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The Effects of Social Media on College Students: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

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It is no longer a question whether or not technology is changing and evolving our society. We all know that technology is everywhere these days. We constantly have a device strapped to our sides, and some would even go as far as saying they feel "naked without their smartphone". I hear these comments from friends on a regular basis and am guilty of feeling that way from time to time as well. But what *really* is happening to the young adults now that we have all these resources at our fingertips? And how is it effecting education? It is safe to say that there have been both benefits and negatives that have come from the evolution of technology and social media in the lives of the youth.

Social media can be a fantastic platform for young adults to put themselves out there and create their identities however they desire. If used in the correct way, social media can be used to show the world "who you are" and what you love. Jeanna Mastrodicasa and Paul Metellus, both research students at the University of Florida, exclaim that, "Social networking sites provide a method to showcase one's ideal identity in a virtual manner by updating status, posting to walls, sharing photos, and making comments on each other's pages" (Mastrodicasa and Metellus). In other words, Mastrodicasa and Metellus are pointing out that social media is an easy place to create ones "ideal identity", where students can be whoever they want to be. However, they are not saying that it is necessarily a good thing that one can create an identity however they choose. I think that it is too difficult to share one's one hundred percent raw self online. We all want to

be seen as a fun, outgoing, and a genuinely nice person, so of course no one is going to put their bad days on social media for the whole world to see. That is why Mastrodicasa and Metellus used the word "ideal". Whether we want to believe or not, there is a gap between the person we are and the person we idealize ourselves to be. I have definitely made myself seem more put-together and happy online. I wanted everyone to think of me as a well-rounded, perfect girl. I didn't know that this was doing more harm than good. Although choosing how we are portrayed to the world sounds exciting, it might be too good to be true. Along with making ourselves seem perfect online, this leads into the issue of students searching for approval from peers.

Friends and family connect through social media and often comment nice things on each other's posts. Commenting on posts seems like an effective way to make someone feel good about themselves, right? Terri Pinyerd, a student at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, wrote an essay about how social media effects college students. In his essay he stated, "Many social media sites are a quick and easy way to receive compliments or flattery, which in turn boost a user's self-esteem. As college is often a difficult transition for many students both freshman and upper classmen, an outlet of reassurance can be beneficial to their overall feelings towards academic life" (Pinyerd). The essence of Pinyerd's argument is that comments on social media boost student's confidence when it is low. Students can access these in a matter of minutes, and instantly they "feel better". However, when one's confidence is low, or they are dealing with other life problems, does it make sense to gravitate towards social media to self-medicate and to make one's self feel better? Mastrodicasa and Metellus agree with S.K. Henry, "Henry (2012) found that when students were using technology to seek support for personal issues or problems, those students reported higher scores on measures of loneliness, depression, shyness, and social anxiety and lower scores on perceived social skill, social self-confidence, and social self-

efficacy" (Mastrodicasa and Metellus). In other words, social media is not a healthy source to gain self-esteem. I agree with Mastrodicasa and Metellus. I have gone to social media to get approval from my peers to make myself feel more confident. I eventually figured out that that is a temporary source of gaining self-esteem. There are many other options that will lead to much longer lasting happiness. Instead of constantly searching for that short-term relief we get from reading pleasant comments on social media, we should be focusing on what we are passionate about and what makes us feel whole. Using social media to get approval from peers is detrimental, and we know it. But we can't stop. It's a heroin.

In order to keep up with our "idealized identity" there are underlying pressures to constantly be in the know about what's trendy and popular. Social pressures are higher than ever for young adults. There is a certain "competition" between users. One often sees someone's post, compares it to how their life looks, and ultimately ends up thinking that person's life is better than their own. There have been multiple times where I have purchased a piece of clothing simply because it would look good on my Instagram. I, as well as many other young adults, have many pressures to always stay caught up, and there can be serious problems caused by it. There are studies showing how social media use is related to depression and anxiety disorders, but also how it is not the entire story. Charles Berryman, Christopher J. Ferguson, and Charles Negy argue, "Research indicates that one mechanism is the use of social media for negative social comparison which, alongside rumination, leads to later depression. By contrast, other research has found that positive use of social media, such as through authentic self-presentation, is associated with positive well-being in users" (Berryman, atl.). The key Berryman, Ferguson, and Negy are pointing out is the use of the word *authentic*. They are arguing that when used in the correct way, social media can lead to more positive outcomes, opposed to the alternative route of

comparison. This ties back into my first point about creating the ideal identity, as well as my second point about using social media as a self-medicating platform. Social media can be a positive or negative contributor to one's life, depending on how they choose to use it.

Based on how jam-packed college students' schedules are, there are aspects of social media that can either improve or set back a student's success. A positive factor of social media in relation to education is that students can communicate outside of the classroom to help each other with their studies. The Social Networking Pro Con Organization states that, "59% of students with access to the Internet report that they use social media to discuss educational topics and 50% use the sites to talk about school assignments" ("Are Social"). Students can easily collaborate with classmates to bounce ideas off of each other and create more valuable work on their own. I personally have used Instagram to direct message a classmate to ask about an assignment; It is a helpful tool when I don't have a phone number or another way to contact classmates. However, social media can be a huge distraction. Pinyerd exclaims, "Social media brings with it new distractions – a way to forget about your surroundings, procrastinate, and lose track of time in a way that past generations would never have imagined" (Pinyerd). Basically, Pinyerd is raising the point that there are more ways to procrastinate now than there ever have been in the past. Students are spending more and more time scrolling mindlessly, simply to avoid the seemingly treacherous task. I am guilty of this. I will be working on an assignment; then out of habit I pick up my phone to check "just one thing". Then all of a sudden, I look up and I've wasted fifteen minutes! With technology such an accessible distraction, no wonder students are pulling all-nighters to finish their work and then saying they "don't have time" to complete an assignment. Pinyerd gathered research from Dias stating, "In another on-campus study, interviewees said that Facebook was the first thing that they checked before studying, spending

at least forty- five minutes of their time on social media sites" (Pinyerd). In making this comment, Pinyerd urges us to stop wasting our precious time on social media when it is not beneficial to the growth of our education. I agree with Pinyerd that social media can be a major time-sucker. Social media can be used to benefit a student's education, but if used incorrectly it can cause serious damage to one's GPA.

Social media in general is simply a tool. Technology is here to stay, so we have to adapt somehow. How we use it matters more than if we should use it or not. If we use it incorrectly, we could end up with terrible grades, poor self-esteem, major stress, and depression. The negatives outweigh the positives and the odds are stacked against college students, but that doesn't mean that student's do not have a say. Each user has the choice of *how* they use their social media platforms. Overall, there are definitive downsides to social media use, but there can be plenty positives if we learn to use it correctly. Regulating the amount of time spent on social media, as well as being aware of what we are doing while on it will lessen some of the negatives that come with social media. Looking at social media as the bad guy will not solve the issues with it. It is when we log off of comparison and "the big black hole of procrastination". It is when we change our mindsets towards social media, is when we really log onto life.

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