

Chapter 3

Social Media:

A Threat to Mental Health or an Opportunity to Communicate?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the path of human interaction by using modern technologies. There are two sides: those in favor of using modern technologies and those who argue that modern technologies have unwanted, detrimental effects on people's lives and health. This chapter explores virtual communication's properties. It focuses on the impact that using social media instead of face-to-face interaction has on the users' health, specifically mental health. In this viewpoint, social media is not an alternative to face-to-face interaction but a complementary device that reminds us the vitality of interaction even with those who are physically unavailable to us.

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INTRODUCTION

Technology marches on. As it progresses, it changes all aspects of human life, from individual thoughts, beliefs, and even personalities, to relationships in society as a whole. Progress is inevitable since movement and change bestow meaning to life. Question is “Where does technology lead us?”

Religion and science present different outlooks on using new technologies. John William Draper (1875) traces the age-old conflict between religion and science back to more than two thousand years by suggesting that “an antagonism between religion and science had existed from the earliest days of Christianity.” On one hand, some religious beliefs regard new technologies as the sign of apocalypse, as Satan’s favored devices, which are used for evil purposes to corrupt human soul. On the other hand, scientific perspective considers them efflorescence of humanity for experiencing more comfortable life, providing equality and fairness by making new technologies available to all social classes, spreading and improving social and cultural knowledge which can lead to the higher level of human right and democracy status, and serving creative and spiritual growth.

The other concern over the consequences of widespread technologies is ethical. Habermas (2003) presents serious debates about genetic engineering in his book “The Future of Human Nature.” He discusses the controversial essence of human engineering and says:

Eugenic programing of desirable traits and dispositions, however, gives rise to moral misgivings as soon as it commits the person concerned to a specific life-project or, in any case, puts specific restrictions on his freedom to choose a life of his own.

Some countries are home to conservative cultures, which desperately try to prevent people from using social media, mainly because closed communities are not in favor of adapting new thoughts and attitudes from other cultures. Instead of global social networks, some countries, particularly communist ones, have developed exclusive and internal social media services with closely monitored systems. Still, many government and public services are supplied through social media. Given this, governments are not able to completely restrict the use of social media; they themselves try to use it in order to monitor their effects on their people.

Nowadays, social media make the world truly a global village. Most people who have access to the Internet find it compelling to use social media in order to satisfy a wide range of needs, from contacting their families to submitting their work and reading or watching the daily news. According to www.internetworldstats.com, on

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