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## Social Media Is One Of The Forms Of Communication Between People

With over 4 billion users active on the internet as of 2019, it is safe to say that the internet is a big part of our culture. The internet gave people so many ways to communicate and connect with each other. This brought masses of diversity and ideas to social media. With people expressing their ideas, it is easier to convince others into believing their ideas too. Social media can change our beliefs in almost an instant. Because of the immense amounts of information on the internet, people are doing more research now than ever before. Social media has the power to change our beliefs, and it does not matter whether those beliefs are true or not. The internet has backup for every theory and opinion ever made. The internet is full of fake news and fake science, which can be easily made to be very persuasive. Several people on the internet have been persuaded by fake news and online forums to believe in something they would have even never thought of. Not only can the internet make people believe in such theories, but it can also cause movements and bring awareness to certain topics. The internet can change beliefs and bring awareness, and it has shaped our culture into what it is today.

Many people today believe that the Earth is flat. A common name for people who believe there is a flat Earth is "flat-earthers." In a survey conducted by YouGov, there were 8,215 adults who were questioned. Overall, the research suggested that 84% of Americans believe the world is round. 5% believe the world is round, but are skeptical about it. 2% believe the world is flat, but are skeptical about it. Another 2% believe the world is flat, and 7% were not sure (live science). According to an article done by The Guardian, researchers say that YouTube is a big reason why people are believing in flat-earth. In an interview with 30 people attending the Flat Earthers annual conference in Raleigh, North Carolina, people were asked how they started to believe in a flat earth. All but one of the 30 said they initially did not consider Earth to be flat two years ago but changed their minds after watching videos promoting these theories on YouTube. In a YouTube video done by BuzzFeed News, they interviewed several flat-earthers to understand why they became flat-earthers (youtube). Many people admitted that they initially thought the theory of a flat Earth was crazy, however as they got deeper into the internet, it started to sound less crazy. In one interview, a person was asked how they got into the flat-earth theory, they said that after watching many flat-earth YouTube videos, it just started to make sense. As previously said, Only 2% of people fully believe that we live on a flat earth. Somehow, those people made themselves widely known, and soon more people joined this belief. This is all thanks to the internet, where people can connect and communicate with each other easily. It is very easy to spread new ideas and form a community. The internet can bring masses of people together faster than ever before.

In the past, people thought we were on a solid flat Earth until new sources from philosophers and scientists such as Pythagoras and Aristotle proved it was not. With millions of sources proving that the Earth is round, how do people still believe that the Earth is flat? An excerpt of "Realization: from seeing to understanding: the origins of art" explains how the mind can believe such conspiracy theories, "It's a strange trait of human minds that while knowledge can be superseded, it can't consciously be unlearned. We might forget we know something, or pretend that we don't know it, but we can't shake off new understanding." The mind is a powerful thing, but it can easily be persuaded. With all of the information on the internet,

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anything is possible.

Many people believe that vaccines that prevent diseases such as chickenpox, HPV, and whooping cough are actually harmful. In a YouTube video on a channel called Jubilee, there was a discussion between people who were anti-vaccine and pro-vaccine. Each group was able to talk about their side and how they reached a final conclusion about this matter. The people that were anti-vaccine were mostly mothers who wanted to do research on the internet to make sure that it was the right thing for their child. Researching on the internet, they were able to reach a final conclusion that vaccines were not safe enough. According to perinatal psychiatrist Rachel Shmuts, DO, the spread of negativity towards vaccines is a phenomenon deeply rooted in human psychology and further amplified by social media). In a recent online survey, conducted by The Harris Poll, more than 2,000 American adults were asked if they did not trust vaccines. The results showed that more than 2 in 5 adults say something has caused them to doubt the safety of vaccines. Like all pharmaceutical drugs, there can be risks to taking vaccinations such as redness and soreness at the injection site or fever and allergic reactions. It is highly encouraged by doctors and the CDC that people take vaccinations, however, people look towards the internet and research to reach a final conclusion, where there can be a lot of fake news.

A paper was published by Andrew Wakefield in February 1998 in The Lancet that brought up a lot of questions about the safety of vaccines. In the experiment, a group of parents brought 12 children to a hospital in North London where they were given the MMR vaccine. Within 14 days, eight of the families said their children developed first signs of autism and inflammatory bowel disease. This paper alarmed many people, causing many to stop vaccinating their children. The internet was able to expose this paper to a lot of people and cause fear. Even though it had such a big impact, it was later investigated by the medical authorities, and Wakefield was found guilty of serious professional misconduct. The news that it was fake and unethical did not get as much attention as the paper did. This resulted in people still believing it was true and seeing it as a scientific source. Unfortunately, fake news gets a lot more attention than actual scientific sources, causing panic and misinformed parents. This proves that the internet can cause panic and change beliefs very quickly.

