

Social networking sites: Concept, role, and impact

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Abstract---Social networking sites represent a recent development in the evolution of information and communication technologies. They are regarded by many as the most significant electronic revolution humanity has experienced in the sphere of social interaction and communication. Numerous experts and scholars affirm that social media currently accounts for approximately 71% of the global media and communication market. While each platform possesses unique features and functionalities, they collectively share a defining characteristic: the ability to facilitate communication among individuals across spatial and temporal boundaries, free from restrictions on expression. These platforms fulfill various functions, including enabling interpersonal communication and social engagement, supporting freedom of expression and content sharing, allowing convenient access to and dissemination of information, promoting interaction with diverse cultures, and serving as vehicles for personal expression. This study presents a theoretical exploration of the concept of social networking sites, which remains relatively new and, therefore, inherently complex to define with precision. It further investigates the roles these platforms play and the range of their effects.

Keywords---social networking sites, role, impact.

Introduction

The contemporary world is undergoing a transformative phase marked by the profound impact of the information and communication revolution, which has reshaped its structure. In this new landscape, information assumes a central role in shaping the experiences of individuals and the operations of institutions.

Technological advancements in communication have significantly expanded opportunities for proximity and interaction among people. These developments have cultivated an environment notable for its exceptional capacity to transmit information and have ushered in a new era of media capable of

How to Cite:

Bentrada, O. (2025). Social networking sites: Concept, role, and impact. *The International Tax Journal*, 52(6), 5210–522. Retrieved from <https://internationaltaxjournal.online/index.php/itj/article/view/559>

The International tax journal ISSN: 0097-7314 E-ISSN: 3066-2370 © 2025

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Submitted: 14 January 2025 | Revised: 05 June 2025 | Accepted: 05 July 2025

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influencing all dimensions of life. This era is characterized by the rise of boundaryless media—media unconfined by political, cultural, or religious limitations.

Consequently, the role of the audience has evolved from that of a passive receiver of information via traditional media to that of an active participant in curating, producing, storing, and sharing content. Today's users engage meaningfully in the exchange and interaction processes within their own societies and across different cultural contexts.

This emerging media form is largely shaped by information and communication technologies—most notably, the Internet. The Internet has emerged as a collective space co-produced by its users. It functions as a public domain distinguished by openness, multimedia integration, synchronicity, and interactivity. These attributes are key drivers behind its broad appeal and global spread.

The Internet, as a global information network, extends across virtually limitless boundaries. It is no longer merely viewed as a data repository, a system for organizing and retrieving information, or a medium for communication and entertainment. Increasingly, it assumes diverse and complex roles: as a generator and disseminator of knowledge, an educational platform, a cultural agent, a media entity, and a socializing force. Additionally, it functions commercially and ideologically—as a marketer, a promoter, a decision influencer, and a purveyor of values across different spheres of life.¹

Among the most prominent and widely adopted outcomes of these technological advancements are social networking sites. These platforms have become the most favored tools for social interaction across societies. They are seen by many as the defining digital revolution of this generation in terms of reshaping interpersonal communication. Social networking sites offer users highly accessible and efficient means to fulfill a variety of needs—from acquiring knowledge and seeking entertainment to communicating and building social connections.

The advent of these platforms has propelled media into new and transformative realms, providing users with unprecedented autonomy in influencing and engaging across borders, largely free from oversight, except in limited circumstances. Social media has introduced direct, real-time interaction with audiences, thus redefining traditional communication models and dismantling the longstanding monopolies over the creation of media content. This shift has opened a more inclusive and dynamic space characterized by increased influence and reciprocal engagement.²

Danah Boyd conceptualizes social networking platforms as “networked publics,” spaces constructed through networked technologies, and as “imagined communities” emerging from the interaction of people, technologies, and practices. These networked public spaces serve functions akin to those of physical public arenas, enabling individuals to congregate for social, cultural, and civic interaction. Furthermore, they empower users to communicate beyond the confines of intimate circles such as family and close friends, extending their reach to broader, more diverse audiences.³

Morsi Mashri describes social networking sites as an intricate web of websites, software, and data platforms that facilitate communication among individuals from various nationalities and civilizational backgrounds. However, their development was not initially intended to promote intercultural familiarity, foster mutual understanding, resolve disputes, or disseminate knowledge. Instead, their

¹ Ali Mohammed Rahouma, *The Internet and the Techno-Social System: An Analytical Study of the Technical Mechanism of the Internet and the Modeling of Its Social System*, Doctoral Theses Series no. 53, Arab Unity Studies Center, 1st edition, 2005, p. 15.

