Research paper on social networking and its applications to todays culture

[Technology](), [Internet]()

In today's world, the Internet pervades every aspect of life, from smartphones to streaming video. Every single human need for information or entertainment can be accessed with the push of a button, which creates a culture of immediacy that some people believe threatens societal development. However, it can be said that the Internet provides a bastion of information and communication that is unprecedented at any other point in history. This is found most clearly in the advent of social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter - these are hubs of information and modes of communication between millions of individuals at a time. The immediate thoughts, the hopes and dreams, and the political beliefs of millions of people are instantly at one's fingertips. With that, however, comes the dangers of making one's lives and personal information nakedly transparent for all to see. In light of the substantial benefits that are thought to occur as a result of social networking - In order to deal with issues of privacy, data mining, and social activism in the United States, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on using social networking to connect people and make media literacy a greater priority, while still keeping this vital information private..

The Advantages of Social Networking - Social and Political

The iPhone generation has created a culture in which no one need ever leave their mobile phone or laptop. Everything can be done with the simplest action on a phone, from contacting nearly anyone you can in multiple ways (speaking, texting, IMing, even through webcam) to checking your bank account or looking up information. With this in mind, people are able to be more informed than ever before. Personalized blogs and social networks, as well as sites like Facebook, allow people to manufacture their own content

and exercise their own creative muscles, becoming their own authors of culture.

As a consequence of this media-savvy culture, people read fewer books on the whole. While many people portray this as a bad thing, citing a potential lack of experience with the written word which can stunt language development and communication, this could not be further from the truth. In fact, children actually write more now with the constant typing of the Internet culture – " Teenagers today read and write for fun; it's part of their social lives" (Goldwasser, 2010). Thanks to instant messaging, blogging, and social media, the written word is a much larger part of their social lives, and as such they have a greater exposure to it. Though some can claim this might dilute language due to new words being formed, and typos being potentially more prevalent, the sheer amount of correctly proofread content on the Internet means that people are given access to a greater amount of immediate professional content than ever before. The immediacy of social media means that people have much easier access to news, and are able to report it themselves in an articulate way. Someone can read a news story from CNN. com, get the full story from other news websites and blogs, as well as Twitter coverage from people who are at the site of the story, and even offer their own perspective for the world to read and absorb. " The Internet has turned teenagers into honest documentarians of their own lives -- reporters embedded in their homes, their schools, their own heads" (Goldwasser, 2010).

Today's electronic age has made it much easier to have international protests take place in multiple areas; Twitter, Facebook and other social media have facilitated groups with the ability to assemble and organize large protests across the country. In the case of a Jena, Louisiana murder wherein six black teenagers were charged with the attempted murder of a white student (whom they had just beaten), many gathered to protest what was, in their mind, an overly harsh charge fueled by racial tensions. This issue had become " viral"; in other words, social media and the Internet had caught onto it, making people around the country and the world aware of it and willing to protest. Thusly, a small town issue suddenly was thrust into the national spotlight, drawing thousands of protestors to the issue and highlighting the effect mass media has in facilitating protest (Wilson, 2007).

The Internet has made it incredibly easy for nearly any issue under the sun to be thrust into the national spotlight. In a world where even a video of a cat playing a keyboard can be seen by people around the world, it makes it even more likely for entire countries to band up against their leaders. This has occurred very recently, in light of the incredible series of national protests and political upheavals that have taken place in countries such as Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. These were widely orchestrated political uprisings that allowed for an entire population to rise up simultaneously against their oppressive regimes; nearly all of them ended up successful changes in administration. This is a very strong piece of evidence for the effectiveness of protest, particularly as it can be performed today. The ability to assemble a large group of people for simultaneous uproar grants protest a greater

amount of power than ever before, provided the numbers are there to make a sufficient impact. Making your protest viral is a vital component of its success; the more people hear about it, the more people will join.

