

Social Media as an Essential Tool for Assimilation

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Abstract-Mobile devices are a necessity for most people. With nearly half the population of the world owning a smartphone, it is hard to not see it as an essential commodity. However, with the rise in smartphone phone usage, the path has been paved for the realm of mobile applications. With resources ranging from healthcare to entertainment in an app the size of your thumb, they have aimed to make smartphone usage efficient and more convenient. However, of the mobile applications that exist out there, the most intriguing ones are social media apps. Social media apps allow people to share ideas, information, career interests and many more through virtual communities. This paper will explore the advantages and drawbacks of social media applications along with how they affect humans' relationship with their mobile devices and their perception of the world.

With over 5 billion humans using mobile devices (Milijic, 2021) and 3.6 billion social media users, it is no surprise that social media comes as a necessity to most mobile device owning people. Our increasing reliance on mobile devices directly corresponds to the popularity of social media. In 2005, only 5% of American adults were using one of the social media platforms, but now 72% of the public uses some form of social media ("Demographics of Social", 2021). The Merriam-Webster website defines social media as "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which people create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content"("Social Media", 2021). Human beings are social creatures that require the companionship of others to make progress in life which explains why they are drawn to social media. It serves as an easy medium to connect and share with as social media eliminates the

obstacles that make it hard to communicate. Social media is an ever-increasing phenomenon and this paper will explore the advantages and disadvantages of these platforms, and the nature of their effect on human beings.

The advances in digital technology paired with the human need to communicate has fueled the evolution of social media in the past years. What began as a means of communicating has grown to become a “sociological and commercial force” (“The Evolution”, 2021) and has changed the marketing world. With seven out of every ten individuals using social media to connect, receive news, share information and entertain themselves, social media has the ability to have a significant impact on us (“Demographics of Social”, 2021). However, these impacts could be both beneficial and harmful. Certain studies have shown that social media provides individuals with a “platform that overcomes barriers of distance and time to connect and reconnect with others and thereby expand and strengthen their offline network and interaction” (Mesfin, 2019) These social networks specifically the offline networks allow people to “form and maintain social capital” (Mesfin, 2019) which further allows people to draw on resources such as information and social support from other network members.

Although being socially connected with other people can relieve stress, anxiety, and sadness, a lack of social connection on the other hand can pose serious risks to mental health (Karim, Oyewande, et al., 2020) The dependency on social media has made it harder to live in a society in its absence. Social media’s rising popularity and familiarity has made it the social norm to communicate on the various social platforms available. With around 2.38 billion active users, Facebook has the power to influence people’s lives. If a person decides to deviate from the

compulsive need to stay active on social media, it is significantly harder to remain connected. Especially since the evolution of photo and video sharing on these platforms, communication has never been easier.

However, deciding to remain on these platforms has its own disadvantages. Although social media has proven to be a growing utility, there has been research that shows the detrimental effects of prolonged usage of certain platforms particularly in the field of mental health. Use of most of these social media applications have been linked to classic “psychological/economic theories such as the mere-exposure effect, endowment effect, and Zeigarnik effect, but also to psychological mechanisms triggering social comparison” (Montag, Lachmann, et al., 2019). Another study examining the influence of Facebook use on subjective well-being over time among young adults found that Facebook, rather than enhancing well-being, may undermine it (Montag, Lachmann, et al., 2019).

Even though there are quite some concerns regarding social media exposure and use, it is a fast growing resource and will be more integrated in our future. Research has shown that technology in the medical field is an advancing field and the same can be expected for social media in the healthcare realm. The results of this research highlighted the amount of papers associated with the health and medical fields and a growing interest in the usability technology of social media (Ramos, 2019). Health information is one of the top reasons for searching the World Wide Web and social media and for finding answers or support (McMullan, 2006) but a third of the parties may distort or misinterpret the truth (Silberg, 1997) Many of the general and medical news media services can publish conflicting or inaccurate information (Gottlieb, 2015)

and it's possible a vulnerable population is being exploited. Another research showed that of those that access social media platforms, 43% used them for education purposes. "Pinterest (30%), Facebook (22%), LinkedIn (16%), and Twitter (14%) were most frequently used for education" (Pizzuti, Patel, et al., 2020). Given the statistics of people accessing social media as a source of knowledge, it validates why healthcare practitioners frequently utilize social media, and many believe it can be an effective educational tool in healthcare. (Pizzuti, Patel, et al., 2020) We can expect the future to show an increase of people utilizing social media as a tool for obtaining reliable information, particularly in the medical field.

Another form of education that shows promise in social media development is science and research. Social media is a tool that the modern scholar and scientist should have in their armamentarium. Those that choose to use it should be aware of potential pitfalls and problems that they could encounter as they enter this world, but should not shy away from them because they can greatly increase the reach and impact of their work (Chan, Stukus, et al., 2017) Considering the great barriers that already prevent effective knowledge translation and patient engagement, it is necessary for scientists and scholars to use every tool in their control, including social media, to reach their intended audiences. There are various reasons academics should consider creating an online presence. It can be used to summarize their own and others' research in areas of their expertise and thus provide a source for timely, authentic, and trustworthy information (Chan, Stukus, et al., 2017). As their online presence grows, scholars have the potential to become powerful influencers of opinion, driving funding for research and education and policies supported by scientific evidence (Chan, Stukus, et al., 2017). Using social media for academic purposes can help you by cultivation mentors, raising awareness for research and

scholarship. A more prominent presence on social media has the potential to influence public opinion and could increase funding for research and education or “support policies consistent with scientific evidence” (Chan, Stukus, et al., 2017).

Based on the information gathered, it can be agreed upon that social media will continue to be present in our future and will continue to grow and increase its popularity. It should be treated as yet another source of information and a community of its own. Seeing that it's a necessity for most mobile users and will become a more common resource for people, it should (and will) be utilized in the healthcare industry as a reliable tool for providing more access and it will be used to spread more factual information. Given that more people are reaching out to social media to answer their queries, there should be more effort put into having accurate information uploaded. Although, it may not be ideal for people to spend as much time on social media at the expense of their mental health, there are benefits to be gained with its use but there should be regulations/ warnings in order to sustain a healthier environment for its users.

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