

## LINKED TO DEPRESSION

Social media users are "2.7 times more likely to be depressed" but what does that really mean?

## OUR FUTURE

What is our future going to look like if more and more users join these platforms?

# SOCIAL

WHAT HAVE WE CREATED?



# My Legacy

## Who Am I and Why Did I Choose This as My Project?

Hi! My name is Sophia Piekarski and welcome to my Legacy project. This year I am currently a junior enrolled at Nipmuc Regional High School and I am taking a class called Legacy which in a nutshell, allows me to learn about anything I want. For my project this year I decided that I wanted to focus on social media and how it affects our mental health. I think that it is a topic that is overlooked by most and it needs to be discussed more by having better awareness and knowledge brought to it.



Originally, I was going to research as much as I could and then create a website out of all of my information but after careful consideration I decided that I wanted to create an info-graphical magazine so readers of any age are able to easily understand my findings in an organized fashion. A bonus with this idea is that creating a magazine is allowing me to further my design skills and learn how to work a new software.

My goal with this project is to create a informative piece that goes into detail on why we act so negatively and have such a pessimistic connotation with the words "social media" and find ways we can possibly change our habits in order to bring back the original purpose of the platforms. I've worked on this project since October so theres been a lot of effort put into this and I am proud of what I've created. I hope when reading this you're able to learn something but more importantly, enjoy!

*"Focus on how to be social  
not how to do social"*

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# What Is Social Media?



*"It takes discipline to not let social media steal your time"*

Social media can be defined as "websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking." But is that truly what we use social media for?

Platforms that fall under the category of "social media" were originally created for people to communicate with each other and for businesses to promote themselves. Despite the simplicity behind the idea, our society has twisted it into a dark and confusing place where our mental health is at risk and we are left wondering, "how are we addicted to something that makes us feel so terrible?"

# The History Behind It

## ***What was the first social media platform and where are we now?***

The website "Six-Degrees" was founded by Andrew Weinreich in the year 1997. This was the first version of social media and comparing it to our current platforms, it is most similar to Facebook. It was made to send messages, post bulletin board items, and let users see their connection to any other user on the website. At its peak, the website had around 3.5 million users. For a comparison, this year Facebook currently has 2.7 billion users. Doing the math, an estimated 2.69 billion more users are active members on just 1 of the many platforms we use daily compared to Six-Degrees at its peak.

In our current society, there are countless social media websites and or apps. Older apps like Facebook and Instagram are just as prominent, if not more, than they were when they were first introduced. 63% of our worlds population is estimated to use social media but the question still remains as to why we continue to use it after seeing or even experiencing the negative influences it can leave on our lives and our mental wellbeing.

*"Social media is more about psychology than it is technology"*

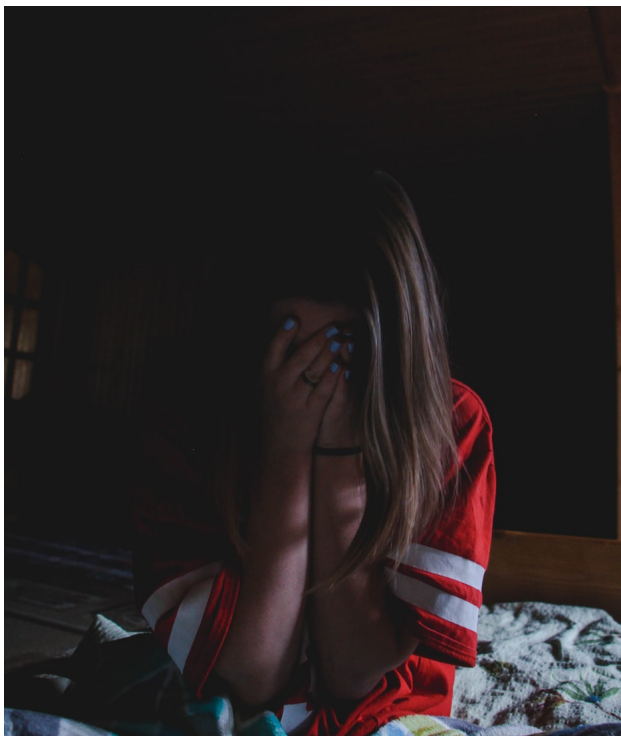


## The Negative Aspects

### How Adverse is Social Media to our Health?

Withdrawal is a word most commonly associated with some sort of drugs and or alcohol. When researching the definition, the most common response is, "physical and mental symptoms that occur after stopping or reducing intake of a drug." Why is the definition only talking about drugs? Despite the fact that it might be the most common form of withdrawal, there are so many other scenarios where withdrawal is the word to describe what someone is going through. To put that into context, 67% of survey participants in 2018 said they felt a form of withdrawal when they took a week long "break" from social media making it something not only drug users feel.

