



OUR ANXIETY REGARDING
SOCIAL MEDIA
NOTIFICATIONS
PG 6



Create post



How Facebook has failed us.



Photo/Video



Tag friends



Feeling/Activity



Check In



Live Video



GIF



Watch Party



News Feed



Public



Your story



Public

Post

EDITORIAL

When did you open your Facebook account?

I had one when I was way too young to have one, but that got deleted, I've had the current one for around 10 years. The world was different 10 years ago, Facebook was quite different too. My Facebook feed today would be unrecognizable from the one in 2010, but is that a fair reflection of how I've changed as a person? Or is my personality a reflection of how my Facebook feed has changed? Wait, is Facebook different now because the world has changed or did the world change because of Facebook?

The power of social media has bamboozled mankind. It has accelerated communications across cultures, but also made it easy for obscure ideas to blossom. It has facilitated people who want to cordon themselves off with like minded thinking, and created echo chambers, the gap between which is quickly becoming unbridgeable. Social media has done tremendous good in giving voice to the disenfranchised, but as the agents of disenfranchisement start to gain control of social media, what does the future hold?

-- Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

DIY



When Paper Does Art

FARNAZ FAWAD HASAN

Paper quilling is an art form that uses strips of paper and glue to create intricate tracery. The history of quilling paper dates back to the Renaissance when the nuns and monks would use gilded paper to decorate books and other scriptures. It became an aristocrat's hobby and in the modern era, has spread to the masses as a common way to decorate just about anything without having to spend too much. This art form closely mimics ironwork filigree where strips of paper are coiled, rolled and crimped into shapes that can be combined to form larger designs and artwork.

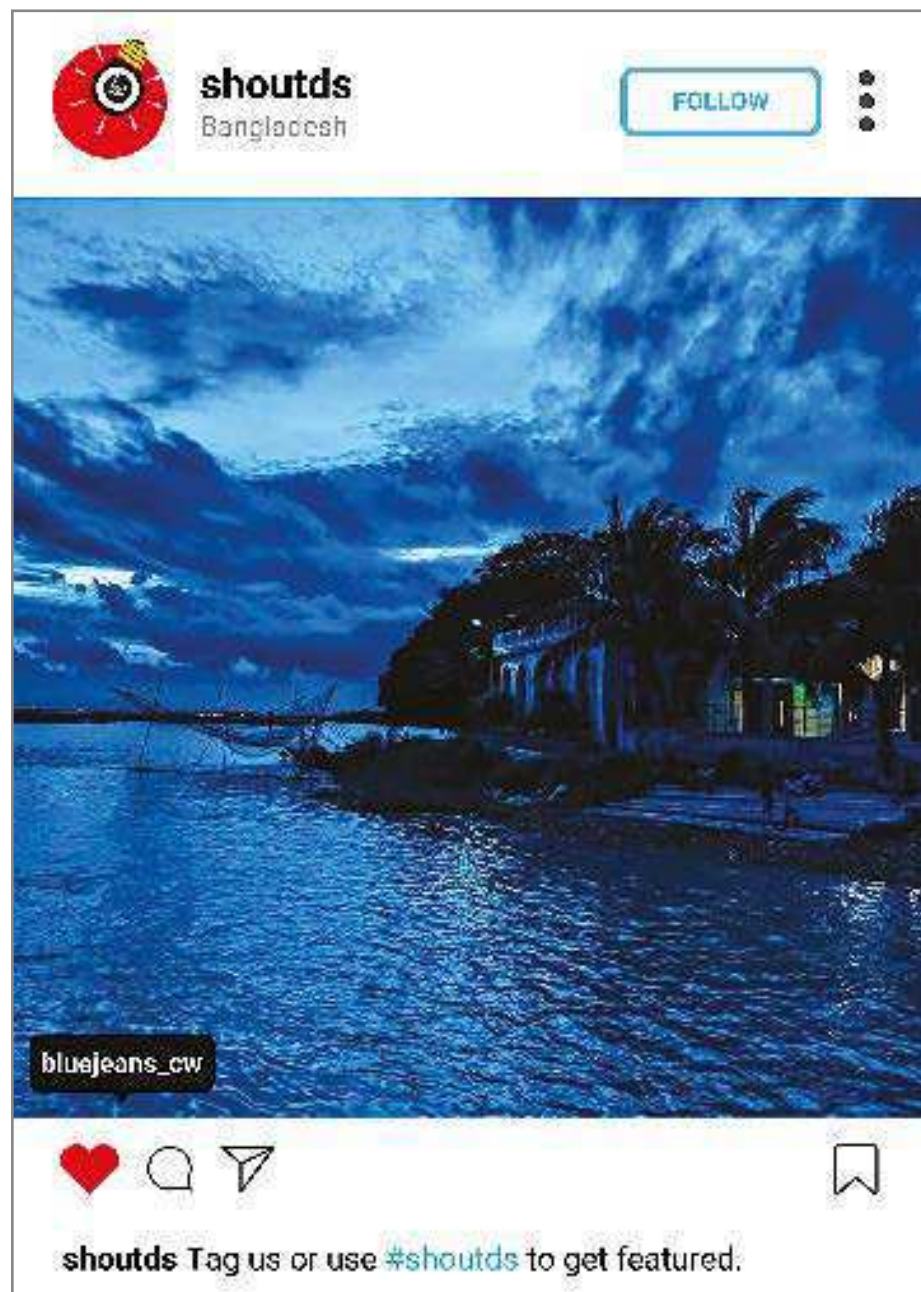
Over the years, paper quilling has gained immense popularity because of its straightforward and self-explanatory learning technique and easily procurable materials. Although different tools like the needle tool, crimpers, quilling comb and paper quilling kits are readily available in stores, these can be easily substituted with items lying around the house. Professional crafters use a lightweight but sturdy paper to make the paper strips. The pre-made strips come in all different colours and textures.