² Muayyad Naseef Jassim Al-Saadi, *The Communicative Function of Social Networking Sites: A Study of Facebook*, 1st edition, Alpha for Documentation, Algeria, 2016, p. 13.

³ Al-Sadiq Al-Hammami et al., *Arab Women in Virtual Debate: A Study of Women's Representations on Traditional Media Pages on Facebook*, Arab Women Training and Research Center — Al-Kawthar, Tunisia, 2015, p. 41

emergence primarily aligned with the demands of the expanding capitalist market economy, which increasingly relies on precise data regarding consumer behavior—data that these platforms are well-equipped to collect and provide.⁴

Numerous experts and specialists have affirmed that social media currently dominates approximately 71% of the global media and communication market. Each social networking platform carries distinct characteristics and advantages; nevertheless, they share a central attribute: the capacity to enable communication among individuals without spatial or temporal limitations and without constraints on freedom. These platforms fulfill multiple roles across different domains of human life, while simultaneously exerting substantial influence and posing various risks to individuals' social, political, cultural, and psychological spheres.

In light of the above, this research adopts a descriptive approach aimed at offering a theoretical examination of the concept of social networking sites, in addition to exploring their roles and multifaceted effects.

First: Social Networking Sites, the Concept

This concept is among the contemporary notions emerging from the era of information and communication technologies. Consequently, formulating a clear and universally accepted definition remains challenging. Definitions vary in accordance with the perspectives of different scholars, and the following are several interpretations that have been proposed.

According to the French *Larousse* dictionary, social networking sites are defined as a system that facilitates the publication, distribution, and transmission of written materials, documents, and audio or audiovisual messages (including those related to press, cinema, and posters).⁵

Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social networking sites—referred to broadly as social media—as a collection of Internet-based applications rooted in the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0. These platforms enable the creation and exchange of content generated by users.⁶

M. Madden and A. Lenhart view them as a virtual environment on the Internet through which users can create personal pages and utilize various tools for communication and interaction with acquaintances who share similar interests, while also offering the ability to propose and discuss topics and ideas.⁷

From an Arab perspective, Abbas Mustafa Sadiq defines social networking sites as media forms presented in a digital and interactive format, relying on the integration of text, image, video, and sound, with the computer serving as the principal tool in both the production and presentation processes. Interactivity is identified as their most distinctive and essential feature.⁸

Saeed Al-Batouti describes them as web-based platforms developed to bring together users and friends, allowing them to share activities and interests and to foster friendships along with new engagements

⁴ Morsi Mashri, Digital Social Networking Sites: A View on Functions, Arab Future Journal, no. 396, 2012.

⁵ Jamal Zern, Traditional and New Media in the Context of the Expansion of Social Media and Its Networks, Media Studies, Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, March 2017, p. 9.

⁶ Haenlein, M.; Kaplan, A. M., "Users of the World, Unite: The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media," Business Horizons, Vol. 53, Issue 1, 2010, p. 61. Cited in: Tebri Samia, The Reality of Public Relations' Use of Social Networking Sites and Its Role in Improving Institutional Image: An Analytical Study of the Official Facebook Page of the Cevital Group, PhD thesis (L.M.D.), Advertising and Public Relations, Department of Information and Communication Sciences, Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University, Sétif 2, 2020–2021, p. 178.

⁷ Lenhart, Amanda; Madden, Mary, Teens, Privacy and Online Social Networks, Unpublished Report, The New Internet and American Life Project, USA, 2007. Cited in: Tebri Samia, op. cit., p. 179.

