Examining the Social Impact of COVID 19–Coronavirus

Matthew Hernandez

            We are experiencing something that we will tell our grandchildren about.  The last pandemic that had affects worldwide was in 1918, the Spanish Flu.  We can read about it, maybe our grandparents heard about it from their parents, but this time it is different.  In the times we live in today, generations to come will be able to see digitally how this current pandemic halted our lives.  As we all know, the media, especially social media is very prevalent in our lives.  Media and social media can have a slightly negative effect as it is constantly filling us with news and more news about the pandemic, and unfortunately, some of it is incorrect.  Some may even call it “fake news.”  The technology available to us today, especially, social media, can be a positive tool to keep us close when we cannot be together.  Covid 19, Novel Coronavirus has impacted our lives in many ways and the social impact can be all consuming.

            We can use social media for many ways – to follow our favorite sports stars and musicians, to follow friends and to digitally journal.  Memes and hashtags can catch like wildfire, Covid-19 has been coined “the rona.”  At times social media can be harmful to one’s self esteem, where we feel we must compete with what others are boasting.  Tragically there is social media bullying that has led to heart break for some families.  Social media has its pros and cons, but at a time like we have never seen before it has helped people who are sheltering in place alone not feel so isolated.

            Media has become something much more than what it was back when our grandparents would watch the nightly news.  News is available everywhere – even social media.  The problem is that sometimes if we take in too much, we become overwhelmed and even experience anxiety.  These our uncertain time and like nothing we have ever experienced before.  It is important to stay informed, but we need to take caution when absorbing it all and what resource we are using to gather information.

            We are fortunate that we are living in an era where technology can allow us to use our phone to video chat.  Our classes were not cancelled as we are able to attend class from home using platforms such as Zoom.  We can order our groceries online and even order a margarita via Postmates.  Our lifestyles are different than 1918.  Music artists have created songs talking about the Coronavirus.  Are we making light of the situation?  Or is the lightheartedness a way to calm our fears in these uncertain times?  Instagram and Twitter use is surging in popularity.  One dj is using Instagram Stories to host virtual dance parties.  Positive use of social media platforms is a great way to ease our fears and to share the message to social distance and to wear masks when out in public.  Using social media to share false information is not and only creates more fear and potential mass hysteria.  Social media panic has the potential to spread faster than the actual virus than Covid-19.

            For those who suffer from anxiety and depression, isolating and self-quarantining can take a toll on their mental health.   Television, cable, internet streaming channels like Netflix and Disney Plus can entertain us, but the ability to connect via Facebook Messenger, Instagram, Facetime, and other platforms allows us to not lose that human connection and is a very powerful and positive tool to have during a time like now.   The ability to even have a doctor’s visit via Facetime or with a therapist is crucial to many and this is all possible with the technology that is available to us today.  Unlike in 1918, we may be isolated at home alone or with a few family members, but we are still able to connect.

            Another benefit of our current technology is for those of us that enjoy going to the gym every day and don’t have the luxury of having a home gym is we can livestream exercise classes from our laptop and get in that important physical exercise that helps us mentally and emotionally too.  Also, connecting with our friends that we used to see every day, but now via facetime is important to stay connected.  Many of us also play video games and playing against others online allows us to talk and stay connected to our friends.

            This academic year has been a transition for me as my first year of college and being in a completely different environment.  It is a complete sense of independence, that I am solely responsible for my success.  In grade school and high school, I had my mother and football coaches and counselors making sure I stayed on top of my grades and really being able to step in when needed.  Although my mother is still here and a great support system for me it really is quite different being in college and she obviously cannot e-mail teachers for me or just call the office to get something squared away.   This year has been quite difficult for me to adjust.  It all seemed overwhelming at times.  Getting to school, getting to class on time, keeping track of deadlines, etc., has been an adjustment.  I have been able to get by and with my faith and family support know I can continue and will earn my bachelor’s degree.

            Spring Semester was in process and then I started hearing about Coronavirus and what if I caught it.  My girlfriend would tell me she had seen something on Instagram that someone at school had it.  I would tell her not to worry, but inside I was a little worried myself.  Then when we were told classes were canceled for a week and we would start to take classes online I was worried about the unknown.

With the support from my professors this has been a smooth transition.  I am grateful that no one in my family has been terribly affected.  My brother works from home now, although he was given less hours.  My mother still must go in to work two times a week and telecommutes two other days a week.  We are all in good health and have food to eat.  I am saddened by all the loss of life and people who have lost their jobs and wait in long lines for food.  What I took for granted, waking up and looking on my Instagram feed I now realize is such a blessing to those alone without a brother to fight for the PlayStation 4 or a mom to remind to get online for class.  These are uncertain times we are in, but I hope we all survive and will have great stories to tell our grandchildren.

            Unlike the Spanish Flu Pandemic in 1918, we have tons of modern technology to keep us informed, entertained and allows us to connect with others virtually – as we have even done in this class.  At the swipe of our finger to unlock our iPhone, we can see the latest news via various social media resources.  We are also able to connect with family and friends.  These positive social media outlets are a wonderful way to not feel lonely during these uncertain times.  However, we must be careful when taking in all this information.  Some is exaggerated or even false and may add to an already anxious state of mind.  Like anything and everything, moderation is key and using this time where we are “safer at home” to reflect and for regrowth is very positive whilst continuing to stay informed.  The Covid 19 Coronavirus Pandemic 2020 has been an unsettling time.  Our lives were changed drastically and things we once took for granted, going to the gym, going for a hike, going out to dinner, we now wait and long to be able to do again.  I am thankful my family and friends are safe and doing well and I am also thankful that we live in a time where social media and technology allows us to stay connected with those we cannot see in.