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## Essay

# Emerging Powers of Social Media : a Blessing or a Curse

## Outline

1. Introduction
2. Blessings of Social Media:
  - i) Enhances Communication and Connectivity
    - a) Connects family, friends and professionals worldwide.
    - b) Facilitates real-time connection during emergencies.
    - c) Bridges social, cultural and geographical gaps.
  - ii) Role of Social Media in stabilising Nascent and Unstable

## Democracies

a) Enhances Role of Public in National and International Affairs

- Boycott of Israeli Products in Muslim World.

b) Increases Accountability

- Resign Campaign for Icelandic prime minister

## iii) Amplifies Business and Marketing Opportunities: Benefitting Individual and National Economies

a) Rise of Influences Market and Affiliated Programmes

b) Prime Minister Imran Khan on Social Media to Support Tourism.

## iv) Voice for Social Justice and Awareness Campaigns

a) Raises Awareness for Social Issues

- Black Lives Matter Campaign for Racial Issues

b) Empowers Marginalized Communities

c) Mobilizes Global Support for Causes

and Crowd-funding

### 3. Curses of Social Media

#### i) Social Media as a Tool of Hybrid War

- Cambridge Analytica Scandal

#### ii) Social Media as a Source of Spreading Misinformation and Fake News

- 1) Incites panic and public riots

- Punjab College Rape Case.

- Misinformation about COVID-19 vaccine

#### iii) Increase Health Crisis

- 1) Increases risks of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem.

- Case study of Journal of Adolescent Health

- b) Over-use leads to doom-scrolling and sleep disruption

### 4. Recommendations to Tame Social Media for Betterment

- a) Increase Public Awareness

- b) Platform accountability Make more

- c) Government Responsibility meaningful

### 5. Conclusion

arguments

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A voice, demanding the rescue of a Russian and a Polish mountaineer, raised through twitter. They were misplaced during their expedition of Nanga Parbat, Pakistan - a killer mountain with the height of 8126 feet. Although, Pakistan army could save only one but the demand through social media, shows its growing power. Nowadays, social media has become an important part of our economic, social, and political life. Before going into the discussion of the merits and demerits of social media, it seems necessary to understand the real meanings of social media. Simply defined, it is a term used to describe interaction between groups or individuals in which they produce, share and sometimes, exchange ideas, images etc and many more over the internet in the virtual communities. Social media has played

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a significant role in reducing the barriers of culture, society and geography. It has become a strengthening factor for democracies by increasing accountability and role of public in national and international affairs. It has boosted individual and national economies. On the contrary, social media has led to an increase in public unrest and riots because of the spread of fake news. Social media has caused an increase in the rate of health crisis as well. The dawn of twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented increase in the power of social media. Having both merits and demerits, it calls for taking necessary measures to tame its power for the benefits of human beings mainly.

To begin with, one of the biggest advantage of social media is that it has actually made the world a global village. People connect with

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their (family) families and friends in a blink of eye, despite ~~them~~ being in a different continents ~~altogether~~. It has become easier to communicate during emergency situations. With almost one third of world population using social media on daily basis, as per Statista report 2023, social media has helped people to adapt to each other's culture as well.

In addition to making communication easier, social media has also lent a helping hand to unstable and nascent democracies by establishing itself as an extremely potential tool for accountability and involving people in the ~~(aff)~~ national and international affairs. For instance, a resign campaign was started by the people of Iceland against their prime minister - Sigmundur David - when his name appeared in the notorious Panama leak case. Secondly,

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Social media has made people aware about atrocities of Israeli government in Gaza which forced them to start a boycott movement of Israeli products to show solidarity with the people of Palestine. Gone are the days when diplomats were considered all in all for international relations. Due to growing social media, people of a country are fully involved in the national and international affairs. They do not shy away from showing their opinion about any matter.

Another important prospect of social media lies in the fact that it has helped to boost individual and national economies. Social media has helped small businesses to reach global audience. It has created a new job market. It has also increased the exposure of already well-established businesses by providing cost-effective marketing and brand promotion. As

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Ryan Lily states, "Social media is not just a spoke on the wheel of marketing. It's becoming the way entire cycles are built." It is not wrong to say that social media has revolutionized the marketing field altogether. Social media has played a vital role in booming national economies as well. Imran Khan, former prime minister Pakistan - Used social media as a platform to promote tourism in the country which eventually bore fruit. There was a significant rise in tourism with tourism contributing to about 5.7 percent of GDP as per reports of a leading national newspaper.

