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HAS INTERNET RESHAPED COMMUNICATION IN MANY WAYS THAT ARE TROUBLING OR NOT ?

BY

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BEING A PUBLISHABLE PAPER ON THE COURSE: THE SOCIAL MATRIX OF COMMUNICATION (MAC 685) IN PARTIAL FUFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN MASS COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The Internet has revolutionised every sector in society. The internet has made communication almost effortless as people communicate with friends and family irrespective of the distance. Hence, it has bridged geographical barriers that were once a challenge in the past eras. This paper used a systematic literature review process, which required searching for relevant papers using certain keywords. Keywords such as internet, communication, society, and social media were included in the search. The search was carried out through scholarly databases such as ResearchGate, PubMed, Google Scholar, and other online repositories. More than thirty articles were reviewed for the study. However, some articles were removed at various phases of the review due to their lack of connection to the topic and poor quality. The reviewed articles showed that Family connectivity increased through the use of the internet. The Internet has been likened to the reduction of loneliness as it improves interaction among family members. However, false information dissemination, cyberbullying, privacy violation and crisis information sharing have been reported continuously as a matter of serious concern.

Introduction

The Internet is a global network that connects computers. The Internet includes email, websites, online banking, online journals, cloud storage, and social media. Social media is the biggest platform that uses the internet to enable communication and content sharing. Social media platforms have a large user population who generate massive amounts of digital footprints, which are valuable data sources for observing and analysing human activities and behaviour (Gong & Yang, 2020).

In the fast-paced digital era, the internet has become an integral part of daily communication, fostering global connectivity while presenting challenges in privacy and misinformation. It is undeniable that social media has revolutionised

communication, global connections, audience engagement, business expansion, positive online presence, and brand growth (Raghavan, 2026).

The rapid advancement of Web 2.0 has fundamentally transformed information-sharing behaviours and communication trends on social media. The digital era is characterised by a willingness to share information (Cai, Kamaradin & Nujaimi, 2025). Social media platforms have become integral to modern communication, which enables connection through shared interests and content dissemination Kapoor et al., 2018). This is the widespread adoption of social media now encompassing over 5 billion active users globally (Petrosyan, 2024). Reflecting a fundamental transformation in communication patterns. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have reconfigured relationship dynamics between individuals, businesses, organisations, and their audiences (Okonkwo et al., 2023). These social media platforms can be grouped into six categories: microblogging sites, social networking sites, content sharing sites, product and service review sites, collaborative knowledge sharing sites, and others (Gong & Yang, 2020).

Many scholars are convinced that the Internet and especially social media extend and transform the traditional (offline) community. It allows people to stay in touch with many more friends, family members, and acquaintances than would have been possible without it (Chen, 2013; Ellison and Vitak, 2015). Nowadays, the Internet is a necessary conduit for modern society's infrastructure. Internet communications alter people's entire lifestyle, their way of thinking, their personalities, and their limits. New behaviour models are being developed, social mobility is rising, and mass consciousness-influencing technologies are improving. As new information and communication technologies are developed, employment markets become more globalised, and the interconnection, individualisation, and pluralisation of lifestyles are

strengthened. Therefore, one may argue that the Internet is a tool for reorganising society and the primary spheres of public life. In addition to altering how individuals communicate with one another, new information and communication technologies can raise doubts about the sustainability of "traditional" communication techniques. Therefore, the quick rise in popularity of online platforms serves as an illustration (Bessarab et al., 2022)

A detailed analysis by the Kepios team shows that there were 5.66 billion social media users, user identities, around the world at the start of October 2025. The latest figure indicates that 93.8% of the world's internet users, regardless of age, now use social media each month. (Kepios, 2025). According to the report from Kepios (2025), Facebook is the world's largest network for connecting people, building business communities through groups, targeted adverts, and local commerce via Marketplace. Facebook boasts of 3.07 billion monthly users, and these users are between the ages of 25 and 44. India, the United States of America, Indonesia, and Brazil are the top four countries.

