



Research Article

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# The Negative Effects of Excessive Social Media Use

Curtis B Preston\*

Department of Applied Foreign Languages, Ling Tung University, Taiwan

\*Corresponding author: Curtis B Preston, Department of Applied Foreign Languages, Ling Tung University, Taiwan

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## Abstract

Living in the modern world means interacting with social media and life online. Whether someone is watching a YouTube video or posting photos to Facebook or Instagram or typing their opinions on some other platform or just communicating on a messaging app, we have all come to learn to live online. Further, it is easy to lose track of time on the Internet while other more important activities or relationships get neglected. And on the darker side of the Internet people are very unwise in what they post or say online, with it sometimes leading to death or the permanent, life-long destruction of careers, reputations and more. Here, we have explored the dangers of social media and how we can live more wisely on the Internet while avoiding its pitfalls and the negatives associated with it.

**Keywords:** Internet; Addiction; Social Media; Effects

## Introduction

In William's Shakespeare's famous play As You Like It the character Jacques famously said, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts" [1]. In the past, not everyone was a real actor and their acting roles in this world would have been probably limited to their K-12 years. But now with the Internet and social media sites like Instagram, everyone who has a cell phone or laptop, along with an Internet connection, can take center stage as the leading role in their own productions. Do you want to give your opinion on something? All you need is your cell phone or maybe another camera of some kind, and you can set up your bedroom as your studio and spout off or comment about anything you have a burning desire about on YouTube. Dating. Relationships. How to get into good universities for aspiring students still in high school; or even how to fix your

car yourself; the variety of topics are as endless as the world is big. Now, anyone can take center stage for a few minutes and probably someone on YouTube will see it and maybe give you a thumbs up. If enough people like you and you develop a large enough following and reputation, you can even become a full-time YouTuber and make money with it collecting patrons who send you money electronically. And of course, this can be done on multiple platforms in addition to YouTube nowadays.

When the Internet first came into use in the mid-to-late 90's, few anticipated that it would morph into the behemoth with the outsize influence it has today, but it most certainly has. Your boss at work can send you work faster than you can get it done. Your boss or co-worker can even send you work past midnight! Then, the next morning in the office at 8: 15, they're asking you for the completed file which you still haven't even noticed yet. Furthermore, who

hasn't had the experience of going off to a meeting or a date only to get a message while you're on the way there that the meeting was cancelled, or your date suddenly had something come up at the last minute and they can't make it, or they'll be late? And then you're left standing there wondering what to do until you look at your phone messages. Without a doubt, the impact of the Internet on humanity is not only the convenience and speed brought about by such amazing technological progress, but it also has had a profound and revolutionary impact on society and people's life patterns, behaviors, and communication methods and even work ethics. People don't look for dates in real life so much anymore; they download a dating app. Someone looking for friends might search Reddit first instead of joining a student club or a local club in their area. Hanging out with others who are like minded virtually and online is preferable to people nowadays than going out in public [2].

The emergence of smart phones has increased the convenience of life, and the acquisition and transmission of information has become faster. People increasingly use smartphones to access the Internet, which has led to increased Internet use instead of talking to real people [2].

At the same time, many instant messaging applications have also been introduced to facilitate people's abilities to communicate with each other, but it may cause people to interact only through mobile phones instead of actual communication; this in turn can easily cause interpersonal relationships to deteriorate and take a back seat to real life communication. As strange as it may seem, people have forgotten how to interact with others in real life. Instead, they become adept at interacting with screens and swiping instead of being able to have authentic relationships in real life. This sort of alienation also causes negative psychological emotions and has given rise to the strange, yet now widespread expression mentioned by Sherry Turkle in her illuminating Ted Talk, "I'm 'connected, but alone.'" (TED, 2012) "People are together, but not together," she points out, as well as observing that, "Technology takes us places we don't want to go." (TED, 2012) This, of course, means that users are endlessly connected via the Internet to hundreds or thousands of people through Snapchat, Reddit threads, Line friends, online video games or Discord accounts, but they know few people in real life; and this, sadly enough, stunts their personal growth as an individual such that they have few substantive relationships; and this of course, is what they really need [3].

Therefore, in this study we have explored the negative effects of excessive use of social media on people. Other negative influences of social media are seen with cyber bullying, "revenge" videos, as well as messaging apps through which lies, half-truths, untrue assertions and misunderstandings are made or inferred to and from others in their social circles or society, such as on Facebook, Twitter, or other similar sharing platforms. As two Ethiopian scholars point out about misinformation spreading during the Covid-19 epidemic and consequent shutdowns, "Social Media is an information vacuum; it spreads both knowledge and information at an exponential rate, which allows for information exaggeration" [4]. This holds true not just for pandemic misinformation as they

were writing about, but also for all other areas as well. The Internet can indeed be a vacuum, a black hole filled with vast amounts of conflicting and contradicting information and the truth can be hard to sort out, which is why people need to be firmly rooted in real life as well.

