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Social Media and its impacts on Communication

Social media is something that has evolved over the past decade. We went from Myspace to social platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X. According to Practina.com, “Between April 2022 and April 2023, there were 150 million new social media users- a 3.2% increase year-over-year. It translates to approximately 410,000 new social users daily and 4.7 every second” (Practina). This citation showcases the rise in social media and shows how many people are on social media nowadays. Moreover, this number is constantly increasing, changing, and evolving daily.

Even the Pew Research Center noticed this drastic increase. According to Pew, “Today around seven in ten Americans use social media” (Pew). In this citation, Pew says that roughly 7 in every 10 Americans have some form of social media or use social media. Social media is becoming more utilized now than ever and is pivotal in communicating with others. For my capstone presentation, I decided to take on social media and its impacts on communication. I asked Americans about their social media stances and whether they believe it helps or harms communication. Those findings will be presented later in this paper. Trust me, you want to stick to the very end because you will feel just as surprised as I was. So, let us dive right into this academic research paper.

Literature Review

Just like any assignment or research project, it is essential to see what other academic scholars have done that is similar to your work or what has been done in order to prove your work or help you get a basic understanding of what has been done on the topic you have chosen to explore. For my capstone project, I found ample research about social media and its impacts on communication. Furthermore, I found many literary sources about my topic as a whole. One literary work I found was from the PEW Research Center. They conducted a study where they surveyed individuals and asked them how they felt about social media. They found from their study that “About two-thirds of Americans (64%) say social media has a mostly negative effect on the way things are going in the country today” (Pew).

Pew also found from this study that “Younger adults are more likely to say social media have a *positive* impact on the way things are going in the country and are less likely to believe social media sites have a negative impact than older Americans” (Pew). This study from Pew showcases that roughly 64% of Americans believe that social media hurts the way things are going in the U.S. currently. The other 36% feel that social media may or may not impact how things are going today.

Not only did Pew discover this negative connotation towards social media, but they also discovered that the younger generations and younger adults believe that social media positively impacts the way things are going on in the world versus the older generations, who have different opinions. This study from Pew made me realize I wanted to conduct a survey and get more individual findings and results for my capstone presentation and assignment.

Another example of a literary work that helped me explore my selected topic was from Demandsage.com. Demand Sage states, “So we did our research and found that as of 2023, 4.9

billion out of the 8.1 billion people on the globe use social media” (Demand Sage). This scholarly website demands and explores trends in social media and the increase and decrease in social media users and platforms. “The USA has 302.35 million social media users as of 2023. That means 90% of the total U.S. population uses social media actively. Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the U.S., with 74.2% of adults using it”. (Demandsage). Demandsage found out from their scholarly research that roughly 90% of the U.S. population uses social media frequently, and roughly 74.2% of all adults in the USA use at least some form of social media.

Not only did Demandsage discover these higher percentages, but they also discovered that “The average number of social media accounts held by millennial or Gen Z users worldwide is 8.5. According to research on 46 nations with internet users aged between 16 and 64, Japan had the lowest overall number of social media accounts at 3.8. In contrast, India had the highest at 11.5 accounts per user” (Demandsage). Demandsage discovered that the average number of social media accounts held by an individual in the millennial or Gen Z age demographic is roughly 8.5. At the same time, other nations like Japan and India have more or fewer accounts than those in those age demographics.

Demandsage also used data and statistics to explore which countries had the most social media users. Overall, this scholarly source allowed me to discover how frequently we use social media and explore different demographics surrounding social media as a whole. This scholarly source added more in-depth research and percentages to my overall study, and it is a source that I recommend everyone check out at least once in their lifetime.

I predominantly used these two literary sources in order to help me in my research. However, I also used additional studies like the one from Practina.com and another source from the Pew Research Center that were mentioned at the beginning of my research paper. These two sources and my literary review section opened my eyes to how much we use social media, and it allowed me to see and get a taste of how frequently we use social media and its potential impacts on communication.