The most alarming part about social media is that withdrawal truly isn't the only negative feeling or emotion that gets brought out of people when using the different platforms. Jealousy, delusion, anxiety, depression, addiction, and loneliness are just some of the other emotions that social media leaves people feeling. To make matters worse, there are respectable reasons behind why people are feeling all of these emotions, yet no one is doing anything to stop them. There might be "campaigns" and "movement" talking about self love, body positivity, etc., but how effective are those when it comes to the overpowering emotions that we seem to have no control over?



*"The power of social media is that it forces change whether its good or bad"*

# Risk For Teenagers



## *"Social media simply is not a safe space"*

Current teenagers were introduced to social media at an age that most seem to think was too young. In early years of middle school and some even late elementary school, current teenagers were focused on posting, following, and keeping everyone up to date on their lives. It's beyond anyone why 11 and 12 year olds were doing this, but again, no one stopped them.

Social media can be linked as one of the main causes of depression, anxiety, body dysmorphia, etc. A study done in 2019 was able to show that over 12,000 13-16 year olds are likely to be using social media at least 3 times a day while feeling these dreadful emotions we all try to avoid. Looking further into it, countless studies have seen that in recent years, social media has mainly affected users ages 13-19. All of this concerning information makes you think, "Is this because they were introduced to it so young?" Or is there another factor making this happen that no one has been able to figure out?

# Are There Any Positives?



*"Just put your phone down... take a break"*

Despite all of the negatives found within social media platforms there are some benefits that most people seem to ignore out of either ignorance or doubt that the platforms might actually be okay. Every platform was created with a simplistic intention and it is mainly the fault of the users that they have been twisted into the negative places that they are now.

Some benefits are consistent throughout most platforms, whereas others are only found within specific platforms. People seem to forget that all of the platforms allow you to connect with other users and make it so that we can stay updated on each others lives. Putting yourself on social media of any kind means losing privacy and to most that is a risk they're willing to take. Nonetheless, a common question throughout research remains, "what would have happened if we listened?"



# What Would Have Happened if We Listened

*How different could social media be today?*

If you were to go and look up the initial intentions of social media platforms, you would likely be shocked. Every platform had an innocent intention behind it and where or not we admit it, it's our society that has found a way to twist all of the platforms to become something they never should have.

Putting this all together should press a question for everyone to consider, "what would social media be like if we followed the intentions of the platforms and didn't turn it into a negative place?". Researchers have tried to find a single answer to the question but because there is so much room for different variables, no one really knows. Most seem to think that suicide rates, as well as anxiety and depression rates found in teenagers 13-18 would be down almost 64% and that's not even taking younger and older users into consideration.

Another thing to consider is how connected and or disconnected we would be if we had followed original intentions of the platforms. Most researchers think we would be better connected because that has always been the purpose of the platforms, but some argue that we would have let social media take up too much of our time even if we didn't twist it the way we have.

*"People shouldn't be using social media as a tool to benefit themselves"*

# What About Psychology?



## *"Social media is not your diary"*

Before diving into the specifics, one must consider if there's any possible psychological explanation behind all of this. It's something that could relieve all sorts of stress and anxiety on the topic simply because there would be a scientific explanation to blame.

There are a few possibilities to this, one being social psychology. It can be defined as, "the study of how people influence others' behaviors, beliefs, and attitude- for both good and bad." This one form of psychology alone can cause anyone to think of countless connections between the definition and how it relates to social media. Going along with this, statistics from countless studies within the past decade all seem to suggest the same general idea: social psychology is one of the many reasons social media has turned into the monster it is today.

# Providing Relief

*Is it possible that having a psychological explanation will help with relief? Or is it going to simply cause more questions*

Having a psychological explanation to this topic is something that most people tend to overlook or not even consider at all. However, it's something that researchers have been looking further and further into within the past few years. Along with social psychology, one other main thing that researchers have all found in common is the "Social Comparison Theory".