### What is Social Media?

First, we must ask, "What is social media? As Attorney and founder of the Social Media Victims Law Center points out, "Social Media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. In other words, social media is an electronic form of communication and information-sharing where users can create and distribute unique content or view the content of others." (<https://socialmediavictims.org/effects-of-social-media/>) By these activities, people establish relationships with other members of the community and integrate with the community as a whole. The key idea that should be focused on here is "virtual". It could be described as "almost real", or "just like the real thing"; but of course, it isn't the same as the real thing. Which is of course to say that the "real thing" (that is, real life relationships) can't be replaced by online "friends". Real life doesn't stop or cease to exist just because you're looking at your favorite Instagram Influencer or YouTuber. Real life goes on and can spiral out of control when too much time is devoted to the virtual world. Online communities are just people looking at screens and typing and making comments to others through cyberspace; they might even really be talking to each other over the microphone such as in playing video games. This virtual world, that seems just as real but not quite real, allows a wide range of community activities, such as playing games, sharing information, participating in commercial activities, ranting, and venting about various issues or subjects and can also provide individual entertainment and public interest discussions. Thus, while the social media platforms are all online and people may or may not see each other face-to-face, social media has created a new media world, an alternative world of information which isn't activated by personal physical presence but online [5].

### What sort of interests or needs does the Internet Meet?

As anyone who is old enough to remember life before the Internet was common and Internet usage began to mushroom in the late 1990s and 2000s, the Internet has both upsides and downsides. As Bergman points out, the pros of the Internet include: The ability to connect people all over the world in seconds; to allow instantaneous discovery of news and real-time information; the fostering of easy and instant communication; the creation of marketing opportunities for business owners to reach a wider customer base; the ability to promote public participation and civic engagement; lifesaving help in emergencies with time sensitive information and announcements; the discovering and brainstorming of new ideas; and a great source of entertainment. Negatives include information overload and feelings of being overwhelmed; cyberbullying; problems of privacy and storage of sensitive information; FOMO, Fear Of Missing Out; procrastination

and distraction; sleep disruption and a sedentary lifestyle; fertile grounds for criminal and illegal activity; Internet addiction; and extreme feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem and self-image (<https://socialmediavictims.org/effects-of-social-media/>).

In addition to entertainment, social media sites also allow users to create and share personal situations and have become a popular communication platform. This virtual world allows a wide range of community activities, such as playing games, sharing information on common areas of interest, participating in commercial activities such as e-commerce, and can also provide individual entertainment and public interest discussions on topics of mutual interest.

So how does social media meet people's needs? The blogging website TwoHat refers to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and submits that the Internet meeting people's needs really isn't that shocking at all and that it fulfills some basic needs people have. (<https://www.twohat.com/blog/maslows-hierarchy-needs-explains-internet/>) After all, as TwoHat elaborates, people don't stop being human just because they go online. Social media, they tell us, brings together a lot of information and resources and people interested in knowing and learning about things. The most important thing is that people can continue to maintain interaction with each other through the Internet without being restricted by time or place and meet the needs of interpersonal interaction. Furthermore, what if you are experiencing problems or are interested in something that no one around you knows anything about? Or if you are interested in a subject which no one has considered, or you are simply ahead of your time with your ideas? In that situation, the Internet could be key in helping you. At the same time, it creates an atmosphere of trust and understanding with each other from their interactions. And as esteemed writers Hagel and Armstrong point out in their early, groundbreaking book, *Net Gain: Expanding Markets Through Virtual Communities*, people have 4 major demands that the Internet meets [6].

First, there is interest. People of like minds attract over common interests which could be anything, such as games, food, beauty, sports, investment and financial management concerns, relationships, or any other number of shared interests. They deliberate at length with each other around certain topics on social media platforms such as Reddit or Discord and share experiences or information or even console each other when they go through similar life-altering events.

Secondly, there are relationships. On any given day people will face numerous different experiences, and they will want to share the victories, the defeats and the ups and downs with others who also go through these experiences, whether they be good or bad. Social media provides that platform unrestricted by time or space that helps to meet people's felt needs. It could be single mothers encouraging each other, or people who work in the same industry helping each other get a pay raise or sharing a recipe.

