

'Likes' that can kill



CHINITTO SINCE 1995
NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

SELFIES were born when people found no one to take their photo. Again, no one among family and friends wanted to be left out, and so the crowding into the frame began. The fish-pout emanates from self-consciousness, and then mimicry. Phones

got cheaper, the reversible camera was installed, apps arrived to share the shots with friends and others, a system of approval ('like') was invented, and an epidemic was born.

Selfies today are a big part of the internet-based public network, the growing web culture. While a great deal of the photography is of glee and gladness, anniversaries and moments of joy, alarmingly a good number of insensitive users chose to go overboard, much to their own peril – social, psychological and physical. It is the outcome of an urge to outdo one another; self-esteem and personal safety can go to hell.

People have taken selfies, smiling against a wall of fire or a coffin at burial. Two girls, God knows why, took a selfie in a funeral home bathroom. Natural disaster victims became the background to 'sympathisers' with pouting lips. Animals have bitten selfie-masters at the right time in the wrong place. Doctors and nurses were selfied by a patient in labour. A girl was clinging on to the edge of a cliff and her friend did the selfie in full grin mode.

On occasions, the dignity of a person is at stake due to overindulgence on Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Tumblr... Only last week, a woman was chatting on her mobile phone while travelling on the Kolkata-Delhi train. While still at it, she got up to go to the toilet and returned to her seat after finishing her job, unawares that she had left her



ILLUSTRATION DAVEHANGGI

pyjamas behind. To her, a greater incident would have been for the handset to have dropped in the loo.

Selfie-ness derives from loneliness and/or desperation for attention. With society suffering from both, a contraption at the end of a stretched-out arm and people huddling to get into the frame is now accepted as normal social etiquette.

Some selfies have remained the last before the unfortunate were struck by tragedy, self-inflicted if you will.

Twenty-one year old Oscar Otero Aguilar was "drinking and decided he wanted to

make a new Facebook profile picture by taking a selfie with a gun to his head. The gun was loaded and went off, killing Oscar".

There is an element of craziness attached to this wave of common practice. "Two Iranian girls were taking a selfie video of themselves singing while driving. Luckily, when they did crash they weren't killed, just badly injured." But that did not deter them. "They also took a selfie on the way to the hospital."

Courtney Sanford was not that blessed. She "posted a selfie while driving and listening to the song "Happy" by Pharrel

Williams. Seconds later her car crashed into a truck causing a fatal accident."

People can be stupid when it comes to impressing others on the social media. To some, it is an unsaid contest. Eighteen-year old Xenia Ignatyeva "climbed a 28-foot (8.4m) railroad bridge to take a selfie and lost her balance. When she fell she grabbed onto high voltage wires and was electrocuted."

Our youths, as well as adults if not to that extent, have been enamoured by this 'like' fad. Below I narrate a posting from one of my younger Facebook friends last week:

"This (10/6/2016) afternoon, a tragic

incident took place in our Rampura WAPDA Road area. Some Class VIII students went to the rooftop of a six-storied building to shoot a video. The video was about them jumping from one rooftop to another, a 'sport' called parkour (which does not advocate unnecessary risk). They would post that video on Facebook to get maximum 'likes'.

"They did not understand how big a risk they were taking at such a tender age. While leaping from one roof to another, one of the boys fell down between two six-storied buildings. His friends were lost for words. The boy has broken bones. With severe head injuries he is now fighting for life at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The police have taken his friends into custody.

"Although this is a heart-rending incident, the social conditions of our youth are more frightening. Why should the 'like' madness affect Class VIII students, 12-13-year-olds, that they have to take the risk of falling from a six-storied roof? Bro, your life has not yet begun. Did you have to finish it so soon? Why do you have to become famous now by getting like after like? You are not yet in college, not yet a graduate, not yet employed, not married, [have] not yet served your parents. There is so much to do, so much to see in life.

"If you have to be famous, succeed in life. Then you[r] one post will get one thousand likes. Your writing, your picture, will then not only be seen by boys and girls of your class and school, but by the entire country. Don't strive to become a so-called 'Facebook Celebrity'.

