Increasing Reliance on Social Media

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What is social media?

Is it an effective method of boasting your professional accomplishments while connecting with other recruiters?

Is it a scary world infested with scammers and people trying to make a quick buck out of you?

Or is it a senseless activity such as watching Tiktoks until you fall asleep in your bed?

The answer is both, yes and no. It is quite complex and intricate so let us break it down.

To begin with, social media is simply a tool. A tool that you can use to make your life easier or a tool that you can hurt yourself with. It does not have any feelings nor would care about your feelings. You have control over it and it is your responsibility to use it safely.

Eva Amin(Eva Amin, 3:15 - 3:17) states, "See, the problem isn't social media. The problem is how you're choosing to use it."

Just like any tool such as a hammer or even a more complicated one like an electric drill, you must understand the usage and dangers of it. You would never give a child an electric drill to play with, so why would you give a child a tablet without making sure it can never hurt your child?

What do you wish to get out of using social media?

Everyone has different answers to this question because we are all different and have our own goals. Some people may want to expand their professional horizons, brand themselves as influencers, or even create a personal account to document their livelihood to eternalize it.

Just like the real world, social media has hidden dangers. Anything you post or say will stay online, even if you press the red delete button. You may think that you are safe by simply pressing a button, but your "digital footprint" will always exist, somewhere in a database or server.

What is a digital footprint?

A digital footprint actually stems from the term "ecological footprint" which determines how dependent humans are on natural resources. Basically a method of understanding how much resources humans use, therefore gives us an idea of how we can reduce the usage. Similarly, our digital footprint refers to the trail of data you leave when using the internet. It includes websites you visit, emails you send, and information you submit online.

Digital footprints are important because they can be used to understand an individual's personality, interests, and their private information. Although this metadata is often secured by companies, there are precedents in which hackers accessed people's digital footprints to exploit them.

A random individual that registers with a company that creates a public social media account can be hacked. This is one of the hidden dangers of using social media.

Disregarding digital footprint, let us shift gear and see the effects of social media in the younger generation.

Children and teenagers are more susceptible to information they consume at a younger age. Their environment and interaction with people shapes their personality as they grow up. Unfortunately, the future of social media with children looks grim. A case study (Weir K, 2023) conducted around 11 to 13 for girls and 14 to 15 for boys, more social media use predicts a decrease in life satisfaction a year later, while lower use predicts greater life satisfaction. This does not mean that social media is necessarily evil. It just means that adults should have a closer grip on the information consumed by children. After all, children can't process what the digital world contains and they do not know what is good or bad about it. As they develop and learn literacy skills, they can have more autonomy.

Does this mean that we should not give children any medium to use social media?

No. It has been proven in many cases that social media increases the sociability of adolescents and provides a sense of community. Especially amongst marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ members who are afraid to talk with their parents or caretakers. Alvord, a clinical psychologist in Maryland and adjunct professor at George Washington University, stated "We know from suicide prevention research that it's critical for people to know they aren't alone."(Weir K, 2023)

In a Harvard article by Amy Roeder, routine social media has been positively associated with all three health outcomes which was social well-being, positive mental health, and self-rated health.(Roeder A, 2020)

The digital world itself has a lot of dangers yet it has enough contingencies to deal with said dangers. There is a kind of balance or a give and take with social media.

"Social media can also provide platforms for bullying and exclusion, unrealistic expectations about body image and sources of popularity, normalization of risk-taking behaviors, and can be detrimental to mental health."(Glasofer, D., & Mellins, C. 2021)

Within the same article, the same authors argued the opposite of the aforementioned statement.

"For very shy or introverted young people, it can be a way to meet others with similar interests. During the pandemic, social media made it possible for people to connect in ways when in-person socialization was not possible. Social support and socializing are critical influences on coping and resilience."(Glasofer, D., & Mellins, C. 2021)

So what's the verdict? Do the negatives outweigh the positives or vice-versa?

There is no clear answer!

Before you villainize me after you read this entire article, give me a moment to explain!

Like mentioned before, social media has tons of benefits and negatives.

There is a kind of balance in this digital world.

Social media contains racism yet filled with communities based in trust and care.

Social media has scammers and hackers, yet software systems to protect you.

Social media allows individuals to attain unprecedented fame and professional reputation, but filled with the eyes of jealous people.

Social media contains false information and rumors while also containing the same information that can save you.

This article is meant to show you both sides of the coin. There is no answer because there really is no clear answer. The digital world is extremely similar to the real world and the real world is not something that we can "take away" like it is a phone.

The best answer I can give you is to understand the dangers and try your best to minimize it. Fortunately, there are many online softwares that limit what children can see on social media to ensure protection. In addition, make sure that you trust the website that contains your private information and do not say/do anything that you would not do in real life.

With all this information, I hope you find some kind of answer that can guide you to a decision.

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