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Anxiety: An Epidemic Through the Lens of Social Media

by Holly M Wright

BA Directing, International Performance Ensemble

Mentored by Ion Cosmin Chivu

An Undergraduate Thesis
Presented to the Pforzheimer Honors College and
Faculty of the School of Performing Arts
Pace University
New York City

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Arts, Directing, IPE with Honors

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Abstract:

Anxiety: An Epidemic was originally inspired by the mental health crisis in my hometown, Palo Alto, California, and evolved to specifically focus on social media-related anxiety. I examined the question: How has social media evolved over the last decade and what effect does the proliferation of social media have on the young adult population? I hypothesized that social media would have a predominately negative effect, especially on young women, and set out to create a theatrical piece inspired by my research. In my meta-analysis of studies conducted, I found that more data needs to be collected on the relatively new phenomena surrounding social media usage both as positive and negative forces. The research I conducted inspired two new artistic works: a physical theatre piece entitled *MASKS: An Ode to Young Women*, and a children's story entitled "The King Who Lost His Smile" (both artistic works can be found in full in appendix A). I discovered that while more research needs to be conducted to definitively find if social media usage has a predominantly positive or negative effect, the artistic works I created can serve as a forum to start important conversations between young adults and their communities at large about their experiences with anxiety, stress, and depressive symptoms.

Table of Contents

Background.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Research Question and Thesis.....	6
Research Question.....	6
Thesis.....	6
What we Hope to Learn.....	6
Goal of Creation of Artistic Pieces.....	7
Methodology.....	8
Part 1: The Evolution of Social Media.....	8
Part 2: The Effects of Social Media on Young Adults.....	8
Part 3: Creation of Artistic Works.....	8
Analysis of Research Question.....	9
Part 1: The Evolution of Social Media.....	9
Part 2: The Effects of Social Media on Young Adults.....	11
Methodology: The Creation of Two Artistic Works and the Purposes They Serve.....	15
Creating <i>MASKS: An Ode to Young Women</i>	15
Creating “The King Who Lost His Smile”.....	16
Conclusion.....	18
Bibliography.....	19
Appendices	
Appendix A: Artistic Works.....	23
<i>MASKS: An Ode to Young Women</i>	24
“The King Who Lost His Smile”.....	28
Appendix B: Graphics.....	32

Background:

Having grown up in Palo Alto, California, I have seen many young adults struggle through mental illness and suffer from extreme anxiety disorders. We have one of the highest teen suicide rates in the country—four or five times the national average, according to an article published by *The Atlantic*, citing research by Suniya Luthar, a youth psychologist (Rosin). I myself have lost several fellow classmates, and, in the past year, a dear friend. Though this problem has come to light recently through a couple of articles that gained national coverage, there are still few students involved in starting a dialogue revolving around the pressure and anxiety felt by students. Over the last decade, Palo Alto has had two youth suicide clusters, an extremely rare phenomenon. The CDC defines a suicide cluster as, “a group of suicides or suicide attempts, or both, that occur closer together in time and space than would normally be expected in a given community” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention). While high schoolers from around the country are worrying about grades, young love, and college, we, the students of Palo Alto, have the added stress of wondering if we will live to graduation.

Introduction:

Since the suicide clusters began, Palo Alto has been striving to reshape itself and create a network of support for mental health in young adults. Blame has been directed at the schools, at parents, at teachers, at the community as a whole. Rarely, though, are the students themselves invited to be an active part of the discussion. My goal is to open a forum for discussion from the young adult's perspective using a theatrical performance as the mediator to establish a common ground. I want to be able to take the pieces I am creating to high schools and undergraduate universities to facilitate discussions with the populations most at risk. I can use my research and the artistic works it inspires to reach out to young adults and give them a chance to share their experiences and be heard by their communities.

The first portion of my research centered around a meta-analysis of research conducted in Santa Clara County, including an in-depth look at the Center for Disease Control's Epi Aid report on the mental health crisis in Santa Clara County. First-hand testimonials were gathered from young adults ages eighteen to twenty-six regarding their everyday levels of anxiety and how it fluctuates in certain situations (i.e. meeting new people, traveling to new locations, interactions with family, interactions with friends, spending time alone), and how they felt anxiety impacted their day-to-day functionality. This research inspired my short play entitled *TRIGGER WARNING: A Story About Youth and Stress, or, Seeking Perfection: The Story of a Young Girl*. This piece was presented at the 36th Annual Dyson Society of Fellows Conference, and had a positive reception, including prompting to develop the artistic work further for performance at high schools and undergraduate universities. It was recently published in Vol. 20 of *Transactions*, a peer-reviewed academic journal published by Pace University.