"Guardians too have to be aware. At what age are we giving our children a smart phone? Why? What are they doing [with] it? Do they know about the dark aspects? We have to think."

Let us not yearn for the approval of another, especially not in a manner that can endanger or jeopardise life.

The writer is a practising Architect at BashaBari Ltd., a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Illiberal Democracy or Undemocratic Liberalism?



WORLD AFFAIRS+POLITICS
YASCHA MOUNK

HOW did it come to this? In the space of a few short months, the prospect of a President Donald Trump has gone from preposterous speculation to terrifying possibility. How could a man with so little political experience and such manifest disregard for facts get so close to the White House?

In a much-discussed essay, Andrew Sullivan recently argued that "too much democracy" is to blame for Trump's rise. According to Sullivan, the political establishment has been shoved aside by the anti-intellectualism of the far right and the anti-elitism of the far left. Meanwhile, the internet has amplified the influence of the angry and the ignorant. What matters in politics today is not substance or ideology; it is a willingness to give

America and Western Europe are defined by two core components. They are liberal because they seek to guarantee the rights of individuals, including those of marginalised minorities. And they are democratic because their institutions are supposed to translate popular views into public policy.

But in recent decades, as ordinary citizens' living standards have stagnated and anger at the political establishment has skyrocketed, these two fundamental components of politics in the West have come into conflict. As a result, liberal democracy is bifurcating, giving rise to two new regime forms: "illiberal democracy," or democracy without rights, and "undemocratic liberalism," or rights without democracy.

In more and more countries, vast swaths of policy have been cordoned off from democratic contestation. Macroeconomic decisions are made by independent central banks. Trade policy is enshrined in international agreements that result from secretive negotiations conducted within remote institutions. Many

like the EU or the World Trade Organization – that stand in the way of the collective will. But their nasty rhetoric should leave little doubt about what they hope to achieve: a clampdown on individual rights, particularly those of the people – from Mexicans to Muslims to muckraking journalists – whom they scapegoat in their speeches to such great effect.

In recent years, Hungary's Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, has demonstrated how easily a country can slide into illiberal democracy. And since late last year, the new Polish government has sought to realise Orbán's playbook. If Marine Le Pen wins the French presidency next year, illiberal democracy may spread to the heart of Western Europe.

The rise of Trump, like that of right-wing populists in Europe, attests to the key political dynamic of our time: The spectre of too much democracy that Sullivan fears has arisen from decades of too little. As political elites have become insulated from ordinary voters' preferences, they have created a wide-open space for appeals – often tribal and profoundly chauvinist – to communal unity and popular self-defense.

There is still some hope of avoiding the disintegration of our political systems into either illiberal democracy or undemocratic liberalism. Perhaps the main short-term priority should be to implement economic policies aimed at raising ordinary citizens' living standards – and thereby soften widespread anger at the political establishment.

But it also makes sense to experiment with new forms of political participation. In recent years, participatory budgeting, deliberative opinion polls, and even forms of "liquid democracy," which allow citizens to choose whether to vote on a policy issue or delegate their vote to a surrogate, have all come into fashion. None of these innovations is a silver bullet. But each can help point the way toward institutions that balance individual rights and popular rule better than current arrangements.

If these measures turn out to be too little too late, or if the political establishment becomes so spooked by the populists that technocrats end up with even greater control over public policy, liberal democracy is unlikely to survive. In that case, we may confront the political equivalent of Sophie's choice: sacrifice our rights to save democracy, or abandon democracy to preserve our rights.

The writer is a lecturer in political theory at Harvard, a fellow at New America, and the author of *Stranger in my Own Country: A Jewish Family in Modern Germany*.

It is hardly surprising, then, that citizens on both sides of the Atlantic feel that they are no longer masters of their political fate. For all intents and purposes, they now live under a regime that is liberal, yet undemocratic: a system in which their rights are mostly respected but their political preferences are routinely ignored.

voice to the people's nastiest grievances – a skill at which Trump undoubtedly excels.

