



How is Social Media Affecting Our Behaviour?

By Kiera Allan

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Q Introduction

Social media has allowed us to share with an average of 155 friends

Smith (2019)

What is Social Media?

Social media is a series of different digital platforms in which we as users can connect with people all over the world sharing stories and information and communicate to a larger network of people than we could in the 'real world'. It allows us to do work, communicate with friends and family that we have lost touch with and are living far away and it allows new connections to be made. Social media has allowed us to share with an average of 155 friends (Smith, 2019), all at once and a potential to reach another 3.8 billion people that are using social media (Kemp, 2020) but is this level of 'social behaviour' actually making us more anti-social? In this research journal, I will be exploring the subject matter trying to understand where the problems lie and how we might be able to prevent or prepare for the future.

Why I Chose This Subject

With the rapid increase in people using the internet over the last decade (Internet World Stats, 2019) I was massively intrigued by whether this access to information and the allowance to put ourselves out there to people globally was effecting our day to day behaviour, if so, how? Social media has allowed us to access a platform of endless information to share and connect with people globally and at any time, with the world available in our pockets is this benefiting us or damaging us? I aim to find out what we use social media for and why and what the negatives are of using social media overtime. This subject matter is vital at this current time with the mass use of social media on a day to day basis and how young people are being brought up with these platforms to use. It is vital to understand the effects fully to be able to prepare for the future and prevent any problems occurring.

Q Aims and Objectives

To understand this subject area fully I need to conduct thorough research to get all angles and see what problems are being caused by our use of social media.

- Firstly, I need to understand the audience who are using social media, their age, what are they using the platforms for and why are they on social media? I will conduct a variety of research focused on identifying key audiences and issues they face and if narrative gaps in understanding are found I will need to create and distribute a survey that should provide answers needed.
- I want to know what people's opinions are on social and what they think of the content being posted online. I want to research into whether users see any problems with being online or if they have any personal negative experiences with social media as this will give me problems that I could bring attention to or try and tackle to try and solve. To find this information I will have to interview various people to get personal stories and meaningful insights to the user's experiences and the world of social media and the myths and realities to the various platforms.
- With people believing social "teenagers are addicted to their phones" Wallace (2020) has social media coming in between us and our day to day lives and relationships, I want to research into this further to see whether other people feel the same or disagree with this assumption. I will need to again interview multiple people to get an idea of people's experiences and I will conduct a survey to get some statistics on these view points across a wider range of users.
- It is significant to understand what people 'follow' and 'like' on their social media and could this be effecting behaviour and their day to day life what are they filling their feed with every day? To find this I will interview people to get a personal insight into their social media I will also ask if they mind me looking at their feed to see and take notes if there are any patterns forming between people.
- Another question is, what is the difference between the most used social media platforms and how do they advertise what they are for? And are users following these expectations or are using them in a different way? I need to research into the platforms to see how they describe themselves and then conduct surveys to compare what their users say how they use the platforms. Will they match up? Why are people using multiple platforms?
- And finally, I want to know if people feel better or worse after being on social media and is this effected by how long they spend on social media? I will need to see if there are any medical studies on this out there already and if not I will need to distribute a survey to ask social media users their screen time and if there is a pattern between this and their mental health. Interviews could also be useful to see if there are any patterns or experiences to look out for and could give me points to explore further.

Methodologies

The 16-24 age group are by far the most active social media users with

91% using the internet for social media

(RSPH, 2017)

From the aims and objectives, appropriate research is needed to gain a thorough insight into the possible areas in this subject matter I will use effective research methodologies to gain meaningful results to understand and work from. There were a multitude of questions I needed to explore.