Palo Alto is the heart of Silicon Valley—it is the home of technology giants such as

Facebook, Google, Apple, and Hewlett Packard, and is, therefore, at the forefront of technological development. As such, social media plays a significant role in our day-to-day lives. Its ever-increasing presence seeps into every aspect of our existence, especially in the millennial generation, defined as those born between 1982 and 2004 by Neil Howe and William Strauss who are credited with coining the term in their book *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*. As social media has evolved into a complex, multi-platform marketing tool—beyond the simple origin as a means of communication—I became fascinated by the level of involvement social media has in our lives today, and, coming from such a technology-centric community, exploring the effect that a heightened online presence has on the young adults of today.

Research Question and Thesis:Research Question:

How has social media evolved over the last decade and what impact does this new-found pervasiveness of the online world have on our young adults?

Thesis:

Social Media has a cumulative negative impact on young adults, inciting feelings of jealousy and competitiveness and promoting body dysmorphia, especially in young women, increasing feelings of anxiety and depressive symptoms. This phenomenon will be explored through a meta-analysis of recent studies on the effects of social media on young adults with a focus on those studies that take gender into consideration.

What We Hope to Learn:

There is a rising mental health crisis amongst young adults in the United States today. Every decade we see an increase in the frequency of depression and anxiety related disorders. I hypothesize that this phenomenon is compounded by the effects of social media on the young adult population, here-in defined as people ages eighteen to twenty-six years old. Often this age range struggles to find their voices in the greater world—shunted by the very people who seek to help them for fear of damaging their fragile psyches. This problem is compounded in high achieving school districts—as notable child psychologist Madeline Levine highlighted in her book, *The Price of Privilege*. She found children of affluent families in high-achieving school districts have higher tendencies to abuse drugs and alcohol and report poor sleep patterns (Levine). In her recent practice in the San Francisco Bay Area, Levine says that she’s seen a decrease in teenagers’ ability to rebel—she finds them withdrawn, resigned to suffering through life, bouncing from one stress to the next (Rosin).

I believe we will find a correlation between the frequency of time spent on social media and depressive symptoms in young adults. Time spent on social media, for our purposes, includes posting, messaging, and reading or interacting with others' posts.

Goal of Creation of Pieces:

The results of this research will be used to generate an artistic work in hopes of capturing the scientifically examined phenomenon in a way that connects to a wider audience. It will be created in collaboration with an all-female creative team and five young women performers. We will explore the results of the research through our experiences and present it with a facilitated talkback after each showing to open a channel of communication between young adults and their community at large.

Methodology:

I began by breaking down the research question into its component parts. The research question is:

How has social media evolved over the last decade and how has its new-found pervasiveness affected our young adults?

The two distinct portions of this question are:

1. How has social media evolved over the last decade?
2. How has social media's new-found pervasiveness affected our young adults?

Part 1: How has social media evolved over the last decade?

To examine how social media had evolved over the last decade I researched when the popular social media sites and applications were founded and looked at their reported usage, including the populations they serve. A large portion of my information comes from *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* by José Van Dijck, in addition to other material found online.

Part 2: How has social media's new-found pervasiveness affected our young adults?

The second part of the research question was analyzed through a meta-analysis of current and ongoing studies about social media's impact on young adults. I looked at ten different studies primarily analyzing correlations between depressive symptoms and social media usage.

Part 3: The Creation of Artistic Works:

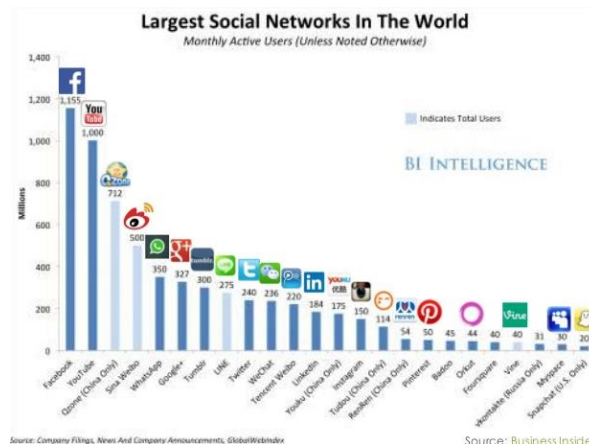
The primary goal of this research was to inspire artistic works, the creation of which will be discussed later in this paper.

Analysis of Research Question:

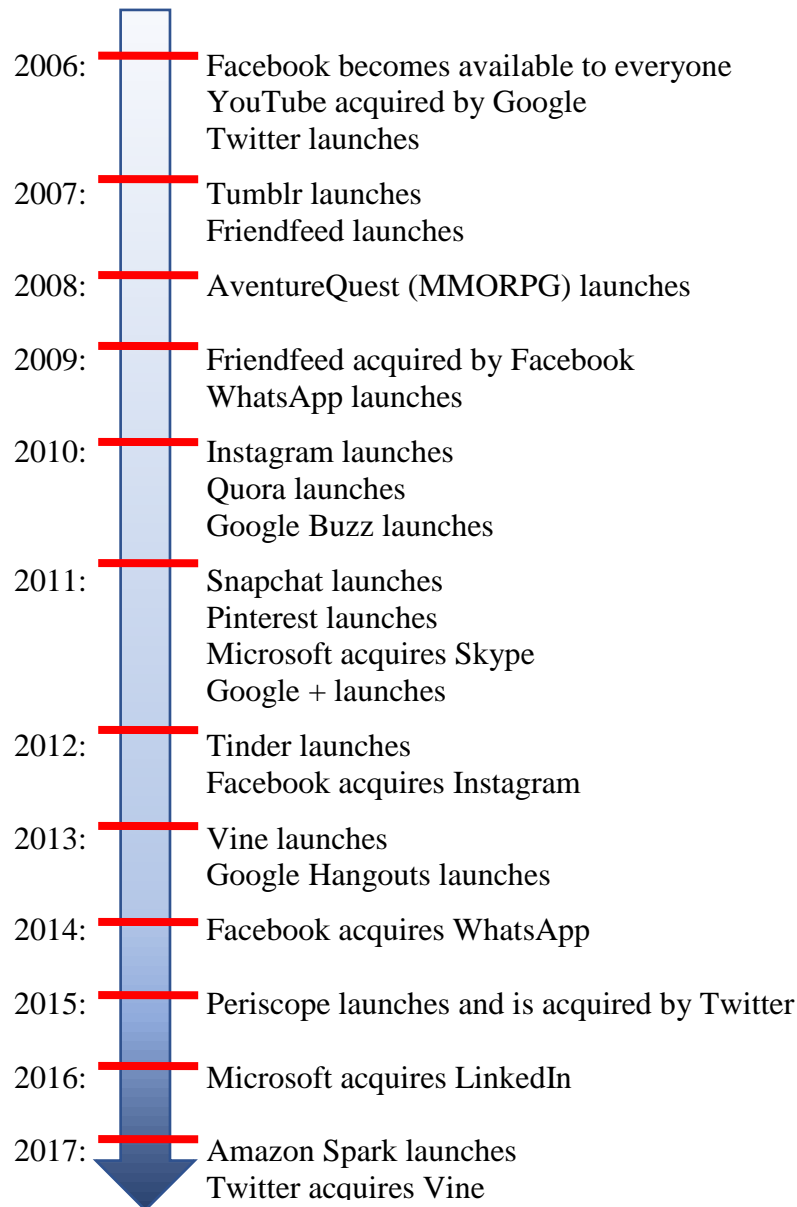
Part 1: How Has Social Media Evolved Over the Last Decade:

Social media, as we know it today, really came into being with Web 2.0 in the early 2000s. Web 2.0 was a major shift from static html-based pages, to dynamic interactive interfaces and is marked by the introduction of social media as we know it today (techopedia). While chatrooms and other methods of online communication did exist prior to 2000, the early 2000s is when Wikipedia, Facebook, and YouTube launched, changing the face of social media forever (Dijck 10). Suddenly social media became about content instead of simply a means of communication. While Myspace was the initial social media platform that gained significant notoriety, Facebook became accessible to the public as high-speed internet was becoming widely available.

With the accessibility of high-speed internet, there was a drastic rise in usage as well as the target market for social media platforms. As of December, 2011, 82% of the world's Internet population over the age of 15 logged onto some form of social media—that's 1.2 billion users, according to José Van Dijck in his book *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. Van Dijck defines social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (4), which is the definition we will be using herein. Image 1 looks at how many users major social media platforms currently experience on a monthly basis (see Appendix B for full size image):



Let us look at the founding of major social media companies in the last twelve years—starting with 2006.



(See Appendix B for sources for Image 2 and for Image 3, an infographic with additional information about the history of social media through 2010.)

Facebook becoming accessible to the public in 2006 is one of the major shapers of today's online world. Facebook has also acquired or has major links to many of the other popular social media outlets such as Instagram and Tinder. Many of our social media platforms today are

linked—Facebook acquired Instagram in 2012, and Google owns YouTube and various other platforms that have become a part of the Google Sphere. Snapchat remains one of the only “independent” platforms and it is only a matter of time before it gets bought by another company or edged out by major competitors. In 2016, Instagram (Constine) and then Facebook in 2017 (Newton), both introduced snapchat-like qualities such as stories that disappear after twenty-four hours and notifications if someone takes a screen shot of something on your story. Social media continues to evolve at an ever-increasing pace, making it difficult to capture the effects of a certain platform before it changes its nature.

Part 2: The Impact of Social Media on Young Adults

One of the largest shifts that the proliferation of social media has caused is in the intimacy of sharing information. Sharing vacation photos, family videos, even art used to be a carefully curated experience—casual but only for a select few individuals (Dijck 7). Now, these materials are posted online for all to see. With the reduction of privacy there has been an uptick in studies on the effects of social media on our mental health in recent years. These studies have been conducted on a worldwide basis and many have focused in on young adults as the most impacted generation. This focus is not surprising since, not only is social media changing the landscape of the job market, but the latter half of the millennial generation (defined as those born between 1982 and 2004), grew up with social media as a part of their everyday lives. Social media will only continue to have a more profound effect on future generations as screens become more and more ubiquitous.