Thirdly, there is fantasy, or perhaps one could say escapism. This is probably the biggest of them all, especially for young people ranging in age from 12-22, or even younger depending on when parents allow their kids access to the Internet. The environment

of the Internet has created a new world that is full of illusion and entertainment. People can have unlimited imagination, perform various role-plays according to their own preferences, and have a life that they can't experience in their real life. Of course, while this is legitimate, the problem it creates is that it does not always dovetail with the reality of someone's life perfectly. A high school girl or boy deeply into cosplay and manga comics may find themselves incessantly mocked for their outlandish clothing and hairstyle choices. Their interests do not match their reality, at least for that time in their lives and where they live. This is where a person would have to face reality around them. At the same time, it's one of the weaknesses of the Internet because many people don't face the reality of their lives around them. They ignore reality until the consequences of reality come crashing through into the real world, often with very, very bad effects.

Fourth and finally, for those who lived through the age of Covid, the Internet met the need of commerce. Having things delivered to your door instead of risking infection from Covid-19 was a serious, real issue. Why risk going out and coming down with a virus when, instead, items can be brought directly to your door? Further, people often want or need something that is often not in their neighborhood and there is no other way to get it. With online shopping those things can be attained, although usually with some extra expense and delays.

However, as Matthew Bergman at Social Media Victims Law Center points out, while these above listed benefits could be expanded on almost indefinitely, there is a dark side to the Internet, also. Even though the Internet is a relatively new technology, there's already significant research to establish the long-term consequences, both good and bad of social media use. However, multiple studies have found a strong link between heavy social media and an increased risk for depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts, among numerous other ills. Further, since so many people share pictures, videos and other things, everyone else is also pressured to share the same also. This additionally causes individuals to influence newcomers to the website, to share content as well. Web-based social networking, then, ends up changing the lifestyle and fabric of society. Excessive social media use, Bergman and his law center point out, promotes negative experiences such as the following six negative repercussions of the negative effects of social media use (<https://socialmediavictims.org/effects-of-social-media/>).

### **Feelings of loneliness, or inadequacy about your life or appearance**

Even if you know that images, you're viewing on social media are air brushed and photo shopped, they can still make you feel insecure about how you look or what's going on in your own life. Similarly, we're all aware that other people tend to share just the highlights of their lives, rarely the low points that everyone experiences. But that doesn't lessen those feelings of envy and dissatisfaction when you're scrolling through a friend's touched up photos of their tropical beach holiday or reading about their exciting new promotion at work.

The clearest warning for this is certainly the Brian Laundrie, Gabby Petito saga of 2021 in the United States. Brian Laundrie and Gabby Petito were a couple engaged to be married. From just looking at their Instagram page anyone would think that they were the perfect couple. In the Summer of 2021 prior to their wedding later in the year the picture-perfect couple set off on a months-long nationwide road trip tour of the USA with stops at numerous renown national monuments and parks.

However, the joy filled pictures on Instagram didn't tell the entire story, and in August things took a turn for the worse. Both had stormy personalities and they often set each other off. Gabby was easily offended and tended to throw things when angry. Brian could be very physically abusive and would often hit back at people that made him too angry; this included Gabby. After an emotional argument Brian lost control and strangled her to death. He buried her body and returned home to his parents' house pretending they had merely broken up. When Gabby's parents could not contact her, they became desperate to find her and contacted the police. A national search involving police in several states ensued, even involving the FBI. Brian quickly went to the top of the suspect list of possible murderers. Unable to live with what he had done, and knowing he was guilty, he went for a walk in a Florida nature preserve and committed suicide. Clearly from such a sad story we can see that wonderful pictures we see on social media platforms do not tell the entire story.

### **Fear of missing out (FOMO)**

Closely related to number one is FOMO, Fear Of Missing Out. While FOMO has been around far longer than social media, sites such as Facebook and Instagram seem to exacerbate feelings that others are having more fun or living better lives than you are. The idea that you're missing out on certain things can impact your self-esteem, trigger anxiety, and fuel even greater social media use. FOMO can compel you to pick up your phone every few minutes to check for updates, or compulsively respond to each alert—even if that means taking risks while you're driving, missing out on sleep at night, or prioritizing social media interaction over real world relationships. Instead, people can focus more on what they do have instead of what they do not have.

### **Isolation**

Hunt, et al, [7], at University of Pennsylvania, found that high usage of Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram increases rather decreases feelings of loneliness. Conversely, the study found that reducing social media usage can actually make you feel less lonely and isolated and improve your overall wellbeing. Once again, the key is to get away from VR, the almost real virtual world we mentioned earlier, and to focus on real life, authentic relationships with people that support us.

### **Depression and anxiety**

Human beings need face-to-face contact to be mentally healthy. Nothing reduces stress and boosts your mood faster or more effectively than eye-to-eye contact with someone who cares about you. The more you prioritize social media interaction over

in-person relationships, the more you're at risk for developing or exacerbating mood disorders such as anxiety and depression.