⁸ Abbas Mustafa Sadiq, New Media: A Study of Its Theoretical Approaches and General Characteristics, Arab Gateway for Media and Communication Sciences, 2011, p. 9.

and pursuits. These platforms also offer various services, including file sharing, instant messaging, email, video clips, images, and blogging.⁹

The term “social networking sites” encompasses a set of virtual networks that exist online, providing users with the ability to communicate with others and to engage in discussions on political, economic, social, cultural, and personal subjects. The nature of these networks varies; some facilitate identifying and connecting with friends worldwide, while others focus on the uploading of video content on diverse subjects, around which users can exchange comments, conversations, and discussions on a broad scale.¹⁰

Sharif Al-Labban defines social networking sites as online services that allow individuals to build personal profiles—either private or semi-public—within a designated system. Through these profiles, users can compile lists of contacts for communication purposes and can view both their own connections and those established by others within the system.¹¹

Abeer Salama considers these platforms to be software applications designed to support communication among groups, allowing them to convene and engage in dialogue through computers connected to the Internet, with the objective of forming virtual communities.¹²

Zaher Radi defines social networking sites as a system of electronic networks that enables users to create personalized websites and connect them, via an electronic social framework, to other members who share common interests and hobbies.¹³

Mohamed Awad defines social networking sites as an electronic social structure created by individuals, groups, or institutions. The fundamental structural unit is referred to as a node, which is linked to other nodes through different types of relationships, such as supporting a particular team or affiliating with a specific organization. These relationships may extend into deeper dimensions, encompassing aspects such as social status, belief systems, or the social class to which a person belongs.¹⁴

Jamal Zern poses the question: when referencing social networking (Social Networking) or social networking sites (Social Networking Sites), does one refer to the concept of social media (Social Media), or to an entirely different notion? He addresses this by acknowledging that, while the two terms may appear synonymous, there is a degree of confusion, as notable distinctions exist between them—despite the prevailing tendency to conflate the two. He characterizes social networking sites as electronic platforms that allow Internet users to establish personal pages for the purpose of sharing information, images, and videos with a network of friends and acquaintances.¹⁵ In contrast, social media comprises a collection of Internet-based platforms that enable individuals to create, organize, modify, and comment on content. This distinction reveals that social networking sites are a subset of social media, while the broader term includes a wider array of digital environments.¹⁶

⁹ Saeed Al-Batouti, *Tourism Marketing*, Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, Cairo, 1st edition, 2012, p. 383.

¹⁰ Reda Amin, *New Media*, Al-Fajr Publishing and Distribution House, Cairo, 1st edition, 2015, p. 108.

¹¹ Darwish Sharif Al-Labban, *Interventions in Alternative Media and Electronic Publishing on the Internet*, Dar Al-Alam Al-Arabi, Cairo, 1st edition, 2011, p. 86.

¹² Jibril bin Hassan Al-Arishi; Salma bint Abdulrahman Mohammed Al-Dosari, *Social Networks and Values: An Analytical Perspective*, Al-Manhajiya Publishing and Distribution House, 1st edition, 2015, p. 22.

¹³ Bushra Jamil Al-Rawi, “The Role of Social Networking Sites in Change: A Theoretical Approach,” *Al-Baheth Al-I’lami Journal*, no. 18, 2012, p. 96.

¹⁴ Mohammed Al-Mansour, *The Impact of Social Networking Sites on Audience Reception: A Comparative Study of Social Networks and Arabic Electronic Websites as a Model*, Master’s thesis in Media and Communication, Faculty of Arts and Education, Arab Open Academy in Denmark, p. 27.

¹⁵ Jamal Zern, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁶ Boyd, Danah; Ellison, Nicole, *Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship*, 2007. Cited in: Jamal Zern, op. cit., p. 9.

Social media functions as a network of networks, whereas social networking sites constitute individual social platforms on the Internet. Social media encompasses various components, including blogs, wiki platforms, chat forums, blogging websites, image-sharing services such as Flickr, video-sharing platforms like YouTube, and social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn. In this framework, the core of social media lies in content and substance, while social networking sites—sometimes referred to as social communication platforms—focus on forming virtual communities and facilitating interaction among their members.¹⁷

A clearer distinction between the two concepts may be drawn by considering the defining features of social networking sites, the most significant of which include:

1. **The social link:** Users within social networking sites engage in shared activities and interests, fostering interaction within the platform, which in turn leads to the development of social relationships and connections.
2. **The mode of communication:** Interaction on social networking sites typically takes the form of dialogue or chat. Messages are crafted based on the recipient's characteristics, interests, and shared experiences. Consequently, these sites function as relationship-building tools via the Internet, while social media primarily provides channels for opinion expression.
3. **The profile:** Each user on social networking sites maintains a unique profile consisting of personal information that can be updated over time. These platforms offer users the ability to define themselves through personal pages that include text, photos, music, and videos. They also allow individuals to curate and present their social connections and profile in a manner aligned with how they wish to be perceived by others.¹⁸
4. **Networking:** Social networking sites display user networks, such as friend lists. They also enable users to search for and connect with new individuals who share common interests or mutual relationships.
5. **Communication tools:** These platforms provide technologies that support real-time communication, file and image sharing, as well as functions to express appreciation or leave comments on specific content, all with considerable ease.
6. **Participatory tools:** Unlike many other forms of social media, social networking sites offer distinctive participatory features. Users can create groups or pages focused on specific topics, events, or issues, facilitating shared dialogue and discussion. Many networks support the formation of interest-based groups, each with its own name and purpose, providing a forum-like space for discussion and coordination of activities or meetings.
7. **Interactivity:** A fundamental characteristic of social networking sites is interactivity, which has contributed significantly to their persistence and development. Previously, user engagement on digital platforms was often limited to content feedback; however, social networking sites have expanded this engagement into dynamic, reciprocal interaction. In addition to these unique attributes, social networking sites also share certain features with broader social and digital media, including:
8. **Ease of use:** One of the primary factors behind the rapid proliferation of social networking sites is their simplicity and accessibility. These platforms are user-friendly, inclusive of all demographics regardless of age, gender, language, or location, and typically offer straightforward registration processes—either directly or through invitations from current users.

¹⁷ Jamal Zern, *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁸ Romina Cachia, *Social Computing: Study on the Use and Impact of Online Social Networking*, JRC Scientific and Technical Report, European Commission, 2008, p. 3. Cited in: Janouh Kalthoum, *Social Networking Sites and the Transformation of Family Values*, Research and Studies, Moroccan Center for Contemporary Studies and Research, February 2017, p. 6.

Second: The Role

Social networking sites are among the most prevalent Internet platforms, a status attributed to the features that set them apart from conventional websites. These characteristics have encouraged greater user participation online. Despite the criticisms often directed at such platforms—especially Facebook—and concerns regarding their adverse effects on individuals and communities, some consider them essential tools for communication, for fostering mutual understanding, and for learning about and engaging with different cultures. Their influence extends into political, social, cultural, and economic realms.

I. The social field:

In the social domain, social networking sites currently play a pivotal role in the socialization process, particularly for youth, who acquire behaviors and internalize appropriate social norms through their use. These platforms also act as powerful instruments of social transformation, shaping individual behaviors, values, and beliefs. This influence is amplified by the consistent and rapid growth of their user base, especially in the Arab world, where the number of users is estimated to increase by nearly one million each month.

The social changes linked to these networks may be observed along two primary axes. The first concerns the formation of friendships, as these platforms facilitate both real-life and virtual friendships grounded in shared interests, linking individuals with similar concerns across digital environments. The second pertains to group affiliation, as social networking sites support the formation and consolidation of social groups with common interests—whether within a local context or across the global stage.¹⁹

The issue of the relationship between social networking sites and the construction of social capital underscores this interpenetration between the real world and the virtual world. Social capital, as defined by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, refers to the collection of actual or potential resources connected to the possession of a stable network of relationships—relationships that are more or less institutionalized and based on mutual acquaintance and various forms of reciprocal recognition.²⁰

Accordingly, virtual engagement does not detach individuals from their social realities; rather, it can enhance human connections and foster deeper interpersonal bonds. Individuals utilize platforms such as Facebook to expand their social opportunities and reinforce existing social ties. This observation challenges the conclusions of earlier studies that argued the Internet leads to social isolation from one's immediate environment.²¹

II. The political field:

The significant role of social networking sites is prominently demonstrated within the political domain, where they contribute to:

- **Mobilizing public opinion:** These platforms serve to galvanize public sentiment regarding societal issues and influence perspectives on various matters. Numerous groups have been created through social networking sites—particularly Facebook—to disseminate cultural, political, and educational programs.
- **The emergence of what is known as virtual citizenship:** In the context of rising tensions affecting the nation-state, the virtual sphere becomes a domain where individuals can exercise citizenship rights and advocate for political entitlements.²²
- **Activating the role of civil society:** Numerous civil society organizations have taken advantage of the capabilities offered by social networking sites to reinforce their initiatives, improve

¹⁹ Jibril bin Hassan Al-Arishi; Salma bint Abdulrahman Mohammed Al-Dosari, op. cit., p. 26.