Similar to social psychology, the Social Comparison Theory is the idea that as humans we naturally evaluate our abilities and beliefs by comparing them with those of other humans. This idea can fall under any category of human life but social media seems to be one of the more prominent ones because of how much time it takes up in the average life.

Despite the fact that the ideas of social psychology and the Social Comparison Theory could lead way to reasoning behind the ways we act, does it ultimately help our mental health by giving us explanations, or worsen it by putting an idea into our brain that there is something "psychologically" wrong with us?

*"Life is simple, yet we insist on making it complicated"*



## Facebook

How long has Facebook been influencing our lives?

Facebook was created in February of 2004 with the simplistic intention of allowing Harvard students to connect with each other using photos and chats. The ultimate goal of the platform was to bring the college experience to the internet, yet somehow we are at a point where in the year 2020, Facebook has 2.7 billion active users every month, making it the biggest social network worldwide. Recently a survey was conducted and within it, 33% of its respondents said they feel obligated to check the platform at least once a day. If you were to calculate those numbers into the 2.7 billion active users that Facebook has, that's 891 million users checking the platform daily. Putting this into a simpler perspective, that's almost 3 times the entire population of the United States.

Since Facebook is the biggest platform does that necessarily mean it's the most toxic? Most seem to not because of the demographic found on Facebook. Majority of the users are above the age of 25 which is taking away the teenage generation, leaving "less" room to feel the negative impacts of the platform. However, Facebook has openly come out before saying that the platform, "has to ability to harm the mental health of its users."



*"Start posting less and doing more"*

# Specific Demographic?



## *"No posting, no liking, just living"*

When talking about the demographic of Facebook it's known that there are less teenagers and more adults using the platform. A 2017 study out of the University of Pittsburgh surveyed a much larger number of diverse adults ranging in ages from 19-32 using Facebook the most. Researchers were able to find that frequent users of the platform are 3 times more likely to feel socially isolated compared to users who are on the platform less.

The question that still remains after this study is something that can apply to all aspects of the social media world, "is social media is the cause of the socially isolated feeling users are left with, or is it that users who naturally feel more socially isolated than others tend to flock to these online platforms?" Opinions are going to vary with this question but no matter what consensus or agreement researchers settle on, there is an undeniable correlation to stress and depression with social media.

# Instagram: The "Teenagers" Platform

## ***Is Instagram the most toxic because of its users?***

Instagram was created in October of 2010 with the intention of being a solely visual platform that users could connect through using pictures. Over the past decade, the platform has turned into arguably the most toxic of social media platforms for this generations teenagers. Countless Instagram "influencers" have admitted that the platform poses a threat for the mental health of the users, especially when it comes to body dysmorphia and self esteem. Even though they're trying to make a living off of the network, they seem to be the only ones trying to do something about the issues at hand. Following this, a survey done just last year in 2019 shows that "out of 1500 teenagers and young adults that use Instagram, 89% say that the platform is the worst out of the entire social network when it comes to negative influences on users mental health and wellbeing" showing just how detrimental the platform is for users.

Posting updates about your life and what you're up to seems fine until it isn't. Users of Instagram have said they feel a mix of emotions when using the platform whether it be "FOMO" (fear of missing out), body dysmorphia issues, or bullying and loosing sleep quality. Despite the repetitive and similar opinions from users, Instagram has yet to come out with a formal statement addressing the issues and talking about possible changes being made to the platform.

*"You don't have to post it in order to prove it"*

## What Are We Missing

What is Instagram doing that we're ignoring?

"Young people who spend more than two hours a day on Instagram are more likely to report psychological distress. Seeing friends constantly on holiday or enjoying nights out can make young people feel like they are missing out while others enjoy life. These feelings can promote a 'compare and despair' attitude.



Feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem are yet another two affects Instagram has on its users. The platform makes it easy for girls and women to feel as if their bodies aren't good enough as people add filters and edit their pictures in order for them to look 'perfect'. But, for a growing number of users - and mental health experts - the very positivity of Instagram is precisely the problem. The site encourages its users to present an upbeat, attractive image that others may find at best misleading and at worse harmful. Because of this, Instagram makes you worry that everyone is perfect - except you.

*"Social media has created jealous behavior over illusions"*

# The Overlooked Platform

## ***Can the platform without likes still be harmful?***

One of the most overlooked platforms when discussing social media is VSCO. The platform was created in 2011 and still doesn't seem to have the attention that other platforms do. When looking at the app, the design and layout can easily be compared with big differences than other platforms similar to it. The platform does not have a "liking system" nor does it have a comment section. On the app, users are able to share photos "without the fear of likes and comparison" and is designed for users to create a personal portfolio of pictures to store memories throughout their lives.

