



## Social Media: Transforming Communication and Social Interaction

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### Abstract

The 21st century is radically transforming our lives by not only bringing to us to the technological developments occurring every hour but also by influencing social outlook as a result of such technological revolutions. The increasing dominance of social media in our personal and social lives has gone on to redefine our existence as a social being. Few decades back man preferred to be in a group of other folks to discuss and share anything he wanted to. Such a closed system was a relief from the miseries of life offering a support system in one's isolation. Replacing the face to face interaction and need for physical meetings, social media has given a new dimension to the way we communicate and interact. On one hand it has given more openness to person, on the other it has also made him confined to the physical space of home or office. If the emergence of social media has widened the scope of transfer of information and sharing of opinion, it has also robbed social interaction of its personal touch. On one hand If evolution of social media has broadened the social circle and network, then on the other it has also rendered social and personal relationships more formal and ceremonious. Such changes are taking place rapidly and the increasing acceptance of this kind of a communication channel speaks volumes about human need of remaining connected and closely knit despite the time and spatial constraints. However, how successful has been this way of networking and how much impact it has laid on our society and individual, is what needs to be looked at.

The paper is an attempt to explore how important social media has become in our spheres of social interaction and communication. There will also be an effort to highlight the changes this new yet popular form of media has introduced in our communication methods and patterns.

**Keywords:** Communication, Language, Social interaction, Social media, Technology





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The 21st century is radically transforming our lives by not only bringing to us the technological developments occurring every hour but also by influencing our social outlook as a result of such technological revolutions. The increasing dominance of social media in our personal and social lives has gone on to redefine our existence as a social being. Few decades back, man preferred to be in a group of other folks to discuss and share anything he wanted to. Such a closed system was a relief from the miseries of life offering a support system in one's isolation. Replacing the face to face interaction and need for physical meetings, social media has given a new dimension to the way we communicate and interact. On one hand it has given more openness to person, on the other it has also made him confined to the physical space of home or office. If the emergence of social media has widened the scope of transfer of information and sharing of opinion, it has also robbed social interaction of its personal touch. One one hand if evolution of social media has broadened the social circle and network, then on the other it has also rendered social and personal relationships more formal and ceremonious.

Today, Social media is fast emerging as a vital tool of communication among groups and communities both social as well as professional .The social media can be defined as the new form of Internet or web communication that facilitates sharing of information. Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (Ahlqvist et al, 13). Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that are built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (Kaplan, & Haenlein, 61).

How popular this media has become can be well gauged from the increasing use of expressions like *Hey whatsapp*, *Follow me on Twitter*, *Are you on Facebook* that we get to hear today in any discussion be it among school or college friends, colleagues or even elderly groups. This new form of communication has become almost like a social expression among different classes, groups or segments. Earlier forms of communication were defined on the basis of their utility at work place but this new form of media has





embraced society thus redefining our existence as social beings. When referring to social media mostly it is the social networking sites that are primarily transforming the way communication is now taking place all over the world through dot net platform.

## Why Social Media?

The question that now arises is why this form of media has become so popular when in a collective society like India people preferred being and working in groups. As per a report by *Internet and Mobile Association of India and IMRB International*, "Social media users in the country have reached 143 million by April 2015 with rapid uptake seen in rural India where user base grew by 100 per cent in last one year to 25 million". Some of the reasons that can be cited for its popularity can be availability of technology and internet at affordable prices, Need for tech education among the youth as well as the old to remain updated, desire to remain connected with more and more people despite physical distances, and most importantly the social pressure to be seen and known.

Use of social networking allows the users to not only communicate but also socialize virtually thus turning them away from real life interactions and physical meetings yet giving them facility to remain connected irrespective of time and place. Moreover, the user friendly features of such sites and apps like calling, messaging, posting info, sharing of pics account for the increased popularity of this form of media.

## Impact of Social Media

Like any other technological transformation, this new form of communication is also not without impact. However considering the wider scope of its usage, there has been its influence over almost all the spheres of communication, be it professional, personal or social

## Diminishing levels of Formality

One of the major changes that social networking has introduced in the world of communication is bringing informality in the sharing of information. The phrases like *whatsapp me, text me* are some of the innovations that have become a form of usage all over the world despite being against the norms of grammar. This kind of language use has become widely acceptable and popular and reflective of one's familiarity with the





latest in the world of technology. No longer is this slanged usage a mark of disrespect or lack of proficiency.