If you don't want to make an investment in buying paper quilling materials, regular A4 paper or even newspapers will do the trick. Instead of a slotted tool, you can also use toothpicks, skewers or the

ink reservoir of a pen for coiling. Alternatively, the sticks of our handy-dandy *jharu* will work wonders as well. For newspaper quilling, the paper tubes should be flattened with something smooth like the back of a spoon or scissors before giving it shape. A fast drying white glue is most suitable for holding the quills in place. In theory, the crafts seem to be flimsy and fragile but you'll be astonished to see how well-built and durable the structure comes out to be.

Apart from being an excellent way of expressing one's artistic abilities, paper quilling has a useful side as well. It is usually used to make 3D cards, pendants, charms and a myriad of other personalised gifts. Newspaper quilling is also a great way to make practical and functional items. From DIY newspaper bikes to paper jewellery, anything can be crafted through this technique. Though this craft is a tad time-consuming, the end results are worth the effort. Be it for enjoyment or just for passing time, paper quilling is a fun skill to acquire. The simplicity behind this craft has made it popular among kids and adults. Go rogue with the paper and let your imagination soar up to the sky. Inspire to create!

Farnaz Fawad Hasan considers herself to be the fifth member of The Try Guys. Suggest her things to try at farnazfawadhasan@gmail.com



Emerging toxicity in social media

AYSHA ZAHEEN

It was not too long ago that we all somewhat knew what the next day would be like. A little surprise here and there kept them from getting dull and mundane. Before we all could even grasp the situation, the pandemic took over and removed our autonomy, which has left most of us with very little, actual interaction.

To compensate for the hollowness that has uneventfully come about, we have resorted to much heavier usage of social media. Towards the beginning, the participation was healthier, everyone preached productivity. Of course, there were critiques of that, too. With that, emerged critiques of those whose “unproductivity” had led to the emergence of the former type of critiques. Soon enough, social media validation started to matter more than reality. The validation that we crave has led to this amassed entitlement, always evident but never as valid as now. Scopes to channel personal frustrations opened up. Meaningless verbal altercations and fear mongering for personal amusement took up the news-feeds. Generalised jokes became personal, vicious jabs that targeted demographics at once. As if active victim-shaming was not already pernicious, passive victim-shaming erupted. Social media is about presumptuous and confounding entitlement now, more than ever.

We have mainly three types of memories; short-term, long-term, and sensory. Short-term memory is what we are thinking about now and are extremely unlikely to remember in the long run, while long-term memory is the information we remember for an extensive amount of time. Now, for any tidbit of information to become a long-term memory, it has to pass through the working memory. The meaningless gossips that take up our working memory disrupt

