

DARK SIDE OF SOCIAL NETWORK

Sherly Vince Samuel

Student, Bhopal School of Social Sciences, Bhopal

ABSTRACT

Social media, a powerful tool for communication and connection, has transformed society in profound ways. With over 5.2 billion users across platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp, it seems to enhance human interaction. However, there exists a darker side to this digital engagement. Social media platforms, while designed to foster connections, have created addictive behaviours that influence users in subtle, often unnoticed ways. Features like "likes" and "hearts" exploit the human desire for validation, leading to an addiction cycle driven by dopamine. Algorithms tailor content to keep users engaged, often at the expense of mental well-being. This has contributed to the rise of "social media depression," where constant comparison to curated realities leads to anxiety, depression, and a distorted self-image. Furthermore, social media's influence extends beyond personal interactions into the realms of politics, misinformation, and societal division. Its addictive nature is often manipulated by "attention engineers" who design platforms to retain user attention. These platforms, which are free to use, make their profits by monetizing user data. The implications of these addictive designs have far-reaching effects on both mental health and societal dynamics, as evidenced by real-world cases and documentaries like *The Social Dilemma*. This article explores these issues, shedding light on how social media shapes behaviors and perceptions in ways that are often harmful.

Keywords: Social media addiction, Mental health, Validation, Algorithms, Social media depression

INTRODUCTION

What is Social Media

SocialMedia is a form of mass media communication through which people can share information, personal ideas, text messaging, and other contents like posting pictures or videos

online. People use social media to stay in touch with their friends and family. Even businesses use social media to know the latest trends, by which they can use it to market and promote their products to gain maximum profit. Some of the most popular social media platforms are Instagram, Twitter, Whatsapp and Facebook.

The above was a brief introduction on what social media is. Now let's hop onto the main topic, that is, the Dark Side Of Social Media.

Although there are around 4000 social media platforms, and about 5.20 billion users, it is safe to say that we are a social but not so “social” society.

Now the big question is, *are these 5.20 billion users benefiting themselves from social media? Or have they let these apps control them?*

The truth is that we humans naturally tend to blame everything else besides ourselves for our negative behaviours. When a person becomes socially isolated or their relationships break down or their behaviour actions impact people negatively, they blame everything else other than themselves. *But is that right?*

We all have to acknowledge that social media has changed the world in ways that means we can never go back to how it once was. Despite this, we often argue that these tools have impacted the quality of our lives. *But has social media changed the world for the better? Or for the worst?*

They say that if a person is sitting completely alone in his room, then he is not actually alone. Accompanying them is an unseen force that influences their eating, drinking, sleeping, and every action they take. This presence observes their activities and even nudges them toward various behaviours. It's surprising that this invisible power is something the individual has willingly invited into their life: their smartphone.

In today's world, it's rare to find someone who isn't engaged with social media. Whether it's YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, or Instagram, almost everyone has at least one of these apps on their phone. Social media has grown so powerful that while these platforms were originally designed for smartphones, now it seems like smartphones are designed for social media. As time goes on, influence of social media continues to expand.

Many of us view social media as a free tool for accessing information and entertainment, but what I'm about to share might give you goosebumps. While we know social media platforms by

their names, these platforms recognize us not by our names, but by unique numbers—often referred to as IDs. Just like prisoners in a prison are identified by numbers, social media users are similarly tracked by unique IDs. Surprisingly, these platforms often know more about us more than we know about ourselves.

Why is social media so addictive? Why are these apps free to use? How is user data being utilized, and how are billions of dollars being made from it? How do the algorithms behind social media interact with human emotions? And how has this technology become so uncontrollable that even its creators can no longer stop it?

First, let's explore why social media is so addictive. The driving force behind these platforms are experts known as 'attention engineers', whose job is to capture and hold our attention. These engineers design features that play on the human mind, turning casual use into a habit or even an addiction. Their goal is to keep users engaged for as long as possible.

It's human nature to feel delighted when we receive praise. Social media platforms exploit this by incorporating features like 'likes', 'hearts', and 'thumbs up'. Whenever we upload a picture, we become curious to see who has reacted, prompting us to check our phones repeatedly. Even if we resist, the apps nudge us with notifications like 'Someone liked your picture,' making it hard to stay away.

Have you ever noticed something? Many social media platforms don't offer a 'dislike' or 'hate' button. Why is that?

It's because, as humans, we generally don't like hearing negative feedback about ourselves.

