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IS SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MEDIA AT CROSSROADS?

Author
Siddarth Gautam



IS SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MEDIA AT CROSSROADS?

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With the onset of technological advancements there has been a paradigm shift in the way how the medium of communications have unfolded before us. These advancements however cannot be seen in seclusion of the impact that they impose on the society. Social media is one of those advancements, considered the most ardent and at the same time most susceptible developments in the realm of media and communications. Has this new medium in due course of time played well with the social dynamics of the country? Or has it challenged the status quo and is at loggerheads with the social norms and values? To answer these, we need to dive deep into the nature of relationship that they share.

Beautifully put in words by Swami Vivekananda, *"Each work has to pass through stages- ridicule, opposition, and then acceptance."* Every new developments, firstly gets exposed to its negative side to the target audiences. It is the later phase that tries to scar out those negativities and presents the positive edifice of it. It is only in the subsequent phase that the main benefits of such developments would be relished. Today social media has entered as the most crucial family member in almost everyone's home. According to the global Digital Report 2018, the number of social media users worldwide in 2018 is 3.196 billion, up 13% year-on-year. Moreover, India is one of the largest user of social media according to the report accounting for the rise in technology. The social media has become one of the major parts of marketing campaign for any brand and from product launch to clearance sale everything is happening on social media. In recent years, it has been a medium to mobilize people for a cause and several social awareness campaigns run by NGO and brands as part of their social corporate responsibility leveraged social media to spread the word.

Social media has turned into a platform for social awareness. The #MeToo campaign was something that got its voice echoed only through the social media platforms which brought forth many unheard and backdoor harassment faced by a particular section of society. To add on, social media has in a way empowered the citizen to keep a check on their political dispensation. Twitter and Facebook revolutions in Iran and Egypt in 2009 and 2011 are enough to emphasize the widely credited role of social media in supporting social and political change. Feeling bored? Friends staying in the U.S. are just away a WhatsApp video call and you can connect to the last damn person on the earth. Apart from bridging the global gaps, the social media has provided a level field to raise dissent, right to express, discussion and deliberation. Looking through the aforesaid examples, social media can be attributed as a harbinger to the social reality.

Rather than simply being in line with the social norms it has inadvertently, started shaping the societal norms. It has influenced the minds of youth in a dubious fashion leading them to a severe obsession with these social media hubs like Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp etc. Ironically, what is apparent today is the fact that social media stands opposite to the literal connotation attached to it. The social media has made the individual unsocial as opposed to the meaning associated with it. There has been a reported rise in the sufferings of depression, anxiety and mental disorder. Recently, how dangerously social media can be mishandled to spread rumors and misinformation is not hidden to us that can incur fatal repercussions. Social media has moved to be the manufacturer of dissent in the society, where half baked, biased and profit oriented reporting leads to misinformed opinion making. The General Election of 2014 widely known as the media election due to the massive use of electronic as well as print media for the first time in the history of Indian politics clearly depicts the extent up to which social media can influence the political discourse of the country. The recent charge against Facebook for influencing elections lays down the precautions that need to be taken into account with the view of such interference.

A study conducted by the University of Copenhagen found that many people suffer from “Facebook envy”, with those who abstained from using facebook lived their lives more satisfied. Not only has social media been proven to cause unhappiness, but it can also lead to the development of mental health issues such as anxiety or depression when used too much or without causation. The addiction of social media is so subtle in nature that even the victim himself is unaware of it. The negative implications of social media are quite evident since last six to seven years and are undermining the positives. The need of the hour is to balance the negatives with the positives and consequently lead to the path of development that is universal for the entire humankind.

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