According to a meta-analysis conducted by Anca Dobrean and Costina-Ruxandra Păsărelu, not enough studies have been conducted to conclusively prove whether social media has a predominantly negative or positive effect. Studies have been fairly polarizing and primarily

rely on self-reported experiences (Dobrea and Păsăreanu). One of the big concerns Dobrea and Păsăreanu have discovered in this field is the ethics of experimentation in an open format such as Facebook. It is difficult to control all the variables that any given user may experience and, as such, user experience differs wildly from person to person based on age, gender, subject matter and frequency of posts, time spent online, etc.

It is important to discuss the benefits of social networking as well as the harmful effects. A paper published in *Psychology of Popular Media Culture* cited the positive effects a social media presence can have on social connectedness which, in turn, improves overall wellbeing (Davila, Hershenberg and Feinstein). This particular study indicated that depressive symptoms, often excessively associated with social media usage, may be “uniquely related to certain types of Internet activity” (Davila, Hershenberg and Feinstein 2). Completely replacing in-person contact with online socializing does seem to increase depressive symptoms, according to multiple studies done by Stony Brook University, the Pew Research Center, and others. According to a study published by the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, social media use can increase perceived isolation amongst young adults (Primack, Shensa and Sidani). Primack et al found that exposure to unrealistic standards and the best of everyone’s lives leads to the perception that everyone is living happier, healthier, more fulfilling lives, thus inciting feelings of social isolation. Similar results were found in a study conducted by Efstratia Arampatzi, Martijn Burger, and Natallia Novik. They found that, especially amongst people who already felt socially isolated, increased social media usage heightened the feeling of social isolation, decreasing overall wellbeing and perceived happiness (Arampatzi, Burger and Novik).

A study conducted by Hampton, Rainie, Lu, Shin, and Purcell coined the term “the cost of caring” (1), a phenomenon they explained as “social media use can increase users’ awareness

of stressful events in others' lives, and awareness of these events does lead to higher levels of stress" (Hampton, Rainie and Lu 1). This study used a perceived stress scale to evaluate their participants and found that, in specific circumstances, social media usage increases awareness of stressful events in the lives of others. This phenomenon is highly dependent on user experience and needs further research; however they found that women are significantly more aware of stressful events in the lives of others and tend to experience "the cost of caring" far more than most men. Women were, on average, aware of 13% more stressful events in the lives of close social ties and aware of 14% more stressful events in more distant social ties. This is compared to the 8% and 6% awareness men have of stressful events in the same categories (Hampton, Rainie and Lu 4 - 8).

Another aspect of social media use contributing to depressive symptoms was researched by Christina Sagioglou and Tobias Greitemeyer. They discovered that the longer users spend on social media platforms such as Facebook, the larger the self-reported feeling of not having done anything meaningful becomes, leading to other depressive symptoms such as anxiety, general discontent, lack of motivation, etc (Sagioglou and Greitemeyer). The third study Sagioglou and Greitemeyer conducted examined why people continue using Facebook if it makes them feel bad and came to the conclusion that most users wrongly predict that continued use will make them feel a sense of self-satisfaction (Sagioglou and Greitemeyer). Similar results were found by Edson C. Tandoc Jr, Patrick Ferrucci, and Margaret Duffy, but only when the feeling of envy was activated (Tandoc Jr., Ferrucci and Duffy). Feelings of envy are often rooted in the need users feel to present only the best parts of themselves to the online world, a phenomenon discussed in *Sweden's Largest Facebook Study* (Denti, Barbopoulos and Nilsson). Maintaining a

certain image can become the focus, and thus a stressor, when it comes to maintaining a social media profile—a feeling more prevalent among women.

Methodology: The Creation of Two Artistic Works and the Purposes They Serve:

Creating *MASKS: An Ode to a Young Woman* (full piece in Appendix A, p. 23)

The online world is at the same time liberating and restrictive. Many of the articles I have analyzed come to the conclusion that more research must be done to determine if social media has a primarily positive or negative impact on our lives. Research supports both claims. I was drawn to this duality and the resounding silence that social media can create. Often, I see friends gathered together, all on their phones, interacting digitally rather than engaging one another in reality. I wanted to find a way to physicalize this phenomenon and explore the idea of altering one's identity. Repeatedly I have come across stories of people either embracing the anonymity the online world can provide or putting forward what they classify as their "best self." The "best self" phenomenon, as I have named it, entails carefully crafting any posts to make one's life look like the best it can possibly be. It includes staging photos, often taking dozens to ensure the best possible angle and composition, editing photos, selecting carefully what material gets posted, only sharing certain articles, and spending a significant amount of time reviewing every post before sharing it. It can also include monitoring those around you to ensure no photos or quotes that differ from your carefully crafted image are posted. This phenomenon not only affects authenticity in the online world, but seeps into our everyday lives. It has the benefit of increasing people's awareness of their surroundings, but it alters their personality (Denti, Barbopoulos and Nilsson).

