

Mae Archacki

Professor Jareb, Professor Moras

Honors Capstone

30 April 2020

### Self-Validation Through Social Media

How often do we check our social media in a day? How many different social media platforms does each individual have? How much do we rate our value based off of likes and comments? Social media has become a predominant part of our lives in this digitized world. We used to live in a world where communication was mostly done in person, or through physical letters. However, due to the advancements in technology we have entered a world where you can communicate with one another instantaneously across the globe. Social media has now become a deciding factor if we deem what we are doing with our lives as satisfactory (Ismali 36). It is in normal human nature to seek confirmation and validation from your peers, yet social media is on a much wider scale. We now are so focused on the random words of a stranger that you may never have met and if they agree with what you put online. Due to the structure of this platform, validation has been pinpointed with how many followers and likes one receives. Thus, adding the visual element of competition. One can now see how many likes and followers another has, therefore making a goal for themselves. However, this sense of competition has always been common in humans as social creatures. We always strive to be the best, even if it is not intentional. The invention of social media and the current advancements in technology have heightened this desire in competition.

With the invention of social media, the concept of reinventing yourself has become much more realistic and attainable for its users. People have a choice to what they put up on their

profile, and all of it may not even be truthful. On Facebook, users are able to post how they are feeling, update their relationship status, upload albums of photos, and much more (Yohkaf 47). Naturally, no human being wants to put up a bad photo of themselves up on a platform for everyone to see. Thus, people will choose the “perfect” photo as their profile picture. However, after extensively beautifying it with filters and fixing any imperfections that they are insecure about. Many studies have been conducted on the effects and thought processes that go about when creating a profile. Researchers realized there is a difference between one’s self affirmation and that of the Facebook affirmation. “...in this case refers to the characteristics that Facebook users ideally wish to have—not what they already possess. Thus, Facebook affirmation can occur only when their ideal qualities or attributes exhibited on Facebook are consistently affirmed by others” (Yohkaf 48). Based off this definition, we find that people are not using the platform to put their real selves out there. They are aiming to fabricate that they have the perfect life and lifestyle that everyone desires. From one viewpoint, researchers can view this as a positive effect of social media. The individual is receiving affirmation from others as they strive to make their ideal self. Data collected from a research study showed that “users reported that they came closer to their ideal selves on Facebook and had higher levels of self-esteem after receiving Facebook affirmation, moderate users (between 31 minutes and 2 hours a day) seemed to benefit the most from such process” (Yohkaf 56). It is a natural human effect to feel good about one’s self when another compliments you or highlights on an achievement. Yet, someone should not discount their own personal feelings about themselves. It is important to feel self-love before seeking satisfaction from others. As noted in the previous quote, those who seek this approval in “moderation” were the ones that benefited the most. Having your life be consumed by staring at a screen and trying to put forth your ideal self can be toxic.

Each individual needs to be able to set limits on how much of this data they are consuming. Based from a study done on college students and their interaction with social media findings showed that, “According to this result, as students' dependence on social media increases, life satisfaction decreases” (Acun 48). If we focus our attention too much to the life that we and others live through the screen versus the real one we have, our appreciation for what we have will dwindle. Studies have shown that excessive exposure to these platforms, predominantly Facebook and Instagram, can result in depression, body dissatisfaction, lower self-esteem, and low self-perceived physical attractiveness (Sherlock, Wagstaff 483). All of these feelings can eventually lead to a much darker path and destructive behavior. Instagram is formatted entirely around photography. You are unable to post anything unless a photo is attached as well, whether it be a full post or something on their story feature. Due to this Instagram provides a wider playing field for social comparison and it creates a more direct reaction in the individual’s feelings. (Sherlock, Wagstaff 484). You are directly seeing an image, there is no imagination allowed, the user is directly given what the other individual is trying to put forth of themselves. Throughout the years of social media interaction and constant updating, a new phrase has been born among millennials and generation Z, the term is “FOMO.” FOMO stands for the “fear of missing out” and it has become widely popular and more common with the excessive use of social media that we see in today’s society. Teens feel this more due to the constant societal struggles they deal with during these crucial years of development. Teenagers are trying to discover themselves and their interests, make lasting and sustainable friendships, as well as worry about the general pressures put on them by their parents. It can be very more demoralizing for them to be following other celebrities, sometimes their own age, who are not going through these everyday struggles they face. It is especially hard for teenagers to make the

divide between reality and what is seen online. People focus on putting the highlights of their life on their feed, not their struggles or bad days. "...individuals compare themselves with friends in social media, they tend to underestimate their friends' negative experiences, but overestimate their friends' positive experiences, and that subsequently causes individuals to feel emotional distress" (Charoensukmongkol 70). We somehow forget that we are all human beings with a variety of emotions. On our devices we see the cookie cutter perfect day and life, not the struggles or personal traumas or even just the boring average days we all experience. There was also a study done on women from the ages of 18 to 35 where they were shown different Instagram images from selected categories. Results from this study showed that "brief exposure to these images did decrease self-rated attractiveness, implying that participants engaged in a reevaluation of their notion of 'average' attractiveness and rated themselves accordingly" (Sherlock, Wagstaff 488). From these results we are able to see the toxicity that lies in seeing others at their "best" all the time and not necessarily knowing their background. For example, whether or not they are a model, what is their age, or was this professionally done. This is also more of a depressive factor to those in their teenage years as they are transitioning in their bodies.

