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We Love the Internet! Social Media in Modern Society

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WE LOVE THE INTERNET!

Social Media & Capitalism

by Brendan Bulger

Question

What are the harmful effects of social media use, how can social media be contextualized as an operation of capitalist ideology in modern society, and what are some possible solutions to resolve or mitigate the effects of the widespread use of social media?

Negative Effects

There are several negative effects associated with social media use. These include:

- **Addictiveness:** Social media sites such as TikTok and Instagram play on similar psychological mechanisms to gambling, adapting to users' interests while providing a "roulette" of various different forms of content, with an interface that encourages mindless scrolling.
- **Mental Issues:** Excessive/problematic use of social media is connected to increased stress, anxiety, depression, and other psychological issues, especially in adolescents.
- **Misinformation:** Social media has led to an increased spread in misinformation. It's very easy for irresponsible individuals to freely spread false information, scam users, etc. without much oversight.

These negative effects are obvious consequences of what these sites are trying to accomplish—generating profit.

Awareness and Ideology

One of the most contradictory aspects of social media's current role is that many young people recognize its negative effects both personally and generally for society, yet use it anyway.

Considering that many young adults were raised on social media, often it's the case that an addiction to social media is simply a given for anyone who has had a phone since a young age. For some, feeding into a negative self-image (one that has already been ruthlessly destroyed by the false images presented to them) through the use of social media is a conscious form of self-degradation. There's a sense of helplessness as social media has become the status quo for young people now, and disengaging from it means disengaging from the generation as a whole. This is where the ideology of capitalism expresses itself in younger generations—because it has become so deeply ingrained in the way we communicate and relate to each other, it can't be escaped.

Solutions?

Any development in communication technology (as with any form of technology) under capitalism is bound to eventually directly serve and strengthen the operations of capitalism. The addictive and reductive nature of social media is a natural result of these websites being developed with the explicit intention of garnering profit. Therefore the only real solution to "saving the Internet" is the removal of these sites from the capitalist system (which won't happen). Until that happens, the best way to avoid falling victims to the manipulation and exploitation of social media sites is to disengage entirely.