
Social Media

"The world needs more love and Twitter just figured out a way to send 'hearts all over the world'." — Germany Kent

"The qualities that make Twitter seem insane and half-baked are what makes it so powerful."- Jonathan Zittrain, Professor of Law at Harvard

1. What is Social Media?

- Social Media is defined as "Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking."
- "Social Media is inherently a selfish medium"- Pam Dyer
- "Social media allows us to behave in ways that we are hardwired for in the first place- as humans. We can get frank recommendations from other humans instead of from faceless companies." - Francois Gossieaux
- The means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. (high degree of interaction)
- Forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos)
- Internet-based software and interfaces that allow individuals to interact with one another, exchanging details about their lives such as biographical data, professional information, personal photos and up-to-the-minute thoughts

2. Features of Social Media

a) User-Based

- Most social media networks are usually built, directed and sustained by users themselves – formation and development of a community
- These users populate the network with discussions and content. The general direction of the content is decided by anyone who takes part in the discussion
- This participative, user driven and based aspect of social media ensures that it is much more dynamic, exciting and nimble as compared to traditional media

b) Interactive

- The ability to interact with anyone around the globe via interactive means such as network-based gaming applications remain another of social media's calling card
- Websites like Facebook provide many opportunities for increased interaction such as playing online chess tournaments to playing a game of poker together
- These online gaming communities have the additional benefit of connecting groups of people together based on common interests and likes/dislikes

- These increased levels of interaction between online personas transcend mere virtual entertainment; it has become a concrete way to connect and have fun with friends

c) Community-driven

- Social networks build and thrive upon community-based concepts
- Community concepts are tangible concepts like common beliefs, hobbies, and commonalities that draw people closer together
- Amongst most social media platforms, there are many sub-committees of people who share similar commonalities such as alumni of a particular college or a special interest group (animal welfare)
- Not only can you discover new friends within these interest based communities, but you can also reconnect with old friends that you lost contact with many years ago
- The community-driven mindset of social media networks ensure that the entire process is almost self-sustaining as humans constantly seek out each other for friendship, companionship and even romantic love
- Facilitates the rise of new social movements pertaining to identity, culture, ideology and politics
 - Examples – LGBTQ movements, environmentalism, women's rights, peace movements

3. Types of social media

- a) Social Networking sites such as Facebook, Google+ and LinkedIn
- b) Collaborative Projects such as Wikipedia and various Wikis projects
- c) Blogging and Microblogging such as Blogger, Dayre, Tumblr and WordPress
- d) Virtual Communities/Game Worlds like World of Warcraft and Second Life
- e) Content Communities such as Yahoo News, Flickr, SlideShare and YouTube

4. Positive Impact of Social Media

a) Improves communication and social interaction

- Social media provides users multiple modes of communication, which transcends geographical boundaries, thus enabling bilateral and multilateral communication
 - Examples – WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram
- Provides opportunities for collaboration

b) Expounding education and enriching impact on society

- Facilitate knowledge transfer and skills acquisition through the transmission of online content, in terms of videos and articles
 - Examples – Online learning, such as Khan Academy, Codecademy, Coursera, AsknLearn
- Serves as a collaborate platform for both professionals and students to engage in intellectual debates and discussions

- o Examples – Online forums, school learning portals
- Utilize smartphone apps for educational development
 - o Examples – GP Studies, Econs Studies
- c) Promotes democratic development**
- Facilitates political democratization through equal access to information
 - o Examples – 2011 Arab Spring, 2014 Occupy Central, Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong
- Serves as a useful communication channel for policymakers and citizens to stay connected
- Promotes internet democracy
 - o Examples – In 2016, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) banned Facebook's Free Basics in India, sparking a debate on Net Neutrality
 - o Net Neutrality – principle that Internet service providers should enable access to all content and applications regardless of the source and without favouring or blocking particular products or websites
- d) Creates economic opportunities**
- Generate employment and lower cost of production through the establishment of new industries
 - o Examples – Financial technology (FinTech) is an industry comprised of companies that use technology to make financial services more efficient
 - o Examples – UOB Mighty mobile app
- Bridges the gap between employers and potential job seekers due to greater accessibility of information in the jobs and labour market, Jobstreet.com
- Generates consumer satisfaction as business owners and service providers can suit the taste and preferences of different consumer groups
- e) Promotes Awareness of Social, Economic & Political Causes**
- Movements & campaigns led by non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
 - o Examples – Earth Hour, Earth Day