Despite creating filters to remove some of the aspects that could cause issues with users, many seem to find themselves falling victim to comparison still. Similar to Pinterest, the app portrays the "perfect life" and can leave users with the negative feeling that none of us enjoy. The platform has very few restrictions on what users can share and because of this, problems have been arising recently and despite complaints, nothing is being done to stop it.

*"Social media is the new permanent record that no one seems to be able to escape"*





## Is It Still Okay?

Is the majority of VSCO good for users and we're just ignoring it?

With the complaints present on this platform, no one seems to be able to observe the better aspects found on VSCO that other platforms do not include. The platform has become a prominent place to bring awareness to issues that need attention. In the year 2020, the "Black Lives Matter Movement" took over VSCO and allowed users to gain knowledge on a topic they might not have otherwise been informed on.



*"Privacy is dead because of social media"*

When breaking down VSCO's demographic, there is one statistic that supports the idea of the platform being mainly younger users saying, "96% of the platform's demographic is made up of 13-24 year old women". The BLM Movement is just one example of what the platform has been able to accomplish with younger generations and there are countless other movements that have made their way over to the platform to inform those users.

Although there are beneficial aspects to the platform similar and related to social justice issues, there are still problems found within it that need to be addressed and changed before one can consider VSCO a safe and a healthy place for users to coexist. Nonetheless, VSCO is one of the best places for users to be on social media currently and taking that into consideration is something that users should be doing before judging the platform so harshly.

# Is Twitter Truly Bad?



*"You shouldn't be using social media to impress people"*

Twitter was founded in July of 2006 with the intention of being an SMS-based communications platform that groups of friends could use to keep tabs on each other and stay updated on what each other were doing based on their status updates.

Breaking down the demographics, about 66% of Twitter's users are men who are more likely than not using the platform for updates on current events. However, 36% of Twitter's age demographic ranges from 30-49 years old which proves very different from the rest of the social media platforms being discussed. With all that in mind, the question becomes, "is Twitter detrimental to our mental health or is it just making us dumb?"

# Taking Away From Our Knowledge

## *Has Twitter been making us naïve without us knowing?*

From an educational standpoint, people are beginning to learn that Twitter is causing learning difficulties because of how easily false information is spread throughout the platform. There are countless studies that have been done to try and determine if this is true or not but more often than not, the studies are able to back up the opinion many are beginning to share.

Recently, a study done in Italy where they tested this idea. Roughly 1,500 students were attending 70 Italian high schools during the 2016-2017 academic year. Half of the students used Twitter to analyze "The Late Mattia Pascal," the 1904 novel by Italian Nobel laureate Luigi Pirandello, which satirizes issues of self-knowledge and self-destruction. They posted quotes and their own reflections, commenting on tweets written by their classmates. Teachers weighed in to stimulate the online discussion. The other half relied on traditional classroom teaching methods. Performance was assessed based on a test measuring understanding, comprehension and memorization of the book. Test results were able to show that using Twitter reduced performance by about 25 to 40 percent of a standard deviation from the average result.

*"Somehow people are envious of lifestyles that don't even exist"*



## Snapchat

Why is Snapchat so popular if there are so many risks involved?

Snapchat was created in September of 2011 with the intention of being a platform that Stanford University students could use to post photos and videos that would disappear from the sight after a few moments. Of all platforms, Snapchat is the least supported by parents. Survey's done have shown that because the "snaps" are gone as soon as they are opened, parents complain that they cannot keep an active tab on their children and what they are doing on the platform.

The biggest risk found on the platform is cyberbullying. This is again because of the "disappearing" aspect incorporated into the app. Users might be tempted to share compromising photos or even engage in the cyberbullying because the photos and or videos are deleted after being seen by the recipient. Along with this, users have access to add people to their contact list that they might not know and have never met before which although is a feature on most platforms, becomes a bigger issue on Snapchat because the app is used for direct communication whereas other platforms like Instagram are not and you can avoid communication with users you do not know.



