

Effects of the Internet and Social Media on Christian Youths
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DEFINITIONS

The Effects – The results, consequences, outcome, end product

Internet / Social Media (SM) – The world wide web and its derivatives such as forums, search sites, e-mail, online communities for socializing and networking e.g. BBM, 2GO, Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, MySpace, Twitter, etc. They are accessed via computers, ipads, smart phones/TVs, Tablets, PDAs, etc.

Christian Youths – The young disciples or followers of Christ, usually between adolescence and mid-age, gospel-obedient individuals such as teenagers and young singles/couples.

PREAMBLE

Psalms 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

James 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: 14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. 15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. 16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: 2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, 3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: 4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, *having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* 5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; 7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. 8 *For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* 9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. 10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: 11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ON TEMPTATIONS

Some desires e.g. to quench thirst, hunger, loneliness or even sex arise naturally. It is when they are not controlled or moderated that it develops to lust –continual longing to fulfill it an excessive or unlawful manner. Satan tries to create the impression or scenario that we need to violate God’s law to get pleasure or fulfill our desires via temptations. Yielding would amount to sin and lead to spiritual death if one persists without repentance, engaging in lasciviousness and licentiousness –assuming there is a license to sin (Rm 6:1). That is not so hence we should make effort to identify temptations which easily afflict us as individuals (Heb 12:1-2), pray about it (Mt 6:13a), avoid compromising situations (Col 3:5, 1 Cor 6:18), use the word of God as a weapon by knowing and quoting “it is written” (Mt 4), be positive and seek way of escape (1 Cor 10:12-13), keep a mature confidant to watch/pray/counsel whether you stand or you fall (Ecc1 4:9-10, Jms 5:16-20).

When we have our values in place, only then can we make the right decisions. Hopefully the following questions can help us establish standards when faced with life’s difficult choices:

1. Is it putting God first, conforming to his authority and glory or of the world? -Matthew 6:33, Colossians 3:17, vs 1 John 2:15-17
2. Would my Lord Jesus himself, do it? -1 Peter 2:21, 1 John 2:6.
3. Would it be a good example? Matthew 5:14, 1 Timothy 4:12
4. Could it hurt my body? -1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Ephesians 5:29.

5. Would I want everyone to know I did it (Luke 8:17, Hebrews 4:13) including Jesus if He should return just then? -1 Jn 2:28
6. Would I want it done to me? Luke 6:31.
7. Is it a good or expedient thing to be? -James 4:17, Matthew 12:1-13
8. Does it have the appearance of evil? -1 Thessalonians 5:21-22
9. Is it a weight to me (Hebrews 12:1) or a stumbling block unto another? -1 Cor 8:9, Rm14:13
10. Can I do it without doubt in my mind -Romans 14:23

ON INTERNET / SOCIAL MEDIA

The society consists of our neighbors, institutions (educational, economic, socio-political and religious), and virtual environment. It connotes those other humans with whom we relate and interact. Man in his natural state seeks pleasure and glory for self in every society. Same goes for the Internet which has its good uses or advantages. **The virtual world however, is a sphere where people not only have a presence but can also assume pseudo-identities or anonymity, crossing boundaries of geographical space in little or no time from behind a screen or button thus its use is very much susceptible to abuse.** It is evident that Christians are redeemed out of the evil world and must strive to abstain from its corrupting influences. It is not easy for one who has been part and parcel of the world (Gal 4:3, Eph 2:2,12), now redeemed but who still lives in the world to pretend as if s/he is totally immune from societal influence. Nay, it is *'not by power nor by might, but by my Spirit says the Lord.'* The essence of this lesson is therefore to identify the dangers and any possible benefits associated with "social media." These media may be used to facilitate secular things, spiritual things or sinful things. They should be well managed with security and spirituality consciousness.

Daniel (12:4b) foretold that knowledge shall increase and the Internet is a part of our civilization. It is becoming more and more difficult for a person in developing or developed world not to have an online presence, given the drive of society towards e-commerce/banking, e-learning, etc. Some have even advocated the online-church with e-worship which is incongruent with true worship. The web and SM are veritable resources for networking and could serve as aids/tools for advancing evangelism, edification and benevolence. They are tools for meeting people or networking, for research / academics (e.g. google.scholar.com, researchgate.com, andrewschallenge.net), for marketing and business sales especially of software items, e-books and even physical products (konga, Interswitch), for religious materials (e.g. preacherfiles.com, apologeticspress.org, lainosint.com/download/faith, religiousdebates.org, bublehub.com), etc. We must shine as lights in the midst of a crooked generation (Phil 2:15) and avoid sites that peddle hate/violence, pornography, hacking or fraud, etc. The bombardment of youths used to be mainly from Magazines and Television which could be somehow controlled by parents. The modern generation is pinging, Facebooking, YouTubing 24/7 on their smart phones and are exposed though bubbling but in-experienced about long-term consequences.

CONCLUSION

To optimize the benefits and minimize the risks / disadvantages of ISM, each individual should answer the following:

1. How much personal information do I reveal for strangers to glean on the ISM?

You cannot claim a lottery jackpot if you did not enter and organizers would already know your details if you did so it is unwise to fill your info in response to unsolicited messages. A fake prophet, bugler or assassin may gather enough info on some to track/harm them based on their online babbling. The scriptures say 'Let your words be few.' Remember Cynthia and her 'FB Friends'?

2. What do I post on ISM and how much time do I spend thereat, doing what?

The words, pictures and videos that you Share, do such reflect your professed faith or you think it does not matter? Eph 4:29; 5:4ff. ISM does not obviate need to call or visit real friends/relations. Let it not become a distraction or addiction (Eph 5:15-17) or avenue to fight/malign brethren.

3. Who constitute the bulk of my close "Friends" on ISM and what Groups do I belong to?

This is not to suggest that one only associate with Christians online but to inform that such should be cultivated while we try to influence non-believers for good also (1 Cor 15:33).