

Social Media and Society: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

By Ann Smarty

<http://www.seochat.com/>



Social media sites have taken over our lives. It's hard to even imagine that 10 years ago there was no Facebook or Twitter! 15 years ago people were actually **waiting** to hear from each other because even email wasn't that common.

How did social media actually influence our life and the society in general? In my opinion (and I am an early adopter) it has had a positive impact. I am all for the widening of the world we live in, and easy communication around the world.

Social media has definitely made us closer to other parts of the world – as someone who used to do the worldwide business from Ukraine, I am the one who can totally appreciate it!

It doesn't mean I don't see the back side of the coin. I do know the cons along with the pros...

The Good

First, we have the obvious: communication. We are living in a time where the world is open to us. We can contact anyone around the world, at any time, with just a few keystrokes. It is free, unlike calling across the ocean, and live. We can also share elements of our life, from what we enjoy to photos of ourselves and those in our lives. It is like being a part of that person's world, even though distance keeps you apart.

We also have the communication between people and businesses. Since they have paved a new way for interaction between the two, customers can now tell brands exactly what they want. Businesses can then use that information to tailor their products of more appeal. They used to have to spend a ton of cash for this kind of marketing data. Customers used to have to spend hours on phones getting more and more frustrated when they had a problem or complaint.

There are also causes and information. Social media has made it possible for like-minded individuals to discuss important topics, widen their personal knowledge and discover things they never knew before. For example, young people around the world are now more involved than ever in their country's politics. The last presidential elections in the US are proof of that. Social media has contributed to that increase in a big way.

Non-profits are seeing the benefits of using social media for their awareness campaigns. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and others are a cost effective means of spreading the word and getting support. Not to mention socially shared petitions from sites like Causes.org, reaching hundreds of thousands of people. There is no doubt that there are many reasons to love social media.

The Bad

But not all consequences of this technology are good ones. Like the way it has allowed us to hide behind screens and limited our social interaction face to face. You get the feeling of being social without having to go out and socialize. In the same vein, it gives you

the feeling of being a friend (or having friends) without having to put in any actual work to build the relationship. Just think of how many people you have on your Facebook friends list. How many of them do you see on a semi-regular basis? At all?

Then we have the issue of how it has taken over our lives. I *hate* being out in public and seeing people on their phones. Seeing them talking never bothered me as long as they weren't being obnoxious. Nor does sending off a quick text bug me; maybe they are meeting someone and telling them where they are, or something. It is the obvious Facebooking or tweeting or whatever else that keeps people's eyes glued to their phones.

I never check social media sites when I am out doing something. Whether it is grocery shopping, getting dinner with friends or waiting in line, it is just so impolite. It also shows a serious problem with distraction in today's society. We can't enjoy the world around us for an hour without retreating back into that safe little digital box.

Productivity is pretty much shot thanks to social media, as well. Admit it, you check your profiles during work, or find yourself wandering over to YouTube or your favorite blog during work hours. Here is a fun little game: every time you get distracted by a social media site, make a little strike on a piece of paper. At the end of the day, count all the strikes and feel your heart drop into your stomach as you try to estimate how much time wasted it represents.

The Ugly

Some of what social media has done isn't just 'bad', it is flat out 'ugly'. Like the number of relationships that have been broken up over social networks. Now, don't misunderstand me, I am not saying that Facebook is to blame for this. It is just a tool that has seemed to make it easier to cheat, or to do things that cross a boundary in your relationship. Like flirty PM's with that high school sweetheart you haven't seen since graduation. Or much more blatant infidelities that are sure to be caught the first time you forget to log out of the computer you share with your spouse.

Then there is the sheer number of stupid, vain people on Facebook. Yeah, it seems a little mean to point out. But I bet you are thinking of at least one person who would fit into one (or both) of these categories.

Each status message is a flat-out attention-fest, usually vague. Or way TMI about their struggling relationship with someone they should have dumped six months ago. Let's not forget the badly spelled, grammatical nightmares that you would need a magic decoder ring that translated it into English to read. If you want proof that this kind of thing is spreading, as is the self-centered people that most of us try to keep out of our lives, check out the comments in any post.

Conclusion

There are many good things about it, and many bad things. In the end, if you can keep your own life centered in reality and use social networking as a small part of it, you should be just fine. For those who can't, it might be time to turn off the computer for a bit and go for a walk.