*"The cars we drive say a lot about us."*

# Faults in the Platform

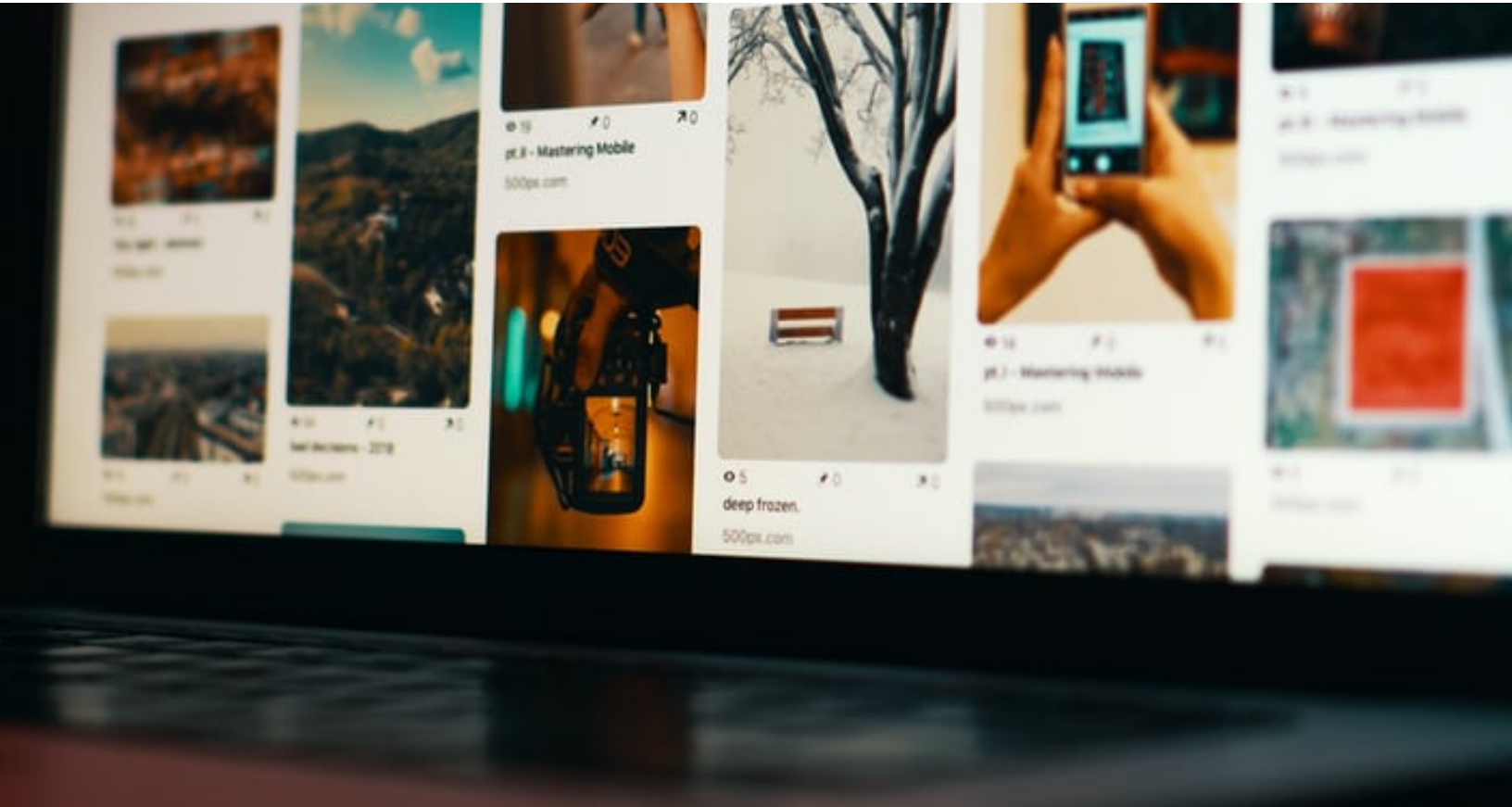


## *"Increasing performance while decreasing value"*

Along the lines of cyberbullying, Snapchat allows users to fall victim to other negative feelings such as loneliness, fear of missing out, comparison, and countless others. Most users like to believe that because the photos and videos being posted "delete" after 24 hours, it is okay to post things that they wouldn't necessarily on any other platform.

Despite numerous complaints from parents and guardians, Snapchat has yet to do anything on this consistent issue, making many parents of these victims wonder if the company cares enough to make changes, or if they are just in it for the money they obtain. Accusations like these are bold and extremely confrontational, but being a bystander or even a victim to these issues, you have to wonder if there might be some truth behind them.

