
SOCIAL MEDIA: A REFLECTION OF SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

In modern society social media has become one of the most influential forces. They use those platforms to expand content such as sharing sites, social networking, blogs and wikis-to create, modify share and discuss internet content. The social media also help in transforming communication, culture, politics, and individual behavior. Social media is vast in nature and performs many functions; therefore, it does not have a single definite definition and differs from person to person. Media presents quite a prominent role in social awareness, influencing attitudes and therefore demands responsible use to maintain social balance and truth. Social media has impact on social realities such as politics, gender issues, class, culture, social values, norms, social movement, opinions and trends. Therefore, the study focuses on the role of media in reflecting social realities. Additionally addressing its positive and negative effects; it concludes that social media acts both as a mirror of society and a catalyst for change.

Keywords: social media, society, digital culture, social movements, technology.

Introduction

In every era, media has acted as a powerful record of human experience and social transformation. By analyzing both historical and modern examples- from the depiction of gender roles in 1950s Hollywood films to the rise of social justice movement in the digital era it becomes clear that media consistently mirrors the social realities of its time. The media we consume, whether it's on television, in films, or circulating through social media, invariably mirrors the societal landscape from which it emerges. These creations offer a window into the prevailing beliefs, the challenges people grappled with, and the evolution of thought during a particular era, effectively providing a snapshot of the collective consciousness.

In the 21st century, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp have become essential to daily life. These platforms offer spaces for communication, self-expression, information sharing and community building. With billions of users globally, social media has greatly changed how individuals interact, access information and shape perceptions of reality. Media is a persuasive way to communicate and deeply integrated into our everyday activities. It covers print media such as newspaper and magazines, electronic media like TV and radio, digital media such as social network, websites, blogs, and streaming services etc.

The main things media does are inform, educate and entertain. It shares news about what's happening now, raises awareness about social and political issues, promotes cultural values and provides entertainment through movies, music and shows. Plus, it shapes public conversations by choosing how to present and frame information. With the growth of technology media's become quicker, easier to access, social media users not just consume information but also create and share their own content. This has changed media from just one-way communication to space where everyone can join in.¹

Social media serves not only as a communication tool but also as a reflection of societal values, beliefs, behaviors and conflicts. Through posts, comments, videos and hashtags, individuals share their views on politics, culture, religion, social media acts as a digital mirror that reflects both the positive and negative aspects of society.²

¹ Jan H. Kietzmann, Kristopher Hermkens, Ian P. McCarthy & Bruno S. Silvestre, *Social Media? Get Serious! Understanding the Functional Building Blocks of Social Media*, 54 *Bus. Horizons* 241 (2011).

² A.M. Kaplan & Michael Haenlein, *Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media*, 53 *Bus. Horizons* 59 (2010).

Social values and beliefs

Social media has a massive impact on how society develops values and beliefs as it determines what kind of information is shared among people every day. It has a predictive coding algorithm that mostly promotes information that is emotionally stimulating, controversial effect that often creates echo chambers where people are only exposed to information that matches their current beliefs. As a result, these beliefs eventually become normal and acceptable norms, even though they may only be a single fact of a particular issue. Discourages people from thinking in a nuanced manner, often promoting manner, encouraging people to make quick judgments about many issues. However, it has been a very effective tool in socializing people, encouraging a given attitude towards culture, identity, relationship and what it means to be successful, especially among young people.

Although it creates a controversial effect among people, there is a wide variety of values that still prevail beneath the surface, despite the constant conflicts that appear on social media, including fairness, security and well-being. In addition to this, it not only shows the values of society, but it also changes them by affecting the thoughts, feelings, and interactions of individuals. One of the major ways that this happens is by constant exposure. If an individual constantly views and observes different types of lifestyles, opinions and trends on social media, they often tend to accept and believe that what they are viewing online should be considered acceptable and valued in society. This can impact individual's feelings and thoughts about beauty, success, relationship, politics and morality. In this regard, one can argue that social media has significant impacts on the value of society by redefining what it considers important.

Most importantly, on a social level, social media shapes collective values. It has power to mobilize society on social issues, on global awareness and for solidarity across borders. Climate change, gender equality, mental health and human rights are just a few of the campaigns that seem to get traction through digital movements. On the other hand, this can also contribute to misinformation and sensationalism in ways that distort public perceptions, eroding trust. Such a phenomenon can breed confusion, division or even fear within society. So, although social media may be beneficial in enhancing democratic participation and shared values, it equally needs critical thinking and responsible use to prevent adverse effects.