After using these four literary sources, I knew more than ever before that this was the topic that I wanted to explore in my capstone presentation. After utilizing these four sources, I had a more extensive understanding of my chosen research topic. Then, I came to the fun part of setting my study into motion and figuring out how I wanted to conduct my overall study.

Methodology

For this capstone research, we got to pick a methodology that could be in the realms of Ethnography (Experiments), Interviewing (Rhetorical Criticism), Focus Groups (Content Analysis), or Surveys (Cultural/Critical/Postmodern Criticism). Alternatively, we could use different types of research methods as well. I used Surveys, Focus Groups, and some interviews for my capstone presentation. Here are the steps of my capstone presentation and how I conducted my research project.

For my project, I explored the topic of social media and its impacts on communication. For my hypothesis or thesis, I explored or asked, **“Overall, do “you feel social media helps or harms communication with others?”** Furthermore, **What are some positives of social media as a WHOLE? What are some negatives of social media as a WHOLE?** After creating these basic questions, I created my actual study and surveys.

For my survey, I asked respondents roughly 10-15 questions. These questions ranged from multiple choice to short answer questions and paragraph-based questions. Some of the questions I asked were: Do you use social media to communicate with others? On AVERAGE, how long do you spend on social media PER DAY? Overall, are you worried about the state of the world due to the rise in social media and technology? These were just some of the questions I asked, and I have included a hyperlink to my survey.

After conducting this virtual survey, I did roughly 15 in-person interviews. I used these in-person interviews for extended research to see if I would also notice trends from the online survey. I asked these in-person interviewees the same questions from the online survey and found very similar responses from the online survey. I also asked these in-person interviewees how they felt about social media and showed clips about the rise of social media. I asked these in-person interviews how they felt about those clips shown to them, and their responses were captured in the memorable quotes section of my capstone presentation from in-class two weeks ago.

After doing the in-person interviews and ending the online survey, I accumulated 120 responses. After collecting these 120 responses and opinions, I compiled them into Excel. I created pie charts, graphics, and other forms of visual aids to represent my overall data from every single question asked. I created these visual aids, which helped me create trends, percentages, and other visual components like word clouds. After creating these visual aids, I separated the respondents' responses to each answer based on their age demographic to see how each demographic voted for each question in my study. This added a different layer of depth and research to my study, which will be explored in the next section.

My Findings

After concluding my survey and study, I found some unique findings and discovered how my respondents felt about certain aspects of social media and its impact on communication.

For starters, all 120/120 respondents in my survey claimed to have at least some form of social media. That equates to roughly 100%, so 100% of the people in my study claimed to have at least one form of social media. Not only did 100% of my respondents claim to have social media, but some viral platforms were dominant in my study. In my study or survey, the most popular social media platforms were **Instagram, Snapchat, Youtube, Facebook, X, and TikTok**, in that specific order. What stood out to me in this portion of my study was how Facebook managed to have a pretty good-sized audience, and a good number of my respondents had Facebook, even though roughly 58% of my respondents under the age of 21 claimed to have a Facebook account.

One thing I found in my survey that was no surprise was the age when people first got social media. I asked my respondents in the survey, “What **AGE** were you when you first got social media?” After asking this question, I discovered that Roughly 66.67% of all respondents claim to have gotten access to some form of social media at 14 and older. At the same time, roughly 33.33% of all respondents claim to have gotten some form of social media under the age of 14. These percentages showcased that specific individuals gain access to social media at the teenage stage of 14 years old and older, while roughly 33.33% of my respondents claim to have gotten social media younger than 14. I fall in the 33.33% category, and I was more surprised that more people have not been exposed to a social media platform under 14.

However, with this rise in social media comes increased screen activity, and we become more glued to our iPhone screens. Moreover, that was something I found prevalent in my survey. I found that Roughly **52.4%** of my respondents claim to use social media for 3-4 hours a day. People in my survey are going over the daily average, according to a study by Mixbloom.com. According to Mixbloom, “The stats for 2023 so far is that the average person is spending 2 hours and 32 minutes on social media. This means two and a half hours of updating their status, writing posts, writing comments, and scrolling through their feeds” (Mixbloom). This citation explains that the average a person spends on social media is 2 hours and 32 minutes, which is LESS than the amount individuals claimed to spend on social media in my study.

