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AICE Global Perspectives and Research A Level

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Does the Harm done to Society by the Use of Social Media Outweigh the Benefits it brings?

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Does the Harm Done to Society by the Use of Social Media Outweigh the Benefits It Brings?

In the world, 2.34 billion people use social networking sites, and in the United States, eighty percent of the population has a social media account. The term “social media” is often used as a singular generic term for multiple sites and includes various applications that allow users to create and share content or take part in social networking. Social media can help individuals stay connected and gain a voice in the world because of its ability to link people. However, social media can lead to restlessness, depression, and unhappiness because of the attention required and the user’s vulnerability to ridicule. Although, some believe social media is harmful to society because it can hurt others, ruin reputations, and have adverse consequences on culture, many believe, social media is extremely beneficial to society because of its ability to promote change and progress society as a whole.

Numerous people hold it true that social media is entirely damaging to society, for example, Stephen Currie, a published author and an editor of children's books and young adult books. Currie believes social media is harmful due to its negative effects on the minds of its younger users, and this is evident in his book, *Cyber bullying*. Currie uses cyber bullying, where users belittle and vilify others through the internet, to explain the effects social media can have on children, and Currie accomplishes this with various examples of children traumatized by the bullying. Megan Meier, an American teenager from Dardenne Prairie, Missouri, who died of suicide by hanging three weeks before her 14th birthday due, was cyber bullied by a fake

account who told her that the “world would be a better place without her.” (Currie 11). The torment drove Meier to consider and perform an act of suicide at the young age of 13. Currie also alludes to a story of young girl named Rebecca Sedwick, an average twelve-year-old middle school student, who decided to make a social media account, just like any other twelve-year-old. One day, as Rebecca was on her account, two girls her age sent a barrage of messages to Rebecca, saying, “You should drink bleach and die,” and “You should go kill yourself.” Sedwick became so dejected that she was able to jump off an abandoned factory, ending her life. Nearly 43% of children have experienced cyber bullying and 1 in 4 have been cyber bullied more than once and in the past five years the incidence of cyber bullying has from 2,200 deaths to 4,400 deaths caused by cyber bullying. As shown previously, cyber bullying can lead to extreme depression and sadness and in some cases even lead to thoughts and acts of suicide. Cyber bullying is not only prevalent in the United States of America, but also around the world with the 2.34 billion people that use it. Furthermore, when other countries understand the negative effects, such as cyber bullying on children, they will opt regulate and control the use of it. In addition, when other countries view the examples of cyber bullying on children they will monitor its use more closely. On the whole, social media should be monitored and regulated because of the detrimental effects that has, such as cyber bullying.

Beyond negatively affecting the well-being of children, social media has the effect of hurting the public as a whole. Carly Nyst, head of international advocacy for Privacy International, argues that social media can be used to invade in to the user’s life, and that this action by governments is unfair to the public. Research shows governments, like the United States, are able to use social media to spy on the users, for example, “there has been reports of the US Department of Justice spying on journalists, the French and Spanish governments trying

to legalize Trojan software for the use of law enforcement, and British legislation that would essentially replicate and enhance the tactics being used by the NSA” (“Big Brother surveillance is our reality”). Nyst believes this trend is becoming more common among governments and societies, and to their citizens, the action is perceived as unwarranted and unjust. Governments that use social media as a means of spying on their society are creating a hostile and dishonest environment. Encouraging other countries to use social media as a way to invade the user’s privacy, Governments that use social media in such a way now are providing a model for others to start the process as well. Nyst presents how just a few years ago, Australia saw the U.S.’s method and emulated it with the Attorney-General's Department submitting proposals to Parliament that could greatly increase the scope of surveillance on Australians, including a scheme that could make the collection and retention of data about individuals' web activities mandatory (“Big Brother surveillance is our reality”). Not only with governments, but also individuals are able to use social media to hack into accounts and find out various pieces of information. According to New York Daily News, Facebook said that it records more than 1 billion log-ons each day, and that accounts are hacked 600,000 times daily during users’ log-in. Hackers are a very real and prominent issue. Every time you log into your account you are subject to being hacked. As a whole, the potential of hacking ties the idea of the adverse effects social media can have on the users and their lives as a whole.

