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YOUNG, SOCIAL AND MISGUIDED

Social media becomes a double-edged sword

Worldwide, over 2.3 billion people use social media in some form. Just under 254 million use it in the United States alone—roughly 78 percent of the country's population. Its use has grown exponentially, from slightly less than a billion users in 2010, to estimations projecting nearly 3 billion users by the end of the decade. According to the web traffic-analyzing company Alexa Internet, as of December 2016, 8 of the top 25 most visited and used websites in the world were social media sites.

In its purest form, social media tangibly benefits us by connecting the world in a way never before seen, enabling us to have our voices heard and our cultures understood, while also hearing those who were previously too distant for this to be possible. However, a platform this large and impactful cannot remain completely pure forever.

With the emergence of the internet in the late 1980s and early 1990s, people around the world were provided with a powerful, budding platform that had the potential to connect them to a greater degree than even the telephone could. During that time, chat rooms became increasingly popular, although they were still rather devoid of personal detail—if not entirely anonymous.

Then, in 1997, the website SixDegrees.com emerged with what were at the time revolutionary concepts: online friends lists, social circles, personal messaging and bulletin-style posting—making it the true predecessor to modern social media. Other platforms soon followed: Friendster in 2002, MySpace and LinkedIn in 2003, Facebook in 2004, YouTube and Reddit in 2005, Twitter in 2006, Instagram in 2010, Snapchat in 2011 and countless other outlets, all serving slightly differentiated and generally overlapping audiences.

THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

From a positive perspective, social media helps facilitate increased, positive communication and interaction between both near and distant people around the world and amongst its billions of users. Any of us can see this by simply going on our phones, opening any one of our multiple accounts and scrolling along our online timelines and profiles.

In a computational social science study

published in September 2015 in the PeerJ Computer Science journal, the content and sharing-activity of more than 19 million English tweets in September of the past year were examined. The study found that although negative tweets did spread and gain attention faster, positive tweets generally ended up being seen and taken in by larger audiences. The study, conducted by computer scientists Emilio Ferrara and Zeyao Yang of the University of Southern California and Indiana University, respectively, found that people tend to prefer and favor sharing—in this case, retweeting, quoting and favoriting—positive content as opposed to negative content.

One benefit of social media is its increasing use for political and social awareness and the sharing and dissemination of breaking news, opinions, thoughts and even political policies.

“For me, social media is definitely beneficial because it gives me the freedom to speak my mind and express myself to the fullest, and that’s something that’s very important to me,” junior Sunveer Virk said. “It helps me keep up with my favorite sports teams and has continued to make me more and more politically aware in a time where that has become quite necessary.”

According to Twitter, from the start of the first partisan primary presidential debates in August 2015 to this past Election Day in November 2016, people in the U.S. posted over 1 billion tweets about the election, illustrating just how large a role social media has taken in U.S. politics. Tweeting thoughts and feelings, snapchatting daily activities and instagramming favorite pictures allows one to socialize, express art, share ideas and feelings and relieve stress.

“I have a lot of followers and many people that I follow, too, and I think that being so connected allows us to better see and understand the different viewpoints, feelings and opinions of others,” Virk added. “It truly helps to bring us together.”

TOO MUCH SCREEN TIME?

It would be fairly ignorant to attempt to proclaim that there is only good in social media. It’s evident that social media has greatly changed the human experience—but as to whether the positives of these changes outweigh the negatives, it is hard

to tell. Not only has social media wholeheartedly embedded itself in our culture and everyday life, but it is now rather difficult to imagine a world without smartphones and social networking sites.

In the episode of the British speculative anthology series “Black Mirror,” entitled “Nosedive,” the sometimes dark, obsessive relationship between humans and technology is examined—particularly in the context of social life. The episode is based in a dystopian reality where the nature of every interaction between individuals is rated in a constantly changing score on an app, contributing to each person’s overall “ranking” in society.

Upon meeting someone new, you can immediately see their ranking, encouraging citizens to attempt to “out-nice” each other to improve their social status; this status is portrayed as the most important aspect of the hypothetical future society. The true horror of this eerie episode lies in the realistic way that this satirical piece compares to our everyday life.

