

The Impact of Social Media and Mass Media: Ethical Issues and Public Perception of the Causes of Violence



Social Media



7 in 10 Americans use social media to connect with each other, engage with news content, share information and entertain themselves.

In 2005 5% of American adults were using social media; by 2011 it was 50% and by 2021, 70% (PEW Research Center, Social Media Fact Sheet, 2021).

In an updated report focusing on teen use of social media, the PEW Research Organization reported that 95% of teens between the age of 13 and 17 used social media with YouTube, Tik Tok, Instagram and Snapchat being the most commonly used platforms.

77% report using YouTube on a daily basis (Teens and Social Media:Key Research (Findings from PEW Research Center Surveys, April 2023).

Recently there has been an increase in attention on the use of social media impact on adults and children.

“While social media may offer some benefits, there are ample indicators that social media may pose a harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents”

(United States Surgeon General’s Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health).

Social media has been widely discussed as contributing to bullying behavior, racism, cybercrimes, gang violence, group violence, aggressive and violent behavior.

On the otherhand, it has been identified as promoting positive outcomes such as providing virtual connections to family, friends and other social networks, increased access to mental health and other health services that are difficult to access, increasing access to resources, raising awareness of issues that may not have been as visible, sharpening and increasing skills, and increased well-being (when limited to 30 minutes per day).

“Although social media can be a minefield of triggering content, social media sites such as Instagram and Tik Tok also provide spaces to share personal experiences with mental illness, find community support and work through trauma in creative ways” (NAMI).

Social media has the potential to prevent the escalation of online provocation that leads to youth violence through such programs as the E-Responder Model in New York.

A study performed by J. Lane at Rutgers University reported that social media can de-escalate and even prevent violence in urban neighborhoods.

Everyone has the capacity to be a reporter and disseminator of news or other activities related to mass shootings, car hijackings etc., by recording events and posting them immediately on a wide variety of platforms, sometimes even before traditional news media.

The rise in the use of social media for reporting events and reporting news has led to what's referred to as the Cross Media Landscape in which mass media may rely on, or use some social media resources such as Storyful as a basis for some reporting.

Storyful describes itself as “ A social news and strategic intelligence organization that sources and verifies content and provides actionable digital media intelligence to help our partners gain competitive advantage”.

Social media reporting and postings impact public and peer perception of individuals with mental illnesses.



Mass Media



Like Social Media, reporting on violent event is ubiquitous in the Mass Media

1980 CNN – 24/7 News Reporting Cycle

1985 CNN Goes International

Since then, many more Networks have followed suit.

Reporting on incidents such as mass shootings and other violent incidents is nearly instantaneous.

Instant dissemination of information such as location of incidents, victims, the names of perpetrators occurs in which perpetrators are more often than not referred to as having a mental illness.



Given the ability to disseminate this information, what are the ethics and responsibilities of news media organizations that report on these events?

Should reporting regarding the mental health of perpetrators be part of the story?

How can this reporting be countered?

Speakers

Morgan Fain who will speak about the impact of social media on youth in Caddo Parish Louisiana.

Drew Hawkins who will speak on social media and media

Subbu Vincent who will speak on ethical issues associated with mass media reporting and the interaction between social media and mass media and the intersection with the frame of mental illness and other factors.