Similarly, YouTube boasts of over 2.5 billion monthly users as the largest video platform and the second biggest search engine. The top users are from India, the United States of America, Brazil, and Japan. Instagram is the leading visual platform for influencers, for influencer marketing and e-commerce. With over 2 billion monthly users, mainly from India, the United States of America, Brazil, and Turkey, Instagram is renowned for driving trends in fashion, food, and travel. TikTok is predominant for short-form video content, and its powerful algorithm gives new creators viral potential. TikTok has over 1.5 million users aged 16-30, with the majority of them coming from the United States of America, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Europe. TikTok is banned in India. Twitter is a go-to platform for real-time news, public discourse, and

trending conversations. It is widely used by journalists, politicians, and tech leaders for debates and cultural narratives. It has over 600 million monthly users, aged 25 to 44. The United Kingdom, Japan, India, Brazil, and the United States are the top users (Kepios, 2025).

With active users across different social media platforms, it is right to state that, indeed, the internet has taken over this era. Elkatmis (2024) opines that, undoubtedly, social media is one of the significant components of computer and internet technologies. It offers users the opportunity to share emotions, thoughts, and life experiences through various means, such as text, images, and videos on the internet. In doing so, it not only provides a multifaceted communication and interaction opportunity for users of all ages but also creates a dynamic and entertaining parallel universe. This universe shapes and transforms individual, social, and cultural life, as well as habits. With the daily increase in user numbers, social media has become an integral part of our lives.

Despite the numerous benefits of social media, many concerns have been raised about the proliferation of misinformation, promotion of social isolation, privacy issues, social media addiction, and health concerns due to the undesirable use of social media (Raghavan, 2026). The phrase "problematic information" encompasses a variety of information modalities, including misinformation, disinformation, and false news, the latter of which is the most often used (Serrano-Puche 2021). Many people define disinformation as inaccurate information that is disseminated, regardless of whether there is an intention to deceive (Martel et al., 2020). Conversely, disinformation is intentionally inaccurate or misleading information that is spread with the goal of harming people or swaying public opinion (Lazer et al., 2018; Bakir and McStay, 2018).

Fabricating stories is a menace of great concern; every iteration of technological progression has provided new opportunities for news fabrication (Gelfert, 2018). A case in point is the advent of social media platforms, which have introduced new methods for generating, spreading, and consuming problematic information on an unprecedented scale (Lewandowsky et al. 2012). Notably, these platforms are characterised by an abundance of emotionally charged content that users encounter during their browsing activities, which can elicit various emotional reactions, potentially shaping how users engage with news-related posts and leading to various behaviours, including sharing, commenting, messaging, and liking (Effron & Raj, 2020; Kim & Yang, 2017).

Excessive social media use has been linked with psychological distress, social comparison pressure, and reduced emotional well-being. Social media can enhance connection, increase self-esteem, and improve a sense of belonging. The use of social media significantly impacts mental health; it can lead to tremendous stress, pressure to compare oneself to others, and increased sadness and isolation (Zsila & Reyes, 2023).

Similarly, several studies have pointed out the potentially detrimental effects of social media use on mental health. Concerns have been raised that social media may lead to body image dissatisfaction, raise the likelihood of addiction and involvement in cyberbullying, encourage phubbing behaviours, and negatively affect mood. Excessive use has increased loneliness, fear of missing out, and decreased subjective well-being and life satisfaction. Users at risk of social media addiction often report depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem (Harriger, Thompson & Tiggemann, 2023; Valkenburg, 2022; Bányai et al., 2017).

Social media's widespread use has aided in the decline of conventional communication methods. Digital communication via messaging applications, emojis, and brief status updates has somewhat replaced in-person encounters, handwritten

letters, and phone discussions. The quality of human connection is called into question by the trend toward digital communication. Social media may not have the depth and subtlety of face-to-face encounters, despite its ability to reach a worldwide audience and facilitate quick contact. Research on the effects of less in-person interaction on social skills and empathy is still underway. The social and psychological effects of social media are extensive. It may both promote and undermine mental health, give rise to worries about data security and privacy, and influence changes in communication styles that may change the character and quality of interpersonal relationships (Anuashok et al., 2024).