This Netflix series, which according to creator Charlie Brooker is so named after the black, “cold, shiny screens” of our cellphones, computers and televisions that we’re so deeply attached to, emphasizes an ongoing message of the fact that technology reflects the darkest elements of humanity. While some episodes of the show are set in futuristic worlds, the most troubling ones seem to shine a light on the uncomfortable situations that society continues to experience with social media.

“Nosedive” stands as a testament to how self-curation and validation-seeking, as offered through various outlets of social media, has come to haunt our lives. According to a study by The New York Times best-selling authors Joseph Grenny and David Maxfield, people will deliberately remove themselves from a fun situation in order to write a status update or post a photo that they think will get them extra “likes” on social media.

There is a diligent inclination for our generation to ensure that our Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter feeds are always updated at every moment of every day, further proving that in today’s society, we are utterly



fixated on an alternative reality. We spend hours with our phones outstretched in our hands, determined to capture the perfect selfie to post or to tweet a perfect idea, only to be overcome with dissatisfaction when we don't receive a significant amount of likes and comments from our peers. Grenny and Maxfield have dubbed users that seek out positive reinforcement through their social media accounts, "social media trophy hunters." Their study found that 14 percent of respondents were willing to risk their own safety for their social media accounts.

The study by Greeny and Maxfield also found that an obsession with social media is correlated with higher levels of unhappiness.

"If our attention is on an invisible audience rather than the present moment, we are disconnected," Maxfield said in a March 2015 Vital Smarts press release. "Our devices are beginning to control our attention and motivations in ways we may not even realize."

A Nielsen Company report revealed that adults in the United States devoted about 10 hours and 39 minutes each day to consuming media in the first quarter of this year. Additionally, a recent study conducted by the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine found that teen users spend an average of one hour a day on social media alone and visit their social

media accounts roughly 30 times per week. That same study found that the more time young adults spend on various social media sites and applications, the more likely they are to exhibit certain symptoms of depression.

As shown in an article published on Psychology Today's website by Dr. Victoria L. Dunckley, an award-winning integrative child psychiatrist, neuroimaging research through brain scans has indicated that too much screen time, damages various parts of the brain.

CYBERBULLYING

Negativity in social media arises not only from its overuse, but also from its intentional misuse. Known as cyberbullying, the use of such online sites to purposefully mock, harass, bully, abuse and hurt others has a greater effect on adolescents than it may seem.

"In middle school, my life was filled with nothing but struggle due to the cyberbullying that I constantly experienced from my so-called 'friends' almost every day," junior Jane Doe* said. "It seemed like there were countless tweets about me, rude texts and shady Instagram posts almost every day created and sent with the intention of hurting my feelings with comments like 'you don't have any friends,' 'you're fat' and 'find some new friends because we don't want you.'"

According to StopBullying.gov, a government website managed by the Department of Health and Human Services, students who are bullied on social media exhibit heavier reliance on alcohol and drugs, miss more school, experience in-person bullying, receive poorer grades, have more health problems and possess notably lower self-esteem.

"My grades definitely dropped a lot—I had mostly C's and I missed at least one day of school per week," Doe* said. "I hated the idea of being in school and having to face the girls that were single-handedly making my life miserable."

In the 2013 National Crime Victimization Survey conducted by the Department of Education, data showed that out of the population of 25 million students between 12-18 years old, 7 percent—or 1.7 million students—reported having been cyberbullied. Females report a noticeably higher rate than males. This is something that affects students in Broward County, too, with student cyberbullying experienced at rates greater than the national level.

In the District's 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, of nearly 1,400 high school students questioned, 12.5 percent said that they have been bullied and harassed online, with nearly 1 in 6 females reporting that they have been targeted directly, as opposed to 1 in 11 males.

"Data can only show us numbers, so we can only guess as to why girls have such higher reported rates of cyberbullying than boys," Aimee Wood, Prevention Specialist at the Diversity, Prevention & Intervention Department of Broward County Public Schools, said. "I would think it relates at least in part to basic differences in gender, such as different societal expectations of behavior, emotional tendencies, and general temperament. It's hard to tell."

Broward County Public Schools adopted Anti-Bullying Policy 5.9 on July 22, 2008. The policy defines the various types of bullying, outlines school reporting procedures and denotes consequences. The policy follows Florida Statute 1006.147. However, the school can only enforce consequences for incidents that occur using school technology or occur during school hours or at school-related activities.

