



DOOMSCROLLING AND ANXIETY: TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

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HOW SOCIAL MEDIA SHAPED MY TEACHING EXPERIENCE

PG 6



# EDITORIAL

In 2022, there's no way to escape social media. Trust me, I have tried.

I always very reluctantly joined every app long after it became the norm too. No, I don't believe I'm quirky, 'different' or deserve brownie points for laying low.

I'm just very hesitant about using technology in general. If I can live without an app, I do. If I had better memory, I would stop relying on my notes app.

The downside of course is that sometimes you feel like you're living under a rock. Mostly this has proven not a bad place for me to be. It's comforting, safe and, somehow, happy. It's perhaps not very fitting for me to be signing our social media issue at all.

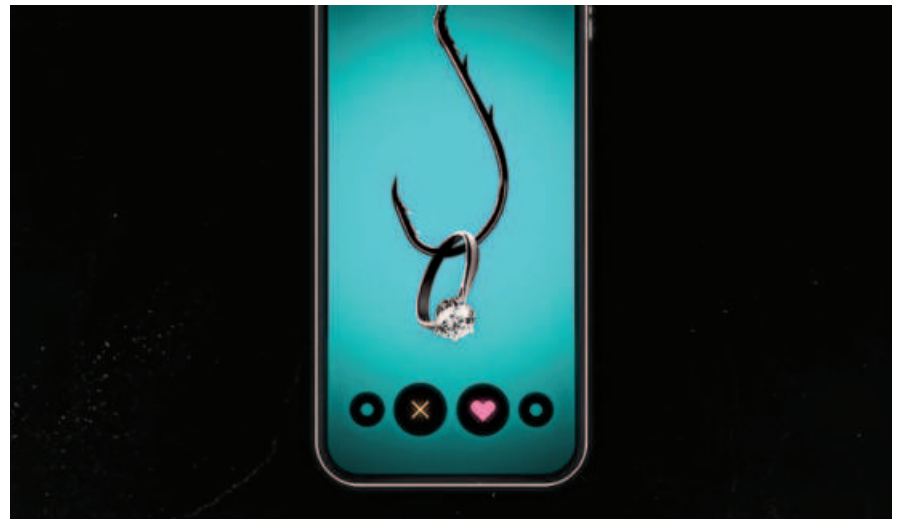
Our cover story this week is a genuine effort by me to understand one of these platforms better. I personally hope to embrace social media more too. At this point, staying off these apps is like being in denial of reality. I hope this week's issue is able to capture at least some of the many worries, dilemmas and confusions we all face about social media.

-Mrittika Anan Rahman, Sub-editor, SHOUT



## PLAYWATCH

### MOVIE



# The Tinder Swindler

*There are bigger worries than men being simply boring*

ANUPOMA JOYEETA JOYEE

Amongst the hoard of men who think height is their most significant personality trait, Simon Leviev, a conventionally handsome, well-travelled man with a seemingly exciting life, was basically screaming "the one" to women who came across his Tinder profile looking for true love in what I like to call the "Black Mirror Era of Dating". *The Tinder Swindler* follows the journey of three victims of Simon Leviev, a Tinder conman who scammed women out of millions of dollars all across Europe.

Leviev professes to be a billionaire's son and heir to a diamond empire. His deception tactic is to make his matches on Tinder believe that he is a charming, wealthy and loving man, with whom these women can envision a future. He flies them out on private jets on the very first date to fancy European holidays, invites them to party with exclusive cliques, and basically induces them to believe in his status as a wealthy business tycoon. Soon, Leviev shows these women an outlandish side of his life, where nameless enemies are after him and he is narrowly escaping mortal peril. This game with women's sentiments comes to fruition when he asks them for substantial amounts of money so that he can ride out these dangers. The victims have no reason to believe that he is incapable of ever returning their money since they have already witnessed just how rich he is. So, they help him out with every penny they can gather and even take out loans.

Calling Leviev's victims gullible would be a very one-dimensional and superficial judgement without having

any regard to how and why they behaved that way. The documentary does a great job at demonstrating how astronomical his deception was and allows the victims to reclaim the narrative.

Every interaction they had with him came with evidence of his wealth and Leviev's digital footprint corroborated his financial status. Just how deep would someone dig to find dirt on a person they desperately want to be the truth in an age where the possibility of ever organically meeting their soulmate is essentially zero?

Although repetitive after a point, it was an absorbing watch, not in the least because I am a true crime enthusiast, but also because as a twenty-something woman who has tried out online dating, I could see how a stroke of bad luck could lead to this awful life-changing experience.

The disappointing part of the narrative was seeing that despite being ultimately captured by the law enforcement, Leviev is leading life as a free man with grossly inadequate repercussions while his victims are still paying off the debt they incurred trying to "help" him out. The documentary succeeds in putting Leviev's name out in the world so that he cannot so easily keep tricking women who are simply looking for love. It also serves a word of caution for people on Tinder – in this post-dystopian hellscape of modern dating, maybe just stick to splitting the bill and don't give random people your money regardless of how dreamy they look.

