

The Dark Side of Social Media

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In today's technology driven world, it comes to no surprise that of all things, social media has become an integral part of our lives. Especially since it transformed the way we connect and communicate with others. However, these advancements come with significant disadvantages. Most noticeably, in its crass relationship with society's mental health. As illustrated in "Nosedive", (a "Black Mirror" episode), social media can have harmful effects on society and contribute to anxieties about social media technology.

In the "Nosedive" episode of "Black Mirror," the plot centers around Lacie, a woman living in a world where every-day nuances are governed by a societal rating system. People's entire lives revolve around these ratings, determining their social status, opportunities, and all around livelihood. Lacie, desperate to improve her already respectable rating, receives an invitation to her former friend Naomi's wedding as the maid of honor. Seeing this as a chance to boost her score, Lacie sets out on a journey to attend the event. Along the way, she faces various challenges and encounters individuals who inadvertently influence her perception of the rating system and the value of genuine human connections. The episode explores themes of social media obsession, the loss of authentic interactions, and the consequences of sacrificing individuality in pursuit of validation. As Lacie's carefully constructed world unravels, the episode delivers a heartfelt message about the dangers of an overly connected society and the importance of embracing authenticity and meaningful relationships.

In today's digital age, people's unique personalities are hidden by the need to conform to social expectations. The mass audience on social media platforms magnifies this anxiety, causing those invested to shield their authenticity, in favor of fitting in. This fear stems from the belief that technology has the power to erode individuality, pushing people to present an idealized image to avoid judgment and garner approval. As showcased in the episode, Lacie, the

protagonist, is shown biting a cookie at a coffee shop “perfectly”. She then sets the cookie down in line with her coffee and snaps a picture on the platform, sharing it with all her peers. She sips her coffee and it instantly leaves her sour faced, showcasing that her choice for the beverage wasn't a genuine act of pure pleasure but yet another feeble attempt to, once again, prompt her audience to awe at her "picturesque morning". Thus, as Lacie did in the show, she got a coffee to take a picture and fit in rather than getting the coffee because she actually likes coffee.

Social media was designed inherently for people to be able to connect with each other, but paradoxically can be isolating. The anxiety of loss of genuine human connection and the obsession involved are vividly showcased in this cinematic feature. It illustrates a world where people's lives revolve around their social media ratings, leading to a shallow and superficial form of interaction. Individuals, like Lacie, become preoccupied with presenting an idealized version of themselves to gain validation from their online peers. As a result, meaningful face-to-face interactions become scarce, replaced by putting on a mask to gain the approval of their peers. Exemplified in the episode, Lacie gets into an elevator with a lady and they engage in a conversation based on looking at their social media in real time. They exchange compliments, however there is a noticeable lack of true friendship or genuine connection. They both seem to be tolerating the interaction to maintain their social status and not be ranked poorly by one another.

The fear of social rejection and the desire for social acceptance drive this, causing individuals to prioritize their online persona over genuine emotional connections. Consequently, society transforms where relationships are built on superficiality and social status, rather than genuine human connection. “Studies have shown that people who spend a lot of time on social media are at least two times more likely to feel socially isolated. Social media use displaces more

authentic social experiences because the more time a person spends online, the less time there is for real-world interactions”(Scott, 2017). This could potentially be an explanation for reports of depression caused by excessive social media usage. Tulane University associated loneliness with higher anxiety, depression, and suicide rates.

Social media platforms thrive on likes, comments, and followers, motivating users to seek constant validation and approval from others. Lacie constantly checks her social page for likes and displays giddy emotions when receiving positive feedback, mirroring a common phenomenon in today's society. People seek instant gratification and self-validation through likes, which can boost self-esteem and social acceptance. Conversely, a lack of likes or negative feedback can trigger feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and social isolation. This pursuit of continuous recognition can lead to an unhealthy obsession with crafting a perfect image for virtual validation.

This “Black Mirror” episode reflects anxieties about social media's impact on individuality and aligns with four key theories: Technological Determinism, Social Construction of Technology, Actor-Network Theory, and Critical Theory of Technology. The episode illustrates how the social media rating system shapes behaviors, influenced by technology's power (Technological Determinism) and societal values (Social Construction of Technology). Users' engagement reinforces the system's influence (Actor-Network Theory), while the pursuit of validation highlights technology's potential to perpetuate social injustices (Critical Theory of Technology).

“Nosedive” undoubtedly corroborates the concept of technology anxiety, as discussed in the article. The quest for validation through social media ratings epitomizes the fear of invisible totalitarianism, where technology subtly controls human behavior and influences

decision-making processes. The social pressure to conform to certain behavior and communication creates a skewed power dynamic, resembling a world where human beings become godlike, dictating societal norms through their online presence.

In my opinion, "Nosedive" presents an accurate critique of technology and modern society. The episode showcases the potential consequences of an overreliance on social media, demonstrating how technology can exacerbate human anxieties and fears. The anxieties portrayed in the film serve as cautionary tales about the current trajectory of our digital era. The increasing obsession with social media validation, the erosion of genuine human connections, and the prevalence of mob mentality are all observable trends in contemporary society, making the critique highly relevant and thought-provoking.

"Nosedive," a "Black Mirror" episode, portrays the harmful impact of social media on society and reflects contemporary anxieties about technology. The constant pursuit of online validation through likes leads to a loss of authentic human connections and an unhealthy obsession with approval. The episode aligns with key theories, highlighting the intertwined relationship between technology and society. It serves as a poignant warning about the dangers of an overly connected society, emphasizing the importance of genuine human connections in the digital age.

References

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