"It can be very challenging for the District and its schools to stop cyberbullying, as the majority of it is occurring in the home and not on the school grounds—generally, we are only able to investigate them and intervene," Wood said. "Almost always, both the parents of the abusers and of the victims are completely unaware of what has been going on, and having the hurtful behavior brought to light usually helps to end it. From there, the families can pursue any action—legal, civil, in-school, or even

*Name indicated was changed to protect student's anonymity



Photo illustration by Liam Hutton

none.”

According to “Social Media and Suicide: A Public Health Perspective”—by David D. Luxton, Jennifer D. June and Jonathan M. Fairall—victims of cyberbullying are almost 2 times more likely to attempt suicide. Cyberbullies themselves were 1.5 times more likely to attempt suicide. Cyberbullying “can increase risk of suicide by amplifying feelings of isolation, instability, and hopelessness for those with preexisting emotional, psychological, or environmental stressors.”

CRYING OUT FOR HELP

Recently some individuals have used social media as a method to call out for help. On Jan. 22, 2017, 14-year-old Naika Venant from Miami Gardens died after hanging herself from a scarf attached to her shower door—a horrific and devastating action that she simultaneously broadcasted on Facebook Live.

According to one of her friends, almost a thousand people watched her for nearly an hour as she prepared to kill herself, calling her names and reacting to the broadcast with laughing emojis. When she was eventually found and taken to Jackson North Hospital in North Miami, almost 3,000 comments had been posted on the video of her suicide before it was closed. Venant may have chosen to do so in a vain attempt to be noticed, but instead, her

audience just sat back and watched her take her own life.

Venant’s death isn’t even the first case of this occurring—in fact, hers was the second of three suicides to be live-streamed in less than a month. Last year on Dec. 30, 12-year-old Katelyn Nicole Davis in Cedartown, Georgia hung herself in her front yard in a 40-minute video which was posted to a site called, “Live.me.”

The day after Venant’s tragic death, a 33-year-old named Frederick Jay Bowdy in Los Angeles, California shot himself also on Facebook Live after telling his watchers that he was going to commit suicide.

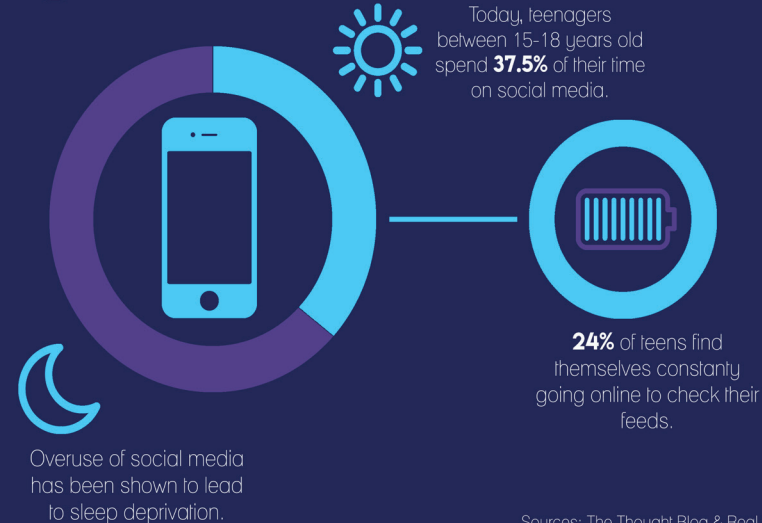
This is not just occurring in the United States, either; in May of 2016, a 19-year-old woman in the south of France threw herself in front of a train, recording her death on Periscope.

With the rise of smartphones and social media in recent years, capturing and sharing violent incidents has unfortunately become more and more common—but this only depicts how likely people are to just sit back and watch the tragedy occur as opposed to helping those in need. Suicide is not only a form of violence against yourself, but it’s also a cry out for help—posting the act on social media only magnifies this.