*Anupoma Joyeeta Joyee would love to know your horror stories of online dating. Email her at anupomajoyee@gmail.com*

### TITLE OF YOUR MIXTAPE



A	B
Beggin' Måneskin	Delilah Florence + The Machine
Amar Mawte Hemlock Society	Chol Dotong Pahar Sohan Ali
Panchhi Ud Gaya Newton	Every Time Around Vansire
This Head I Hold Electric Guest	Skin Marika Hackman

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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

## Doomscrolling and anxiety: *Two sides of the same coin*

**EAHSAN ABEDIN**

Picture this. Someone picks up their phone for the last scroll on Facebook before falling asleep. What was meant to be a five-minute scroll turns into hours and before they realise it, the clock strikes four in the morning. Not only have they wasted their time, they missed out on sleep, leaving them drained for the next day.

Unfortunately, this person is me and the ordeal I went through is called doomscrolling.

Although the term “doomscrolling” seems unfamiliar, it originated in 2018 on Twitter. In 2020, it was named Oxford Dictionary’s most trendy word for the year. While Covid-19 spread outside our homes, phones gave us doomscrolling inside our very rooms.

But, what is doomscrolling?

Human brains are hardwired to enjoy consuming information. It makes us feel safer and informed, giving us the feeling that we are always in control. Subconsciously wanting more of it, it tells us to continue facilitating news and information to the brain, necessary or not. This is exactly what happened during the pandemic. People felt that scrolling social media was keeping them updated. But the problems began to sprout when people could not stop, and continued scrolling until they eventually became addicted.

Studies have found that people struggling with anxiety-related disorders (panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, post traumatic stress disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, and social anxiety disorder) are more susceptible to doomscrolling. What happens is that your desperation to consume more information and your anxiety become one. Ultimately, your anxiety and social media feed off of each other, making you the victim. It gets you obsessed, intensifying fear and anxiety even more, further aggravating mental disorders. As you scroll more to escape this problem, it triggers fatigue, further exacerbating your existing mental health issues and turning this into a vicious cycle.

Eventually, doomscrolling can become so addictive that even if you are faced with a minor hurdle on your day or have a deadline in 30 minutes, your anxiety does not let you do your job. It leads you to open your phone and start scrolling, almost like second nature. The worst part is that social media algorithms adapt with that and show you content recognising your scrolling behaviour.

Like other phenomena, the solution to the problem is inside its very definition. Our “awareness” of our habit is the first step to quitting it. If you are self-aware and are able to recognise this behaviour, a positive intent may be one of the most helpful ways to snap out of it. Simple tasks such as limiting social media consumption or even seeking positivity through reading books, going on walks, and spending time with family go a long way. Ultimately, newer habits, such as not picking up that phone before you go to sleep, journaling, or even watching a TV show may help. If things get too difficult, seeking out professional help is always an option, and often a good one.

*Eahsan is unsure if his experiences generated his personality or is it the other way around. Send him help at [eahsanabedin@gmail.com](mailto:eahsanabedin@gmail.com)*

## We are overly reliant on social media, but does social media care?

**AAQIB HASIB**

Over the last decade, more people have started to depend on the internet for information, their social lives and even for their livelihoods. However, the internet is somewhat of a double-edged sword in this respect, as our reliance on it can work against us.

I remember a friend of mine was recently locked out of their Google account for over 12 hours. Those were some of the most stressful 12 hours of his life, which makes sense when you realise that everything from your bank account to your personal documents might be linked to your Google account.

**THE ALGORITHM ISN'T YOUR FRIEND**

Social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram run on algorithms that determine the kind of content which is pushed to its users. And this algorithm is constantly being tweaked to make the sites even more engaging for users, leading to a lot of volatility for content creators and businesses.

One minor change in the algorithm might result in many small businesses losing visibility amongst their customer base and as a result, losing a big chunk of their revenue. These social media platforms refrain from disclosing guidelines on how to adapt to the changing algorithm, leaving users in the dark.

If we look at YouTube’s algorithm change around 2018, we can see just how many creators lost their audiences because they could not adapt to the changes.

**DATA LEAKS**

For many of us, our lives now live on the cloud. Google has so much of our data, that if one were to lose their account, they would be in quite the bind.

On top of this, data leaks have recently started springing up more and more, with Facebook and Google having massive data leaks and breaches in the past five years. These companies failed to take adequate measures to protect it, in the process losing the data of millions of users, between Facebook and Google alone. These leaks can result in users losing their accounts, which can prove catastrophic for those who use their accounts

for business, work, or something equally important to their lives.

