

Is social media  
eroding our sense of  
community assignment



The claim “ social media is eroding our sense of community’ is as complex and ambiguous as the term community itself, in both its understanding of the notion and its fluidity as a concept. Social media has the both the potential to perpetuate the erosion of our sense of community, and equally to influence and extend a less secular sense of community. The local and traditional sense of community is diminishing through our ever-increasing interaction with social media that now shapes how we now interact and communicate with others – but has it forever changed the traditional sense of ‘ help thy neighbor?

Logic suggests that, in this context, to erode is not solely to diminish but rather to change. With the proliferation of positive social movements, community engagement tools and online access to education, social media also gives us scope to increase the sphere of our influence. It would be dogmatic to state that social media does not have the capacity to provide a positive and more global context to our sense and understanding of community. While this concept is changing; social media is simply a symptom of this, not the cause.

There is the potential for it to perpetuate the short-comings of a more isolated ND globalizes society but it also has the power to enhance our connectedness and ignite a better understanding of humanity and equality. Which way it goes will be determined by how we, as a society, use it. Community is a fluid, every changing concept that has a perpetual relationship with society and its values as a whole. As society changes, so the concept of community is also changing.

In an ever turning world, society evolves through changing values and views that flow through into how we interact and are influenced by norms and ideas (Turner B S (deed) 2011: 83). For the repose of this paper one finds it imperative, not only to define a traditional place centered definition of community, but also to consider how this definition has evolved to now be centered around the meaning that human beings have inter-twined with community rather than simply the functional structure of community.

The debate about the balance between individual interest and the common good for all is well documented in literature about community through the ages. Before the sass's social theorists such as Mercer (1956) and others discussed the concept of a community as group of citizens residing in a region or location, for a particular era and who share a common set of social structures and cultural behaviors. Neal, (1981) went further and described the concept as those attributes combined that ' show an awareness of their uniqueness and separate identity as a group' (Neal, S.

Deed. 1981 : 27). Perhaps with changes in glance of autonomy and the collective in modern society, more importance is moving toward that of the individual. Recognition of these tensions by scholars has, in part, led to the discourse on community studies that encompasses ore than a functionalist or formalist concept of community as a physical locality. Like any other social construct, community has a symbolic dimension as well (Cohen 1985: 8). For the purposes of describing and examining social media as online communities this distinction is of paramount importance.

Western culture, which is mainly seen as individualist (Vaughan G & Hog M 2010: 320), recognizes a concept of community that is the sum of more than its social function or formalist nature. The environment, the terrain, the industry of a community all define or frame the notion of a community. The human element imparts the meaning to our communities. Cohen (1985) outlines that a constructional view of community ' is symbolically constructed as a conglomerate of normative codes and values that provide members with a sense of identity (Cohen, 1985 p 8).

This definition emphasizes meaning over structure and highlights that the underpinning constant in our idea of community is the meaning both individuals and society in general perceive it to be - and not its physical state. As Cohen (1985) states it is ' not whether it's structural limits have withstood the onslaught of social change, but whether its members are able to infuse TTS culture with validity and to construct a symbolic community which provides meaning and identity (Cohen, 1985: 9) '.

Community as a concept is determined by the perspective of society and its culture at a certain point on the time and space continuum. Community like love is where you find it, and most importantly, it has many forms, one just as vital the last or the next, erosion is inept in describing it's continuously changing and manifold nature. Traditional communities have always evolved through cycles of development as new technologies and services that have been introduced.

The arrival of electricity, the railways and the telephone have all impacted on the way we perceive community and the way we as individuals interact

within it. It is interesting to note that studies on community and social change, particularly those articulated by Ferdinand Townies (1887) and George Simmer (1887), during the height of European modernity, outlined that while an understanding of community was still mainly bound in locale they also commented on the degree to which the forms of the 19th century social existence reflected those changing notions of the value of the collective social experience'.

At the time communities become more connected and urban, peasant societies were declining and city life was seen as exemplifying the decay of oral culture, traditional morality and family ties but not necessarily as causing it Cones, S. Deed. 1999: 277). Social media as both a by-product of and an accelerator of social change must logically be seen as more than eroding our sense of community but rather changing with it and helping it to evolve.

In western culture, a more individualist and autonomous drive is emerging and social media is perpetuating this drive. Whether this change in itself is erosion is to be left o the philosophers and ethicists of the social sciences to debate, the facts are that with change comes some sort of diminishing of some factors but not without the enhancement or even creation of others. In the modern age, the necessity for physical involvement with those geographically close to you is clearly diminished.

