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Poster Information

Poster Title:

[Pause for Thought: Supporting Reflective Use of Social Networking Sites with Interventions]

Poster Abstract (up to 5,000 characters):

Please include

(a) statement of the research question or issue explored,

(b) brief review of relevant studies,

(c) short description of methods,

(d) summary of findings,

(e) comment on the practical significance and implications of the findings.

We explore the use of interventions for social networking sites (SNS), particularly to enhance the quality of attention and decision-making. We aim to show how they encourage users to take time for reflection and evaluation online, thereby aiding in personal development and the fostering of healthy relationships. Our work is motivated by the premise that just as the physical environment impacts our ability to grow, so too the online environment, perhaps more so because of the degree of cognitive processing involved. Whilst this is mainly a philosophical discussion, we also provide suggestions for practical validation.

Much of the foundational work concerns notions of friendship, well-being and human welfare. The value of interventions for friendship is amply demonstrated in (Adams and Blieszner, 1993), which reveals their intricate nature and considerable variety. Drawing on social sciences literature on well-being, we note the gradual shift in notions of 'social capital', moving away from small-scale family (kinship) relationships, the original focus for Durkheim, to large-scale societal views (Portes, 1998). Hence many SNS studies have tended to dwell on the collective paradigm, where discussion of ethics is more in terms of personal data and privacy. To redress the balance, we concentrate on individual behaviour, especially on making choices more skilfully, particularly for one's educational development.

Accordingly, we draw on work by Foulger et al, who adopted Harvard's 'Visible Thinking Routines' in an inquiry-based pedagogical protocol to prompt trainees to reflect on and evaluate SNS. We highlight two repeated patterns of risk that generally affect behaviour between academic staff and their students: how we conduct ourselves in making connections ('friend' requests); and how one communicates about others in light of the potential for public revelation. These situations make prominent the need for robustness, essentially protection from undesired eventualities that cause serious risk, both individual (as personal and emotional integrity) and institutional (as maintaining honourable status).

Seeking suitable means for protection, we apply normative Buddhist ethics based on analysis of canonical texts that are especially relevant for householders. They promote the cultivation of moral virtue according to the principles of vāritta (the Pali term for avoidance of harmful actions) and cāritta (positive performance of wholesome actions), leading naturally to more sustainable friendships and livelihoods. The conscious decision-making involved, requiring mindfulness and clear comprehension, has resonance with cognitive sciences and indeed such Buddhist teachings have already played a key role in the development of therapeutic techniques (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

For each scenario above, which are core to social media in general, we thus propose interventions using Thinking Routines based on Buddhist teachings on harmless speech and wholesome conduct. Further deliberations lead us to observe that robustness depends substantially on the availability of distinct and varied support networks for resilience. To help ensure such integrity, we indicate how new software architectures can be inspired by a particular Buddhist text, the Sigalovada Sutta, which separates out different kinds of dyadic relationships. At the simplest level it distinguishes between kinship and non-kinship connections; and it also suggests interventions that involve reflecting on the nature of the connection and how to properly nurture it.

The specificity of such interventions should render their effectiveness amenable to verification by cognitive science. In this regard, we note they are mental-emotional states associated with virtue, particularly around qualities of loving kindness and compassion, which have already been well demonstrated in neuroscience studies (Immordino-Yang et al, 2009). Given our broad-ranging treatment, we provide only a framework, and necessarily invite colleagues to help validate and improve the various components.

Irrespective of the research presented here, we would encourage experts in MBE to become involved in co-creating SNS systems of the future for our current and future well-being.

REFERENCES (abbreviated)
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Portes, A. 1998. Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology

This research is relevant to (check all that apply):

☑Mind ☑Brain ☑Education

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