I found the best way to capture the "best self" phenomenon and the self-imposed silence the online world can create was through movement. Based on conversations with the young people in my life, I also discovered that young women are more prone to feeling the effects of an online world than their male counterparts and chose to focus specifically on the experiences of

young women. Women more profoundly feel the pressure to maintain a perfect online image—especially in the realm of the performing arts, where our image is how we market ourselves, women have an increased pressure to maintain that perfect double-standard: innocent, yet enticing; worldly, yet sensitive; beautiful, yet approachable.

In crafting this piece, we started by generating a shared language of our experiences with social media. We all differ drastically in our posting habits and the frequency with which we choose to engage with the online world. Some only use it for educational and professional purposes, others need to be reminded to leave their phones outside the rehearsal room. We worked in the language of hyper-stylized everyday movement—every action calculated either for maximum efficiency or ultimate grace and style. In a hyper-stylized world, it was easy to tip into the land of dreams, and thus “The Ballet of the Masks” was born. Our sound designer works in the room with us, so we create to the sound, but the sound also gets built around us, allowing us to respond to our environment, just as one does in the online world. The decision to incorporate masks was directly inspired the desperate desire I kept encountering to present only the best self to the world. As we developed the piece we investigated the phenomenon of when are we authentically ourselves in public—if ever. We have drawn a direct parallel between the social media self and the self we choose to present to our friends, at work or school, and the public at large.

Creating “The King Who Lost His Smile” (full piece in Appendix A, p. 27)

When discussing this research with several colleagues one of them said, “I feel like I lost my smile years ago. Now I walk around hoping no one will notice this smile isn’t mine.” This statement directly inspired the children’s story, “The King Who Lost His Smile,” which explores themes of lost identity, misrepresentation of self, and taking appearances for granted—themes

that were consistently echoed through the research. While this piece is a departure from the theatrical form, it branches out into a new form of communication that is just as important as opening a dialogue between young adults and the larger community. This story acts as an educational tool for the younger generation, teaching the importance of social support. While the focus of this project is to open communication about what is happening right now to our young adult population, preventive measures are just as important. With the rampant increase in mental health issues, we must provide the tools to deal with such problems at an earlier stage. If social coping became a part of early childhood training, we might be taking a step towards mitigating the issue, though—of course—it would take much more than a single story to make a substantial level of difference. I include this story herein as an example of one method for introducing such ideas into our educational system at a young age. And the story itself could easily be adapted into a children's theatre piece.

Conclusion:

Social media research still has a long way to go. There is evidence that supports negative effects of social media as well as studies that applaud the positives. The most important aspect of this research, though, is that it is helping to give a voice to the underserved population of young adults, especially in high-achieving public school districts like Palo Alto, California, we have a mental health crisis with our young adults. Everyone is blamed—the parents, the school, teachers, administrators, other students—but rarely is the affected population listened to.

Pieces like the artistic works presented in Appendix A are important to give an accessible voice to the research being conducted. Both pieces are rooted in the real-life experiences of young adults and are performed by young adults for their communities at large in hopes of facilitating a conversation about the given situations. As theatre has done for thousands of years, it provides enough distance from the immediate issues that we can craft a safe space for young adults to air their concerns and adults to ask questions they otherwise may not feel comfortable tackling with their own children or students. Seeing their own children or their own students act out these situations gives the community a way into a very difficult subject.

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APPENDIX A
ARTISTIC WORKS

MASKS
An Ode to a Young Woman

Created by Holly M Wright

Inspired by the Dyson College Summer 2017 Undergraduate Student-Faculty Research Program

Characters:

Woman 1

Woman 2

Woman 3

Woman 4

Student

*Ensemble: colleagues, Woman 2's Significant Other, Barista, Couple, Professor,
Friends, people dancing at the club*

We see five women lined up, each going through their morning routine, all at different points—waking up, getting dressed, showering, making/eating breakfast. Their movements are fluid but practiced. One by one they check their phones/computers and get a text/notification they must respond to. Some type, others take photos. As they show themselves to the world they put on a mask, all except the student. Woman 2 puts her mask on first, out of habit rather than in response to anything. Once they put on their masks, their movements become mechanical. All this is done to a rhythm—the sound of a ticking clock.

They exit their apartments and go their separate ways— two off to work, two are friends meeting for coffee, and another goes to school. All movements are sharp, precise. All turns are sharp right angles.

Off to Work—

Woman 1 arrives to her office. She waves to a co-worker, scans her badge, takes the elevator up to her floor, walks to her desk and sits down. She opens her laptop and begins to type.