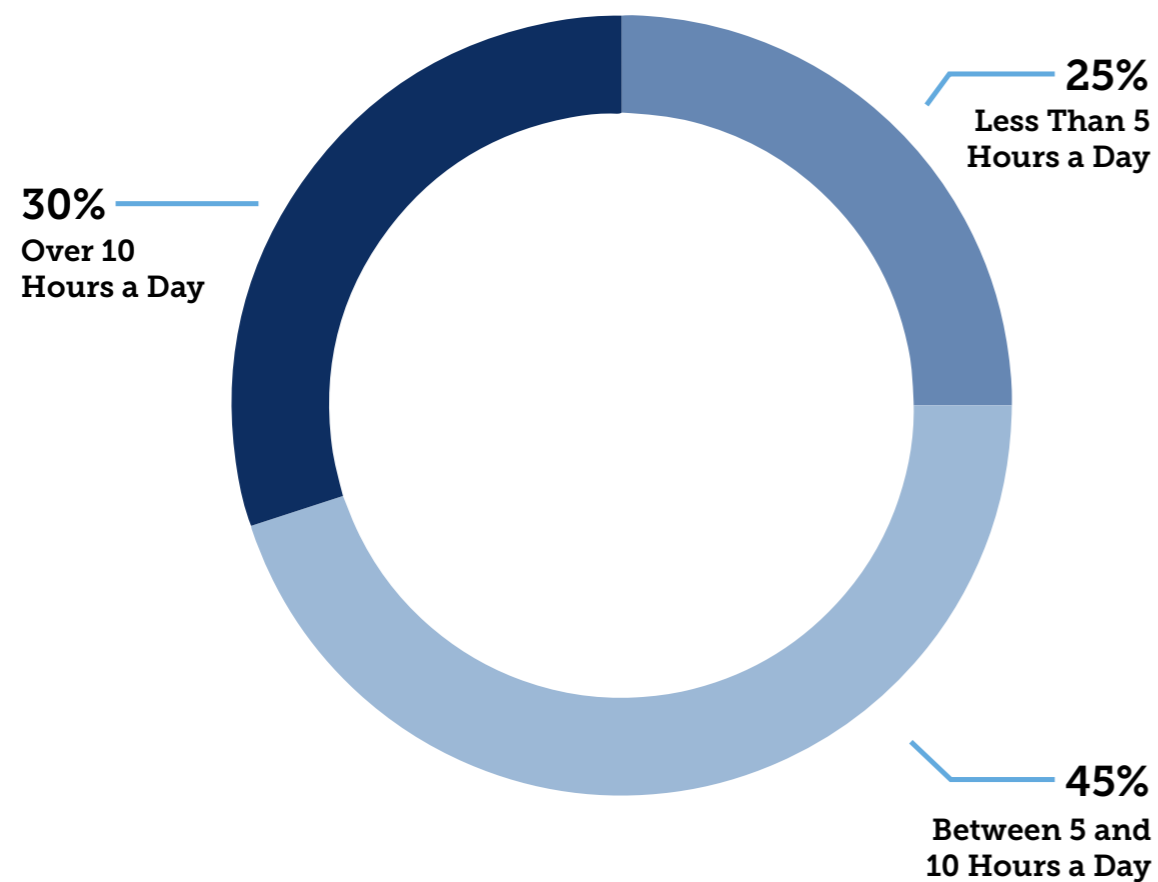
Who is Using Social Media?

To get a general knowledge into who was using social media research was conducted into existing studies finding that "The 16-24 age group are by far the most active social media users with 91% using the internet for social media" (RSPH, 2017) with YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter being the most used sites by the general population Ortiz-Ospina (2019). Social media has been a vital part in this generation's lives having grown up on the new technology they are usually more tech savvy than their parents making them more likely to have secret accounts and be able to post statuses online without the knowledge of their parents and family members, and parents can't help when a problem occurs. Tracy (2020)

An additional survey was conducted to get a further understanding on the amount of time social media users spend online and whether this differed between age groups.

This survey was shared online to social media users through Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to gain a wider reach in audience, 55 people answered the survey with none of them skipping any questions, participants ranged from the ages of 14 to 75 with the majority being between 18 and 24. The survey showed 45% of users admitted to spending between five and ten hours a day on technology that included social media (this being chat rooms, Social media platforms, YouTube, and gaming) 30% of users were using these platforms from upwards of ten hours a day with a few people using social media for work. And Finally, 25% of users admitted to using social media for less than 5 hours a day with no one answering less than then one hour a day spent on social media. (Allan, 2020). This survey also asked the users to describe why they use social media and the technology they use, this would give insights into the areas that could need further research as well as connect any links between location of time and problems encountered online.

How Many Hours a Day Do People Spend on Social Media?