**YOUR NEWS FEED ISN'T FOR THE NEWS**

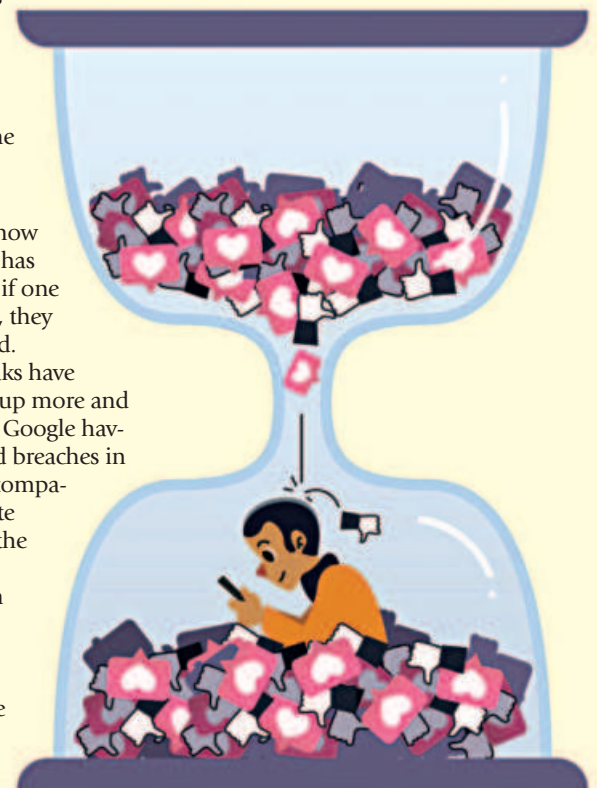
*“Just because it’s on the internet, doesn’t mean that it’s true” – Abraham Lincoln*

I am sure we’ve all seen this meme at some point, but misinformation on the internet has continued to grow exponentially. Or have you forgotten parents discovering Whatsapp groups during the peak of the 2020 pandemic?

The consequences of fake news can be devastating, ranging from people using horse deworming medicine to literal genocide. There are people whose internet usage consists of only social media, who rely on it as their primary source of information. Getting them to be more sceptical about news on social media is already an uphill task, and it’ll only get harder in the future. When social media companies fail to filter out fake news, especially for non-English posts, this reliance becomes a dangerous thing.

I suggest we acknowledge our dependence on such platforms. And in doing so, start to branch out to other platforms, digital or physical, to get our news, run our businesses and share our art.

*Aaqib Hasib will someday finish writing his book. But not today. Write to him at [aaqib.hasib@thedailystar.net](mailto:aaqib.hasib@thedailystar.net)*



# Boredom, and How Social Media Makes It Worse

MATILDA

Recently, as I sat waiting to be called for my IELTS Speaking Test, I felt a strong urge to ask one of the people in charge of maintaining the exam conditions to ask for my phone back. This was strange, for the situation was not new to me. I had taken many exams before, and had to wait much longer than I did that day, that too without any devices to distract myself.

However, this test was a familiar one, and my wanting to just get it over with, made me unnaturally restless during the 30 minutes before which I was called. While the feeling surprised me, this need to turn to our gadgets at the slightest hint of boredom is one that has become more than common in the past decade.

Boredom, by itself, is universally considered an undesirable state to be in. It also seems to be ancient. A *New Yorker* article titled "What Does Boredom Do to Us — and for Us?" mentions not just industrial age philosophers but Seneca from the first century who used "taedium vitae" to describe nausea at the repeated nature of life. It can be distressing and even excruciating, and this is a problem that plagues not just adolescents and adults beginning their work-life but older segments of the population as well.

We can get a sharp understanding of just how dire this state can be if we look at a 2016 BBC article mentioning the case of Frederic Desnard who sued his previous employer for "boreout", a term derived from burnout.

Furthermore, links have been found between boredom and adverse mental health conditions. A *Washington Post* article titled "Boredom's link to mental illnesses, brain injuries and dysfunctional



DESIGN: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

behaviors" details how agitated people can be when bored, even for 10 minutes. This was indicated by an experiment where one participant shocked himself 190 times when placed in a situation with zero distractions.

It might seem like a paradox, but the whole issue seems to have been signifi-

cantly exacerbated with the advent of the digital age where unimaginable amounts of content is produced every second.

A line that perfectly encapsulates the differences in reactions to boredom between past generations and this one comes from a Vox article called, "Bored and lonely? Blame your phone", where it

says, "Because of the promises of the digital age, when we experience those feelings, we're more surprised and alarmed than our ancestors were."

The words come from one of the authors of a book called *Bored, Lonely, Angry, Stupid: Changing Feelings about Technology, from the Telegraph to Twitter* where comparisons are made between people of the 19th and 20th centuries and people today, in terms of how both groups felt about boredom. The author states that while former generations viewed monotony as an ordinary feature of life that couldn't be avoided, the potential of instant and constant entertainment and companionship provided by our devices today, make us feel worse when we feel bored and alone.

In addition, the lack of effort with which we are able to use social media is also to blame as it offers no challenges for us to overcome. A study at Kent State University found that the usage of social media increased boredom while self-selected schoolwork decreased it. The results might be shocking, but as members of this generation, we know all too well that this has a grain of truth.

#### References

1. BBC (July 26, 2016). *Is there such a thing as 'boreout'?*
2. The Washington Post (July 17, 2021). *Boredom's link to mental illnesses, brain injuries and dysfunctional behaviors*
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4. Kent State University. *Social Media Use Increases Boredom and Homework Decreases Boredom, Kent State Research Shows*

Matilda sincerely believes it is always other people's fault. Tell her she's right at matilda.tilda1234@gmail.com

DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

# THE ALLURE OF TIKTOK

MRIITTIKA ANAN RAHMAN

As soon as I open TikTok, a video of a girl lip-syncing to a song jumps at me. Then, with each beat, her face changes, little by little, until it's fully transformed with red cobwebs covering her skin. I knew I wanted to talk to her. Thankfully, my two-minute research tells me she's Sanjina Islam Lupita.

