

SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH

Amra Kurešepi¹

ABSTRACT

Social media has a huge impact on everyone's lifestyle especially on the youth. This influence has its pros and cons, some of which are further discussed in the article below. The main purpose of the article is to show both positive and negative sides of using social media and contribute in achieving the right balance between real and virtual world. The inspiration for the article has been drawn from some buzzwords which are fashionable in the context of technology and which clearly denote what challenges young people face on a daily basis as far as virtual reality is concerned.

KEY WORDS: *Social media, advantages, disadvantages, influence, real, virtual*

INTRODUCTION

If I had to use one word to describe the life of nowadays it would be *progress*. We used to say times change, however, that is not the case. Times are the same but the progress occurs in every branch. The branch with the most rapid development is technology. Comparing today's technology with the technology of the recent past makes me wonder what will happen in twenty years, what kind of smart device will exist then. The constant development of modern technology makes changes in our lives which mostly occur due to the use of social media and are followed by numerous advantages and disadvantages. In this essay, I will discuss some of the positive and negative uses of social media.

THE ADVANTAGES OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Due to many advantages, social media has occupied a vital part of our time. It became so important firstly because it kept people in touch when circumstances set them apart. Many parents, children, brothers, sisters, and friends are grateful for the existence of online communication because it allows them to stay in a close touch despite any distance. Now, parents can easily know whether their children are safe and sound, in high spirits or sad, whether they are on the right track or in need of help, and help out with messages which are sent in a second or with conversations which are free of charge. The same goes for all those who care and love each other, so the proverb 'out of sight, out of mind' is hardly applicable anymore. Moreover, besides messages and online talks, modern technology has

¹ professor of English Language at Secondary school for Secretaries and Administrative Workers in Ljubljana, email: amra.kuresepi@gmail.com

developed to such an extent that it enables new forms of sharing current emotions, as is the case with using emojis. Sending digital hearts, kisses or bunches of flowers can make anyone's day a little bit brighter, as well as the use of the smiley emoji can make each tense chat look nicer. Or, since no one would write that he or she is about to cry at the moment, it's easier for everyone to send tear-stained emoji so the person on the other side immediately knows how to respond. It is an incredibly fast and powerful way of expressing thoughts and sharing moods without long explanations.

Another plus for being an active member of social networks is the possibility to post and share with friends whatever we want in an easy and compatible way. So we share photos of trips, videos and anything else that we want to give voice to and what will probably be diverting to our friends.

Nevertheless, what also keeps us tied to smart devices is the amount of fun we find in using social media - different types of online games which are much more challenging from those simple video games we used to play before drastic technological advances. On social media, there is a bunch of online games which can be played with friends no matter where they live, unlike video games which were played only with people sitting next to us. Despite the fact that playing online games is often considered as a waste of time, that waste of time can sometimes result in very beneficial outcomes. The one of the benefits is that people make foreign friendships and in that way learn and practise foreign languages. For example, there are many young learners whose command of English is pretty native-like because they used to play story building games or games which require constant communication among team members in order to win. Besides learning languages, such types of entertainment also arouse interest for other creative inventions as was the case with constructing artificial languages – *conlangs* – such as Dothraki which was used in HBO's *Game of Thrones* and Esperanto and Interlingua which were then invented for international communication. These are just some out of many insights on how the use of social media positively influences our lives. Below some negative influences of using social media will be discussed.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA

The harmful effects of using social media occur mostly due to overuse. We often find ourselves staring at our smart phones for hours, consuming completely useless information, so we lose valuable time and our efficiency decreases. That is because nowadays, thanks to the internet and social media, it is easy to get to all kinds of information and news which are not necessarily reliable and instructive but curiosity drives us to peruse them. Burdening brains with a lot of information deprives us from doing something productive at the moment, and then we feel a void, and suffer from *infobesity*². What is worse, Daniel Boorstin claims that "the fog of information can drive out knowledge" and this is one more reason to protect ourselves from becoming infobese. (Hinssen, 2010, p.94) Infobesity occurs due to the lack of self-control and self-discipline pertaining to the use of social media and it is considered as a kind of addiction.

