

Mkhitar Sebastatsi Educational Complex

Student: Alex Paturyan, High School, Grade 11

Supervisor: Nune Aydinyan

Reviewer: Armen Voskanyan

Research work

**The Impact of Social Media on Individuals
and Society**

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Introduction

Social media has become one of the most influential technologies of the 21st century. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and Snapchat have transformed the way people communicate, access information, and interact with the world. What began as simple online networking websites has rapidly evolved into a sophisticated global system that connects billions of users every day (Karapetyan & Gardner, 2023).

The influence of these platforms extends far beyond personal communication; it deeply affects modern education, business practices, politics, entertainment, culture, and psychological well-being. Through social media, individuals can share ideas instantly, stay informed about current events, and participate in global discussions regardless of geographical distance. At the same time, severe concerns have emerged regarding data privacy, systemic misinformation, cyberbullying, and excessive screen time.

Research Aim

The primary aim of this research is to analyze the dualistic impact of social media on individuals and society by critically evaluating both its structural advantages and systemic disadvantages. Particular attention will be given to its influence on communication, education, business, mental health, and privacy, culminating in a detailed case study of how these global trends manifest within the specific societal framework of contemporary Armenia.

Research Objectives

To achieve this overarching aim, the study is structured around five strategic investigative objectives, which correspond directly to the subsequent chapters of this paper:

Objective 1 (Chapter 1): To trace the chronological development of social media from early internet communities to mobile applications, identifying the core technical and social catalysts driving its global popularity.

Objective 2 (Chapter 2): To examine the positive contributions of digital networking, specifically exploring its capacity to facilitate global connectivity, expand educational accessibility, create economic opportunities for enterprises, and mobilize social awareness.

Objective 3 (Chapter 3): To investigate the primary negative impacts of prolonged platform exposure, evaluating documented correlations with youth mental health deterioration, productivity loss, online harassment, and the unverified spread of fake news.

Objective 4 (Chapter 4): To contextualize these broader trends within the Republic of Armenia by examining local platform preferences, the country's reliance on networks for real-time news during crises, and the domestic business and cultural impacts.

Objective 5 (Chapter 5): To synthesize emerging technological trends, such as artificial intelligence and virtual environments, in order to project the future regulatory and ethical frameworks required to safeguard digital users.

Relevance of the Research

The relevance of this research stems from the pressing need for balanced digital literacy in an era where societal dependency on digital feeds has outpaced public awareness and institutional regulations. Understanding the cognitive and psychological impacts of continuous platform engagement is vital for helping individuals become more informed users, develop healthier digital habits, and protect their well-being.

Locally, this study is highly relevant to the modern Armenian landscape. Following successive periods of intense national crises, public health emergencies, and political shifts, Armenia's digital environment has become deeply influential yet structurally vulnerable, turning social networks into volatile primary news sources (Izquierdo-Iranzo & Sayadyan, 2024; Paturyan & Melkonyan, 2024). By identifying specific local usage patterns and algorithmic challenges, this research provides essential insights for Armenian students, educators, and community members aiming to cultivate critical thinking, maximize digital economic opportunities, and minimize online harms for the next generation.

Chapter 1: The Development and Growth of Social Media

1.1. The History of Social Media

The origins of social media can be traced back to the early days of the internet. During the 1990s, websites such as Six Degrees allowed users to create profiles and connect with friends online. Although primitive by modern standards, these platforms introduced concepts that would later become central to social networking.

The early 2000s witnessed the rise of platforms such as MySpace and Friendster, which allowed users to customize profiles, share music, and communicate with others. These services became particularly popular among young people and demonstrated the growing demand for online social interaction.

A major turning point occurred in 2004 with the launch of Facebook. Originally created for university students, Facebook quickly expanded worldwide and became one of the most widely used social networking platforms in history. Soon afterward, YouTube revolutionized online video sharing, while Twitter introduced real-time communication through short posts.

The introduction of smartphones further accelerated social media growth. Mobile applications allowed users to remain connected at all times, leading to the creation of platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. Today, billions of people use social media daily, making it one of the most powerful forms of communication ever developed (Karapetyan & Gardner, 2023).

