Understanding The Emergence And Impact Of Social Media Platforms.

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Abstract:
This study article explores the origins and evolution of social media, evaluating its impact on long-held family values and larger societal dynamics. The emergence of social media has changed the way individuals interact and express their opinions, from a previous emphasis on family bonds to the omnipresent usage of online platforms in today's digital world. Although social media has provided new opportunities for interacting with others, it has also created new challenges, such as cyberbullying and the spread of disinformation. The aforementioned considerations highlight a critical issue with parenting and societal norms. It is critical to emphasise the development of responsible digital citizenship and an environment of open communication within families and communities.

I.   Introduction :

Social media users: who are they? What was the first era of social media's debut, and how has the user base changed over time? Throughout the years, how has the conduct changed? What is the social media's level of dynamics? What level of risk does social media pose? What do traditional values and parents' duties look like in the digital age? Let's explore.

In the current digital era, social media's rise has fundamentally altered how individuals interact with one another, presenting opportunities as well as challenges that have shaped our social structure. The intricate relationship between social media and conventional family values is examined in this study. How this shift has impacted contemporary society is shown.

During the traditional era, norms and family guidance were very important for keeping society together and making sure people got along with each other. These basic ideas made people feel responsible and accountable, allowing them to get along with one another and the community to thrive. However, the emergence of digital social networking sites in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries marked a new era in the way people interact and communicate with one another. Platforms such as six degree, Friendster, and Myspace enabled users to communicate with their peers in earlier unthinkable ways, completely changing how people interact with one another.

As the 20th century turned into the 21st, social media continued to change quickly with its 5.04 billion users by January 2024. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Snapchat, and Instagram became major players in changing online conversation. While these platforms made it easier than ever to connect with others and express yourself, they also had negative aspects that included abuse, harassment, and the sharing of harmful stuff. People can do harmful things without being caught because of the anonymity that internet platforms provide. This makes social problems worse and damages mental health.

This issue is fundamentally rooted in a crisis of parenting and societal values. In today's digital age, families are growing more distant, leading to a decrease in the guidance and supervision traditionally offered by parents. It is concerning that numerous teenagers are left to figure out the complexity of social media without sufficient guidance, resulting in a decline in ethical standards and values. The disintegration of family connections and cultural standards has created a gap in our society, impacting the welfare of upcoming generations.

Historical roots of Social Interactions

Traditionally, teens and young adults had strong ties with their families and communities, which created a vibrant network of relationships and shared memories. Friendship was crucial during teenage years, as it greatly influenced social dynamics, providing essential supports, companionship, and it also plays a very important role in shaping one's identity. However, the process of developing friendship and engaging in social interaction was strongly connected with Parental supervision and traditional values.
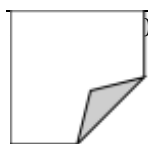
Before the introduction of the digital era, the concept of socialising with friends and hanging out with them required meticulous planning and parent consultation. Youth, In their quest for social interaction, they often found themselves in the middle of a complex web of social norms and family expectations. Parents used to take a thorough interview for granting permission in allowing their child to visit any of their friend's house or engaging in outdoor activities. They would often ask about the nature of the friendship, the friend's character and the planned activities and even the friend's familial background. Parents took an active role in guiding and supervising their children's social interactions and made sure that they spent time with trustworthy friends and participated in activities that aligned with family values. In my point of view, this procedure contributed to instilling in young people the principle of responsibility, respect and caution along with parental guidance. required parental approval and following established protocols.

Engaging in social activities with friends, such sports, outdoor games, and leisurely hobbies and interest was highly valued in this era of face-to-face interaction. Through these activities, teens were able to grow personally, acquire new skills, and form social connections. The pre-digital era nurtured a feeling of togetherness and connection among teens and young adults, as their social interactions revolved around common environments and shared moments. Growing up in the company of their loved ones and the larger community, teenagers found comfort in their social circles, where they could seek guidance and empathy from peers. social interactions were enriched by a strong emphasis on communal cohesion and familial supervision, which gave them a sense of purpose and belonging.