In an incisive response, Michael Lind argued that Sullivan gets things backwards: the real culprit is "too little democracy." Trump, he points out, has fared best among voters who believe that "people like me don't have any say."

And there's a reason why more and more voters feel that way. Some of the most important political decisions are now made by technocrats. Even in policy areas where elected representatives still call the shots, they rarely reflect citizens' preferences. At first glance, the explanations offered by Sullivan and Lind seem to be mutually contradictory. But, to make sense of the deepening crisis of liberal democracy – which has also emboldened far-right populists throughout Europe – we need to recognise that they are actually complementary.

controversies about social issues are settled by constitutional courts. In those rare areas, like taxation, where elected representatives retain formal autonomy, the pressures of globalisation have attenuated ideological differences between established centre-left and centre-right parties.

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Alienated from an unresponsive political establishment, voters are flocking to populists who claim to embody the pure voice of the people. Like Trump, their promise to cast aside the institutional roadblocks – from critical media and independent courts to international institutions

Quotable Quote

URSULA K. LE GUIN
American author of novels, children's books, and short stories

You cannot buy the revolution. You cannot make the revolution. You can only be the revolution. It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere.

CAREER OPPORTUNITY

NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY

Center of Excellence in Higher Education

North South University (NSU), the first private university in Bangladesh seeks applications for the following positions:

Assistant Software Engineer: 02 positions (Dept. of IT)

Qualifications and Experiences: B.Sc or M.Sc in Computer Science from a reputed local or international university. At least 2 to 3 years of experience in any reputable organization.

Required Skills: Proficient in PHP and /or Java, html, java script, jquery, mysql.

Essential Traits: Passionate about automating manual work for efficiency, transparency across the institution. Excellent analytical and problem solving skills. Must be energetic, committed and willing to work extra hour to meet the deadline.

Optional Skills: C#, Spring, Hibernate, Postgresql.

Job Description:

- NSU information system has evolved into a true enterprise system consisting of heterogeneous platforms communicating in a language agnostic way. The candidate will be responsible for developing new systems as well as maintaining the existing ones.
- Develop application middle tier and backend by using industry standard persistence and integration framework.
- Integrate internal and external systems to automate day to day business process in NSU.
- Responsible for gathering and analyzing the business requirements across multiple academic and non-academic departments and offices.

Web Developer: 01 position

Qualifications and Experiences: B.Sc or M.Sc in Computer Science from a reputed local or international university. At least 2 to 3 years of experience in any reputable organization.

Required Skills:

- Must be proficient in various web frameworks such as Codeigniter, bootstrap/foundation, wordpress, Modx.
- Proficient in PHP, Java script, html, CSS, jquery, Photoshop.
- Good English writing skills.

Essential Traits:

- Passionate about improving look and feel of the existing and new websites.
- Must have design sense and expertise to meet the new requirement and criteria.
- Must be energetic, committed and willing to work extra hour to meet the deadline.

Job Description:

- Design and develop next generation web application using new framework and technology.
- Maintain legacy web application based on Modx, Codeigniter and wordpress framework.
- Integrate web application with other platforms and systems.

Secretary, Department of Law: 01 position

Qualifications and Experiences: Master's degree preferably in Business Administration / English / Social Sciences. Candidates with a 4-year Bachelor degree from NSU will be preferred. Candidates with experience in related field will be given preference. Adequate skill in computing / MS Office is essential.

Age limit (for all positions): Not exceeding 30 years

Monthly Salary (for all positions): An attractive salary packages & benefits will be offered to the deserving candidates.

Other Benefits (for all positions): Provident Fund, Gratuity, Festival Bonuses, Group Insurance, In- house Free Medical Consultation etc.

Only short-listed candidates will be called for interview

Candidates may apply with a complete CV, two photographs, experience certificates, copies of transcripts by **28 June, 2016** through e-mail or in hard copy:

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