# The Innocent Platform



*"At the end of the day, a private life is a happy life"*

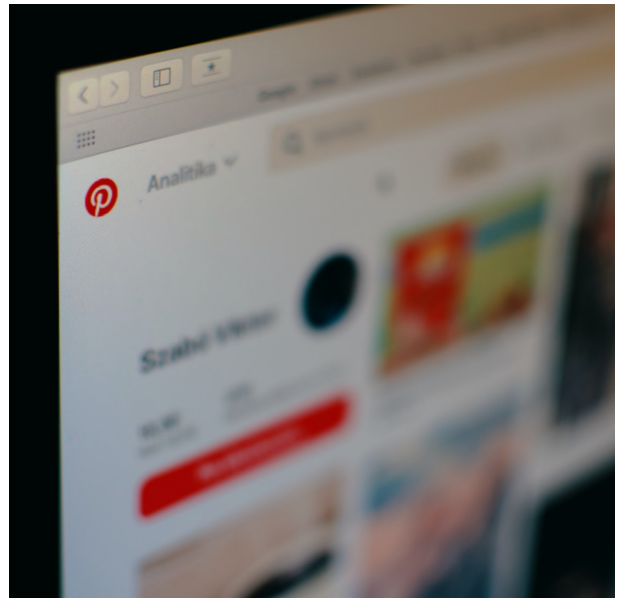
Released in January of 2010, Pinterest can be seen as the most innocent of the social media platforms. Bringing users together with the intention of sharing ideas, crafts, clothing, etcetera, the platform is seen to have the least amount of negative effects on the mental health of the users on the app.

Despite all the positives that come from the platform, there have been countless complaints on the ideas that the app portrays. Users believe that the platform channels and encourages "perfect" lives that more often than not, no one truly has. Although the "perfect" life can be seen as motivation to improve yourself for some, most are offended and left feeling worn down by the unrealistic standard.

# Comparison of the "Perfect Life"

## How Can An Innocent Intention Leave Such a Negative Impact?

A consideration or estimate of the similarities or dissimilarities between two things or people is the "perfect" definition of comparison. More often than not, comparison is used to compare people and the differences found within them. Although you can find this on any social media platform, Pinterest is known for being one of the most prominent comparison platforms.



Within the platform, there are thousands of different "pins" that can be used with good intention but there are also thousands of pins that can cause negative impacts on a users mental health. Pins talking about recipes or DIY projects that users can do are the type that leave users feeling satisfied and content with themselves but almost any other type of pin can cause users to fall victim to comparison.

Displaying the "perfect life" is something that users of any social media platform subconsciously do almost always. Pinterest is just one of the many platforms that cause issues like this but because the platform hasn't gotten any form of backlash for it, the same issue keeps occurring. Users, mainly women, will fall victim by seeing other women with "perfect bodies" and "perfect lives" and of course this is something they can't control, but why has Pinterest done nothing to stop it?

*"Less scrolling and more living"*



## Too Much Freedom

Does Reddit allow users to have too much of a say on certain subjects?

The Reddit platform was created in June of 2005 with the intention of creating a space for college students to discuss current events and share their opinions on them. Over time, the platform lost some of its popularity, making it one of the lesser known social media platforms to date, but nonetheless it is still causing countless issues.

Despite complaints from users, Reddit has put out numerous statements saying how they are most likely not going to change their platform. In 2014, there was an issue with the platform revolving around a celebrity being photoshopped onto certain pictures to try and ruin their reputation. In a statement made to address this issue, Reddit said, "We are unlikely to make changes to our existing site content policies in response to this specific event."

If Reddit cannot make changes to help an issue involving celebrities and people who could easily sue or go after the company, how are we as average society members, supposed to trust that they will make reasonable decisions for our safety and wellbeing on the platform?



*"Social media is supposed to be neutral"*



# Controversial Communities



*"Social media is society's biggest problem"*

Along with too much freedom, another issue that Reddit seems to face is extremely controversial communities. One of the aspects highlighted on the platform is freedom of speech and from this, there are many "groups" and or "communities" formed to support similar beliefs.

When looking through all the different groups on the platform, there are multiple communities supporting positive things, but when scrolling through some more you will find concerning groups. One of the most controversial groups you can find on Reddit, is the "DeepFake" community. They are people who will photoshop videos and pictures to create voices sounding identical to the person they are imitating. If Reddit can't stop this large community, whose to say they won't start creating copies of average citizens?

