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The Impact of Social Media on our Intelligence - narcotic or productive?

Understanding the impact of online platforms on our thinking, learning and social interactions in the digital age.

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Introduction

Social media is an integral part of our lives in the rapidly evolving digital age. From the first thing we see in the morning to the last thing before we go to bed, we are confronted with sites such as Instagram, TikTok and Facebook. These social platforms provide us with social connection, information, and entertainment - but at what expense?

It's no longer about whether or not we use social media, but how it is changing our minds. Are we becoming more enlightened, or are we losing our capacity to concentrate, think critically and think through issues? This is a critical issue for young people in Pakistan, where the use of digital media is growing fast.

"We're not only consuming social media, but to a large extent, it is changing our perception, cognition, and even memory."

Technology Overview

Social media sites use sophisticated algorithms to track users' interests. These algorithms track what we 'like', 'share' and 'view', and continually serve up more of the same to keep us occupied. The objective: keep us online as long as possible.

On the upside, social media makes information more accessible. A child in the countryside can learn how to code, science or world events from the world's best teachers. Learning materials, lessons and educational drives are readily accessible and oftentimes free.

But this comes at a cost. The rapid delivery of bite-sized information conditions us to crave speedy information. Rather than consuming long-form content, such as articles or books, users often turn to short videos and posts on various social media platforms, which can be less informative. This could have negative effects on critical thinking and attention spans.

Key Findings & Impact

Recent evidence indicates that social media has improved and compromised human intelligence - as a tool.



On the one hand, users have greater knowledge of world events. They are instantly informed, are more aware of social causes, and can help them gain more perspectives. It has increased people's social and digital literacy.

However, social media addiction is associated with lack of attention and devalued thinking. Students struggle to pay attention to lectures or books because their attention is trained to scan and skim for short information. Frequently, users simply absorb information without critically thinking about it.

The effects are even greater in Pakistan, where a large percentage of the population is young. Social media has provided opportunities for education and business, but also distractions that can impact on education and work. It is a matter of moderation - harnessing these channels for development and productivity, instead of distraction.

What's Next?

How we use social media is what will determine its future. Social media is not the enemy; it's how it is used that matters.

Social media users need to exercise restraint, not endlessly scrolling and consuming content that is not relevant. Universities can also help with educating students about how to use social media in an educational context, rather than just for fun.

In the future, social media will progress with the rise of artificial intelligence and personalisation. The question is: who will be master and who slave?

Ultimately, social media is neither a good nor bad thing. It is a tool - and like all tools, it is as good as its user. It's up to us to make sure it doesn't make us stupid.

About the Author

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