- Another promising prospect of social media is that it has given voice to voiceless people. Social media appeared to be a ray of hope for the marginalized communities of the society. It helped people to raise voice against the ethical, social



and sectarian violence. For instance, "Black Lives Matter" was a campaign raised against the atrocities carried on the people on the basis of colour. The need for the campaign was further realized when "George Floyd", an African-American man, was killed mercilessly over a meagre crime during Covid time. Similarly, hashtag "Me Too" was used by the women all over the world to share their stories of harassment, rape and abuse. Thus, social media has proven to be a great platform for social awareness about different issues as well as it also helped to raise funds for different social causes.

Although, there are countless numbers of prospects for social media that has been revolutionizing the world, but there are also some problems

in this regard.

Going into the problems of social media, it is a potential tool of hybrid war of this era. Simply defined, it is a war strategy <sup>which</sup> employs political and conventional warfare with other influential methods. It also includes spreading disputes. These services were employed to intelligence and secret agencies. Now, this work is taken by social media. There are many examples of international arena where these social media platforms have been used: firstly, an issue of spying 50,000 famous persons of different field, including Imran Khan, through Israeli spy agency known as PEGASUS is on the scene. Secondly, Islamophobic sentiments are spread through social media; thirdly, India's agenda of causing a hybrid war was disclosed by European Union Disinfo Lab. All these show that social

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media is being used as an instrument of hybrid war.

Adding further, social media has emerged as a tool for the spread of fake news and disinformation. Lack of fact-checking and algorithmic amplification of false content aids in the widespread of fake news which influences public opinion.

For instance, during the COVID-19 time, there were certain myths about the vaccine developed to curb the spread of the deadly virus. Social media helped in widespread of those myths which caused a hindrance to develop herd immunity against the virus.

Additionally, a recent case of disinformation was seen in Lahore - Pakistan, when there was a news about rape of a college student by the bodyguard of the college. This created panic among the students and parents, it resulted in protests.

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against college administration in different cities. Later on, it was discovered that it was discovered by the law enforcement agencies that it was a case of disinformation.

Furthermore, reflecting on the negative impacts of social media, it is important to consider the effects it brings on the mental health of people especially the teenagers and adults. People compare the highlighted aspect of other's lives with their real life scenarios. This (leads) comparison culture leads to inferiority complex and depression among them. As described in a research (conducted) published in Journal of Adolescent health, the teenagers who spend more than two and a half hour on social media have greater chances of having anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. Over-use of social media leads to doom-scrolling and disruption.

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of sleep cycle. This disruption eventually has an impact on their daily activities and professional performances.

Going into the recipe to tame the potential impacts of growing power of social media, there is a hardcore need of legal framework to the spread of news on it. Unfortunately, making and implementation of laws are reserved to national and international organizations which are nowhere on the ground. There must be international and national regulatory authorities to protect the negative impacts of social media. Firstly, every news which is going to be posted on the social media should be filtered to curb the lack of fact-checking and algorithmic amplification of the false content. Moreover, social media accounts should be restricted on defined hours which are generally specified for playground,

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parents and sleeping. This step will protect the generations from physical and psychological impacts of social media. In addition, a sense of responsibility must be aroused in individuals by enlightening them about the dangerous aspects of social media.

In a nutshell, the strengthening of social media in the present era has revolutionary impacts on society as well as on the world. It has changed the perspectives on human interactions, businesses and economic growth. It has provided a helping hand to the oppressed communities of the world to raise their voices against the oppressions carried out against them. It has revolutionized the political lives by enhancing accountability and international affairs by increasing the public role in the diplomacy. However, it is abused too.

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This abuse is detrimental to societal health in the form of a tool of hybrid war, a source of disinformation and its impacts on the mental health. The situation, therefore, requires a proper plan to ensure that the harms associated to social media are tamed. If the world can curb societal health issues like polio, then why can not this be handled. The need of hour is to take constructive steps to curtail the negative aspects of social media and expose the benefits of social media that will be a step for the success of social media with the success of humanity. As it is rightly said by Mark Zuckerberg that when you give everyone a voice and give people the power, the system usually ends up with a really good place.



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