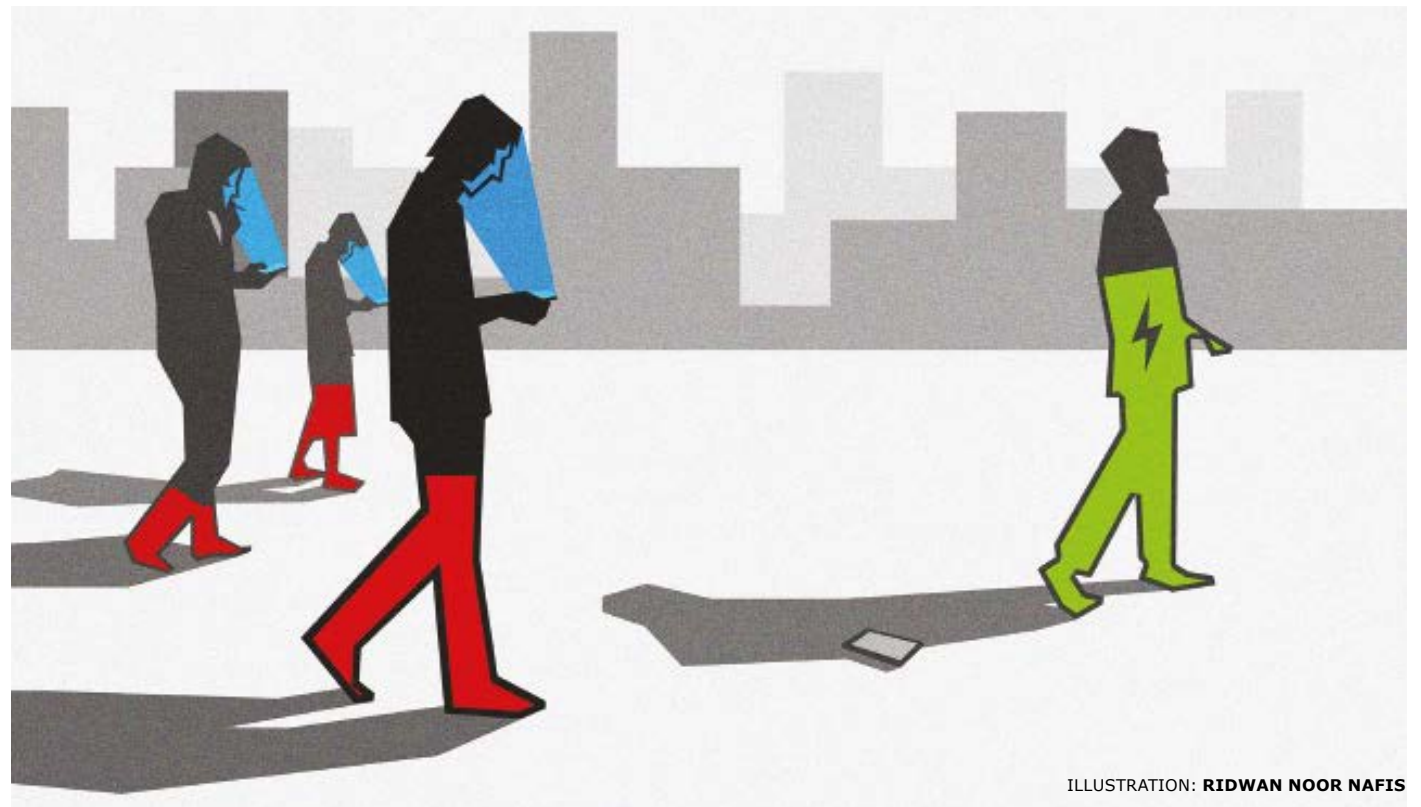


ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

the passageway, weakening comprehension. It effectively takes away from our understanding if the uncultured gossip we dignify as “tea” is even worth the consumption at all.

A more sophisticated version of “gossips”, in this context, is misinformation. “Misinformation on the coronavirus might be the most contagious thing about it,” Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus says. However, the most harmful of all this misinformation is bad science; people with medical credentials causing unfounded terror among others. Social media is the easiest device for fear monger-

ing through misinformation. Panic diffuses among people with the aforementioned practice and causes dire psychological impacts (insomnia, mental fatigue, stress).

What we need now is social media detoxing. Voluntarily cancelling out the usage of social media cannot be that bad. In fact, the enduring relaxation due to detoxing will make us realise how much we needed this. Of course, no one is suggesting that we pull out of social media for good. However, giving ourselves a breather to focus on our life that certainly thrives without social-media-presence is also extremely important. It has become pertinent for many of us to take this into

consideration, for our own betterment.

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Aysha's brain unclogs at the sight of a crown of raven curls. Don't ask her what it is because she won't tell at zaheenaysha10@gmail.com

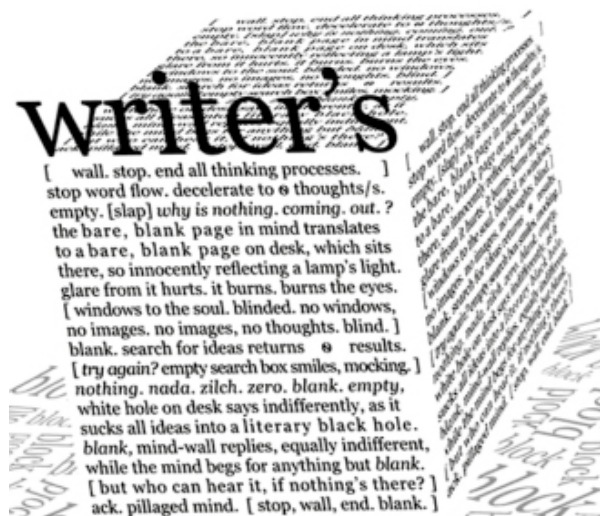
THE WRITER'S BLOCK-DOWN

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

“Now that you have a lot of time in your hand, why don't you write?” This is a question many writers and bloggers have faced, especially during this shutdown.

Writer's block is something every writer goes through when they run out of inspiration. It's a disdainful feeling of being stumped and dissatisfied. And this takes a whole new toll on writers now that they are stuck at home.

Home quarantine has given us a lot of time on our hands, but what people often tend to forget is that time is not the only thing a writer requires to write. You need inspiration, you need to *observe*. Brilliant write-ups stem from careful and active observation. There's a difference between just researching and actively observing. When you are doing the latter, you try to understand and pinpoint what's going on around you. You just don't see and hear, you try to interpret the hows and whys and read between the lines. But when you are stuck inside four walls, it's pretty difficult to observe new things. When you go to different places, you experience and observe so many things that help you generate innovative ideas. With the shutdown though, coming up with new ideas is really difficult.



Another thing that makes writer's block more troublesome now is the present news consumption. If you refresh your news feed, then every time at least one new piece of information or news pops up. And the current,

depressing situation is an enemy on its own. Writers are humans too and they also need a sound mental health state to write anything. One might argue that the present circumstance is a good prompt itself, but often when writers are struggling with writing, they feel that whatever they think has been written or talked about already. This is almost always true but that's where social interactions come in. The different ways of interacting with people is what sets apart two individuals facing the same situation. The amazing characters we read in books are all results of the writers using their interactions or/and experiences with people. It is how you perceive situations which gives you incentive to draft a work. So all in all, it's a quite difficult phase right now.

However, as statistics go, writers are surfacing above these and publishing their work. Even if there aren't always fresh out of the oven ideas, there are still topics to fill up the pages through a variety of lenses. So, next time you read something, know that the people behind it are trying their best despite the adversities to put out content that you would love.

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HOW FACEBOOK HAS FAILED US

OSAMAN BIN AHMED & SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

The internet and technological advancements over the past decades have enabled social media platforms to bloom and develop immensely. Gone are the days when we would have to continually log in and out of MSN Messenger or save up tiffin money to send extra text messages which required us to type 443355555666 to even start a conversation on our Nokia 3310 handsets.

One of the major turning points leading to social media reaching the heights it has today was the creation of Facebook. However, the platform that we had such high hopes for has unfortunately let us (its users) down.