According to Luxton, June and Fairall one of the main concerns with suicide and self-harm videos is that they can normalize

SOCIAL STRUGGLES

TIME SPENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Sources: The Thought Blog & Real Simple

WAYS TO COMBAT SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION

- Make a list of the things you are missing out on by spending time on social media
- Take up real-life hobbies such as exercising, reading or cooking
- Consider cutting down on the number of social networking sites that you use
- Take a week or even two week long break from social media
- Start connecting with people offline instead of online
- Set personal boundaries on when and where you go online
- Unfollow drama-starting pages and accounts
- Delete any social media apps you have on your phone

Sources: The Thought Blog

WHO TO TURN TO FOR HELP WITH CYBERBULLYING OR IF YOU ARE HAVING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

- Broward County 211 Hotline
Dial 211 or 754-537-0211
Confidential 24/7 free hotline
- School Social Worker
Marianne Dubin
- Peer Counseling
Room 211
- A trusted teacher or adult
- A parent or guardian
- Broward County Department of Prevention and Intervention
754-321-1655
- Administrator
- Local law enforcement
- School Resource Officer
Deputy Scot Peterson
- Head of School Security
Kelvin Greenleaf

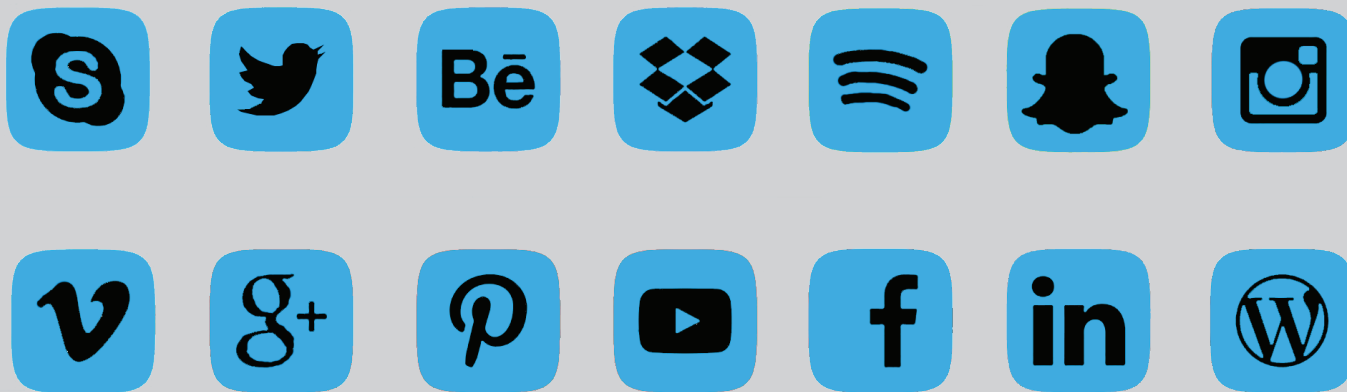
and reinforce this type of behavior. Their article calls for more research on their “extent of social media’s negative and positive influences.”

In a world where we are all but defined by the social media sites that have come to serve as the “highlight reels” of our everyday lives, it’s easy to start feeling defined by the things that we choose to post. Our profiles offer a distorted sense

of reality, and this can undoubtedly take a toll on users. The validation from likes and comments can provide lasting negative effects on people who frequent the sites and have come to depend on the feeling they get from getting this online attention. While social media has some benefits, the negative side of it without a doubt makes it a double-edged sword. *Story by Amit Dadon and Alexa Kravitz*

- THE HISTORY OF -

SOCIAL MEDIA



1970



FIRST E-MAIL

travels between two computers



The **BLOGGING ERA**

LIVE JOURNAL & Blogger

2000

FRIENDSTER

became the first popular social network

LinkedIn

Launched in 2003

f FACEBOOK

Takes over the social network kingdom in **2004** **15%** of the worlds population uses Facebook monthly

You Tube

was created in **2005**

Over 6 billion hours of of video are watched a month

twitter

made its first tweet in

2006

100,000 tweets ARE MADE EACH SECOND

SPOTIFY

Music streaming LAUNCHED IN **2008**



2010



INSTAGRAM Known for their square frame **PHOTOS**

VINE

Was created in **2013**

Introducing 7-second **SHORT VIDEOS**

SNAPCHAT

Hits mobile IN **2015**



With disappearing photos and videos

WHAT GOES ONLINE STAYS ONLINE

Colleges factor social media posts into college admissions process

The saying that once you post something on social media it stays there forever is no longer a warning for those worried about how their posts may affect their social life, but now it can also affect the ability of students to get into colleges. Colleges have begun to utilize sites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to track prospective students.

