

The Psychology of Social Media

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Introduction

In the upcoming exam paper, I am focusing on the psychology of social media. Rather how social media can affect us emotionally. In order to investigate this topic, I will analyze Facebook and pinpoint exactly how certain elements of Facebook's software is orchestrated to promote a certain behavior and trigger specific emotions. I will be focusing on the layout and composition of Facebook and the different interactive features.

In relation to working with this objective there are some questions I wish to explore;

- What are the essentials of Facebook's layout and different components?
- How can the layout and different components within Facebook affect its users psychologically?
- How does this affect the behavior of the users within Facebook?

The inspiration behind my paper is Benjamin Grossers article;" What Do Metrics Want? How Quantification Prescribes Social Interaction on Facebook"¹. Benjamin Grossers article is relevant in this time in our society. He casts light upon how

¹ Benjamin Grosser - What Do Metrics Want? How Quantification Prescribes Social Interaction on Facebook". School of Art & Design, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
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<http://computationalculture.net/what-do-metrics-want/>

Facebook manipulates their users while promoting certain behavior. To address this, he talks about capitalism and how the need for more influences our behavior. In utilizing his work, I will further zone in on my topic. Rather than focusing on metrics I will focus on the different concepts within Facebook, the way it is structured and built around posts and the interaction with posts. To dive further in to this subject, I will start by drawing upon the works of Abraham Maslow and his theories about human needs and emotion². My reason for looking to Maslow for material is that Benjamin Grosser mentioned Maslow's pyramid of human needs in his article and I found the parallel highly interesting. Something that I found strange however was that he only mentioned it briefly and did not utilize it in any way in describing the components of Facebook in his analysis. Although his perspectives are relevant I found that he was missing the psychological side of the issue. I suspect that he considered that objective, otherwise he would not have mentioned Abraham Maslow. I figure that he just did not have enough time to address capitalism and psychology in the same article.

I find that Maslow's material is somewhat essential in the understanding of human behavior. In his book "Motivation and Personality" he describes different kinds of motivation and needs of the human being. He shares different theories and observations to further describe the needs of humans. Although he creates a hierarchy of basic needs, he also describes how certain individuals deviate from that order. Some people for example can have stronger needs for love than others due to different neglects in their upbringing. He welcomes and values the fact that all people are different, and that they therefore have different needs. He does not try to force his hierarchy of needs, rather he explores the differentiation of human needs. He is highly capable of flexible thinking which is one of the reasons that I chose to implement his work in my paper. Maslow's theses are not about the behavior of humans using Facebook or any other social media. But as social media is an extension of your social life I find that it

² Abraham H. Maslow. Motivation and Personality. 1954 by Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

is very much the same behavioral pattern within Facebook. Although you are interacting socially online, you still have the same needs as in the physical world.

Having a foundation for the understanding of human needs, I find that it is more relevant to progress with literature that is more appropriated to my specific topic. Other than focusing on the material above I will search for different articles and other sources such as documentaries and podcasts that touch upon the subject to acquire a broader understanding of the issue. I acknowledge that this is not supposed to be a psychology or philosophy paper. However, it will be a Software Studies paper that has a focus on how software can affect mental health. To make sure to stay on this path I will incorporate material written by authors to whom software is the main focus. Throughout my paper I will remain critical towards the software I have chosen to analyze and the literature I have chosen to utilize. Other than that I will make sure to not let the paper be influenced by my own opinions. The statements I do express will be fully supported by relevant literature such as the sources I have mentioned above.