



Some Reflections on Social Media

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COMMUNICATION can be considered a core element of our civilization. All animals have the ability to communicate with each other through sounds – cooing, chirping, hooting, barking, growling, mooing, and bleating, and so on. But they don't have languages like us. We communicate through spoken languages. Our language encompasses the creation of a range of unique bits of sounds called phonemes. Every language possesses distinct sets of phonemes, and the mixing of these phonemes gives rise to words and sentences that convey specific meanings to the listener.

The development of writing came much later in human history as a means of representing spoken language in a visual form. It started with pictures, and symbols, and eventually developed into the alphabet. Writing allowed information to be recorded, stored, and communicated over time and space.

With the advancement of technology, we now have digital communication tools such as email, instant messages, electronic billboards, signs, scrolling ads, and more. The digital world of the Internet and web has popularized the term "social media." Social media provides users the ability to share information, photos, videos, hold conversations, etc. over the Internet. Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, X (former Twitter), and TikTok are considered top social media platforms.

Social media has so captured our lifestyle that we now convey our greetings and wishes to immediate family members through social media. Love and wishes for spouses or children on occasions like birthdays and anniversaries are posted on social media. The words and feelings that were once told only in private are now open to the public eye. The concept of privacy has changed. Even when we meet in person, we concentrate more on taking photographs and sharing them on social media with accompanying comments, rather than deeply engaging in conversations and enjoying each other's company. Similarly, the practice of photographing food and posting it on social media has become an integral part of dining at social events.

According to an Al Jazeera news report of June 30, 2023, 4.8 billion people use social media every day with an average daily usage of 2.5 hours per person. This figure was 1.5 hours in 2012, as stated by Statista. The trend is on the rise. Digital socializing is taking over the physical one.

Since 2010 World Social Media Day is being celebrated globally on June 30 highlighting its significance and growth. Social media's importance is also reflected by its business value. We can recall Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter for \$44 billion last year. It would be interesting to compare this amount with country-wise GDP for 2022 published by the World Bank. It appears that approximate-

forms. The downside is that these electronic connections are limited to interactions that end up in reading the caption of a post or seeing a picture of someone and then clicking on the "like" button or inserting some emoji or gif, etc. It's more like a protocol or social norm detached from the heart.

The ease and abundance of digital interactions are replacing or reducing personal contacts. Greetings, wishes, and expressions of love are moving from the physical world into the Internet. We are keeping in touch but losing the closeness. Thus, although the interactions are growing, bonding is loosening. Bonding and love build on sights

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Indeed, we are drifting towards shallowness and superficiality. Technology has provided us with loads of options for entertainment, amusement, and leisure. It has expanded the scope of our materialistic dreams. We have now so much to long for and so much to run after. Deep understanding and knowledge have no place in this world of fast-paced pursuit of the newest and the latest.

Besides, our work and lifestyle are constantly putting us under time pressure. Consider the sheer volume of emails and instant messages we receive, the numerous social media posts we scroll through, and the endless ads we endure every day. Our employers' expectations have also changed. They now expect us to be reachable at any time through digital communication. We truly don't have time to delve into the details of anything. There is so much news and information pouring in every second, that we can't afford to explore each of them in depth. Consequently, we often just read the headlines and the visible part of any write-up; we can't muster the time or will to scroll down.

Commensurate with this fast-paced lifestyle, we have developed short-form content like Shorts and Reels so that we can convey everything in 60 seconds tops. We've also adopted abbreviations like OMG for Oh My God, BTW for By the Way, HAND for Have a Nice Day and so on. We no longer have time to write out full words let alone express feelings in sentences. We now use emojis for that. Are we going back to the pre-alphabet era of writing? There is a good side to it though. We would be transcending the barriers of language.

With the advent of AI, we now have the amazing opportunity to offload the burden of thinking, analyzing, and creating onto AI, accelerating the descent into the culture of shallowness and superficiality. We can now pass on a lot of our tasks and activities to AI to get them done better. This will free up more of our time to indulge in social media engagement.

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ly 113 countries of the world could not achieve a GDP of this magnitude in 2022 including our neighbors Bhutan and Nepal. Furthermore, Mark Zuckerberg's Meta which owns social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Threads, and WhatsApp has currently an estimated net worth exceeding \$800 billion.

In 1885 Leo Tolstoy wrote his timeless story "What Men Live By". In that story, an angel is punished by God and sent to Earth to learn three lessons. The celestial being learns that humans live by love. Today, Tolstoy's angel would probably have decided that humans live by social media.

In a sense, social media has made us more social than ever. We are connected with hundreds or even thousands of people through various social plat-

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Digital media is also driving out the print media along with its associated culture of reading, imagining, and thinking. According to a report published in the Guardian in June last year, on average, two newspapers were going out of circulation every week in the USA. In an interview with CNBC in August 2020, Mark Thompson, the then outgoing CEO of the New York Times said that the newspaper cannot be expected to have a print circulation by 2040.

In his March 2023 article, "Are We Witnessing a Decline in Our Reading Habit?" Scott H. Young, a bestselling author featured in The Wall Street Journal, observed that a growing number of indi-