In sum, social media is less of a communicative means than a powerful cultural force. It shapes individual beliefs, dictates social norms and reconstructs collective values in positive and negative ways. Its impact depends largely on how individual engage with it whether passively

consuming content or actively thinking, questioning and interacting responsibly.³

Social movements

Social movements are defined as a group of people who come together to address social, political or cultural issues they believe require change. In the past, social movements have significantly contributed to the shaping of our societies. In earlier periods, the mainstream media was the only source through which social movements communicated their messages. However, with the invention of communication technologies such as social media, social movements have the power to mobilize their messages. Social media sites have helped activists to instantly share information, organize events, raise money, and reach out to both domestic and international supporters without totally depending on traditional news media.⁴

In addition, social media sites have provided activists with a space to interact with their supporters as they discuss their ideas, create their identity and enhance their networking. Although traditional news media shapes public debates, digital media has changed the communication landscape by lowering the costs of participation while facilitating faster coordination. Therefore, social movements today take place in a hybrid media system in which online and offline communication complement each other in shaping public discourse.

Social media has greatly impacted the way social movements are structured and led, as it has caused a shift from being centralized and leader-led to a more decentralized and network-driven type of activism. In the past, social movements were highly dependent on charismatic leaders who would articulate the vision of the movement, rally support for the cause and provide overall direction to the movement as it developed. The role of leadership was very important in organizing the collective action of the movement and in ensuring that the movement stayed focused over time. However, with development of social media platforms, there is now less reliance on leadership authority as it is now possible to quickly disseminate information, communicate directly and participate in large numbers without necessarily being controlled by hierarchical structures. Social activists can now sway public opinion, organize action and even get noticed without being part of the leadership of the movement. While this is a great advantage in that it is now possible to quickly mobilize and involve large numbers of people, there are also potential disadvantages such as internal conflicts, lack of representation

³ Bradley Hook, How Social Media Shapes Our Values and Beliefs, Values Institute (Sept. 8, 2024).

⁴ Wayne Walcott, Positive Effects of Social Media on Social Movement, 5 IDOSR J. Comm'n & Eng. 43 (2020).

and difficulties in negotiations.

Gender and politics

Social media is an important factor in the construction and representation of gender, as it shapes and reinforces the understanding of masculinity and femininity in society. Sex is understood as a biological construct, while gender is a social construct that is shaped by society, and social media is an active participant in this process. Social media platforms are filled with images, words, and stories that shape what is considered “proper” for men and women which in turn, perpetuates traditional stereotypes of femininity as soft, emotional, and fragile, and masculinity as strong, powerful, and authoritative. Social media platforms are not only a reflection of existing social inequalities but also contribute to their perpetuation by giving voice to the dominant discourse. The digital world also provides an opportunity to challenge these stereotypes by giving voice to alternative discourses. However, because the digital world is a rapidly changing and dynamic environment, the analysis of gender representation on social media is complex, and its impact can both educate and manipulate.⁵

Social media serves as a complementary communication platform that enables engagement and expression; yet, it tends to perpetuate the dominant discourse of patriarchy instead of dismantling it. Social media platforms such as Twitter may perpetuate traditional gender roles through the dissemination of stories that prescribe how women should conduct themselves, present themselves, or engage with politics. Online discourse may tend to mirror the existing power relations in society, where the views of men tend to dominate online discourse and suppress the voices of women. Gender in social media is socially constructed through discourse, where the construction of gender, particularly women and men, is informed by societal norms and political ideologies rather than biological differences. Social media also has the potential to disrupt the dominant power relations by establishing alternative online publics where marginalized voices can contest stereotypes and promote gender equality.

Social media has surfaced as a significant factor in contemporary politics by changing the manner in which political information is created, circulated, and entered. Unlike mainstream media, social media spots enable politicians, political parties, and activists to reach the millions directly without the need for intelligencers as interposers. This enables increased political participation by easing immediate commerce, feedback, and engagement. Social media is also

⁵ Kadir Demirhan & Derya Çakir-Demirhan, *Gender and Politics: Patriarchal Discourse on Social Media*, 41 *Pub. Rel. Rev.* 308 (2015).

essential in political juggernauts by enabling politicians to mobilize support, circulate policy dockets, and target specific groups of choosers using online political juggernauts. Social media also shapes public opinion by determining political converse, emphasizing trending topics, and promoting specific opinions using algorithms. still, social media can also be responsible for political polarization, the creation of misinformation, and the development of echo chambers where users are primarily exposed to opinions that support their pre-existing views. therefore, while social media enhances popular engagement by easing discussion and activism, it also raises issues concerning validity, manipulation, and division in political converse.

Globalization and technology development

Social media has emerged as a major player in the globalization process through the unification of people, cultures, and information around the world. Social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (X) have enabled the instantaneous communication of individuals from different countries. Information and news have spread rapidly through social media on a global level. Social media has played a significant role in the globalization process through the promotion of cross-cultural interactions among individuals. It has exposed individuals to different cultures, traditions, and lifestyles⁶.