A week later, I'm on a Zoom call with her.

"During quarantine, I got into face art. I started without the intention of making it a public account. I would draw flowers on my eyelids or dress up as Avatar characters. Once I shared my videos, my friends encouraged me to make my account public," shares Lupita, @isthatgina\_ on TikTok. She's also an influencer, and an Economics student at Brac University.

"My main focus is Instagram," says Lupita. "In Bangladesh, TikTok isn't like abroad — you can't get PR or monetise it. My aim is to gather an audience who'll know me and know my face, to eventually help with Instagram."

When asked if she has experienced toxicity on the app, she explains, "I try to keep a healthy distance from all this and use TikTok to only make videos. I don't reply to all the comments. Somebody once called me 'Illuminati' for doing Goth makeup. I did a red face devil makeup look once and got swarmed. But the audience has changed over time. There's only two percent toxic people now, and 98 percent are good."

During the pandemic, Tazreen Khan, a second semester BBA stu-

dent at North South University (NSU), also discovered the world of TikTok.

"I introduced my younger sister to TikTok. I used to make small videos for fun and they wouldn't get many views. Then, suddenly, one video got 100,000 views and boom, my videos started getting many views. Now I do mostly dance, comedy, or versatile content."

Tazreen is also an influencer. She goes by @typicaltazz on TikTok.

"When I started, there was a negative perception of doing TikTok. There wasn't much quality content. But now, I think people are seeing there is more to the app. People are realising this is helping them grow their presence online. Since quarantine started, the overall content on TikTok has improved a lot," shares Tazreen.

It's also hard work being on the app. "TikTok is tricky. You need time to understand how the mechanism works. TikTok is famous for transitions. There are many effects and you need to learn how to work them. Even if a video is 15 seconds, it might take six to seven takes for those 15 seconds," says Tazreen.

TikTok also shifted many of Tazreen's perceptions. "We always think Bangladeshi people don't think out of the box but TikTok has shown me that we do. There are boys here doing makeup. Some people ask them to stop, but they don't."

Communications executive at Tiger IT Bangladesh, Irfan Aziz, says it was his wife who made him want to get on TikTok after they watched videos on it together.

"I think most people present a much curated version of themselves on platforms like Facebook or Instagram. TikTok felt like a safer platform to be your true wacky self without being judged. I started making TikTok videos because none of my friends were there. By the time they found out, I already had a following going and realised that it's okay for me to create goofy content," says Irfan.

When he made a video about skincare, though, the response told him what he needed to know about people on the app. He adds, "The reaction to my videos has mostly been positive. Even if it's not, the TikTok community always stands up for you. I remember getting some hate on the skincare video but for each negative comment there were two to three people standing up for me."

The app proved to be a safe space for Tazreen, too. She says, "A few people joined after me and I made friends on TikTok. It's always nice to see good quality content makers. You feel like you're part of the same squad, like you belong."

Truth be told, I had my own res-

ervations about joining TikTok. My understanding of the app was based on clips I saw on Facebook, or videos featuring young people breaking things they owned as part of viral challenges.

TikTok was launched in 2018, after ByteDance bought Musical.ly and expanded globally. Ever since, it has appeared in the news for the wrong reasons with surprising frequency.

In December 2020, a Bangladesh Supreme Court lawyer filed a writ petition to ban the app, stating "in order to protect the young generation from social degradation". The lawyer stated that young people on the app are "losing their morality and social values."



In 2021, 11 people were arrested after using TikTok to lure girls for human trafficking. The amount of blame TikTok should get for this when human trafficking has been a problem in the country for quite some time is still a matter up for debate.

My personal reservations about TikTok are different, however. If everyone is following the same trends and challenges, does it not promote groupthink? Mursalin Hasan Chowdhury Alfie, a TikTok user and Marketing student at NSU, provides a counterargument.

"I think TikTok does encourage groupthink to some extent. Then again, those who are emulating these trends have to find their own ways of doing them. How they incorporate their own flavours into these videos is interesting to watch. These challenges, at the end of the day, are started by a certain individual or groups of individuals. It compels them to think originally," Mursalin argues.

The algorithm of TikTok is another thing that confuses users. "Every six to seven months, there's an algorithm change," says Tazreen, based on her experience on the app.

"Suddenly different things will start blowing up and I'll start seeing things I like, good content creators. Then when my videos start doing well, I understand that the algorithm has changed. Few months later, it'll become mostly 'cringe' content. For example, my 'For You Page' will show videos with 20,000 to 40,000 views, then suddenly drop down to 1000 views on a video. Five to six days later, I'll only have 1000 views on a video whereas I have

10,000 followers," Tazreen explains.

