

By Shoshie Hemley

Social media has been in my life since I got my first phone for Hanukkah at eleven when my mother started working, leaving me to become more independent. My older sister, who was living in Wisconsin, downloaded Snapchat to my phone so we could stay in touch. The next year, my parents finally gave me permission to download Instagram. Since then, it's played a significant role in my life.

In sixth grade, I moved from Iowa City to Singapore. Then back to Iowa, back to Singapore again, and finally back to Iowa. With each move, I kept in touch with my closest friends from each school. We stayed friends because of social media. We were able to direct message and keep up with each other's lives through social media platforms. Although I rarely talk to my best friend in Singapore, we still know what is happening in each other's lives by following each other's social media. Keeping in touch was the initial reason I downloaded social media. I have sisters who live in different states and it helps us keep in touch without having to make time for a daily call that our busy lives don't allow. Being able to see milestones in my friends' and family's lives, regardless of distance, at the click of a few buttons, is a blessing I wouldn't have without social media.

Social media can also create amazing experiences. Without the power of Twitter, Greta Thunberg would have never seen the Iowa City school strikes, nor would she have reached out to come here. Social media has enhanced the power of activism, birthing a generation of young activists. The March For Our Lives and Fridays For the Future movements wouldn't have been so successful without it. For me, as an activist, my message is spread through Instagram stories. People show up to walkouts and other protests due to the spread of screenshots on social media. The renaissance of youth activism wouldn't be possible without the connections created by social media.

Social media isn't simply a necessity for practical matters. It can be a fun way of expressing yourself. Taking pictures, organizing your feed, and making video are forms of art. While many criticize the culture of influencers and content creators, it's a passion for many and people enjoy consuming that content. Regardless of if you have thousands or a few hundred followers, being able to express yourself to a platform of people is a creative outlet. Just because it's social media doesn't mean it's taken less seriously. Expression on social media can be graphic design, video editing, or photography in professional careers. It can be a way for many to share their creations and their art.

While there are inevitable downsides of social media, we're not getting rid of it. It came out of nowhere, and it's here to stay. As long as users can educate themselves on how to use social media safely and be smart, it can be an amazing platform for so many. We live in the digital age and if you don't catch up, you'll get left behind. If social media were bad, it wouldn't be so prevalent today. While there are downsides—as there are downsides to any technological advancement—social media can create meaningful connections and creative outlets that are far too valuable to give up.

By Emme Perencevich

You look around your classroom as you settle into your seat. Almost everyone has a phone in hand. Your teacher gets up from their desk and asks everyone to put their phones away. Most resign their phones to their backpacks but others move their hands under their desks and continue scrolling.

When about 70 percent of teenagers have and regularly use at least one form of social media, in this case a public forum rather than instant messaging, you might think it's hard to be connected without it.

I don't have social media, and while that used to be because my parents were worried that it would affect my grades and mental health, I now believe that it's in my best interest to avoid social.

Social media scandals range from Russian interference in a US election via Instagram and Facebook and the countless instances of misinformation spread on almost every platform. The number of personal information leaks has also increased and become more significant with the rise of public forum platforms. They also give hate groups a way to spread their message, not to mention that the failure of Twitter to moderate content gives Donald Trump a platform to encourage hate speech and neo-Nazism.

These instances of misinformation can have dire consequences. Misuse of Facebook as a platform led to Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. According to the Washington Post, "Russia carried out a vast cybercampaign in an effort to help elect Donald Trump." This "cybercampaign" also directly targeted minorities and specifically African Americans in an effort to suppress voting. This not only harms our democracy, but the people most directly affected by the misuse of it.

On a smaller, but no less important scale, social media greatly affects the mental health of its users.

Instagram models and the great majority of those who are "TikTok famous" create unrealistic expectations and insecurity. Filters on TikTok and Snapchat also create absurd beauty standards, especially for young women.

Not only do these cause anxiety, but the amount of time spent on them cuts into time for doing homework or sleeping. Social media platforms prove to be incredibly distracting. People turn into zombies, mindlessly consume content for hours. I know so many people who have, literally and metaphorically, wasted their lives away on social media.

With all of the controversies surrounding social media, I have decided it is best to avoid them for the time being. They've been riddled with political scandals, information leaks, and research proving the detrimental effects they have on mental health. They're cesspools of hate speech and foster anxiety in teens. I haven't even had time to discuss their problems with catfishing or cyberbullying. To be clear, I'm not advocating for everyone to quite social media. I'm just trying to bring to light some reasons to avoid using public forum platforms and defending why I have chosen not to use social media. While staying connected and keeping up with friends is fun, at the end of the day, the harms of social media outweigh the possible benefits they could have.

Head to Head: Stigmatizing social media

ART BY REESE HILL

RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT

Don't satisfy yourself in class... that's weird.
-Burkle

MINIMAL DISH SOAP IS MY IDEAL BEVERAGE.
-MR. WELP

If you stop singing I will literally fall to the floor and die.
-Mr. Hagy

I'm, like, shook. No. I'm not shook. I'm just appalled.
-M. Balcaen

Slight destruction might lead to growth. Total destruction... that might lead to issues.
-Mr. Miller

If you have a crush on her, take it outside. No kinky games.
-Sra. Silva

Invading Iowa is definitely something that should happen.
-Mr. Hartwig

WHY IS MY TIK TOK APP TAKING SO LONG TO DOWNLOAD?
-MR. ROGERS