CONTENT AND CENSORSHIP

Facebook has faced criticism time and again for censoring and regulating content that may be damaging to its reputation or ones supporting opposing views and establishments. In 2019, US Senator Elizabeth Warren had placed ads that targeted tech companies such as Amazon and even Facebook itself, expressing her intentions to break them up if she won the 2020 elec-

tions. The ad was quickly taken down and later re-uploaded once it faced sufficient backlash. Needless to say, the removal of the ad and the reluctant restoration only after reports criticising the move had surfaced, show a clear bias.

The problem not only lies with what they tend to remove but also with what they refuse to take down. In the past few weeks, Facebook has been under fire for refusing to remove hate speech and censor political advertisements. Since then, CEO Mark Zuckerberg has “doubled down” on his decision to not remove political advertisements as he says he believes in “free speech” and thinks “people need to see what the politicians have to say for themselves”. However, that does not provide a good enough reason for Facebook not removing hate speech or even fact check political advertisements.

On July 8, 2020, Facebook finally released its independent audit report which was being worked on for the past two years. The audit ultimately concluded by saying that the measures taken by Facebook were “piecemeal” and raised doubts about their intentions to actually make resolutions to address the innumerable problems that remain regarding the civil rights of its users.

The question that arises next is, why should we care about political advertisements, that too ones that may not directly impact our lives?

The answer lies with the picture being depicted. This helps us understand two things. First, that Facebook is biased in terms of actions taken, and second that it doesn't seem to care too much about the safety and civil rights of its users. Not only that, the impacts of spreading misinformation through said ads could create false ideas about vulnerable groups and minorities that could ultimately be damaging to them.

This understanding helps elaborate some other issues that Facebook seems to be facing for a long time, such as those regarding content that may be psychologically damaging or sensitive in nature. Facebook groups, when big enough, can be ecosystems of their own. However, Facebook refuses to police the content of such groups and only focuses on the news feeds of its users. This often leads to inappropriate, violent and/or harmful content to remain and circulate in a way that may cause direct and long-lasting impacts on those who come across it. The fact that a picture that has nothing to do with other people and is posted with full consent may be removed whereas sensitive material exploited and passed around without the owner's consent may remain for days even after being reported, speaks volumes of the kind of environment being harboured within the platform.

PRIVACY AND TECHNICAL ISSUES

In an investigation carried out by the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) in 2010, it was found that personal information on a Facebook profile was accessible to almost anyone even if it was not visible to the public. The foundation categorised personal data breach techniques as “connections” and “instant personalisation”. Such a “connection” is established when a user clicks on the “Like” button on the Facebook site or app or an embedded button on the page of a product or service. Facebook then treats that data as public information where the user's public information is visible on the service provider's Facebook page. This breach of privacy is not even half of the equation.

EFF's research concluded that not opting out from Facebook's Instant Personalisation services results in instant data leakage. The way it works is that they may use users' personal information to provide them a more personalised experience on the internet. Facebook does this by monitoring their interests, such as the brand or type of clothing they tend to like, or specific pages a user has been frequenting. The next browser ads they come across will then be more likely of a fashion house or anything else the algorithm deems to be similar. Facebook has a number of sites under its pilot programme such as Microsoft Docs, Pandora, etc. As soon as they enter these sites under the programme, Facebook gains access to their personal information, including but not limited to, the user's name, gender, location and who they are friends on Facebook with. Basically, everything falling under what Facebook considers “public information”.

One might think that opting out of it automatically makes them safe. Unfortunately that is not the case as a person's Facebook friends who may have not opted out of Instant Personalisation, can give away this personal information about them as well. To be completely on the safe side, you have to block the applications individually. In a nutshell, your data is out in the open, giving brands the perfect amount of data to know your needs. It was found that Facebook's top rated apps such as Zynga and Lolapps were transmitting tons of data to internet tracking companies. Your data is being treated as nothing but a product, ready to be marketed. And yes, this happens in Bangladesh, too.

There have been a few instances where Facebook has turned a blind eye to data breach risks. In 2018, Facebook succumbed to its biggest ever data breach. Data security experts had been warning Facebook from as early as December 2017 about a flaw which was neglected by the company and later resulted in a breach in which personal information from 29 million user accounts were compromised. The data included dates of birth, log in devices, location data and search queries, among others. The breach also caused the hackers to get hold of certain data such as posts on timelines, group memberships and friend lists of some 400,000 additional users.

Hackers exploited a flaw in Facebook's “access token system”. Basically, access tokens are a method Facebook uses to provide seamless access to external web apps by providing temporary, secure access to Facebook APIs (App Programming Interface). You are more familiar with this as simple Facebook sign in features on different apps and pages. These tokens, however, did not have any expiration date on them. This is what the hackers exploited in the very first place. The company

