The Impact of Social Media on Society

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Abstract: Over the past decades, Information and communication technology has undergone tremendous changes, and one of the benefits it has brought is the emergence of social media. As each day passes by, new inventions are developed. The development of mobile technology has made a significant impact in shaping the role of social media. Research shows that mobile devices have taken dominate the world due to the total time spent online. Mobile devices have made it easier for anyone with a device that has internet connectivity to access social media across the globe. Nonetheless, although social media has brought positive impacts on society, the negative effects cannot be overlooked. This paper analyzes the impacts of social media on individuals and the society in general. By exploring different sources of literature, this article expounds on the effects of social media such as crime and security, lack of privacy, political influence, and cyber bullying.

Keywords: social media, social network, impact, terrorism, privacy and security

1. Introduction

Although this article mainly focuses on the adverse effects of social media, it’s important also to consider the positive impacts of social media on society. Social media has made it easier for like-minded people to connect and work together. In schools, social networking sites help students work collaboratively on school assignments and projects outside of class. For instance, students can connect via Facebook live to share ideas that can help in completing assignments. Research shows that some schools have been successfully using blogs as teaching tools hence improving creativity, grammar and writing skills. Besides that, most entrepreneurs are using social media as a marketing tool for advertising, promoting their brands, discussing product features and collecting customer feedback. Most social media companies rely on advertisements to generate revenue that sustains their operations. Furthermore, social media platforms are also used to spread information since they are faster compared to traditional news outlets. The impact of social media in spreading of information can be seen from the messages of missing persons that are frequently circulated on various social platforms even before the news gets to other media outlets. For instance, news about the Colorado shooting in 2012 and the Boston marathon bombing in 2013 reached most people via social media before it even got to local media outlets. After the Boston Marathon bombing, people formed groups on various social media platforms where they shared information and photos about the case. This act of crowdsourcing helped the police to arrest the perpetrators in a week's time [9].

Facebook is one of the most popular social media sites with approximately 1.4 billion users globally. It has played a significant role in helping us understand, learn and share information making the world a global village. Despite these benefits, social media has also brought negative impacts on individuals and the society. This article finds about the effects of social media on society which includes lack of privacy, increased crime and insecurity (Terrorism) and political influence.

2. Social Media and Terrorism

One of the most dangerous aspects of social media is the fact that it’s being used by terrorists to spread propaganda and to lure more people to join them. Over the past decade, terrorist attacks have occurred in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Russia, the United States, Europe and Russia. Terrorists have managed to launch attacks on various countries by using social media to their advantage, i.e., to gather information, to recruit members, for fundraising and to spread propaganda. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have widely use of the Internet and social media as a valuable tool to spread their message and to motivate others, especially the youth, for supporting them through joining these terrorist group in combat , or to join the group with the role of supporting . ISIS posts are produced on social media that contain sophisticated and high-quality videos and Images and Social media have allowed ISIS, despite of distance, communicate with thousands of people throughout the world [3].
A research has been conducted by [18] about the relationship between social media and terrorism since the Invention of the internet, and his findings are presented in his new report titled “New Terrorism and New Media.” According to his report, terrorists started using the internet approximately 16 years ago. Since then, there has been a rapid increase in monitoring of terrorist activities from 12 to 9800 terrorist websites. Most of these terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and other terrorist movements moved to cyberspace after the 9/11 bombing. According to Weimann’s [18] report, for more than a decade now, terrorists have been using social media to interact and recruit new users. The main targets of these terrorist groups are young people since they spend most of their time online. Most of the youths who are recruited into these terror groups are emotionally weak and lack a true purpose in life [11].

Basically, social media has made it easier for terrorists to recruit emotionally unstable youths from all over the world without them being in the same country or region. ISIS, one of the most dangerous terror groups, has launched attacks on countries such as France, Italy, Iraq, U.K, and Syria by recruiting and training new members via social media. Reports from the New York Times indicate that over the past year, ISIS has managed to recruit more than a hundred Americans. Mohammed Ibrahim Yazdani, a young engineer, is one of the victims who were recruited into the group via social media. He was being coached virtually by an ISIS trainer in Syria. Apparently, his recruiter was guiding him on how to carry out attacks in India before he was arrested by the police. His recruiter, Abu Issa al-Amrki, communicated with him via telegram and other encrypted messaging apps [4].