1.2. Why Social Media Became So Popular

Several factors contributed to the rapid growth of social media. First, it provides instant communication. Messages, photos, videos, and news can be shared across the globe within seconds. Second, social media satisfies people's natural desire for social interaction and belonging. Users can maintain friendships, join communities, and connect with individuals who share similar interests regardless of location.

Third, the accessibility of smartphones and internet services has made social media available to a larger portion of the global population. Many platforms are free to use, allowing users from different economic backgrounds to participate. Finally, social media offers entertainment, education, and information all in one place. Users can watch videos, follow current events, learn new skills, and communicate with friends through a single application.

Chapter 2: Positive Impact of Social Media

2.1. Communication and Global Connectivity

One of the greatest advantages of social media is its ability to connect people worldwide. Family members living in different countries can communicate instantly through video calls, messaging applications, and social networking platforms.

Social media has also helped create international communities. Individuals with shared interests can participate in discussions, exchange ideas, and collaborate on projects regardless of geographic boundaries. This has contributed to greater cultural exchange and understanding between people from different backgrounds (Karapetyan & Gardner, 2023). During emergencies and natural disasters, social media often serves as a valuable communication tool. Information can be shared quickly, helping individuals stay informed and locate assistance when needed.

2.2. Education and Learning

Social media has significantly influenced education. Students now have access to educational content that was previously difficult to obtain. Platforms such as YouTube contain millions of tutorials covering subjects ranging from mathematics and science to music and language learning.

Online study groups allow students to collaborate, ask questions, and share resources. Teachers and educational institutions use social media to communicate with students, distribute assignments, and provide additional learning materials. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of digital communication platforms in education. During periods of remote learning, social media and online communication tools helped maintain educational continuity for millions of students worldwide (Paturyan & Melkonyan, 2024).

2.3. Business and Economic Opportunities

Social media has transformed modern business practices. Companies can now reach customers directly through digital marketing campaigns, reducing the need for expensive traditional advertising methods.

Small businesses particularly benefit from social media because they can promote products and services to large audiences at relatively low cost. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have enabled entrepreneurs to build successful businesses from home. Influencer marketing has also emerged as a significant industry. Content creators with large audiences can promote products and services, helping businesses reach targeted consumer groups more effectively.

2.4. Social Awareness and Activism

Social media has become a cornerstone tool for raising awareness about social issues and shifting political landscapes. Campaigns related to environmental protection, public health, human rights, and charitable causes regularly transition from viral hashtags into powerful real-world actions. By bypassing state-controlled traditional media networks, digital platforms have democratized information dissemination, providing everyday citizens with a direct mechanism to organize, document, and amplify grassroots movements.

To master civic participation in the digital age, citizens must understand the mechanics of media "like the five fingers on their hand" (Media Initiatives Center, 2024). When analyzing modern political history, this framework perfectly traces how digital tools transformed from simple communication networks into sophisticated instruments of revolutionary mobilization.

As explored in foundational political frameworks, political decisions and authority are increasingly shaped by external forces like mass protest and non-traditional media networks, shifting control away from centralized governments toward bottom-up "people power" (Adams et al., 2020). The modern era of digital activism began globally with the Arab Spring between 2010 and 2011. Across Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, anti-government protestors utilized early iterations of Facebook and Twitter to coordinate mass demonstrations and share strategies for evading state crackdowns.

According to political perspectives analyzed by Adams et al. (2020), these networks function as external political catalysts that break down traditional state authority, unpack complicated political barriers, and allow alternative ideologies to spread faster than ever before. This digital landscape fundamentally shifted how citizens confront political systems, tracing a line from global internet anxieties to active public squares where state violence could be broadcast directly to an international audience, forever altering how modern resistance movements operate.

