

Do social media and other platforms require greater regulation?

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Abstract. In this paper, evidence was shown to support the idea: social media and other platforms require greater regulation. By analyzing different negative aspects that social media brought us, the evidence that is provided can prove why social media needs new norms. At the beginning the consequences of the misinformation during the 2016 US election and Covid-19 were shown. Secondly, the paper goes through the issue of the companies selling users' personal data. To conclude some data is provided to support the existence of negative effects on the younger generation.

Keywords: social media; privacy; spread of misinformation.

1. Introduction

The concept "social media" gathers together many Internet-based applications such as Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, WeChat, Tik Tok, Youtube and more. Because of the different functions and the services that these platforms offer, their customers and the people they reach are different in the terms of nationality, gender, religion and age. Social media is used to communicate with other people through long distances and most of all to generate contents available to a wide range of people such as posts, videos, photos and comments. Social media is different from traditional media in several aspects: it reaches a larger audience; the contents are less reliable as everyone is able to post information, while in traditional media they are selected by professional teams; social media is more versatile as you can make changes once published; social media are two-way conversations, in fact the readers can write comments under posts. Nowadays, social media are viewed as the new market and they are used with strong business purposes: making personal advertisements, presenting content of your interest and collecting our data to sell them, without us knowing that, to other companies in order to make profit. This new approach to social media has generated new issues, for example the data market, the violation of people's privacy and the spread of misinformation. Because of the popularity of these platforms, social media has been used as some tools to spread ideas, influence and gain popularity by many political parties. In addition, social media has a great psychological effect on teenagers and young people. In fact, in 2013, 89% of Europeans aged 16–24 years participated in social networks (Seybert & Reinecke, 2013).

The reason why I chose this topic is that I want people to be aware of their actions on these new platforms and inform them of the dark work that the big companies do behind them so that they can be more careful and aware of what they are doing while browsing on the Internet, for example before accepting all the agreements when they first enter a platform. As a teenager born in the modern era, I use most of these applications in my everyday life, so I can explain and show real facts that happened around me to give more credibility to my paper. The aim of the paper is to convince people that the social media environment should be improved and needs to have more rules and regulation by providing facts and negative effects that were brought and that are affecting our lives right now.

In this paper the problems are divided into two types: the problems that should be regulated by the government's measures, and the ones that should be regulated by the social media platform itself. At last there is research about the social media's effects on teenagers.

2. Body Part

2.1 Platform regulations

The use of social media has generated many problems, and as mentioned in the introduction, we can divide them into two categories. In this part we will examine the issues that the platforms should find a solution for, because they involve bad behavior from the users which they can partially control with warnings and blocks of different functions.

2.1.1 Misinformation and 2016 US election

Although misinformation has always existed before the invention of social media, its effects on today's society have become very important and have affected many people in different ways and different fields. For example, we can notice from different evidence that they play an important and fundamental role for the political parties. The most classic example where social media has shown its influence was the 2016 US election. In fact, social media use has risen sharply: in 2016, active Facebook users per month reached 1.8 billion and Twitter's 400 million. Many studies and surveys have shown that the elections were conditioned by the fake news that were spread quickly and wildly on the social network platforms, for example Facebook and Twitter which were the ones that were used the most. People who create fake news have mainly two reasons, one is to make a big amount of money through users' clicks and views; the second reason is to support the political candidate that they prefer. But regardless of people's motives for writing these lies, we definitely can say that they covered a part in determining the final results of the election. Evidence showed that: Facebook is the main platform where fake news are mostly shared; people who read fake news tend to believe them; and that most of them were pro-Trump news. After the election, it was conducted a survey (Gottfried and Shearer 2016) and it suggested that: 62 percent of adults in the US got news from social media, but not all of them focus on the information they can get on online platforms, in fact only the 34 percent of these believe in those information "some" or "a lot". The survey also showed that only 13.8% considered social media as the most important source, making it the fifth of the list after cable TV, network TV, websites and local TV. These data are telling that social platforms have become important news sources.

2.1.2 Misinformation and Covid-19

If we look at more recent problems, we can definitely notice that the propaganda of misinformation has influenced people's thoughts on the Covid-19 pandemic and vaccine campaign. In order to fight against the pandemic, all the people should collaborate and should leave the old habits by changing our behavior. All people must receive right and dependable information from experts to protect themselves and the people around them, but instead the fake news that were spreading in that delicate situation on social media like Youtube, Twitter and Facebook weren't helping at all. Some public figures have also participated in this dissemination, "they made up just 20% of the claims in our sample but accounted for 69% of total social media engagement."(J. Scott Brennen, Felix M. Simon, Philip N. Howard, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen; 2020) On different social media applications, the fast-checkers have responded quickly to this new issue, but some parts of the fake news still remained on the platforms even if they had been rated as unreliable and fake: on Twitter the 59%, on Youtube the 27% and on Facebook the 24%. These fake news brought irrecoverable consequences as some people didn't follow the rules and made protests, becoming in this way a threat to public health and also narrowing people's possibility to return to normal life.