To me, this sounds like a lot to take. "I'm old enough to not let social media hurt me," she comments. "But I had so many people following me, and then it went down. My friend started unfollowing people, and so her followers dropped. The For You Page is also messed up so we don't really complain. It was demotivating of course. The video algorithm changes every six months or so and alternate crowds get attention on the platform."

Nahian Ibnat Beg is a co-founder of Trivents, an event management company in Dhaka. I reached out to her in the hope of finding how TikTok influences small businesses. Surprisingly, TikTok's mechanism of randomly boosting videos has served her well.

"I saw some international pages promoting their service-based business in my For You Page. Some had great views and reach, some had none. When I realised no one was really using the platform to promote event-related services here, I took the opportunity," she recalls.

"I took a leap of faith and started uploading videos. Initially, there was not much response. It increased with time. We understood people liked our content. This gave us the confidence to post more. After a few exclusive events, we gained some attention and since then, we haven't looked back."

Asked what TikTok did for her business which other social media platforms couldn't, Nahian replies, "Our views increased, reach increased, we gained a wider audience — potential future clients. There was a sudden increase in the client base. The automated video making and editing ability has allowed us to do more. Previously, we used complicated apps and softwares to make videos."

Shovy Zibran, Assistant Producer in the Multimedia Team of The Daily Star says the algorithm of TikTok threw him off from time to time too, "My friends and I started a face mask business during lockdown. We were a small business without much of a budget but then this app gave us the platform to access a newer audience."

"TikTok wouldn't categorise videos on their app. If you used a certain hashtag, people would see that video with all other videos using that hashtag," he adds.

TikTok seems like it's here to stay for a while. After the app's tumultuous journey, circling back to Lupita a year after her initial interview, I ask what's new.

"I make fewer TikToks now. Once a week or whenever I feel like it," she tells me.

But her face art videos opened new doors for her. Lupita is now a budding makeup artist and when I check out her feed on TikTok, it has a link where you can DM her for makeup appointments.

Mrittika joined TikTok at some point during writing this article. You can find her @rahmanmrittika

THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE SHOUT

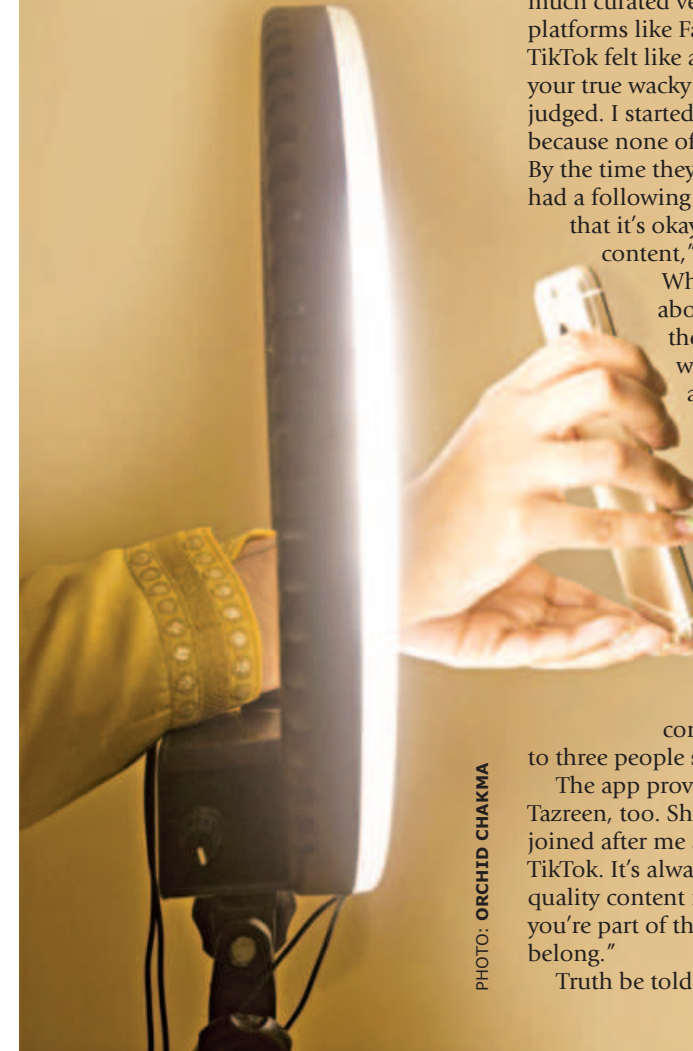


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA



**ECHOES BY**  
ASRAR CHOWDHURY

# How social media shaped my teaching experience

**I** My introduction to social media happened in August 2007. My childhood friend, Abhijit Chowdhury – Mithu – visited and gave me a “Facebook tutorial”.

Looking back, 2007 seems a generation ago. Facebook was in its infancy competing with Orkut and Myspace. During that competition, Facebook was defining the social media landscape, making it an integral part of our lives across generations as it has become today.

Before social media, I could electronically communicate with my students, via emails. However, internet access was not as good as it is today. Google Drive was not available till 2012. Sending large files in a single email was a fiddle; most email portals did not have the capacity. Facebook did have Groups in 2007. The groups in those days did not have the features of adding files and videos.