How Do People Feel About Social Media

A variety of interviews were organised to get a deep insight into people's opinions on social media and understand what people's issues were with the online platforms. One user interviewed, Max (2020), was concerned with the fact that because it is all on his phone, he no longer has a work life balance because people can now reach him at all hours and from anywhere and it was currently effecting his mental health and enjoyment for his job and college course. One teenager described social media as "a drug, I hate it but I can't seem to get off it" Kyle (2020). The interviews demonstrated themes between the amount of time people spent on social media and a negative effect on their mental health, the survey distributed reflected these along with themes between age and opinions, with older participants having a more negative perspective on social media than younger users (Allan, 2020). Another theme presented itself during the interviews, with teenagers saying they had placed self-regulations on their social media usage time but not the content, is this really beneficial or just giving them the idea that they are being responsible? With a growing number in teenagers saying they suffer with their mental health are they really being as effective as they can?

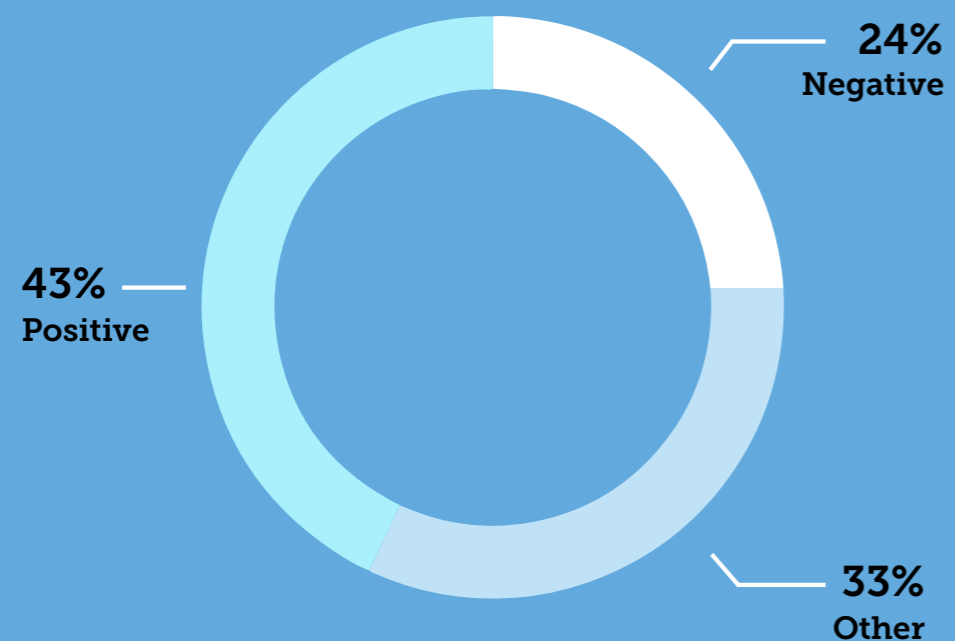
"Like a drug, I hate it but I can't seem to get off it"

Are We Becoming More Social?

While running the interviews the participants were asked on their opinions on whether social media was making users more social or ant-social in their day to day lives, the majority of the people interviewed said that they believed that it was making people social because of the wide range of people they were now talking to that they wouldn't have access to in 'real life' however, most agreed it was an easy platform to get sucked into and become consumed in, with seven out of eight people using the words like addicted or addicting to describe relationships with social media and the girls all brought up how social media was causing issues with their image and mental health. So, overall people might agree it is making users more social but at what cost?

A similar question was also asked in the survey distributed online, asking the participants whether they believed users were benefiting from social media and related technologies or were they hindering users, 43% believed people were benefiting from this exposure to technology and it could only enhance lives. 33% believed the opposite and that these platforms were causing far more problems than solutions and raised their concerns they had with younger people being encouraged to use these platforms from such a young age. 24% answered "other" giving explanations that they could see both sides and couldn't fully see whether it was benefiting or hindering people and were concerned about the long-term effects with 80% of these people bringing up the idea that users might becoming too reliant and was causing people to become addicted. (Allan, 2020)

Do People Think Social Media Is a Positive or Negative?



Reliance on technology is often observed in day to day life an ethnographic study showed this when at the waiting room at Cardiff Central Station fourteen out of seventeen people were on their phones even people who arrived together were on their phones and not interacting with each other, also observed in a university lecture, three students checked their phones throughout, one student checked his phone eleven times in the space of one hour and another girl spent the hour on social media, this shows the distance social media and technology is putting between people and how they function in day to day activities.



Photograph Of People in Cardiff Central Station on Their Phones (Allan,K. 2020)



Are Users Using Social Media for The Right Reasons?