5. Negative Impact of Social Media

a) Undermines social relationship

- Fewer face-to-face interaction as individuals are increasingly pre-occupied with social media usage. Consequently, the erosion of social relationships increases the likelihood for misunderstandings, giving rise to social issues
 - o Examples – Using mobile phones during mealtimes and social gatherings – change in the forms of interaction
 - o create sub-groups and alienate certain loved ones from your social media

How to rebut this? – maintain long distance relationship – skype, whatsapp
video – still conduct face-to-face communication

- link people to a particular group of interest and build closer link with people who are willing to share

b) Rising number of cyber crimes

- Increased vulnerability to cyber threats as much of our personal information is left accessible on social media platforms
- By piecing the information together from various social media sites that we use, cyber criminals can obtain important personal data and engage in cyber extortion
 - Examples – Phishing scams, bank fraud, theft of classified information, identity theft,
- Sex extortion
 - Examples – 17-year old Daniel Perry was a victim of a webcam blackmail plot. While he was conversing on Skype with a girl of the same age as him, a gang hijacked the conversation and threatened to publicize the video to his family and friends unless he paid them. Eventually, Daniel committed suicide.

c) Moral degradation

- Websites and Videos that promote violence shape the minds of users, resulting in them engaging in moral undesirable behaviours
 - Examples – In 2013, the Media Development Authority (MDA) banned the social network, Ashley Madison, which allows people to engage in extra-marital affairs

d) Cultural deprivation

- Opportunity cost incurred in terms of less time for reading books and engaging in other forms of educational activities
- Social media contributes to the clash of cultures, leading to the emergence of dominant Western cultures, such as individualism, which undermines the stability of households
- Loss of cultural identities/cultural pride – cultural inferiority complex
- Loss of ability to appreciate cultural activities and norms

How to rebut this? – the cultural activists will promote the local culture with youtube upload – getai – local street singing event – promote the awareness of this event – erase the cultural inferiority complex associated with these street performers

e) Social division

- Creates platform for individuals to align their views with certain individuals or organizations

- o Examples – 2016 US Presidential Elections – Supporting Republican or Democratic political candidates, such as Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump
 - o 2012 US Presidential Elections – Tea Party
 - o Brexit, outcome of US 2016 election
- Emergence of social media creates social division in terms of race, class and income
 - o Examples – Social media sites allow users to publish personal content that accentuates their social status, creating envy among the audience that may translate to social unrest and disorder. Consequently, social unrest results in greater political dissatisfaction that may undermine stability of a country

f) Political indoctrination of religious fundamentalism and extremism

- Terrorist organizations, such as Islamic State of the Iraq (ISIS) and Jemaah Islamiya (JI), capitalize on the ubiquity of information to spread extremist ideologies to indoctrinate users, so as to rally more people to join their cause (self- indoctrination, enticing hatred among social groups)

g) Economic loss

- Non-productive activities like advertising undermines local firms
- Negative consumer feedback tarnishes the reputation of companies, thus lowering credibility and trustworthiness

h) Compulsive addiction

- One of the impacts of addiction is the ‘fear of missing out’, in which individuals are compulsively addicted to the need to stay up-to-date on what their friends and other people are posting, sharing and discussing online
- Users suffer from withdrawal effects if they do not check their social media accounts

i) Undermines mental well-being of users

- Promotes individualistic behavior as users are encouraged to share and publish personal content with friends or even the public
- Social media sites like Facebook and Instagram create distorted views towards personal identities that may lead to greater unhappiness
 - o According to research studies, those who spent more time surfing Facebook instead of generating new content are unhappier
 - o Facebook posts are edited to illustrate the best parts of their lives, while omitting out the unpleasant personal experiences
 - Examples – We tend to feel envy while browsing through photo albums of friends at their travel destinations

- Social media sites cause us to crave for social recognition in trivial ways, such as accumulating Facebook likes, while we strive to match up to the more popular friends online
 - When we fall short of achieving this aim, it creates a misconstrued perception that we are ostracized or shunned and lack the necessary skills to interact in real life

6. Sample Questions

- With the rise of new media, censorship is required more than ever. Do you agree?
- "The usage of blogs and microblogs is utterly natural" What is your view?
- Account for the increasing fascination with celebrities on social media? Do you think this is a cause for concern?

7. Questions to Ponder/Wider Implications

- Is this clear and direct evidence of social media's ability to influence others into violence?
- How can educational systems and by that extent, governments help to curb this scourge of social media?
- Is it necessary to censor social media? Is this just an isolated incident by itself?