Social media does not potentially only have negative effects ethically, but culturally as well. Frank Furedi, a former Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent in Canterbury, writes in Aspen Institute Prague, how he believes that social media has extensive effects on society. Furedi begins by mentioning Dr. Maryanne Wolf, the Director of the Center for Reading and Language Research at Tufts University, who explains how she perceives the online world to

be impacting culture and in a negative light. Wolf believes the online world skews children's minds to perceiving that the experiences in the online world are the same as experiences in the real world (Furedi). In this sense, children begin to act out what they see and believe that this sort of replication and action is okay. Furedi also believes that social media can lead to and fuel unnecessary debates, protests, and movements. Movements such as "the mushrooming of Occupy protests, the Arab Spring, the mobilization of resistance against the Government of the Ukraine or in Hong Kong," were heavily dependent on the resources provided by social media (Furedi). The occupy protest, which was the debate of how the one percent of America is appreciated and taken into account more than the ninety-nine percent, used social media as a basis to progress and prolong the protest. All these protests were a tremendous use of time and resources. Moreover, because social media allows protests and propaganda to stay relevant on a strong podium, other countries will monitor and regulate the use of social media. Overall, this evidence depicts how the use of social media can negatively affect the culture of various countries.

Another view of how social media is detrimental to culture comes from Clinton Alexander, a reporter for the New American. Alexander believes that the real world culture is being negatively altered by the online world because of how social media promotes feelings of anger, animosity, and sadness in those that used it. Alexander uses polls and studies to outline the consequences and response of social media on culture, such as how respondents to the University of Birmingham poll describe how social media was causing them to experience feelings such as anger and sadness more often than normal (Alexander). In addition to the negative emotional and evolving aspects of social media, there is also a prevalent occurrence of addiction and feelings of depression. 48% of 18-34 year olds check Facebook when they wake

up and are faced with posts of seemingly amazing lives. The addictive qualities of social media draw people to log in, even though they are usually faced with posts that make them feel miserable. Photos of happy families and impressive accomplishments flood their streams, making viewers feel unaccomplished and depressed. And this is only to start their day, imagine the effects of checking your account throughout a day. As other countries see how social media negatively affects them, they will decide to end or lessen the use of social media. Overall, social media use is harmful to society because of the detrimental effects it has on culture.

Social media not only affects the cultures of society, but also can also negatively affect the medical field. Grobler C, a chiropractic healthcare organization, and Ames Dhai, the director of the Steve Biko Centre for Bioethics at the Faculty of Health Sciences, wrote an academic journal claiming that social media places scientists and their reputation at risk because of how social media can cause a medical professional to lose their professionalism, credibility, and boundaries. When medical professionals are on these websites they often forget that they are trained doctors and do hold a higher paradigm in the eye of the average day person, and they act as though they have no standard to uphold. The article explains how “numerous online breaches were found of patient confidentiality on social networking sites by medical students, including identifiable information about patients being discussed on Facebook,” which is unprofessionalism by the doctor and leads to the tarnish of their reputation (Grobler, C., and A. Dhai). The authors also explain how “online behavior of an individual may also harm employability and recruitment and limit professional development and advancement,” which again can harm a medical professionals reputation and status (Grobler, C., and A. Dhai). The claim that social media is harmful to medical professionalists is strengthened through the various laws and organizations used to back the argument, for instance the group Medical Defence

Union who watch over other doctors on social media accounts to fight against the breaking of patient confidentiality. Medical professionals can become too relaxed with social media because of how detached it is and reveal too much information about a patient or an incident they have. Beyond this, if other countries view the problem with social media experienced by medical professionals, then they might choose to make it harder to access and use social media accounts. Overall, social media has the ability to hurt and ruin medical professional's reputation.

Not only hurting the medical professionals, but scientists as well, social media is again believed to be harmful. Kimberley Collins and Jenny Rock, who works for the Centre for Science Communication at the University of Otago, and David Shiffman, who works for Leonard and Jayne Abess Center for Ecosystem Science and Policy at the University of Miami, believe social media can be detrimental to scientists because of the boundaries it blurs and crosses. In their argument, the authors use a study from the University of Otago, New Zealand's oldest university, to describe how scientists are using social media more to express their scientific research. In sharing their scientific research, scientists can be subject to false information as the data they receive may not be accurate (Collins, Shiffman, and Rock). On these social media websites, a scientist struggling to advance his research could be taking the information from others that might not be trustworthy to use in progressing their studies. Then a survey by Survey Monkey, the world's leading provider of web-based survey solutions, trusted by millions of companies, organizations, and individuals alike to gather the insights they need to make more informed decisions, is used to strengthen how social media can allow scientists to share classified information or even information that is not backed or corroborated. If other countries see how the scientists in their society negatively view social media, then they will

decide to end or lessen the use of social media. As a whole, the authors claim shows that social media can have a negative effect on scientists in the world.

