

- 1 Study the information below and answer the questions that follow.

A bad year to be a celebrity

A lot of famous people died in 2016. It seems like hundreds. It started with Lemmy from Motörhead on December the 28th; then there was David Bowie on the 10th of January, Alan Rickman on the 14th and Glenn Frey from the Eagles on the 18th. Since then reports of the ‘curse of 2016’ have been all over the media. I am 50 years old and I cannot remember a year when so many famous people died. I wondered if it was just my imagination – hard facts are hard to come by on this issue. However, news corporations often pre-prepare news reports in anticipation of the death of famous people. One big news corporation ran 42 of these pre-prepared reports in 2016, compared to an average of 25 a year from 2012 to 2015.

The year has ended with Rick Parfitt from Status Quo dying on the 24th of December. Perhaps there is some truth in the ‘curse’ after all.

- (a) Identify **three** problems with the evidence presented in the passage. [3]

- (b) The author claims that “A lot of famous people died in 2016.”

One explanation is that there was an exceptionally large number of celebrity deaths in 2016.

Suggest an alternative explanation. [2]

Questions 2, 3 and 4 refer to Documents 1 to 5.

- 2 Briefly analyse the argument in Document 1: *Social media*, by identifying its main conclusion, intermediate conclusions and any counter-assertions. [6]
- 3 Give a critical evaluation of the strength of the argument in Document 1: *Social media*, by identifying and explaining any flaws, implicit assumptions and other weaknesses. [9]
- 4 ‘Online social networking is good for society.’

Construct a reasoned argument to support **or** challenge this claim. In your answer you should make critical use of the documents provided. [30]

DOCUMENT 1**Social media**

'It was better in my day without all these performing cat videos.' How often do we hear the older generation grumbling about online social media? But have these traditionalists got it wrong?

'Being attached to the internet all day is unnatural' is the usual complaint. However, this appeal to nature is deeply flawed. In the really old days people lived and worked with small family groups all day, every day, and communicated with the same small circle of people all the time. With long-distance travel and the changing nature of work, that natural state disappeared. Now social networking sites allow us to communicate once again with the same circle of people all day, wherever we are and whatever job we are doing. The rise of social media is not unnatural.

It is hard to disagree that being well informed is a good thing. Social media undoubtedly spreads information faster than more traditional print, or even broadcast media. A government website has estimated that over 50% of people learn about breaking news from social media and this is likely to increase with the decline of more traditional news outlets. Indeed, there have been cases of newspaper editors using social media as a source for their printed news stories. Furthermore, a higher proportion of young people use social media than used other forms of media in the past. Undoubtedly, social networking sites increase the spread of information.

Interestingly, social media is also a force for gender equality in the workplace. In the world of senior business executives, men greatly outnumber women. Men have traditionally had more access to social clubs and other organisations that helped them to progress to the top of their career ladders. However, most social network users are women; some estimates suggest that between 60 and 70 per cent of online social media posts come from women (presumably because a higher proportion of women do not have paid employment). With the help of social networks women will soon be able to take over the majority of senior business roles from men.

Perhaps more unexpected has been the effect of social media on politics. Social networking increases the speed of political change. During the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, anti-government demonstrations in Egypt quickly led to the downfall of the government; these protests were organised via social media. The ability to spread political information widely and quickly has grown since then, and there have been further surprising political events. The use of social media was an important factor in both the UK's vote to leave the EU and the election of Donald Trump as US President. Who knows what exciting political changes will happen in the future?

Social media is a good thing; aside from anything else, it is fun. You can easily plan social activities with friends. You can form relationships that might never have been formed and keep in touch with absent friends that might once have been lost. You can even share amusing videos of performing cats.

DOCUMENT 2

Anti-social media

I know several people who say they have thousands of friends. Do they really? Or do they in fact have a few real friends and hundreds of acquaintances – or even people they have never met – that they have added to their social networking group? The term ‘friends’ was once well understood: a friend was someone you met regularly and whose company you liked. Such people are still friends, but it now seems that the word also includes people you have only a minor connection to on the internet. It does not matter if you never talk to them, care about what they’re doing, or have any interest in them; they’re still listed as ‘friends’. Future generations might be unable to distinguish meaningful relationships from casual acquaintances. Perhaps we need a new word to describe people that are important to us only because they appear on a list on a social networking site – ‘parafriends’ might be a suitable alternative.

Social networking sites work because we all like to talk about ourselves and our interests. But there is a difference between passing on important news or anecdotes that will (or might) interest people and reporting every aspect of your daily routine. Social networking seems to turn people into crushing bores who will post photographs of what they ate for breakfast and list the shops they intend to visit later that day. People – young people in particular – gain an inflated sense of self-importance, and they start to think that what they have to say deserves to be read and responded to by a wide audience.

Have you noticed your attention span shortening in recent years? Since the arrival of the internet my mind flits between things much faster than it once did. There is so much information out there that we no longer have time to explore any of it in depth. Social networking sites add to this information overload. If you constantly condense everything to 140 characters it then becomes difficult to focus on anything in detail. This is another way in which social networking sites have damaged society.