Are social media platforms being used for the described uses? Research was conducted into the top used social media platforms to find out how they are advertised and whether their users would agree with their descriptions.

Originally designed for college students, Facebook was created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg while he was enrolled at Harvard University. By 2006, anyone over the age of 13 with a valid email address could join Facebook allows you to send messages and post status updates to keep in touch with friends and family. You can also share different types of content, like photos and links.

(What is Facebook? 2020)

There was a broad agreement that the main reason they used Facebook was to keep in touch with people and the main feature used was the messaging app. What was discovered was that even though the age required to join is thirteen 80% of the people asked made their accounts before they were thirteen years old. Does there need to be more age restrictions on these platforms? Or do people need to make younger users are more aware of what is online so they can be more informed if something goes wrong?

Where Facebook is known for its way of connecting people with friends and family Instagram differs it focuses on sharing photos and videos and following people with similar interests, recommending accounts with similar tags and themes. 70% of the people asked said that they use Instagram mainly to follow celebrities, 'content creators' or 'influencers' and actually follow more of these than their own friends. A few of the girls interviewed expressed how their 'feed' made them feel inadequate or that they weren't doing enough with their lives and this constant stress was effecting their mental health and opinion they had of themselves. Along with "around 70% of 18-24 years olds [that] would consider having a cosmetic surgical procedure." (RSPH, 2017) Because of what they view online.

Twitter follows the same patterns as Instagram with more people following celebrities and public figures than their friends and family, Twitter works as a small blog with "every microblogged tweet post limited to 280 characters or less... which makes tweets easy to scan" (Gil, 2019) making post snappy and straight to the point. Seven out of eight of the students interviewed said they usually find the news out from the 'trending' section on the platform and that it is more interesting as it is often live and from people involved, however, five of these seven students said that they get overwhelmed by this feature as it often sad or tragic news and their whole 'timeline' will be filled with people tweeting about the same event.

Patterns Emerging from Interviews?

From the interview with eight different students a pattern was found between a couple of the student's Instagram feeds and their answers about being online. The student who followed a majority of celebrities and 'online influencers' found that they compared their lives to those they followed and felt they experienced FOMO (fear of missing out) and body image issues after comparing themselves to the people they follow. Caitlin and Fraya (2020)

Lastly, it was sought out whether users believed social media platforms were positively or negatively affecting their mental health. In the interview conducted, it was asked to the participants whether they felt social media effected their mental health and whether they could see any issues with the online platforms. Kyle (2020) stated, "there would always be a downside to social media" and Anthony (2020) explained how he had to start going to the gym to create a more balanced life because he found himself spending most of his day inside on his phone.

**"there would
always be a
downside to
social media"**

Kyle (2020)

Tracy (2020) as a parent was extremely frightened about her daughter using so much social media because she has seen the effects it has had on friends and family and this constant worrying has negatively affected her mental health. Finally, Caitlin (2020) and Fraya (2020) said that they had suffered from mental health problems and image problems because of the standard that is put on by the people she follows on social media, they are both trying to change the people they follow and Caitlin said she is feeling much better when on social media.

The other participants said that they didn't believe it was affecting them enough to notice but the majority of them knew at least one person that had mental health problems but this was unclear whether it was linked to their social media habits. (Anthony, Caitlin, Catrin, Fraya, Jack, Kyle, Robbie and Tracy, 2020) This all reflects the results that were produced by RSPH (2017) where they shared that the rates of anxiety and depression in young people have risen 70% in the past 25 years.

Q Discussion

Addiction

Mental Health

Data Sharing

By using a variety of different methodologies to conduct research distinct themes and concerns have arose, these themes are discussed in detail bellow and offer opportunities to be talked about to make every day digital usage safer and more enjoyable. Many of the themes related around time spent on social media and the fear of social media addiction, then these online platform's effect on their user's mental health and well-being. Followed by concerns with how much people share online and who and what has user's data and what is it being used for. (Allan, 2020) Overall, social media has many benefits to it, from making sure people keep in touch and share memories all the way to allowing people to check in safe in the event of a crisis and can even let you raise money for people effected, Facebook (2020). However, the negatives to social media cannot be ignored and must be addressed properly and tackled to help the younger generation growing up with these resources.