8. Glossary

Social Media related terms	General definition and explanation
5 th Estate	Refers to a socio-cultural group of media personnel (bloggers and non-mainstream media outlets) which are able to influence both people and events.
Censorship	The suppression of speech, public communication or other information which may be considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive, politically incorrect or inconvenient as determined by governments, media outlets, authorities or other groups or institutions.
Freedom of Speech	The right to speak without censorship or restraint by the government
Microblogging	The activity or practice of making short, frequent posts to a microblog.
Sedition Act (Singapore)	The Sedition Act is a Singapore statute which prohibits seditious acts and speech; and the printing, publication, sale, distribution, reproduction and importation of seditious publications. Often

	used to curb any speeches/acts that might disrupt the harmonious nature of Singapore's society.
Blogosphere	<p>The blogosphere is an imaginary atmosphere in which all the nattering bloggers chatter floats around.</p> <p>People say things like, "the blogosphere was abuzz with talk of the Elliot Spitzer scandal."</p>
Hashtag	<p>Is a single word or phrase preceded by the # symbol to define messages relating to a particular topic? Hashtags are most commonly used on Twitter.</p> <p>On Twitter the # symbol is used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet.</p>
Newsfeed	<p>A news feed is a list of news posted on a particular platform. Newsfeeds exist on your Facebook profile page, on blogs and on Twitter.</p>

Model essay

Theodore Roosevelt once commented on the mass media and journalism specifically – “The power of the journalist is great, but he is neither respected nor admired for it, unless it is used right.” The former president of the United States aptly summed up what the mass media should aim to do: to tell the truth and not abuse their power of massive influence. However, the recent spate of terrorist events tailored for the media seems to propose that the media should not always tell the truth, and that there are circumstances that do not require the whole and absolute truth. That, however, does not imply lying, but instead the telling of a partial truth.

The mass media represents the specific body of the media envisioned for a large scale dissemination of information. Therefore, it is understandable that the mass media wields immense powers of influence over society. As it is, we depend on the media for coverage on the events taking place around us and for information on important global events. As Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore once commented, the mass media has a “moral and social responsibility”, and possesses powers of influence “greater than executives and corporate leaders”. Therefore, the mass media has to wield its responsibility and use its position of mass influence wisely – and this suggests a constant, steady, unwavering adherence to the truth. The extent of the mass media’s influence means that its every coverage of events would be eagerly lapped up and absorbed by members of the public, and the media has a social responsibility to cover and report events in a truthful, forthcoming light. Society depends on the mass media or factual reporting and unbiased recounts, and the mass media should live up to this dependence and expectation, and be held accountable.

Moreover, it is important for the media to tell the truth, especially when it pertains to a nation’s welfare, or is in relation to important political affairs that concern a country’s well-being. This function of the media in which it exposes misdeeds and misdemeanour is one that clearly entails a telling of the truth. The media’s whistle-blowing and expose on the Watergate scandal for example, shows the need for telling of the truth and journalistic integrity despite possible opposition and backlash. The media is commonly regarded as the fourth estate to judge a government’s efficiency, and there is therefore a significant reliance of a nation on the media to check and report factually, the truth on affairs big and small. Therefore, the media’s actions should always be guided by the truth as they have to live up to a societal need for the truth, and non-slanted, unbiased and factual reporting.

Besides its ability to disseminate information on a large scale, the mass media also has the power to shape mindsets, create opinions and mould thought processes. For example, media coverage on the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky extramarital affair created widespread disapproval of the former American president with females worldwide frowning on the adultery of Clinton. The media therefore shaped an opinion on a global scale. Thus, the media should adhere to the truth, as opinions

and mindsets are governed and influenced by the media's coverage on events; dishonest or slanted and untruthful reporting would lead to opinions and reactions based on lies. Not only is this socially harmful, it is also unfair to the parties these lies are built upon.

However, there are instances in which the truth will not set one free, and there is a gap between what society needs and what society should get. Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong commented at Today newspaper's anniversary celebration that a media's interest should converge with a nation's goals of order and stability. Therefore, there are several circumstances in which the media, in order to move in tandem with a nation's goals, has to avoid revealing the truth.