# The Platform that Took Over Everything

*TikTok has taken over social media recently but are we ignoring the consequences of the app?*

TikTok was released in September of 2016 but grew in size recently during the past year. Due to COVID-19, the platform has become one of the outlets that users go to in order to escape from reality. Many users of the platforms have fallen victim to getting sucked into the "rabbit hole" and scrolling through the app for hours, but with 800 million active users, the platform is one of the biggest in the social media world, giving way for users to fall victim to ideas and views presented on the app.

In November of 2019, concerns about censorship on TikTok surfaced when a 17 year old girl posted a political video disguised as a makeup tutorial. The teen was trying to bring attention to Uighur interment camps in China, and after more than 1.5 million views, the video was taken down by the platform. Doing this caused TikTok to receive severe backlash with users saying, "TikTok is censoring posts based on the wishes of the Chinese government." Situations like these presses the question, if the platform itself cannot seem to keep out of political issues and drama, how are the users supposed to?

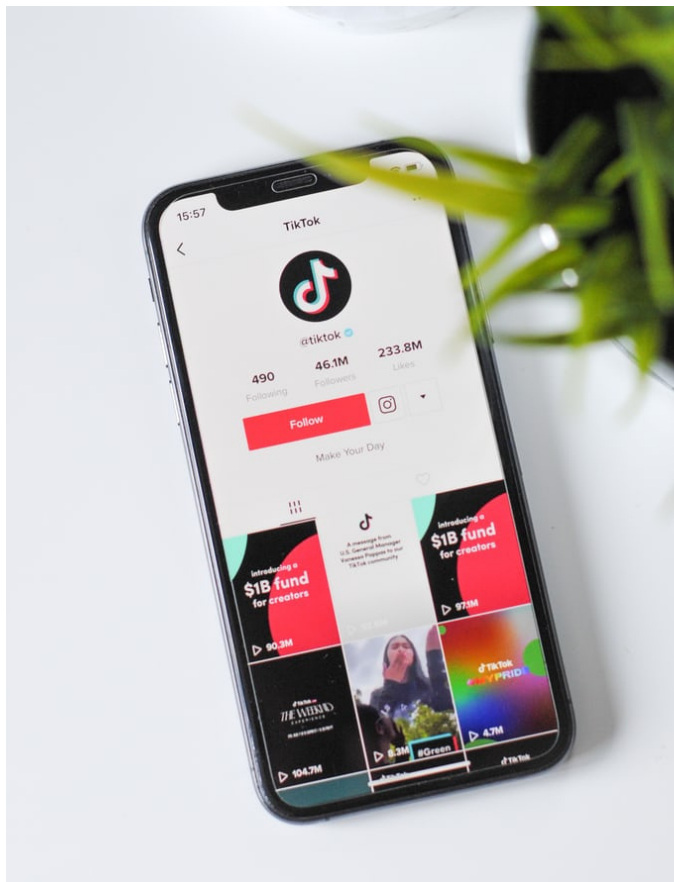
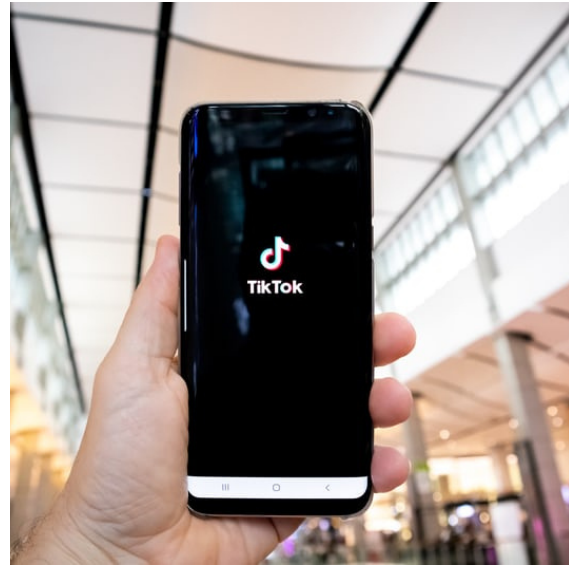
*"Be happy in real life not just on social media"*

# Harmful Trends

## How Innocent are TikTok Trends?

Along with political issues, the platform is also accused of "body-shaming trends" and countless other negative promotions towards its viewers such as: addiction, bullying, comparison, and of course mental health.