²⁰ Bourdieu, Pierre, "Le capital social: Notes provisoires," *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, no. 31, 1980, pp. 2–3. Cited in: Al-Sadiq Al-Hammami et al., op. cit., p. 47.

²¹ Al-Sadiq Al-Hammami et al., *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²² Walid Rashad, *Citizenship in Virtual Society: Theoretical Reflections with Reference to the Egyptian Context*, paper presented at the Tenth Annual Conference of the National Center for Social and Criminal Research, Cairo, May 16–19, 2009. Cited in: Al-Arishi & Al-Dosari, op. cit., p. 27.

communication among their members, and extend invitations to beneficiaries for participation in their programs and activities.

Social media acquired its symbolic significance within the collective consciousness through its perceived connection with pivotal political developments in the Arab world. It reached the point where these platforms were almost universally regarded as the principal catalysts of the Arab revolutions—hence the frequent reference to the uprisings as the Facebook and Twitter revolutions.²³

Social networking sites have created a global arena for voicing dissent and engaging in self-expression, outside the constraints of censorship, repression, and the many exclusionary measures that restrict independent thought. These mechanisms of control had diluted the substantive meanings of concepts such as democracy, freedom, diversity, rights, and responsibilities—values traditionally associated with citizenship.²⁴

In this context, social media has come to symbolize freedom and emancipation in the collective imagination. It provides a platform for ordinary citizens to emerge within the public sphere and claim their right to voice opinions and participate in matters of public concern. Thus, these new media tools have fulfilled some of the promises attributed to the technological revolution: enhanced communicative access, broader democratization of expression, the expansion and openness of public discourse, and the introduction of new avenues for civic and political engagement.²⁵

Charlie Beckett, Director of the Polis Research Centre in London, highlighted this evolution when he observed that the dissolution of governmental monopolies over media contributes to the empowerment of populations. He further stated that society may now be entering a phase in which social networking sites begin to function—at least to some extent—as instruments for democratic transformation, if only because they increase governments' awareness of public opinion.²⁶

III. The institutional and economic field:

Institutions have utilized social networking sites as tools to present themselves and their products, to construct favorable mental images among their audiences, and to engage with them to understand their opinions and preferences. These efforts aim to establish positive relationships with the public and to retain audience loyalty through carefully designed content and messaging tailored for social networking platforms.

The growing engagement of users with various social networking platforms has led to the proliferation of such sites and the continuous evolution of their communication functionalities. Emarsys reported a marked increase in the number of users in 2019, with a substantial portion of the global population accessing these platforms nearly every day—estimated at 3.2 billion users, or approximately 42% of the world's population. This figure rose even further in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated global lockdowns and imposed remote work as a critical adaptation for individuals and institutions alike. Consequently, by April 2020, the number of social media users had climbed to nearly 3.8 billion globally, accounting for around 49% of the world's population.²⁷

Among these platforms, Facebook holds the position of the most widely used, followed by WhatsApp and YouTube, along with Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Usage rates surpass 50% across

²³ Al-Sadiq Al-Hammami et al., op. cit., p. 19.

²⁴ Amina Nabih, *Digital Communication and New Media: Facebook as a Model*, Ghidaa Publishing and Distribution House, Amman, 1st edition, 2019, p. 115.

²⁵ Al-Sadiq Al-Hammami et al., *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁶ Ali Lafta Al-Essawi, *Facebook as an Alternative Homeland for Youth and Its Negative Impact on Iraqi Youth: A Descriptive Analytical Study*, Islamic Center for Strategic Studies, Cultural Penetration Series no. 10, 2021, p. 59.

