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The Disagreeableness of Social Media:

How the Convenience of Facebook Can Create Fools

During a time when all things electronic started speeding up and a letter from home took too long to reach the hands of its receiver, Mark Zuckerberg and other Harvard students decided communication would be faster and more accessible online (Shepherd). Facebook was the result of that thought-process, and since its inception in 2004 to help students at Harvard interact with one another, it has grown exponentially (Shepherd). In other words, Facebook, with its intention to allow students to be social through media, has ultimately become a multi-billion dollar industry that does more than send messages from one to another saying, “Hi! How have you been?” (Shepherd). It is now a platform for everything. It is a means to get across any kind of thought its users have. Of course, some of those thoughts are more than a genuine hello or a comment on an old photo. Sometimes they are fake, hateful, and inappropriate in nature, and it is at times like these that scrolling through one’s Facebook stream can bring more scowls than smiles. Twenty years after its creation, Facebook has allowed anyone and everyone to communicate about almost anything and everything, and with three billion personal agendas, not including those of various Facebook Groups, it is easy to see that even a statement as simple as, “Trump is…,” can make the average person look like a fool because they posted it, re-posted it, or believed it in the first place (Shepherd).

If one is not a Facebook member and does not really know what Facebook does for those who have joined, Manish Dhingra and Rakesh K. Mudgal describe in their article, "Historical Evolution of Social Media: An Overview," that Facebook is "[a] social networking website that permits [users] to send messages, create profiles, upload photos and videos by users who are registered on it and also promotes and facilitates interaction between friends, family and colleagues" (5). Facebook has always been about connecting people with people. A profile page allows members to present information about themselves that illustrates their story, including their age, relationship status, education, and employment. If the person is known, and has been befriended online, there is a trust in the information that is provided, that it is factual and a true representation of the person who posted it. Accompany that with photographs and videos of vacations, babies, and pets, and a clearer picture of the person comes to light. Family members and friends from away or just in the next room can connect or reconnect with their loved ones in a very visual way. They can also comment on what they have seen, repost videos, or tag themselves in pictures. That is what Zuckerberg originally created: a means to communicate with friends and family in a user-friendly manner on a visually appealing screen; to trust the communication as much as the one communicating it. Since then, however, Facebook has become the avenue for some to spread fake news and hate speech, to pressure others into uncertain situations, and to provoke political turmoil.

Undoubtedly, changing one's age on a Facebook profile page is faking it. If friends or family are aware, the member might get called out for the lie. This is nothing new and has likely been going on since the site's inception. But what if there is information being sent out that is more harmful than that? Any person or group of people can set up an account under false

pretenses and misguide its readers. It is not uncommon for people to impersonate others and create false accounts using those identities. How often have people posted phoney job positions for hire? Attempted to sell scam products? Retouched photos to deceive the masses? Reported fake news to incite anger? Facebook cannot control whether someone tells a lie in a post. Nor can it fact-check all information relayed across its pages and profiles. But over the years, it has attempted to do something about the circulation of misinformation. In a May 2021 article on Meta titled, “Taking Action Against People Who Repeatedly Share Misinformation,” it is proclaimed that new steps are implemented to reduce the spread of misinformation and particularly by those who constantly spread it: “we're launching new ways to inform people if they’re interacting with content that’s been rated by a fact-checker as well as taking stronger action against people who repeatedly share misinformation on Facebook.” The site further explains, “Whether it’s false or misleading content about COVID-19 and vaccines, climate change, elections or other topics, we’re making sure fewer people see misinformation on our apps.” Facebook is trying to control what the message is and who is sending it. Its desire to present accurate information might help stop some of those backyard uncles from preaching about anti-vaccines, and maybe it will allow elderly grannies to vote for the candidate of their choice and not who they are bullied to elect. Facebook has not gone so far as to censor everything and everyone, but it has tried to do its part to present accurate information by reliable posters, until recently, that is.

In an Opinion Piece by Norr Noman, an MSNBC columnist, in mid January of this year, it might appear that some of the directions towards information affirmation have been overridden or altered to allow for more freedom of speech. Noman writes that the alterations now taken hold

in the Facebook universe "replace fact-checking teams with user-driven notes…, citing a desire to promote free speech and to reflect the political landscape." Further into the article, Noman interprets the adjustments as "new policies [that] allow for hate speech against society's most vulnerable groups." He defends this comment with Facebook's actual policy that states, "'we do allow allegations of mental illness or abnormality when based on gender or sexual orientation, given political and religious discourse about transgenderism and homosexuality.'" It looks as though Facebook has tried to move with the flow of tides and ultimately has determined that discrediting some things are not worth the effort. Therefore, Facebook members are left trying to discern fact from opinion, or worse, fact from pure hate.

Facebook started with a strong idea to connect the masses through a forum that allowed a person to reflect their true identity and to meet up in chat groups and community pages because of common connection. The intentions and medium were reasonable and good. Humans, being who they are, have helped to ruin what once was a place to post baby pictures and educational credentials. They have manipulated the medium for their own purposes, sometimes completely contrary to the reason it all started. They have hated and harmed and incited and ignited in the purpose of making their beliefs known and to promote their agenda through one of the easiest and fastest forms of communication there is: electronic media. Their posts and re-posts on Facebook have hurt, intentionally or otherwise, millions of people who identify outside of the demographics of those posting the negative content. Because of comments, posts, reposts, created profiles, impersonations, scams, false advertising, fake news, and everything else that has negatively impacted the receiver, Facebook is more than just the opportunity and place to share wedding photos, health statuses, and sports team interests. It is now a place riddled with lies,

hate, and disinformation that pops up in one's stream, only to ruin the day and make the one posting it, hidden or visible, look like a true dimwit. Too bad Facebook's newest policies did not include a warning on its site to prevent idiocy. If it had, the website, and all that is good about it, might allow millions of its users to have civil conversations, as it did in Massachusetts in 2004, when communicating electronically simply meant typing, "Hello!"

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