Woman 2 arrives to her office. She greets security, gets waved in, and takes the stairs up to her floor. She sets her bag next to her desk, gets a cup of coffee, and returns to her desk. She opens her laptop and alternates typing with sipping her coffee.

Coffee with a Friend

Woman 3 arrives first. She gets a coffee, tips the barista, and sits at a table. She sips her coffee, taps her toe, and scrolls through her phone, occasionally looking up at the door.

Woman 4 takes the subway. She keeps checking her phone impatiently. The subway gets to her stop. She gets stuck behind a slow-moving couple, pushes past them and arrives at the coffee shop. She runs to greet her friend.

They hug. Woman 4 drops her bag and gets a drink. She sits and they chat. Nothing of substance, but a series of one-up-manship.

The Student

The student takes her mask, looks at it, sighs, and places it in her backpack. She leaves and goes to class. She sits, she sighs. She reaches into her bag and puts on her mask. She studiously takes notes. She raises her hand and answers a question.

At Work—Lunchtime

Woman 1 closes her laptop, pulls a salad out of her bag, sets it on her desk, takes a picture of it (#justsalad, #greenlife) and pulls out a bag of chips. She takes off her mask and begins to eat the chips, scrolling on her phone.

Woman 2 closes her laptop, tightens her mask, and catches up with her colleagues. They all go out to lunch. They laugh and eat and drink.

Coffee with Friend

They laugh, they chat. Woman 3 looks at the time, feigns surprise, gives Woman 4 a hug and leaves. Woman 4 sighs, pulls a book out of her bag, takes off her mask and begins to read.

The Student

The student looks through her notes, and asks a question. She gets a response and packs up her bags to leave. She takes off her mask, but someone calls her name. She turns to see her friend. She sighs, puts her mask back on, and goes to join her.

Back to Work

Woman 1 sighs, crumples up her chip bag, throws it away, puts on her mask, grabs her laptop and goes to present in a meeting.

Woman 2 laughs with her colleagues, finishes a glass of wine, and returns to her office. She opens her laptop and begins working.

Woman 4

She orders a pot of tea and continues reading her book.

The Student

Her friend takes her back to her apartment. They laugh, the student smiles through the mask. They take pictures.

Work—End of Day

Woman 1 packs up her bag to leave the office. She throws away her uneaten salad. She exits out the main entrance and begins to walk home.

Woman 2 waves to her colleagues, packs up her bag, and meets her SO outside the front door. They take off their masks, kiss, and head off to dinner.

Woman 4

She finishes her book, packs up her bag and puts her mask back on.

The Student

Her friend dresses her up but gets a call and chats on the phone. The student takes off her mask for a moment and looks in the mirror. Her friend asks if she's ready to go. She sighs and puts her mask back on.

They leave her apartment and head to the club.

At the Club

They arrive at the club. The student's friend is swept away. Someone puts a drink in her hand.

She gets pulled into a circle of people dancing. Someone gives her another drink.

They dance. Someone brings a tray of shots. She does three.

They dance. She has another drink.

There's more dancing and more drinking. And more dancing. And more shots.

And she's tired.

The student lays down.

The Ballet of the Masks

The student is asleep.

Women gather around her, all masked. They are taking pictures of themselves, others, chatting, etc...all of it is extremely mechanical.

One walks over to the student and pulls her up. She hands the student a mask and, when the student does nothing, the women put it on her. She struggles but they succeed. The student tries to remove it, but it's impossible to take off.

The student is forced to join their ranks. Her movements transform from unwilling to mechanical, matching the rest in their competition and meaningless conversation as the mask becomes her identity.

The Next Day

Almost a repeat of the beginning. Women 1, 2, 3, and 4 are going about their morning routines, all at different points—waking up, getting dressed, showering, making/eating breakfast. One by one they check their phones/computers and get a text/notification they must respond to. Some type, others take photos. As they show themselves to the world they put on a mask.

The student wakes up from her nightmare, terrified. She's different, changed. She gets up and gets dressed. She sees her mask on her desk and throws it away. She packs up her stuff, takes a deep breath, and leaves her apartment.

The King Who Lost his Smile

By Holly M Wright

Once upon a time there was a young girl who had the most beautiful smile in all the land. Her smile could light up the darkest of corners, make little babies squeal with glee, and tame the wildest of beasts. As word spread of the little girl's smile people began to come from far and wide to catch a glimpse of it. They swore it was magic. Now the little girl, who naturally had an enormous heart, was thrilled to share her smile with anyone who wished to see it, for nothing brought the girl more delight than the joy of others. She welcomed these visitors on her walks and began to learn about the far flung reaches of the land. Her parents were so proud.

Now far away on the other side of the land sat the capital where the king lived. He was a well-liked king, always generous, with a warm heart. He was passionately in love with his queen who became his entire world. One day the queen fell ill and though the healers did all they could, it simply wasn't enough, and the king's beloved queen passed away. The king sealed the palace, sinking into a deep depression. Nothing could bring him joy. Food turned to ash in his mouth. The jesters were no longer funny. The palace gardens fell into disarray with no one to tend to them. The king issued a decree—no one was allowed to have any happiness. No one could smile and laughter was punishable by death. A deep gloom settled over the capital.

