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Connection Failed

In modern society, Social Media serves as a rather prodigious form of communication, networking and interactions. People may use social media for a variety of reasons, be it to find job openings, meet a significant other or simply just have a simple conversation with a friend. Most of these tasks which could be done in person have now been replaced by the idea of social media, which was the brain child of many technology scientists. Be it Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, all these websites and applications aim to bring people 'closer'. That goal seems to have been achieved due to immense number of users on these internet-based systems especially Facebook, but at what cost?

Facebook's mission statement is '*to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together'* but all it has seemed to do is encourage people to dwell in their own isolation and sit behind their screens with a façade of happiness. In Stephen Marche's article '*Is Facebook Making Us Lonely'*, he mentions the everlasting paradox '*the more connected we become, the lonelier we are'*, and a symbol of that was the late B-movie star Yvette Vickers. The woman was found dead in her own household, who wouldn't have even been registered dead if it weren't for her neighbor Susan Savage, who decided to check when she noticed the cobwebs on her mailbox. The dead and lone women had her computer on and the last phone calls before her death weren't made out to friends or family, but to distant fans to whom she was connected

through fan conventions and websites. She died an elderly woman with no one to turn to in the time of need and from being a star of a horror film, to being a symbol of the horror of reality: loneliness. During her life, she connected with many people over the internet and social media, but none of these people seemed to check up on her or make any contact when she was out of the picture for good portion of the year. One would normally connect Vicker's death to the heart condition she had, but popular opinion links it more towards loneliness in this and lack of 'real' friends despite living in this connected world.

Marche very eloquently points out that during the course of the past three decades, technology has created a world for us where it is impossible to not stay in contact or feel lonely at any time of the day. This technologically created world, while unbounded by the limits of space and time, has bounded us within the boundaries of our phone or computer screens. It has encouraged us to be detached from one and another and actually have social interactions with one and another. Facebook is the forefront of this unbounded reality and is the rationale behind the rise in the importance of 'likes' and comments on photos. Marche continues to stay that we as individuals have become so mesmerized of the attention that we so receive on our profiles when we make an update or upload a photo, and that has become more important than actually maintaining a healthy friendship with an individual. Marche makes us aware that Facebook was a creation at a point of time when a majority of individuals believed that having more friends and being more connected is the key to finding our places in society. This led to a situation which can be compared to that of a common high school highway where the popular kids are the ones with the more friends, likes and comments whereas the rather reserved and introverted kids aren't that popular and have lesser of the same. This lead to an evolution of an entire congregation of careers in the field of mental health due to the high rise in loneliness. We started

depending on individuals to solve problems in our lives which were earlier considered 'regular' and 'normal'. There are factors such as belief in God, marital status which may influence the feeling of loneliness, but they cannot be trumped by the importance of social interaction. Humans are meant to be social creatures, and if they are abstained from socializing and networking in person, this will only lead individuals to a pit of despair and disconnection. The issue of loneliness has now become an issue of public health, but yet Americans aim to amplify that feeling by working towards possessing their own houses or apartments. Individuals have begun to rather suffer and close themselves off rather than being open to the experience of being able to share a part of yourself with others, especially our own family. Facebook may have connected us to different people outside our households but has made us a prisoner of our minds away from families in our own households. Rather than actually feeling happy, people want to show through mediums like Facebook that they are happy or attempting to be happy. As per human nature, individuals do feel left out and jealous in the way that the other individual is happier than me and always try to one-up each other in an accidental popularity contest created by Facebook. Social Constructivism states that human development is socially situated and that one gains knowledge with interaction with others. Facebook is supposed to be a tool of the ideal cyber-utopian reality we all wish to live in, but more than the system itself, it is important as to how we as individuals make use of it.

By crediting Moira Burke and John Cacioppo, Marche aims to credit the fact that Facebook is simply a tool in the epidemic of loneliness, and what matters more is the choices and the decisions the individual makes. How an individual chooses to handle conversations and interactions with people away from the phone screen decides the depth of one's social network. Facebook is an extremely useful asset for us if we choose to use it the right way. Humans are the

ones who invite loneliness, but they are also the only ones who can drive it away. Marche states that even though there is a stark difference between a connection and a bond, it is extremely absurd to want to go back to the time of complete disconnection from technology, due to the lack of efficiency without the machines so created. Solitude serves valuable at the time of self-reflection which seems to be taken away from us by Facebook.