In Armenia, the true maturation of digital civic consciousness began with localized socio-economic struggles. In 2013, when municipal authorities attempted to increase Yerevan's public transit fare from 100 to 150 AMD, citizens launched the highly coordinated "No to 150 Dram" (Չեմ եմ 150 դրամին) campaign. Using Facebook as an alternative town square, youth activists organized boycotts and established community-driven carpooling networks that ultimately forced a complete reversal of the government's decision.

This digital strategy expanded dramatically during the Electric Yerevan protests of 2015, which were sparked by a proposed hike in electricity tariffs. Protesters occupying Baghramyan Avenue bypassed heavily censored state television by using smartphones to live-stream interactions with police in real time. The international hashtag *#ElectricYerevan* went viral, creating unprecedented global visibility and establishing a digital shield of transparency that successfully minimized police escalation.

The absolute culmination of this digital evolution occurred during the 2018 Armenian Velvet Revolution. This movement completely redefined how decentralized, non-violent political transformations are executed (Paturyan & Melkonyan, 2024). Protest leaders heavily leveraged Facebook Live to broadcast their 200-kilometer march from Gyumri to Yerevan as it happened. This unfiltered transparency created a deep sense of psychological proximity and shared collective ownership among the population. Through viral network dynamics, citizens crowdsourced roadblocks, coordinated localized flash-mobs, and sustained entirely non-violent resistance. In this way, social media acted as a decentralized nervous system for the country, allowing millions of citizens to act synchronously and resulting in a historic, peaceful transition of power.

Chapter 3: Negative Impacts of Social Media

3.1. Mental Health Concerns

Despite its benefits, social media can negatively affect mental health. Excessive use has been associated with increased stress, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness in some individuals (Karapetyan & Gardner, 2023).

Many users compare themselves to carefully selected images and content posted by others. Because people often share only positive aspects of their lives, viewers may develop unrealistic expectations regarding appearance, success, and happiness. Research has suggested that frequent exposure to idealized lifestyles can contribute to reduced self-esteem, particularly among teenagers and young adults. The pressure to gain likes, followers, and online approval may also increase emotional stress.

3.2. Addiction and Reduced Productivity

Social media platforms are designed to encourage user engagement. Features such as notifications, infinite scrolling, and personalized content can make it difficult for users to disconnect.

Excessive social media use may interfere with academic performance, work productivity, and sleep quality. Many individuals spend several hours each day browsing content, often without realizing how much time has passed. For students, excessive use can become a significant distraction from studying and other responsibilities. Maintaining balance between online activities and real-world obligations is therefore essential.

3.3. Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

Cyberbullying is one of the most serious challenges associated with social media. Unlike traditional bullying, online harassment can occur at any time and potentially reach large audiences.

Victims may experience emotional distress, anxiety, depression, and reduced self-confidence. The anonymity provided by some platforms can encourage harmful behavior that individuals might not engage in face-to-face. Governments, schools, and social media companies continue to develop strategies to address cyberbullying and create safer online environments.

3.4. Misinformation, Fake News, and Operational Security Vulnerabilities

The rapid spread of information on social media creates severe opportunities for misinformation. False or misleading content can be shared quickly before fact-checkers have an opportunity to verify it. Examples have occurred globally during elections, health crises, and international conflicts. However, beyond the spread of false text, the uncontrolled broadcasting of *real-time, authentic* data on social media during active warfare poses an equal, if not more lethal, threat to human life by completely undermining military Operational Security (OPSEC).

The catastrophic potential of social media exposure during modern warfare was brutally demonstrated during the 2020 44-Day Azerbaijani-Armenian War and its immediate aftermath. Amidst intense anxiety over missing soldiers and the initial staggered processes of returning prisoners of war (POWs), families, volunteers, and local users frequently utilized platforms like Facebook, Telegram, and TikTok to crowdsource info regarding stranded units. Well-intentioned citizens routinely uploaded localized photos, videos, and names of Armenian soldiers who were holding defensive lines or attempting to navigate back through dense terrain.