Human beings are always on a quest to strive and be the best versions of themselves. Yet, who even made up this perfect desire that we are all chasing after? This is where comparison to others heavily comes into play. The social comparison theory can be defined as "...the belief that individuals have an internal drive to gain accurate self-evaluations" (Sherlock, Wagstaff 482). Before this digital outlet was invented, this "internal drive" existed. It was more predominant in the word of mouth, sharing stories with one another. However, due to these advancements we now are able to have physical proof whether it be photo or video. This can now be sent to the

palm of anyone's hand all across the globe. One thing we have to remember about this platform is that it is available to everyone; young and old, rich and those who have smaller incomes, and famous and common. No one is ever on the same playing field in life, that is just a fact. We all are born into different types of families with different lifestyles. Every human being has different talents and interests as well. Certain aspects are out of an individual's control. One example, is that many people feel a lot of insecurities about their body. purports to act as motivation for others to pursue a healthier lifestyle, but the majority of these images contain very thin and toned women" (Sherlock, Wagstaff 483). However, there is no one "perfect" body. This is just something that has been generated by big businesses and the media. Yet, it is fed into the brains of children at such an early age they are led to believe there is a certain expectation they need to fit in to be a part of society. This can only be combatted to a certain extent, it took years for certain magazines to expand the shapes, ethnicities, and different background of models that represented their companies. Even today, not all businesses support this notion. Once again, it has become more of a commonality for one to post the positive and highlights of one's lifestyle to their feeds and pages. With the invention of social media, an entirely new job market has also been created. Many college students now pursue careers in digital marketing due to the fact that they heavily grew up with media in their lives. It is not only used as a personal resource but a major selling tactic for many companies and businesses. The use of these platforms has skyrocketed over the past decade, where roughly about one third of the world's population are currently using it to some extent (Kat Tian). Every business eventually develops a social media page in order to promote their products, communicate with their buyers on questions they have, and promote their brand more by creating an aesthetic on this platform. This is even done on the personal scale as well. We aim to create a style that fits our personalities and we try to stick with

this to have consistency on our feed. The more pleasing a page is to the human eye the more attention that person and their content will receive. People have been able to even make profit of assisting other's with creating their perfect page, whether it be assisting in edits, making preset filters for them to buy, or giving them a shout out on their page. How does this make a person feel when they view something who has more things than them, or has extravagant vacations with families and friends? More likely than not it will make that individual feel small and that their life is minimal in comparison to this one on their screen, therefore lowering their self-worth (Yohkaf 49). This new medium makes it hard for others to be grateful for what they have been given while they are constantly fed photos and videos of what they do not have. Even though there is a physical photo to be seen sometimes there is a lot reading between the lines that goes into the social media world as well. Referring back to the term, FOMO (fear of missing out) it can be very hard for people, especially teenagers, when they see their friends doing something without them. It can also be especially difficult when this person realizes they were never originally invited to this gathering. There is a lot miscommunication in this territory, trying to understand if this was meant to intentionally hurt the person left out or it is just friends having a good time (Weinstein 3614). This new era has made human beings greedier and more focused on materialistic items, versus the joys of experience and the comforts that come with having a loving family and friends.

In any type of community whether it be in person or virtually there is always a high concern for bullying. Bullying can be created from many different experiences. Whether it be a person feels powerful by being able to make another individual feel small, trauma from an earlier time in their lives, or sometimes it could simply be an individual lacks the maturity to be a civil human being. The term for bullying when it is done on a technological platform is cyberbullying,

or cyber-aggression. “Cyber-aggression is defined as intentional harm carried out through electronic means to an individual or a group of individuals of any age, who perceive(s) such acts as offensive, derogatory, harmful or unwanted” (Faye 222). Cyberbullying has become a prominent topic of discussion in school systems over the past decade. Teachers, professors, coaches, etc. have been instructed on how to help manage this type of disrespect when it happens to a student they know. However, there is not a lot of education for those who may suffer from these attacks. Young people are unsure about the proper policies to follow when trying to inform higher ups about particular incidents. Yet, cyberbullying is able to sneak under the radar of many people. At a Canadian University a study was conducted to document the different health issues that can about from those who are victims of cyberbullying. (Faye 223). There are various forms of attacks that can occur. Whether it be sexting, inappropriate insults on public profiles or privately, body-shaming, and many more cruel ways created by the perpetrator. Due to direct messaging, these attacks and insults can occur in a private chat on these applications, without anyone else being aware. In these cases, no one will know it is occurring except the victim and the abuser. Many people feel too embarrassed when this occurs to even try and bring it to anyone’s attention. When a victim experiences these attacks they are more likely to suffer from depression, constant anxiety, and devaluation in one’s self (Faye 223). Suffering from these thoughts is not something that necessarily goes away in a day. Many people suffer from these mental illnesses for years, developing further trust issues or isolate themselves and disconnect from social interactions. These violations can also occur from an array of people. Ranging from friends, intimate partners, a person at the same university, or even a complete stranger (Faye 226). The digital world allows for a cruel playing field where people can hide their true identity under a fake name. Victims may never even come to know who their aggressor is. Why should

they feel uncomfortable or unsafe from words on a screen? Unfortunately, in today's society we have not found a way to prevent this from happening. Certain privacy measures can only protect an individual to such an extent.

