The Daily Star
CELEBRATING
29
YEARS OF
JOURNALISM WITHOUT
FEAR OR FAVOUR

SEGMENT 2
LIFESTYLE EVOLUTIONS
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Stuck in the web: How ok is our digital life

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With every yang, there is always yin, and the Internet has its chock full of yin. When something as influential and far-reaching as the world wide web exists in our lives, you can bet there would be consequences, especially when taken to the extreme or in the wrong hands. The Internet is responsible for many afflictions that are currently hounding society, and will unfortunately continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Issues such as online bullying, cybercrime, rampant pornography, mental disorders, fleeting attention spans are just the cream of the bad crop that are the negatives of the Internet.

FAKE NEWS
While many people are under the impression that 'fake news' is new, it really is not. Back then, it paraded around under the name of yellow journalism, and tonnes of establishments had their hands in it, and history is littered with many exorbitant false news; the Great Moon

Hoax, the Spanish-American war, the rushed reporting on the Titanic, and so on.

With the possibility of instantaneous information, it would only be a matter of time before this concept of sensationalised journalism caught up with the digital age to a whole new generation of unsuspecting victims.

Fake news can be of two types: completely fabricated, or sensationalising existing news with false information. As time went on, people has slowly become somewhat adept at spotting completely fabricated ones, but the unfortunate victims of them are people in the 50-70-year old mark. Modifying existing news is the actual terror here, because it lures users in with established facts, and then modifies them to boost their website statistics by bringing in more and more users, and we do not do ourselves any favours as well, as we have a tendency to share articles before verifying them, further boosting their reach.

INTERNET ADDICTION
Internet addiction is a very new type of dependency, and something that is under consideration by the vast scientific community. Also, prevalence rates for Internet addiction vary across different countries. In essence, it refers to people who spend more time with the Internet in order to raise their feelings of satisfaction.

This form of addiction is especially prevalent across the young adult segment, alienating them from

their peers, and replaces real social interaction with a poor virtual substitute. Excessive Internet usage has its share of other problems, namely juvenile obesity and severe lack of exercise, amongst many others.

CREATING SOCIAL ISOLATION
The Internet has brought about a communication medium without any perceived borders, and as such, many communities of like-minded people have a refuge online, which would have been very difficult if online communities never existed. Users end up developing close friendships or intimate relationships with loads of individuals with such similar interests, and to remain connected with said individuals, users stay online for long hours.

Similar to Internet addiction, time spent on the Internet does not necessarily translate to more intimate social bonds in the real world, especially if the time that could have been given to nurture it is spent online. Owing to such behaviour, Internet addicts often end up isolating themselves from their families and peers. Extensive social media use, in particular, is connected with loneliness and social isolation.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD AND HARMFUL COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT
The Internet is probably the greatest treasure trove of knowledge ever created by human hands. And the power to access it is always within reach; be it a computer or a smartphone. However, like all things in life, too much of something is never a good thing. And so it is for the Internet, because there is something called information overload, something to not take lightly, as this impedes on your ability to make sound decisions; be it work or personal. And information overload is much more prevalent these days as we have more channels by which we receive said information: e-mail, social media, mobile, print media, radio, TV, etc.

DIMINISHING CULTURAL DIVERSITY
Similar to how television was doing it back in the '90s, the Internet seems to be doing the same nowadays. Cultural diversity has been a longstanding issue, and for us, something that we seem to be losing, as many people tend to forget that cultural diversity is what differentiates people from different nations.

You see, the Internet heavily promotes Western lifestyle, and all that is supposedly great about it. And

as this promotion never includes the other side to Western society, we are made to believe that casting aside our 'backdated' one is what should be normal. As a result of which, we are losing touch with our own systems while desperately running to catch up with things that do not make sense for us in the first place.

We are a nation of meticulously graceful fashion, food, and celebration, but with the advent of Internet, and content from all around the world promoting all sorts of fast paced lifestyles, we are ditching our unique ways for that fleeting taste of a fast and flashy lifestyle. The Internet is also responsible for challenging the moral perspectives and ethical values we hold dear.

POLITICAL AGENDAS
Politics have been around for thousands of years. And technology has always been a medium for that politics to spread, be that the printing press, television or radio programmes, and now, the instantaneous speed and reach of cyberspace.

Internet has the power to transform politics and it is already happening, and unfortunately, not for the better. The Internet's capability of allowing instant communication across a big area allows certain groups of people spread across the country to unite. This aspect can be applicable to the extreme elements of any political party, allowing them to find similar individuals who share similar views, which only encourages them to share their views even more forcefully.

Aside from that, politicians are using this medium for their own propagandas, as it allows them to reach every individual on a personal level. The Internet had also become the centre of quite the controversy during the 2016 U.S. Presidency election, when it was proposed that there was evidence that Russia interfered the elections with cyberattacks. And with Facebook allowing political advertisements, even the false ones, things are only going to get worse, if entities like Facebook are not restrained anytime soon.

RISE OF CYBERBULLYING
With the younger generation moving their lives onto cyberspace, it would only be a matter of time before real world bullies made a beeline for the Internet, and prayed on the helpless there. Just like in real life, such behaviours can make people feel lonely, unhappy, frightened, and insecure and that something might be wrong with them, and these tendencies tend to stay with them their whole life. They have no self-confidence and may find refuge in solitude. In extreme cases, it has even led to terrible outcomes such as self-harm and suicide.

SCAMS
If you ever came across an e-mail proclaiming you won $1 million dollars, or a worldwide cruise, and you foolishly open it to claim your 'reward,' congratulations, you have been scammed, like millions of others around the world. Of course, it wouldn't be you who'd open it; it would probably be your parents, who have no idea how shady and downright manipulative the Internet can be to the uninitiated.