All this constrained collaborative learning. Learning was within the classroom only.

**II** As internet access became easy and Facebook became the all-in-one platform in social media, it was possible to keep up with my students. Soon, Facebook would be connected directly with Messenger, Instagram and WhatsApp, broadening its dimensions.

Parallel to this development, other databases started to develop. Specialised search engines for reference texts also began emerging. This was the missing link.

Sharing links to and from other platforms became easy. Mobile phones developed, and became affordable. Internet access in Bangladesh started to take its present form.

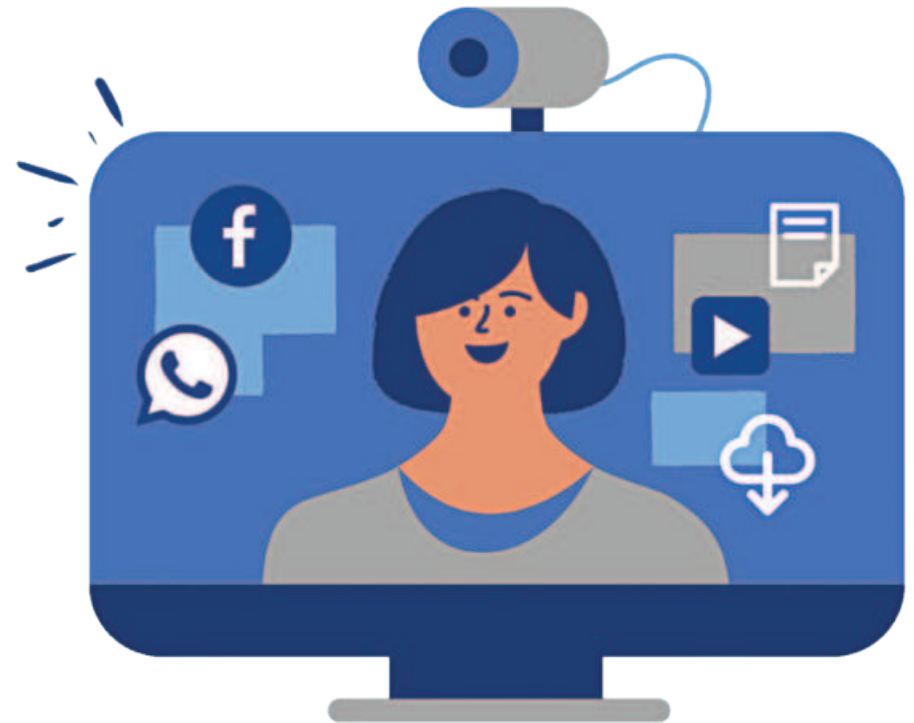
By 2012, Facebook Groups were ready to be used as a platform for collaborative learning. This led to a new experience for myself as an educator.

**III** When it comes to tech, I observe and/or discuss with young people. Today’s youth are a step ahead of us. If you treat them like adults, they respond like adults.

There are shy students in class who won’t ask questions. With Facebook Groups, all students started asking questions. Discussions became collaborative. When you write in text, you tend to think before writing. I could identify where my gaps were in a particular course. All of a sudden, the students and I were interacting intellectually. I was learning the ins and outs of different platforms from my students.

When the pandemic struck, Zoom, Google Meet, Facebook Live and others became the “new normal” platforms. I never liked online classes, but they opened a window none of us knew was possible. Social media went a few steps ahead. Different platforms could be synchronised.

As universities open up, hybrid classes – if they can be well-planned, executed, and monitored – hold a prospect in shaping teaching in our universities, colleges, and schools in the future.



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

**IV** All technology is a double-edged knife. One edge heals, while the other can cause damage if not managed properly. The proliferation of social media has become integral to our lives during the pandemic. It has made large-scale cooperation possible.

At the same time, it has been intrusive

on our privacy and mental health. We need to find that fine border line that divides technology from creation and destruction.

*Asrar Chowdhury is a professor of economics. He follows Test cricket, listens to music, and spins Vinyls when he has free time. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com*

## Start using LinkedIn as a teenager

**EAHSAN ABEDIN**

As a high-schooler, you might think that LinkedIn is for corporate hotshots only. Well, you might be wrong.

With 39 lakh active users in Bangladesh alone, LinkedIn is the world’s largest professional network. Having opportunities to network, learn, make connections, and get jobs, it might seem somewhat contradictory as to why the minimum required age for opening an account there is 13. In reality, LinkedIn is for everyone, everyone who wishes to create a professional presence online.

Here are five reasons why teenagers like us can, and should, use LinkedIn.

### START NETWORKING

Today, knowing people with varied interests goes a long way. And what better way to do that than starting early? With LinkedIn, you have the opportunity to connect with mentors and peers. Surfing their profiles, you can find inspiration and plan better. Widening your professional cloud and



gradually growing connections lets you engage and learn in countless ways, which might possibly lead to making newer connections, learning and planning from an early age.

### EXPLORE

With LinkedIn, you can filter out jobs,

courses, companies, and even people who are passionate about the same subjects as you. You can learn about opportunities you didn’t know existed just by exploring profiles. Even if you aren’t passionate about a subject, you can discover just about any job, company, event, group etc. in any subject of your interest, potentially making that your passion and heading on.