This has led to the promotion of cultural awareness and understanding. Social media has played a critical role in global social and political movements. It has enabled individuals and groups in the world to mobilize global support and create awareness about different issues. Social media has also played a critical role in the globalization of businesses. It has enabled businesses to reach global markets and expose products to the global community. However, despite the positive aspects of the globalization of social media, the process has been associated with several challenges. Some of the challenges associated with the globalization of social media include the spread of misinformation and the promotion of digital inequality.⁷

The social media platforms encourage the development of new technological innovations because they continue to enhance the features of the social media services they provide, such as live streaming and realtime messaging. The need for better online interactions has led to the development of new technologies such as video conferencing and other digital

⁶ Fabrizia Santoniccolo, Tiziana Trombetta, Maria N. Paradiso & Loredana Rollè, *Gender and Media Representations: A Review of the Literature on Gender Stereotypes, Objectification and Sexualization*, 20 *Int'l J. Env't Res. & Pub. Health* (2023)

⁷ Socrates Ebo, *Globalization and Social Media: Impacts of Facebook on the Contemporary Order*, 6 *Int'l J. Res. & Innovation Soc. Sci.* 438 (2022).

communications. The social media services provide valuable user data that has helped technology companies develop better digital services. The success of user-generated content has led to the development of new content creation technologies.⁸

The social media services use advanced technologies such as algorithms that help personalize the content they provide to the users. This has led to the development of new technologies such as artificial intelligence. The social media services have started using new technologies such as AI, VR, and blockchain technology. The social media services provide companies with the opportunity to collect ideas and suggestions from the users. The issues of misinformation, user privacy, and cyber security have led technology developers to create better and improved digital security measures. The social media services have the potential of influencing the development of new technologies such as augmented reality, video interactions using AI, and digital user privacy.⁹

In conclusion, social media has become an essential aspect in the development and evolution of globalization and technology. The way we connect and share information has been fundamentally altered by social media's global reach. These platforms have become crucial for disseminating and championing emerging technologies and digital trends across diverse nations and communities. This constant flow of information and interaction has, in turn, fueled the development of novel technologies and significantly enhanced our communication methods. Ultimately, social media doesn't just bridge geographical divides; it actively contributes to the ongoing progress and evolution of technology.

Positive and negative effects of social media

Social media has both positive and negative impacts on health. It assists in the dissemination of health information, online consultations, health awareness, and support groups for patients, along with enhancing communication between healthcare providers. At the same time, it may cause misdiagnosis, health misinformation, violation of privacy, addiction, excessive screen time, and mental health issues like stress and anxiety.

Social media is beneficial to businesses as it provides an opportunity for low-cost marketing, global marketing, direct communication with customers, creating brand awareness, and understanding the needs of customers. Conversely, social media can also have negative impacts

⁸ Shilpi Chakravarty, *The Dynamic Interplay Between Social Media and Globalization*, Online Manipal (Aug. 21, 2023).

⁹ EDU3LABS, *The Impact of Social Media on Technology Development*, Medium (Nov. 10, 2023).

on businesses, such as negative customer reviews, the creation of misinformation, cyber fraud, time-consuming management, and negative criticism of brands.

Students can certainly find social media to be quite useful in their academic journeys, offering as it does a straightforward avenue for information retrieval. Beyond simply finding things, it fosters an environment where pupils are prompted to share their insights, smooths communication channels between educators and learners alike, and opens up a vista of global learning opportunities. Nevertheless, one can't overlook the potential downsides; social media might, in some instances, cast a shadow over a student's academic performance, act as a distraction, impair communication skills, decrease reading habits and have a negative impact on language development.

Social media improves connectivity, awareness of social issues, facilitates community building, and provides an opportunity for self-expression. Conversely, social media can lead to cyber bullying, fraud, privacy issues, social isolation, and reputation damage due to false information.¹⁰

Social media assists young people in building social skills, raising awareness, providing learning opportunities, and showcasing creativity. On the other hand, social media usage may cause issues such as distorted body image, viewing inappropriate content, engaging in risky behavior, addiction, and mental health problems.

Conclusion

Media is a living reflection of society as it portrays the changing values, traditions, power equations, and social relations of society. It is a reflection of the realities of everyday life, ranging from political events and economic conditions to social trends and inequalities in society. Media, through news, movies, advertisements, and social media sites, reflects how society perceives gender, youth, social movements, and nationalism. However, this reflection is not always objective and comprehensive; it may give prominence to some voices while ignoring others, creating public perception in the process. As society keeps changing, the content of media too keeps changing, thus establishing the close link between societal change and media representation. Thus, media is both a reflection of societal realities and an active agent in creating public attitudes and perceptions, thus establishing the close link between communication and society.

¹⁰ Waseem Akram & R. Kumar, A Study on Positive and Negative Effects of Social Media on Society, 5 Int'l J. Computer Sci. & Eng'g 347 (2017).