

Outline a current environmental, political, or social issue that requires redesign. Explain how you will solve this issue over the duration of your future design career. Underline the tools and approaches you will use and discuss how and why.

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Social media is a digital space used for connectivity. Initially, social media helped identify personal, social, and professional opportunities for individuals. It has since been used to share negativity, body shame, abuse and harass. I am going to discuss how social media has a negative effect on society and what I am going to do in response to my findings. I am going to address the mental and physical health issues surrounding social media and explore what aspects of social media in particular are causing these issues. Social media is a big part of modern life and is actively being debated whether it is good or bad. I believe that social media can have a massive impact on a designer's career and can be a useful tool. After reviewing all my findings I will then consider what to take forward, and if the negatives outweigh the positives. I will then decide what tools and approaches I will use to solve the problems social media presents with the hope that people will take inspiration from my decisions.

Social media is a weapon used to arm online attackers. More than half of adolescents have said they have been cyberbullied. Shockingly, "around the same number have engaged in cyberbullying" with social media being one of their biggest tools (bullying statistics, 2019). It has never been easier to find personal information. Social media makes it easier to get personally targeted and to target someone else, making the strongest of people vulnerable. According to a recent study by the University of California, "victims of cyberbullying had significantly higher scores on measures of depression, anger and dissociative symptoms than those who were not cyberbullied", this demonstrates when social media is misused it can have damaging effects to an individual's mental health (Brauser, 2017). Wicase, a company for advice on online activity believes children are 7 times more likely to be bullied by their friend. This could be a result of miscommunication. Online communications give little or no indication on the tone of how someone is speaking. This causes people to judge the tone. People can act and speak differently online. For children it can be confusing to understand people's messages online. Therefore, miscommunication can cause friction within the relationship which can result to people taking offence over things that did not mean to cause offence. Children will sometimes act out when they are angry and the easiest place to do this is online because they get the reaction they want from friends without their parents or guardians knowing. Cyberbullying is hard to eliminate as a lot of victims are afraid to report the incident, making cyberbullying a huge problem in the online world.

Even when social media is used for its intended purpose and no negative actions take place individuals are still risking their mental health. Individuals who spend "too much time online can result in poor sleep quality" and feeling anxious and isolated (Glazzard & Mitchell 2018, P.41). Social media is designed to bring us together so we feel a stronger sense of community. Instead it can make us feel like we are missing out making us feel isolated which can cause us to feel anxious and not sleep. In addition to this, we can become addicted to watching friends have fun through social media. We feel isolated making us spend hours awake when we should be resting. This lack of sleep can make individuals feel irritable and in extreme cases makes them act out in reality, further isolating them. The word 'fomo' was added to the Oxford dictionary in 2013, partially thanks to social media. Standing for 'fear of missing out', fomo has become a well-known acronym used on social media. Before we thought we were missing out, now we can visually see what we are missing out on. This becomes exaggerated through people posting what they want others to see. Unintentionally, social media has made us want to create jealousy in others, causing jealousy in ourselves. Due to the fear of missing out we make ourselves feel like we need to be at every social event we are invited to. We then feel the need to post pictures of this event so we get invited to others. This then lowers self-esteem because we believe our personality will not get us an invite. An endless circle is formed. Only until we see the bigger picture and are brave enough to step out will we end our circle. By turning up to these social events we are missing out on the things we should

prioritise and mark as important. Not only but participating in social media extra activities we also lose precious time scrolling through endless pages. For some, the fear of missing out can be extremely hurtful, “our biggest pains in life aren’t always what happen to us, but what happens to others”, without realising we are hurting ourselves using social media (Norton, 2018).

On today’s social media there are so many things trying to grab our attention, in response to this we try to take some of that attention for ourselves. Social media can create useful links for us as individuals for personal and professional opportunities. We can discover new communities, people with similar values, and explore the world all at the touch of a button, this expands who we are as individuals and lets us build a globally viewable identity. It is easier now than it ever has been for companies using these networks to recruit and find information about employees. This is known as “positive social capital that can be gained on social media sites like Facebook”, allowing us to connect with people and form new relationships (Tagg, seargeant & Brown 2017, p.22). Although this seems good it is heavily weighted with a negative side.

Despite the fact that not everything on social media is true, we still want to believe in things that are ‘too good to be true’. In an online article, Suciuc asks “ why wouldn’t we want to believe a story our friends share” yet on social media “we emphasize the best versions of ourselves instead of the real versions”, and in some cases making up a version of ourselves which is far from reality because we have a screen to hide behind (Holland, 2014). When going for that new job and looking at the other candidates online all we see is the university degree they achieve or a marathon they did on the weekend, not the criminal record they hold or how they are gambling addicted. It is easy to compare ourselves when everyone else appears perfect. Therefore, it is no wonder why individuals have low self-esteem when they see their profile next to someone else’s. We know all our faults and insecurities which is what we compare against with everyone else’s perfect profile. Arguably, instead of helping to develop society, social media has become a hindrance for individuals finding their identity, making it next to impossible with us to be happy for who we are. Social media is addictive to those individuals who have a compulsion to post to make themselves look better to others. The initial feeling of seeing all those likes or thumbs up on our posts is good but can pull us away from reality, isolating ourselves and making us anxious when we stop receiving likes.