### EARLY START TO YOUR PROFESSIONAL CAREER

With 1.5 million jobs and internships exclusively targeted towards students, trying out for a post through LinkedIn might be completely worth it. Besides, an organised profile makes any student come off as more dedicated and driven in any application. In a world of CVs typed out in pasher golir mamar dokan, why not try saying “Yes” to showcasing your recommendations, ECAs, skills and experiences through an accredited and acclaimed platform?

### KEEPING TRACK

Properly maintaining and documenting

your achievements on LinkedIn doesn’t only let you enrich your profile gradually, but seeing those further motivates you to work harder. Sixty percent of college admission officers and employers try googling the name of an applicant while evaluating them. And when googling a person’s name, the algorithm always projects LinkedIn on top of any other social media platform. So, updating your LinkedIn profile might just give you that extra boost.

### STAYING UP TO DATE ABOUT RELEVANT INFORMATION

Although other social media might cater to you with news and opportunities about various subjects you are interested in, none does it as exclusively as LinkedIn, maintaining its status as a professional networking site. Students can access information about their dream schools and companies of interest for internships. LinkedIn has also invested heavily in its online course offerings to provide more avenues for professional and personal growth, including vital courses such as how to save or manage finances.

**FABLE FACTORY**

# Moon's Demise

**SYED NABIL AHSAN**

They say the moon yearns to see the sun,  
For the night misses its stars,  
And before the wind kisses your face,  
Take my hand, and walk in my embrace?

The ink today writes the saddest lines,  
And the paper grieves for mercy,  
For grief bled for being loved once again,  
While the remnants of our love become condemned.

Tonight, the cricket cries with the dead,  
As the cloud parted in defeat,  
To announce that the moon has breathed her last.

However, in your eyes I seek comfort,  
For my hand yearns for yours,  
Let our universes collide,  
And let the sun and moon's love finally confide.



# THE AUTHOR

**ZAREEN MUNIYAT**

We live in a world in which we are born with a timer engraved on our wrist. A countdown to the exact moment a person meets his/her soulmate. The person who was born to be ours. This has always led me to picture my life like a novel. The chapters have already been inscribed and my faith has been surrendered to the author's whim.

It's a kind of blissful existence, with the thought of our destiny already decided. I can't BEGIN to imagine the pressure of writing my own fate. It seems tiring. Now, we know we are exactly where we are supposed to be, doing exactly what we are supposed to be doing. All the time.

I was born with my timer at 18 years:4 days:15 hours:11 minutes:6 seconds. Right now, it is at 6 hours:15 minutes:32 seconds.

Only one other person in the world has the same countdown as me. I've been waiting for this day. I'm about to meet my person.

My mother says it's okay to be nervous. When she was about to meet dad her pulse went up so high, she had to be rushed to the hospital. And there he was! Dad, his charming self, coincidentally being a doctor there. Mother says they clicked the very second the timer struck zero. Their eyes met across the hall, and they knew.

I'm wearing my favourite red dress. It has polka dots. The Chinese believe that

red is a lucky colour. Although I don't think I need any "luck" today. My parents' story reassures me that things will go right. No matter what.

I try to imagine what he might be like. Will he have hazel brown eyes complementing his dark smooth hair? Will he be rugged and unbothered, or boyish and shy? Will his eyes sparkle when he laughs like the way I imagine they would?

I double check myself in the mirror before heading out.

**30 MINUTES:20 SECONDS**

Frankly, I don't know where I'm supposed to be right now. What if there is a small ripple in the grand perfect scheme of the

universe and I don't get to the right place at the right time. No, that can't happen. Follow your guts, it's never wrong.

I start walking to my favourite spot in the city. A small park. I also have a favourite bench there. I imagine the two of us sitting there someday, hand in hand, talking about the mundane details of our day. Old and wrinkly. The thought spreads a smile across my face.

**2 MINUTES:5 SECONDS**

It's almost time! My heart might leap out of my body with the pace it is beating right now.

As I'm about to cross the street, I see him. I KNOW it's him, even though he looks nothing like I imagined. He looks like what love would look like. I thought I saw a stranger I knew very well.

**0 MINS:30 SECS**

He looks up at me. We exchange a warm, knowing smile. As if we can already see the years ahead. Together. As if he's not a stranger at all, but a soul that parted with mine long ago, and is now being reunited. This is my person.

He starts crossing the street to get to me. What happened next will always be a blurry nightmare. I saw the speeding car coming towards him, everything seemed to slow down, and then the car hit him. He reached his hand out to grab mine. We were inches from each other but a lifetime apart.

There it was. His lifeless body in a pool of red.

**0 MINS:0 SECONDS**

This wasn't supposed to happen. My knees got weak as I looked at my destined future, completely undone. It felt like the pavement under my feet cracked and the Earth was swallowing me whole. The author will continue my story for the rest of my miserable life, but our chapter is over before it could begin. For the first time, I wished I was the one holding the pen.