In the academic journal '*Loneliness in relation to social networking site usage among university students'*, Komal Rai and Gurpreet Gill seem to address the same issues as Marche did in his article. The academic journal uses figures which may be used to formulate a relation between loneliness and social media networking, specifically Facebook. The journal provides a rather technical approach to the entire issue by using all derived statistics and also derive their own figures as well to assess the advantages and disadvantages of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter etc. Gill and Rai state that these applications were meant to serve as a medium of communication for the curious human species, who have seemed to replace in-person interaction altogether. Usage of social media networking is considered an addiction in their opinion. They quote Sherry Turkle who argues that social networking website seems to give a false sense of friendship and is a ludicrous and completely absurd way to replace communication, rather it should be facilitating in-person communication more. They also quote a research done by a psychologist at the University of Michigan which revealed that the negative impact of these websites lies in the way individuals see themselves rather than how they see others. Rai and Gill also found that boys are more likely to be using social networking sites and be negatively impacted as opposed to girls, as well in terms of ages, a young adult aging from 18 to 29 is more likely to experience the negative side effects as opposed to a 30-year-old individual. They also concluded from research that Facebook has shown to be a factor

contributing towards stress of a young university student. All these results may differ between sample populations. At the end of the journal, they give reports and insights of their own research study employs the use of the UCLA Loneliness Scale, Facebook Intensity scale and their psychometric properties to come with their own figures, and their target population being students aging from 18 to 25 studying at Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. The study had a normative approach and wasn't meant to be experimental. In the future, they aim to further continue research on this co-relation between loneliness and social networking, specifically Facebook and further observe the impact towards alcohol or drug abuse. In their conclusion, they seem to be agreeing Marche's point about how social networking impacts us is as per how we make of it.

Marche's article provides a sociotechnical perspective towards the co-relation between loneliness and Facebook such as with the example of Vickers's death, whereas Gill and Rai's journal takes a technical approach to the same by giving already calculated and also calculating figures associated with the topic at hand. Gill and Rai give a better insight in terms of which gender, age group or demographic is more affected by Facebook in terms of loneliness, but Marche's article actually makes one reflect upon their own usage of the social networking site. While the academic journal could probably help you learn more, the article will actually encourage you to make a change towards improvement. This is mainly because Marche is able to connect with the reader with his simplified and casual language and give a more 'normal' approach, rather than the journal which was written for purpose of research and understanding as opposed to actually reaching out to people. Mentioning Vickers's death gives us a better insight as to what message Marche was actually trying give out about the disconnection due to social media using a direct fact and inferences from that fact, whereas the journal exemplifies the idea

by stating numerical figures. Both the journal and article employ use of academic sources to explain their point more such as the article quotes Moira Burke to explain the effect of different Facebook features and contrast them with one another, whereas the journal quotes figures from Sherry Turkle at Massachusetts Institute of Technology to get an insight of the several social media impacts. Both the article and journal, while taking two contrasting approaches in terms of the style of writing and the type of facts, conclude that Facebook and other social media networking sites are a key factor in causation of loneliness, but it is more about how an individual themselves use social media or to put in Marche's terms '*We are what we make of it*'. The journal and article both mention the UCLA Loneliness Scale, but the approach for that is significantly different as well, such as the journal uses it as an actual measurement tool along with its psychometric tools to derive a conclusion, but the article actually explains what the tool is and how is it beneficial for psychologists and researchers. Overall, both the article and journal address the same thing but into significantly different ways. The sociotechnical perspective of a journalist is one which meant to be more relatable towards readers and explain 'why' the issue or topic is substantial using quotes, facts and inferences from facts, whereas the technical approach aims to explain 'where' and 'how' the issue exists with direct factual statements and calculated numerical figures. Marche approaches the relation between loneliness and Facebook with a technological deterministic approach, which is basically understanding the impact of the technology on the social structure and cultural values.

From both these papers, what I inferred is that Facebook is a social networking application that was made to benefit us in terms of communication and connect people. It has achieved that but at the cost of disconnecting people from the world and having it negatively impact people in terms of loneliness. Facebook cannot be blamed completely for this and it needs

to be taken in account that the impact of social media is on how one makes of it. If one is able to balance the same social interactions outside of the digital screen, then only will Facebook and other social media serve as a boon rather than bane. Social media networking is a tool of cyber-utopianism which is created to help us but it depends on how the individual makes use of it, if used incorrectly can be a tool of destruction and cyber-dystopianism.

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