

# GDN Reader's View: Double-edged

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Bahrain's youngsters must be protected from the dangers of social media, as well as appreciating its benefits. Sean Parker, founding president of Facebook and a co-founder of Napster, recently surprised the world with his harsh remarks against social media. He complained about Facebook's harmful effect on society and warned against its potentially dangerous impact on children's healthy development. He admitted that when they first came up with the idea, they wanted to get people addicted to the system as much as possible; the "Like" button was born as a result of this desire.

"...exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology" is how Parker describes the function of the "Like" button and social media in general. This is painfully true. Most people start a subconscious race in their minds with people they consider to be in their league and after a while, gaining either validation or eliciting feelings of envy in their peers turns into something of a life goal. This is a dangerous way of thinking. Not only does it not help anyone, it makes people depressed when they feel they've fallen short of reaching these goals. When social media steps in to capitalise on that vulnerability, the outcomes can be disconcerting. However, we can easily change this trend by using it in a positive manner.

Many studies confirm the existence of this threat and show that social media can be more dangerous than helpful. According to a survey, out of 1,500 social media users, 62 per cent stated that they felt inadequate, while 60pc said they felt jealousy when they compared themselves with others on the platforms. Professor Margaret Duffy from University of Missouri also mentions about the harmful phenomena and says: "If it is used as a way to size up one's own accomplishments against others, it can have a negative effect".

The constant desire to seek validation and make comparisons mostly affects impressionable young people, who are also the most vulnerable age group. In the past, when there was no social media, the need for validation was limited to a small number of friends and acquaintances; as a result, expectations – and the possible disappointment levels – were low. Today, the number of virtual faces creates unrealistically high expectations and the resulting disappointment can be overwhelming.

As Parker suggests, this kind of thinking negatively affects the development of vulnerable young people. They've grown up with "Like" buttons, with followers, with

too much attention on social media status. How will they cope in the real world? What will happen when the validation they seek in the online world doesn't translate into the real world? It is crucial that these issues are addressed before generations upon generations grow up with such unnecessary burden on their souls.

It is possible to replace such line of thinking with constructive and helpful thoughts by harnessing also the power of social media. Spreading positive messages consistently throughout this platform can balance out the more negative effects. It can be an extremely effective tool in overcoming prejudices, countering hate culture, spreading messages of love, understanding and peace.

And the desire for validation can be negated with the following hypothetical messages:

I Remember that someone else's validation has no actual effect on you

I Realise that your own validation doesn't really affect anyone's life, and the validation of the lives of others does not affect yours either.

I Do not tie your self-esteem to the opinions of others, regardless of whether they're acquaintances or anonymous Internet users.

I Remember that your character is what counts, not what someone else thinks of you.

With this kind of thinking, young people will hopefully be saved from the validation snare and start developing strong and independent characters that are less self-centred and more attentive to their environment.

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