



Social Media: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

The social media has become a virtual deity, omnipresent and omniscient. It is a facilitator, an educator, and an entertainer and a spiritual trainer – all rolled into one. However, we need to keep in mind the fact that the social media has entered our drawing rooms with its own share of the good, the bad and the ugly.

The youth have grown from couch potatoes to web addicts; the social media revolution has morphed the way they think and behave. It is hard to imagine how quickly social media has brought a major transformation, almost changing the way we communicate.

Whether we like it or not, the cyber migration is here to stay, and has a profound impact on the life of youth. It is raining social media sites, with people finding a virtual platform to connect, to socialize, to share their thoughts and feelings...

The power of social networking is such that, the number of worldwide users currently is 2.2 billion, which is expected to reach some 2.5 billion by 2018, around a third of Earth's entire population. An estimated half a billion of these users is expected to be from China alone and approximately a quarter of a million from India. The region with the highest penetration rate of social networks is North America, where around 60 percent of the population has at least one social account. As of 2015, over 70 percent of the United States population had a social networking profile. Facebook has over 1 billion active users. Pinterest was the fastest independent website in history to reach more than 10 million monthly unique visitors, but, it is still behind other strong players, such as photo-sharing social network Instagram or microblogging platform Tumblr.

"The web has become the place where young people most find their opportunity to explore and express their identities and their social relations, and navigate their way through the values that are on offer around them," says Sonia Livingstone, professor of social psychology and head of the department of media and communications at LSE. Livingstone has studied media and its effects on young people for two decades.

The social media is good to connect with our friends, family and relatives. It opens up for newer ideas, sharing of information, many resources for us to access and learn from; it helps an individual to put his opinion forward on various spheres of life, be it politics, society, economy, education etc. and discuss it with myriad people. People can share their work of art, creativity with others...

One can still remember, one Facebook post sparked the mass uprising in Egypt during the Arab Spring in 2011. Such is the power of the social media.

The youth have this kind of potential to trigger mass revolution... to change the world, to get the deafer heard, to throw the oppressors out, but it has backfired.

A tool which could have done wonders turned one of the biggest distractions for them.

Ever seen the photo-shopped image with spikes and some adventure activity... holding a camera or at least giving tough looks? The worst impact social media is having on youth is that the youth is borrowing its thoughts and culture from internet. The youth have less real and more digital communication. They have a weak touch with reality, real people, real thoughts, real problems; they almost live in a false reality.

The study suggests that the most important factor youth seek from social media is – acceptance. They want to be ‘cool’ among their peers - trying to fit-in constantly. Girlfriends, Guccis and iPhones have set the trend for them. Showing it off unabashedly to impress the unknown.

Just to pose themselves as ‘cool’ youth is doing insane things. Who can forget the case of the man at the Delhi zoo, who accidentally fell into the tiger’s cage. What was disgusting is that the whole mob of onlookers, instead of trying to save his life, started clicking and shooting videos of him.

The youth indulge in cyber bullying and sexting, which is very common. The exchange of inappropriate texts or pictures, and due to permanence and pervasiveness of digital world, it proves life altering many a time.

Girls and boys are creating an ideal persona of themselves online. Thanks to celebrity culture, the venom of perfect body-image has swathed the youth. Use of Photoshop, photo-editing tools, before uploading their picture indicates the same underlying problem.

The youth is bitten by a new narcissist bug, ‘selfie’. Every time you go out, you won’t miss people trying to capture themselves. Making faces, weird gestures, hanging, sitting, standing, dangling, youth is going all out for the love of selfie. All this fuss is solely for acceptance, to re-enforce a sense of psychological satisfaction. The youth are at a loss of privacy, with absolutely no idea, how much is too much to share on social platform.

Among all this, one can’t rule out the hazard of online gaming. Hours are spent on creating farms and shooting enemies. Like networking, gaming also comes with its own set of addiction, where one encounters a situation, “I will do, and just let me finish this last fight”; but the fight never finishes and time flies.

Gaming has very real social and psychological repercussions. The disconnect from reality, neglect of personal relationships and social relationships, gaming takes precedence over everything else. The social awkwardness created by the isolationism of gaming addiction, unfortunately, feeds the addiction. The gaming addict will likely retreat to his online world where relationships are easier and already waiting for him.

Another aspect of online gaming is the kind of game people are engaged in. There are highly violent and sexual games available. Studies suggest that those who are addicted to playing violent online games, like killing or bombing targets, turn aggressive and violent in their offline behavior and feelings too. They are at higher risk of acting violently, and less likely to behave amicably as violent behavior, vengeance and aggression are rewarded in it.

Online sexual games, work like sexual contents, focus on arousal of one's instincts, and then leaving it at its disposal. Such games include, paying prostitutes to have sex with her. This portrays women in a very demeaning and disrespectful light often times in a violence-induced depiction; they are seen as someone weak and sexually provocative in other words an object.

Where are the youth today heading? These youth are misdirected today... the whole lot lack vision, focus, ideology... This system has deliberately engaged the youth in futile video games and exploited them from top, to control its use by them. No kind of parental control or supervision would solve the problem. This is the problem of the system, and the solution lies with the system only. This system has allowed negativity to creep in, it has allowed obscenities to poison young malleable minds, it has allowed such violent games to pollute the youth with vengeance and aggression – and this all in a bid to save the love of their life – their chair, power, position and profit.

The solution lies within the system of Islam... not to make it work, but to throw and replace it with the system of Islam, playing a vital role in lifting one's character emphasizing on the best of Islamic values while upholding the highest code of ethics and discipline according to the merits of Islam. It is indeed an unfortunate absence in today's society, one that is sorely needed to free ourselves from the constant stream of poisons. Islamic media as a result would greatly differ because of this viewpoint and concept.

Islamic media would encourage the good and noble deeds and reject the vices of society we see today – sexting, pornography, cyber bullying, illicit friendship, objectification of women, violence and its glorification, etc. It would educate and inform the general public in their actions, elevate their thoughts, purify their emotions leading to a correct positive viewpoint. Thus, leading to a great revival, steering society towards greatness, enveloping non-Muslims as well. Obscene and derogatory material will be forbidden in all types of media, social media would not contain the image of skimpily clad women waiting to be clicked with a mouse. There will not be this type of freedom of expression, a freedom which knows no bounds, a freedom, where you are free for any corrupt practice, as this destroys society as a whole including its individuals. Men and women will be reminded how to deal with one another in public, or any public platform as well as in the private domain. It would not be used for violating the privacy or rights of an individual. Most certainly, the concepts will be inculcated in both men and women, the youth and children, how to behave, treat, speak online with their male/female counterparts. Thus influencing how the masses, especially youth, use social media for its benefit. Islamic social media will promote a positive welfare environment eradicating racism, discrimination, nationalism, celebrity culture, perfect persona, display of assets etc. that lead towards a spiral of decline something we as Muslims feel and realize the catastrophic results today.

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