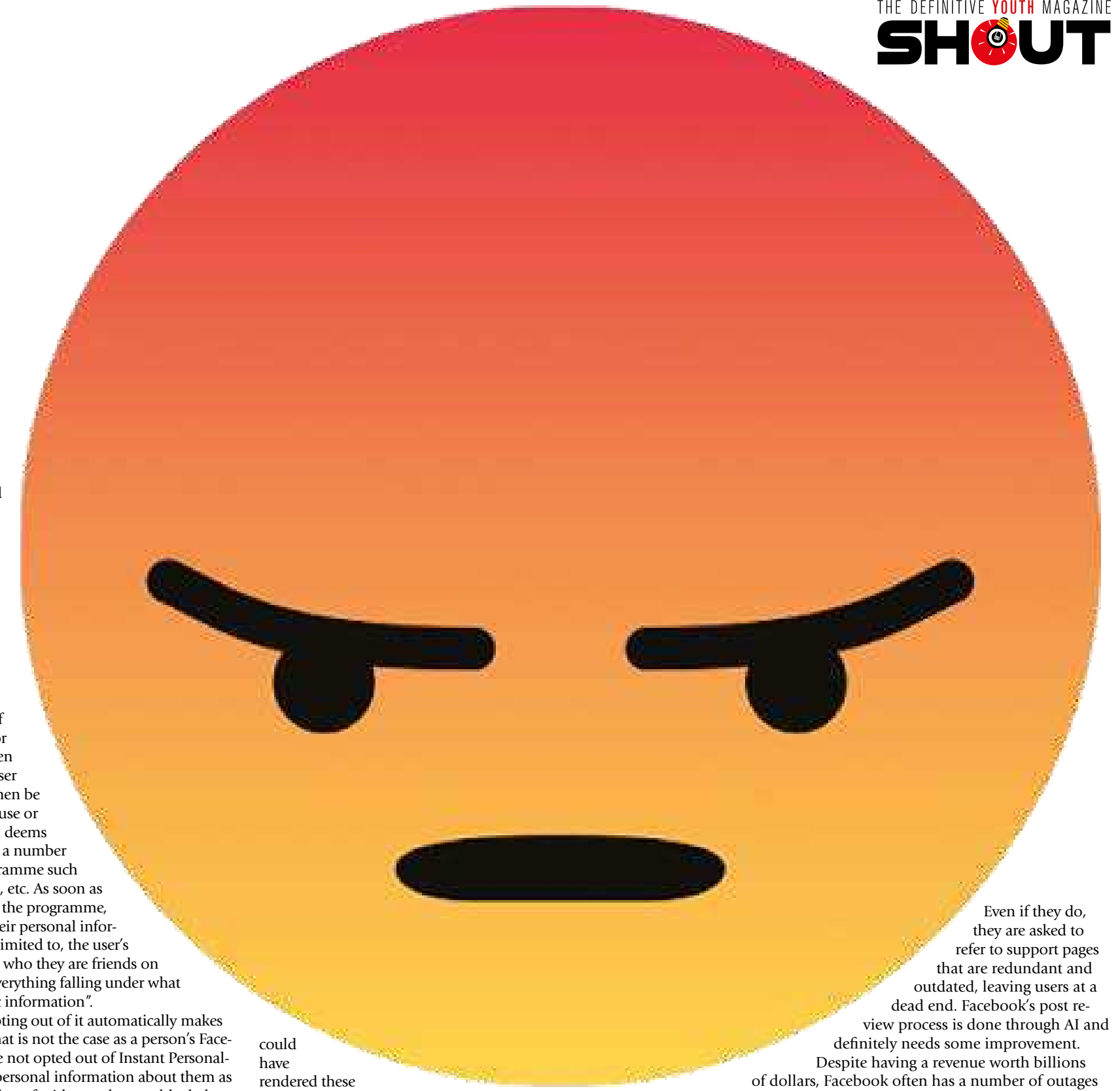
could have rendered these tokens invalid or could have patched the loophole. This would have eliminated any such risks.

Facebook had been clear on their statements after the breach saying the social media giant had no knowledge of any such risk. Some Facebook employees have spoken saying that the risk of such a breach was well known and could have been averted. Facebook, ever since the breach, has vowed to make such a token with no time limit, inaccessible to the public.

In 2018, the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data breach occurred which caused millions of Facebook users' personal data to be harvested without the consent of Cambridge Analytica. The breached data consisted of a questionnaire used to build cognitive profiles of its users. Personal data of the users' friends were also compromised.

Facebook's controversial approach to such scandals can be better understood if their past motto “move fast and break things” is brought into perspective. This mentality has influenced Facebook's way of tackling things not only in its R&D but also how they handle data breach scandals. Future scandals are inevitable and only time will tell whether Facebook has learned from its mistakes or if the trend continues.

Furthermore, Facebook has often struggled in reviewing non-English posts, often removing them. Facebook does not have an adequate support system to genuinely read the content and make decisions. The organisation has poor customer service as a vast majority of users simply cannot contact them.



Even if they do, they are asked to refer to support pages that are redundant and outdated, leaving users at a dead end. Facebook's post review process is done through AI and definitely needs some improvement.

Despite having a revenue worth billions of dollars, Facebook often has a number of outages and noticeable downtime. Sometimes, the user experience is flawed as pages take longer to load due to the enormous load on its servers and sometimes inaccessible.

Undoubtedly, Facebook is the most used social media platform. A large number of people globally have Facebook as their primary source of news. With Facebook's weak fact-checking, it has now become a perfect mishmash of facts and misinformation. With fewer moderators working due to the pandemic, Facebook cannot monitor enough incoming data and more responsibility has been bestowed to AI. The AI itself is not perfect but is ever-evolving and needs a large dataset and information to distinguish facts from misinformation.

At this point, it can safely be said that Facebook has a lot of problems and not nearly enough measures to truly tackle them. Their intentions to truly work on the issues seem sketchy or fragmentary at best. However, the question to ask is if these problems reflect the need for a social media platform not dominated by a single entity, and whether all hope is lost for Facebook.

