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It is no secret that the Internet has completely restructured our world. More specifically, social media has had the greatest impact on how, when, and what we communicate with others. We have become a society that centers our entire lives on being social without actually having to interact with one another. I think that it is safe to say that each and every person has a love-hate relationship with the Internet and how it has impacted our self-image, our relationships, and our ability to communicate. In this paper, I am going to be looking at how multimedia and the Internet have both had positive and negative impacts on communication, the effects it has had on major life events, and a new phenomenon that has resulted from social media.

Let us start by looking at the positive impacts that social media has had on communication. Specifically let us look at Facebook. Facebook is the most widely recognized form of social media, as well as the most popular with over 1 billion users to this day. Facebook and other social media vehicles have given us the opportunity to share important life events with our families and friends. Events such as graduations, birthdays, weddings, and having children are all under events that we want to share with our loved ones, but in the past might have had some difficulty doing so. With social media it is much easier to keep track of your loved ones birthdays as well as sending out congratulations when appropriate. Facebook has also given us the opportunity to increase our chances of connecting with people who we have lost contact with. A long lost childhood friend doesn’t have to stay lost forever. This goes for reunions as well. Social Media has allowed us to stay updated on so many people’s lives, which in away allows us to stay connected to a larger group of people for a longer period of time. (Gross, 2014) According to a University of Wisconsin Study, Catalina Toma who is an assistant professor conducted a study that tested college student’s self-esteem after viewing his or her own profile for 5 minutes. The results were that overall students experienced much higher levels of self-esteem. (Price, 2013)

Facebook and other social media vehicles have not just affected our personal relationships and lives, they have also affected the work place in a positive manner. Social media has enabled workforces to work together collaboratively to come up with solutions for problems rather than just a specific. It is much easier for a company to communicate via Internet and brainstorm rapidly, than getting everyone together in the same room to do so. Secondly it has made it significantly easier to find information and people. This can be done in a way that is empowering to employees. Giving employees a sense of empowerment results in happy employees who gain a feeling of self worth, which eventually results in a happy company environment. Which leads me to another benefit of social media, that any employee can have a voice and any employee can be a leader. Social media has given people the confidence to voice their opinions and contribute ideas more often. Employees are not the only ones to be opening up more however. Social media has guided upper management to be more open with the company. This is so important because when all workers of a company are on the same page, which means that they all are working together to produce the same goal. It allows top management to gather more ideas in a simple inexpensive way, as well as showing recognition to those who are actively participating in coming up with innovative ideas. (Afshar/Morgan, 2013)

Of course with the good, comes the bad. Social media has also had negative impacts on the way we communicate with each other. As mentioned before let us take a look at Facebook again. I mentioned previously how sharing major life events have become easier for us, but that also means that sharing unimportant events has also become easier. By constantly sharing pictures of food, or even someone put up one too many photos of their newborn, you could be potentially harming relationships with people. If you are cluttering someone’s timeline with irrelevant information, the chances of them getting annoyed with you and potentially deleting you on social media only increase with time. Your online presence now affects how people view you as a person as well. Facebook has been proven that it makes individuals happier by increasing their self-esteem, but it also can make us sad. Sure it is great to share our accomplishments and life events, but it can also make us anxious or depressed that we aren’t in the same place in our lives as some of our other Facebook friends. This can cause us to develop a sense of jealousy or resentment towards certain friends that are succeeding more than us when we should be happy for them. (Gross, 2014)

However, the biggest negative impact easily has to be interpersonal communication. Despite Social Media starting an era of staying in constant communication with each other, they way we are communicating is no longer actually personal. We talk to people throughout the day via text message, and when we want to catch up with someone we haven’t spoken to in awhile we will send them a wordy e-mail rather than picking up the phone and dialing. Our social connections with others are not strengthened when we utilize social media. Although we may open up to someone via Facebook message we aren’t connecting with them on an emotional level like we would face to face. Yes, we can read the content and appreciate someone opening up to us, but we can’t experience the emotions associated with the message. Gathering information on people is also much easier which makes us not feel as connected to someone when we know that so many people have access to this information. This leads to the concept of information overload. Processing so much information on so many different people can be mentally and emotionally difficult. Social media has caused so many people to actually become addicted to technology. We start spending more time on the Internet than with others, which are probably, the biggest concern regarding social media and interpersonal communication today. (Keller, 2013)

As mentioned, social media has made it more easily accessible to share life events, but how has it exactly changed them? Let’s take a look at politics and elections. Politics being one of the most controversy topics, people can’t help but share their opinions with one another. In the year of 2014, we have seen a huge jump in people utilizing social media for politics. People are starting to follow political candidates on twitter, and many use smart phones and the Internet as a way to keep up with rankings and news. Many would believe that this increase is due to Millennials getting older and younger generations using smart phones to keep updated with politics, however the largest increase is in the age group that ranges from 30-49. (Alford, 2014) According to Ford, author of “Does Social Sway Elections,” 40% of adults that are 30-49 now use their cell phone as a means to keep up with election news. As social media starts to become a dominant part of the political lifestyle, particular sites, like Twitter and Facebook, are taking notice and developing discussion boards for users to have meaning conversation over. (Alford, 2014)

Social media has not only had an impact on politics, but it has also affected prospective college students and the college experience as well. There are various ways that colleges and universities have utilized social media to attract prospective students, keep current students happy, and encourage alumni to stay involved. For example some universities hold competitions during decision days to encourage parents and prospective students to tweet/post photos to various social media outlets. The concept of the hashtag has given colleges the opportunity to differentiate themselves from other universities with hashtags that are specific to them. Other social media vehicles such as YouTube, allow colleges to share experiences of both the students and faculty. YouTube videos give potential students an idea of the atmosphere the college can provide for them, as well as giving alumni a look into what is going on at their schools. Social media has not only affected our personal relationships, but it is clear that it is starting to affect major life events such as choosing a college, or participating in politics. (Penna, 2014)

It is evident that the Internet has had a major impact on our lives in more ways than one, but this is not the only thing that social media has contributed to society. Recently social media has developed the concept of FoMO, or Fear of Missing Out. According to “Computers in Human Behavior,” FoMO is “defined as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, FoMO is characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing.” FoMO has been linked to higher social media engagement, lower need satisfaction, lower mood and life satisfaction, and it has also been linked with distracted driving and using social media during lectures and school time. This is definitely one of the more negative aspects that social media has contributed to our society. Not only does is cause people to spend even more time on social media, but the time that is spent online results in negative feelings. This also generates a need to be on the Internet more when it is not necessary. Users develop a sense of resentment towards others, and instead of going out and living life, people just want to make it look like they are constantly doing something with their lives. FoMO is funny like that, people develop feelings of sadness because they feel left out of life events, but in the end they find themselves more inclined to check Facebook and see what they are missing out on rather than joining. (Przybylski, 2013)

In summary we have touched on the positive and negative impacts that social media has had on interpersonal communication, the effects it has had on major life events, and the new phenomenon of FoMO. Right now, it is hard to say if social media has impacted us for the better or worse. There are strong arguments for each side, and right now the Internet is growing so rapidly it is hard to determine how social media will affect us down the road. What we do know is that is does play a major role in how we interact with others. We have to remember that we can’t replace real relationships with online ones. Sharing information is not the same as developing a relationship with someone. Social media and the Internet can be an amazing tool, but the key to anything in life is moderation. We must remember that we control what we put on our social media; our social media should not control us.

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