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Social Media Progresses American Society

For the past few centuries that humans have inhabited America, the theme of progress has been an ever present constant that defines the average citizen’s life. Progress has been delivered in the form of how automobiles have been built by using the famous assembly line, to the quickening pace of communication. In the 21st century, progress has made its way into the social lives of Americans in the form of social networking. While some people believe that social networking has been a leap of progress towards aspects of the daily life such as faster friendships, virtual learning, and the spreading of news, other people believe that it has been a step in the wrong direction of progression towards inappropriate social accessibility, criminal rates, and even brain damage. As social media progresses to find its way into what seems to be nearly everyone’s life, the question has been raised on whether or not social media has a positive or negative impact on the society within America. Despite if the position taken by an individual results in a positive or negative view, one thing is clear. The fixation on social media has found its way into millions of lives, altering, mobilizing, and progressing American society.

Since the integration of Myspace, which began the social media frenzy, social networking has received a bad reputation. However, this is untrue as the beneficial aspects outweigh the negative effects for a variety of reasons. To begin, social media such as Facebook and MySpace are sites with the ability to connect people with others, and they have been a great source of advertisements for companies. It is human nature to seek personal connections, and networking has created an avenue to accomplish this. Social media and friendship is the equivalent to a TV dinner and the microwave oven. Social media in today’s society is dependent on the relationships formed on the sites, just as there would not be certain relationships without social media. Old high school and college acquaintances have rekindled friendships all because of the connections started on these sites. Social media has also had an impact on solving crimes. According to the article “Social Media’s Top 5 Contributions to Society”, Facebook has helped the NYPD in New York City stop gang activity in its tracks because of online communication gang members were having. Furthermore, it has been useful is stopping drunk drivers through the use of online monitoring of potential alcohol users. Police and law enforcements are using social media to save the lives of the innocent and put away the guilty, thus creating a safer environment for society. Similarly, as political candidates campaign to win over voters, they know that the most effective way to reach their audiences is through social media. Many prominent political figures have a Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook page available to update and raise awareness for the public. Through these updates voters have been more educated than ever before due to the easy accessibility social media provides to society. (Rupert)

Politicians aren’t the only people taking advantage of the ease of access provided by social media. On these sites, word travels fast. When all you have to do is turn on a computer or press an app icon on a smart phone and the daily headlines are in your face, it is easy to stay connected. Because of the amount of users on networking sites, there is an abundance of news to keep the public knowledgeable. Social networking has not only conveyed the news, but it also can raise money for charities such as the Red Cross. According to research done on the negative impact of social media on individuals, about one in four people around the world are on some type of social networking site, which is equivalent to about 1.45 billion people. There is estimation that in 2017 that colossal number will jump to 2.25 billion (Jung, 5). These numbers are proof that people view networking sites as a positive force not only in America, but in societies all around the world. Social networking sites are going to continue to make the world more informed, better connected, and much safer.

The illusion that social media creates a more informed, better connected and safer world is just that: an illusion. While it may be true that social media is an excellent tool to dispense information, the truth is that these sites may indeed be lacking the truth. Information on a social media site is often times inaccurate in current events as the contributor is merely going off of heresy, and gossip predominates many twitter feeds and home screens. According to the journal *Social Media Changing How We Receive News and Other Information,* “You can look up the same story in two different places and get two totally different stories and never really know which one is the correct information”(Marcos, 6). The spread of information is so easy, that a person could be receiving news on the recent political candidates by a man who lives on a different continent. While the spread of information on a global scale has the potential to misinform masses of people, misinformation also occurs on local levels in the form of gossip. A typical American high school corridor is filled with the whispers of ever-present “twitter-wars” or the claims that a picture of a teen at a party was photo shopped and uploaded onto Instagram. This gossip contributes to misconceptions about people or events, and it even results in a decrease in moral values as social media participants are sent the message that gossip is okay simply because millions of people are posting it onto the permanent World Wide Web.