This is the primary reason why you won't find a 'dislike' or 'hate' option on platforms like Instagram.

Is Social Media Controlling Us?

When we use social media, we might not realize that we're being guided by a plan. These platforms show us content that matches our interests, keeping us engaged longer. Another part of human nature is comparing ourselves to others and wanting to look better. That's why filters were created—to help us enhance our appearance and present a better version of ourselves.

It has gotten to the point where people are so consumed by the desire for praise and likes that they engage in behaviours they would never have imagined or could afford in real life. This isn't just happening by chance—it's the result of a deliberate design. Social media platforms are structured in a way that encourages us to seek validation through likes and positive feedback, pushing us to go to extremes just to maintain that feeling of approval. The scary part is that most of us aren't even aware that we're being influenced in this way.

Now a question arises: *what difference does it make if this happens? After all, we are enjoying our time online.*

While it's true that social media provides a great way to pass the time, it's important to recognize that their goal is to keep you engaged and returning to their platform repeatedly.

Experts suggest that when we upload a video or photo, our brains become attuned to the anticipation of receiving praise. This anticipation prompts us to check our phones repeatedly. When we finally receive the likes or comments we were hoping for, a chemical called dopamine is released in our brains. This release of dopamine creates feelings of happiness and relaxation.

Medical research indicates that the amount of dopamine released through social media interactions can be comparable to the effects of cocaine. When dopamine levels spike, we experience a momentary sense of joy; however, as those levels decrease, we begin to crave that pleasurable sensation again. Unfortunately, the trigger for this dopamine release is often beyond our control, as it's influenced by algorithms designed by social media platforms.

These algorithms determine how long our photos remain visible to our friends and followers. As long as our content is circulating in their feeds, we continue to receive likes and engagement, which keeps the dopamine flowing. Once our posts fade from visibility, the craving for that dopamine rush intensifies, prompting us to share even more photos or videos. This creates a continuous cycle of seeking validation and pleasure through social media interactions.

Why do tech companies operate this way? What is their ultimate purpose? And why are social media services often free?

To understand this, consider the idea that if you're using a product that doesn't cost you anything, you might actually be the product being sold.

Think of a grocery store that advertises “free chocolates.” People will rush in to get the free chocolates. This offer draws people in, creating two key benefits for the store.

First, when others see a crowd, they’ll want to check it out too, as we are naturally curious about what others find appealing, which brings in even more customers. The more people that come in, the higher the chances of the store making sales.

Second, in order to receive the free chocolates, customers typically need to fill out a form or provide their phone numbers and other personal details. In this way, the store collects valuable data in exchange for a seemingly free treat. This is similar to what happens on social media platforms, where they gather our data while we enjoy their services, often without realizing it.

New Medical Condition

Experts have identified a concerning phenomenon known as "Social Media Depression," which is affecting millions of young people. This condition arises from the tendency to compare ourselves to others based on curated snapshots of their lives shared on social media. Often, we are only exposed 1% of a person's reality while the remaining 99% remains hidden.

As young people scroll through their feeds, they might feel like they are measuring their own lives against these unrealistic images, leading to feelings of not being good enough and unhappiness. This constant comparison can cause mental health problems, like anxiety and depression, which are increasingly being diagnosed in younger individuals. In serious cases, the emotional burden can become too much, leading some to think about or attempt suicide.

It is important to raise awareness about how social media affects mental health and to encourage healthier online habits. By helping people understand that social media often shows a distorted view of reality and by promoting open conversations about mental health, we can help reduce the negative effects of this troubling trend. <https://youtu.be/zQwSm5l99pE?si=Y2doQl44YFi6w993>

A MOVIE BASED ON THE DARK SIDE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In 2020, Netflix released a documentary called “The Social Dilemma”. The Social Dilemma is a Netflix documentary that explains how social media affects people’s lives in both good and bad ways. It focuses on how platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are designed to keep people using them for as long as possible. Former employees from big tech companies share how

these platforms use special algorithms to show users what they want to see, making it hard to stop scrolling.

The film talks about how this can lead to problems like addiction, anxiety, and depression, especially in teenagers. It also explains how social media spreads false information quickly and can cause arguments and division between people. The documentary highlights how this affects everything from personal relationships to politics, warning that if we're not careful, these platforms could harm society in the long run. It encourages companies to make changes to protect users and suggests that people should be more aware of how social media influences them.

