

## A s s i g n m e n t # 1

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*Topic: Social media is the new platform for raising social concerns and creating awareness more effectively*

### ***Introduction***

Social media has become a part and parcel of human lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Across the world, billions of people use social media on a daily basis and the number keeps on growing. The social media has entered in every part of life, like personal relationship, entertainment, professional relationships, professional assignments, studies, research works, marketing and so on. It has gained such significance in the last decade that social media has become another identity of people. This a great social change. There are many social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, twitter etc. In Facebook, each day, almost 10 billion messages are sent collectively (Review42, 2021), and in Twitter, almost 6,000 tweets are posted each second (internetlivestats.com, 2021). It has created a massive social platform for netizens to connect and the global reach has become extremely easier. Access to real time information and update has become convenient and that creates a significant impact on the society. With the help of technological support, social media has emerged as a very important platform for raising concern on any social or environmental issues, which can led to strong movements and effective actions to bring changes. However, it may draw attention towards any social or environmental movement, the background information may not always be authentic or the outcome may not always be desired or fruitful (weforum.org, 2016). In this essay, an argumentative discussion will be done on effectiveness of social media as a platform in raising social and environmental concerns and influencing actions to address those concerns.

*Argument for social media being an effective platform for raising concerns and creating awareness*

In the recent times, new trends of social media movements have been noticed, such as, hashtags and viral videos regarding various social events and environmental issues. While some of the trends are to generate entertainment and fun, others generated great social concerns that demanded an extensive change in policies for the betterment of people, animals or environment. Social media is highly effective for bringing together activists from across the world. The social media movements have seen variety of issues in the recent times, such as, MeToo, global warming, bush fires in Amazon forest, Australia or California, movements by Greta Thunberg, Paris climate agreement, protests by PETA members advocating vegan food or legal prohibitions on using animals for cosmetics testing, terrorism attacks, human rights violation such as Black Lives Matter and so on (Berenson, 2018).

Regarding all these issues on social media, the most striking aspect is the global reach of these movements. People all over the world are connected so deeply and extensively that it does not take much time for an information or trend to go viral. Before social media, people had to rely on newspapers and television to publish global news or any social or environmental concern and those were never real time updates. Hence, even if there was some injustice or human rights violation or any climate issue, those did not get much attention and create awareness as much as they do now. Therefore, social media plays a very significant role in creating a global awareness or global movement in a short span of time.

For example, the #MeToo movement was a social movement against the sexual harassment and sexual abuse and its aim was to create mass awareness and create a change in

policies and social systems for establishing a safe world for not only women but also for children, men, and the vulnerable other genders. The term was first used by Tarana Burke in 2006 on social media, however, this gained momentum across the world when high profile actresses started to open up about their sexual harassment experiences in the film industry. Women all over the world came forward with this hashtag to show solidarity. A massive social wave was created globally and countries started coming up to modify policies against such crimes. Thus, #MeToo brought social changes (Brünker et al., 2020).

Similarly, 2020 saw not only COVID-19 outbreak and a pandemic, but it also experienced a very crucial social movement through social media against racism. This is known as Black Lives Matter. This movement was also started much earlier, in 2013, in the United States, against anti-black violence, which was mostly present in the society in the form of police brutality. The unjust killing of Black people in the USA is a deep rooted social problem, and this movement demands equal rights and humanity for Black people as it is for the White people (Mundt, Ross & Burnett, 2018). Since 2013, this movement was present on the social media but in a mellowed form. However, in 2019-2020, the incidences of police shooting and killing Black people had increased such that the BLM movement attracted global attention. After the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020, this movement became a global one, aided by social media platforms. In 2020, around 15 to 26 million people participated in this movement in the USA making it one of the largest social movements in the US history (Nytimes.com, 2020). The real time detailed updates and hashtags helped to create global awareness in a very short time with protests being conducted in other parts of the world as well. Social media helped this movement to be organized and created a mass awareness which had a very strong social impact. Hence, it is evident that without social media, this movement to stop racism and unjust killing of

Black people could not have been so large and impactful, which aims to create a better living condition for all the Black people worldwide (Dave et al., 2020).

