

Social Media: Building Peace or Inciting Violence?

Dark. Soundless. Birds snoozing. Squirrels dreaming.

Only a single phone screen glowing.

The house was quiet and not even an atom moved. Gleaming stars fill the night sky. The clock ticks furiously in the air as time wooshes by. The midnight wolves howl outside under the glowing moonlight. Laid down on my bed, I scroll through social media sites, streaming for more content. Incorrectly used, digital content might incite violence, stir up hate speech, or become a new form of cyberbullying. But correctly used, social media today is not only an app with likes and comments, it is a portal connecting people of different worlds together, a type of glue that fosters world peace, and an ax that breaks barriers each and every day.

Social media apps are developed through an algorithm. An algorithm is a repeated process in order to solve a problem or accomplish a specific task. For example, the TikTok algorithm is a set of rules that can influence the thinking of the teenagers in the United States. In the TikTok algorithm, shares, follows, and what the user watches all play a role in what TikTok feeds to you. Also, the app depends on how long you watch a piece of content, or how many times you rewatch it to choose which kinds of videos to give you. In the TikTok algorithm, shares, follows, and what you watch all play a role in what TikTok feeds to you. Also, the app depends on how long you watch a piece of content, or how many times you rewatch it to choose which kinds of videos to give you. Through one rewatch or follow, TikTok determines your hidden interests and gives you content that is deeper into the same topic so that you cannot resist to stop watching the videos.

Although social media customizes its content in accordance to the user's needs, it poses mental health and peace concerns. A recent case involves a teenager, Molly Russell and the

company Meta. In London, a teenager named Molly committed suicide in November 2017 (Satariano 2022). She was viewing depressive and suicide content months before she died on social media. The suicide videos were so disturbing that it even upsetted the courtroom workers. The judge ruled that Instagram and social media platforms have contributed to his death. In a legal battle with the Russel family against the largest social media companies, a new draft law is underway to force social media companies to adopt new child safety protections on social media. Social media companies should be liable for the content they show users, particularly children. First, the minds of children are still young and moldable, so they will believe and take seriously every content they show on social media. Also, by using an algorithm to control people's minds, people do not even know that they are being controlled by an algorithm. The last reason is that users do not have full choice in what they want to view since once they start to view a video, the social media algorithm will give them more of the same type of video. If used incorrectly, social media can be a taunting platform.

Although social media platforms can be an incubator for such a hostile world, the Peace Islands Institute is ensuring that social media platforms are a safe place. For example, the Peace Islands Institute has been keeping peace through social media campaigns on world peace such as hosting a short movie contest and essay contest on world peace issues. During the Ukraine and Russia conflict, social media has also been a tool to spread awareness and stories on peace building. For example, the Peace Islands Institute has hosted a bike and hike event that has spread across social media and brought awareness to the issue of world peace. In addition, social media can be a bridge connecting people from places far away. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many families who have relatives living across the country were separated. However, new social media platforms create a network that links them together even

in hard times. Lastly, social media breaks down barriers between cultural and ideological differences. For instance, a new Youtube channel called MilMilk recently launched a new series called “Seven Million Different Lifestyles” that documents different people from various countries with diverse backgrounds promoting peace and building positive change in the world. This online channel bridged the barriers between different people of various perspectives. One video showed a restaurant owner in Hong Kong devoting her time to save stray cats in the streets, while another video shows someone in the United Kingdom rallying for world peace. No matter how big or small of an impact social media posts create, they serve to break down barriers between people with cultural differences, link individuals together, and create a more peaceful world.

Social media has a dark side and a bright side. It can be a loophole showing teens inaccurate information, a web of digital content possibly inciting violence, and an incubator for cyberbullying; it can also be a string connecting the world together and a guardian for world peace. One phone, one app, two sides: which one would you choose?

References

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