An obvious instance is when the phenomenon of terrorism is tailored for the media. Instead of simply bombing an obscure enemy village without injecting widespread fear, terrorists nowadays are known to specially tailor their terrorist actions for media coverage, so as to fulfil the more insidious objective of sparking off panic, pandemonium and distress on a large scale. This can be seen way back during the 1972 Munich Olympics in which Palestinian terrorists massacred Israeli athletes. The Olympic event was specially selected by the terrorists as there would be global coverage, and their acts of brutality and slaughter would be broadcast on an international scale, injecting distress across not only one country – but globally. Other instances include the execution of American Nick Berg and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombings. Terrorists who captured Nick Berg purposefully filmed the gory and grotesque execution process and circulated it on the Internet to spark off distress to all who chanced upon the film, using the large scale influential power of the Internet to publicise their terrorist activities. In the Oklahoma City bombings, the bomber Timothy McVeigh picked his bombing destinations as he knew it would be a good spot for maximum coverage. During such deliberate, depraved acts of using the media, and exploiting its influence, the media should not succumb or fall prey to such schemes, and should hide some of the truth of the matter, in order to oppose this manipulation of the media.

Moreover, such terrorist acts purposefully attempt to spark off pandemonium using the mass media, and by reporting the full unadulterated and undiluted truth, the media would be a complicit in these acts of trying to destabilize and threaten the public. Therefore, this is a significant instance in which the complete truth is not expected of the media. In the aforementioned Nick Berg execution, media moguls CNBC, CNN and ABC refused to air the execution videos to avoid causing distress to the public. By not fulfilling the supposed talk of reporting the absolute truth, these media stations saved America from further panic and pandemonium, allowing a quicker recovery from the attacks, and helping to salvage the remnants of American national security. Another good example of how the media should be allowed to not reveal the whole truth, is the recent London Tube bombings. Instead of airing unedited and therefore completely truthful footage of the bomb-scene, the news

stations decided to air edited still footage, to not further upset the already distressed nation. Therefore, it is pivotal to acknowledge that in such instances, the media should cover up the truth, in a bid to maintain stability and for the welfare of society, and to also prevent itself from getting exploited due to the influence it holds.

At times, to not report the full truth in the interest of national stability is what the media has to do. When Jemaah Islamiyah terrorists were arrested in Singapore, the media had to have the discernment and perspicacity to dilute certain information so as not to ignite racial tensions in Singapore's unique multi-racial social fabric. Therefore, this is another instance in which the absolute truth would not be the necessary truth, in order to protect and maintain a country's welfare.

Therefore, the media should always tell the truth, but at times, it is required of the media to tell half-truths in order to converge with the primary concerns of a country's security and stability. Although backers of complete press freedom and seekers of pure, unadulterated truth like non-governmental organization "Reporters Without Borders" might say that half-truths are equivalent to partial lies, I believe that "partial lies" are at times what is truly required instead. It is far too absolute to say that the mass media should "always" tell the truth, as there are precarious situations in our world that make truth-telling an amorphous affair. Roosevelt's quote on the power of the journalist and it being used right should probably apply to telling "partial lies" for the greater good as well.

Newspaper Article #1: *Concerns Over Social Media Link to Virginia Girl's Killing.* 1 February 2016

By HAWES SPENCER, SHERYL GAY STOLBERG and RICHARD PÉREZ-PEÑA

BLACKSBURG, Va. — The arrest of two Virginia Tech students in the abduction and murder of a 13-year-old girl who posted on a Facebook group called Teen Dating and Flirting — and showed a neighbor girl texts she said she had exchanged with an 18-year-old man — has set off new concerns about the dangers to young people who seek liaisons on social media.

The two students — David Eisenhauer, 18, of Columbia, Md., and Natalie M. Keepers, 19, of Laurel, Md., both aspiring engineers — are being held without bond; they made brief court appearances Monday but did not enter pleas. They are charged in the death of Nicole Madison Lovell, 13, a liver transplant recipient who disappeared from her home here last week.

The murder has stunned this college community, though Virginia Tech, the site of a 2007 massacre that remains the deadliest shooting by a single gunman in the nation's history, is no stranger to sorrow and tragedy. And while the authorities have not said what, if any, role social media may have played in the killing, the girl's electronic communications, and suggestions that she was bullied, have stirred deep concern here.

Stacey Snider, a neighbor of Nicole and mother of 8-year-old twins, said one of her daughters had given law enforcement authorities information that may have played a role in the arrests. The girls were playing in the snow with Nicole hours before her disappearance when, they said, she showed one of them texts she had exchanged through Kik, a mobile instant messaging app, with an 18-year-old that included plans for an evening meeting.

"She said that he was 18, but I didn't think it was real," one of the twins, Jaydon Snider, who said she had seen the text, said in an interview Monday, in a cul-de-sac near where Nicole lived. "I was like, 'You shouldn't do that.'"

Law enforcement officials have raised concerns about the Kik app as a potential vehicle for sexual predators; a teacher at the Bronx High School of Science, whom the police said had used a messaging app, was arrested last year on charges of child pornography.