An evolutionary process where the space and distance between those you converse with and interact with socially has decreased, especially in the 21st century where demands on an individual's time have increased with

seemingly less and less time that isn't occupied by work or 'life maintenance'. This has led to a tension between lost opportunities for face-to-face communication and the ever broadening horizons accessible through social media.

Clearly one can see this has the potential to challenge society's views about the impact of social media on our traditional understanding of community. It is likely that Sociologist will seek to measure the ways it could change our construct of community rather than examining how it has changed our notions in the hopes of minimizing the negative impacts of how we are using social media (Keen, A. 2012: 99) Furthermore it has been evidenced that it is wrought face to face interacting that we learn how to treat others, read others and interact peacefully with others, particularly as children. Vaughan G & Hog M 2010: 333-334) Any decline in face-to-face communication and interaction will mean there is a risk that a general lack of empathy and understanding will evolve in western society, but only if our culture continues to have a secular rather than a global push. (Christensen & Elevation, 2001: 477) Also maintaining some level of face to face interaction and learning, especially in young children could mitigate the risk of such an outcome.

In addition pursuing an understanding and interaction with differing others, a strong and aslant ideal within our culture, while still giving prevalence to our face to face interaction will have a balanced outcome on society. The amplification of the scope of our interaction is possibly the most amazing element of change that social media has exemplified and perpetuated.

Through our ability to connect globally in real time, we now have not only a greater scope of influence and access to information and education but also <https://assignbuster.com/is-social-media-eroding-our-sense-of-ommunity-assignment/>

increased connection with boundless numbers of individuals in similar circumstances (Cartrescue, L. 10). Clearly these are all huge enhancements to our sense of community, not only does it enhance our connectedness with others it also enhances the potential for direct action by citizens - either for political reasons or to marshal support for local and international issues of importance - environmental, human rights and economic development. Recent movements such as the world wide action to stop the destruction of palm oil forests in Malaysia, that were organized through online channels (anon, 2010), or the use of mobile phones to stream videos of violence against citizens in the uprising of the

Arab Spring show the power of modern communications in a connected world. (Fuchs C. 2012: 109) These causes have achieved increased international reach and therefore greater support through social media.

Moreover, traditional locale oriented communities were somewhat limited in their capacity for inclusion of every individual, because it implied uniformity of a citizen - the values and behaviors expected by the majority marginal's the lives of those who were, or felt, different. People were ostracized and made to feel less worthy or deviant if they didn't meet the communities 'expectations'.

Christensen, K. & Elevation, D. 2001: 41 5) Communities online allow for freedom of the individual, particularly giving power for those that don't fit the standard model in their current locale to connect with like-minded people across the globe, in a way that encourages variety and allows creativity to flourish and people to access ideas and norms from many, varied societies. Access to so much has been amplified through our <https://assignbuster.com/is-social-media-eroding-our-sense-of-ommunity-assignment/>

increased connectedness that has emerged through social media, from access to other individuals and their ideas to more varied social groupings and formal education.

Greater access to information, education and ideas increases the opportunity for many and it is through this lens that it can be seen that social media has the ability to enhance social equality. Individuals no longer need to be so isolated - there are kindred spirits actively seeking connection through social media channels - feelings of helplessness or futility in trying to fit or change the way things are can be moderated and sometimes eliminated. Social media channels open up the possibility of free and uncensored discussion about thoughts and feelings. Social Edie can also enable new alliances and support networks to emerge and flourish.

We don't have to feel helpless about how to change things any more, now we can share our feelings and thoughts on any subject, freely and openly. Our capacity to connect to like-minded others, especially as counter to those who would suppress the truth, and provide a voice citizens to speak the truth openly and marshal support for difference - in thinking and believing is enormous (anon, 2010). The pressing questions for current researchers in the social sciences will include how to further remote the enhancement of connectedness and sharing of ideas and views while still maintaining a level of face to face communication and learning.

Western society must embrace social media as a way to enhance a changed sense of community - both its values and the styles of community involvement - getting left behind is the only sure fire way to segregate, as

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opposed to mesh these two forms of community(Froth, M. Deed. 2011: 304). Western societies sense of community has changed this is undeniable, it has not however simply eroded nor has social media been the instigator or catalyst of this. It has contributed to both the disintegration of he traditional, locale orientated and quite secular communities and the enhancement of a more global and connected community.

It has in its own way extended current communities and given access to arrange of empowering tools for the individual and the group, it has the ability to broaden the horizons for all with access to it and to enforce empathy and equality. But only if we as intelligent, complex and power wielding human beings integrate and impart meaning and importance on both our locale and online communities. While embracing its empowering ability we must be aware of its complexity and effect on traditional incepts and learning.

We have the power to use social media for good and not for evil.