Social Media and Loneliness

Social media is having a massive effect on the global population and especially people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four with "91% of 16-24 year olds [that] use the internet for social networking" (RSPH, 2017) from the research it was found that the majority of this demographic spent at least six hours of their day online, so what is this doing to young people? People are arguably the most connected they have been with people being able to communicate with 3.8 billion users (Kemp,2020) on social networking sites, but the easy everyday access people have to their online persona is also causing a massive disconnect.

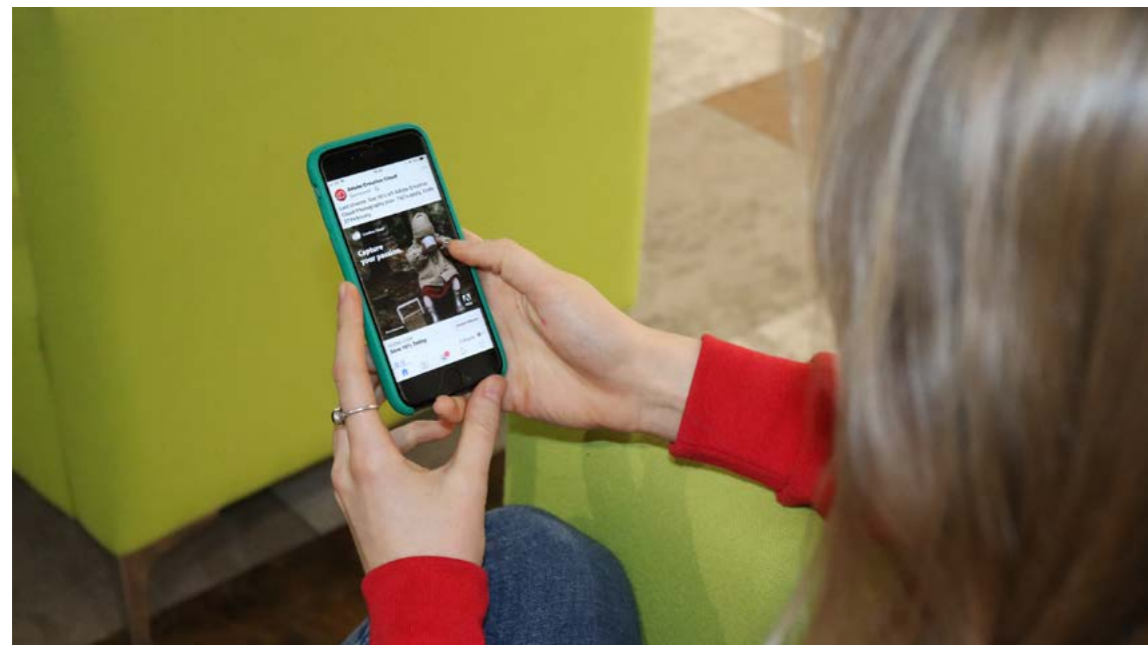
researchers have reported that social media use can increase loneliness. For example, a study of 754 U.S. adults by Stepanikova, Nie, and He (2010) found that people who spent a lot of time communicating online (e.g., using chat rooms, SNS, and instant messenger) felt lonelier than those who spent less time or no time at all online.

Ryan, Tracii A., Kelly A. L. Allen, DeLeon L. M. Gray, and Dennis M (2017)

People are using social media to connect and communicate to people around the world but are not actually connecting with the people around them and are feeling lonely and then go back to social media and the cycle repeats itself with Hilary Andersson saying how "today's teenagers check their phones on average 90 times a day" (Smartphones: The Dark Side, 2018) Multiple people stated felt like they were missing out on real events due to their social media habits and weren't paying attention to the important things in life because they were too concerned with their online appearance and one person even said he has spent "hours cycling through different apps refreshing pages" Jack (2020) out of boredom. Social media has been designed to make its users addicted and stay as long as possible on their sites with no concern to the health and well-being of the public

Social Media Adiction

Social media has specifically been made to get people interacting, however that level of interaction has become currency and social media sites have had to design their sites and features to maximise user's interaction causing the public to spend more and more time on these sites without realising what it is doing to their health. If users are unaware of how much they are scrolling through on sites like Facebook they are more likely to spend more of their time on the site because it makes it hard to self-regulate their activity. Aza Raskin references the soup experiment when talking about how he designed the endless scroll on phone apps because you don't have the automatic cue to say you're finished (Smartphones: The Dark Side, 2018) this is then corroborated with Jack's statement of endlessly refreshing pages and often losing hours to videos on Facebook, and this becomes again harder to regulate with the auto-play feature videos have on Facebook creating that endless scroll effect with all its content. Social media addiction has become such a concern with many of the teenagers that participated in the interviews that features such as screen time on their phones have been activated by them to monitor their activity and even ban them if they spend over an allocated time on an app.



