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### Impact of Social Media Pranks on the Pranked

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#### Abstract

The rise of social media has greatly altered the way we communicate and interact with one another, and offered new avenues for self-expression, entertainment, and connection. Amidst the millions of content shared on these platforms daily, social media pranks have risen to the top as a popular form of entertainment that captures its audiences with the air of humour and spontaneity around it. However, behind the laughter elicited from the audience, there is a complex web of interpersonal dynamics and emotional ramifications for those who find themselves, fortunately or unfortunately, at the center of these dramas. Drawing upon the Social Penetration Theory proposed by Altman and Taylor (1973), this paper examines the multifaceted impact of social media pranks on the pranked individuals, taking into consideration the layers of trust, self-disclosure, and relational development, and how they are altered after the prank acts themselves. By analyzing the mechanisms through which social media pranks penetrate the emotional depths of individuals, this study aims to shed light on the different consequences of online humour and the importance of fostering empathy in digital interactions, especially in a world that has become large-scale, digital.

**Keywords:** Impact, Social Media, Prank & Pranked

## Introduction

The phenomenon of social media pranks has garnered widespread attention and captivated audiences with its blend of humour, surprise, and spectacle. From harmless practical jokes to elaborate 'dark' pranks, they have shaped the way we entertain ourselves and interact with others in the digital space. While these pranks often make us to laugh and amuses us, it is essential to examine the less visible consequences experienced by the individuals who find themselves at the center of these spectacles.

Social media pranks are rooted in the tradition of practical jokes and performance art. They evolved alongside

the rise of digital platforms and have leveraged technology to reach global audiences. What begins as a playful prank can quickly escalate into a viral sensation, with videos and images spreading rapidly across social networks, garnering millions of views and reactions in a matter of hours. The beauty of social media pranks lies in their ability to surprise and entertain, both of which offer a brief respite from the monotony of everyday life. Hence why the large number of viewers each time these videos drop.

However, behind the laughter elicited from the audience, there's something often overlooked. While the perpetrators of social media pranks may view their actions as harmless fun, the individuals on the receiving end often experience a range of emotions, from

embarrassment and humiliation to anger and betrayal. The boundary between playful jest and genuine harm becomes blurred on social media, where the line between entertainment and exploitation is often crossed in the pursuit of likes, shares, and views.

The impact of social media pranks extends beyond the immediate moment of the prank itself. It lingers in the 'space' long after the initial shock has worn off. What starts as a fleeting moment of embarrassment can haunt individuals indefinitely, as anything put up on social media can never be actually retracted. This permanence of digital content amplifies the potential for public humiliation (especially when humiliation is the first emotion felt by these hapless victims), as videos and images can be endlessly reposted, remixed, and shared across multiple platforms, reaching audiences far beyond the intended scope of the prank.

In light of these complexities, it is essential for us to examine the broader implications of social media pranks for interpersonal relationships and digital communication. By analyzing the nuances of trust, vulnerability, and emotional resilience, this study aims to shed light on the multifaceted dynamics at play in the world of online humor. Through an interdisciplinary lens that integrates insights from communication theory, psychology, and media studies, this paper seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media pranks on individuals' well-being and the broader social fabric of digital communities.

## The Intention behind Social Media Pranks

Social media pranks are often conceived with the intention of eliciting laughter and amusement from viewers. Rooted in the tradition of practical jokes and slapstick comedy, these pranks aim to entertain by surprising and delighting audiences with their 'cleverness' and ingenuity. Whether it's a well-executed prank call, a hidden camera stunt, or an elaborate performance, the goal remains the same: to make the audience laugh, thereby providing a momentary escape from the stresses of everyday life.

The appeal of social media pranks lies in their ability to cut across geographical and cultural boundaries, offering a form of entertainment that is universally relatable and accessible to anyone with an internet connection. In this era of digital globalization, social media pranks brings people together through shared experiences of laughter and amusement. From viral videos that rack up millions of views to trending hash tags that dominate social media feeds, the impact of social media pranks on popular culture cannot be overstated.

However, while the intention behind social media pranks may be light-hearted, it is essential to recognize the potential consequences for the individuals who find themselves at the receiving end. What begins as a harmless prank can quickly escalate into a source of embarrassment, humiliation, or even trauma for those who become unwitting participants in the prank.

Despite these potential risks, the temptation of social media pranks persists, driven by a desire for attention, validation, and social approval in an increasingly

competitive online world. Content creators and influencers are constantly seeking new ways to capture the attention of their audience and stand out from the crowd, often resorting to shock value and sensationalism to generate clicks, views, and engagement. Sadly, in this quest, the well-being of individuals may be sacrificed in the name of entertainment.