A student's social media profile factors into whether or not they get accepted into certain colleges. The process of looking at prospective students' social media accounts as a way to further examine them has become a common practice amongst admissions officers.

According to a study done by IvyWise, 27 percent of admissions officers surveyed admitted to Googling prospective students. In addition, when observing students' online activities, 35 percent of those surveyed uncovered something that negatively impacted an applicant's likelihood of getting accepted to the school.

Students' social media profiles give admissions officers a better understanding of who they are aside from their GPA and class rank, as listed in their applications. College admissions officers gain the ability to see how prospective students present themselves to others in public, rather than just how they appear on their application. This can help them decide whether or not a student is an acceptable fit for their school, as well as if the student's image matches with the school's image.

In 2012, while attending a campus informational session for Bowdoin College, a student began to tweet negative comments regarding the school. The admissions office at Bowdoin was soon made aware of the student's tweets, ultimately resulting in the student being denied from the school.

"We would have wondered about the judgment of someone who spends their time on their mobile phone making such awful remarks," Scott A. Meiklejohn, the former dean of admissions at Bowdoin, said in a 2013 interview with The New York Times.

Social media posts were not the only thing that led to the student getting denied. Meiklejohn said that the student's

grades were lacking as well; however, if her credentials had been better, her tweets could have potentially affected her chances of getting into their school.

Still, this situation shows the power of social media and how one's posts have the ability to affect their college admissions.

"I think that if a student makes questionable comments online, especially in regards to a school, that school should be allowed to factor those posts into whether or not a student is accepted into their school," sophomore Crystal Tang said.

New websites and apps have been created to help students and adults alike to clean up their social media accounts before applying to colleges and for jobs. The website The Social U provides students with their so called "social media GPA." With the help of websites and apps like these, students are given an idea of how appealing their social media profiles would be to various colleges so they can delete such posts from their accounts.

In addition to these websites, some students receive help from their school guidance counselors to remove controversial content from their social medias. According to The New York

Times, upcoming college students at Brookline High School in Massachusetts are taught to remove posts relating to alcohol from their accounts, as well as to construct appropriate email addresses.

However, even though students possess various resources to perfect their social media presence, when it comes to college applications, some students find the addition of social media to the list of things they must fret over to be unnecessary.

"Students have enough to worry about when it comes to getting into college as is. I don't think they should be forced to worry about their social media in addition to everything else," sophomore Caroline Haight said.

Though some may protest its involvement, the use of social media in the admissions process is undeniably becoming a more common practice. As the prominence of social media in everyday life continues to grow, more and more colleges have begun to utilize it to aid in the admissions process. As the importance of social media continues to progress, students are warned to think before they post, as it may later affect their chances of getting into college. *Story by Taylor Morrison*

STAY OFF MY SOCIAL

Colleges overstep boundaries using social media as admission factor

In the modern era, the advent of social media sites such as Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram enable people to share their thoughts, feelings and everyday routine with people all around the world. This growing connectivity allows us to stay in contact with loved ones and friends, creating a growing personal connection. However, all this information-sharing eventually comes with a downside.

Social media allows for people who we may not know to learn an abundance of personal details about us. From birthdays, to our favorite color, to what we ate for dinner last night, much of what we post and share on social media is up for anyone to see, whether we think about it or not.

This wealth of personal knowledge that we amass for personal benefit as well as for our followers can often be found with a simple Google search, making it a prime tool for college admissions officers looking to learn about their potential students.

Colleges are always looking to recruit students who they think would fit well on their campus and while adding something special to the student body, and social media is a very effective way of letting them both connect with prospective students as well as keeping them informed on important issues. But this also works in reverse; the public, open nature of social media provides admissions officers with a way to delve deeper into your personal life, regardless of if you would want them to or not.

This raises many privacy concerns, such as whether colleges should be able to reject a student based on something personal they posted on social media, and

whether they should even be allowed to look at an applicant's social media without expressed permission.