Osaman is a curious mind always wondering about AI, simulations, theoretical physics and philosophy. To discuss nerd stuff DM him on [www.fb.com/osaman.binahmed](https://www.facebook.com/osaman.binahmed)

Syeda Afrin Tarannum would choose 'The Script' over 'G-Eazy' any day. Continue ignoring her taste in music on afrintara@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: NOOR US SAFA ANIK

OUR ANXIETY REGARDING SOCIAL MEDIA NOTIFICATIONS

H. RAINAK KHAN REAL

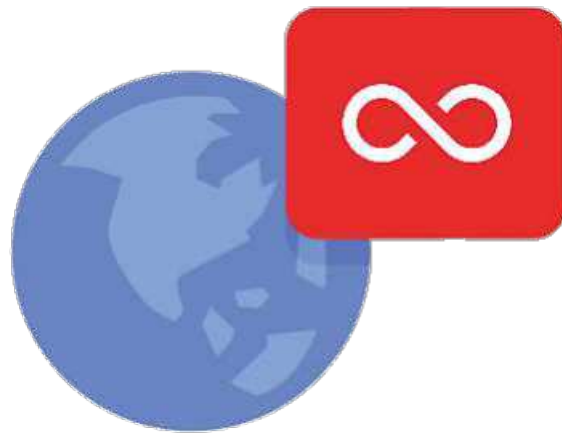
"It's been 15 minutes since I changed my profile picture," my friend complained with a sad face. "Still zero reactions!"

"So what? Zero reactions do not imply people dislike you," I replied with a straight face.

"I know but it's making me feel uncomfortable. Why don't you log in and give my picture a like?" he insisted. And I did as I was told.

This "uncomfortable" feeling, and this measure of sense of worth based on the number of reactions, shares and notifications is common among social media users. Studies suggest that anxiety is induced due to a higher level of screen time in social media platforms because everyone else's life looks perfect in the virtual world, except ours.

Several researches linked anxiety to the use of social media and researchers have identified several forms of anxiety induced among the users. When scrolling through aesthetically perfect photos, posts of achievements and successful careers in social media, we inadvertently begin comparing ourselves to others and start harbouring feelings of self-doubt which is bound to take its toll on our mental health (Boers et al., 2019; Barr, 2019). The pressure we feel because others are doing better than us and the news of their successes in our social media feeds may make us feel unhappy and left out (Bono, 2018). Other studies found that anxious and insecure people tend to use social media more to alleviate stress and escape from worries as they find it easier to express their opinion via social media than face-to-face and in doing so, they feel more insecure and unhappy as they become susceptible to



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

social comparisons (Bonnette et al., 2019).

So, what change of behaviour and shift in perspective is necessary for healthy use of social media that do not knock off our self-esteem?

The first step is conscious use of social media—controlling the amount of time spent through scrolling the news feed or texting others. This will save time and boost self-confidence as well as help in maintaining sound communication with others in social media.

Instead of quitting social media for good and missing out important information regarding education, career and life, devoting the time saved through conscious use for self-improvement is the better choice.

Following self-imposed rules such as no social media

during study and before bed and adjusting day-to-day routine accordingly to combat distraction will greatly improve mental health.

Rather than directing our attention towards stories of strangers and getting worked up, if we focus on ourselves and on people we care about the most, we will be much more satisfied with our lives.

When we measure our sense of worth based on our performance with respect to others, we place our happiness in a parameter that is well beyond our control. So, having a practical outlook on life instead of making comparisons in social media will relieve us of unnecessary stress and anxiety.

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H. Rainak Khan Real has found the potion that can slow down the time. Send him clues about how to use it at rainak-khanreal@gmail.com

Playing with Memories

ADHORA AHMED

Nostalgia has always fascinated me. Not only the memories that induce it, but its very nature. When I look back on my own halcyon days, I sometimes wonder whether I would feel the same wistfulness if I "edited" those happy recollections. In most cases, nostalgia has three factors: time, place and people. One of these—time that has passed—is a constant in all nostalgic memories.

What if I fooled around with the other two factors?

To test this, I go back to my childhood. I'm playing with friends in my school's playground. It's a memory that always makes me smile. What if I strip away all the running children and the supervising teachers from that place, leaving the equipment behind? Does the memory still elicit the same response? To some extent, because there's sentiment attached to the swings and slides. However, I feel that the essence is missing, only to be filled by the people whom I vanished.

What if I transported the people to another place and have them play games there? That's what I do, picturing them at a vast green field. This version of the memory feels dream-like, because I've never run around with my friends in a field like that. Although it paints a pretty picture, it never happened, so this is more like an imaginary scenario than a memory.

Wait, what if this event never happened? What if I only had the happy feeling it left

behind? Let's say I'm plugged to a machine which induces the pleasure from my childhood memory without ever living through it. It might feel good at first, but eventually I'll feel empty. To those familiar with *The Matrix* franchise, this idea might ring a bell. It originates from a well-known thought experiment called "experience machine", proposed by philosopher Robert Nozick, who hypothesised that most people would choose to experience the events over connecting to the machine. Later studies have shown that the choice depends on the nature of the scenario, with a tendency to connect to the machine for painful ones and experience those which are pleasurable.

All this mental gymnastics later, I return to the memory in its original, untainted form. The contentment I've been missing during these thought experiments comes back in full force. I decide that I prefer the original over the rest, because it reflects what I considered was the best of both worlds—favourite people and place—in my childhood. Perhaps, it's because when recalling precious memories, we try to remember every single detail. And isn't nostalgia about cherishing memories to the fullest?

Reference

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Adhora Ahmed daydreams too much. Send her reality checks at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com



NOX CAELO

NABIHA NUSAIBA

She was a little taken aback by my laughter. Looking back, I think she reconsidered my diagnosis. Who in their right mind laughs when they're told they have severe depression? Someone who spent a lot of time thinking they have something worse, something more permanent, that's who.

We are in a small, square room at the farthest corner of the house. I take in everything around me to curb my nervousness, the clean mosaic floors below the wall of bookshelves, two cosy sap green sofas on either side of a rectangular glass table and a burnt sienna beanbag for the vermilion lady who charges by the hour. A beanbag is a very weird seat for a formal meeting, no?