Looking at the app, you could spend hours going through countless trends that have been created on the platform whether it be makeup, acting, dancing, lip-synching, etc. Although the trends are



created with the intention of being innocent and "sweet", any user following the trend or creating their own video to contribute can fall victim to the negative promotions created with the trend itself.

In an article, four girls from a small high school were interviewed and shared their experience on TikTok. They all brought up body image issues or unhealthy eating habits as something they had seen handled irresponsibly on the app. One of the girls went as far as to say that she felt that, "they have an algorithm that pretty much blocks plus sized people from being seen doing trends." She believes that this can be "really harmful". In another article for NBC, author Sarah Kaufman stated that, "the app is particularly dangerous for people who are susceptible to an eating disorder relapse. Even if a minority of TikTok users experience this it is still an issue and an environment that tugs at these insecurities and is not one that I want to recommend."

*"Offline should be the new luxury"*

# Who Is To Blame

## *Is this situation entirely our fault?*

Despite all of the factors in this situation that could be our fault, are we the only ones to blame? As society members should we be taking some of this blame off of ourselves and putting in onto the companies that keep letting these issues happen on their platforms? Researchers have been debating this over the past couple years and the varying opinions are shocking.

The most common response when going through data is a 60-40 ratio. Most believe that companies are 60% to blame for these issues and that the users are putting too much blame on themselves. Others however believe that the situation is entirely our fault simply because of the fact that we were the ones who twisted away from the platforms original intentions.

Nonetheless, you can't help but think if companies should be held responsible for some of these issues. They are fully aware of what is happening on the platforms and some have come out with statements saying they will "fix" the issues, while others blatantly say that they will not be making changes due to legal reasons. Personal opinion aside, everyone should be able to agree that changes need to be made before social media does more damage than it has already done.

*"Offline is peace of mind"*

Instagram


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SOCIAL MAGAZINE

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# Taking Responsibility



## *"Social media should not be used as a tool"*

Many people need to realize that companies are unlikely to make the changes necessary to make social media safe again. We can try and put as much blame as we would like onto them but if change was going to be made, it would have likely been done by now.

There are countless things that we can do to try and create a healthier environment, one of them being taking responsibility. If everyone on these platforms were to admit and address to the wrongdoings they might have done, an instant change could happen. Researchers all agree that the first step in this process in admitting that we are at partial fault, and even though it is something that our minds don't naturally agree to and or want to do, it needs to be done.



## Is There Any Hope?

Do we still have the chance to change social media or is it too late?

1997 was the year the society changed completely. No one knew it at the time but nonetheless, the creation of social media changed the way that people think about themselves and others. Every social media platform was created with a pure intention, but it's because of the users that they have become such a negative place.

As a society, we need to change the way that social media is used, whether or not that means redesigning social media platforms or starting from scratch and creating new platforms entirely. Social media is an unavoidable part of our lives, for better or for worse. We could put the responsibility in the hands of the social media companies themselves, but they haven't exactly proven trustworthy with making changes to their platforms. So what can we do? Do we risk restarting everything or do we try and make changes in our own personal lives to make social media a safer and more enjoyable place for users to connect.



*"We let social media have too much power"*

# Simple Changes



*"Less social media, more of everything else"*

If every user of social media were to try and create reasons and positive uses for social media, most believe that the platforms wouldn't be as toxic as they are now. There are countless things we could all do to make our experiences better on the platforms yet none of us are doing it.

If we were to do simple things such as: creating a purpose as to why you're going onto the platform to begin with, scheduling a set amount of time to spend on each platform, trying to use others people's posts as inspirations rather than comparison, or even just thinking before your posting, we could have an experience far different than what we're used to. Of course, it's going to be difficult to make these changes... but if we want change we need to take action.

# Thank You



*"Engage, enlighten,  
and encourage on  
social media"*

If you have made it this far I just want to say thank you. I've worked on this project from the beginning of October all the way through the beginning of January, putting in about 6 hours of work a week. It was a long process making this but I'm extremely grateful to have gotten the opportunity.

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SOCIAL MEDIA HAS CREATED JEALOUS BEHAVIOR OVER  
ILLUSIONS. SADLY SOME ARE ENVIOUS OF THINGS,  
RELATIONSHIPS & LIFESTYLES THAT DON'T EVEN EXIST.

# SOCIAL

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# MY MAIN RESOURCES

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