This decree took a long time to spread through the kingdom because everyone in the capital lost the will to do any work. The king's sadness was infectious. But the news of the decree did indeed slowly spread. People stopped coming to see the little girl with the beautiful smile, but all she noticed was that she heard less stories. Being the carefree child she was she didn't really mind, it gave her more time in her little garden with her bluebells. But her parents worried. "I worry our daughter will get lonely," said Mother.

"I worry too," said father. "She brings others so much joy." And so, they thought, and thought, and thought, but couldn't figure out why people would stop coming to visit their daughter. Being on the far edges of the kingdom meant that they were always last to receive any news and the king's new decree looked like it might never reach their village so how were they to know that joy had been banned from the land.

Mother and father came up with a plan. They would take their daughter to see the king who they had always heard had a very warm heart. Surely, he would know best how to save her smile, after all she was only a child and couldn't possibly understand.

Her parents found her playing in the garden, singing to her bluebells, and told her the good news. “We are moving to the capital,” said mother.

“The king will love your smile,” said father.

The girl’s smile faltered, but she said, “You are my parents and therefore you know what is best. I will say goodbye to my friends, the bluebells. I am sure I will like the capital just as well as our little cottage.” And she smiled, but it wasn’t quite as bright as usual. However, it being a particularly sunny day, her parents took no notice and went to hitch their plow horse to their best cart, the one they used on market day.

The little girl turned back to her bluebells and hummed a little tune

*Goodbye little ladies,
I’ll see you soon.
Goodbye little ladies,
Remember this tune
I may be gone,
But I’ll be along
To sing you another sweet tune*

She shed a single tear and tried to smile, but the bluebells drooped as though they were sad to see her go.

Mother and father took no notice of the droopy flowers or the grey clouds on the horizon and bundled their little girl into the back of their best cart, the one they used on market day. And off they went.

After a long and somewhat boring journey, they arrived in the capital and the little girl’s curiosity overcame her. She smiled as they drove through town and the sun began to shine a little brighter. A hush descended over the town. The sun hadn’t shown brightly since the queen died. The road to the palace was immediately cleared and the gates opened as if by magic. The little girl laughed with delight and the palace walls began to shine. She thought she heard a gasp as they drove up to the palace but paid it no mind.

Now the people of the capital were frightened by her pure joy for, since the queen had died and the king issued his decree, no one had smiled or laughed. The little girl knew nothing of this, of course, since the news never reached her tiny village. She clapped with glee as their cart stopped in front of the doors to the palace. “Oh my,” she thought to herself, “everyone here looks so sad, but if I lived in a place as grand as this, I shouldn’t help but smile so hard I might burst.”

But though she smiled her biggest and brightest, though the palace walls shone brightly with her joy, not a single servant would look at her. Not a single servant smiled.

The little girl was ushered into the throne room which was dark and gloomy. The curtains were tightly shut and the only light came from smoky torches that lined the walls. The girl coughed and peered through the gloom to see a sunken old man lost in a grand throne.

“Who’s there?” croaked the king, for indeed he was the sunken old man lost in the giant throne. The little girl said nothing but made her way to the end of the impossibly long throne room. She peered up at the king.

But she didn’t see a king. She saw a lonely heart desperately in need of a friend. She climbed up the throne, which was twice as tall as she was, and reached out and tapped the weary old king on the shoulder. He slowly turned to look at who could possibly be intruding on his misery to find a little girl perched on the arm of the throne. “Hi!” said the little girl. And she smiled.

As she smiled the king began to change. His eyes softened and he sat up a little straighter. He adjusted his crown and looked around. He looked back at the little girl who smiled all the brighter. The king cleared his throat and croaked out a “Hi.” His face began to move, to tremble, and the tiniest little smile touched his lips.

The girl beamed. The king leapt off his throne and threw open the curtains. He called all his ministers and all his chamberlains who doused the smoky torches and issued a new decree that spread through the kingdom like wildfire—joy was once again welcome in the kingdom.

The king threw an enormous ball that night in honor of his little friend. At this grand ball he knelt before her and said, “Thank you, my little friend. I had forgotten how to smile. You let me see the beauty of my kingdom again—whatever I have is yours, just name it.”

The little girl thought for a moment and looked at all the riches that surrounded her. But when she turned back to the king she said, “Your smile is thanks enough. What I would really like is to go back to my cottage. I promised my bluebells I would be back and they get so droopy without me.”

The king laughed a big booming laugh that made the sky sparkle and said, “Your wish is my command, little friend, but know you will always have a friend here should you need it.” And the little girl with the beautiful smile returned to her little cottage in the good cart, the one they use on market days. There she lived and grew up, tending to her bluebells.