This total breakdown of digital discipline yielded lethal intelligence for opposing forces. In mid-December 2020, following the November 9 ceasefire, groups of Armenian servicemen remained cut off but secure in the mountainous forests of the Hadrut region, specifically around the villages of Hin Tagher and Khtsaberd. When unvetted updates, celebratory footage, and distinct location markers of these isolated soldiers were shared across domestic Armenian social media circles, Azerbaijani intelligence forces actively monitored and geo-located the leaks. By tracking the digital trail left on public feeds, Azerbaijani forces successfully mapped the exact coordinates of the Armenian troops hiding in the woods. This digital exposure directly contributed to the mass encirclement, subsequent capture, and tragic detention of over sixty Armenian servicemen (Center for Truth and Justice, 2022). This specific tragedy proves that in the digital age, a single thoughtless social media post can instantly weaponized into open-source intelligence, transforming online platforms from tools of connection into literal geolocating beacons that place lives in immediate jeopardy. Consequently, cultivating a deep understanding of digital hygiene and maintaining strict informational boundaries during national crises is no longer just a matter of media literacy—it is a critical imperative for physical survival (Media Initiatives Center, 2024).

Chapter 4: Social Media in Armenia

4.1. Social Media Usage in Armenia

Social media plays an important role in everyday life in Armenia. A significant portion of the population uses digital platforms for communication, entertainment, business, and access to news, alongside highly dynamic advancements in personal smartphone ownership and technological penetration (Harutyunyan et al., 2024).

Facebook remains one of the most widely used platforms in the country. Instagram has also experienced substantial growth, particularly among younger users. Messaging applications such as Facebook Messenger, Telegram, and WhatsApp are commonly used for both personal and professional communication (Karapetyan & Gardner, 2023). The increasing availability of smartphones and internet access has contributed to the continued growth of social media usage throughout Armenia.

4.2. Social Media as a Source of Information

For many Armenians, social media has become a primary source of news and information. Users can receive updates about local and international events in real time.

This accessibility provides significant benefits, particularly during important political developments, emergencies, and public events. However, the high polarization within the domestic internet landscape generates high visual and text volume that forces a continuous need for information verification, as inaccurate reports can spread rapidly across unregulated feeds (Izquierdo-Iranzo & Sayadyan, 2024).

4.3. Business and Cultural Impact in Armenia

Many Armenian businesses use social media to advertise products, communicate with customers, and expand their market reach. Small businesses often rely heavily on social media marketing because it offers a cost-effective alternative to traditional advertising.

Social media has also provided Armenian artists, musicians, photographers, and content creators with opportunities to reach international audiences. Through digital platforms, local talent can gain recognition beyond national borders.

Chapter 5: The Future of Social Media

Technology continues to reshape social media platforms. Artificial intelligence increasingly influences content recommendations, advertising, and moderation systems. Virtual reality and augmented reality technologies may transform how users interact online in the future. Concepts such as virtual social spaces could create entirely new forms of digital communication.

At the same time, governments and technology companies face growing pressure to address concerns regarding privacy, misinformation, and online safety. Regulations designed to protect users while preserving freedom of expression will likely play an important role in shaping the

future of social media. As technology evolves, society must continue balancing the benefits of connectivity with the need to protect users from potential harms.

Conclusion

Social media has fundamentally transformed modern society. It has revolutionized communication, expanded educational opportunities, created new economic possibilities, and enabled individuals to connect across geographical boundaries. These benefits have made social media an essential part of daily life for billions of people worldwide.

However, social media also presents significant challenges. Issues such as cyberbullying, misinformation, privacy concerns, excessive screen time, and mental health impacts demonstrate that digital platforms are not without risks. Understanding these challenges is necessary for responsible and effective use.

In Armenia, social media continues to play a growing role in communication, business, and access to information. Its influence on public opinion, culture, and economic activity reflects broader global trends (Karapetyan & Gardner, 2023).

Ultimately, social media is neither entirely positive nor entirely negative. Its impact depends largely on how it is used. By promoting digital literacy, critical thinking, and responsible online behavior, society can maximize the advantages of social media while minimizing its potential harms. As technology continues to advance, understanding the effects of social media will remain increasingly important for individuals, communities, and future generations.

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