Along with the social causes like human rights violation, social media is a great platform for raising awareness on environmental problems also. Whether it is the bush fires in the Amazon forest, Australia or California, or the retreats of glaciers in Arctic and Antarctica resulting in rising sea levels, the activists can draw global attention in a short span of time using platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. During the COVID-19 lockdown, the environmental activism went digital across the world (Pleyers, 2020). Social media has made people more aware about the latest sustainability aspects, and the research works on the future impact of climate change are also available more than before, creating a stronger impact on the society. For example, the protest by a 15 year old school girl outside Swedish parliament against inaction by the government on climate change was viral on social media and that made Greta Thunberg internationally famous. Her protest inspired many children and youth across the world to be united through social media and continue the protest in their respective locations. Within a year of Greta's protest, around 7 million school students worldwide joined school strikes for the cause of climate change (Olesen, 2020). Thus, it can be seen that social media has been extremely helpful in creating a global awareness about these protests against the governments and politicians for their inaction towards climate change, and it also helped in taking the movements on the digital platform involving millions of youth activists, drawing attention and creating pressure on the respective governments (Finnegan, 2020). Hence, the aim of such protests is to have a long term impact on the society as well as environment. Without social media, these protests and movements would not have gained such large scale attention and coverage and number of participants. Not only a global network of people was established for a

social and environmental cause, but social media had been helpful in educating people about sustainability goals and actions taken.

***Argument against social media being an effective platform for raising concerns and creating awareness***

Social media has some negative effects on the society as well. Since, day by day the youth are getting more engrossed in social media, they are often getting influenced by virtual reality and crossing the thin line between the real world and virtual world. As stated by Antoci & Sabatini (2018), adolescents have limited ability for self-regulation and also face higher risk of vulnerability to peer pressure and in those cases, social media results in a negative influence on the society. There can be various risks like cyberbullying, instigating by spreading rumours, hurting religious sentiments, coordination of the terrorist groups and so on, which can lead to mental health issues among youth. Since, the source of information is not always validated, the risk of false rumours is high along with the risk of social unrest is also high (O'Reilly, 2020).

With increasing usage and reliance on social media, the incidences of false information are quite high. Those can include a wrong diet plan influencing young girls to stop eating normal food to achieve a body like their favourite celebrity, misinformation about any disease or healthcare plans, or a wrong political agenda based on religions creating communal violence and all these events have a highly negative impact on the society (He et al., 2019). Whether on Facebook or on Instagram, there are plenty of sources spreading misinformation and the adolescents are the most vulnerable groups who get easily influenced by such attractive but wrongly presented information. Thus, creating social unrest also becomes easier in such cases.

Another significant negative impact of online network on the society is the obsession regarding the one's presence in the social media to get attention and the behaviour of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). Social media has invaded people's lives in such a way that adolescents are getting obsessed to get attention and validation from the peers in the virtual online network. They are spending too much time on these platforms, and this peer pressure for presenting a perfect life all the time is generating powerful negative emotions like jealousy, sadness, stress, loneliness, embarrassment and anxiety and so on (Best et al., 2018). These are affecting mental health of people and these are added with the attitude of Fear of Missing Out. This is defined as the anxiety and pressure one feels when the others were seemingly having fun or rewarding experiences without them and those updates were being posted on the social media. This fear leads to spending a lot of time on these platforms, which hampers other essential daily activities like studies, or the job. According to Blackwell et al. (2017), people who use social media more intensely, experience FOMO more than others who use these online networks less intensely. People often get obsessive regarding their social media life and their tolerance level, sensitivity and humanitarian aspects are reducing. The image on the social media is becoming more important than actual life. Hence, while this media can be immensely helpful in creating global awareness about a social or environmental cause, this media can also bring negative effects on the society by changing the behaviour, lifestyle and outlook of the users by spreading false information, creating a parallel universe without any connection with reality and making the users more agitated, judgmental and intolerant towards others without privileges in life (Reer, Tang & Quandt, 2019).

### *Conclusion*

The above arguments show that the power of social media is increasing day by day. As the number of users is increasing rapidly, the costs and benefits of social media in the context of social impact are increasing too. On one hand, it has been helpful for creating a global awareness and movements for causes that can affect any society in any country anytime, and on the other hand, it influences and attracts a whole generation towards wrong outlook of life. In the end it can be said that social media is extremely powerful and it must be used for many more socially and environmentally responsible causes for improving quality of life across the world. However, the youths and adolescents must also practice self-regulation and limitation, under the supervisor of their parents, such that they are not influenced easily by any type of information. They must develop the rational judgment ability to understand and identify the right and wrong causes in the social media movement. It can therefore be concluded that with proper regulation and control, usage of social media can benefit the world by presenting the concerns and movements in a society and creating awareness about those such that a positive change can be achieved.



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