### **Cyberbullying**

About 10 percent of teens report being bullied on social media and many other users are subjected to offensive comments. Social media platforms can be hotspots for spreading hurtful rumors, lies, and abuse that can leave lasting emotional scars.

Included as a part of cyberbullying are revenge videos that people post. This can be especially true of intimate, videos, as detailed by Gareth Davies [8] in the UK's Daily Mail article about a one Tiziana Cantone, a woman in Italy in 2015 who broke up with her boyfriend Sergio Di Palo. In an act of revenge, she quickly found a new boyfriend within a few weeks and made an intimate video of them and sent it to the old boyfriend to make him feel bad. However, Di Palo sent the video to all her friends and family members and posted it on her Facebook page to embarrass her and even uploaded it to sex video sharing websites. After months of embarrassment and trying to take them down she committed suicide.

### **Self-absorption**

Sharing endless selfies and all your innermost thoughts on social media can create an unhealthy self-centeredness and distance you from real-life connections. Becoming obsessed with taking selfies and uploading them becomes an obsession. People can spend hours photoshopping or touching up images. Ironically, some people even die trying to get the perfect selfie to show off by getting too hard-to-reach places such as on cliffs, the edge of a tall building, the edge of a waterfall, and other hard to reach spots. How can this be treated? Once again, the answer is moderation, the same thing to treat (mostly) boys hooked on video games. The problem is not that they play video games. The problem is they play too many video games. The problem is not posting videos or pictures to Instagram. The problem is that they post too many things to Instagram and spend too much time obsessing over the perfect video or perfect shot.

From the above-mentioned negatives it is clear that focusing too much on the less-than-real-world we see presented to us on social media platforms with flawless images and carefully shot videos, we can come to the following conclusions.

**Social media is addictive:** To have so many options and so much information available to us at our fingertips is hard to resist. The convenience is hard to ignore. But we must remember there is a life outside the Internet that can be far more rewarding, and we need to nourish it.

**Cyberbullying is more and more frequent:** Many people have seen or experienced cyberbullying. People on the Internet think that the other person does not know who they are, so they will abuse or post private photos of the other person. Rumors, lies that can leave lasting emotional scars with even killing themselves or others in response. And above all, be very, very careful about which photos and videos you allow to be taken and posted.

**Social media affects personal safety:** Many people have been doxed before or have concerns about information leakage about

who they really are. Many news reports have also pointed out that member information on social networking sites was stolen. This problem makes social media more dangerous. In addition, many have experienced the harassment of being secretly photographed; this also means that it's very easy to tag people on social media.

**Social media does indeed affect relationships:** Many people think that making friends on social media is more effective and as a result they become less adept at communication with real people in the real world. This means that when people are face to face, they may not be able to communicate or even know how to chat with each other well or interact with other humans. Over time, both work and family will be affected.

**Social media can cause depression and anxiety:** Most people feel worried when their mobile phones are out of power, or they do not have access to their cell phone or the Internet. Being this Internet dependent is never a good thing. People need to develop their own lives outside the Internet.

It is clear then, that social media does seriously affect people's lives, whether in schoolwork, work or interpersonal relationships. The main reason for this is that modern people's lives are too fast, too busy, and social media is very common and overly addictive. Many know that the use of social media should be reduced and more carefully monitored. Once we are aware of our patterns and the emotions involved in our social media use, we can then be more proactive in ways to counteract the negative effects of social media.

Additionally, if viewing certain webpages causes negative emotions, then it is best to avoid them. We often forget that we can control what shows up in our feed. If the number of likes, comments, or other people's posts on social media causes negativity don't visit those sites and unfollow those that cause emotional unrest. We do not need to let others control our thoughts and emotions. One can always choose not to visit those sites.

Another way is limiting the time spent using social media. As mentioned earlier in the study by Hunt, et al, [7] from University of Pennsylvania, an increase in time spent on social media is associated with an increase in negative emotions. There are many ways to control time spent on social media, including apps with timers. The most practical way to start setting limits on social media is to apply a few simple rules to one's daily life. First, not using your mobile phone during mealtimes and concentrating on eating. Also, do not use your phone for an hour before going to bed. Third,

work on developing authentic relationships off the Internet in real life. Other steps could include not using social media immediately after waking up, or cultivating more interests in free time, such as reading, drawing, or working out. These steps can keep you away from social media and help you focus on the life you do have and improve.

In summary, while we live with social media every day, and it is known that social media makes our lives more convenient, many are unaware of its negative impact. Through these findings and conclusions, people can self-assess and act. For those consumed by social media, it is recommended they follow the steps listed for help to improve the situation or seek professional help [9-11].

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## Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest

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