

Positive and Negative Effects of Social Media



Regardless of the fact that social media have become an integral part of ordinary human life, these modes of communication have both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, social media have granted instant connectedness of people across the globe within different social networks, ranging from families and friends to business partners and governmental officials. On the other hand, the use of online communication platforms may also have disadvantageous effects on various aspects of an individual's socialization activities and life-work routine as a whole. The digital communication dimension is oftentimes linked to time-wasting in light of the excessive focus on computer-mediated communication, while the real-life relationships are ignored and even addiction among other issues gets developed. Of course, a degree and extent of such influences vary depending on population segments and specified purpose and approaches to the application of these media in communication. Nonetheless, a solely positive role of social networks in human life is a myth.

The arguable nature of these new media and their implications in societal experience has become a subject of abundant exploration. For example, a single query entitled "effects of social media" in Google search engine



alone provides 192 million results in 0.42 seconds. Undoubtedly, the amount of scholarly research is less presented, although academic interest in the field is extremely high. At the same time, the investigators tend to study the issue from the narrowed perspectives rather than research its multidimensional character thoroughly. Therefore, the paper critically reviews the contemporary academic articles on the topic in order to draw a holistic picture of the analyzed problem. The hypothesis tested in the scope of the literature review is as follows: in-depth awareness about positive and negative effects of social media use allows to manage these impacts for effective communication outcomes. In light of this, the awareness regarding the effects of social media is an independent variable, while effective communication is a dependent one.

Rationale

First of all, the most vivid and probably revolutionary effect of social media is their capability to transform a traditional human understanding of communication and opportunities that this process may entail. For example, social media use has been associated with providing users with such resources as "emotional support, exposure to diverse ideas, and access to non-redundant information" while reducing the cost of communication and reshaping social networks (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011, p. 873). Therefore, the discussed media have changed the perception of human communication in its conception as a social capital that is accumulated within the online constraints of a particular website or a few of them constituting a huge online community. Apart from



uniting and leveraging the users' power according to the fields of interest, age, and spheres of professional activity among other features, social media become the means of further influence and manipulation of the human mind.

The fact that social media grant interaction rather than mere communication is another distinctive trait of these tools. This effect is oftentimes referred to as a participative Internet (Konda, & Itani, 2013, p. 15). In particular, the summarized scholarly research has evidenced that social media are likely to ensure "enhancing communication, social connection, and even technical skills" (O'Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson, & Council on Communications and Media, 2011, p. 800). In addition, they offer expanded and enhanced learning opportunities for different age groups ranging from an enrolled student's instant connectedness with his or her learning institution, peers, and tutors to accessibility of online tutorials on a variety of interest topics of ordinary Internet users (O'Keeffe et al., 2011; Jacobsen & Forste, 2011).

Moreover, social networking is transforming to a panacea for seeking healthcare-related and other pieces of advice due to the abundance of credible information within the online domain in different spheres of knowledge (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). Konda and Itani (2013) have explored a similar trend and identified that more than 53% of seniors, approximately 57% of Generation X, and 56% of Generation Y representatives look for healthcare information on social media sites (p. 15). Although the accessibility of healthcare-related data regarding different health



concerns seems to be a good factor, this issue is twofold. On the one hand, an individual can easily trace the symptoms that he or she experiences and clarify how to deal with them immediately. On the other hand, this opportunity also implies a shortcoming. Namely, self-treatment may often be a misleading approach since ordinary people are incompetent in properly diagnosing and treating a disease as compared to a practitioner's assistance.

