Social Media: The Root of Teenage Problems or an Aid

Why do people why our elders, always pester us on constantly being on our phones? Is always being on our phones that bad? "In 1996, the first social networking site, Six Degrees, was founded by Andrew Weinreich," Ngak, Chenda. "Then and now: a history of social networking sites." https://www.cbsnews.com/, 6 Jul. 2011, www.cbsnews.com/pictures/then-and-now-a-history-of-social-networking-sites/. Ever since then, has social media taken a turn for the better or, the worse? Social media has become part of our daily lives, and everyone uses it. Especially one group: Teenagers. Is it wise to use social media often and rely on it during our developmental stages, as it causes most modern-day teenage problems?

With social media integrating into our daily lives, keeping our eyes and hands off our phones has become more challenging. We have a lot of different applications to get ourselves distracted with, including Reddit, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and the list goes on. Two main types of social media are trending nowadays: Constitutional and ephemeral media. Constitutional media allows the users to be seen by anyone they want, friends or the public eye, to gather attention or likes; Ephemeral press, on the other hand, is when the text or image disappears after a set amount of time, usually causing the user to pay more attention to the media because of the fear of losing out.

Constitutional media, like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Reddit, allows users to post anything on said platform, and whatever is posted stays posted until taken down or deleted. This allows countless media and posts to keep on its database, enabling users to scroll endlessly. This creates a huge issue with people who have poor time management, especially teenagers. We spend much time mindlessly scrolling through the endless media available on the said platform instead of doing productive, more meaningful things.

Ephemeral media, such as Snapchat and Instagram Vanish mode, consists of media that disappear after a set amount of time. This type of media disappears after a set amount of time, causing people to pay more attention to sent media in fear of losing out. Since the media will disappear, users tend to focus on the media, neglecting their surroundings and what they are supposed to do. An article titled "'Snapchat,' youth subjectivities and sexuality: disappearing media and the discourse of youth innocence," written by Jennifer, Gregory, and Sue, states that Snapchat leads to a few major modern-day teenager problems: Youth innocence, the gaze, sexting, and cyberbullying.

The main problem with youth innocence is that childhood innocence needs to be maintained and surveilled. Some things are not meant to be learned at a young age. Some items require understanding and maturity before someone can completely apprehend their meaning. With the availability of countless media and information online, coming across one or two forums that were not meant for a kid is inevitable. The University of New England conducted the research by interviewing two parents of adolescent children (15 and 16 years old), both female. Both children are active on social media, and regularly text/browse through social media sites, including Instagram and Snapchat. The research was conducted to study teenagers nowadays think or feel about sexually explicit media. The study shows that the children were not surprised or shocked by cyber sexual interplay or images shown, which is seen on disappearing media (Snapchat). We could see this in two ways: Do they know what they see, or are they too young to understand the importance or weight of what they see? Moreover, will this affect what they perceive as usual in the future?

The gaze has also been part of a significant issue for a while. People are vulnerable to being gazed at – We would not want everyone to be staring at our every move and action, and we would not want to be judged for what we are constantly doing; this has been a well-known fact ever since social hierarchy existed. However, what if we can move this "gaze" only to be shown at our brightest moments? What if we could change these judgmental gazes into gazes of envy? This is what social media allows us to do. We could divert other people's gazes to the highlights of our lives. People feed on the "hearts" and "likes," the attention social media gives us, which provides us with a false sense of accomplishment. How many of these "hearts" are genuine, and are the "likes" given to us what people like? How many of these "followers" and "friends" are friends we would spend time with and hang out with in real life? This kind of digital flirtation invigorates online users giving them a false sense of reality. This false sense of reality causes people to think that they are loved by lots or get famous through social media. Still, many found themselves relatively isolated, without many true friends they could rely on in real life.