In my study, surveyors claim to spend roughly 3-4 hours per day on social media, slightly above the national average. Moreover, here comes the fun part; for two of my last questions, I asked my surveyors: Overall, do you feel social media **helps or harms** communication with others? Overall, are you worried about the state of the world due to the rise in social media and technology? By asking these questions, roughly 70% of my respondents believed social media **was HARMS** communication with others. At the same time, 30% believed social media **HELPS** communication with others.

Roughly 66.7% of my respondents are worried about the state of the world due to the rise in social media and technology. These numbers in this section did surprise me as I expected my surveyors to believe that social media would help communication. Especially since 40% of my surveyors were under the age of 21. I was expecting people in my generation to believe that social media helps communication, but that was not the case.

Another thing that surprised me in these findings was that more than half of my surveyors are worried about the rise of social media and the state of the world due to the rise in social media and technology. These percentages were very high, and I expected a more comprehensive range of percentages and diversity in how people felt about social media. However, that was different in my survey. Almost all of my respondents feel that social media negatively impacts communication, and almost all of my respondents felt that social media was negative.

My respondents backed up the study done by the Pew Research Center, where “About two-thirds of Americans (64%) say social media has a mostly negative effect on the way things are going in the country today” (Pew). However, the respondents disproved the claim in Pew’s study: “Younger adults are more likely to say social media have a *positive* impact on the way things are going in the country and are less likely to believe social media sites have a negative impact than older Americans” (Pew). This was not the case in my study; the younger people in my survey claimed that social media hurts the current way things are going. My findings showcased that social media is a weapon and could have some benefits, but that social media is mostly a harmful tool. Moreover, my respondents felt that social media was harmful overall.

Conclusion

After my study and doing this capstone research project, I found that my respondents noticed that social media is on the rise, and the people in my study felt nervous about this rise. My respondents were nervous about social media’s rise and timid about what was to come. Also, while some respondents believed social media was a good tool, others felt it created unrealistic perceptions and made it easier to ruin lives. My respondents felt that social media was

predominately a negative tool that can harm others' mentalities and views about themselves, that it could be a powerful weapon for spreading misinformation and lies about others, and that it could make us feel more isolated and alone more than ever before.

The respondents in my survey felt that social media predominately harms communication as a whole, and my respondents believed that social media is a tool that can create harmful, unrealistic views on how we could live our lives. People in my survey felt that social media could create unrealistic perceptions and that social media could increase insecurities now more than ever before. Moreover, my respondents are more worried than ever about the state of the world due to this rise in social media.

Reflection

My study exposed social media and its pivotal role in communication. My survey allowed me to see how other individuals view social media and how social media can be a harmful yet helpful tool in specific contexts. My survey allowed me to see how social media can harm communication and create fear and tension in what we see displayed on social media.

This capstone presentation allowed me to explore a tool that most of us use daily, and it analyze its pros and cons from a communication scholarly perspective. Using my research methods, I got concrete evidence to showcase this phenomenon. I enjoyed presenting on this topic as a whole and thoroughly enjoyed researching it. One thing I could have done differently in this capstone presentation and my research is to ask more detailed questions. I could have added more typing questions to gain more details and perspectives, which I could have added to this paper.

Another thing I could have done differently would be collecting more responses. 120 is a nice number for one person, but next time, I should market and send my form to more people to collect 200 and 300 responses. Another thing I could have done differently would have included clips and external research in my survey. Adding clips and videos to my survey would allow my respondents to watch positive and negative videos about social media. I could have asked them how they felt about seeing those clips and videos.

Overall, this capstone presentation was one that I enjoyed researching; it allowed me to step outside my comfort zone, and it is one that I am proud of for submitting in my last communication class as an undergraduate student at Florida Gulf Coast University. Conducting this research-based work inspired me to take an honors thesis course next semester to pursue more research, and this capstone presentation inspired me to take an honors-level seminar course next semester.

Works Cited

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