While misinformation and gossip contribute to the more incorrectly informed society, it also is a contributing factor to the disconnectedness between the people, or more accurately the accounts posing as people. While sites such as Facebook appear to be an exceptional place to make friends because of all those times that it reconnected a user to their long lost cousin or former classmate, a social media website is not the same as actual human contact. It is only in rare cases that a social media site creates meaningful and lasting relationships due to the fact that accounts are set up by a person trying to appear in a certain light. Photographs, quotes, and other personal information are carefully constructed to create the perfect profile, not the perfect human being. While worrying about how many followers or friends a person has, he or she is missing out on real life experiences to go beyond the computer screen and into the world by having human contact with a living and breathing human being. Social networking sites can also lead to inappropriate and frighteningly dangerous interaction and harassment. According to USA Today, a researching group from BYU sifted through 1.2 million tweets and found that 37,717 tweets demonstrated users who were at risk of suicide (Jayson, 7). Many of these tweets were results of social media related bullying and harassment, which are increasingly prominent due to the ability to belittle fellow users by gossip and inappropriate posts. Other inappropriate uses of social media sites include the ability of a predator to use social media to befriend users under false pretenses and even stalk others. According to the journal article *Social Media and Harrasment,* “People are able to get through loopholes in the social media that allow them to stalk others, sell illegal substances, verbally, emotionally, and sexually abuse others, commit fraud, and more”(2). In fact, social media is the number one way that sex traffickers locate their targets to institute them into the sex slave trade. Thus proves the reliance of social media while committing immoral and criminal acts. Human interaction is only one of the few ways that social networking creates an unsafe media environment.

The issue of safety on social media sites goes beyond the realm of human actions and enters into the complex sphere of health. This is because social media affects normal brain behavior and the body functions of many people. The article “3 Reasons You Should Quit Social Media in 2013” explains that the frequent use of social networking can lead to stress and anxiety. Lowered self esteem is one of the largest culprits for this increase in blood pressure as users frequently compare themselves to others while browsing on these sites. Social media is also directly related to brain growth because the fast pace of social networking increases the risk of lowered concentration, which can lead to increases in symptoms similar to those found in people suffering from ADHD. Not surprisingly, social networking is even inversely related to sleep. Studies have proven that the more time a person spends on social networking sites, the less sleep they receive. The importance of sleep on the day to day functions of the human body cannot be overemphasized, and therefore it cannot be overemphasized that social media is negatively affecting the daily routine of thousands of social media users. Because of the overuse and improper use of social media, American society is suffering.

I, Jill Haight, a fervid social networker and average teenager in American society rely and use social media on a daily basis. It is my belief that through the use of online interactions, society has been greatly benefitted from these new ways of communication. In my personal experience I have managed to stay in contact with peers from different states that I would surely have lost all connection with if it weren’t for my media pages. Because I don’t frequently watch news stations or visit sites such as CNN, I am able to quickly see the daily news by simply opening the Twitter App. Although it is argued that users can abuse sites to harm or harass others, the truth is that these actions have been present in society for many years, even before social media was created. Using social media as a scapegoat will not prevent these actions, but instead raise awareness to the problems at hand. Therefore, with the awareness of the few negative uses of social media, it is my belief that social networking can and is used as a force for good in our society.

I, Savannah Duffy, a conservative and rare user of social media, believe that the impact of social networking has infiltrated our society negatively in more ways than it has impacted America for the better. I have been a witness of the use of media to rip apart friendships, bully others, and gossip; these factors prove that social networking sites do not improve human interaction, but rather hinder it. The claim that social media prevents crime is similarly related because I have witnessed the opposite of this effect. In the time that I have spent working to prevent sex trafficking in the communities close to me, I have come to see the role that social media has had on its victims. However, I have yet to see a social media site prevent one of these instances like it is claimed to be able to do. Finally, my belief that life is lived to its fullest outside of the computer screen forces me to view social media as nothing but a quick and unsatisfying imposter to the joys of truly living. With these factors in mind, I cannot bring myself to the conclusion that social networking is of much benefit to society.

While the debate of whether social media is a force of good or evil in American society is likely to continue for as long as this form of networking exists, the conclusion can be made that no conclusion can be drawn. The beliefs of the matter are permanently at a stalemate, never to be completely determined or resolved. However, it is obvious that there are both positive and negative aspects which will surely effect the direction in which American society progresses. These aspects come directly from the users of social media, and it is now up to the users which type of impact they intend to make. Therefore, the fate of the encounter of social networking on society literally lies in the hands of the people who posses its control at the touch of a “like” button.