Social networks, messengers, and mobile phones as evil

Yelena Kolesnikova
independent scholar; Saint Petersburg, Russia
e-mail: lena_kolesnikova@gengo-chan.com

Abstract

Social networks are usually considered as something extremely positive and the most optimistic forecasts and expectations are associated with them. The reality, however, is slightly more complicated, and social networks have negative aspects. The first negative aspect is a tendency to escape meaningful content. Another negative point can be conventionally designated as stereotypization and artificial segregation of ideas. Also social networks serve the standardization of mind and behavior. And also a very negative aspect related to social networks and messengers is the obsession with mobile phones. The fact that there is such a large demand for brainless content is a sign that in modern society there are a variety of crises. People should pay more attention to real life and should not hesitate to be unsocial, 'unmodern' and complicated.

1. Introduction

In the last decade we can see a huge development of social network services and messengers which function much like social networks.
Social networks are usually considered as something extremely positive and the most optimistic forecasts and expectations are associated with them. The reality, however, is slightly more complicated. In this paper, I would like to critically consider the role of social network services in modern society.

An obvious positive aspect of social networks is the following: social networks help people to spread information that often can't be shared by usual media, and also social networks help certain social groups to increase their visibility and to coordinate.
However, in this short paper I am going to pay attention to negative aspects of social networks only.

2. Negative aspects of social networks, messengers, and phones

The first negative aspect is a tendency to escape meaningful content. Social media have a tendency to change/to move from more meaningful content to less meaningful. It is possible to can say that Facebook and Twitter are a lot like forums/blogs, while Instagram and TikTok are not. (Of course, formally TikTok can't be considered as a proper social network, but actually, it acts as a social network. TikTok can be considered as almost the ideal type of social network that consistently escapes mindful/meaningful content.) Initially social networks were intended to share some information/certain meaningful content, while now they mostly intended to gain popularity. And it is not at all necessary to produce certain meaningful original content to

achieve popularity, it is fairly enough just to entertain. If earlier ideas and events were the subject of discussion, now the most popular are not even some scandalous events, but odd/ridiculous subjects related to things and animals. And also pretty popular are subjects where people perform various experiments with their bodies/appearances (for instance: a girl made herself ass exactly like Kim Kardashian). It seems to me that such subjects reduce people down to the level of things.

Meaningful discussions disappear, meaningful communication is replaced by likes and reposts.

Another negative point can be conventionally designated as stereotypization. Four points/aspects can be singled out in this rubric.

One aspect of stereotypization is the fact that different ideas are spread only in the most grotesque forms and lose their 'nuances' while being spread, and when certain ideas are discussed they are usually discussed in a rather abrasive manner, i.e.: attention is usually paid to very key points while many 'nuances' are simply omitted.

Another aspect can be conventionally designated as forced labeling. Forced labeling means that when a person expresses some ideas, especially not very popular ones, they will usually certainly say that the person read it somewhere, i.e.: it is supposed that a person can't come up with something on his/her own, but only can borrow ideas from certain writings, from certain groups, and thus any person is forcedly attributed to a certain ideological group. And thus, it is possible to say that person, in a certain sense, loses his/her value, since it is presupposed that a person has no ability to think and analyze, make conclusions and create theories, but can only follow ideas produced by certain authoritative writes or by certain communities/groups.

The third aspect connected with stereotypization can be conventionally designated as artificial intellectual segregation or artificial segregation of ideas. Usually people tend to be interested in different things and combine different ideas in their worldview, while social media tend to artificially divide different intellectual spheres and build artificial 'walls' between them. And a person who is versatile and claiming to possess a holistic worldview is likely to receive some labels, for example, people can say: "don't pretend to be a person of Renaissance/Classical Antiquity".

The fourth aspect can be designated as standardization of mind and behavior: many people have a fear of being alone (a fear of being unpopular, of losing some social relations), and so they prefer rather follow 'mainstream' rather than openly show their real wishes and preferences.

And also a very negative aspect related to social networks and messengers is the obsession with mobile phones.

The obsession with popularity on social networks and virtual status makes people permanently check what kind of response their actions find, how many likes and reposts are there, and a mobile phone is an instrument of being on-line permanently. When a person permanently looks at a screen of a phone it leads to unpleasant and even dangerous effects: when one looks at the phone screen while crossing a road or driving a car, and not at cars or traffic lights, then an accident is just a matter of time.

Also, when a person constantly looks at the phone screen, he/she simply ceases to see the world around him/her and also ceases to critically comprehend reality.

3. What can be done with all the above-described issues?

The fact that now there is such a large demand for brainless content suggests that in modern society there are a variety of crises.

Of course, it would be too naïve and presumptuous to propose any ready recipes in this situation since the crises are too complex and require complex measures.

However, it is possible to say that it would be nice if people would pay more attention to real life. It would be nice if people would watch nature not for photos on Instagram, but just for their own pleasure. People should not be ashamed of themselves, people should not hesitate to be unsocial, 'unmodern' and complicated.