

Be a Smart Social Media User

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Some time ago, I read an essay on the Internet and something that struck me as unusual was this quote: “Honestly, I sometimes truly wish that ‘tools’ such as the iPhone, laptops, iPads, tablets, etc. hadn’t been invented”. I wonder why the author would say this as in this information driven century, we seem to be unable to live without these “tools” as well as the news on social media.

The advance of science and technology, as much as it was and is a blessing, has trebled the amount of time teens spend on the web. Young people, aged from 16 to 24, spend about 24 hours per week browsing sites such as Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram. Whenever we log into Facebook, we are bombarded with pop-up news items. Likes and shares make these stories spread like wildfire and effectively reduce the need for traditional media sources. The convenience of having news at your fingertips, combined with storytelling and engaging videos, makes browsing the Internet more attractive to teens than reading a newspaper. But does this convenience trump reliability? Are you viewing puzzle pieces instead of the whole picture?

While social media provides a good

platform for discussion and sharing ideas, it does not guarantee the truthfulness of the news. A criticism of traditional media is that it does not allow the kind of interactive discussion about the news that social media does, but a recent survey has revealed that social media does not always facilitate conversations around the important issues of the day. In fact, it often impacts discussion of news events negatively. In addition, 73% of the news on Facebook and other platforms centers around entertainment and 57% is sports related. This is not only a reflection of the one-sidedness of news on social media, but also an indication of the interest of the platform owners. And with the click of a button, we help them disseminate their views to thousands of people.

Does this mean social media should be disregarded as a news platform? Of course not! What I am saying is that, as more young people get their news from social media, we have to ensure that we will take everything with a grain of salt and question ourselves on the motivations of the site owners. Besides, before we click the share button, we should make sure the news item is true and accurate. Of course, if you are just sharing sports and entertainment news, go right ahead.