In addition to that, social media is being used for cyber terrorism, whereby criminals disseminate false information on the internet. For example, in April 2013 the Syrian Electronic Army hacked the Associated Press’s Twitter account and sent false messages to millions of readers saying, “Breaking News: two explosions in the White House and Barack Obama is injured.” The false alarm negatively affected the stock market in just a few minutes; the New York Stock Exchange dropped with 136 billion dollars. Apart from terrorist groups, Individual criminals are also using social media as a tool for disseminating their violent acts. For instance, on August 26, 2015, Vester Lee Flanagan II, a disgruntled news station employee shot and killed two of his colleagues on live T.V. His intention wasn’t just to commit the crime, but he was bent on doing it in a visible world for the entire world to see. The fact that he had easy access to guns and social media made it easy for him to commit the crime openly. According to Raymond DiGiuseppe, a professor of psychology at St. John’s University, most people who commit violent crimes think that there’s nothing wrong with it [10]. Consequently, they are driven by the urge to expose their violent crimes to as many people as possible and the first option they consider is social media.

3. Privacy and Security Repercussions

Although social media has security options, cases of hackers taking over personal accounts are still rampant. Most people are comfortable sharing their details as they interact with other people online oblivious of the fact that; hackers can use the information to gain access to their social media account. This explains why IT experts recommend that users should update their social media frequently to minimize the possibility of hackers gaining access to their accounts. Whenever a user like a certain post, write a post or post a photo on his/her timeline, exposing a lot of information about personal details to everyone on friends’ list and to many agencies probably don’t know about. These organizations might end up sharing the user personal information with other marketing firms, advertisers, and spam senders. Although sharing user information for advertising purposes is not a crime, the probability of the data falling into the wrong hands should also not be overlooked. Private information like text, photos, messages, online survey, marketing, and videos in social media shared by the user unintentionally or willingly requires security and privacy since the social media user’s location or of his/her friends can be identified via the Location-Based Social Network Services (LBSNS) like FireEagle, Google Latitude, Nearby etc., [14]. More importantly, The availability of sensitive personal information on social media provides an ideal condition for the abuse and leveraging of such information which allows criminals and terrorists to do “criminal data mining.” moreover hackers, fraudsters, and malicious users using social networks for illegal activities as malicious actors may use personal information from social media to select targets, profile victims, and plan and execute criminal activities [2]. Now social media expose information from different social domains for instance, the personal information on Facebook and professional activity on LinkedIn ,which are aggregated, leads to detailed profiles. Unnecessary exposure of user information combined with the social media between the professional and personal aspects of user lives leads to terrible consequences, since the user might be at risk by interacting with other users, particularly to the strangers [6].
As mentioned earlier, a majority of online users aren’t worried about privacy and security concerns when sharing their personal information on social media. At the same time, the number of cybercriminals targeting social media users with online scams and malware keeps increasing, and users need to be careful about the information they share online. Malware authors spreading malicious code easily though social-networking sites among socially connected users, which target the popular services, such as Facebook and Twitter, to take advantage of large user bases and similarly many attackers use social media or social network by creating false profiles and false links which leads to sites infected with malicious code. Spam, Phishing, and Financial Fraud Phishers often use user information from compromised social-network accounts to send spam and phishing messages as phishing that targets banks, phishing the targets social Medias may have financial effect and loss of money [2].

According to the 2010 Consumer Reports by the State of the Net Analysis, nearly half of social media users expose their information online putting themselves at risk. The other key findings of the report include: First, 40 percent of social media users posted their full names and date of birth online, exposing themselves to identity theft. Secondly, 25 percent of households that have Facebook accounts don’t adhere to the site’s privacy controls. Third, 9 percent of social media users have suffered a form of abuse online be it identity theft or harassment, malware attack and online scams [5]. IT experts claim that hackers can easily find out more about their targets just by looking at their friends' list. Although this sounds unrealistic, the truth is that hackers can go to any extent to acquire any information they need.

Apart from exposing one’s personal information, social media can also be used to spread gossip and abuse. Some malicious individuals can go to the extent of posting embarrassing photos without the knowledge of the individual in the photo. The person in the photo may only come to know about it when it has circulated online and ruined their reputation. Nowadays, most employers have started paying attention to the Facebook pages of their prospective employees for any opinions or posts that can influence their decision to either hire or not to some individuals. The fact that some employers can go through the personal information which puts the applicants’ career at risk since they can choose not to hire or even fire the employee as now in Afghanistan the government will check before hiring to find what the employee or applicants has put on his or her Facebook. Some employees have a habit of posting what they think of their job, employer, and coworkers, and if their bosses come across the negative posts, they are likely to get fired for their opinions. Web rights activists claim that as more and more users sign up to social media, the loss of privacy also continues increasing at the same rate. Assuming a loophole that allows anyone to see anything that’s posted on social media emerges, this would not only ruin users’ reputation but also the reputation of the network as well.