### **Evolution of Social Media Pranks as a Dominant Form of Digital Entertainment**

In the digital age, entertainment has undergone a profound transformation, with social media platforms emerging as the primary arena for capturing the attention and engagement of global audiences (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This shift in entertainment consumption habits has been accompanied by the rise of social media pranks as a dominant form of online entertainment. Unlike traditional forms of entertainment, such as television or film, social media pranks leverage the immediacy and interactivity of digital platforms to create immersive and participatory experiences for viewers.

The allure of social media pranks lies in their ability to surprise, engage, and entertain audiences with their humor, spontaneity, and shock value (Jenkins, 2006). Whether it's a well-executed prank video that goes viral or a trending hash tag that sparks a global conversation, social media pranks have become an integral part of the digital entertainment landscape, shaping the way we laugh, connect, and share online.

However, the widespread popularity of social media pranks has also raised important questions about the ethics and responsibility of content creators and influencers who profit from the misfortune of others (Burgess &

Green, 2009). While laughter may be the primary goal, it is essential to consider the potential consequences for the individuals who find themselves as victims of the ridicule that follows. What begins as a harmless prank can quickly escalate into a source of embarrassment, humiliation, or even trauma for those who become unwitting participants in the prank. The boundary between entertainment and exploitation becomes increasingly disappearing in the digital age, where the pursuit of online fame and notoriety often comes at the expense of someone else's dignity and well-being.

Moreover, the prevalence of social media pranks has led to a normalization of harmful and unethical behavior, perpetuating a culture of online cruelty and insensitivity (Marwick & boyd, 2011). The anonymity and distance afforded by digital platforms can embolden individuals to engage in behavior that they would not consider acceptable in face-to-face interactions, leading to a proliferation of pranks that cross the line from harmless fun to genuine harm. It is imperative for us to strike a balance between humour and empathy, in order for us to ensure that laughter does not come at the expense of compassion and respect for others. While social media pranks may offer a momentary escape from the stresses of everyday life, they should never undermine the fundamental principles of human dignity and kindness.

### **The Impact on the Pranked**

Social media pranks, while intended to be humorous and entertaining, can have a significant emotional impact on the individuals who find themselves at their receiving end. The emotional toll of being the subject of a prank can vary widely,

from momentary discomfort to lasting psychological trauma (Orben & Przybylski, 2019). For some, being pranked may evoke feelings of embarrassment, shame, or humiliation, particularly if the prank is publicized and shared widely on social media platforms (Marwick & boyd, 2011). These emotions can be exacerbated by the knowledge that the prank has been captured on camera and will be preserved indefinitely in the Cloud, adding an extra layer of distress to the experience (Shaw & Gant, 2002).

Moreover, the emotional impact of social media pranks may extend beyond the immediate moment of the prank itself. Feelings of betrayal, mistrust, and resentment may arise as the pranked individual grapples with the realization that someone they trusted has exploited their vulnerability for the sake of entertainment (Leary, 2004). In some cases, the emotional trauma caused by social media pranks can have long-term consequences for the mental health and well-being of the individuals involved, leading to symptoms of anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Tokunaga, 2010).

Trust, a fundamental element in human relationships, can be severely compromised when someone becomes the target of a social media prank. Friends, family members, and acquaintances may question the sincerity of interactions and the authenticity of the relationship, wondering whether future interactions are genuine or merely part of another elaborate prank (Rotter, 1980). The boundaries between playful jest and genuine intention may become blurred, making it difficult for the pranked individual to discern whether they are being treated with respect and

consideration or simply being used as fodder for online entertainment (Stewart & Healy, 2019).

Rebuilding trust becomes a subsequent challenge for the pranked individual, as they live the aftermath of the prank and attempt to repair damaged relationships (Bachman et al., 2019). The line between humour and harm becomes a dangerous tightrope, with the pranked individual forced to be in a delicate balance between forgiveness and self-preservation. In some cases, the erosion of trust caused by social media pranks may irreparably damage relationships and lead to estrangement, isolation, or social withdrawal (Reis et al., 2010).

One of the distinguishing features of social media pranks is the permanence of digital content, which can exacerbate the emotional impact of the prank and prolong the distress experienced by the pranked individual (boyd & Ellison, 2007). What starts as a fleeting prank captured on camera can linger indefinitely in cyberspace, resurfacing at unpredictable times and rekindling feelings of embarrassment and humiliation (boyd, 2014). The potential for public humiliation is amplified by the viral nature of social media, where videos and images can be endlessly reposted, remixed, and shared across multiple platforms, reaching audiences far beyond the intended scope of the prank (boyd, 2011).

This perpetual visibility can have far-reaching consequences for the pranked individual, affecting their personal and professional spheres in unforeseen ways (boyd, 2017). In addition to the immediate emotional distress caused by the prank itself, the long-term repercussions of being associated with a viral prank can

include damage to reputation, loss of opportunities, and social stigmatization (boyd, 2019). The permanence of digital content means that the consequences of a social media prank can extend far beyond the initial act, shaping perceptions and shaping reputations for years to come.