However, we should not discount the positive effects that these social media platforms can hold, and why we necessarily should not completely barricade them from our lives. The ability to be able to stay in contact with loved ones all across the world provides a greater way of communication than humans could ever have imagined. People are also able to not only stay connected with these people, but also be able to meet others. Many people have found their spouses on other social media platforms; whether they be specifically dating apps such as Tinder or Bumble, people even find their future spouses by sliding up into one another's direct messages. It is an incredible tool to be able to create a brand and showcase your achievements in life on a simple application. On Facebook, there is a feature called groups where the users can create a group and title it whatever they want. You are then able to add others to this or invite them to join, therefore creating a digital community of people that may have a particular shared interest. This allows for more group discussion and a place for people to share and. Get to know one another. There is also the ability for self-expression, which is definitely a high point for many users on their devices. A study was done on high school students in the western area of the united States, where several interviews were conducted. Ron, an eighteen-year-old participant of the study said, "I feel kinda happy ... Every time I have an idea, I get really excited about it, I wanna put it out there" (Weinstein 3611). There is a lot of joy and pleasure that can come from putting up a video or photo of something the individual enjoys. It also provides instant access to "reminiscing with 'memorable photos'" (Weinstein 3611) says Tony, another participant of the study. It is your own time capsule of memories that you end up making unintentionally. These

platforms also promote a greater sense of creativity. Although most of them revolve around photography, people are able to create edits, filters, draw, create video, and be able to stylize their own sense of being. The arts are supported by this digital item seeing it as another medium for people to put forth their creative ideas and create and a new escape for others who can connect with their work. Many people are positively affected when they come across what they are looking for on these mediums, for example “When Thomas browses his Instagram during our interview, he quickly encounters a post that illustrates this inspiration” (Weinstein 3614). The student was able to find something fairly quickly that brought joy and shared a similar interest he had, therefore making it worth his time.

Social media can be a difficult item to control as well, due to the fact that certain barriers can only provide so much protection. Although it is based within the internet and we use the internet to find what we are searching for, unfortunately more likely than not users will come across items and pages that they did not search for. These businesses try their best to keep the inappropriate activity to a minimum, however it can be difficult to end the issue immediately when there is over a billion users on each site itself. There are also different ways for photos and different content to slide past the bar, whether it be using different names or titles to hide the main purposes. Hashtags are also a way people search for content of their interest. If a user posts an inappropriate image, they can use a hashtag though that is currently trending. This would then cause this image to appear on a higher percentage of users’ feeds, and potentially causing discomfort or harm. “There are people who make Instagram pages for the sole purpose of expressing how depressed they are, or something like that, which can get graphic” (Weinstein 3615). This was a statement from a sixteen-year-old boy named Joseph who participated in one of the studies. Social media does not want to limit the basic rights of humans to their ability and

use of free-speech. Yet, it is a difficult situation to deem what is appropriate and acceptable to the public eye, especially when you have different users varying from young ages of around thirteen to anyone to about their eighties. These articles and images may not be appropriate for a young child to see, and they may not be at the maturity yet to handle this kind of information. Being exposed to these kinds of thoughts can then have a negative effect on themselves, and cause discomfort and a lack of self-confidence or a question of self-value. There are a lot of things to worry about and watch for when being on these types of platforms. Making sure that the information and images they are seeing are real and not fake is crucial as well. The mind is very malleable, and people can be easily persuaded by something they see online due to the fact that they could believe it is legitimately. It is important to know that people can lie online just as they can with in person interactions.

Social media also has a difficult relationship with trust. On one's own personal profile that individual user has to have a certain level of trust in those that follow them that they will respect what they are putting out there online. Looking at another study on college students, those who participated already had a relatively lower level of trust in human nature (Acun 42). It can be difficult to develop a substantial bond with this type of technology when some people have grown up with the horror stories that can occur online. Yet, we have to learn to move past the bad and realize that even though we may go through terrible situations throughout our lifetime we can learn from these experiences and better prepare ourselves to deal with them in the future. The effects of social media can also go even past mental health issues, and also affect a student's work ethic in their studies. Students who have a higher GPA (grade point average) were found to have a generally higher self-esteem (Acun 46). It is important for individuals to be able to feel comfortable in their own skin as well as the choices that they are making. If they feel

as if people are disapproving of their lifestyle, or worse their own being, it can affect the work and how they live their lives out from this point as well.

Today's social media platform has proven to be a double-edged sword that can have just as many negative effects as it does as positive. This technology has the ability to broaden our horizons and open us to an entirely new world of appreciation of interests, self-discovery, maintained friendships with those worldwide while also being able to make new connections as well. However, the approval of what we see through a screen should not be the defining factor of our main emotions. