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CASAR Student Discussion Series: 'Does Social Media Bring More Harm Than Good?'

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September 25, 2023 at 1 pm
AUC New Campus Waleed CP74
Event Report by Maha Muehlhaeusler

Event Title: Does Social Media do More Harm Than Good?

Summary:

Launching the Center of American Studies and Research (CASAR) Student Discussion Series for the Fall 2023 semester was this event, a student-led debate on whether social media does more harm than good. The debate began with a welcome of CASAR Assistant to Director & Adjunct Faculty Yasmeeen El-Ghazaly by the CASAR Director Professor Mark W. Deets, who explained to the students that the CASAR was created in 2003 to promote United States and Middle East understanding. In this student Discussion series, students play the role of delving into topics together to understand one another. Refreshments, snacks, and beverages were available for the packed room of forty + students that came to support their peers and present their argument. The students that argued social media does more harm than good were seated on the left side of the room, and the students who argued it is more beneficial sat on the right side. This event was broadcasted on facebook live via the [CASAR Facebook Page](#), where the entire record is still available to watch now. Students passionately presented their arguments in an organized manner, going back and forth between the two sides, and often students became excited about leading their side of the class with their perspectives. Some arguments for the beneficial use of social media included keeping up with current events, learning, using media to raise awareness. Arguments that social media does more harm than good included the increased levels of depression, media companies using people as products, and hate speech/cyberbullying, that gives strangers the power to disrespect people behind a profile.

Report:

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people as products, and hate speech/cyberbullying, that gives strangers the power to disrespect people behind a profile.

The debate began on the left side of the room. A student argued that social media has a degenerative effect on people, causing them to spend more time than they are supposed to consuming content that was created for that purpose exactly. This student also argued that Social media causes insecurity especially among women, who have started comparing themselves to models with perfect hair, skin, and features online. It was emphasized that these comparisons and insecurities are sometimes subconscious, and they are what create concepts such as a “beauty standard.” Furthermore, it was argued that social media has surpassed its main purpose, which was to create connections, and now creates divergence between people. A student that agreed on these points mentioned the main concern of Netflix's documentary *The Social Dilemma* and argued that companies such as Instagram and Facebook have engineered systems so that the “attention of people is a commodity,” where the largest companies in the world are creating profits through the creation of advertisements. Furthermore, students argued that self harm and depression have increased drastically due to social media pressures, especially on young adults and teens, a student started. Scandals are easily shared and can become viral videos overnight, a student stated, using Monica Lewinsky’s scandal with former US President Bill Clinton as an example of this, as the media coverage of it was all over the internet. This also began the argument of how social media allows strangers the freedom of speech as they “hide behind” a fake profile, bullying or harassing others online, and even leading to kidnappings in extreme cases.

On the other side of the room, students came up with responses to each of these arguments back and forth, and presented their own as well. One student argued the importance of political and social awareness that comes from social media, and how social media is more good than harmful because it advocates for human rights. The student suggested that students are aware of what is happening in Palestine because of social media. Furthermore, it was argued that events such as the 2011 or 2013 Egyptian revolution was a result of individuals connecting to one another and having similar concerns on social media, along with sharing videos and photos that are now famous. Students also argued that there was a “beauty standard” before the days of social media, as movies and magazines existed, along with social notions that women like Marilyn Monroe were considered the standard of beauty. It was argued that on the contrary, social media actually creates body positivity and allows people to be exposed to beauty in different ways. A student argued that to view social media from this perspective was surface level, and its importance actually lies in its ability to bring good changes. The signing of petitions, the rallying of people, and the overall awareness of the world is arguably more important. In response to the argument that social media causes depression, the right side of the room responded with the fact that usually those who are diagnosed with depression have a trigger that is not social media, and though social media can worsen depression it might not necessarily cause it. It was also emphasized that choosing to scroll is a choice, and with critical thinking and analysis of what one is exposed to, they can always assess and take a step back from what they are presented with.

Students presented these arguments excitedly and with obvious amounts of research, clearly showing how their own experience with social media has influenced their arguments and how they continue to learn more about maneuvering themselves in the world of social platforms.