²⁷ Maryam Mohsin, *10 Social Media Statistics to Remember in 2020* (Infographic), Oberlo Source, published May 27, 2020. Cited in: Tebri Samia, op. cit., pp. 182–183.

institutional practices in sectors such as tourism, media and communication, information and communication technologies, and real estate services.

Institutions have come to rely heavily on social networking sites to enhance their image and reputation and to manage brand perception. This reliance illustrates the role these platforms play in linking institutions with their audiences and in cultivating trust and loyalty. Social networks have emerged as essential tools for product marketing and as significant sources of economic information, including updates on financial markets and tenders, technological advancements, product innovations, competitive landscapes, and developments involving major corporations. Through these transformations, the material economy has transitioned into a digital economy.

IV. The field of education:

Advancements in information and communication technologies have triggered substantial transformation across all domains, compelling adaptation to the rapid pace of change—particularly in the educational sector—and encouraging the integration of technological innovations to enhance the efficiency of educational processes. These technologies have introduced novel educational tools and methods, including the use of computers and the global information network, enabling learners to engage with content more effectively and with less effort, while benefiting from flexibility in time and location.

E-learning is defined as a learning approach that incorporates modern communication technologies such as computers, networks, and various media formats—including audio, images, graphics, search tools, electronic libraries, and Internet portals—regardless of whether instruction takes place remotely or within classroom settings.²⁸

Social networking sites offer features that support the exchange of information and files in both textual and audiovisual formats, positioning them among the tools applicable to distance learning. During the pandemic period, students and teachers made extensive use of these platforms to maintain educational continuity.

Third: Impact

I. Social impact:

Sociologist Anthony Giddens posits that the social and cultural changes shaping contemporary society are characterized by centrifugal forces that drive individuals outward, creating cultural patterns marked by instability and confusion. He further observes that in societies where communication via Internet networks is widespread, individuals tend to experience increasing social detachment. This is attributed to their immersion in fragmented and episodic daily experiences, which prevent them from forming a cohesive and comprehensive understanding of life. Consequently, life becomes devoid of meaning under the weight of rigid, static social systems that lack vitality and dynamism, stripping life of its richness and its intimate social dimensions.²⁹

Numerous studies suggest that one of the contributing factors to modern family disintegration is the widespread use of social networking sites, with Facebook cited most prominently. While such platforms have enabled the creation of social connections in virtual environments, they have also introduced

²⁸ Tarek Abdel Raouf, *E-Learning and Virtual Education: Contemporary Global Trends*, Arab Group for Training and Publishing, 1st edition, Cairo, 2014.

²⁹ Helmi Khadr Sari, "The Impact of Internet Communication on Social Relationships," *Damascus University Journal*, Vol. 24, Issue 1, 2008, p. 308, cited in: Ali Lafta Al-Essawi, op. cit., p. 33.

divisions within families and contributed to the weakening of familial bonds. This outcome stems from users' deep engagement in virtual spaces and their detachment from tangible social interactions.

Dr. Abdelkader Ahmed Al-Obaid argues that the use of interactive platforms has increasingly replaced direct social engagement with friends and relatives. Individuals now spend extensive hours navigating various digital platforms, reflecting a shift in the social value system. Overuse of these sites tends to reinforce individualistic values at the expense of communal and cooperative values, which are vital components of cultural cohesion.³⁰

At the level of values, users of social networking sites shape value systems that are formed within a rapidly changing world and that socially and culturally conflict with real-life reality. Social networking platforms have contributed to reinforcing a set of values, including transient trust, curiosity accompanied by deception, individual egoism, and entertainment as an intrinsic value. A recent study conducted by researchers at Boston University in the United States demonstrated that excessive engagement with social networking sites can cause disturbances in emotional relationships. The study identified a link between the use of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and the emergence of social issues related to divorce and emotional strain between spouses.³¹

II. Psychological impact:

Excessive use of social networking sites gives rise to numerous psychological issues, including depression and feelings of loneliness. Many studies have confirmed that heavy Internet usage can adversely affect an individual's mental well-being. The design of Facebook, in particular, is structured around exploiting psychological tendencies. Adolescents who use Facebook frequently tend to exhibit higher levels of stress and isolation compared to others, as their interactions on the platform with virtual acquaintances often remain superficial due to the lack of genuine face-to-face connections.

