Mind *games*

Social media is destructive. Here's why you should care

As human beings, we are social creatures who crave connection. As a result, some of us spend a lifetime looking for that special someone who knows us better than we know ourselves. Well, the average internet user spends roughly two hours every day on a platform that seems to do just that, and does not require the effort of making a candle-lit dinner. It is time to unravel the best-kept secrets of social media platforms.

Lisa Passov

Lisa Passov is a second-year information systems engineering student at the Technion institute of technology and a maths tutor. She is passionate about using her skills and knowledge in technology, humane interaction, and education to improve the world around her.

On May 19th, 2022, my uncle Gennady died. He was 79 years old, and it happened in one second while he was getting ready to pick up his granddaughter from kindergarten. Then, a few minutes before he was supposed to leave, he just collapsed.

After his funeral, I took some time to ponder the things that mattered to me, like spending quality time with loved ones and actively supporting meaningful causes. There are, however, things, I realized, of lesser importance that became daily habits that many of us mindlessly engage in. Time wasters like binge-watching that TV series for the 5th time or playing Candy Crush (do people still do that?)

Well, in this article, I would like to talk about one of the undoubtedly biggest time wasters of all – social media platforms, on which the average person spends roughly [two hours every day](). We will explore some of the aspects that make up modern social technology – the technology that shapes how we live, interact and view the world around us, And maybe, just maybe, I will be able to convince you that you should care about the impact of those platforms and perhaps even click "Delete Account".

Throughout this piece, I will be showcasing quotes from young adults who participated in Jubilee's ["Middle Ground" project]() on YouTube regarding the effects of social media platforms on teens.

Emma: "…(TikTok) is manipulating their users and taking so much information from them, and they're showing that through the "For you" page, and people don't care."

Facebook's creation and official worldwide launch in 2006 brought about a new era, after which our interaction with technology, surroundings, and ourselves gradually changed.

Facebook, and the social media platforms that followed its launch, were designed to [be addictive](), featuring principles borrowed from slot machines in casinos. These principles include using bright, bold colors and the refresh-pulldown action compared to the slot machine lever. However, it's essential to emphasize that these platforms are merely a source of entertainment. As technologist Jaron Lanier puts it, they were built to offer you shiny treats in exchange for minutes of your attention and bites of your personal data that can then be sold. Even though the awareness of a platform's potential ethical impacts is crucial for keeping our digital world safe and secure, it seems as though companies have turned a blind eye, favoring higher profits. [ii]

At this point, you might wonder, however, how social media platforms make a profit even though these platforms are free of charge. Well, in 1973, world-famous American sculptor and video artist Richard Serra said:"[if something is free, you're the product](#)."

And indeed, as mentioned previously, social media platforms are turning their addicted users into profit-making machines without them even realizing that. For example, let's look at the Cambridge Analytica scandal that blew up in 2018.

Cambridge Analytica took targeting audience for political purposes to the next level By targeting US citizens not only as voters but as [personalities](#). The company used Facebook apps that had special access to information not only about the user but also about his entire friend network – an unbelievable amount of data that the company harvested without the user's friends' knowledge or consent. About 50-60 million profiles were pulled in 2-3 months and were used to target US citizens to influence the result of the 2016 US election.

Therefore the first reason I would like to propose as to why you should care about the impacts of social media on our society is that social media is no longer just a place to connect with your loved ones. It's an addictive platform that will use your and your entire social network's private data in any way it wants, most of the time without your awareness of the massive scale on which it's doing so. These platforms are pretty much performing unethical social experiments on the masses.

Ella: "I find it very toxic because everything is based off of numbers."

You're hooked. Now social media platforms want you to keep posting. More posts = more data that can then be sold. So it's time to dive deeper into the psychological aspects of this unbelievable technology.

I vividly remember waking up as a 16-year-old to the anxiety of checking my phone. I felt like the number of messages or likes I received equaled my worth. I remember doing my very best to showcase this meticulously curated, perfect persona that would fit the norm at my dance studio, even though I felt like I was a completely different person in the real world.

Many of today's social media companies hire so-called "attention engineers" to try and make these platforms as addictive as possible, causing numerous well-documented problems.

Suppose you happen to think that social media companies have no idea just how addictive and harmful their products really are. In that case, you'd be amazed to hear that it couldn't be further from the truth.

In 2021, internal research documents from Facebook were leaked, exposing that staff at the company have been studying the impact of their product on young users for at least two years prior but kept the findings secret. Their research repeatedly found that using Instagram (purchased by Facebook in 2012) worsened body image issues for teen girls and was detrimental to how young users feel about themselves and others.

In addition, a growing amount of research suggests that spending significant portions of your day in a state of fragmented attention, i.e., constantly breaking up your attention from the task at hand to check your phone, can permanently reduce your capacity for concentration. The more you'll be unable to focus, the harder it will be to produce meaningful work.

At this point, it might be pretty clear that it's time to start caring about the impact of social media on our lives. However, there are some positive aspects that are worth mentioning. For many of us, having an online presence had a role in helping us land our dream job or find love, as well as interact with loved ones. Social media is also vital in business promotion and customer service. Furthermore, some of us use the online world as our creative outlet and use these platforms to interact with like-minded people.

Are the positives of social media platforms outweighing the negatives? Well, I'll leave that up to you to decide. Suppose I've managed, however, to convince you that you should, in fact, care about the effect of social media on our society. In that case, you might wonder at this point what can be done. Talking from personal experience, I would suggest completely deleting your social media accounts. But since I'm aware it's not always possible for multiple reasons, other things can be done. You might want to familiarize yourself with some of them:

➢ Taking part in a social media detox: there are countless videos and articles featuring people who decided to step away from their phones and delete social media for a set amount of time. If closing your social media accounts seems like something you are not quite ready for yet, try to merely delete the apps from your phone for a while and see how you feel.

➢ California age-appropriate design code bill: with this bill, California State Assembly hopes to make the digital world safe for American children since, at this point, the entire digital world is designed by and for adults. You can sign their petition and take part in promoting a safer online experience for everyone.

➢ The LOGOFF movement: this unique movement made by teens for teens is dedicated to rethinking social media. They've created a podcast, a school curriculum, a blog, and a thriving online community revolving around discussing social media platforms and promoting healthy digital usage.

➢ The GoodforMEdia movement: a peer mentoring campaign for older teens and young adults to share their personal stories, insights, and strategies with younger teens and tweens to support their healthy engagement with technology and social media.

The most important takeaway I believe should be made is that you should, in fact, care. Your mental and psychological health, social and interpersonal skills, and value in the workplace and the academy are all on the line. An influential political thinker, Hannah Arendt, saw emerging technologies in quite a pessimistic light.[i] However, having a gloomy outlook on modern social technology isn't the way to go probably, so we, therefore, should make informed decisions regarding our use of social media platforms and advocate for transparency and a healthier relationship with them, keeping in mind that technology can be used for good or ill but is never simply neutral.[iii]

Additional references

[i] Lozanoska, Jana. (2020). "Temporality, Technology, and Justice in Hannah Arendt: A Critical Approach." *Ethics and Politics of Space for the Anthropocene*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

[ii] Reijers, W. (2022) course handout number 1

[iii] Reijers, W. (2022) course handout number 2