Another kind of addiction is following people on social networks including celebrities and everyone else who makes their posts public. Social media has different options, for example the largest social network Facebook has check in options – starting from checking

in a destination, mood, what are you eating, drinking, tagging people who are with you at the moment et cetera. So, on a daily basis, people see what everybody else is doing and become somehow connected, start doing things popular at the moment which society 'dictates' them to do but which they don't necessarily enjoy. As a result, people often feel tired of such excessive connection and they are in need for *digital detox* – to escape from a virtual reality. This notion of a virtual reality Kerckhove further explains by saying: "When you walk around in it, your whole body is in touch with your surroundings, as it is with water when you are in a swimming pool." and escaping means 'getting out of a swimming pool'. (Kerckhove, 1997, p.43) The condition of escaping from a virtual reality and doing what makes us happy is known as JOMO (joy of missing out), Macmillan Dictionary describes it as:

... a backlash against the hyper-connected society we live in, where technology pushes both social and professional activity constantly in our faces, so that it's virtually impossible to be blissfully unaware of what everyone else is doing. (Macmillan Online Dictionary, 2015)

Moreover, maybe the major disadvantage of using social media is that people get feeling of being social without live socializing. They can spend days and days alone, chatting with their friends and thus satisfy the need for socializing but there is a lack of face-to-face authentic exchange. Nothing can replace long live conversations full with enthusiasm, adoration, wonderment and the pleasure that is felt in the air. One more paradoxical problem of the today's modern use of smart devices is that people scroll on their phones even when they go out with friends or do any other outdoor activity, they deprive themselves from feeling the present moment. *Tech crèche*³, a lockable box intended for encouraging people to leave their phones and enjoy in the atmosphere around them, would be a way out for this problem. These are some of the most common disadvantages of using social media which came along with the development of modern technology.

CONCLUSION

As shown above, today every piece of news from around the world is easy accessible, as well as staying in touch or establishing contacts with whomever you want, no matter where the person is or whether you have his/her phone number, was never easier. Sharing pictures, videos, even your thoughts, emotions, and moods are also part of this, let's say, modern industry of social media which slowly but surely takes the greatest part of our daily routines. What is more, playing internet games often sounds like a time consuming process but in fact it has so many benefits in such as befriending people from different parts of the world and practising foreign languages.

When looking at the dark side of social media we see that imbalanced use or overuse leads to addiction that further results in decreased productivity and has some negative impacts concerning live social interactions. However, Keen (2007) rightly remarks that we need to find a way to enjoy the advantages of modern technology without destroying benefits which we had before, when modern technology was not developed to such an extent as it is today. (Keen, 2007, p.185) All in all, as long as there are advantages, there will also be disadvantages, as long as problems occur, people will always try to find solutions.

GLOSSARY

1. This term is used for a language which has not developed in a natural way as every other human language, but has been invented. Because of that it is called a *constructed language* or a *conlang*. It is the work of an individual who has structured new vocabulary and syntax. For a long time, inventing new languages was considered a useless hobby, but popularity of some TV series such as HBO's *Game of Thrones*, which features the fictional language Dothraki (invented by linguist David Peterson), made this conlang, which has a vocabulary of over 3,600 words, known to the public.
2. *Infobesity* is the term used to denote the state of people who constantly process a great deal of news or useless information available on the internet. We say that people suffer from infobesity when they find themselves overloaded by a lot of unimportant and redundant information, because it negatively affects concentration, productivity and is very time consuming. Becoming infobese describes the feeling one may have after realizing how much time has passed while just scrolling on a phone or computer screen and doing nothing worthy.
3. A *tech crèche* is a box made of metal which can be locked. It serves as storage for precious things mainly for electronic devices. These days, people are used to keeping mobile phones in their hands even during their relaxation time when going out with friends or walking in the fresh air, so they often miss the opportunity to feel the present moment and enjoy in real conversations. Because of this, the main idea of tech crèche is to encourage people to disconnect from virtual reality and connect with the world around them.

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