"So, what brings you here?"

"I feel..."

Dr Niaz patiently waits for me to elaborate while I stare at my hands. It wasn't like I didn't know what to say, it was that I had too much to say. To understand me, she had to know everything. And everything was a few words more than what I could fit in 50 minutes.

"I used to be raven black with hints of glittering silver here and there. My grandmother would say that I had diamonds embedded to my skin. I was proof that blackness wasn't sorrow, that I lit up every room I set foot in, that my skin was true to my character. And then one day, the silver faded to a dull grey. I'm sure it was gradual, but I only noticed when a little less than half of it was gone. A few months later, the grey nonuniformly enveloped my entire body, leaving only streaks of darkness to remind me of my past magnificence."

"And how long ago was this?"

"Almost six years now?"

Before that, I thought all psychologists masked their expressions when they saw their patients, however, mine has no intention whatsoever to do so, leisurely raising one of her thin, wispy brows.

"And has it always remained grey after that?"

"Pretty much, yes."

She says nothing, leaving me scrambling to end the silence.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm broken, that my body simply doesn't portray how I feel on the inside anymore. But then, have I been feeling anything other than jailed in a cage of melancholia?"

"So, you feel trapped?"

"From within, if that's even possible."

Again, with that patient gaze motioning me to carry on.

"I feel this ache in my chest, here," I point to the centre of my chest. "Coincidentally, this is where my body is the darkest."

Dr Niaz sits up straighter while using her right hand to rotate her pen between her thumb and forefinger.

"Maybe, it's not a coincidence, maybe the unevenness is a consequence of your pain. If that's the case, then your body does still portray how you feel," she smiles at me. What do I see on her face? Reassurance? Hope?

"What about the rest of your body? Does it hurt anywhere else?"

"My legs would hurt so bad I wouldn't be able to sleep for days, or even sit straight. Sometimes, my forehead. You can tell that my forehead is darker if you view it from up close," I say as I raise my emerald fringes from my forehead. She bends toward me to examine my forehead.

"Hmm, yes, yes, I can see it," she returns to her original position before asking, "What about on days your legs don't ache? Are you effortlessly able to fall asleep then?"

I try to stifle a burst of laughter bubbling up from deep within, but that only causes me to scoff villainously.

She chooses to let it go.

"So, why do you think your colour

Out of your bed. Onto your balcony.

No, thanks. I'm good.

NOW.

I jump out of my bed, put on my slippers, wrap the scarf laying the foot of my bed around me, grab my phone and dash out onto the balcony.

I almost slip in the dark, saved only by gripping the curtains at the last second. It must've rained sometime during the night. How did I not notice?

I obviously cannot go into the balcony. You know how mom gets about muddy floors. Besides, where would I sit? Back to bed, then.

You're so annoying sometimes. Sorry, we do not use negativity towards ourselves. I'm sorry, I did not mean that. You're a wonderful person.

Please grab a rag. We need to meditate.

I sigh.

I am a wonderful person. I am a truly won-

notification. I open it at the speed of light to escape my little conversation.

"Been up all night trying to finish this assignment, Noxxie. Can we take a rain check for our plans? I'd like to sleep in," writes Casia.

"Sure," I write back.

"I'm sorry, did I wake you up? Or, are you having sleeping difficulties again?"

"Neither, I just have a terrible cold," I lie.

"You need to invade some Vicks right now."

"Okay, I'll gather my troops."

"What?"

OHH

inhale

Why are you like this?"

I giggle.

Can we go inside now, please? I'd like to sleep in too.



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

shifted?—

No, come back, come back. I let you stroll freely in dreamland, but venturing off to the why always makes you spin around. We don't need to ruin this moment. What did Dr Niaz say? WHAT DID DR NIAZ SAY?? PRACTICE MINDFULNESS. DO IT, DO IT RIGHT NOW.

But I don't want to. I just don't want to bother.

No, no, no. Up. UP!

It is during moments like these that I regret reading *The Hunger Games*. If I hadn't, my brain wouldn't have known to use simple commands to make me do things. Up, it is.

I fumble for my glasses before sitting up and turning the bedside lamp on. The digital clock attached to it reads 04:57.

I'm up. What now?

derful person.

I tiptoe out of my room and into the kitchen with the precision of a ballerina and grab the topmost rag from the drawer before returning to the balcony and swiping at the floor with the ecru fabric under my feet. I set it aside and sit cross-legged on the floor with my back against the wall.

Close your eyes. Now, I want you to feel the cool breeze.

Okay, but how did we miss the rain?

Shh. Focus on the breeze. Focus on every part of your body that it touches.

BIRDS. One bird, two birds...

SHH. THE BREE...

Aren't birds supposed to be asleep at night? Why do we hear them throughout the night? Is it because of light pollution? Is it? Is it?

Hmm, may...

My phone buzzes urgently with a new

I can't believe this. You're... fine.

Almost reflexively, I check my hand in the dim glow of the rising sun before stepping back in, hoping for a change in my colour. Nothing. I sigh.

Nox Caelo will be worthy of her name again someday.

Until then, we just have to focus on getting better.

It'll be okay, I'll be fine.

Unbeknownst to herself, a silver dot the size of a full stop is victorious in the war to place itself among its duller peers on the small of her back.

The writer 'accidentally' put 3 tablespoons of detergent in her brother's pancake batter. Contact her at n.nusaibaah@gmail.com to view pictures of the resulting bubblecake.

