

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA

INTRODUCTION

Is education limited to schools and colleges? Is education considered to be gained only through these means? In the global and digital age, where information flows wide and avast, the basic definition of finds its way anything but straight. Education is defined as the process of receiving (or giving) “systematic” instruction or information. But is unsystematic, chaotic receipt of information *not* education? If not, what is it? One could argue that social media has its own system of providing information. Would that then be considered education? What are the impacts of this new form of education? How does it affect us, the students of this establishment?

SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN EDUCATOR

India has become one of the worlds largest social media markets. There are about 491 million social media users in india. Around 77.9% of this population uses Instagram. The average screen time of an average Indian on social media is 2.5 hours per day. Social media feeds are rich in videos, images and texts of all sorts and form. These media consume significant data. Tests show Instagram can use up to 64MB of data from 10 minutes of scrolling (approx.). Using this as a ballpark figure, 30 minutes of active social media use would involve around 150-200 MB of data. Given the average daily Indian use of 150 minutes, it adds up to around 0.7-1GB of data per day per user. The point of this math was to show that a person’s mind inhales *gigabytes* of information each day.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACT

Social media algorithms deliver a constant stream of highly varied content, which can strain mental and emotional wellbeing. Curated feeds often promote sensational or emotionally charged posts, leading to “doomscrolling”. Heavy social media usage has constantly been linked to increased depressive symptoms and loneliness. Experts note that consuming a deluge of harrowing news constantly via social feeds can even produce vicarious trauma and distress.

Social media also plays an increasingly powerful role in shaping political narratives and fueling unrest. By design, algorithms amplify content that grabs attention, especially political. This creates echochambers and leads to the spread of misinformation in large amounts. False breaking news, stories, half statements, memes, comments, etc all contribute to *the war of disinformation*, where social feeds become a breeding ground for hate speech, war narratives and emotionally manipulative disinformation. By giving users an unfiltered and unmoderated feed of information, much of it false and unverified, social media conditions public opinion without people realizing it. As a public health hazard, physicians specify that algorithmic newsfeeds can inadvertently endorse extreme content and heighten political echo chambers.

CONCLUSION AND ANALYSIS

We often forget that even while just mindlessly scrolling through Instagram, our brains process polarized and varied information and stores it. While we have an infinite capacity of memory, heightened, random and polarized information can throw us in disarray. This is a new form of education, where information is simply dumped onto you with no reasonable logic, and many people, especially the youth and children form opinions and act on the basis of this “education”. It is observed that children born in the years from 2015-present have shown anger issues, insomnia, attention problems, loneliness, depression, and lack of sound mindedness at a very early age, due to their access to social media being unsupervised and unregulated. While it is concerning in the case of children, it is also as concerning in the case of adults and old people alike. The need for a regulated and accountable mechanism of filtering extreme algorithmic responses is necessary for maintaining public health, both physically and mentally. Institutions should come together and hold social media companies accountable in making this happen.



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