DESIGN: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM



# I tried a social media detox

**RASHA JAMEEL**

Just a couple of months ago, I had a personal account on every social networking site: Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Tumblr, Reddit, LinkedIn, TikTok, you name it.

I spent an unhealthy amount of time every day either doomscrolling, or just engaging in comment wars left and right. Before I knew it, I couldn't enjoy quality time with my friends or family without documenting it on social media first.

## I NEEDED TO SNAP OUT OF IT.

"It'll be like ripping off a Band-Aid," I told myself. One fine day, I grabbed my phone and impulsively proceeded to uninstall every single one of my social media apps. I didn't reinstall any of them for the next five months.

Here's what I discovered in the period of time I spent away from social media.

### Decreased exposure to anxiety triggers online

As someone struggling with anxiety disorders, I often get easily affected by certain visual content found online. Continuous interaction with social networking apps resulted in either my anxiety skyrocketing or my depression intensifying.

After I distanced myself from social media for a significant amount of time, it dawned on me that I felt much less stressed than when I was going through my social media feed. Instead of taking in a large amount of online content at a faster rate, I was taking it slow, processing one thought at a time while I cleared my head of specific sensory triggers.

### INCREASED AMOUNT OF SPARE TIME

I had more time on my hands every day. All those hours I used to spend tapping away at my phone's keypad, were finally being put to better use.

Not only did I have more time to work, but I was also able to devote an additional amount of time to things that genuinely made me happy, my hobbies and such. Extended periods of doomscrolling gradually became replaced by more productive hours of scrapbooking and journaling.

### A HEALTHIER LEVEL OF INTERACTIVITY WITH THE PHONE

Prior to my break from social media, I'd never kept a count of how many times I checked my social media feeds. Logging into the five different apps on my phone every few minutes was practically routine.

For someone who couldn't go longer than 20 minutes at a stretch without logging in to Facebook, resisting the impulse to just tap the blue app icon proved to be quite the task. Deleting the app meant that I was no longer (a) up to date with all the chatter on social media, and (b) staying awake till 4 AM going through the comments section of a viral post.

I recently reinstalled two of the social media apps I used to have on my phone. Thus far, I've been limiting the amount of time I spend on each app and I no longer lose sleep over an anxiety-inducing Facebook post. I'm happy to announce that the social detox has been an absolute success.

*You can bring the author up to speed on all that she's missed out on social media lately by dropping a note at [rasha.jameel@outlook.com](mailto:rasha.jameel@outlook.com)*

# The Art of Humourising Everything

Or the sheer lack of art in it

**HASIB UR RASHID IFTI**

A few days back, a status popped up in my feed, which had some 500+ shares and around 2000 Haha reactions. It simply said, "Neither do I have the brains nor the looks. Why do I even exist?" in Bangla, with a smiley face at the end.

There's no well-established joke or any clever multi-layered pun here. It's just straightforward mumblings of a frustrated teenager, which 2000 people found funny, if we are naive enough to take Facebook reactions seriously.

It's not the humour, however, rather its relatability that's the selling point here. We are a generation that's accustomed to laughing at our own misery and using humour as our only defence mechanism. Although using internet memes as a substitute for clinical therapy might sound like a bad decision (and probably is), discovering a crowd of people sharing the same frustration, anxiety and depression as you, works wonders.

Even 15 years back, screwing up at your academics would make you feel lonely and depressed. Now, the meme culture dedicated to ranting about our education system somehow helps get over that frustration.

Things get a bit problematic when we relocate from this relatability factor of ranting through "shitposting" and consider it to be more of a responsibility. It starts with the recognition as an "internet memer" and a shot at social media validation. At some point, ideas stop coming. Yet, you can't. You have an imaginary quota to fill and social media points to gain. And then it happens - you cross the line. The invisible line of humour that separates "just a dank joke" from "plain offensive" and the line with which we

tend to skip rope.

Where do you draw this line? Is there a line to begin with? If so, then who chooses where to draw it?

No matter how offensive something might seem to you, there's always an audience for that sick joke somewhere in this creepy wonderland. Is it truly insensitive of him or is it your threshold of tolerance that's a bit too low? On the internet, you can make the most politically correct joke about three polar bears entering a bar and yet trigger someone enough to get cancelled. If we do take everyone's sensitivity into account, the glorious culture of self-deprecating millennial humour will lose its charm. It's all just a loop of questions with no definitive answer.

But does that snatch away our self-proclaimed right of making fun of our own tragedy? It doesn't. You can crack a joke about our national misery but not the victims of that misery. A joke about our poverty, weak financial infrastructure, unsafe streets and sickening culture of extortionist capitalism? Sure. One about a homeless guy who lost his everything due to the pandemic and died in a car crash? NO.

Humour has no grand pious intention. It cannot start a revolution, topple a dictator, or reshape the world order. It's simply how we choose to dump our frustration by laughing at our own tragedy. As victims, if not humour as our only language, then what? Reaching out for professional help, constructive criticism or protest for changes, just like in the old days?

How lame.

*Remind Ifti to be quieter at [hasiburashidifti@gmail.com](mailto:hasiburashidifti@gmail.com)*

