Chapter 6
Paradigm Shift for the Future

ABSTRACT

Through case studies of incidents around the world where the social media platforms have been used and abused for ulterior purposes, Chapter 6 highlights the lessons that can be learned. For good or for ill, the author elaborates on the way social media has been used as an arbiter to inflict various forms of political influence and how we may have become desensitized due to the popularity of the social media platforms themselves. A searching view is provided that there is now a propensity by foreign states to use social media to influence the user base of sovereign countries during key political events. This type of activity now justifies a paradigm shift in relation to our perception and utilization of computerized devices for the future.

INTRODUCTION

In previous years, the impact of technology upon society has been a focus of debate between the people who have the infrastructure and the financial means to gain access to it and those who do not. To some degree, social media platforms blur the discussion around the technology assets themselves due to their nature of being web-hosted platforms. As highly popular applications for communications and interaction, they transcend borders providing ubiquitous connectivity for the masses. In this chapter, the author examines Facebook. This particular social media platform's declared mission is to facilitate democratized connectivity to all. It is arguably the most popular

social media platform in the western world, and as a consequence, it is the biggest anthropological experiment in human history (Bird, 2017).

Presently, one third of the human race is connected to Facebook, and effectively, the company sells anonymized data from our online interactions to advertising companies. Users are all in effect the 'product' of this social network, in which their online activity is used to directly target us with advertising (Newton, 2019). However, some have started to use the Facebook social media platform for an unintended and unforeseen purpose (Sputnik News, 2019). Cambridge Analytica and subtle propagandist interference by Russia have blurred the intersection between freedom of speech and fake news to sway the U.S. democratic process. This chapter looks at the lessons that need to be learned and how cyber consciousness within society needs to be more attuned to informed facts. Without it misinformation provides contradiction, feeds personal bias, and undermines society as users have known it.

BACKGROUND

The Arab Spring of 2011 is an example of the use of social media messaging in unexpected ways (Al-Abdin & Costello, 2015). The epicenter was Tunisia after a street seller torched himself whilst protesting against the authorities who had seized his vegetable stand because he did not possess a permit (Huang, 2011; Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). Consequently, pro-democracy activists seized the opportunity to further protest in Tunis and this action ultimately caused the Tunisian dictator to abdicate and escape to Saudi Arabia (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013; Markham, 2014). Other countries followed with demonstrations at Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt as well as uprisings in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, igniting civil wars (Howard et al., 2011). Academics have listed Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube as key platforms that were used during the Arab Spring revolutions across North Africa and the Middle East (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). Some believe that the use of social media in the Tunisian and Egyptian cases encouraged their tyrants to be deposed over a very short period of time. Protesters used these platforms to organize themselves and communicate with the outside world. People are still using social media today in Syria for communication and for keeping abreast of the news (Gire, n.d.). Researcher Gerbaudo (Coretti & Maha, 2013) provided a convincing argument that in the case of Egypt's disturbances when the government isolated Internet Service Providers to quell the disturbances, it had the opposite effect of driving

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