**(Virtual) Reality Check**

**Social Media**

On February 12, 2015, President Barak Obama made history by becoming the first active President in history to be featured in a Buzzfeed Video. As hilarious as the notion may sound, it marked a significant example as to how a majority of Americans are absorbing their information. Using it as a platform to advertise Obamacare, the President set a precedent on communication between Government and citizens.

In 2008, when Obama began his first term as President of the United States, I was in 8th grade updating my MySpace song to Jules Santana. YouTube and Facebook were fresh out of the oven and had not grossed a large number of users. For 14y/o Sam, they were more of a network for interacting with friends after the school day had finished; like a new and improved AOL instant massager.

As of December 2015, there are 1.5 billion monthly active Facebook users. About a third of which claim their newsfeed is their main source of receiving news. My news feed no longer shows pictures from my neighbor’s recent vacation; it has become littered with activism for every cause imaginable, most frequently the 2016 Presidential election. It recently struck me that never before in the history of human interaction has there been a platform that can showcase as many voices as social media can. Social media has given society the unique ability to organize itself, quickly and concisely, into collections of like-minded people. Facebook has been the most influential of these new platforms; I would argue it has successfully “shrunk the world.” But ‘sharing’ mere ideas to promote drastic social change is a slippery slope fallacy.

Through the still fairly new interaction platform, people have found a solution for sharing their ideology’s with their friends and family. Political activism has been reduced to its most simple form: clicking the “like” or “love” button on an article or video. And for the issues that really hit home, the “share” and “retweet” button have become some of the most important features of social interaction and raising awareness. Social media has given society the unique ability to show support or consideration though these forms of ‘social currency.’ Social currency seems like a weird term, but considering the underlying value of Internet popularity, demonstrated through advertising and sponsorship, it seems that this rating system is shaping the way people express themselves.

The ability to shape ourselves has made us into our own brand, and like a skilled marketer, we do this the best we can to keep ourselves looking the way we wish to be perceived. However, people often mistake this process as being ‘fake,’ or fooling the world into believing they are better than their reality persona. My understanding is that the process showing our better selves to the public is no different from opting to wear ‘those jeans that make your gluteus look great’ to class rather than sweatpants. We construct our own reality physically and virtually.

However, I seldom find a ‘friend’ or ‘follower’ that uses their social medium to voice their own thoughts; rather the trend is to share short, palatable content, created by another party, which aligns with their specific beliefs. A Facebook timeline has evolved from a chronological photo album into a virtual tack board that showcases the values, virtues, and (at times) vices that define an individual. While some argue the new form of activism is shallow and useless, there is significant proof its effectiveness to raise awareness and change attitudes. The simplicity and low risk/reward ratio for revealing a personal opinion has revolutionized idea sharing.

With the 2016 General Election on the horizon, my (and many others I assume) newsfeed has transformed into a battlefield of thought promoting ideas from both sides of the political spectrum. But how influential can a tad bit of information be? And are we silencing our own personal voice by sharing the voice of others?

The answer is different for every individual, however in the grand scheme of social media and the world, what you post on your social medium cannot hurt anyone. If social media sharing has made any fact apparent, it’s that the ideologies of our friends and neighbors are as diverse as our heritage. It is our responsibility to accept that people have different ideologies about our world and do our best to promote what we believe in inherently fair and just. A community of voices invites the possibility for a wider range of ideas and drastically lowers the cost for participation. If we ostracize people who differ from our own ideas, then progress will be limited.

The “I share, therefore I am” attitude, coined by Harvard sociologist Sherry Turkle, has reshaped my outlook on social media. I will admit, I have learned new and important information while browsing my newsfeed, but it still seems like the bite-sized bits of information are not sufficient enough for me to “share.” You are what you share, and in my opinion, ones character is very apparent through the items they share.

Aside from our judgments on individual’s social media activity, our social platforms have given humans the ability to voice their opinion on any topic, at any time, and to people who represent our reality. I believe this process has pushed the boundaries of the first amendment and facilitated a better autonomous conversation. And remember, j*ust because you do not get retweets or likes doesn’t mean that you say less.* So be yourself and share ideas on topics you hold close to your heart; or don’t. Use your social media as a platform for debate; or don’t.