Emergence of Digital Social Networking

The birth of the initial social networking platform in the late 1990 and early 2000 brought huge revolution in the digital world, it was a completely New Era of human interaction and socialisation. One of the first virtual interaction sites was sixdegrees which was created in 1997. This social networking platform introduces users with the concept of online socialising by allowing them to create profiles, list their friends, and search for connections within the network. Sixdegrees laid the foundation for social networking but unfortunately it was shut down in 2001 due to the financial crisis. However, its groundbreaking concept made the way for future networking sites.

Following the success of SixDegrees, many more new platforms arose, each with its own unique set of features and functions. In 2002 an innovative networking site called friendster launched with a game-changing approach on a larger scale. It allowed people to make profiles, connect with friends, and exchange updates and images in a virtual environment.

Then MySpace entered into the arena of digital media in 2003 and by 2004 it achieved the milestone of being the first social media site to reach a million monthly active users. It completely revolutionised the way people expressed themselves online with customisable user profiles and music integration, and created a vibrant community of artists, musicians, and fans. Hi5, which was also introduced at the same time in 2003, became popular because of its global reach and multilingual interface, which allowed for contacts across geographic boundaries. With Orkut, Google made its social networking debut in 2004. This platform prioritised connecting people through existing relationships and communities.

The rise of digital social networking platforms was a huge turning point in human connection, democratising communication and connectedness on a worldwide scale. With these sites, people got opportunities to communicate, express themselves, and participate in virtual communities that they never had experienced before. The early phases of digital social networking were the beginning of a transformative journey, as technology evolved and social dynamics reacted to the opportunities of the digital environment.

Evolution of Social Media in 21st century

In the 21st century, there has been a significant shift in the landscape of social media and communication with billions of users using social media. From the birth of Facebook in 2004 to the rise of YouTube in 2005, these platforms have had a profound impact on shaping digital culture. By 2008, Hi5, MySpace, and Friendster were close competitors to Facebook, yet by 2012 they had virtually no market share. Facebook introduced the concept of social networking on a global scale and according to data in 2019 Facebook had 2.4 billion users, while YouTube transformed the way we consume and share video content which also had over one billion users by 2019.

After the resounding victory of Facebook and YouTube , Twitter made its debut in 2006 as a platform for instant communication through short posts. For survival, the features that most social media sites give to their users constantly evolve in significant ways. For example, Twitter users couldn't post videos or pictures initially. This has been possible since 2011, and now more than 50% of the content viewed on twitter contains pictures and videos. In 2010, Instagram revolutionised the way people share visual content by introducing a platform that emphasised curated and aesthetically pleasing photos and videos. Around the same time, with its unique future of ephemeral messaging and augmented reality effects, Snapchat began to gain momentum among the younger demographic, with 73% of its users under the age of 25, compared to just 3% of the over-65 user
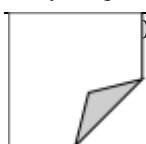
population. In recent years, TikTok has become a global sensation, attracting users with its innovative platform for creating and sharing short-form videos that have a profound influence on popular culture. The rise of TikTok has been remarkable. Since its launch in September 2016, the platform has gained more than half a billion users by mid-2018. During this period, TikTok experienced an ongoing surge of approximately 20 million new users each month. Other platforms like LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Twitch, have also greatly expanded the social media landscape, providing a wide range of experiences and opportunities for connection.

Reflecting on the development of social media in the 21st century, it is clear that these platforms have become essential components of modern day communication and social engagement. Nevertheless, the influence of these advancements goes far beyond just connecting people, causing serious concerns into issues of privacy, misinformation, and the societal implications of digital technology. As we explore the intricacies of the digital era, it is crucial to analyse the impact of social media on our daily lives and contemplate its potential consequences for the evolution of communication and community.