It was not clear whether the 18-year-old was Mr. Eisenhauer. But in Maryland, the arrests of two seemingly promising students have shocked their communities.

Mr. Eisenhower, a 2015 graduate of Wilde Lake High School in Columbia, was a high school track star who was once featured on a Baltimore television station for his track achievements. “I just have this internal thing saying I want to be the best,” he said then. The school’s principal, James LeMon, called Mr. Eisenhower, who had moved to Maryland from Washington State, an “excellent student athlete.”

Mr. Eisenhower faces a charge of first-degree murder. A statement from the Blacksburg police said he and Nicole were “acquainted prior to her disappearance” but did not say how. It said that Mr. Eisenhower, who was arrested on Saturday hours after Nicole’s remains were found in North Carolina, “used this relationship to abduct the 13-year-old and kill her,” and that Ms. Keepers had helped him dispose of the body.

Ms. Keepers, a 2015 graduate of Hammond High School in Columbia, worked on that school’s literary magazine and was assistant director of its theater department. She was arrested Sunday.

Friends and neighbors described Nicole as a sweet girl; her two Facebook pages are filled with the usual stuff of a 13-year-old’s life — posts about pandas, boyfriends and music. But they also say she seemed to be connecting with older boys through social media in a way they found troubling. One neighbor, Sara Demiri, 15, also said older boys on the bus had sometimes bullied Nicole.

Nicole’s brief comments in the Facebook group Teen Dating and Flirting, a site replete with sexually charged messages — including some that appear to be from adults looking to prey on young people — have also created unease.

“My first thought is that this kid was really too young to have been using Facebook,” said Jenn Burleson Mackay, an associate professor at Virginia Tech who teaches social media use in the Department of Communication. “To be looking for boyfriends and dating advice on Facebook at age 13 just seems inappropriate.”

Facebook declined to comment, except to say it was looking at the group page. The company prohibits users under age 13, and publishes a set of community for use of the site that ban, among other things, nude images, threats, bullying, harassment and anything that promotes sexual exploitation.

Nicole’s mother, Tammy Weeks, declined to be interviewed on Monday; a police officer stood by the eight-unit, two-story apartment block where she lives here, and shooed a reporter away. But The Washington Post, in an article published in Monday’s newspaper, quoted Ms. Weeks as saying her daughter, a seventh grader at Blacksburg Middle School, was bullied on social media and at school, particularly about her appearance.

Content for Review

1. Should social media be feared?
2. Social media is too powerful to be regulated/
3. The advent of AI to accelerate the improvement in social media will undermine the youths in the future. Do you agree?
- 4.

“She didn’t like going to school, because she was bullied,” the newspaper quoted Ms. Weeks as saying. She added that her daughter had told her that “girls were saying she was fat and talking about her scars from her transplant,” which included a tracheotomy scar.

At Blacksburg Middle School on Monday, school officials called in counselors for the students, and asked reporters to keep their distance while their community grieved.

Nicole’s disappearance, sometime between midnight and 7 a.m. Wednesday, prompted an intense search and led her father, David Lovell, to issue an anguished plea on television for her to come home. In an interview with WDBJ, a station in Roanoke, Mr. Lovell said he was worried about his daughter’s health; she needed daily medications.

“At this point, I know that she’s sick, she’s hurting, she’s probably already into convulsions, her liver is shutting down as we speak,” Mr. Lovell told the station. “Right now, I’m scared to death.”

On Monday, for the second day in a row, Virginia State Police divers searched a pond on the Virginia Tech campus. The State Police confirmed that the divers were searching for evidence in the death of Nicole, at the request of the Blacksburg police, but declined to be more specific or say what was found.

Friends of Mr. Eisenhower’s said on Monday that his social life, at least in high school, centered on seven or eight long-distance runners who hung out together. He took Advanced Placement classes and was not a partner, said Paul Lyon, a high school classmate and fellow runner. “We’d go to someone’s house and get out the Xbox and play Halo or something.”

He was also on the track and field team at Virginia Tech, though the school’s sports department has taken down its page about him.

On the Virginia Tech campus, where memories of the 2007 shooting by a student that left 32 people dead remain strong, there was deep dismay yet again.

“We’ve obviously had a lot of tragedy here before,” said Devynn Breen, a junior from northern Maryland who majors in animal and poultry science. “But it’s just hard to think that one of your fellow Hokies is capable of this.”

Source:

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/02/us/concerns-over-social-media-link-to-virginia-girls-killing.html?_r=0