

Future of Society's Faulty Social Media

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As we go into a tech-driven future, the urgent question lingers: Is it time to change the era of our social media before it changes us? In the article, “A better kind of social media is possible — if we want it” from *The Washington Post*, Bina Venkataraman (2023) argues that social media has become toxic and there is a need to create a new form of social media that “serves the best interests of society instead of exploiting its worst impulses.” She highlights the idea of having special communities built based around one given's interest, and therefore promoting “safe spaces,” where people can talk with others on the same subject. Overall, she believes that even though most people veer towards those private messaging apps, we should still push for an inviting, fun, and open social platform. I fully agree with Venkataraman (2023) that our media now needs revision, and I find her perspective of wanting a shift in its curriculum an essential part of bettering our society. Venkataraman (2023) delves into the problems of our apps today, calls for change within the political aisle, advocates for the rise of public feeds, and discusses the positive expansion of a strong talent pool for social networking.

Venkataraman (2023) begins her article by sharing the important contradiction between a previous forecast of what our media would look like compared to what the current social status is. She writes, “The pendulum has fully swung from early Pollyanna predictions that social media would unite families and topple repressive regimes to today’s declarations that it is depressing teenagers and destroying democracy.” Venkataraman’s (2023) meaning behind the words “destroying democracy” refers to the belief that social media is having negative effects on democratic principles and processes, such as polarizing society. I support this statement, as the media is filled with negative posts that violate other's expressions and truly pin down the meaning of a democracy for the people. I’ve witnessed these violations during my time on

Instagram, seeing several racist, anti-religious, and judgmental posts scattered on my feed; while still many wonder why opinions aren't voiced. European Liberties (2021) from "Why is social media toxic? how to deal with it the right way?" goes even deeper on the concept of "destroying democracy", advocating against the content posted on popular apps. European Liberties (2021) mentions how "Social media is toxic not just because it is addictive by design, but also because platforms spread disinformation and they encourage their users to engage with these fake news more than with fact checked 'real' news." False quotes combined with a flashy presentation draws in an audience to its comment section. Users usually never do further research or ask where the info was cited from, "As a consequence, disinformation spreads faster and reaches a wider audience. This has a toxic impact on public trust in democratic institutions like elections, governments or any public services" (European Liberties, 2021). These issues are not visible to some, meaning that they are the target audience for 'disinformation,' which is especially seen in vulnerable elders.

On top of that, Elizabeth Germino (2022) from *CBS News*, in her writing "How social media has changed the U.S. congress." brings up a study done by *Northwestern University*, saying, "[...] the most effective way to build a successful social media presence is by sharing content which criticizes political opposition. According to a 2021 report published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, a social media post is 67% more likely to be shared with every word attacking one's political opponents. The study found that across multiple datasets, the main catalyst of engagement was anger." emotions were valued over facts and statistics, resulting in bias. Although false information spread across social media is inevitable, a change in the platform would allow for the issue to be minimized. Venkataraman (2023) then recognized the political aspect of futurizing social platforms. She realizes that if changes were to

be made, government accountability would need to be lightened: “Frustration is widespread; calls for change cross the political aisle. Pioneers have decamped from Twitter and Facebook to join experimental platforms such as Mastodon and Post [...] To get there will require new business models and funding sources — and probably some smart and not heavy-handed legislation.” She believes that the next era of social media should be shaped by the public it serves, not the political leaders that overshadow the app. As of now, I mainly use an open social media app called Discord. The app has servers run by individuals themselves instead of the company. Personally, my experience with it has been good because of the variety I get from every channel. I can join certain groups that strictly talk about my interests, and it makes me feel as if I can voice my opinion; unlike apps such as Instagram, Twitter, etc. The write-up ‘NY officials announce legislation aimed at protecting kids on social media’ from *CNN Business* further expands on legislation being pushed by introducing the “Stop Addictive Feeds Exploitation (SAFE) for Kids Act.” Athena Jones and Brian Fung (2023) describe that this act allows for content to be decided by the users instead of the popular algorithm; altering the feed and allowing for parents to set a time limit for app usage. Which once again, is meant to combat “[...] significantly high rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts and other mental health issues[...]” (CNN Business, 2023). Supporting Venkataraman’s (2023) move away from big apps, Jones and Fung (2023) address that “The bill targets platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter and YouTube, where feeds are comprised of user-generated content [...]” veering towards a society shaped curriculum.

