

Is social media to blame for our ignorance?

Examine whether social media is responsible for the ignorance of the people.

Type:	DYA	Date:	22 Jul 2019
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1) Introduction

Student Answer

In this day and age, social media plays a large role in all of our lives, shaping our thoughts and beliefs as well as how we perceive different topics and events. While the rise of social media has led to our growing ignorance towards many issues, it is not solely to blame for our ignorance.

Tutor Answer

While social media as we know it only began to enter the public consciousness in the mid-2000s, it has quickly become an indispensable and fully integrated part of the modern connected life. It is undeniable that the ability to connect instantly and seamlessly with countless people across the globe has changed the way we think and live. Some believe that this change has been for the worse, and that the shifts in habits and mindsets born of social media have contributed to a woeful popular ignorance. Others see social media as yet another of the many tools and technologies in content generators' and consumers' hands, attributing any and all possible thinking and behavioral changes and consequences to the desires and actions of users, instead of to the medium itself. While this essay acknowledges the substantial agency of users in interacting with and being influenced by social media, it contends that to see the form of social media as consequently devoid of inherent influence is myopic. Ultimately, it is undeniable that social media has, through changing the way we think and approach information and ideas, been to blame for our ignorance.

2) Main Body - Opposing View

Student Answer

Many may argue that social media has led to our ignorance, due to the false and biased information that is spread via social media. For example, popular instagram account Blossom is notorious for sharing videos including false food-related information, in particular sharing false information on how to distinguish between organic, natural foods and processed foods. With a large and growing audience of 5.7 million followers, many people have taken these videos as fact, choosing to believe these videos instead of taking time to do proper research or consult people educated on the topic. As such, many people who take what they see on social media as immediate truth are likely to be more ignorant to different matters.

Tutor Answer

Social media cannot and should not be the culprit for our ignorance as it is but a value-neutral platform, and cannot in and of itself be held fully liable for shifts in behaviour and thinking. While social media has

certain specific characteristics that might facilitate some kinds of interaction over others, it is ultimately on users to determine what kind of interaction the medium is used for, and the consequences of such interaction. Social media platforms such as Facebook can be used for constructive discussion and sharing of insightful articles, or memes and excrement-posting and Twitter can be used to marshal activists, or to broadcast daily banalities. Much as a car cannot be blamed for an accident, such a mere tool as social media cannot be blamed for the ignorance manifested in its users.

3) Main Body - Rebuttal

Student Answer

However, many social media influencers have taken to various platforms in order to raise awareness against the spread of such false information, educating their audience on the truth and advising them to not be so quick to believe all content that they see online. For example, in the height of controversy within the Youtube influencer community, in which Youtuber James Charles was called out for not disclosing sponsored content, to which he quickly denied. In response, youtuber PrettyPastelPlease, who works in marketing herself, shared a video to her channel explaining social media advertising and the inner workings of influencers and sponsored content. Her using of her platform and audience to educate and warn easily-influenced people about such important issues allows people to have a greater understanding of different happenings, thus becoming less ignorant to issues they might not have previously known about.

Tutor Answer

However, it is ridiculous to assume that the nature and usage patterns of any medium, quite apart from its content, are entirely neutral and devoid of influence. Even if the content of social media is (at least notionally) up to the users to determine, the peculiarities of social media have had at least a substantial contribution to the standardization of the society where it may have forged by the values of the society. While social media is not directly responsible for the content posted on it, it has nevertheless provided the platform for users the opportunity to spread their own personal agenda that may promote anti-social behaviours.

4) Main Body - Supporting View 1

Student Answer

Firstly, social media is not to blame for our ignorance in that we have to be responsible for how we perceive different information online. While social media may be a factor in our ignorance, we are still responsible for how we take in and respond to the information. For example, many Instagram and Twitter influencers have risen to popularity for short viral videos of themselves committing crimes, mainly being licking ice cream in supermarkets and placing it back in the shelf. However, it is our responsibility to differentiate between right and wrong, and not just perceive such actions to be okay simply because these people are popular, and instead call out such inappropriate behaviour. Thus, while social media may play a role in our ignorance, it is still our personal responsibility to come to conclusions and decide what is right and wrong.

