



# THE INTERNET IS IN CHARGE

BLACK TO BASICS

SOCIAL MEDIA IS OFTEN FRAMED AS A TOOL FOR CONNECTION, CREATIVITY, AND SELF-EXPRESSION. AND TO SOME EXTENT, IT IS. BUT WHAT'S LESS TALKED ABOUT IS HOW MUCH OF WHAT WE SEE—AND EVEN HOW WE THINK—IS SHAPED BEHIND THE SCENES. SOCIAL MEDIA DOESN'T JUST REFLECT CULTURE. IT ACTIVELY INFLUENCES IT.

THIS MATTERS BECAUSE MOST PEOPLE ENGAGE WITH THESE PLATFORMS DAILY WITHOUT FULLY UNDERSTANDING HOW THEY WORK OR HOW THEY AFFECT BEHAVIOR, IDENTITY, AND PERCEPTION. THE GOAL OF THIS POST IS TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA—AND TO QUESTION WHETHER WE ARE ACTUALLY IN CONTROL OF OUR DIGITAL EXPERIENCE.

### **THE ILLUSION OF CHOICE**

ONE OF THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA IS THAT IT REFLECTS PERSONAL CHOICE. IN REALITY, PLATFORMS LIKE INSTAGRAM AND TIKTOK RELY ON ALGORITHMS THAT DECIDE WHAT CONTENT IS SHOWN TO USERS BASED ON ENGAGEMENT PATTERNS. THIS CREATES WHAT IS OFTEN CALLED A “FILTER BUBBLE,” WHERE USERS ARE REPEATEDLY EXPOSED TO SIMILAR CONTENT, IDEAS, AND PERSPECTIVES. OVER TIME, THIS CAN SHAPE OPINIONS, REINFORCE BIASES, AND LIMIT EXPOSURE TO NEW VIEWPOINTS—WITHOUT THE USER EVEN REALIZING IT. SO WHILE IT FEELS LIKE WE ARE CHOOSING WHAT WE SEE, MUCH OF THAT EXPERIENCE IS ACTUALLY CURATED FOR US.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND IDENTITY

SOCIAL MEDIA ALSO PLAYS A MAJOR ROLE IN HOW PEOPLE PRESENT THEMSELVES.

PLATFORMS ENCOURAGE USERS TO CURATE THEIR LIVES IN A WAY THAT IS VISUALLY APPEALING AND SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE. THIS CAN LEAD TO A GAP BETWEEN REAL LIFE AND ONLINE IDENTITY.

THE PRESSURE TO PRESENT A POLISHED VERSION OF ONESELF CAN IMPACT SELF-ESTEEM, ESPECIALLY FOR YOUNGER USERS. CONSTANT COMPARISON TO CURATED IMAGES AND LIFESTYLES CAN CREATE UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AROUND SUCCESS, APPEARANCE, AND RELATIONSHIPS.

AT THE SAME TIME, SOCIAL MEDIA CAN ALSO BE A SPACE FOR VISIBILITY AND EXPRESSION, PARTICULARLY FOR COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE HISTORICALLY BEEN UNDERREPRESENTED. THIS DUAL ROLE—BOTH EMPOWERING AND PRESSURING—IS WHAT MAKES SOCIAL MEDIA COMPLEX.

## **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT**

FROM A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE, SOCIAL MEDIA IS DESIGNED TO KEEP USERS ENGAGED. FEATURES LIKE LIKES, COMMENTS, AND NOTIFICATIONS CREATE A FEEDBACK LOOP THAT REINFORCES USAGE. THIS CAN LEAD TO:

INCREASED SCREEN TIME

REDUCED ATTENTION SPAN

DEPENDENCY ON EXTERNAL VALIDATION

OVER TIME, THIS CONSTANT STIMULATION CAN AFFECT HOW PEOPLE PROCESS INFORMATION AND INTERACT OFFLINE. IT BECOMES HARDER TO DISCONNECT, AND EVEN MOMENTS OF REST ARE OFTEN FILLED WITH SCROLLING.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO TAKE BACK CONTROL

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA IS ONE THING—CHANGING HOW WE USE IT IS ANOTHER. A FEW

**REALISTIC SHIFTS INCLUDE:**

\*AUDIT YOUR FEED: UNFOLLOW ACCOUNTS THAT DON'T ADD VALUE

\*SET TIME BOUNDARIES: BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT WHEN AND HOW LONG YOU SCROLL

\*DIVERSIFY YOUR CONTENT: ENGAGE WITH PERSPECTIVES OUTSIDE YOUR USUAL ALGORITHM

\*PAUSE BEFORE POSTING: ASK WHETHER YOU'RE SHARING FOR CONNECTION OR VALIDATION

\*THESE AREN'T EXTREME CHANGES, BUT THEY CREATE \*AWARENESS—AND AWARENESS IS WHERE CONTROL STARTS.

## CONCLUSION

SOCIAL MEDIA IS NOT INHERENTLY NEGATIVE, BUT IT IS NOT NEUTRAL EITHER. IT SHAPES HOW WE THINK, WHAT WE VALUE, AND HOW WE SEE OURSELVES AND OTHERS. THE CHALLENGE IS NOT TO DISCONNECT COMPLETELY, BUT TO ENGAGE WITH INTENTION.

AT THE END OF THE DAY, THE QUESTION ISN'T WHETHER SOCIAL MEDIA IS INFLUENCING US—IT'S HOW MUCH WE'RE PAYING ATTENTION TO THAT INFLUENCE.

ARE YOU USING SOCIAL MEDIA, OR IS IT USING YOU?