

Assignment #1

Title:

Hey Siri, Play 'Come Together' by *The Beatles*;
How Social Media has Helped to Unite People Globally

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Hey Siri, Play 'Come Together' by *The Beatles*; How Social Media has Helped to Unite People Globally

This paper explores how contemporary technologies have allowed for and encouraged people to be whole-heartedly themselves, whilst globally uniting people and communities in the process. While acknowledging valid concerns around potential harmful consequences of social media, this study dissects the critical uses of social media in self-expression within online communities. Important discussion of current controversial topics are addressed in relation to the role that social media plays in relaying particular information and voicing the opinions of its users. Additionally, this study explores the essential role that social media plays in ensuring that the human being's innate desire of belonging is met through participation in online communities, concluding that social media and online communities are vital in keeping a healthy sense of social connectedness and belonging.

Digital and social media platforms have liberated individuals by encouraging users to be self-expressive and confident in their ability to be a part of online communities that make them feel welcome and heard. When a person begins to feel as though they do not belong in any of the groups and communities that surround them, contemporary everchanging and ever-growing use of technology and social media has allowed for people like this to rediscover their sense of worth and inclusion. This feeling of non-belonging not only affects our confidence, but it also works to dampen our self-expression, self-worth, and our connectedness with the world around us. However, in today's ever-growing society, social media tools such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat have allowed for people of similar interests and beliefs to come together, connect and communicate freely without having to worry about their physical locations. The intimacy of sharing photos online can also assist in making a person feel less lonely and more connected with the world around them. Additionally, social media users develop a stronger sense of belonging when they participate in online discussions or are accepted into online communities. It is therefore clear that that digital and social media play a vital role in maintaining a strong sense of belonging whilst also developing a healthy sense of social connectedness.

Firstly, what is social media? Mackson, Brochu, and Schneider (2019) describe it as “technologies that facilitate user sharing, content creation, and information exchange with online communities” (Mackson, Brochu, & Schneider, 2019). It can also be used as a means of communication between people despite where they are located geographically. Today’s generations are becoming more and more self-expressive, especially with the ever-growing use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram (Treem, Dailey, Pierce, & Biffi, 2016). Younger generations are finding that social media can be a tool in which to accentuate their personalities and relate to others who are similar to themselves. Not only does social media provide its users with a valuable source of self-expression which aids in them feeling less lonely and more connected (Chopra, 2019), but it also acts as a microphone that can be used to amplify the voices of those who have previously felt silenced. Take the microblogging platform Twitter for example, which uses hashtags to more readily communicate particular themes, topics, events, or conversations (Olafson, 2020). Twitter was the first platform to incorporate the use of hashtags in order to help connect its users across the globe and to help group together similar tweets. Not only are hashtags used to help boost user engagement, they can also be used as a way in which to show support for a particular social issue (Olafson, 2020). The hashtag #BLM or #GirlsLikeUs showed advocacy for the rights of transgender women and helped build online communities where like people could unite and feel heard (Jackson, Bailey, & Welles, 2017). Hashtags have also opened up opportunities for particular political actions to be heard and seen, for example, the implication of ‘flash-mobs’ (Ling & Campbell, 2012), peaceful protests, charity events, and fundraisers. Thanks to social media, important news and events can be shared with people all across the world in less than a second. Not only is social media used to connect with people all across the world, but it also plays a large role in a person’s sense of belonging, especially within communities.

Whether it is communities created around race, gender, sexuality, religion, disability, or simply common interests, social media opens doors for those who have previously felt shut out, unheard, and outcasted. The union of like people assists in making a person feel as though they have a voice that is loud enough to be heard and one that is resounding enough to make a difference in this complicated world (Ling & Campbell, 2012). Similarly, Pittman and Reich (2016) found that using social media platforms to consistently assist in maintaining social relationships has the potential to “subtly embrace is in the warmth of

self-affirmation, the whispers of encouragement, and the meaningfulness of belonging” (Pittman & Reich, 2016). If ever a person feels as though they aren’t fitting in in their local communities, it can be guaranteed that someone within the online space will be able to relate to the exact same struggles. This helps to make users of digital and social media to feel validated and they are not alone, furthering their sense of self-esteem and confidence (Mackson, Brochu, & Schneider, 2019). Again, the use of hashtags can help users quickly find particular topics of interest more quickly and also find links to particular conversations that they feel they can contribute to, thus giving them a sense of purpose and, yes, a sense of belonging. Humans possess an innate psychological desire and need to belong in worthwhile groups whilst also taking part in meaningful social interactions. Social media is an exceptional tool that is used to help fulfill these innately drives by ensuring users feel as though they are a part of multiple social groups or communities (Mackson, Brochu, & Schneider, 2019). When a person feels like they have somewhere to belong, even if it’s not in their immediate surrounding, they begin to develop a sense of purpose; that perhaps they too can contribute things to this world that can make a difference. One way people are utilising social media to make an impact is through the creation of awareness for particular issues and topics from posts, hashtags, and discussions online which helps to create a stronger sense of social connectedness.