Tutor Answer

Social media should be blamed for our ignorance as its constant and instantly accessible stream of narcissistic trivia has led us to value and crave the unimportant and valueless over useful and meaningful information. It provides us with instant gratification since amusement and distraction are available at our fingertips, especially with mobile devices such as using Instagram or Twitter feed to showcase the users' follower on what we have been up to. As a result, many of us frequently fall to the temptation of filling up the bulk of our time with the consumption of such hollow intellectual calories, with the limited time not being used to acquire useful information. This is because it is much more pleasurable and less stressful to distract oneself with pointless trivia and personal minutiae such that vast amount of time is spent on social media. Over time, social media has conditioned us to instinctively seek trivia, leaving us with no interest or motivation to learn important things where it infuses in us the little comfort in life since it is easy to influence us to adopt a hedonistic lifestyle. With our knowledge bank and desire to improve it absent, we have become more ignorant because of the proliferation of social media.

5) Main Body - Supporting View 2

Student Answer

-- none --

Tutor Answer

Second, social media should be blamed for our ignorance as the ready availability of opinions and "information" on it has made us less willing to ask critical questions and seek a better understanding of the world around us, in other words social media has conform our thinking into standardized values. Many of these contents are readily available on social media, more so than on other media such political or social interest pages like SMRT Feedback, Temasek Review and Wake up Singapore. These perspectives may vary in credibility but are often misinterpreted as gospel truth by social media users due to their lack of media savvy or laziness to find assurance to the claims being told. Furthermore, it could also be the result of intentional misrepresentation by social media sources. Hence, this can lead to both lack of awareness of the full range of perspectives on issues, as well as a habit of taking things at face value without exercising critical thinking which both constitute ignorance.

6) Main Body - Supporting View 3

Student Answer

Lastly, the presence of social media is not to blame for our ignorance, but instead it is the irresponsibility of users that result in the ignorance of others. False information has been spread like wildfire even before the invention and popularisation of social media, thus showing how social media merely serves as another medium for such people to spread their false information. For example, a community known as breatharians came into popularity and eventually were disproven as a large hoax, sharing their beliefs on how they are able to survive on just air and sunlight, and how others could do the same too. This resulted in the rise of people adopting or attempting to adopt similar lifestyles, resulting in severe health complications. However, this is the result not of social media, but of irresponsible and dishonest users exploiting the platform to spread their ideologies.

Tutor Answer

Lastly, social media should be blamed for our ignorance as the ease of posting opinions and gaining others' support makes us unused and disinclined to fully consider and craft our views and perspectives since small issues and trivia like voicing out self-centred concern which promotes individualism can be done with just a click of a button. As a result, it is far easier to gain widespread popularity and currency on social media, regardless of the merits of the opinion expressed just like what is being done by "Social Justice Warriors", a negative term used to describe individuals who are engaged in activism to raise personal reputation like social liberalism, feminism, cultural inclusiveness and politically correct views. Seemingly spared from the need to ensure quality of argument, we become accustomed to focusing more on extreme delivery and sensationalism instead of the strength of our arguments themselves, leading to shoddier thinking and ignorance.

7) Conclusion

Student Answer

In conclusion, while the existence and popularisation of social media may play a significant role in our ignorance, it cannot be solely to blame, as we as users and an audience also have a large say in our ignorance.

Tutor Answer

In conclusion, we should accept that social media is a tool whose content is determined by users. Also, even if social media were to blame for ignorance, question whether the blame should be pinned on social media or those who design it. Either way, the unique characteristics of social media make it very much to blame for increased ignorance among the population today, as the population are affected and swayed by these characteristics even if they have notional control over the content.