If you ever wondered why such scams exists in the first place, it was when the Internet gained the ability to conduct transactions that people thought of ways to cheat others.

Nowadays, scams are just a small aspect of the landmines that litter the Internet. One of the most troublesome is a method called 'phishing.' In this scam, an attacker will design a fake version of a login page for a popular site, and wait for unsuspecting individuals to type in their credentials. When that's done, the information gets sent to the attacker, and they can use that information as they please.

Also, as ways of getting Internet ads became easier, it also became easier for subpar businesses selling goods and services of questionable value and quality. This lures in many unsuspecting

users into making bad purchases.

BREAKDOWN OF SOCIAL SKILLS
Our growing reliance on the Internet and social media has had a dramatic effect in how we communicate with others in real life. Instead of taking the time to talk or spend time for real, we resort to things like texting or emailing. These are not the kind of mediums that allow any kind of subtle emotions, and because of this, misunderstandings take place when communication is solely electronic.

PORNOGRAPHY
The influence and dominance of pornography is something we'd be foolish to underestimate. Some of the first clay-fired figures uncovered in ancient archaeological sites have been of naked women. So, it seems the erotic has been a force driving technological innovation. And so, when the Internet started getting more popular, the pornography industry found its ultimate medium.

Being able to access a user directly and privately, the pornography industry grew to such an extent that nearly 30 percent of all Internet traffic is porn. Considering how large and diverse the Internet is, that is an astronomically high number. Another statistic shows that four percent of all that is Internet, and I mean all of it, is just porn, with 13 percent of all searches being porn.

And why wouldn't this statistic make sense? The amount of business that paid porn makes online is astronomically huge; current estimates put it around $15 BILIION dollars!

What is truly scary is the fact that the Internet can be accessed by just about anyone capable enough to type. And since there are no proper ways to validate someone's age when they visit such sites, a lot of underage users can be exposed to age-inappropriate materials. And it's not like bans and filtering options can do much; a simple VPN can easily bypass just about any restriction.

INTERNET SECURITY AND ISSUES OF PRIVACY
As more and more people put ever increasing amounts of personal data and financial information on the Internet, the more it becomes a target for unscrupulous people. To meet these increased attacks, Internet security has had to evolve at an immensely quick pace. Unfortunately, as it is with life, the wrongdoers tend to be one step ahead, and so, the Internet really isn't a safe place if you don't exercise strict caution.

Here are some of things that makes the Internet a very unsafe place:

Hackers — They are individuals who break through online security measures in order to retrieve information on someone or something for financial gain, or plain mischief.

Virus — Probably the worst element there is of the Internet, viruses are rogue programs that wreak havoc on your devices while stealing/deleting your data. The truly scary thing about viruses is that you never know where it might come from; a sketchy site, pop-up ads, a file you downloaded, or a pen drive you shared at the photocopy place.

Spyware — While spywares don't wreck damage to your machine, it does wreck your privacy as these allow their makers to spy on you, or push product ads you don't need.

Worms — Worms are a bit like viruses, except they don't need to attach themselves to any file or app; its independent and can replicate on its

own. Due to the rise of cryptocurrency and cryptocurrency mining, worms are sometimes used to infect other machines, which forces those machines to mine cryptocurrency, damaging your system in the process, and send the mined currency to the worm's creator.

Spam — This used to be a big thing in the early 2000's, so much so that all e-mail accounts have a 'spam' folder dedicated to this menace. On the surface, it seems to be more of an annoyance than something dangerous. In essence, a spam is a large number of notifications/messages/e-mails that are sent to someone from any website/page. Problem is, if you aren't careful, some of those e-mails may contain worms, or viruses.

Identity theft — Identity theft is an increasing concern as the days go by. This is because, as mentioned before, more and more of our information is available online, enabling a criminal to simply use that information to for their financial gain. A combination of the methods above may be used in order to gain access to their account

information. This fake identity can then be used in crimes like credit card fraud, bank fraud and a bunch of other financial misdemeanours, all of which fall on the victim, who has to clear their name, and recover that money.

LINKED TO DEVELOPING ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION
A very important difference between young adults growing up now versus earlier generations is that this generation tends to prefer connecting with others electronically rather than in person. And this is why experts see the rise in depression as evidence that the connections via social media are less emotionally satisfying, creating a sense of isolation.

Another reason for the increase in depression is the loss of self-esteem, especially amongst teenagers, who compare themselves negatively with edited images of those who 'look' prettier, thinner, more popular, and richer. In fact, some online surveys show that image based platforms like Instagram leads young people to report feeling anxiety, depression and issues with body image. People spend a lot of time on social media posting what they assume people would consider as perfect.

Other, more indirect ways, in which social media may impact someone's mental wellbeing could be sleep deprivation, a common contributor to depression. Research indicated that around 60 percent of adolescents look at their phones just before they turn in for the night. Social media can have a profound effect on sleep, almost recreating a drug addict-like state of withdrawal when away from their social media outlets for more than 10 minutes. And just like any addiction, time seems to fly by; what was meant to be a 4-minute break ends up being 40 minutes.

Reading this may create the impression that the Internet is a bad place, only to be used when absolutely needed, and then, put back on the top counter, but that is the furthest thing from the truth. There is no denying that the Internet is now the backbone of modern society, and an integral part of someone's daily life. The problem unfortunately lies with us, not the medium, and if we are more aware, and make proper use out of it, it will just keep getting better.

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Art: Nagarbasi Barman