### **The Role of Social Media Platforms**

Social media platforms play a crucial role in amplifying the humiliation experienced by individuals who are pranked online. The viral nature of social media means that prank videos and images can quickly spread across multiple platforms, reaching millions of viewers within a matter of hours (boyd, 2014). This widespread dissemination of content can exacerbate the emotional distress experienced by the pranked individual, as they are forced to relive the humiliation of the prank over and over again (boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Moreover, the algorithms that govern social media platforms often prioritize content that elicits strong emotional reactions, such as laughter, outrage, or shock (Bucher, 2012). As a result, prank videos that provoke intense emotions are more likely to be shared, commented on, and recommended to other users, further perpetuating the cycle of humiliation and embarrassment for the pranked individual (boyd, 2011).

Another key aspect of social media pranks is their ability to engage a global audience that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries in ways that traditional forms of entertainment cannot (boyd, 2017). The democratization of content creation and distribution on social media platforms means that anyone with an internet connection can participate in the prank phenomenon, regardless of their

location or background (boyd & Ellison, 2007).

This global reach has both positive and negative implications for the individuals involved in social media pranks. On the one hand, it allows pranksters to reach a wider audience and potentially achieve viral fame and notoriety (Marwick & boyd, 2011). On the other hand, it exposes pranked individuals to the scrutiny and judgment of millions of strangers, who may gleefully join in the mockery and derision (boyd, 2019).

### **Recognizing the Humanity of Those Pranked**

In the midst of the laughter and entertainment generated by social media pranks, it is crucial to recognize the humanity of the individuals who find themselves at the receiving end. Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, becomes an essential antidote to the potential harm caused by social media pranks (Davis, 1994). By empathizing with the experiences of those who are pranked, we can better understand the emotional toll and relational complexities involved, moving beyond mere amusement to genuine compassion (Decety & Jackson, 2004).

Empathy prompts us to question the boundaries of humour and consider the potential consequences of our actions on the well-being of others (Batson et al., 2002). It reminds us that behind every prank video and viral meme is a real person with thoughts, feelings, and vulnerabilities (Hoffman, 2000). By acknowledging the humanity of those who are pranked, we foster a culture of empathy and kindness in our online interactions and ensure that laughter does

not come at the expense of someone else's dignity or emotional well-being (Decety, 2011).

Empathy challenges us to critically examine the boundaries of humour and the ethics of online entertainment. While humor is often seen as a harmless form of amusement, it can have real and lasting consequences when it crosses the line into mockery, ridicule, or exploitation (Morreall, 1989). Social media pranks blur the line between playful jest and genuine harm, raising important questions about the responsibility of content creators and the ethics of online humour (Galloway & Smith, 2020).

### **Beyond Social Media Comedy**

The effects of social media pranks are not confined to online entertainment; they have far-reaching implications for the emotional and relational landscapes of those thrust into the spotlight. What begins as a seemingly innocent prank can leave indelible imprints on the psyche of the pranked individual, shaping their perceptions of themselves and their relationships with others (Twenge & Campbell, 2009).

Feelings of humiliation, betrayal, and mistrust can linger long after the

In extreme cases, social media pranks can have legal implications, leading to charges of harassment, defamation, or invasion of privacy (Solove, 2006). The line between online entertainment and real-world harm becomes increasingly blurred as social media pranks blur the boundaries between digital and physical spaces (Boyd, 2007).

laughter has subsided and erode the foundation of trust and intimacy in personal relationships (Mayer et al., 1995). Friends, family members, and acquaintances may struggle to reconcile the image of the pranked individual as a victim of online cruelty with their preconceived notions of who they are, leading to feelings of confusion, discomfort, and alienation (Goffman, 1959).

The normalization of online cruelty and insensitivity perpetuated by social media pranks can erode the fabric of social cohesion and mutual respect, undermining the values of empathy, kindness, and compassion that are essential for a healthy and thriving society (Putnam, 2000).

Furthermore, the effects of social media pranks are not confined to the digital space; they spill over into offline interactions and real-world consequences. The viral nature of social media means that prank videos and images can quickly spread beyond the confines of the internet, influencing public perceptions and shaping offline behaviors (Wang et al., 2018).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, social media pranks have emerged as a dominant form of online entertainment, captivating audiences with their humour, spontaneity, and shock value. However, behind the laughter lies a complex web of emotional and relational dynamics, as individuals who find themselves at the receiving end of these pranks grapple with feelings of embarrassment, betrayal, and vulnerability. The perpetuation of online cruelty and insensitivity normalized by social media

pranks speaks of the urgent need for empathy and compassion in our digital interactions.

By prioritizing empathy and recognizing the humanity of those who are pranked, we can foster a culture of laughter that is rooted in respect and that laughter never comes at the expense of someone else's dignity or emotional well-being.

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Habila, I.J., Foseb N. & Jilang, L.T.

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