The Sims 2020: *Karmic Justice Edition*

NAFISA AFSARA CHOWDHURY

In light of our recent plague, I had some profound realisations. You can run, you can hide, but you can't escape the questionable actions of your past.

Ghosts of Our Past

It's a fine summer evening, a nostalgic instrumental music fills the air in my bedroom, where I, a seemingly innocent 15-year-old in my sweaty school uniform, sit glued to my computer screen for several hours playing *The Sims*. I take a lifetime to create a couple of fictional characters, spend another to construct their fancy mansions. Then, I add a fancy swimming pool from which I later remove the ladder, for no apparent reason, and watch until the very same characters inevitably perish.

Did that stir your memories?

On other days, when I feel a bit more adventurous, I trap my Sim in a tiny room and remove the doors. Oh, and let's not forget the occasional fires. There is no use looking at me in disgust like I'm some monster, I know you're probably recalling the cathartic experience of

annihilating a pixelated character's life right now.

Is This Real Life? Or Is This Just Simulation?

It's Day 107 today. It all started with losing my front door on March 20th. Surreal, right? Nothing has been the same since. I was mildly suspicious initially, but I have now managed to connect the dots. Oh God, this is such a disaster. Despite carefully locking them up in the furthest corner of my brain, vivid flashbacks of my Sims begging for an escape have finally come back to haunt me. Honestly, I could never see this coming. But, here we are, facing the ridiculous consequences of karmic justice.

The sequence of chilling events didn't end there. Before I knew it, a giant plumbob started to hover over my head, which

quickly switched from a vibrant green to a haunting red. Stupidly, I disregarded this. Of course, I tried pressing Ctrl+Shift+C repeatedly, but alas, no cheat codes worked to fix my stir-crazy episodes. Have some mercy.

Just when I thought I witnessed all abnormalities, I somehow started uttering bits of Simlish gibberish (I'm suddenly fluent) in between speaking human.

Tell me, how long do I keep denying these eerie parallels? Living with all this shame and guilt... I can't help but wonder if this would be happening if we had simply controlled our sadistic impulses when we had the chance?

At this point, I'm fairly certain that like my Sim, I'm just swim-

ming in circles, paddling and thrashing, searching fruitlessly for a ladder that no longer exists.

What Goes Around... Comes Back Around

Every time something happened, I felt that this Higher Being had been looking over me with a triumphant smile, along with all my dead Sims cheering on raucously from the Afterlife, their plumbobs shining a bright green, as they rejoiced in their prophesied victory over me.

It is true what they say, you reap what you sow. It may have taken a life-threatening plague for my eyes to finally open up and have this crushing realisation of the irrevocable damage I have caused, but I promise I'm a changed person now, growing and learning from my horrid past.

That being said, can I have my door back, please?

Nafisa has clearly played too much Sims in her lifetime and finally lost it. Send her thoughts and prayers at sara.chow26@gmail.com



A CURIOUS CASE OF MINI-MANIA

SARAH WASIFA

From airplanes to designer bags, bubble teas to Ghiblian trips, miniatures are nothing short of metaphorical teabags infusing magic into everyday life. While these Lilliputian creations are often dismissed as simple toys, they are feats of patience and sheer craftsmanship. If you've ever stopped scrolling to look at a tiny cake, or even diminutive succulents, you're not alone in your admiration. But the question still stands, and it's a curious one at that: what is there to love in a miniature?

IT'S CUTE.

Dollhouses and ships in bottles, as early as the 18th century, were objects of wealth and dexterity. Maybe it was the allure of things to attach ideas to—narratives, voices to the objects, cake in the oven, the impossible details, or the fantasy of time travel that delighted the masses, or because they're simply everyday objects, just shrunk down. Beauty products, thermos flasks with working lids, scenes taken from everyday life, or even movies, storefronts, medicine shops with drawers filled with dried herbs, miniaturists today are in no way limited to the confines of a 1:12 living room. And it's all undeniably, and for absence of a better word, cute. How else would you describe a cupcake that's a centimetre tall, or an ice cream with dainty toppings? Tiny army men? Cute. The abandoned theatre on display on a teacup? Cute. Neo-miniaturism is as diverse as its enthusiasts and trends, and it's all in the details.

IT'S SCIENCE.

Miniatures scratch a very particular niche in everyone's brain. Whether you gravitate towards food, or vignettes, the scale of these incite an immediate power trip in most - a universe at your control, your story to write, no bills, no realistic property prices to consider. Flaws, scaled down, become next to invisible. While most of our lives are spent seeing disjointed parts and stitching them together in our heads, miniatures provide the satisfaction of seeing how it all comes together, allowing us to better process the big picture. Add that to the illusion of frozen



time, and voila, you have a fantasy retreat at your fingertips. A gentle wish of fulfilment, be it a new world, a moment of peace, or a bit of control. For a maker, it's the challenge of creating something realistic in such a small form, and effort put into every detail that forms a mental exercise that keeps them, well, sane.

Whether or not you've been swept up by the recent wave of miniaturism, popularised by the multitude of blogs detailing the how-tos and more, you can't deny the appeal in their little forms. From toddlers to collectors in their eighties, this transfixing hobby has made home

in the part of everyone's hearts that yearns for a bit of enchantment. Everyone has a favourite miniature, be it for an emotional value for just the plain aesthetic. As for the artists, the tabletop is a stage, and their skills, the performer.

Care for a piece of pretend-cake, anyone? Delicious.

Sarah Wasifa sees life as a math equation: problematic, perhaps with a solution, and maybe sometimes with a sign to tear off a page and start over again. Help her find 'y' at sarah-wf77@gmail.com