This is not a small issue, either. In a 2012 survey of 386 of the nation's top colleges and universities by Kaplan Test Prep, about 40 percent of admissions officers said that they visit applicants' social media pages for part of their assessment. In addition, 35 percent discovered information online that negatively affected an applicant's prospects, and unsurprisingly, yet potentially devastating statistic.

With no specific guidelines in place for assessing applicants' social media accounts nor its place in the admissions process, the weight of any findings is completely up to the admissions officers.

"Often, false and misleading content online is taken as fact. To me, it's a huge problem," Bradley S. Shear, a lawyer specializing in social media law, said in an interview with The New York Times.

Colleges could easily stumble upon a profile of someone with the same name as you showing illegal activities, yet with no connection to you whatsoever. What is even worse is that colleges don't have to state whether or not something they saw on social media was the reason for an applicant's rejection.

This infringes upon student's basic right to privacy. Colleges should respect that right and stay off applicant's social media unless those applicants give them expressed permission to do so. Viewing students' profiles erodes trust between applicants and the institution.

One example of online material costing a student admission was when an undergraduate at Pitzer College in Claremont, California, befriended a prospective student on Facebook and soon after, went and notified the admissions

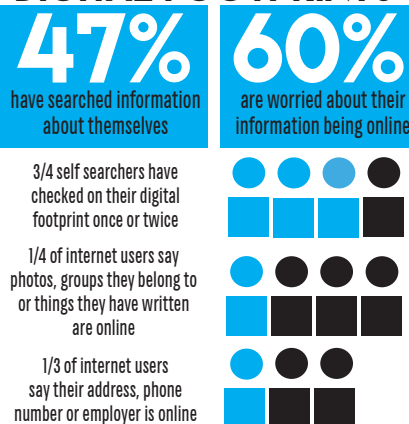
office because he noticed that the applicant had posted offensive comments about one of his high school teachers.

"We immediately knew that this was not the kind of person we wanted in our community," Angel B. Perez, Pitzer's dean of admission and financial aid, said to The New York Times. "We didn't admit the student."

While the student's comment may have been offensive, the issue with using such posts in the admissions process is that the student never gets the chance to explain any issues; maybe it was simply a joke in bad taste, or maybe the comment not meant to be taken seriously.

Colleges must stop such practice, and stay out of students' personal online lives, because the image that people portray online is often not who they truly are. All that is needed to evaluate applicants is the information that they provide. Our online lives should remain private in order to protect ourselves from potential discrimination and violation of our privacy. Any schools that do decide to hold students accountable for what they post online need to make it clear to the applicant that their online profiles will be under evaluation just as much as their essay. Just because colleges can look, does not mean that they should. *Editorial by Robert Schentrup*

DIGITAL FOOTPRINTS



CLEAN IT UP

- SEARCH YOURSELF ONLINE.** Do a quick web search of your name. If you find something you don't like, ask the individual or site administrator to remove the post.
- THINK BEFORE YOU POST.** Your digital footprint is more than the information available about you on the web; it's about your interactions too. Before you put anything online, ask yourself if it's something you really want others to see or know about you.
- MAINTAIN YOUR MOBILE DEVICE.** Take time to understand your mobile device settings and set a password. Review any apps you've downloaded and their information-sharing policies. Delete ones you just don't use.
- BUILD A POSITIVE REPUTATION.** Use your online presence to build a positive reputation for yourself and inspire others. Start a blog about the good things happening in your community or make a virtual fundraising campaign for a cause you're passionate about.

CONFIDENT CREATIVE

This group does not worry about the availability of its online data. Members actively uploads content, but still takes steps to limit their personal information.

17%

CONCERNED & CAREFUL

This group worries about the availability of their information online data. The members of this group proactively limit their digital footprint.

21%

WORRIED BY THE WAYSIDE

The members of this group are anxious about how much information is available about them. They do not actively limit their online information.

18%

UNFAZED & INACTIVE

These group members do not worry about their personal information, nor take steps to limit the amount of info that can be found about them.

43%

Sources: Pew Research Center and Family Online Safety Institute



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EXPRESS YOURSELF

Alexandra Robinson accumulates over 200,000 subscribers on YouTube

Alexandra Robinson may seem like just another average junior at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School—that is, if the average junior has a YouTube channel with nearly 200,000 subscribers.