Rumor has it that, in a distant village, one can still find a little old lady with a smile that can cure heart aches and the most beautiful bluebells in the land that aren't the least bit droopy. The village itself is quite small and her cottage is quite humble and it is quite far away from the capital, but once a year in the middle of the night, a carriage that looks suspiciously like the king's carriage arrives at her door. And on those nights, once a year, booming laughter can be heard rolling through the hills. Sometimes it's so loud and filled with joy that even the sky will sparkle.

APPENDIX B

GRAPHICS

Image 1: Largest Social Networks in the World: Monthly Active Users
 Source: Business Insider (BI Intelligence)

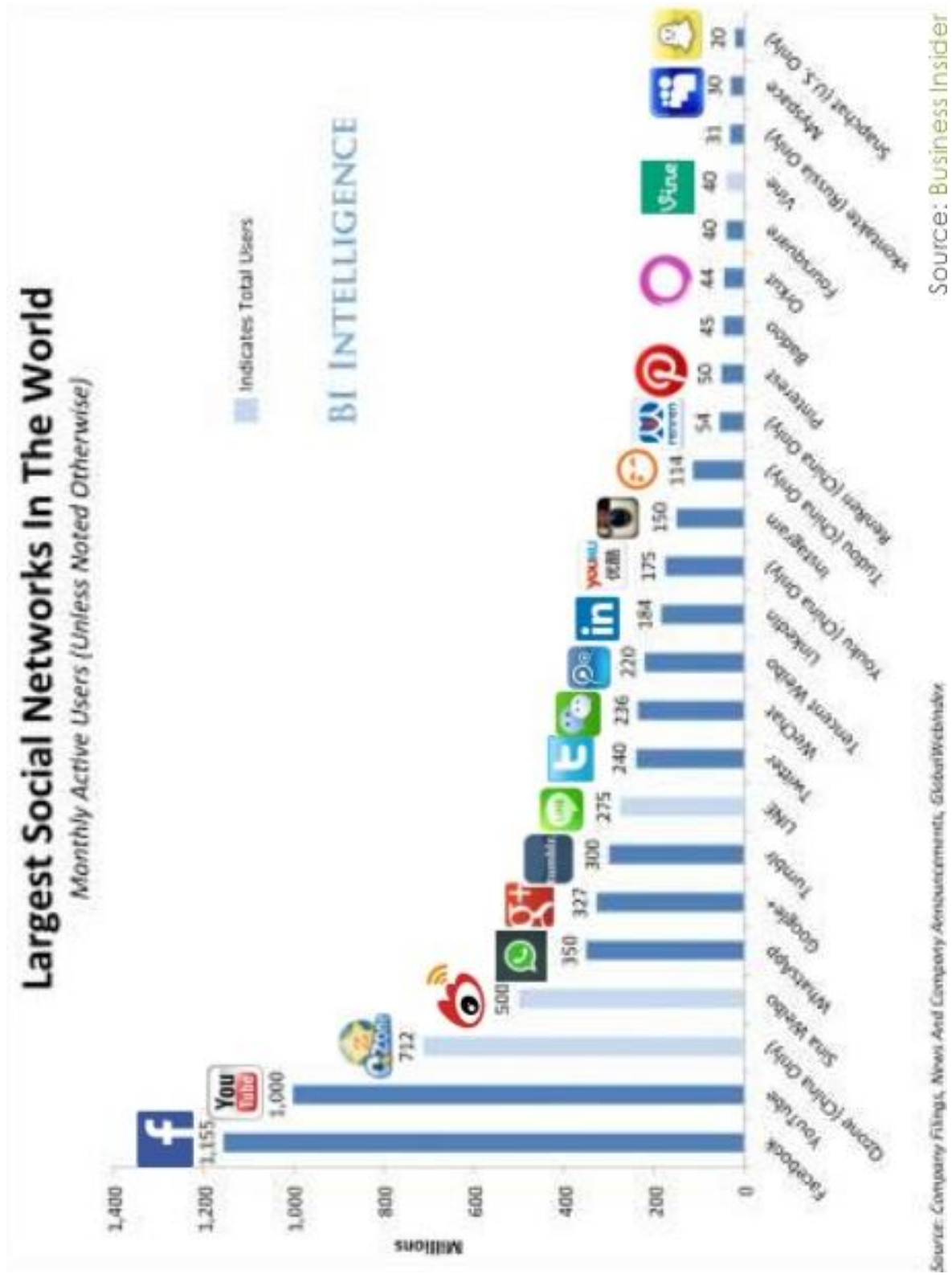


Image 2: Timeline of Social Media

Sources: Toth, D'Onfro, Carlson: The Real History of Twitter, Tumblr, Kincaid, Artix, Molloy, Shontell, Carlson: Pinterest CEO: Here's How We Became the Web's Next Big Thing, Microsoft, Crook, Perex