Social media has generated a new space where activism on controversial topics can be expressed and discussed (Gerbaudo, 2012). These new social platforms are also often used as “a means of representation” that are put in place to create “external attention” (Gerbaudo, 2012). In other words, social media has become a sort of outlet that people can use to draw attention and awareness to particular important issues, controversies, or worldly events in a safe space such as particular online communities. Although some may argue that this newfound platform in which to amplify our voices may cause more diversion than cohesion, Gerbaudo’s (2012) research clearly shows that the benefits that social media offers its lonely or outcasted users outweighs the platform’s negatives (Gerbaudo, 2012). Social media should be seen as a space in which to share and converse about issues and particular topics whilst simultaneously creating diverse groups of online communities where people across the world can unite and relate to one another. Social media has continually been found to maintain one’s sense of social connectedness (Mackson, Brochu, & Schneider, 2019), so it shouldn’t be overlooked that these new online technologies can work

to better a person's mental wellbeing along with their education of important hard-hitting topics. Particular social media applications such as Snapchat and Instagram have been found to be more effective in creating intimate connections along with benefitting our psychological wellbeing.

Instagram is a photo sharing platform where users can post photos and videos to both public and private communities. Many users of the app enjoy posting monumental moments of their lives while others use the app simply to communicate to friends and family across the world. Pittman and Reich (2016) suggest that photo-based platforms, such as Instagram, have the most potential to eliminate loneliness within younger generations because of the intimacy they offer (Pittman & Reich, 2016). Instead of other social media platforms that predominantly use text, apps like Instagram and Snapchat allow for the potential for more intimate connections to be made because they offer visual insight into the environments of its users. Additionally, a study was completed by Mackson, Brochu, and Schneider in 2019 which examined the association between Instagram and the psychological wellbeing of its users (Mackson, Brochu, & Schneider, 2019). The study looked at both users and non-users of the app Instagram, and the results revealed that participants who did use Instagram reported lower levels of depression and anxiety, along with lower levels of loneliness and higher levels of self-esteem (Mackson, Brochu, & Schneider, 2019). Social media sites have also found that their users' sense of connectedness was higher than those who don't use social media sites thus assisting with young people feeling more connected and as if they were part of a community where they could meet new friends and maintain strong relationships (Mackson, Brochu, & Schneider, 2019). Despite the clear evidence that social media plays a strong role in the positive development of young peoples' psychological wellbeing whilst also developing global connections, communities, and a sense of belonging, there are some arguments that might be made about the negative effects social media could have on its users.

Some people may argue that social media damages relationships between people rather than developing them. Firstly, it should be addressed that many people use social media for many different purposes. From online dating to online conversations about controversial topics of today's complicated world, different people find different ways to feel satisfied from the multitudes of social media platforms. Maintaining a safe and healthy online reputation only develops when a person has a strong sense of maturity in order to

completely understand the connotations of some of the content being shared today (Gerbaudo, 2012). Past research may have also suggested that these online technologies and platforms may be problematic or addictive thus contributing to potential negative consequences (Mackson, Brochu, & Schneider, 2019) however, recent advances in these applications have allowed for users to apply time limits for chosen applications that they might have previously had trouble removing themselves from (Ferenstein, 2019). Additionally, users who are abusing others online can now be muted, blocked, or even banned from particular platforms if their offence was particularly harmful or threatening thus reducing the levels of self-consciousness or online anxiety within its users who obey the guidelines of these applications (Mackson, Brochu, & Schneider, 2019). It therefore becomes clear that the benefits of social media, including community building, inclusivity, ease of communication, and many more, cannot be neglected to be seen.

Social media has become an everyday tool for the majority of people of the contemporary world, especially with younger generations. It has become a way for many people to feel a sense of belonging when maybe they feel like they don't belong in the communities that encompass their geographical locations or environments. The emergence of these digital communities has been especially important within today's society where it has completely changed the way that we communicate, develop, and retain strong relationships with friends and family globally, along with bringing attention to particular issues or topics. Social connectedness develops as social media does, so we can be confident that as times continues to change, we will be able to remain connected, included, and heard. It was also discussed that particular applications such as Instagram are seen to be more intimate and therefore more effective in creating and retaining online relationships. Research also shows that those who use Instagram have been found to be less anxious, depressed, and lonely, yet more self-confident. Community is and will be forever changing, but so long as digital and social media platforms continue to develop and thrive, our sense of community and belonging will continue to stay vehement.

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