With technology becoming more widespread and accessible, combined with the raging hormones of teenagers, sexting has become one of the significant parts of using ephemeral media. Sexting, sexual texting, is also being normalized among teenagers. According to the Strohmaier survey, 54% of students said they had sent some form of sext, and 28% had sent a picture sext before 18. Most teenagers are minors and should not be showing off their bodies to their peers. It is almost impossible to take responsibility, account for future events, and know the consequences of sending "sensual" photos. The dangerous part is that these messages disappear, and no evidence will be left, making it hard to track down what happened. These images sent online will also build up much expectation, leading to disappointment in real life, further giving us another false sense of what is "normal."

Social media has given us a lot. Furthermore, the anonymity it has given us is indisputable. Many people can abuse this anonymity to harass and bully others online – cyber harassment. Many people say how they genuinely feel online while hurting offline, spreading all their true feelings to strangers online. However, many internet strangers can abuse this anonymity to bully and harass those hurting, posting harmful comments or directly attacking the user in direct messages, making them fall into more profound despair. Is it correct to rant and share all our feelings and emotions with people online? Are all these decisions teenagers make right, or do they require a form of guidance or supervision?

Moreover, why are our attention spans getting shorter? This is because our current media mainly consists of short 15-second clips; anything we find uninteresting, we can swipe to the next. Dislike YouTube a video? There are millions more available catered to our liking. These "endless" scrollers constantly force us to look at something dynamic. Sitting still and looking at a static book causes us to want to be continually fidgeting since we are not used to having something still in our hands.

Many people are against social media use. One research center, Pew Research, surveyed Brooke Auxier among Americans. According to the study, around 64% of Americans agree that social media harms us, 25% suggested that it was neutral and only 10% decided that social media brings benefits. Is this the users' fault? Or is it the social media companies at fault?

These online platforms require more moderation. Much fake news and bad advice are constantly appearing on social media. One example of this is Reddit. In Reddit, there are plenty of different forums called subreddits that connect people with the same interests/issues. In a subreddit called RelationshipAdvice, we often see commentators asking people to break up or leave their family without the full context; these naïve posters follow said advice and ruin real-life relationships. Many troubles could be involved if users blindly follow advice from unknown commentators, with or without ill intentions. We could prevent similar incidents from happening with good moderation and without crossing the line of censorship.

Disallowing or controlling our use of social media sits near the line of censorship. Nowadays, where freedom is very much encouraged, governing our web use would be against our values. Instead, educating and inspiring the proper use of these media would be a much better approach. In the Wall Street Journal, Julie Jargon, A Family & Tech columnist, interviewed a few kindergarten teachers about media use. Gina McNair, an eighth-grade kindergarten teacher, stated, "You could cut off YouTube, but this is the world these kids live in, and they need to learn how to be good digital citizens." Educating children about social media use is very important since it is inevitable, and it is better to learn how to use it more productively for future use.

We could argue that banning social media would be a more practical approach. However, this would only make the teenagers more curious. When one is curious, one tends to have more of a tendency to do something behind one's back. This results in uneducated teenagers using social media in the wrong way unknowingly.

There are many different reasons we can argue about social media being destructive. However, we need to see the libraries of knowledge filled within it. Instead of restricting or censoring, we could learn how to use social media effectively to our advantage. Twitter user, She\_Thrivess, made a post on many different websites, which could be handy in learning. These include COURSERA, edX, KhanAcademy, and GoSkills. All this helps tremendously in self-improvement and knowledge—many websites like these are available across the net and on social media. We could utilize social media this way and find useful websites that help us learn instead of scrolling mindlessly.

There is plenty of bullying going on on social media every day. However, with our current measures, avoiding these issues is simple. Every social media platform has a "Block" and "Report" button. With just one click away, one can stop seeing hateful comments from certain people. Aside from avoiding, social media also has given us a way to connect with people. With Facebook, Instagram, Discord, and other applications, we can connect with people, friends, and family and even meet new people from all over the world.

We cannot deny that social media harms us, especially in the hands of curious and naïve people, teenagers. However, with the countless features, including blocking, and reporting, social media provides, people can easily avoid social media's toxicity. If we educate people more about social media, we could even educate others on how to use social media beneficially. This is how we make social media help us through teenagerhood instead of making it a significant problem for us later in life.