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Scrolling Through Society: Navigating the Dual Faces of Social Media

Social media has slowly been part of our lives since the early 2000s. Back then, there were Friendster and MySpace, where users had the power to customise their social media pages, such as background, theme colour, and, interestingly, even add background music. Those were the days. Today's social media pages are more general and standardized, but the content posted could be customised into so many forms such as reels, shorts, and pictures with music, the list is endless. According to Johnson (2017), among the earliest social media examples were instant messaging (IM) services, namely ICQ (1996) and Yahoo! Messenger (1998). In Malaysia, there was the legendary MIRC (Malaysia Internet Relay Chat), which was a very popular chatroom application among youths in the middle till the end of the 1990s. We're sure most of you are familiar with these IMs, as they were the earliest form of WhatsApp, Facebook's Messenger, and Instagram's direct message as we know it today.

Many benefits could be gained from social media, be it for personal or business use. One of them is connectivity, where individuals across the globe can interact within seconds, regardless of location and time horizon. Long-lost relatives, friends, and school buddies could reconnect after many years. Communities of hobbies and interests are also blossoming in social media, where enthusiasts can gather and talk about the same interests among themselves; topics include home gardening, cars, games, movies/TV shows, locality, and many more. Information sharing is now as easy as only one mouse clicks away.

Not only that, but social media also helps small and home-based businesses grow by providing a space for free marketing and advertising. From only having physical shops, businesses nowadays must and should have social media accounts to gain new customers besides retaining existing ones. Businesses provide cash on deliveries (CoD) services; it is common now for people to buy groceries online, including fish, chicken, and vegetables, and then wait for deliveries to arrive. In such a fast-paced world, society no longer has the time to leisure around the retail shops to buy groceries.

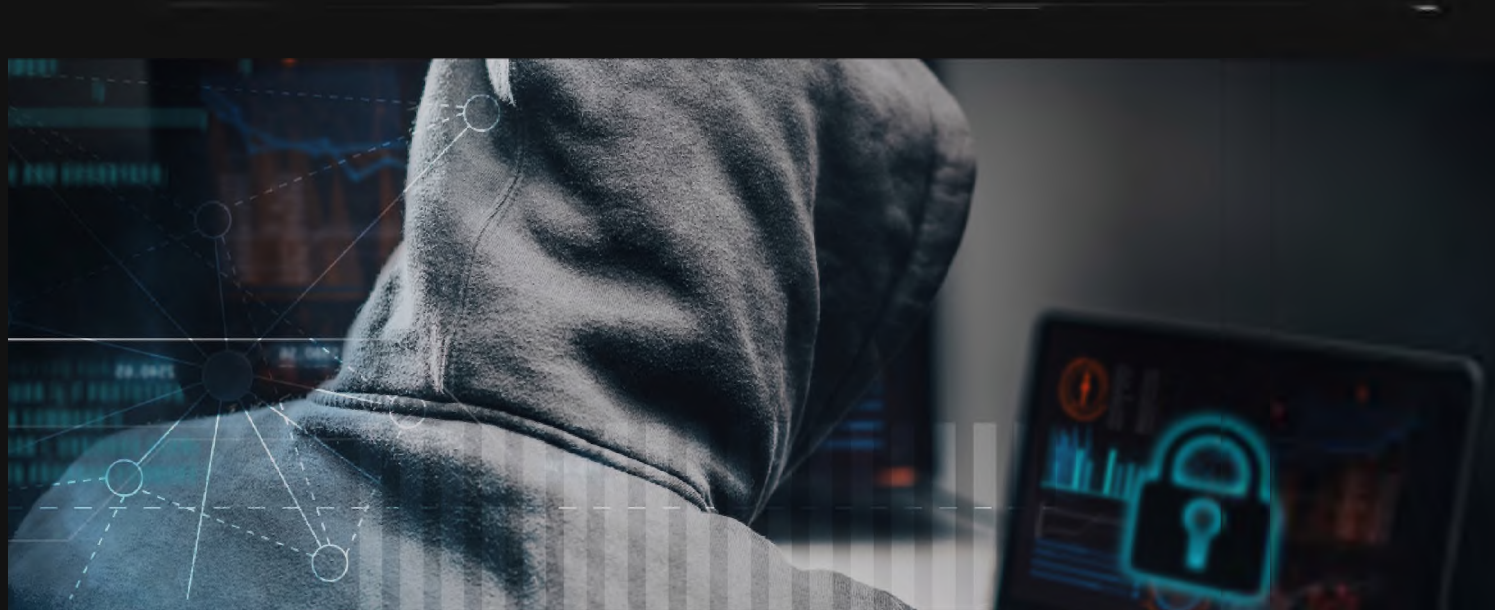
However, behind the rainbows and sunshine promised by social media usage, the technology could backlash into massive concerns when going online, especially on security and privacy, where consumers and business owners may be exposed to prevalent cybercrimes such as hackers, spammers, scammers, phishing, social engineering, virus attacks, cyberstalking, identity theft, and many more (Kaur et al., 2024). Moreover, Sharma et al. (2023) found that among the endless list of negative impacts of using social media, people are most concerned about cyber theft. It is widely known that massive volumes of user data are collected by social media sites, which raises privacy and data security concerns.

Besides that, it is worrying how social media is affecting the minds of youths nowadays. Feelings of envy, anxiety, and loneliness can all be exacerbated by excessive social media use. Self-esteem problems and bad self-perception might result from comparing oneself to the well-constructed online personas of others. The situation worsens, and now people feel they must share everything on social media, resulting in the effects of FOMO or 'Fear of Missing Out.' People who use social media frequently, such as Facebook, Instagram, Tok-tok, Twitter, Snapchat, and others, may experience anxiety that contributes to FOMO. Talan et al. (2024) exclaimed that FOMO sufferers would continuously monitor social media, follow friends' updates, follow other people's lives, and assess other people by contrasting their own lives with others to be informed and not miss anything. Ultimately, FOMO could result in anxiety, weariness, depression, or stress.

To sum up, managing the two sides of social media means being acutely aware of its influence on our lives, especially for young people. While social media brings unmatched chances for creativity, connection, and knowledge sharing, it also poses difficulties like FOMO, which can result in worry, feelings of inadequacy, and digital tiredness. Maintaining mental health in today's digital era requires an understanding of the distinction between carefully constructed online personas and real-life experiences. We can maximize social media's positive aspects while reducing its negative ones by establishing boundaries, cultivating a healthy relationship with it, and placing a higher value on real connections. These initiatives will ultimately result in a more balanced and satisfying online experience.

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