Not only can the internet lead us to believe some crazy theories, but it can also bring awareness to a lot of topics, such as #BlackLivesMatter. In response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman, three Black organizers, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, started a political movement called Black Lives Matter. The project is now a member-led global network with more than 40 chapters (herstory). Its goal is to provoke change against violence and systemic racism towards black people. The hashtag started on Twitter after Garza, Cullors, and Tometi posted the hashtag, where it spread across the internet like wildfire. Many activists had heard about the Black Lives Matter movement through social media apps such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

"Twitter, Facebook, and social media platforms are really ground zero for focusing attention," said Charlton McIlwain, a New York University professor and co-author of the study "Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #BlackLivesMatter and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice,"(). In this study, it was evaluated whether social media was the big drive for this movement. To determine this, 40.8 million tweets, over 100,000 web links, and 40 interviews with Black Lives Matter activists and allies were analyzed. The results determined that social media was critical at the start of this movement. Protestors were able to spread their own stories and messages

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without the help of mainstream news outlets. The study also determined that social media was used to educate, bring forward a message, and cause change against systemic racism towards Black people.

#WomensMarch was started by Teresa Shook when she posted on Facebook that a pro-women's march was needed during this time. The post got a lot of positivity, but when she realized no one was starting a march, she decided to start her own. A few dozen friends said they would come to the march, where overnight, 10,000 people RSVP'd to the event which would become the Women's March in Washington. "It was an out-of-body experience, to look out and see that sea of pink bodies," Shook said. "We knew it would be a fairly large turnout, but no one knew for sure that the numbers would be, so to see that in reality was just mind-boggling". Shook was surprised by the huge turnout the march made, and it all happened because of a post made online. The internet can quickly spread information and quickly start movements overnight. Not only did it start in Washington, but it went worldwide and all across the country. From L.A. to New York, there were an estimated 4.1 million people in the march, making it the largest protest in U.S. history. Through social media, Shook was able to get worldwide attention and was able to find a lot of people who thought like her. She could not have started it at a more perfect time.

Many were sharing their experience in the Women's March using the hashtag #WhyIMarch. The hashtag also went viral with thousands of pictures at the Women's March. Elizabeth Brass, a Design Manager at Amplify Relations and Reno, NV Marcher posted on Twitter, "The power of social media helped this march gain so much traction because it brought so many like-minded people together to show our commitment to stand up for equal rights for everyone." Social media had a big impact on the Women's March movement, with thousands of posts under the hashtag #WomensMarch. Without social media, this movement would not have been as big as it was.

The internet can help start a lot of movements, and it can also help fundraisers. After the tragic shooting in Las Vegas, a GoFundMe page was started by Clark County Commission Chair Steve Sisolak and Clark County Sheriff Joseph Lombardo. In 7 days, over 10 million dollars were raised, with over 83,000 donors. This is a great example of how much the internet can impact fundraisers such as this one. One donor from Jim Murren and MGM Resorts International even donated 3 million dollars (MONEY). The GoFundMe page was able to reach its goal of 500,000 and a great quantity more. This GoFundMe page got a lot of attention because of people who shared it online, where it eventually reached a shoutout on The Ellen Degeneres Show.

One big reason why people can become so passionate about certain topics is because of confirmation bias. When someone has confirmed what their beliefs are, it can be hard to persuade them into believing something else. When people do research on a certain topic, they will have what is called confirmation bias, which is the tendency to only interpret information that further confirms their beliefs. For example, one person is opposed to gun control and the other is for gun control. Each person will only look for sources that further confirm their beliefs. They may also both look at one source and interpret it in different ways so it aligns with their beliefs. Confirmation bias is important when researching online, and most people are not aware of it. When people like a certain idea, they will go out of their way to believing that it is true. In a study to test confirmation bias called, "Neural Bases of Motivated Reasoning: An fMRI Study of Emotional Constraints on Partisan Political Judgment in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election,"

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participants with strong opinions about the candidates in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election. When presented with contradictory statements by their respective candidates, the participants had inaccurate judgments. From this study, it was apparent that confirmation bias had a strong influence on judgment. Because of confirmation bias, it can be hard to change judgment once someone believes in a concept. The internet is filled with biased news. It can easily convince people to believe in certain concepts and movements, and further strengthen them because of confirmation bias.

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