After experiencing troubles with social life her freshman year at St. Thomas Aquinas High School, she decided to start her own YouTube channel to talk about her problems. Robinson transferred to MSD in 2015 and began using her YouTube channel as a form of bonding with friends, relieving stress and finding positivity.

Robinson started off only wishing to achieve a goal of 1,000 subscribers over a year ago. Due to her sudden popularity on the website, Robinson became more serious about getting acting jobs. She is currently in the process of writing her own comedy series.

If one of the companies she submits her series to accepts it, then Robinson will also be able to act in her creation. Robinson has had some screen time however, as she was interviewed for the

TV show “The Ultimate Fighter” and was put in for a quick cameo scene.

Robinson meets new and different people as a result of her YouTube account. Like every celebrity, she gets both positive and negative comments. The positive ones are part of why she works so hard on her channel, specifically comments like “this made my day.”

“Youtube has become my way of spreading positivity in a world that dearly needs more,” Robinson said.

On the other hand, there are internet trolls who comment hateful thoughts, Robinson finds some amusing and others harsh. According to Robinson, she disregards the mean-spirited words of strangers and does not let the hate affect her.

“When I get comments saying I made someone’s day better, it’s such a gratifying feeling. I know that there was a time when I needed that positivity, so I want to make sure anyone who needs it can have it,” Robinson said.

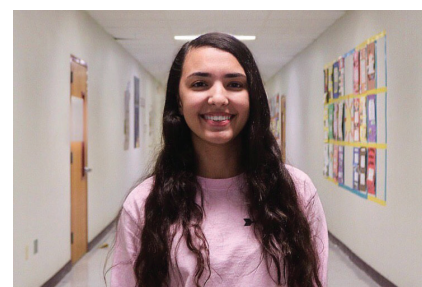
YouTube stars with millions of

subscribers often make collaboration videos with other YouTube stars. On May 5, 2016, Robinson found YouTube user Wolfieraps, who has over 4.4 million subscribers, in Miami and made a collaboration video with him. The worldwide gathering of all YouTubers at Playlist Live is this May in Orlando. Robinson will attend it and be able to meet other popular YouTubers.

As a young YouTuber, Robinson has the support of her family. She is the youngest in not only her immediate, but also her extended family. Despite this, not everyone in her family takes her channel seriously; they are pushing her towards a more traditional college experience.

“The only reason I would go to college is to become a director,” Robinson said. “I would go to NYU if I’m able to get in. I will definitely continue YouTube, though, because it can take me to different and higher platforms.”

Not everyone in her family views it the same way that Robinson does—as her job. Robinson gets paid based on views, so that



for every 1 million views, she earns \$1,000. Her most viewed video got up to 2 million views, earning Robinson \$2,000.

“I have no plans of stopping [YouTube] right now,” Robinson said. “The only way I would ever stop it is if YouTube died down. I love YouTube, I love everything about it. My friends and I have made an even deeper connection through the videos.”

Alexandra Robinson continues to grow on social media with nearly 200,000 YouTube subscribers, 10,000 Instagram followers and over 3,800 Twitter followers. *Story by Einov Cohen. Photo illustration by Liam Hutton*

LIVING A DOUBLE LIFE

Students should not alter social media persona to empower ego

The average person in the United States checks their phone 46 times per day. Are you as addicted to your phone as most Americans? On average, most browse through a combination of five different social media platforms. The original purpose of a cell phone is entirely overlooked; although we still call and text, we are more focused on our friend’s Facebook statuses. Society has painted a picture of perfected people and personalities all through the use of the media. We are all supposed to experience extravagant lives, be positive and look like Victoria’s Secret angels on top of it.

It has become part of our daily routines to stay updated on the exposure each social media platform contains. It is inevitable that the younger generation will forever be in “share mode,” waiting for more substance to capture and later

post. This is intended to gain attention and positive feedback, such as a “like” or a flattering comment. Society seems to rely on this attention as a form of approval to essentially boost their self-esteem.

The concept of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. is generally appealing to all ages, genders and countries. Everyone around the globe is hooked on seeing visuals of puppies, babies and the cool cafe your classmate visited for lunch.