2.2 Government regulations

One of the problems of today's society is the marketing of our private data. Nowadays we are doing many activities, which we used to do offline, online. The websites that we browse on, the applications that we use to check our credit cards, to buy stocks and to post photos of our daily life, all collect our data, which are very valuable for the people known as data brokers. These people can track down our personal data very easily and sell it to companies that need them, such as for

advertisements to attract new customers. Shoshana Zuboff, in her book named “The Age of Surveillance Capitalism”(2019), mentioned a notion called “digital dispossession”, the fact that our private experiences that we provide on our social media profiles have become a commodity. This method has been used by many companies to conduct researches and collect data, for example Google had introduced a security system called Google Nest that incorporated the use of microphone and camera without people knowing it. Another example is that in 2014, Google admitted using Gmail which analyzed the emails for content. Also Facebook used posts to see how people would react and to see how it affected their lives. This economic system is called “Surveillance Capitalism”, because it accumulates data without us knowing it. The people who can give and sell our data aren’t only companies of online platforms, but also the chemist and the gym where we often go, because they can provide our health information; and the bank that can tell our average profit and our work. By posting and commenting on social media, we give public access to our personality and information about our private lives, so the data brokers don’t even have to search for them. In fact social media is leading us to the “deboundarying”, the loss of distinction between private and public. People tend to share too much information and private issues about themselves. With our likes and dislikes on other people’s posts, the number of clicks on a topic that we are interested in, they can make a copy of our profile very quickly, and then sell it to advertisement companies to make a profit.. Many people will ask if this is even legal, and this is a consequence of their unawareness of the movements and actions they do on social network platforms. In fact, from the first moment we sign up and make a profile on a new application, we digitally sign an agreement for providing our data. We accept cookies that can track down our life on the Internet, but the problem is that the majority of those people don't even know what they are signing.

This is an action done by the social media platforms themselves and this issue cannot be neglected anymore, and the most efficient solution for this problem is the government’s control by approving new laws and rules that should eliminate or at least limit this kind of behavior.

2.3 Social media and dependency among teenagers

Social media platforms can be divided into two types. The first one is called advertising platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, which make profit with other companies’ adverts on their applications. The second type is called lean platforms, where the users are consumers but also producers, and these platforms are for example Airbnb and Amazon. In the advertising platforms, in order to make profit, as said before, they make use of adverts, and they need data to adjust and show the right advert to each user. So the data is crucial to make a profit for these platforms, and on the other side the number of users is also very important to provide accurate data. As a consequence, both the data and the number of users became essential to the social media economic system which is also called platform capitalism. In order to keep the right amount of users, the data is used also to keep our engagement on social media applications, because the system will automatically suggest photos and videos about the topics that we like, this causes many people’s dependence on the Internet, especially among teenagers. Today, young people and teenagers, who are growing in the “modern era”, have a very intimate approach with the Internet and social media platforms. They use social media to communicate with their friends, to meet new people and chat with them, to watch topics of their interest and to build a reputation among peers. In recent years, one of the platforms that is used the most by young people is Instagram. Instagram is one of the most influential social platforms in the world, it has roughly 1 billion active users per month and it is particularly popular in the United States and India, the two countries with the highest number of users. In the world, according to Statista, 31,5% of the Instagram users are aged from 25 to 34, 30,1% from 18-24 and the 8,5% from 13 to 17. The data show that the percentage of teenage users isn’t low, and this is the data without calculating the teenagers who falsificate their age. Internet addiction in teenagers has become a preoccupation because it has many negative effects on young people such as: depression and impact on their real life relationships. In 2015, Pew Research Center in a research showed that 92% of the teenagers reported going online daily and 24% said they went online constantly. In addition 56% of those

teenagers aged from 13 to 17. The consequences of this big amount of use of social media platforms on teenagers aren't very positive: for example it caused teens' cyberbullying peers, the creation of the perfect image, catfishing and trolling. In 2018, the Pew Research center conducted a survey which found that 59% of US teens have experienced forms of cyberbullying, such as offensive name calling (42%) and spreading false rumors about them(32%).

3. Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to show people why social media should be regulated by providing different real life examples. In this paper many concepts were proposed to support my idea, and all of them were explained. I went through the issue of the spread of misinformation, the problem of data selling and at last the effects on teenagers.

The essay could not provide real and actual solutions to these problems and couldn't suggest the right way to deal with these issues. But these limitations can be overcome by some further studies of experts and by waiting for new regulations since these are some recent problems.

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