Venkataraman (2023) expresses enthusiasm for a new form of social media by quoting author *Eli Pariser*, claiming, “next-generation digital platforms should be public spaces [...] In the future social media landscape [...] people might go to a certain online network to connect

with people at their school, a different one to connect with neighbors, and yet another to connect with people in their cities or more globally.” The concept of shifting to public feeds opens new opportunities for fostering a sense of community that prioritizes the collective society and diverse interests of users. I have a virtual reality headset, which is considered as one of the ‘next generation’ devices on the market today. A game on the console called ‘VR Chat’ reminds me of this idea of a ‘social media landscape.’ People from around the world are put into a giant map where they can connect with others by playing games, talking, etc. Venkataraman (2023) gives an example of the benefits of an open community, “Wikipedia, although it is an online encyclopedia and not a social media network, shows what can happen when people are invited to tend their own digital community gardens.” Notably, as a nonprofit, this platform was designed not to keep its users addicted, but to share credible information with the public. We already have a taste of what the communities Venkataraman is talking about with the current Wikipedia. If we draw more of our attention towards these subjects, new platforms will work better than ever. There are some platforms just like Wikipedia. Brent Csutoras (2022) wrote an article called '6 Alternative Social Media Platforms to Consider.' He mentions six platforms, but one stands out: it's called Ello. Csutoras (2022) describes the app as “[...] a social media platform just like Facebook, but without the ads, the infamous 'like' button, and the threats to security and privacy.” Apps like these remove the competitive aspect of fighting to see who has more followers and/or comparing who has more physical possessions. The app provides both a unique chat for people interested in 'art, fashion, photography, web culture, and privacy,' not requiring much info to sign up. I looked more into the social network and found that the company never sold any info to third parties, supporting their claims. Sadly, the app was discontinued when bought out by a larger organization.

Finally, Venkataraman (2023) supports the idea that we should push for the expansion of a talent pool used towards social networking. She ends her article with the following statements:

“[...] technologies and the talent pool to create new kinds of online communities are expanding. Thousands of workers have left Big Tech companies in recent months, some of whom itch to do something civic-minded. While building social networks once took a great deal of money and technical expertise, today’s wannabe hosts can use open-source protocols and their own servers to build micro communities that offer users more control over content, privacy and the rules of the road.”

This slow decentralization of large companies reflects the growing desire for digital spaces that prioritize transparency, in which communities can feel as if they're not being under control and open to different opportunities. Recruitment Marketing Magazine (2022) goes further into the concept of a ‘talent pool’ in their article, ‘How Social Media Talent Pooling Helps You Hire.’ They introduced the networking app called 'LinkedIn,' allowing smaller companies to look for skilled workers by having a community based strictly on careers. The app allows one to showcase their success and achievements openly to the public. The author describes the work pools within social media, “having a dedicated social media page just for careers can be a massive drawcard as it segments members of your audience into potential candidates for a talent pool, and also helps you avoid oversaturating your main social media channel with employee stories” (Recruit Marketing Magazine, 2022). This approach can enhance your organization's overall brand image and engagement with potential job candidates. Both of my parents use LinkedIn to make connections with co-workers and industry professionals. They said that the site helped them with networking, and it allowed them to talk with employers about possible job

opportunities. For example, my father was offered a position at Medtronic after they saw his qualifications that were posted on LinkedIn.

The future of media starts with the problems of our apps today. Change within the political aspect, the increase of public feeds, and the expansion of new technology and social networks are what drive us as a society to improve. My personal experience with the current media has had some rough patches, especially with those big apps like Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. I've always felt out of place, endlessly looking for communities in my area that equally share my passions, such as ones for the sport of soccer (somehow barely finding any groups). I may sound like a geek, worrying about the future of our social media. But it's an important thing to talk about, considering that social media will be present throughout our whole lives, shaping generations as they come. Addressing the question of whether it's time to reshape the era of our social media before it reshapes us, the answer should be quite simple: yes, we need to take action and propel our media into the future instead of leaving it merely as a dream.

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