

# Social Media Aids Self-Expression. Or Does It?

By Nishita Malhan

Conformity may have served our ancestors well, but it has evolved to be a hindrance to society in recent times. The echo chamber-inspired responses to the Supreme Court leak regarding Roe v Wade, Musk's decision to buy Twitter, and even something as apparently apolitical as the Depp-Heard trial, has led to a culture of deep-seated uniformity and unoriginality. We need to fix it.

The fundamental cause of the problem is social media. Social media and the internet make the opinions of others easily accessible. We are inclined to resort to confirmation bias, the tendency to be drawn to opinions supporting and reinforcing our own. Beliefs of others colour our own, causing us to conform to the ideologies that are most socially acceptable or likened to the ones held by those we wish to gain acceptance from. Social media, thus, aids and encourages conformity.

The effects of this have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The use of online mediums of communication have compelled people to rely increasingly on online sources of information, which, being biased, influence one's own.

There is no easy solution to this issue. For families separated by geography who haven't met in months, social media provides a refreshing respite from the isolation. For professional colleagues all over the world, a life without social media seems unimaginable, even if it takes a toll on their intellectual sharpness. Asking them to disconnect from the internet completely would be unrealistic and impossible to execute.

However, something as simple as a month-long social media detox is undoubtedly achievable, as many who have successfully completed one and benefitted from it, will confirm.

Jason Zook, the co-head of 'Wandering Aimfully', a business coaching website, took a 30-day long break from social media. After deleting all social media apps, he said of his experience on the website, "It was as though I'd lifted a 900-pound silverback gorilla from my back... And I had a sense of freedom from the shackles of notifications and rabbit holes of links, photos and feeds."

## **What I Learned From a 30-Day Social Media Detox**

**Taking a 30-day break from social media had an  
astounding impact on my life and business.**



Written by  
**JASON ZOOK**

Figure 1: Jason Zook's article on his website, 'Wandering Aimfully'

One may also take the help of companies like ‘Digital Detox’, which assist customers in improving the balance of technology in their lives. Whether it’s summer camps for adults or unplugged nights out, Digital Detox strives to create immersive device-free experiences so that customers can “Disconnect to Reconnect”.



Figure 2: Agenda of Digital Detox, as stated on their website

A digital detox doesn’t have to be a monthslong agenda. As evident from the testimony of Zook, disconnecting from social media even for a few days can be exceedingly advantageous. It provides us with a breather from the barrage of information (and misinformation) we receive daily.

A 2019 study by Medical News Today found a positive relationship between social anxiety, loneliness, and social media addiction. The immediate ease, lightness, and clarity from being disconnected from the grind and FOMO and self-consciousness of social media will indubitably prove the benign destruction that social media causes us.

The internet is breeding a generation of non-thinkers; echo chambers and filter bubbles draw like-minded people to each other, but they also strengthen an individual’s perceptions based on the group’s opinions, facilitating group polarisation.

One may argue that it is basic human nature to seek belonging in our community. We imitate people who inspire us or whom we strive to seek approval from. No one wants to be the outcast, and the best deterrent of that is to conform to the prevalent and expected social norms. We conform to unite and unite to conform.

Conformity also encourages equality. Uniforms in schools is a compelling example of where conformity works and is advantageous. Conforming to rules forms the foundation on which our justice system is based. Lack of conformity in society amounts to chaos.

However, in the fight to be the same, we have lost the meaning of what it is to be human. Each of us has different backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs, and conforming to the opinions of others is disrespecting that individuality or what makes us, us. This lack of individuality can stir deindividuation, because of which dangerous occurrences like the Capitol riots may transpire.

Here's where the politics comes in. Statements issued by public figures regarding controversial events like the Capitol riots or the Kyle Rittenhouse trial, incite the masses to form opinions coinciding with the ones held by the dignitaries they have previously identified with, thereby hampering their own ability to judge an issue and rather to rely on the assessment of the issue by someone else, widening the divide between the ends of the political spectrum. Social media only intensifies this effect.

To say that people should not let their political standing taint their perception of independent issues is idealistic and unreasonable. After all, the aforementioned ways of thinking are so innate and ingrained in us that changing them overnight is impossible. However, tangible steps can be taken to mitigate the effects of such undesirable habits. Individuals should try their best to avoid online chat rooms, which act as echo chambers and trigger conspiracy theories, an extreme example of which is QAnon.

Additionally, one should not rely solely on social media as a source of information. The information we receive via social media if not wrong, is deeply opinionated. An example of this is the Johnny Depp – Amber Heard trial. The attacking of Heard on social media undoubtedly shaped the public's perception of the case as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok were flooded with memes, mockery, and criticism of her, thus wrecking her credibility.



Figure 3: Mockery of Amber Heard

And even more alarmingly, the jury deciding the case was not effectively sequestered; therefore, the disparaging of Heard on social media not only swayed public opinion but also likely impacted the jury. Brainwashed by anti-Heard propaganda, impartiality must have been difficult to attain.

Now, when polarization is at an all-time high, and in a world alienated by division and devoid of cooperation, battling the inordinate conformity that has permeated society is of utmost importance.