Here are a few lines from the documentary:

"There are only two industries that call their customers "users": illegal drugs and software."

Edward Tufte, American statistician and professor emeritus of political science, statistics, and computer science at Yale University "We've created a world in which online connection has become primary."

Jaron Lanier, founding father of Virtual Reality Computer Scientist

"If something is a tool, it genuinely is just sitting there, waiting patiently. If something is not a tool it's demanding things from you. It's seducing you, it's manipulating you, it wants things from you. We've moved away from a tools based technology environment, to an addiction and manipulation used technology environment. Social media isn't a tool waiting to be used. It has its own goals, and it has its own means of pursuing them by using your psychology against you."

Tristan Harris, former design ethicist at Google and co-founder of Centre for Humane Technologies

"There's only a handful of people at these companies who understand how these [algorithm] systems work, and even they don't necessarily fully understand what's going to happen with a particular piece of content. So as humans we've almost lost control over these systems. Because they're controlling the information that we see, they're controlling us more than we're controlling them."

Sandy Parakilas, former operations manager at Facebook, former product manager at Uber

Source: <https://www.ensemblemagazine.co.nz/articles/the-social-dilemma-netflix>

THE DARK SIDE OF DARK WEB

What is the Dark Web?

On the Dark Web, users communicate through encrypted messages and can buy or sell anything with total anonymity. It is called the “Wild West” of the internet because operating here in the shadows are extremists, criminals, and trolls.

Where did the Dark Web come from and how does it work?

Well firstly the Dark Web is not a place but a term that describes parts of internet that hide your identity and location. The Dark Web’s infrastructure was created in the 1970s at the same time the internet itself- but to utilize it, you needed dark net software. Enter the U.S Naval Research Lab who created, back in the early 2000s, one of the first and still the most popular darknet software “Tor”.

It was created for a number of reasons, which included providing the U.S. Navy’s intelligence officers with the means to maneuver [navigating] through the internet without being recognized or traced.

The Silk Road

The Silk Road was one of the first online black markets where you could buy drugs, guns and child pornography. Two years after starting the site the founder, Ross Ulbricht, was arrested in 2013 and sentenced to life in prison for money laundering, drug trafficking, hacking and fraud. This was quickly followed by a shutdown of its successor Silk Road 2.0 along with similar sites such as ‘Project Black Flag’ and ‘Black Market Reloaded’.

There are even reports that the FBI has hacked into Tor itself, which subsequently saw the browser’s usage drop by nearly 50%. This all gives the impression that the authorities are fighting back, but closing down one or two online markets has simply cleared the way for its competitors.

The Dark Web however is not just an E-bay for illegal purchases. It’s also used by radical extremists to communicate and spread propaganda. But not all activity going on down in the Dark Web is illegal.

Tor for instance, receives 60% of its backing from the U.S. State Department and the Department of Defense to act as a secure network for both government agencies and political dissidents fighting oppressive regimes.

Over the past decade, the dark web has empowered activists to spread news during the Arab Spring and encourage whistleblowers to release information.

The Dark Web as a tool to help journalists uncover the truth was made popular by wikileaks. Now new organizations such as The New York Times and The Guardian all host Dark Web drop sites for uploading anonymously leaked tips and documents.

It's also helped domestic-violence victims hide from online stalkers and allowed ordinary Citizens to surf the web without being tracked by advertisers or even the government. Which leaves us with a great dilemma.

If the authorities try [and succeed] in shutting down the dark web and the criminal activity that it supports, they'll also be adversely affecting all the people that use it for social benefits.

Here are few cases which happened on Dark Web:

1. My Name Is Darius

The reddit note is written by Darius before him going missing. This incident was shared on Reddit on 17 April 2020 by a guy named Darius. Driven by curiosity, Darius ventured into the dark web, a part of the internet not indexed by traditional search engines and often associated with illegal activities. During his exploration, he came across a live stream that was both shocking and horrifying. The stream featured a woman being tortured, and viewers were paying in Bitcoin to suggest different methods of torture.

As the live stream continued, the situation took a terrifying turn. The perpetrators behind the stream somehow managed to track Darius's personal information. They revealed his real name and other personal details, making direct threats against him. This revelation left Darius in a state of fear and panic, realizing the grave danger he was in just by being a spectator.