While some believe social media is immensely detrimental, there are those who believe that social media can benefit society. In an article titled "Social Media," published by Global Issues In Context, an organization that spans continents and cultures to bring essential, balanced information to researchers across many academic disciplines, the claim is made that social media is beneficial to society due to its ability to bring awareness to disasters. The article mentions how "within 72 hours of the Paris attacks, the hash tag "PrayforParis" was accessed over 5.7 million times on Twitter and 4.8 million times on Instagram to share messages of support for the French people," and how this example depicts social media in a light which illuminates the helpfulness it brings ("Social Media"). The article also expresses that social media does not only alert the public of what is happening or has happened, but it can also prevent disasters. Currently "law enforcement and activist hackers use social media to monitor and respond to international extremists," like how the United States government screens social media accounts for dangerous keywords and phrases, and this action shows that social media is able to help in tremendous ways ("Social Media"). The article addresses different countries, such as France and the United Kingdom, that have used social media to relay information. Through the many examples of social media providing alert and awareness to global issues that are occurring, countries will want to use and communicate more through it. Social media has the possibility to effect society in a positive way.

Social media is not only beneficial for its ability to relay information, but also to rid barriers in social standings. Johanna Blakely, who has worked across a huge variety of media platforms -- producing for the web on a large scale, conducting gaming research, coordinating

events for film festivals and executing consumer research on entertainment and politics, believes that social media is beneficial because it is allowing social changes in society and relays this through a TED Talk, which is a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful speeches. Johanna begins by explaining how “Social media can dismantle the gender stereotypes in the world” by allowing both men and women to have a say in what happens (TEDTalks). There are many different people on social media sites and they each have the ability to share their thoughts and ideas with other users without discrimination. Social media is allowing demographics to change, as advertisers are using social media to gain an understanding of society’s wants and needs. Blakely claims that it is much easier to lose the rigid demographic boxes the world is in now (TEDTalks). The argument is strengthened through the different examples of advertisers and methods that show stereotyping, such as The Norman Lear Center, a nonpartisan research and public policy center that studies the social, political, economic and cultural impact of entertainment on the world, who provided a study for her argument. Blakely also uses visuals and thorough explanations to drive her point to her audience. Furthermore, through the many examples of social media providing a way for different races and genders to break free and create their own class, countries will want to implement the use of more social media. Social media is beneficial because it is allowing social changes in society through its ability of connecting people with various backgrounds and differences.

Social media is not only a tool for finding other people, but also a tool to spread revolutionary political movements. Social media can spark revolutions. Social media allows individuals to post whatever they want; this includes posts concerning a country’s government. Users can use their accounts to further their cause of removing a tyrannical government and round up support from other people and nations around the world. S. Craig Watkins, an associate

professor at the University of Texas at Austin who studies and writes about young people's social and digital media behaviors, believes social media can affect politics in a positive way by allowing for revolutions in different regions. Watkins claims social media can bring awareness to different political problems around the globe and round up support for a protest or revolution occurring in a region. In relation to a Egyptian revolution, Watkins explains how “Egyptian protestors were not only consuming images of their efforts, they were also producing and sharing those images with the world and giving new meaning to the notion of participatory politics” (Watkins). In this case, social media provided a platform for the change and removal of the past damaging government to the current one in place. Protestors were using Facebook to organize, set dates, and share mobile pictures and video with peers, and Twitter became the social media backbone of the movement's day-to-day machinations (Watkins). Social media was able act as a platform for those oppressed to find and gain freedom. Watkins reinforces his claim by using historical references to describe how having social media in the past could have helped to further that cause and taken less time to achieve. In his argument, Watkins uses anonymous first-hand accounts from Egyptians involved in the movement to strengthen his claim. Viewing his claim, countries could see that when going about a revolution or a protest, social media can be another outlet to promote or gain support for the movement. In this issue, the author provides a key example of how social media benefited society through a political matter.

As well as promoting a revolution, social media can accomplish a goal such as encouraging a presidential candidate. Marcia Clemmitt, a veteran social-policy reporter holding a bachelor's degree in arts and sciences from St. John's College and a master's degree in English from Georgetown University, claims that social media is another crucial and necessary platform for a citizen to understand political ideals and politicians themselves. Clemmitt believes, through

social media, politicians are able to promote their ideas in another format; citizens are able gain extensive knowledge on what is going on in the government, and campaigning can become easier and more economically feasible. An example of this is of Ted Cruz's campaign in 2012, which used social media to cheaply and vastly back his candidacy for Texas governor (Clemmitt). Clemmitt also provides an example of social media providing immense support of voters to a candidate, through the campaign of Barack Obama who used the blog Reddit to gain ten thousand followers (Clemmitt). The blog allowed Obama to talk with over 246 million people and get his ideas and political views out to the public. Alejandra Guzman, a strategic thinker with 10 years of international experience across functions from start-ups to large organizations in the US, Europe, and South America, believes that in the near future, we can expect more and more leaders to embrace this type of transparent governance, as it becomes easier for them to interact with their constituents (Guzman). Receiving facts from Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world, Clemmitt integrates various facts from this source to strengthen her claim. Providing a clear and thorough explanation for why social media can be beneficial and detrimental to society, Clemmitt has reinforced her claim. Through thorough explanations, countries begin to understand social media's positive effects on politics and advancing politicians goals they will want incorporate more use of it. Overall, social media can be very effective in providing political advantages to society. Democracy is being reformed by social media sites.