Someone Scrolling Facebook
(Allan,K. 2020)



Social Media and Mental Health

(RSPH, 2017)

Social media has become all-consuming and the constant access people have of others is unlike it ever has been before, with everyone surveyed having at least one phone they were able to be contacted everywhere they went at all times of the day, this stress to keep up with everything can cause fatigue and especially if people are accessing masses of information each day. Many people suggested they felt depressed by the information they were seeing on their wall as the only time people would all be posting similar posts were after disasters and tragic events. With the "rates of anxiety and depression in young people have risen 70% in the past 25 years" (RSPH, 2017). It wouldn't be hard to assume social media and this constant flow of information had a part to play in this statistic. Then with the aspect of anonymity and ability to access people it is a breeding ground for bullying and harassment with seven out of eight people interviewed experiencing at some point in their social media lifetime some form of bullying and hate online through group chats and comments sections

**rates of
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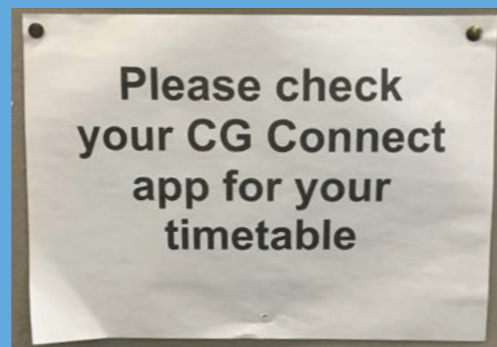
Just looking at the comment section of posts is disheartening especially posts with sensitive or controversial topics, I see lots of negative comments on posts to do with LGBT+ people and seeing that over and over again gets to you. Ryall (2020).

Everyone has a voice online and the ability to hide yourself behind a keyboard and computer means that people will say anything with no fear of consequences. With this aspect to social media there is also a concern of what can you believe of what goes online? Catrin (2020) raised an issue she has with Twitter is the mob mentality that can cause anything to trend and become headline features even if they are completely false, with headlines like #thequeenisdead and #RIPPrinceCharles that trended and gained massive popularity she finds it difficult to believe anything is true now. Social media has also effected those who created the platforms as Pearlman explains

My relationship with it started to shift. And I noticed that I would post something that I used to post and the Like count would be way lower than it used to be. Suddenly I saw, uh oh, I'm actually also kind of addicted to the feedback. And that's when I started to realise I wasn't sure that having this number in which somebody else was in control was healthy... feeling lonely, let me check my phone. I'm feeling insecure, let me check my phone. The intention is actually to comfort ourselves. For me it was realising when I need validation and I go to check Facebook and there's nothing there, how bad that feels.

(‘Smartphones: The Dark Side’ 2018).

The fact that the developers have been effected by their own designs shows how impactful social media is and the potential danger it holds. We as a society also need to help prevent this dangerous impact from happening yet we are encouraging it with many schools now being taught their lessons on Ipads and as observed in Crosskeys College their timetable was on an app is bringing technology and platforms like apps adding to the problem and encouraging students to be on their phones? Do we as responsible adults have to help limit their screen time when at controlled environments such as schools? These questions will be something that if taken any further will have to be asked and explored fully.



Sign in Crosskeys College.
(Allan, K. 2020)



Social Media and Online Influencers

With the growing popularity of social media means the availability to make a financial income off the various platforms, and this is how the 'online influencer' was born. With their thousands to millions of followers they are able to use their platform to promote products in promotional posts, recently Instagram changed their policies and this means that influencers now need to declare that the post is sponsored by a brand (currently this policy only applies in Europe and the United Kingdom). These influencers have a massive impact on those who follow them. Caitlin and Fraya two students interviewed admitted to having negative feelings about themselves because of the people who were on their feed and one described how it felt like a constant stream of comparison and judgement towards herself. She found herself getting anxious about how she looked in her day to day life. They both talked about how they were trying to change their social media feeds by following people that represented a healthier mind-set and lifestyle. And it is not surprising that they feel this way with social media influencers agreeing with them and feeling the same way

According to a social media report from Norwegian global influencer marketing platform inzpire.me revealed nearly half (47%) of surveyed influencers felt their job as an influencer had an impact on their mental health and 32% believes the platform gave them a "negative" impact on body image.