Darius turned off his phone, deleted Tor, and vowed never to use it again. However, he later discovered his camera had been hacked, and the dark web users had taken pictures of him. They

left a threatening letter in his home, and despite calling the police, he felt unsafe. Darius shared his story to warn others about the dangers of the dark web and the risks to privacy and safety.

Source: *My darkweb story : r/TheWolfPackfire (reddit.com)*

2. The Missing Girlfriend

In this story 3 people are involved. Alex, Mark and the reddit user himself [he didn't mention his name but the user is iOSJailbreakGod on reddit]. These 3 visit the dark web as they were bored and suddenly joined a chat box. There those 3 friends experienced different types of users coming to chat for buying/selling guns, drugs etc. But the situation takes a turn when one user messages them in a sweet tone asking "Hi, How are you?".

Now it's a bit unusual for someone to be this polite on Dark Web. Seeing this they replied with "Hi, I'm doing fine. How about you?". And after seeing the reply they were in shock as it said "I'm fine. Have you seen Alice?". Alice is Mark's girlfriend and the scary part is that Alice had disappeared 2 months ago.

Now those 3 friends spoke more and asked the stranger "How do you know Alice" and they immediately got a response as "Alice, well, I've been watching her for two months now. But suddenly, she disappeared.". As they spoke more, the stranger said "Alice is a wonderful girl. I took her away and I've been keeping after her since then." Seeing this made Mark really furious and said that he wants to meet Alice.

In reply to that the stranger gives them the address but the scary part is that the stranger said that if they didn't come to meet Alice then no one will ever be able to see her.

The rest of the story is a mystery because the user didn't give us an update on what happened next.

Source: *"Alice" Part I A Darkweb Story... : r/creepypasta (reddit.com)*

3. The Abyss

In this story the user went to the dark web because of curiosity and boredom. For him the internet was just a spooky corner filled with urban legends and exaggerated tales. One night, he stumbled upon a chat room called "The Abyss". The chat had a very cryptic

[mysterious] description which said "Talk with those who truly see".

He entered the chat and saw just a black screen with a list of usernames and a chat window. Some usernames like— EbonShade, SoulSeeker, WhisperingVoi— and they suddenly started texting him.

Now the user “EbonShade” asked him that would he like to see something truly enlightening and he replied with a yes and then a link appeared on the chat labeled “Enter the Abyss”. After clicking the link, his screen went black and then filled with a montage of disturbing images: old, decaying buildings, people performing strange rituals, faces twisted in terror.

When the images stopped, He found himself back in the chat room, but it was different. The usernames had changed to real names—*David, Claire, Michael*—and his webcam had turned on, displaying his own horrified face in the corner of the screen. He couldn’t turn of his webcam and he started panicking. He tried to unplug his computer, but the screen remained on and he could still see the cold, emotionless faces of the others in the chat. Then Claire said “We know where you are”. He tried to ask for help by grabbing his phone but failed to do so as his phone flickered and then he saw his own apartment footage on his screen.

Then Michael said “You invited us in. Now we are everywhere”. Then he started running around his apartment to check if someone has entered his apartment or not. Suddenly his phone buzzed, and he saw a notification from a new email from an unknown sender which said:

Subject: Welcome to the Abyss

Body: We are always watching.

After that incident, he shifted to a new city and changed his whole identity. One night, about a week after he had moved, he woke up to the sound of his computer booting up. He had left it off, but there it was, the screen glowing in the darkness. The chat room was back, but now, the names were different— *John, Emily, Sarah*—all people he had known in his life, all who had passed away. And they started saying “Why did you leave us?”, “You can never escape.”, “We are part of you now”.

He then unplugged the computer and threw it out of his window, watching it shatter on the ground and finally screen went dark. Later he bought a new computer, thinking it all ended but then he got the same texts from unknown numbers saying the same thing “We are watching”.

This thing still haunts him and he can see shadows and hear whispers of them calling his name and telling him that he is not alone.

Source: [I was bored and went to a dark web chat but that was a life changing : r/nosleep \(reddit.com\)](#)

In conclusion, while social media provides an unprecedented platform for connection and expression, its darker side cannot be overlooked. The addictive nature of these platforms, driven by algorithms and features that exploit human psychology, has led to detrimental effects on mental health, including anxiety, depression, and social media addiction. Furthermore, the spread of misinformation and societal division is exacerbated by these platforms. As we continue to navigate this digital landscape, it is crucial to raise awareness about these risks and promote responsible, mindful usage to mitigate the negative impact on individuals and society.

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