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Social Media: An Open Platform of Interpersonal Communication

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Abstract: In this era of technology, when communication and information travel faster and faster, the world seems to get smaller and smaller. The internet and social media have drastically changed the way people, all over the world, interact and communicate. In the past, unless you spoke to people directly, you had no way to get your message across, regardless of your freedom of speech. We were extremely limited in our means to interact with others and we were limited largely to the people that we knew in-person. Now we can use social media to get our messages out to thousands or even millions of people uncensored. Because of social media networks, we are now able to interact with thousands of people all over the world – this is why we see people who have thousands of Facebook friends or tens of thousands of Twitter followers. Social media is about conversations, community, connecting with the wider audience and building relationships. Social media not only allows you to hear what people say about you but enables you to respond. Listen first, speak second. Be compelling, useful, relevant and engaging. Don't be afraid to try new things, but think through your efforts before kicking them off. Another big change that has occurred is that there is now no filter on the way we speak.

Keywords: *Social Media, Communication, Web, Twitter, Information Sharing, Internet*

"The term Social media of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue". In other words, it is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Barua 2). Social media denotes

a new era of technology-based and interactive forms of communication, such as blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, social network sites, photo and video-sharing, and other, primarily Internet-based, phenomena that have emerged only in recent years. It also "takes on many different forms including magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro-blogging, wikis, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking" (Barua 1). Some people describe "'social media', for the purpose of communication only, contrasts to mass-media, as in the form of interpersonal communication and personalized expression of ordinary users" (Lüders 685). "This is often framed in terms of 'user-generated content' and 'users as producers'" (Lomborg 56). This virtual media of communication facilitates not only classic broadcasting through one-to-many communication, but also one-on-one and many-to-many forms of communication; hence it can be implied as a more distributed agency. Social media is a form of sub-group of digital media, which groups together because it is a part of the virtual platform for communication. In this article, I intend to provide 'how social media provides an open platform to communicate people broadly and what are pros and cons of its use as well.

Social media forms an increasingly central part of how we all communicate. Its online communities carry a strong and influential voice, and there is much to be gained from engaging directly with people through these channels – whether to reach journal readers, to network with colleagues, or even just to keep up-to-date with friends, family members or relatives. With the world in the midst of a social media revolution, it is more than obvious that social media is used extensively for the purpose of communication. Communication might be with a person or a group of persons. Social media is about conversations, community, connecting with the audience and building relationships. It is an open platform where a person can put forward his opinions freely and he can easily get feedback, which provides an opportunity to self-evaluate for improvement.

Calling only this medium of communication as a social media would be erroneous because another medium of communication is also used for social purposes. For example: "we discuss the news with our friends, families and coworkers, we gather around the television set to hang out in the evening, and so forth. Using media is intertwined with,

sometimes a core part of, our social activities. Thus, 'social media' needs a qualifier regarding what is special about being social in and through these Internet and mobile phone-based services compared to other media" (Lomborg 56). One can argue "that social media facilitate(s) a particular way of being social, namely a sort of everyday togetherness and relationship maintenance among participants. Social media are (is) distinctly social because they are (it is) based on interpersonal communication and interactive content creation, typically with a personal purpose. The connections, mutual orientation, and conversations among users are central aspects of social media use (Helles 7). In this era of technology where people are very much techno-savvy and they rely on social sites for their personal/professional communication, and any updated information, social networking sites are helpful to:

> ...create new virtual communities where discussion and exchange of ideas through words, images and sounds take place across national and regional borders…. Most of the people prefer using the social network as the primary means of communication. Initially social networks started with simply a profile picture, profile details, and some form of a wall, and drove most of their usage via communication. The social network is a new communication medium along which people broadcast and receive various bits of information. (Barua 3)

Moreover, Social media shares digital technology and the aforesaid social purposes. They may be based on different software, and have different communicative features that enable them to accomplish interpersonal orientation and interactive content creation, but digital media technology underpins them all. In "contrast to media such as television or newspapers, but similar to the letter and telephone, social media are the direct facilitators of, or venues for, this togetherness due to their interactive potential and invitations for contributions of active content from the users" (Lomborg 57).

Social media offers a variety of platforms where we can easily get in touch with people. Nowadays it is being widely used in the educational field as well. In more than three decades, the nature of communication has changed drastically and it keeps changing as well. How Email has changed people's written communication in their

professional life. Nowadays it is shorter, time efficient, economical and more frequent. Instant messaging has created another method of interaction, where the length of messages is shorter and the style of the interaction is more conversational and sometimes informal as well.