4. Social Media and Politics

The onset of various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube has significantly changed politics, especially how campaigns are run and how citizens interact with their leaders. A famous role of social media example was in Egypt revolution during 2011 in which Facebook and Twitter were used to spread revolution message, and around five million social media users especially Facebook users were attended the revolution protest at the Tahrir Square [1]. Both politicians and voters, with the power of social media, are met as an undeniable virtual platform in which political debate, reform, and burning issues. Since the social media playing a significant role in stating the political tempo of many developing countries as people in Arab countries influenced by social media revolution, they include Tunisia, Libya and Iran [15]. It’s evident that social media has changed people’s perspective about politics. For instance, most users on Facebook are always posting about political issues. Some people even go to the extent of swearing to unfriend or delete some of their friends who don’t share the same political alienations with them, by posting messages like: “if you don’t support candidate X or Y, then we don’t need to be friends any longer.” Twitter, on the other hand, is also being used to shame people who disagree with you publicly. Some users might abuse you for sharing an article that portrays a certain political inclination. Some people pretend that the insults don’t affect them, but they end up re-tweeting the message back to their followers. This behavior creates a cycle of nasty political exchanges which we seem to revel in. The prevalence of social media in politics has made it easier for elected leaders and aspiring candidates to have easier access to voters and it has also led to accountability. Social media allows users to promote their campaigns by publishing content and then broadcasting it to millions of people within a few minutes. One of the most notable effects of social media on political elections is America’s 2016 presidential election. Social media platforms
such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc., had a significant influence on the presidential election outcome. Most people didn’t imagine that Trump would win the election; he beat all odds to become the president of the U.S. His victory can be attributed to his massive presence on social media especially Twitter [13]. Research shows that no other presidential candidate so far has matched up to his combative online presence. Politicians know that the only way they are likely to win an election is by targeting the millennial demographic since a majority of them have shifted most of their attention to social media networks. Candidates are continually coming up with creative ways of incorporating social media into their campaigns so that they can reach out to millennials for support. Several studies have been conducted to evaluate the influence of social media on elections. According to a study conducted in 2016, Facebook feeds have a significant influence on voting patterns. The study claims that certain messages directly or indirectly increased voter turnout in the 2016 U.S presidential election by approximately 340,000 votes. According to another survey conducted by Ipsos Mori, social media has a higher influence for 18-24-year-olds than any other media outlet. A third of the youths who participated in the study claimed that reading something online would influence their vote [7], which explains why most candidates have shifted their attention to social media ads. It is considered that a large number (72%) of younger voters could be aged 18-24. As the most social media audiences, this may be a key indicator of how social media impacts their political contribution. In addition, it is noteworthy that politicians can capture the younger market by posting advertisements and sponsored campaigns across various social platforms [12].

5. Recommendations

As much as change is inevitable, people need to be cautious when using various social media platforms. Some of the measures that should be taken include: First, the government needs to ensure that they establish agencies that monitor social media activity and evaluate encrypted messages to prevent recruitment of youths into terror gangs. Youths, on the other hand, should be encouraged to seek guidance and counseling if they have emotional problems. Secondly, everyone has a responsibility to use their social media accounts responsibly to ensure that their privacy and security is not violated. Therefore, the user should avoid posting personal information such as full names, contacts, address, etc. since it puts user privacy and security at risk. In addition to that, user should also be careful what to post on social media since it might have a direct impact on user current or future job. Lastly, social media has played a significant role in shaping politics, but politicians and users should refrain from using offensive language when campaigning or expressing their political stand.

6. Conclusion

Social media has its benefits and limitations, but we need a fast, affordable and reliable means of sharing information. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc., have made it possible for people to access information with just a click of a button. This article discusses the three major impacts of social media on individuals and society. To manage the negative effects of social media, we need to take responsibility by ensuring that we are constantly evaluating its impacts with the current trends. Lastly, young people should also refrain from spending much of their time on social media, lest they forget the importance of socializing with people in real life.

8. References
Available at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/mca/vol1/iss1/4