


# Chapter 13

## Exploring the Dark Side of Social Media and Digital Consumer With a Dystopian Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

*Social media has emerged as a central focus of consumer research, with marketers recognizing its ongoing significance in their field. While previous research has primarily explored consumer behavior and its outcomes through the lens of social media opportunities, it is now apparent that social media carries inherent risks for individuals, companies, and society at large. This chapter delves into the darker aspects of social media, shedding light on its multifaceted nature within the marketing context. By adopting the honeycomb model, the author elucidates the contributions of various parties—individuals, social network owners, and collaborating companies—to the emergence of these dark phenomena. Through careful reflection, the author put forth a series of propositions throughout the article, highlighting avenues for future research and unveiling theoretical implications in this domain.*

### INTRODUCTION

The advent of the Internet and its accompanying technologies, such as internet-connected devices, the Internet of Things (IoT), virtual reality (VR), and artificial intelligence (AI), holds the promise of a profound transformation in consumers' online experiences. For companies, establishing “digital relationships” with consumers has become crucial in this landscape. Consequently, a considerable body of contemporary research has focused on understanding digital consumer behavior within virtual environments, as evidenced by studies by Mathur *et al.* (2022), Kamboj and Sharma (2023), and Ju *et al.* (2022). These researchers sought to uncover the impact of virtual environment characteristics on both consumers and organizations, aiming to maximize the associated benefits. However, it is important to acknowledge that the virtual world also harbors inherent risks for individuals, firms, and society at large.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-3767-7.ch013

While these platforms facilitate collective efforts to promote products and services, it is essential to recognize that collectively generated product reviews and information sharing can inadvertently create a breeding ground for malicious activities, potentially giving rise to a dystopian environment.

The exploration of the negative aspects of digitalization is still in its early stages (Zwass, 2021). Drawing from the dystopian perspective, this study centers its attention on the negative aspects of online social networking services (oSNS). The choice of oSNS as the focal point is driven by two key factors. Firstly, social media platforms inherently possess both positive and negative attributes. oSNS offers genuine advantages in achieving company objectives by serving and engaging with customers, influencing their decision-making processes, and facilitating information exchange among customers and other businesses. However, it is crucial to recognize that alongside these benefits, incidents have increasingly revealed a “dark side” of oSNS. These platforms seem to fuel deviant behaviors at an alarming rate. Examples include provoking compulsive and impulsive buying tendencies among customers, promoting trolling, fostering addictive usage patterns, facilitating destructive interactions, enabling the fabrication of fake news, facilitating privacy violations, and propagating misinformation (Sultan, 2021; Aghakhani and Main, 2019; Wu et al. 2020; Lund et al., 2020; Wansink, 1994). Despite all these studies, the current literature falls short of providing a comprehensive understanding of the breadth and multidimensionality of the dark side of oSNS.

## **Research Problem**

The primary objective of this study is to contribute to the understanding of the dark side of oSNS by elucidating the characteristics of social media platforms that contribute to negative consequences. Furthermore, it aims to identify the roles played by different parties, including consumers, social network owners, and collaborating companies, in engaging in any form of destructive activity. Additionally, building upon existing research on anomalies in digital consumer behavior, this paper explores the precautions that companies should or could undertake to mitigate potential risks. As one of the few, this research provides a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted nature of the dark side of consumer behavior on oSNS within the context of dystopian discourse. The dimensions were identified through an extensive review of the literature, and the ones selected are most relevant to oSNS.

The prominence of dystopia in this research is rooted in Pantzar's (2000) definition of this concept as “a dystopia where individuals are enslaved to an entertainment machine, succumbing to computer dependency and the erosion of rational life” (p. 13). Considering the maladaptive behaviors exhibited by digital consumers on oSNS, which inherently seek to disrupt established norms, there exists a resemblance to the notion of dystopia. What is more, Podoshen et al. (2014) suggested that although there have been studies on utopia, marketing, and consumption in the last 20 years, there was a paucity of literature on consumption and dystopia. This paper aims to bridge this gap by establishing a connection between dystopia and consumption in the realm of oSNS, shedding light on the consumption patterns within these platforms.

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