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Lost in the feed: The pitfalls of social media

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PHOTO: AFP

We live in an era where information is everywhere, yet we're starving for thought and craving for perspective.

Every day, our phones deliver headlines, videos, threads, and hot takes, from global news to philosophical debates, and it's all just a tap away.

Youth today have unprecedented access to knowledge at their fingertips, but having information doesn't automatically mean we know how to interpret, critique, and contextualise what we see.

Social media algorithms reward the loudest, hottest take, not necessarily the most thoughtful one.

A single Instagram post can ignite extreme opinions that spread like wildfire, often bypassing any real reflection. The result? Principles, ethics, and even basic context get blurred or distorted long before we've had a chance to pause and assess anything critically.

Suddenly, everyone becomes an authority: A random psychologist on TikTok telling you how to judge your relationships, an influencer diagnosing your personality flaws, and the glorification of being hyper-sceptical as if cynicism automatically equals intelligence.

In this environment, it's easy to forget that not every loud opinion is a wise one. Without even realising it, many of us end up forming views not through careful thought or genuine understanding, but through whatever gets attention, earns validation, or aligns with what our peers approve of.

That said, engaging in thoughtful, reflective thinking isn't easy either. It requires time, discomfort, patience, and the ability to sit with ambiguity. It demands that we pause before forming conclusions, weigh perspectives, and question our assumptions.

But when every scroll, swipe, or like reinforces speed and immediacy, practising these skills becomes difficult, and, for many youth, almost unnatural.

In fact, a 2025 study by the veterinary science journal Frontiers in Humanities and Social Sciences shows that social media can weaken critical-thinking skills, amplifying sensational and one-sided content while burying the more reflective, nuanced voices we need to learn from.

On top of that, social conditioning compounds the problem, playing a subtle but powerful role. Growing up in many Indian households, for example, the focus is often on doing well in exams, excelling in measurable achievements, and following the "right" path.

We're taught what to think: answers, grades, respect for elders. But rarely how to think: how to question assumptions, navigate uncertainty, or challenge ideas constructively.

Questioning authority or convention is often mistaken for disrespect, which discourages independent thought and honest debate. Combine this with a digital environment that rewards instant reactions and outrage over reflection, and it's no wonder that thoughtful, deliberate reasoning can feel like a lost art.

The danger is clear: we start chasing speed over substance, performance over understanding, and conformity over critical engagement.

Decisions could be made based on what trends or gain attention, rather than what's thoughtful or ethical. Conversations may become shallow or reactive. Opportunities for genuine learning and growth could be lost.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

Maybe we don't need to overhaul everything. What we need is to pause, question, and think a little more deliberately. After all, having endless information at our fingertips matters only if we learn to use it wisely.

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