Overview of Social Media Usage Trends Worldwide.
Global use of social media:
● In the previous decade, social network platforms' overall user population has almost tripled, rising from 970 million in 2010 to 5.04 billion in January 2024.
● Some 94.2 percent of people who use the internet now use social media every month, which is similar to 62.3 percent of the overall global population.

Demographic distribution:
● The most active users are aged 18-34.
● Followed by 35 to 54
● There is a huge rise in the number of people aged 54 and above.

Regional variation:
● The 2024 research of regional usage of social media reveals the considerable diversity in social media usage.
> 74 percent in Eastern Asia.
> 71 percent in North America.
> 66 percent in Southern America.
> 80-82% in Northern and Western Europe.
> Southern Asia has 32%, Western Africa 16%, and Middle   Africa 10%.
Source: https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/

Popular platform:
● Here are the top five leading platforms with billions of users globally. With Facebook on the number one followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram and tik tok.
Here is the figure of monthly active users of each platform
Facebook: 3.049 billion people are monthly users.
Youtube: 2.491 billion potential advertising reach.
Whatsapp: 2 billion monthly active users.
Instagram: 2 billion active users.
Tiktok: 1.56 billion potential advertising reach.
Source: https://datareportal.com/social-media-users

Negative Consequences of Social Media:
As we delve into social media's early days and witness its evolution, undoubtedly, the social media revolution has revolutionised communication and connectedness by offering previously unthinkable possibilities of engagement and interaction. However, as these platforms gained traction, it has also brought forth an endless number of unavoidable downsides, making room for the spread of hateful and discriminatory sentiments. If these effects go unresolved they will constitute a grave danger to the future and well-being of the next generation.

A major drawback of social media is the widespread problem of cyberbullying and harassment, causing significant harm to numerous individuals, especially teenagers. One of the studies of Pew Research poll from 2022, 49% of teenagers have been the victim of cyberbullying. Offensive name-calling was the most prevalent, although 10% of respondents had also experienced physical threats. According to the data from the National Crimes Records Bureau (NCRB), there has been a significant rise in crimes in India. From 2018 to 2019, the number of cases increased by 63.48%, going from 27, 248 cases to 44,548 cases. This upward trend continued in 2020, with a further increase of 12.32% reaching 50,035 cases.
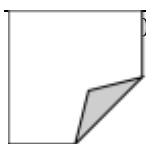
In 2016, a young medical student sadly ended his life due to the continuous cyberbullying she faced following a Facebook post. This tragic event serves as an important reminder of the severe impact of online harassment and the tangible repercussions it can bring. Another troubling incident in Delhi in 2020 shed light on the harmful impact of digital harassment. A 15-year-old boy has been apprehended by Delhi Police in relation to the "Boys Locker Room" controversy, in which participants shared images of underage girls and engaged in inappropriate discussions on the Instagram platform. According to a Northwestern University study, more than 50% of teenagers report having often or sometimes seen sexist (61%) or racist (64%) hate speech on social media. This surprising discovery has brought attention to the widespread issue of cyberbullying and the immediate necessity for more stringent actions to address online harassment and safeguard vulnerable individuals, especially young people.

Furthermore, the spread of false information and misleading news on social media platforms has undermined people's trust in reliable sources of information and deepened divisions within society. The growing number of conspiracy theories and false information, like the disinformation rumours connecting 5G technology to the transmission of Covid-19, highlights the dangerous outcomes of unregulated misinformation on public discussions and decision-making processes.

Privacy breaches and data exploitation further compound the darker sides of social media. The Cambridge Analytica scandal shed light on the alarming breach of privacy and the potential for manipulation by unethical individuals, as it involved the unauthorised collection of personal data from millions of Facebook users for political profiling purposes.