(Leighton, 2019)

If social media is effecting those who have a career on these sites and are creating the content it is no wonder it is effecting those who aspire to be like these influencers. Kyle (2020) briefly mentioned how he felt he wasn't living an exciting enough life and felt he needed to do more adventurous activities to make his feed more impressive.

“Likes, the comments, the shares have become this form of social currency by which we attribute value to something”

Parnell (2017).

This competitive nature is creating more and more stress in younger people and can lead to spending more and more money for the perfect photo and to portray the perfect life. Social media and follower count puts people on a chase for followers as a sign of status and respect causing youngsters to stress and worry about people's interactions with their posts.

“Likes, the comments, the shares have become this form of social currency by which we attribute value to something” Parnell (2017). The way people are attributing value to the amount people 'like' their posts and the amount of personality and effort users place in their profile then makes the 'likes' a more personal judgement and it is understandable why people get disheartened when a post has less engagement. The amount we value these statistics it is damaging mental health with a multitude of studies that show the correlation between anxiety and depression and social media usage.

Social Media and Data

During an interview with Max he brought up his concerns with the amount of information people put out on social media and how it is being used. There have been many cases where technology has been used to store data on users. Although not a form of social media a Ted Talk raised an issue with a toy named Cayla and shows how easily technology can be used for negative actions.

“more than 900 pages and sat down in our office and read them out loud ourselves... It took us thirty-one hours forty-nine minutes and eleven seconds to read the terms [and conditions]”

Lützow-Holm Myrstad (2018)

She [Cayla] connects to the internet and uses speech recognition technology to answer your child's questions, respond just like a friend. But the power doesn't lie with your child's imagination. It actually lies with the company harvesting masses of personal information while your family is innocently chatting away in the safety of their own home, a dangerously false sense of security... You need to download an app... parents must consent to the terms being changed without notice. Recordings of the child her friends and family can be used for targeted advertising and all this information can be shared with unnamed third parties. Lützow-Holm Myrstad (2018)

This idea that people can sign over their day to day information and the events that happen in their own home without even noticing is truly terrifying. But what was scarier was how easily hacked the Bluetooth device inside the toy was and how it could be used for anyone to say anything or listen to anything in strangers' homes, this toy is now in the German Spy Museum because of the severity of the situation and the possibilities it held. Lützow-Holm Myrstad then proceeds to talk about the power imbalance between people and digital companies as people tick to accept terms and conditions probably without reading or understanding them fully. His company produced an experiment to prove the unrealistic expectation of reading and understanding the terms and conditions of apps on the average phone. They printed “more than 900 pages and sat down in our office and read them out loud ourselves... It took us thirty-one hours forty-nine minutes and eleven seconds to read the terms” Lützow-Holm Myrstad (2018)

This shows how people are more than likely to agree to terms and conditions without knowing what is included in the fine-print and could agree to anything.

Q Summary

How Do We Stop

Attributing Our Value

To Likes

Who and What Do You

Trust online?

Who Do We Trust With

Our Data?

By starting with my initial question of “how is social media effecting our behaviour?” I was able to explore the subject matter in a multitude of directions some of the directions include exploring into mental health, loneliness, addiction and data safety, allowing me to find a wide variety of problems that concern social media users on a day to day basis. With all of these issues brought to attention, the one that seems to have the most impact on people causing them to bring it to attention on multiple occasions it how social media is harming their mental health. However, this question is still too broad and needed to be narrowed down into a question that would manageable to a tackle and try to solve to make user’s experiences better. Therefore, the significance of this aspect of a sub issue that again was brought to attention on multiple occasions through interviews and surveys, the issue with the amount of pressure people put on themselves to chase likes, comments and shares and the issues around equating such interactions with value and accomplishment. There needs to be a healthier way to interact with these social media platforms that don’t cause the mental health issues being presented in young people around the world using social media. My final question is “how might we prevent associating our personal value to likes, shares, comments and views?” I believe this question will be able to spark a conversation that could be beneficial to many young people.

Final Question:

“how might we prevent associating our personal value to likes, shares, comments and views?”

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