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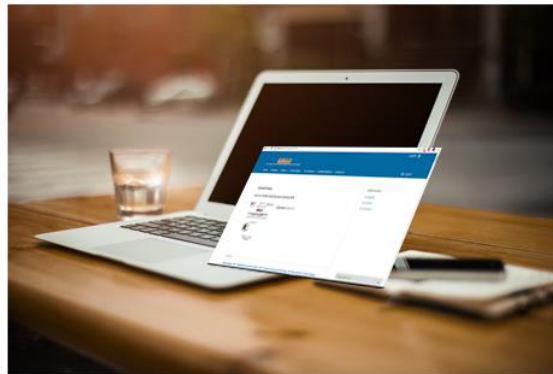
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Social Media: Panopticon of Power, Entrapment, and Alienation

Abstract : Since the dawn of civilization expression through speech, letter or various forms of literature has been human bliss. Civilizations wouldn't have structured but for communication. However, Social media is blurring lines and turning us all into social zombies. Privacy no longer exists in this current digital era. The moment information is online the cat is out of the bag. . This submission to online corporate power is disconcerting. Prevention is better than cure and here containment is the new prevention. A constant permanent supervision is must to ensure that data is not leaking away. The sense of togetherness is lost and life is hollow, empty and the virtual world is not able to fill this emptiness and shallowness. One has to draw a line between reel life and real life which is necessary to maintain and foster creativity, expressiveness and social unity.

Key Words: Online Power, Panopticon, Social Media, Social Zombie

Social media is an electronic form of communication wherein users share ideas, information, personal messages, and other content. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat are so of the many tools used by internet users all around the globe. It is not a fundamental technology but a source of entertainment that is an entertainment product. We live and breathe in a hyper-connected world where the social media has become an appendices' to our body. Since the dawn of civilization expression through speech, letter or various forms of literature has been human bliss. Barring saints, ascetic's men usually can't live alone.

Communication is his dire need for survival. Civilizations wouldn't have structured but for communication. It needs something beautiful, which are those that never pass into nothingness. To compose a beautiful thing one needs free-thinking, security, leisure and society in which society is the core.

Years ago nobody visualized that a time would come when communicating would be hijacked by multimedia tools. The changes in the 20 and 21 century have brought so many fidgets in the form of Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook. The social media is an electronic form of communication mastered by multimedia technologies like Google, Apple, Yahoo became the medium to share ideas, messages, and other content. However, Social media is blurring lines and turning us all into social zombies. It is primarily entertainment which is not only beguiling but also surreptitiously addictive. Scrolling mindlessly we are enchanted by the vicious circle of clicking on links leading the user into hypnotic and mesmerizing diversions. It is corroding our social civic life and making our already chaotic lives culturally shallow.

Making us self-absorbed, narcissistic and alienating us, the social media has made us asocial. Slowly and steadily we are falling prey to its monitoring and manipulation. Our memories are degenerating and decaying where individuality has gone for a toss. We have turned into spectators of our own lives because of our now inherent need to capture, document and store everything. Staying in the selfie stricken virtual world is very demanding as digital memory trumps actual experience. At the end of his book *'The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, From Edison to Google'*, Nicholas Carr¹ believes that all multimedia and social violence on the Internet blunts and dulls us.

In her book entitled *'Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other'* (2011), technology sociologist Sherry Turkle,² borrowing a famous phrase from Marshall McLuhan³—*"We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us"*—declares that modern technology is changing us: *"We are shaped by our tools. And now, the computer, a machine, on the border of becoming a mind, was changing and shaping us."* Although social media connects us, says Turkle, in fact, they are only driving us into ourselves. Technologies make it easier to have no personal contact at all. Why should you telephone if you can send an SMS message? It is perhaps not without reason that the abbreviation SMS is currently being read as Social Media Syndrome. We often dig out our phone because we think that we have received a message, although that turns out not to be the case. Looking at this phantom behavior, we can ask who is in charge—human beings or technology? Similar to Nicholas Carr, Turkle also nurtures concern about the present state of

affairs. She is afraid that technology, just like Frankenstein's monster, will ultimately turn against its creator.