Besides the language, the content sharing has also widened by not being limited only to that of having high priority and significance. Social media users now enjoy sharing everything and anything from very important to the most trivial. Remaining connected 24X7 with your friends and family gives one flexibility as well as convenience of sharing everything that they wish to share. This thus eliminates the barriers to choosing or filtering the content.

### **Increased visibility of life**

With the informality and ease in sharing information Social media especially social networking sites have also facilitated increased visibility of life, both personally and professionally. Personally, one is connected with the not so close family and friends via pictures, moments (of both happiness and sorrow) that one shares, wishing each other on occasions (birthdays, anniversaries, festivals etc.) which would otherwise be missed.

Professionally, in addition to being connected with colleagues, one is also visible to other employers through a community of professionals facilitated by networking groups like *LinkedIn and Glassdoor*. This provides a great platform to showcase ones skills and be recognized while also exhibiting ones expectations and requirements from the job. On personal front if this kind of visibility has made communication faster cheaper and well networked on professional front it has added a new dimension to the way one moves and grows professionally.

### **Changing Communication Patterns**

The greatest impact of social media has been on the use of language among the users of networking sites. Excessive texting is robbing the language of its formal tone and expression making it sound more like a spoken language which is informal and telegraphic. McWhorter states that texting isn't really written language, but rather a form of spoken language. Spoken language is looser, telegraphic, and less reflective than written language. He calls it "fingered speech." The language of social media emotes more than just conveying a message as is often with a written message thus doing away





with the use of punctuation mark of period, incorporating more of exclamatory marks and replacing written expressions with emoticons and abbreviations or acronyms like LOL, ROFL, BRB, GTG and so on. “The use of acronyms (an abbreviation formed from the initial letters of other words and pronounced as a word) are now commonplace substitutes to whole sentences; LOL (laugh out loud), OMG (Oh my God), TTYL (talk to you later) are just a few that demonstrate how social media speeds things up by lessening the need to write longer phrases and reduces space.”

As a social media user, one can also not miss noticing the neologisms that have been the product of facebook like *selfie*, *unfriend* and also the new meanings of so many of the words the origin of which can be attributed to facebook. Therefore on one hand we have extended meanings of words like status, wall, etc. and troll “which is now no longer just a character from Norse folklore, but someone who makes offensive or provocative comments online.” and on the other we have many newly coined words specific to social media. (<http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2014/06/social-media-changing-language/>)

## Social Reverberations

If we look at the social sphere from the lens of social media, it may have brought people closer virtually but has drifted them apart physically and emotionally. RIP word, an acronym for Rest in Peace is the cruel impact of too much of socializing through media. Though widely accepted, this kind of condolence message smacks of insensitivity; a form of customary sharing of the grief over the loss of the departed one. Even when people meet, they prefer to only eat, have fun and rejoice rather than spending time talking or sharing thoughts or emotions. It has connected the masses globally but separated them emotionally and socially confining them to the walls of their home against the screens of laptops or mobile phones. Thus despite having a huge network of friends and family, man still feels lonely and alienated because the life that is lived through social media is superficial and since he himself is a part of it well understands the artificiality of it. Eventually he gains no consolation from this virtual society during times of distress, which a real life society can offer significantly.





## Conclusion

Going forward we can say Social Media is here to stay and transform the way we socialize and communicate. Despite all its negative influence on language usage and social existence and values, one cannot deny its importance in keeping people not only connected but also updated. The addiction of socializing through media further testifies to its popularity and acceptance. All we need to realize and avoid is the over involvement with social media at the cost of real life relations, emotions and values. No matter how convenient its use may be it cannot replace the warmth, solace and emotional strength that the physical company of friends and relatives can offer. Further it may bring you a community of friends but that friendly world will be artificial and only superficial. “Cureting a perfected self might win followers or Facebook friends, but it will not necessarily cure loneliness, since the cure for loneliness is not being looked at, but being seen and accepted as a whole person – ugly, unhappy and awkward, as well as radiant and selfie-ready”. Social media thus should remain only an appendage to one's social and personal life and not become the life itself.

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