

Abstract

Title - Scrolling: Social Media and the Power of Habit

Program of Study – History; Government: Politics & Policy

Presentation Type – Oral Presentation

Subtype – Choose one of the following for poster or oral presentation types: Textual or Investigative.

Mentor(s) and Mentor Email - Dr. Gai Ferdon (gferdon@liberty.edu)

Student name(s) and email(s) - Lucas Bishop (lbishop7@liberty.edu) & Nathan Sexten (nsexten@liberty.edu)

Social media represents a constant medium with which people interact and perceive each other, and has morphed into a formative experience for individuals today. As people spend an inordinate amount of time on social media, their emotions and desires are being formed by the experience, not only in terms of its content, but also in the simple habit and practice of using it. This research reveals that, in light of these realities, social media consumption is inherently negative because it drives individuals towards a *telos*, or end in life, that competes with the kingdom of God and a just society. In arguing this point, this paper connects the works of James K. A. Smith and St. Augustine to show how habits and practices inherently shape the direction of one's life and drive one's emotions and feelings in a particular direction. Social media is designed in a way to automatically maintain engagement by manipulating emotions and forming ingrained habits in users. Thus, as people habitually engage in social media use, it lowers their likelihood to balance emotional responses with rationality. This paper then applies

the work of Neil Postman and Marshall McLuhan to emphasize the formative power of environment and technology in today's world to create a society of essentially unreflective robots. Finally, in light of this dilemma, the paper applies Augustine's work once again to how reason and reflection can assist in redirecting the formative power of habit towards a higher telos than that which social media promotes. This research ultimately aims to integrate the work of Smith, Augustine, Postman and McLuhan in order to assist Christians in navigating the social media culture they inhabit and pursuing the kingdom of God rather than the competing kingdoms that social media pushes them towards.