After meeting someone for the first time, it has been the norm for one to frantically search their social media. It is the simplest way to discover their age, zodiac sign and favorite TV shows. However, their top liked photo, last retweeted tweet and their follower count are now your first impression.

The majority of us only hit the post button on things we know will allure our audience. We might post a cool traveling

experience, a really appetizing meal at a restaurant or a spontaneous night out with friends. We would not usually voluntarily snap a picture of a wild Friday night spent at home alone watching Netflix.

Based on what you scroll across, it is easy to create an unfair comparison between our lives. People choose to divulge the most celebratory moments in life, leading the viewing public to believe each day is just as luxurious as Kim Kardashian’s. Although we have a magical ability to make it seem this way, we unfortunately cannot use filters, hashtags and catchy captions when we engage with people in real life.

Comparing our lives to other’s lives is easily one of the biggest causes of insecurity. We are comparing our behind-the-scenes to another’s highlight reel. Overall, we all know that we’re more likely to share an accomplishment rather than a

challenge we are facing. To test this theory, take a closer look at someone’s social media account that you know really well. Likely, your prior knowledge of this person will not exactly match their online posts that enable viewers to envision a complete alternate perception of the kind of person they actually are. Social media is a game, and the potential to be anyone we want is why we are all so addicted.

The next time you examine the differences between yourself and another person, rather than it be through a glass screen, pay attention to physical encounters. Things that take place right before your eyes are what mean the most. You will remember how a person makes you feel and can analyze their words and actions better in person, far more than you can from their photo editing skills and how clever their puns may be online. *Editorial by Lauren Blodgett*

FINSTA: FOR FRIENDS ONLY

Students use fake accounts to share private lives

Sophomore Lexi Ofstein’s public Instagram account with over 500 followers is filled with cute selfies, photos of her with her friends on vacation and from parties. However, the account is not telling the whole story. Lexi is one of the many social media users who has a finsta, or an additional fake Instagram account.

Around 2015, “finstas” started gaining popularity among teenagers. A finsta is a platform where one can post certain pictures that they would not necessarily post on their everyday Instagram account, or “rinsta.”

Teens create these accounts where they post about their daily lives or just anything on their minds. Having a finsta gives users a place to share their silly pictures, inside jokes, complaints, rants or anything not meant for public consumption. It is a place where they can put their guard down and not worry about

how many likes they will receive.

A very important aspect of a finsta is the username. Finsta usernames need to be creative, clever and usually have something to do with the user’s first or last name.

“I enjoy posting on my finsta because I can post whatever I want and no one can judge me,” sophomore Jocelyn Krooks said. “I also like to read what other people post, but sometimes people post a little too much which can get annoying.”

Finstas became really popular when Instagram started to allow users to remain automatically logged into multiple accounts. Before this update, users had to create an entirely new profile and log on and off to switch between them. Now, users can add up to five different accounts and manage them under one profile.

“On my finsta, I post pictures that represent my day and feelings in a positive and fun way,” junior Jenna Korsten said.

“I like that it lets my friends see the humorous side of me.”

According to The Huffington Post, even though many people have been making finsta accounts, the world of finsta seems to be dominated by females and teenagers. Males use finstas, but it seems as if many more females have accounts than males.

“My favorite part about having a finsta is scrolling through my feed, laughing at everyone’s hilarious pictures,” freshman Dara Gottlieb said. “My finsta feed puts a smile on my face, so if I ever need any cheering up, I just scroll and laugh at everyone’s posts.”

Teenagers are excited to express their fears, feelings and secrets. Ironically, they do this by making finsta posts more real and Rinsta posts essentially fake.

Although there are many pros for having a finsta, there are also significant cons. Finstas often cause cyberbullying, or the use of electronic communication to

bully a person. This occurs when teens post their opinions on something or even just to embrace one’s alter-ego and it is often very difficult to prevent these situations.

Many parents do not exactly understand what the point of maintaining two Instagram accounts is. The pictures that teens post on their finsta are ones that they feel do not feel comfortable with sharing publicly. Most finstas are private accounts therefore teens know that only their close friends are able to view their posts.

Currently, many high school students have finstas and they continue to grow in popularity. For many teens, finstas fill a need that many have to rebel against all the norms of social media, and to fight against the pressure they feel to look perfect all the time. *Story by Andrea Hengber*