In recent years, social media is said to have a very good impact on public discourse and communication in society. Nowadays it is also increasingly used in political context. Broadcast technologies like Twitter transform these short bursts of communication from one-to-one conversations to little news (or trivia) programs. "Twitter…offers us an update of things people we know, happen to be doing at a particular point of time" (Barua 4). Twitter is an ideal platform for users to spread not only information in general but also political opinions publicly through their networks, political institutions, like politicians, political parties, political foundations etc., have begun to use Facebook pages or groups for the purpose of entering into direct dialogues with citizens and encouraging more political discussions and discourses. While the tools of social media are easily accessible, the rules of the road are not necessarily intuitive. It's a new communication platform which has tremendous opportunities; however, users need to learn a lot. Though it is a social tool yet it has professional application as well to enhance employee engagement, improve internal communication, promote team camaraderie, communicate on a global scale, and create internal touch points that were previously unavailable. It is an effective and efficient use of Social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, Second Life and World of Warcraft that they provide an online meeting platform where users/members/residents/players – can put across their views freely. They offer a way to keep in touch with existing communities that users belong to offline, such as social and professional groups. They also make it possible for people who don't normally communicate more than a few times a keep in touch – at conferences, for instance, or friends met online community itself. Moreover,

> YouTube is also a repository of popular culture in the form of newscasts, television shows, movies, or music videos that are of current interest. The kinds of interaction that occur on these sites centre around shared interests and include not only verbal commentary but the commentary in the form of original or derivative works based on popular pieces.

> One of the reasons people prefer such form of media is because of the interactions they can have there, both social and professional. Whether it is as simple as checking back to see what other comments have been added to yours or as involved as attending a workshop or presentation in a virtual world, the nature of the attraction lies in the connections between people that these online spaces afford. (Barua 5)

Today most of the people especially the youngsters are captivated and addicted to social media to be in contact with their friends, peers, relatives and family members. Social media is a media for social interaction as a superset beyond social communication. There are pros and cons to the use of social media as well. One of the most important advantages of the use of social media is the online sharing of knowledge and information among the different groups of people. This online sharing of information also promotes the increase in the communication skills among the people especially among the learners/students of educational institutions. This platform is increasingly being used by teachers and learners as a communication tool. Online tools and technology have not only mediated communication in countless ways but also the very ways we communicate and even the ways we talk and think about communication is changing as a result. Social media has the potential to change fundamentally the characters of our social lives, both on an interpersonal and a community level. There is also a flip side to the use of social media tools, because, sometimes, such tools are misused by the people who lead to interfering into one's privacy. Such instances can lead to dangerous proportions keeping in view the ethical aspect of the use of such media.

Social media's effect on our ability to interact and communicate is visible throughout different areas of society. According to Paul Booth (PhD, an Assistant Professor of Media and Cinema Studies in the College of Communication at DePaul University in Chicago), social media certainly affects how we engage with one another across all venues and ages. "There has been a shift in the way we communicate; rather than face-to-face interaction, we're tending to prefer mediated communication," he says. "We'd rather e-mail than meet; we'd rather text than talk on the phone." That said, our interactions on social media

tend to be weak ties—that is, we don't feel as personally connected to the people at the other end of our communication as we do when we're face-to-face. "So while we're communicating more, we may not necessarily be building relationships as strongly," Booth adds (Keller). Further, Booth notes that when we communicate through social media, there are three key issues play in people's communication styles. First, we tend to trust the people on the other end of the communication, so our messages tend to be more open. Second, our social connections are not strengthened as much through social media as they are face-to-face, so we don't tend to deepen our relationships – they tend to maintain *the status quo*. Last, we tend to follow and interact with people who agree with our points of view, so we aren't getting the same diversity of viewpoints as we've gotten in the past.

It is a serious concern that the impact of social media is communication overload - it provides us with an abundance of information which is not easy to handle. Getting more information about more people than ever before, forces people to process and perhaps even respond to it all. As Nicholas David Bowman (PhD, an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies in the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences at West Virginia University) explains that "teens are perhaps pulling away from Facebook because it's just too much for them to handle" (Keller). Another serious concern is technology addiction when individuals spend more time with their Smartphone rather than interacting with their near one, which is detrimental to face-to-face relationships. "It may be the parent checking his or her e-mail during a family dinner or the young college student updating Twitter while on a first date," Bowman says. "For these people, they likely feel such a strong sense of identity online that they have some difficulty separating their virtual actions from their actual ones." Internet addiction now can be listed as a mental illness marked by the emotional shutdown, lack of concentration, and withdrawal symptoms. "However, many of us caution that Internet addiction might be an inaccurate portrayal," Bowman says. "After all, if social media is designed to connect people with people, then is it really a human-technology relationship or is it a human-human relationship mediated by technology?" One potentially negative consequence of social media is a lack of privacy. "Because inter-personal communication is changing, we're finding ourselves more apt to share on

social media the sort of information we might have previously shared privately face-to-face," Booth says. "We always have to keep in mind that our social networks are searchable – even when privacy settings are set extremely high, it's always possible to find out personal information." Of course, the negativity surrounding social media is countered by positive influences, including the ability to communicate with more people across greater distances and with increased speed. "Your message can be shared and spread farther and faster than at any other time in human history," Booth says (Keller).

In a nutshell, Social media is a good platform where users can access information easily and abundantly. In this era of technology, we should use this platform for the purpose of knowledge and information about community/family members. People should use it for a limited time, because, addiction to excess use of social media is a bad habit, which leads to time killing. It can also affect our mindset.

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