect in the information we share on such platforms. Personal data is not always safe in public domain. These are some concerns we must be aware of while engaging in interactions on social media.

A significant number of adolescent children presented with Tics (involuntary movements) of the face and neck. This triggered serious concern among the parents and doctors in the community as tics are often due to neurological causes. It was eventually connected to a TikTok video on social media which showed this movement and it was subconsciously picked up and imitated by those who had seen this video which had gone viral. This example merely highlights the possibility of the subconscious mind to imbibe habits unknowingly. Repeated viewing of a trend on social media influences immature minds to accept as a norm what they view. Fads such as Tattoo and body piercing are promoted and adopted by many without questioning the rationale behind these fads. A normal healthy person should consider seriously any irreversible infliction on the body purely for cosmetic reasons. Unfortunately, the social media visuals sometimes become the guiding force of one's decision. Reason and logic then get replaced by compulsive obsession. These are some of the real dangers of unsupervised watching of some videos. Some video games available on social media platforms like Blue Whale and PubG have been found to influence the minds of children by drawing them in with tasks leading to secrecy, isolation, emotional pressure and eventually despair. Some have even been reported to have committed suicide because of these digital game videos. Parents must be aware of the time spent by their school going children on social media and must in clear terms explain the consequences and set limits of what may and may not be viewed by them. Parents are fully responsible for what the children view on social media and cannot shirk the responsibility of strict supervision in the name of freedom of choice.