As someone who works from home on my computer, I find it hard to stay focussed and on track. I cannot avoid being surrounded by sites trying to distract me from work. Social networking sites are some of the worst offenders. They are a constant stream of news and views, many of which are interesting, and hence I can be lured into wasting time easily. There are also games; you think ‘I’ll just play that for five minutes’ and you end up losing your entire afternoon. This is OK if you have an afternoon to spare, but most of us don’t. For those working or studying the distraction is harmful to productivity, and isn’t going to do society any good in the long term.

In many ways it is a nice idea to get back in touch with old friends from school. But what if you reconnect with someone you once had ‘feelings’ for? You might get the urge to explore those feelings again. If you’re currently in a relationship this could lead to trouble. I worry about the number of relationships or marriages that have ended because of social networking.

Perhaps the biggest negative impact that social networking is having on society is the erosion of privacy. Many of us are connected to the internet 24 hours a day, and this online extension of society does not set a high priority on privacy. The concept of ‘privacy settings’ is an illusion. The internet seems able to coerce people to happily give up personal information in a way that would have been unthinkable only a couple of decades ago. On social networking sites most of us list our full name and birthday, family members, work history, and even what we like and dislike. People would not walk around with a billboard advertising such personal details to any passer-by. Social networking sites are a dream for advertisers but a nightmare for the rest of us.

DOCUMENT 3**Newspaper report**

Billionaire founder of the world's biggest social network, Mark Zuckerberg envisions a bigger role for Facebook in world politics.

A couple of years ago, Zuckerberg posted something of a combined personal and company manifesto. Much of it is about Facebook and its role in the world. It admits that Facebook has contributed to some of the big problems plaguing the world but, worryingly, it seems to think the solution is more Facebook.

Many of us are increasingly worried about Facebook's power over many aspects of life, particularly when it comes to news and media consumption. Facebook's own algorithms determine which news items are prioritised, so Facebook is making decisions about the media world its users inhabit.

It is in the interests of Facebook to show people the things they enjoy. This means showing them things that fit comfortably with their existing views. Thus it creates 'bubbles' in which people are only exposed to news that confirms their existing views.

Zuckerberg's solution to this problem involves Facebook offering users a wider range of content. Not in encouraging users to look elsewhere for news! Such a strategy seeks to consolidate or increase Facebook's already enormous power in the lives of its users. He even discusses a bigger role for Facebook in the democratic process.

The manifesto discusses establishing a mechanism for people across the world to participate in collective decision-making. The argument goes that many of our global problems span national boundaries. So, as the largest global community, Facebook is uniquely placed to explore examples of how we can work together to tackle such problems.

This sounds worryingly like a world in which democratic governments around the globe govern via the medium of Facebook. I find this thought terrifying.

DOCUMENT 4

Extract from magazine article about the effects of social media

Social media has had a large impact on business and culture. Social media websites have revolutionised the way people communicate and socialise. However, apart from seeing your friend's new motorbike, or reading about a celebrity's latest plastic surgery, what real effect has social media had on society?

- Companies increasingly use social media for a variety of functions, including advertising and customer loyalty – those that don't struggle to survive. Interactions with customers help businesses to understand the market, and fine-tune their products and strategies. Compared to television advertisements and other expensive forms of marketing, social media presence is a cheap and effective means to enhance brand image and popularity.
- Social media is a tempting distraction for addicted employees, whose attention and time can easily be diverted from their work. Some studies have shown that companies have lost billions of dollars in productivity because of social media addiction among employees. An increasing number of companies now block such sites on office networks.
- Social networks are so called because they offer the opportunity for people to re-connect with old friends and acquaintances, make new friends, share ideas, share photographs, and many other 'social' activities. Users can also stay up-to-date with the latest news, and participate in campaigns and activities of their choice. Professionals can use some sites to enhance their career and business opportunities. Students can connect with virtual peers to enhance their academic success. You can even learn about different cultures and societies by connecting with people in other countries.
- Things that you have posted on the internet can come back to haunt you. Many of us readily reveal personal information on social sites. However, this can make users vulnerable to crimes like identity theft and stalking. Before hiring new employees, many companies perform background checks on the internet. Something embarrassing a job applicant might have posted on social media can affect their chances of getting the job years later. By the same principle, relationships are also affected – our loved ones and friends will know if we post something undesirable about them on social networks.
- It is all too easy for people to target others for cyber-bullying and harassment on social sites. Children and adults can fall prey to online attacks, which can create tension and distress.
- The influence on politics could be considered positive or negative, depending on your point of view. Politicians have been jumping on the social media bandwagon, but it has been necessary for them to do so – those that don't do not get elected. Such websites have played an important role in many elections. They have also served as a mechanism to rally people for a cause, and have inspired mass movements and political unrest in many countries.

DOCUMENT 5

Political engagement and social media

Activity that social media sites are used for	Age group			
	18 to 29	30 to 49	50 to 64	65 and over
Promote (or 'like') political material	45	42	35	28
Follow candidates	26	22	17	13
Post thoughts on issues	43	36	31	23
Repost political content	37	34	32	35
Encourage others to act	37	33	30	31
Belong to a social media political group	27	22	15	9

Data collected by respected polling company showing the percentage of users who use social media for each of the listed activities.

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