The internet wields the power to facilitate or inhibit effective communication. It has been applauded as a tool of social change and has been faulted as a tool of misinformation and disinformation. Whichever function the internet provides depends on how it is used by its users. Whether the internet has reshaped communication in a way that is troubling or not is an ongoing debate that this study seeks to address. Specifically, the study seeks to:

To review existing literature on how Internet communication has reshaped human interaction and the concerns arising from this transformation.

Empirical Review

The following articles provided valuable insights into the subject of discussion, exposing the benefits and potential dangers of the internet in human interaction.

Li et al (2022) found that the internet has been used significantly, increasing both the time and frequency of people's communication with their family and friends, making them feel more connected. Similarly, family connection increased by an average of 102.150 minutes, while interactions with friends increased by an average of 54.838 minutes. Additionally, internet use contributes to reducing loneliness by improving

people's interactions with their family members. Cai, Kamaradin and Nujaimi (2025) systematically reviewed 66 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2024, and the findings revealed four core research themes: general information sharing, health-related information sharing, false information dissemination, and crisis information sharing.

Elkatmis (2024) conducted a study using semi-structured interviews as the qualitative data collection method. The universe of the study consisted of 654 fourth-grade students attending state schools in seven different provincial centres representing the seven geographical regions of Turkey during the 2021–2022 academic year. The research findings show that approximately three-quarters of primary school fourth-grade students use social media on a daily basis. Moreover, most participants stated that they use social media for educational, communicative, and entertainment purposes. The most preferred social media platforms by students were identified as YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram.

According to research by Gu (2022), the participants were Chinese high school students. The sample was obtained using a practical and stratified sampling technique. The results of this study demonstrate the close relationship that high school students have with social media. Most high school students use social media on a daily basis. The majority of the students use social media for communication and conversation, followed by amusement and leisure. According to the report, these high school students have a strong reliance on social media, using it for almost three hours every day. Students are therefore greatly impacted by social media. Furthermore, 97.56% of high school adolescents utilise online memes when conversing with friends, followed by classmates (73.17%), family members (21.95%), teachers, and strangers (14.63%). In summary, the results of this study indicate that high school youngsters have a close

relationship with social media. Most high school students use social media on a daily basis. The majority of them use social media for chat and communication.

The significant impact of social media on modern communication dynamics was examined Anuashok1 et al (2024). The Study investigates how social media platforms influence social discourse, information transmission, and interpersonal relationships using theoretical frameworks and empirical investigation. The study found that social media's impact on innovative communication is very erratic. Social media platforms have altered how individuals communicate, exchange information, and express themselves within the evolving landscape. Both positive and negative outcomes have resulted from this trend, which has significantly changed the way people interact. Positively, social media facilitates smaller-than-expected contact, dismantling geographical barriers and enabling people to communicate anywhere. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram encourage customers to share thoughts, experiences, and ideas in real time, fostering a sense of community. As evidenced by movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo, where social media was a powerful tool for organising and raising voices, this connection has also played a significant role in mobilising social progress. Apart from that, social media has altered the elements of data distribution. People can purchase, especially distribute, and obtain data; organised media channels are not the only gatekeepers of news. There are benefits to this democratisation of data, such as highlighting distinctive marine centres and enabling a more interactive form of communication. However, social media wouldn't have been possible without its difficulties. The development of malware and how easily it may spread is one of the main causes for concern. The speed at which information travels on social media can result in the fast spread of misleading or deluding substance, affecting open-mindedness, and, in reality, contributing to the polarisation of societies.

Another issue that is concerning is the addictive nature of social media platforms. Social media can have a negative impact on the incidence of cyberbullying. The puzzle that these stages present can cause people to engage in risky behaviours, which has the opposite effect on the mental health of those they are focused on. Social media's effect on self-esteem, body image, and the concept of 'social validation' contribute to its complex societal proposition.