However, it's important to recognise the negative effects that excessive social media usage may have on people's overall and mental health. Cases of social media addiction have become more common, with users obsessively utilising the platform and spending excessive amounts of time in front of devices. Particularly among younger individuals, these habits have been connected to higher levels of anxiety, despair, and loneliness. Documentaries such as "The Social Dilemma" have shed light on the societal effect of social media platforms. The short films provide insight into the deceptive methods algorithms utilise to increase user engagement—sometimes to the cost of social cohesion and mental wellness. Numerous scholarly articles have shown a connection, especially among young individuals, between excessive social media usage and a rise of anxiety, despair, and feelings of loneliness

Ultimately, despite the undeniable impact of social media on communication and connectivity, it is crucial to acknowledge the adverse effects it brings. Everyday instances, like the devastating consequences of cyberbullying and the subtle impact of misinformation, highlight the pressing necessity for heightened consciousness and measures to tackle the negative aspects of social media. Neglecting to address these concerns directly puts the well-being of future generations at risk, as they may face a bleak future with exploitation, division, and hopelessness. On top of that, the intense competition found on social media, where popularity is determined by likes, shares, and virality, presents a distinct risk to the younger population. Constantly seeking validation and approval in the online world can have detrimental effects on one's mental health and self-esteem. It can lead to harmful comparisons and a skewed perception of one's own worth, amplifying the negative impact of social media on individuals.

Challenges in Parenting and Navigating the Digital Landscape.

Catherine Steiner-Adair observes in her book The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age, "Our children are growing up immersed in a culture where it is cool to be cruel, where media influences encourage it and social networking facilitates it."

The modern era has brought about a multitude of challenges for parents as well, they are navigating the complex landscape of social media and online interactions. With the rising number of mobile devices and digital technology, parents are facing a range of new challenges. There is growing concern regarding the potential negative impact of excessive screen time on children's development, particularly when screens are used as a means of soothing them. Early exposure of children to mobile devices can potentially impact their social, cognitive, and emotional development.

Moreover, family dynamics and interpersonal interactions have shifted due to digital technology. Outdoor play and face-to-face social interaction have been replaced by solitary screen time, and teenagers often prefer digital engagement over in-person interaction, even during family gatherings. These trends underscore societal implications, potentially leading to a generation lacking social connections and emotional support.

Parents' lack of digital literacy adds another layer of challenges. Many struggle to understand social media and digital technology, making it difficult to monitor their children's online activities effectively. This gap highlights the need for comprehensive education and support for parents in navigating the digital age. Dr. Preeti Singh, a clinical psychologist at Paras hospital in gurugram India, notes, "Over use of social media platform has exposed a lot of people to body image issues, cyber bullying, tech addiction and much more personalised features and fake account names give no access to the elders to know what their kids are posting or
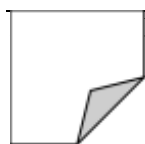
watching on these platforms. They have no clue about the mental condition and assume that children are safe on social media. Constant use of social media is directly then to mental health."

This reality poses significant challenges for parents, who must cultivate empathy, respect, and kindness in both the digital and real world. By promoting open communication and setting limits on screen time, parents can mitigate the adverse effects of digital technology and create a healthier digital environment for their children.

II.   Conclusion:

Social media has a huge influence on almost every part of our life. Its impact on how we connect and engage with one other is evident in our day to day life, influencing everything from activism and business to communication and entertainment. While social media and technology are here to stay and will continue to advance, we need to keep recognizing and addressing the risks they pose to our society and general well-being.

Throughout our study into the historical roots, emergence, evolution, and harmful repercussions of social media, it has become obvious that immediate action is required to address the darker aspects of this digital phenomena. Cyberbullying, disinformation, privacy violations, and social media addiction are just a few of the dangers that face people and communities globally.

However, among these problems, there is room for collaborative effort and constructive change. All of us—parents, educators, governments, technology firms, and individuals—must unite to promote digital literacy, and appropriate online behaviour. We can leverage the groundbreaking potential of social media for greater good by providing ourselves and future challenges with the information and skills needed to navigate the digital world securely and ethically.

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