

# Is social media to blame for our ignorance?

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

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## 1) Introduction

### Student Answer

With an increasingly technologically advanced society, there has been an upward trend of lack of information and knowledge in individuals. Proponents state that social media may be the reason for our ignorance while others may believe that social media is not the reason for it. In view of this these controversial views, this essay attempts to discuss the various factors behind the reason why to a large extent, social media may not be the key factor behind our lack of situational awareness or preparation.

### 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.

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## 2) Main Body - Opposing View

### Student Answer

Opponents proffer that social media is the main cause of our ignorance due to its ease of convenience of use, causing individuals to become overdependent on it. Social media carries a significant amount of content and allows ease of access. Due to its ability of allowing people to access windows of information with a tap of a button, people withdraw from their innate ability to think. Instead, they will just easily download the information from social media into their brains and believe what they see online, resulting in imperfect information. According to a Wall Street Journal, today's college graduates have been observed to have a critical analysis deficit, and many graduate without the ability to analyse, create a cohesive argument or identify a logical fallacy. As such, due to the entrance of social media, individuals today are unable to make logical deductions, which is a significant soft skill that is needed in order to overcome our

ignorance.

### **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.

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### 3) Main Body - Rebuttal

#### **Student Answer**

However, it is far-fetched to say that social media is responsible for our ignorance. With social media having a significant amount of information, individuals require the ability to discern between biased and objective information to overcome ignorance, which is an innate ability. Moreover, due to one's tendency of having a confirmation bias, which is the tendency to search for and interpret information that substantiates our pre-existing beliefs, individuals further believe in matters from their own perspectives. If one searches about the charms of American president Donald Trump, similar articles will be linked based on the Internet's algorithm, which is something that cannot be helped. This will hence improve the users view on Trump and is more likely to vote for him and disregard the other candidates, which they little knowledge of. This was observed trend by analysts in the 2016 American elections. As such, social media is not responsible for our ignorance, but rather it exacerbates our already biased beliefs, causing us to only have a one sided perspective and is the main reason for our ignorance.

#### **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.

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### 4) Main Body - Supporting View 1

#### **Student Answer**

Due to the egoistic nature of individuals, we are unable to accept the reality of information that has been presented to us, choosing to stay ignorant about issues. Individuals choose to be right than have the willingness to be enlightened, even with the information relegated to them by social media. In a survey carried out by the National University of Singapore (NUS), despite acknowledging the consequences of environmental damage, firms continue to carry out their actions due to their stubborn belief that the

damage is less significant than it seems. As such, due to our the arrogant nature of humans, we continue to live with ignorance.

### **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 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.

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### 5) Main Body - Supporting View 2

#### **Student Answer**

Due to the aims of certain groups of people, they may implement regulations within social media that may cause our ignorance. These groups of people may censor out that they may deem inappropriate or unacceptable to their society. As such, our access to information on social media is limited and we are forced to thinking in such a way that is considered more politically correct, reducing our awareness. In Singapore, the Media Development Authority (MDA) regulates the information their citizens see on the Internet such as drugs. However, due to this, their citizens are less able to have a better and more nuanced understanding of these matters and come to their own conclusion, causing them to continue their ignorance.

#### **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.

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### 6) Main Body - Supporting View 3

### **Student Answer**

Due to their profit driven-aims, social media firms may put forward biased information that causes us to become more ignorant. In retrospect, social media firms are essentially still a business so their aim is to still generate profits and revenue. As such, they may constantly bombard individuals with articles that will help improve their revenue. As these firms are widely recognized, individuals have a tendency to believe in their opinions, causing them to stay ignorant. Recently, the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal came to light. Facebook consolidated its users' data and frequently served their users articles that influence the public's opinions and votes favorably to politicians that hired them. Hence, users lack the awareness and have only a single perspective of certain matters.

### **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.

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## **7) Conclusion**

### **Student Answer**

In conclusion, it is not the presence of social media but the various groups of people (Ourselves; government; social media firms) who mishandle it which aids our own ignorance to a large extent. The most significant reason would be due to narcissism, causing people to choose what they want to see rather than understand matters from a multi-faceted angle. As such, we continue to wear our rose-colored glasses and live in our personal bubble, away from the outer world.

### **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.

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