Who Knows? The Danger of Privacy on Facebook

Despite the fact that social networking draws people into worlds of connectivity between people, privacy is actually a legitimate and frightening issue. When sites like Facebook place a value on the sheer number of friends you have, it can be easy to let anyone in to see your timeline or messages. Often, the drive to express one's daily life through Facebook status updates or tweets can be so great that it can expose information about yourself to anyone who dares to listen. Add to that the option of reporting and " checking in" to wherever you are, and Facebook can literally track you down to where you are at that moment. This is a dangerous prospect to consider, especially since companies and third-party organizations will often sell your private information and search histories to the highest bidder (Barnes, 2006). While the computer itself may allow you to work and communicate in physical privacy, the actual information you provide, whether inadvertent or not, is still very easy to access.

Some claim that the Internet culture makes people even more alienated from themselves, due to the fact that it is much more easy and convenient to respond to people via email and smartphones. Even in mixed company, people tend to take out their phones and check them in lieu of communicating face-to-face with others – " when technology brings us to the point where we're used to sharing thoughts and feelings instantaneously, it

can lead to a new dependence" (Goldwasser, 2010). This is a recurring theme in business and personal interactions of late, as the immediacy of Internet media has become preferable to actual physical and verbal interactions. However, people still have the choice to have face-to-face conversations with people, and are able to be perpetually present in each other's lives – no amount of technology will restrict that. In fact, email, text messaging and instant messaging act as a means to provide more opportunities to find more people, make more friends, and even find romance. Rather than replacing our normal means for social lives, it enables us to simply have more than we have now.

Despite the advantages the Internet provides us, it is necessary to address the aforementioned privacy paradox. There are three types of solutions that can be implemented to help keep people's information confidential and identities anonymous - social, technical and legal solutions (Barnes, 2006). In terms of social solutions, the responsibility lies with parents to help regulate children's access to Facebook and other social networking sites - they need to involve themselves more radically with their kids' Internet usage, and understand the technology better in order to make themselves available. Schools are also said to play a huge part in keeping this information private - having their own social networking policies for on-site computing helps somewhat, limiting students' access to non-productive sites like social networking services. However, there is more that can be done on the school level towards educating students and social networking users on media literacy through social networking and the maintenance of privacy (Barnes,

2006). Continuing the aforementioned privacy policies is a good idea, but privacy and media literacy courses designed to inform people how their information is used and accessed on Facebook could equip individuals with greater tools to keep themselves safe.

Social networking sites are the entities that could be responsible for technical solutions to address privacy violations. Improving technology and website security, including the improvements and changes Facebook continually makes to its privacy settings, places more control over who sees what in the hands of the user. Some websites are also including failsafes and verification methods to make sure that children under the ages of 13 and 14 are not allowed on social networking. Methods of reporting inappropriate content are also included within these social networks, in order to allow for individual policing of content and profiles (Barnes, 2006).

Finally, legal solutions to the privacy problem include initiatives like the Deleting Online Predators Act (DOPA) (Barnes, 2006). This act mandates Internet filters to be placed in school-located computer libraries, which would limit access to social networking sites. However, despite the good intentions of this bill, further action is needed to protect privacy. Given the aforementioned benefits of social networking, complete censorship is not the answer; instead, students must be given the ability to police themselves. Becoming educated on what can happen to them on social networking, instead of allowing them to find out the hard way, permits them to exercise caution when participating in activities on social networks. This grants the user with a greater level of confidence, and the freedom to enjoy the media

literacy, interconnectivity, and sociopolitical power that social networking has to offer.

In conclusion, the new nature of media today creates positive social development in the citizens of our culture, creating more media-literate, intelligent and skilled writers that can navigate a more complex and immediate level of information and entertainment. Social networking sites permit the aggregation of incredible amounts of data and news, feeding the interests and politics of their peers into easily-assimilated nuggets of information. However, the willingness to share information that is personal and potentially harmful can cause harm to what is typically a harmless endeavor. Therefore, initiatives have to be taken at the social, technical and legal levels in order to handle these problems and find out how best to allow self-policing of social networks to occur. The media and information potential of social networking, both for interpersonal communication and mass culture aggregation, is staggering; it would be foolish to leave it unprotected, along with the private information of those who seek to use it. Maintaining vigilance in the light of an age of oversharing and a false sense of safety is paramount; new laws, new technologies, and the encouragement of safer personal practices can accomplish these goals and more.

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