The futile and nonsensical pursuit of *amour-propre*⁴ is posing a serious problem. The number of likes, retweets and hashtags are turning out to fuel our egos. The fear of being singled out is a big blow to our self-esteem. The more we use social media more are we likely to feel lonely, depressed and alienated as the prudently curated positive and happy portrayal of our friend's life on social media is only going to make us feel inadequate and can cause severe psychological harm. So, this *idees fixe*⁵ is an irrational obsession that so dominates an individual thought as to determine his or her actions which will automatically result in the sad demise of creativity and innovation.

A more troubling and dark side is our minds inability to handle so much information that is handed out to us via social media which may further lead to brain freeze. Social media is designed to fragment our attention and make it as addictive as possible which harms our ability to think deeply with sustained concentration. Our attention span is reduced to a bare minimum as we often check our phone for updates and more. In the report entitled *Diagnosis: Social Media Syndrome*⁶ dating from March 2011, a warning is given for Facebook depressions, among other things. The management of Google, Apple, and Yahoo send their kids to Waldorf schools⁷, where computers are prohibited and classes are given with old-fashioned school boards, books, and real teachers. The masters of the e-universe appear convinced that computers “*reduce attention spans and inhibit creative thinking, movement, and human interaction*”.

The moment we post any information online we relinquish control of it. Privacy no longer exists in this current digital era as social media is a massive storehouse of information wherefrom various insights can be extracted which would form the basis for any kind of lucrative business. Today big corporations target us directly; they can model us directly and stealthily. Modeling means having answers without making it known you are asking, or having the target know that you know.

By this breach of privacy, our personal information can be used, misused, reused, exploited and interpolated. Ignorance is bliss here as we choose to give out our very private information to these so-called “attention engineers” who use computational techniques to mine information.

This information is knowingly or unknowingly passed unto these people as they monitor our movement on social media whether it is just “liking” a page on Facebook or revisiting any page or website. These large corporations will further manipulate, mold, prod,

and contour our ideas, dreams, and desires. Once an information is on social media the privacy is stripped off which is a far reach cry in the current age. Social media has become such a powerful tool of information where inferences can be drawn to form the basis of any business. This tempting business though winds up privacy, people still feel secure to this cynical idea as the information or data is used, misused, reused, exploited and interpolated. This submission to online corporate power is disconcerting.

Cyborg anthropologist Amber Case⁸ studied the way in which people and technology affect one another and jointly evolve. According to Case, people have externalized their own evolution by making all kinds of tools. The use of tools and other resources has mainly had an influence on the physical aspects of human development. Computers are not an interface of the physical manifestation of humankind, but an intermediary of our consciousness. Memories are becoming hyperlinks to information triggered by keywords and URLs. We are becoming “persistent paleontologists” of our own external memories, as our brains are storing the keywords to get back to those memories and not the full memories themselves.

This information asymmetry combined with the behavioral applied science is used increasingly by industry, political campaigns, and corporations. Fan following on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter became the yardstick for a person’s self-esteem and existence which may be fallacious. As is the case in Putin’s Russia and Trump’s and Hilary’s skirmishes. The twitter encounters between Trump and Hillary made the elections non-serious. Social Media is an international battleground for dirty politics. The Illusion of online support for a candidate` can spur actual support through a bandwagon effect. Research shows that Russia first developed its digital propaganda expertise for dealing with internal threats to stability and drowning out dissent to Putin’s regime. Russia’s Social media⁹ is heavily infiltrated with digital propaganda domestically. It is the progenitor of social media manipulation where around 45% of highly active Twitter accounts are bots(internet robot, web robot)

Kim Kardashian¹⁰ is an American reality television personality, socialite, actress, businesswoman, and model. With more than 100 million Instagram followers she has been included in Time magazine¹¹ top 100 list of people. She is a brand in herself. Her whole existence is dedicated to showing off her opulent and coveted lifestyle. Allowing fans to keep track of her every infinitesimal movement, Kim paid a colossal price as she was robbed at gunpoint in her Paris Hotel by miscreants who were updated on her whereabouts via her social media updates. The Instagram loving selfie queen faced a grim reality of her preening narcissism as her glamorous life was too easy to track. This voracious user of social media has now mellowed down.