Among the detrimental aspects of these platforms is the significant amount of time users spend engaging in trivial browsing and conversations, especially among youth, resulting in a loss of time, cognitive focus, and energy without any tangible benefit.

One of the most critical psychological consequences linked to platforms like Facebook is addiction, which researchers classify among the most severe forms of dependency. Certain specialists define this condition as the individual's inability to regulate Facebook usage, wherein it becomes the central activity in the person's life. The user experiences pleasure and comfort while engaged on the platform, and conversely, feels irritation, discomfort, and unease when access is restricted.³²

III. Political impact:

Social networking sites have emerged as venues for dialogue, discussion, and the articulation of opinions. They function as effective tools in shaping public opinion and have become alternative sources of information and news, standing in contrast to traditional media. However, these platforms are also exploited by certain actors for purposes of deception and misinformation, often hidden behind fabricated accounts.

One of the terms recently coined within this context is "electronic flies," used to describe automated or programmed accounts operating on social media platforms. These accounts are typically mobilized for political purposes and are directed at targeting specific individuals, companies, governments, states, languages, religions, societies, persons, ideas, ethnicities, or genders through the dissemination of hate speech.³³

³⁰ Ali Lafta Al-Essawi, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

The core issue lies in the unethical and deceptive methods employed. These accounts do not reflect authentic public sentiment but instead generate an artificial and inflated narrative designed to manipulate discourse and dominate alternative perspectives through the orchestration of fake identities. In this sense, such practices constitute a falsification of truth and reality and are widely perceived as a direct assault on public consciousness and collective awareness.³⁴

The threat posed by electronic flies stems from their capacity to mislead vast numbers of individuals and distort the awareness of millions. Experts have described their influence as more destructive than that of armed groups.

IV. Security impact:

From a security standpoint, social networking sites have also contributed to the proliferation of criminal activity, extremism, cyber blackmail, threats, defamation, harassment, fraud, and financial hacking. These platforms have been utilized to promote radical ideologies and hate-based rhetoric, presenting significant threats to national and societal security.

As a result, social networking sites have become tools that jeopardize the safety of societies and states, prompting the development and institutionalization of concepts such as information security and cybersecurity. In the modern context, protecting technological infrastructure and national digital information is considered no less crucial than safeguarding territorial borders; indeed, it is often deemed even more critical.

V. Cultural impact:

Many researchers maintain that social networking sites contribute to promoting the culture of globalization and to the homogenization of diverse cultural identities. These platforms function as channels for transmitting cultures, values, and behavioral models to millions of users with ease, speed, and without cost. Consequently, they are seen as posing a threat to national cultures and as eroding individuals' distinct cultural identities.

As stated by the UNESCO committee tasked with preparing the Conference on Cultural Policies for Development, held in Stockholm in 1998, cultural standardization is facilitated through the exploitation of opportunities provided by the information revolution and the global communication network. This process aligns with the network's economic and productive structure, which is reflected in the circulation of information, the transfer of goods, and the flow of capital.³⁵

Conclusion

Social networking sites have triggered a communication revolution, advancing the media landscape into uncharted dimensions. They have offered individuals a vast arena for information exchange, participation, and interaction, and have drawn millions of users by providing services that span not only social communication but also political, cultural, organizational, and educational domains.

Despite the unique functions they serve, these platforms have also come to represent a threat to both individuals and societies. A broad consensus among researchers highlights their adverse psychological, social, and cultural consequences, particularly in relation to youth. The responsibility for addressing the challenges posed by social networks—and by digital media more broadly—rests primarily with the institutions of socialization, chief among them the family. This responsibility also involves responding constructively to the realities of an open digital media environment, where temporal and spatial boundaries have faded, and ensuring that individuals are equipped with the competencies necessary to navigate and benefit from this technological revolution while mitigating its potential harms.

³⁴ Nasr Al-Din Bouziane, *Fake News, Electronic Flies, and the Falsification of Awareness: Paths of Prevention and Efforts of Confrontation*, *Academia Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. 6, Issue 5, 2021, p. 40.

³⁵ Ali Lafta Al-Essawi, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

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