Another aspect of social media effects is new sharing options as a "phenomenon of increasing social, economic and political importance because individuals now can participate in news production and diffusion in large global virtual communities" (Lee & Ma, 2012, p. 331). In this respect, social media are used as suitable tools for consumption and sharing of news on a variety of events while simultaneously framing the content in light of gratification and prior experiences, either positive or negative. This personalized news release and sharing across online communities are capable of thoroughly shaping public opinion. Such a circumstance confirms once again the possibility to manipulate human behavior and attitudes. Apart from ordinary news sharing, the discussed social media effect is widely used by marketers as a word-of-mouth marketing approach that has been analyzed by Pfeffer, Zorbach, and Carley (2014). While social media can be a valuable means for brand-to-consumer connectedness and interactivity in this regard, such an aspect also poses a severe threat to consumer relationship marketing and business operations as a whole. Specifically, a questionable statement or a dubious activity of a particular enterprise can become a



centerpiece of thorough online discussions embodied in the word of mouth and complaints written on social websites. In this way, a few-hour campaign of this consumer outrage, which is defined as an online firestorm, can result in sufficient losses for a firm and notable image and reputation damage with long-lasting consequences for a brand (Pfeffer et al., 2014).

On the grounds of the brief summary of scholarship in the field, the importance and power of social media in contemporary people's life and activities should not be doubted. At the same time, no research has considered whether individuals' thorough awareness in different social media effects and dubious power of their influence will contribute to users' more careful approach to comprehension of the information proposed by these media. Therefore, the above statement draws a distinct research paradigm that would allow a better understanding of social media effects. In particular, it is interesting to explore if users' knowledge of potential impacts of these means will result in their filtering and more conscious information consumption, seeking for the credibility of the news and data, as well as more rationalized attitudes and behavior.

Literature Review

The overview of social media effects provided in the rationale reveals such a distinct characteristic of these communication domains as a value-adding effect or its capability to develop a reverse impact, namely creation of a negative image either for an individual or an organization of



any type. In order to illustrate this phenomenon, Schultz, Utz, and Goritz (2011) have offered an insight into this aspect of the discussed problem with relation to perceptions and reactions to crisis communication represented in Twitter, blogs, and traditional media. A comparative analysis has shown a strong power of social media in terms of influencing the masses by means of shaping their perceptions and attitudes to critical information in light of specified behavioral intentions, such as apology, sympathy, or any other form of responses with negative intents (Shultz et al., 2011). For example, Shirky (2011) has aptly exemplified this effect by providing the illustration of the impeachment of Joseph Estrada, the Philippine President, whose corruptive activity raised 7 million-message outrage in a week in 2001 as soon as this evidence was availed to the public. As a result, the president was prosecuted for his deeds, which demonstrated the uniting power and public influence effects of social media as communication means. These facts clearly display the political strength of social media use in social interactions. A similar research paradigm has been followed by Valenzuela, Arriagada, and Scherman (2012) who have labeled social media as a means for revealing the youth protest behavior on the grounds of political changes in Chile. In particular, the scholars have attributed the strong political empowerment potential to Facebook as one of the most popular global social networks. This site was evidenced to be not a mere place of self-expression but a powerful tool for smooth organization of Chilean protest activities, thus revealing the multiplied advantage of value-adding and news-framing of the website.



In contrast, certain effects of social media reveal either strongly negative or potentially negative character. For example, social networking has also become commonplace for revealing antisocial behavior, including such manifestations as bullying, cyberbullying, and online harassment, serious concerns in terms of "privacy issues" and "sexting," along with the Internet addiction and "concurrent sleep deprivation" (O'Keeffe et al., 2011, p. 800). One more dubious effect, which is softer than others but has a potentially detrimental impact, can also be attributed to developing body image perceptions of the social media users as one of the controversial implications of the problem. Williams and Ricciardelli (2014) have outlined several growing concerns linked to this area, including "exposure to unrealistic body images, pressure to conform, internalization of appearance ideals, gender-type socialization," and "compensatory motivations such as disordered eating as a way to validate one's self-concepts," to list a few (p. 390). Therefore, this research has once again confirmed the critical aspect of value-creation, especially its misleading and stereotypical power that heavily impacts the public perceptions and results in improper behavioral patterns.