Discretion no longer exists in the current age. The moment you post information online, you give up control of it. As ignorance is bliss as we choose to shut our eyes to the plausible harm this information sharing causes since the benefit trumps the harmful effects of the data being compromised. This submission to online power is troubling. The world according to Google and Facebook calls to mind *panopticon*¹² (Greek for seeing all), wherein we are under surveillance and we don't even know it.

Through these various gadgets, the humanity has come close to being called a 'Global Village'. However, the irony is it is close yet too far. The moment information is online the cat is out of the bag. Social media like the self-destructive Frankenstein's monster that hinders farsightedness making our view constricted. Social media has become brain candy or new endorphins that activate online and puts in inertia on physical movements. People appear close but miles away in reality as is escapism in Romanticism. Long before this modern age of information set in, the famous poet and Noble prize winner T. S. Eliot¹³ explains this lack of physical proximity and solidarity through the probing lines in '*The Rock*'. These lines are about the life, the wisdom and the knowledge that he feels have become lost in the miserable desire for rapid progress:

"Where is the life we have lost in living?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

The 21 century has a critical new responsibility to reset the culture. Descartes's¹⁴ – Father of Western Philosophy phrase, "*I think therefore I am*" has today acquired connotation of "*I Google therefore I am*". A new virtual world has been carved out by social media that is functioning as a unifying cultural juggernaut. Undoubtedly, social media is informative, not intrusive and provides more room for the exercise of mental capacities. It appears that it should unite mankind but the social media has brought with its attention and knowledge deficit and social and financial loss that darkens the gains which were so eagerly sought.

There is identity crisis about the observation of oneself. A person is observed from different angles. Facebook, Instagram, Google give one sighted view but people, in reality, are like diamonds, view from different angles and a totally different observation comes in the scanner. Here comes the modern man's predicament of how to deal with one's online identity. Whether to go for the path paved by internet giant's Facebook, Google or make a choice for oneself, a path of anonymity where nothing is fixed and chaos rules.

The ability to be creative and expressive on the internet is at stake, particularly for the youth. To find about oneself, one's passion, interests, mistakes is part of one's growth. Social media should be informative, not invasive and leave more room for our own mental capacities. But there is no anonymity on the internet and it builds death of creativity. Google and Facebook refer to the problem of privacy as rational ignorance. It is a situation where people decide to remain ignorant about a certain thing because they suppose that the cost or effort involved in will not be equal to the gain of getting that information. But on the sad part of it everything may be done to protect oneself and then right and even then the information or data is used in the manner one doesn't know and doesn't want to know and there a person surrenders. It is a natural human tendency to disclose the things which are not bad but the things come to a head when that disclosure is being manipulated to draw conclusions with which a person has nothing to do.

Individualism has ushered in an era of unknowns. People behave like strangers on face and friends on Facebook. Cold handshakes and expressionless words mark the day as the society has become individualistic and personal freedom has no relation with the community. The sense of togetherness is lost and life is hollow, empty and the virtual world is not able to fill this emptiness and shallowness.

People speak to one another without having a conversation, look at other people without actually seeing them. They communicate through fast short messages. Our society is becoming more and more individualistic. The world of reality demands humanity and liberated individual to probe the ways back to what unites us. The commercial life is taking over human life and the modern generation doesn't have time to look up. Technology can't be allowed to rule humanity through social media entity may be more interesting than the credit card. As without a certain sense of "togetherness," our existence is becoming empty.

Prevention is better than cure and here containment is the new prevention. A constant permanent supervision is must to ensure that data is not leaking away or infiltrating via internet connections. It needs to install a containment zone that is continuously under monitoring. As stringent laws in Germany requiring social media network to take responsibility for what gets posted on their site. The virtual world can't be ignored, it is necessary to be in tune with changing scenario of life and world but not at the cost of real life. One has to draw a line between reel life and real life which is necessary to maintain and foster creativity, expressiveness and social unity.

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