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ON NAVIGATING NEW MEDIA

October 13, 2015 · by Sarah Neal · in Sarah Lynn Neal, Student Life ·

Written by **Sarah Lynn Neal**

Social networking, for many people, has displaced the newspaper. We are given the ability to track current events occurring around the world through a device we hold in the palms of our hands. The age of sharing information has reached its height, and we are in the thick of it. As for social media's ability to provoke necessary discussion and change, one must discern whether reaching this peak in globalized media will usher in an inevitable downfall in human connectedness or if it will continue up the hill, trudging for an ever-improving social awareness and togetherness.

The capacity to catapult social change, in this case by highlighting the true, unfiltered thoughts of people is social networking's strength, but it also has an unavoidable downside: people sharing posts in a token effort to be on the right side of history, while not representing their social-media-proclaimed ideology in their everyday life. Every week draws in a new trend among social media users, where people share the latest hashtags or emotionally charged rhetoric in an effort to connect, to be apart of the social networking machine. People also share messages via social media as a form of activism, which is where the media platform may become questionable in its effectiveness. Is the person who updated their profile picture to the Facebook-engineered rainbow filter actively standing up against the bigotry facing LGBTQ communities, or is the effort merely a lazy attempt to appear involved?

Beth Sullivan, an English honors major, is critical of social media's ability to actually provoke social change, saying, "It allows people to have a false sense of doing something." Her critique goes off of the supposition that the world of social networking isn't truly real, that it's just a place where we go to share our thoughts before logging off and checking back into reality. There is an inherent privilege built into the framework of social media, which allows people to build an online persona that is not necessarily reflected in their everyday lives. Its privileged nature comes from people who, for instance, "actually engage in homophobic dialogue in the *real* world," but their social media posts suggest otherwise. Because the Internet provides a permanent, user-made record, we can craft the person we wish to be or think we should be without supplying all the necessary tenants of becoming that person in the real world.

Dixie Eiermann, an English major, is more concerned with social networking's ability to draw out the human desire for affirmation with its focus on 'likes' and follower count. When sharing something on social media, "are we really speaking whole-heartedly about these issues or just trying to see how many re-tweets we can get?" she asks, echoing the same cynicism underlying Beth Sullivan's argument. The likeability of posts on social networking sites does complicate its potential to facilitate a natural dialogue. It likens the sharing of personal ideas to the larger media machine, in which a 'like,' re-tweet, or share of an idea promotes the popularity of a media brand, as social media pats the individual sharer on his/her back. While the sincerity behind these posts is necessary to consider when uncovering biases, one must focus on the ultimate impact of sharing these ideologies on a platform that provides remarkable accessibility for voices that have previously been silenced.

"Every day there is a mini revolution waiting to happen. All of this potential energy is being built up and it can be released at any time," said Markus Molina, a student of the School of Social Work. The energy Markus refers to is the very energy that elected our current student body president and vice president, Xavier Rotnofsky and Rohit Mandalapu, and it is the same energy that organized a movement to bring down the Jefferson Davis statue. Social media has not been a central tenant of our everyday

lives for very long, but its positive effect can already be seen. Through hashtags and video posts shared via Twitter and Facebook, it has increased the visibility of the Black Lives Matter movement into what has become a significant platform of the upcoming 2016 election.

The brave activists kick started the movement in 2012 after George Zimmerman killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager. The movement's initiators were given a pedestal to express their concern and anger at the lack of justice for African Americans in the United States. Their pioneering efforts, echoing that of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., were shared at an alarming rate, forcing the visibility of the issue at hand. Regardless of who is sharing the latest tragic shooting on their Facebook page, and regardless of their intentions, that story is being heard. Naturally, there is apathy and lack of activity, but on the other side of that, there are activists utilizing social networking as an organizational tool to engage in meaningful dialogue. Social networking, despite all its frills and distractions, gives each and every voice a free and unfiltered platform. We are all the new media.

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Jim Moore October 13, 2015 at 11:59 pm · [Reply](#) →

Well, less-filtered anyway. We are lacking one vital piece of data: If a radical idea that stands to alter the status quo for the wealthy class takes root on social media, it will be interesting to see how it is "handled".

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