Scholars have also identified a prevalence of technology-mediated, contactless, and dehumanized communication as contrasted to face-to-face encounters. Jacobsen and Forste (2011) have explored technology-mediated communication patterns of 1,026 first-year students and discovered that the primary goal of their reference to social media is multitasking. In addition, Wang and Wei (2012) have emphasized "individual-level tie strength and group-level identification" as strong



points and part of such bonding relationships within institutional and network-wide domains (p. 198). On a similar note, the researchers tracked the respondents' offline face-to-face communication through the survey and found that the participants, especially females, felt a sufficient degree of social anxiety within such circumstances. The surveyed students still preferred messaging, chatting, and texting through the online domain as opposed to other types of communication such as Skype calls. Therefore, the dehumanization of relationships can be identified as potential harm that social media may cause.

Experiment

Drawing upon the multifaceted literature review, social media significance in contemporary human life should not be underestimated. Apart from the thorough presence of these communication modes in a variety of social domains, the analyzed online communication instruments reveal several common effects that can be of equally positive and negative nature.

First, social media are powerful tools for immediate and instant news and information sharing (Ellison et al., 2011; O'Keeffe et al., 2011). While this factor implies easy availability and accessibility of any relevant data or the information particularly necessary for a user, there is no guarantee that this information will be adequately perceived or credible enough for all users as a whole. For example, negative word-of-mouth messages and complaints can be heavily impacted by individual experience, possibly



negative, which will eventually affect other users' perceptions of a brand, service, person, or any other subject of discussion.

Second, technology-mediated communication via the discussed modes is a great way for constant and emotional connectedness, limitless communication, value development, and opinion expression (Shirky, 2011; Valenzuela et al., 2012). Namely, these online hubs are places for direct expression of multiple selves and a means of unity at the same time. However, this factor also refers to immense possibilities for violating manipulations of the public opinion and farming those opinions in a flawed manner or using this power for wrong purposes.

Third, social media can be used as tools of directly negative phenomena which imply bullying, online harassment, cyberbullying (O'Keeffe et al., 2011), or softer manifestations that are embodied in developing and initially misleading stereotypes such as perfect body images which entice users not only improve their lifestyles but also torture their physical and mental health (Williams & Ricciardelli, 2014).

Fourth, along with granting instant connectedness with multiple people across the world, social media transform communication from human-centered to technology-centered paradigms that tend to dehumanize communication as such. Moreover, the overwhelming connectedness of social media users makes all the outlined trends viral which show a threatening role that these modes may play in further exploitation of person-to-person communication for controversial



purposes.

In accordance with the findings of the literature review, the hypothesis may be justified to a great extent. In particular, the common attributes of arguable characteristics of social media effects can be called manageable if the negative implications are taken into account prior to the media use. To be more precise, the knowledge obtained through this multidimensional data aggregation may be used for the development of preliminary mitigation strategies to manage these impacts for effective communication outcomes. For example, young users' vulnerability regarding body image perception and potential consequences of this potentially flawed comprehension should be paid the utmost attention in posts of this type. Moreover, the awareness about strong political perspectives of social websites and the fact that the quality of the information posted there can be impacted by individual experience, either negative or positive, will entice information filtering rather than blind following. The same issue relates to a brand perception or other aspects of presenting personal opinions, especially negative comments and complaints. Simultaneously, the factor of dehumanization in light of social media based on thorough technology-focused communication should be considered as a potential risk in terms of overreliance on these modes, specifically within the learning environment and friends and family communication.

In light of the above rationale, an experiment is proposed. The study will involve random users of Facebook as the most popular social network.



The researcher will recruit the sample of at least 200 individuals through invitation messages explaining the purpose of the investigation. The content will provide a brief explanation of the dubious social media effects on individuals. In the scope of participation in the experiment, the respondent will be asked to thoroughly study the summarized material and conduct his or her common manipulations with social media sites during a few days. Afterward, a respondent will be asked to answer the survey questions regarding the changes, if any, which occurred after studying the information about effects these media have on users.