Social media has the ability to benefit society on an economic standpoint. Ugochi Onwuanibe a writer for Market Mogul, an Editorial free from bias meaning who has featured in the Forbes and Huffington Post, believes that social media allows businesses to promote and

present their brand in a relatable view. Providing a means for businesses to operate on, social media allows businesses to advertise what they are and what they sell. Onwuanibe strengthens this reasoning by stating how a specific site like Facebook supports businesses by enabling them to promote their activities, and matching them with the customers who are most likely to be interested in consuming their products and services. On Facebook, one is able to like a business's account and then join a group underneath that account that has users that share the same interest in that business. This group of consumers can also provide commentary and their own opinion on the products the business produces. Social media sites have the ability to advance a businesses' venture because of its ability to reach a wide variety of consumers. Using graphics that depict the rise in businesses' production, Onwuanibe has reinforced his belief and reasoning for why social media has a positive effect on the economy. Overall, the article as a whole depicts to other countries that after understanding the benefits of social media, economically, on society, they will want to use social media as a platform to drive their economy. As a whole, social media can advance businesses, which shows that social media can benefit society.

Social media has various advantages to society, and having the effect to benefit the economy is another one of these advantages. Tim Mullaney, an economics correspondent based in New York who explores how new technology changes the economy, believes social media is affecting businesses in a positive and advantageous way, because social media allows companies to interact with their consumers and provides a platform for businesses to advertise themselves and their product. A recent study of Australian businesses found 70 percent offer social media channels for customer service (Hessinger). Mullaney's claim is found on USA Today, an internationally distributed American daily middle-market newspaper. Using various executives

to support his claim, Mullaney alludes to Barton George, director of the Dell computer division that sells to Internet-based companies, who used social media sites to incorporate his consumer's requests into the new software designs (Mullaney). With social media, businesses are able to accurately please and involve consumers in the product making process. On twitter, businesses are able to create polls for consumers to vote on, so if a product was being considered, then companies are able to submit a poll and instantly get results on what the consumer wants. The consumer and the company both win through this social media exchange. Not only does it provide a place for businesses to interact, but social media provides a platform for companies to advertise themselves and their product. SuperValu, a collection of supermarket chains ranging from Shaw's in Boston to Albertsons in California, used social media to build a network to connect 11,000 executives and store managers (Mullaney). This connection among businesses allowed each company to tell of how they were reaching their customers and what methods worked for them. Promoting companies and increasing their sales, is another way social media is positively affecting the economy. Throughout his article, Mullaney uses examples of social media benefiting different types of companies through their first-hand experiences with it to strengthen and backs his claim. Mullaney also reinforces his claim by including the response of executives on how social media has positively affected businesses. When viewed as a whole, the article shows the ability for social media to reduce business prices, increase sales, and increase consumer happiness, which will attract other countries to continue and encourage the use of social media. On the whole, social media can provide gains for businesses illustrating that social media can benefit society.

The use of social media should be continued and encouraged because of its many positive effects, yet because of social media's various detrimental effects, the use of social media should

be equipped with safe guards and or be monitored. Being able to power a revolution, stimulate an economy, and bring society together, social media should continue to be used. But, again, because of how it can ruin a person's self-esteem, negatively change culture, and hurt professionals' reputation, social media should be reduced in its use and monitored by governments. Alternative perspectives allowed the researcher to see each theme of the question in a different and revealing light. The different viewpoints brought new ways of understanding and researching the question. At the beginning of the process, social media was perceived as being entirely damaging to society. During the process, different pieces of evidence found and different topics researched, proved social media to have an immense positive impact as well. The research process illuminated ideas not previously known or fully realized. The researcher was able to gain a full perspective on the question and consider the answer to the question in depth. The sources covered the topics presented in the research. The student could have used more numerical and statistical data to corroborate each claim made by the different sources. Differing countries will continue to use social media openly and freely, while other countries decide to have their governments monitor user's accounts. In other countries, social media will be used as a platform to advance society in all aspects.

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