Astuti, Jefri and Novia (2023) sought to determine whether youth use of social media reduces social engagement with peers. The sample for this study was taken using a straightforward random sampling strategy as part of a quantitative approach. Students studying Business English Communication from batches 2019, 2020, and 2021 served as the study's subjects. Social media (X) and friend interaction (Y) are the two variables in this study. Data for this study were gathered using a questionnaire. The instruments and methods for gathering data were two different kinds of questionnaires: closed-ended and open-ended. The t-test, linearity test, and normality test were used in data analysis to assess hypotheses. Data analysis was done based on the questionnaire findings, and the two variables' scores fell into the high category. According to the t-test results, H0 is rejected when the t-count value is more than the t-table (7.722>2.002). Therefore, it may be concluded that the results support the Alternative Hypothesis, which holds that teenage social media use reduces friend engagement.

Gazi et al.'s (2024) study investigates the impact of social media on improving interpersonal communication, as well as its opportunities and problems. This study used an integrated approach of secondary data analysis methodology, including an extensive systematic review of the existing literature and the Canadian Research Data Collection (CREDC) national web-survey, to collect attitudinal and behavioural insights from

social media users on various platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, while considering theoretical frameworks such as Social Presence Theory and Media Richness Theory. Furthermore, this conceptual review applied PRISMA principles to investigate how social media promotes communication. The eligibility and exclusion criteria ensured that peer-reviewed articles were selected and credible. According to research, social media platforms improve interpersonal communication by encouraging greater interconnection, more accessible knowledge, and community development. Notably, while these digital environments have numerous advantages, such as the facilitation of learning and support networks, they also pose significant difficulties, such as misinformation, privacy concerns, and potential negative effects on mental health. These findings suggest a dual approach to reaping the benefits of social media in communication: promote user education to reduce misinformation and build digital literacy, while also considering regulations to protect against privacy violations and cyberbullying.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the Technological Determinism Theory.

Technological Determinism is a communication and social philosophy that holds that technology is the fundamental influence on human thought, social organisation, and communication practices. According to the thesis, technological breakthroughs not only benefit society but also actively shape how individuals interact, communicate, and understand reality. Early concepts of technical determinism may be traced back to Karl Marx's works, where he contended that changes in means of production influence social relations and consciousness. Thorstein Veblen expanded on the notion, emphasising technology's role in shaping economic and social systems (Marx, 1976; Veblen, 1914; McLuhan, 1964).

Technological determinism holds that technology influences social structures and cultural values. From this perspective, the Internet is viewed as a force that fundamentally affects communication rules, regardless of human intention. Critics claim that algorithmic communication systems prioritise speed and engagement over accuracy, which promotes sensationalism and disinformation.

Methodology

This paper employed a systematic literature review methodology, which required a search for relevant articles using appropriate keywords. Keywords such as internet, communication, society and social media were keyed in for the search. The search was conducted using scholarly databases such as ResearchGate, PubMed, Google Scholar and other online repositories. Over thirty articles were reviewed for the study. However, some articles were excluded at the various stages of the assessment due to a lack of relevance to the topic and the quality of the articles.

Conclusion

Family connectivity increased through the use of the internet. People could communicate using email and social media, even if they are miles apart. The Internet has been likened to the reduction of loneliness as it improves interaction among family members. Similarly, social media has been applauded for information sharing, especially health-related information. Furthermore, it was discovered that students use social media on a daily basis for both educational entertainment and information purposes. The most common platforms identified were YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram. Strong social media reliance was also recorded, indicating a close relationship with social media among the students. It was also discovered that social media platforms have altered the communication pattern, dismantling barriers and

enabling easy communication. Social media has made it possible for movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo, indicating that it's a strong voice for such campaigns.

On the contrary, the internet, especially social media, has been faulted for reducing friend and family engagement. People communicate freely using different digital platforms, reducing face-to-face interactions. False information dissemination has been reported continuously as a matter of serious concern. Privacy concerns, crisis information sharing and potential negative effects on mental health have often been mentioned as some of the challenges of digital communication platforms. Privacy violations and cyberbullying have been identified as some security concerns of social media that require urgent attention.

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