Not only does the addiction to social media have consequences on mental health it can also harm our physical health. Over the years there have been many different trends on social media



Fig 1. Ice bucket challenge

including the ice buckets challenge (figure 1) to the I have all my fingers trend (figure 2). The ice bucket challenge had people of all ages on social media pouring ice and cold water onto their heads. Unknowingly to most, “34 people have lost their lives due in part to the phenomenon that is the ice bucket challenge”, in majority of these cases their deaths have been caused by hypothermia due to the cold water (WW News, 2014). This is a prime example where someone has started a trend on social media and people have wanted to

recreate what they have done to get more followers or likes. Originally this trend was to raise money for charity. This could be a majoring factor in why this trend grew so fast with people wanting to make themselves look good to others by doing a video link to charity. In many cases people participated in the trend but did not donate to charity. In my second example of a dangerous trend the dangers are



Fig 2. I've got all my fingers challenge

much more obvious and prominent. This trend sees people using a knife to bound over and tap between each finger. The song that goes with this trend speeds up making the individual speed up their actions making it more likely to injure themselves. In figure 2 a child is watching a video on this trend released on a social media platform, he is copying the actions with a pencil. Although he may feel like it is a fun thing to do especially in front of his friends. He can still cause harm to himself with a pencil. It is very alarming that a child can easily gain access to these types of videos and the fact he could have chosen to copy the movements with a knife. In the first trend the dangers were easy for people to miss yet could cause fatality, while in the second trend the dangers are clear yet people still continue to do these trends. Social media can directly impact how people live by being used by people to influence how we live. Trends are not the only thing on social media making us do foolish things, “a study published in the *journal of family medicine and primary care* found that some 259 people had died taking selfies” between October 2011 and November 2017 (Fast company, 2019). People have now become so addicted to social media they are risking their life to get that ‘perfect’ photo to gain more friends online.

In recent years, dating online has become popular. We are meeting less and less new people in person, making people turn to online dating for help. During the past year online dating has expanded reach more people than ever before. Dating apps like Tinder make it easy for people to prejudge behind closed doors. When dating online the first thing anyone sees are faces of people using the app. At no point can users get their true personality across before other users judge them on how they look. This leads to people changing how they look through filters or physical body modification to seek validation from others. It has been reported that an Australian influencer named Maven has recently quit social media because she would “constantly compare herself to others” and “measure her self-worth by the number of likes” she received on her posts (Flaxington, 2016). I believe other will follow in her footsteps and reduce the time they are having on social media because people will realise what it is doing to their mental health.

Not only can people harm themselves they also have the capability of hurting others online. Social media makes it easy for people to track the whereabouts of another person, “information on social media sites may not only be searched without permission or knowledge but may be permanently stored”, some information people think is private can be seen by anyone (Lipschultz, 2017 p.147). A branch of cyber security called OSINT uses social media to find information on individuals. People on social media unknowingly give out personal information that can lead to people being scammed. In recent news there are accounts of people who have been scammed online, stalked by someone and even cases of people being targeted for their beliefs which has resulted in fatality. A study by Gloucestershire University found that “the majority of killers stalk their victims on social media before murdering them”, this is to plan out movements of the victim and used for the killer to pick his next target (Robertson, 2017)

As a designer social media can be useful but without the right proof of your designs can be dangerous. One of my main goals as a designer is to get my work out into the world. An easy way of doing this would be to use social media. This makes it easy for other people as well to share my design. However, it also makes the designers easier to steal. With my ideas people have the ability to produce a product from a stolen idea to make profit.

To conclude, social media was designed to enhance our experience of the real world. Originally it gave people the opportunity to view parts of the world they are unable to reach through connecting different people together. I now believe social media makes our world smaller in some respects, we are all following the same trend, we all want to live that same ideal life with no worries or problems and we are not all realising that it is unachievable. As humans we will always have fears

and worries. We will always want the next best thing. Social media speeds up that time between the next best things. I believe social media needs redesigning so it can be used in a different way that will be more helpful to society. From the research I have undertaken and the personal experiences I have had, I believe the negatives outweigh the positives of social media. The risks of cyberbullying, social media addiction, sleep deprivation and access to private information has motivated me to limit the time I spend on social media. If social media was used just to post positive images and text it would give the wrong message to people on what is achievable and what everyone else's life would look like. We would have the same problems of comparing to an unachievable ideal. Currently, people are free to post what they want on social media, this can be hurtful and offensive to others and no one wants to post about normal life. Therefore, I have personally decided not to post about my private life. I feel that using social media to document your private life means you are missing out on time to do meaningful things and adding to the FOMO effect on everyone else. Time spent on social media is time wasted to me. In response to my findings I have decided to only use social media for advertising purposes because it can be a useful tool to professionals. I will only use tools such as LinkedIn because it is a more professional platform compared with Facebook and Twitter. I will think harder about what I am posting on social media and how that might make people feel and how they could react. I will only share designs I am comfortable in sharing. When designing I will consider the social aspect of the design. My designs will bring people together rather than promote self-isolation. I believe we make more meaningful connections in person and I will only use social media to make professional connections that would happen in real daily life. I want to control my experience on social media and not let social media control me.

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Figure 1. The ice bucket challenge 2018. 12 Dangerous Social Media Challenges 2019 [Updated harmful teen trends]. [online] Available at: <<https://www.theonespy.com/12-insane-dangerous-social-media-challenges-trends/>> [Accessed 10 November 2021].

Figure 2. Budiman, 2013. YouTube video: I have all my fingers. [video] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WLaKjxZh4g>> [Accessed 10 November 2021].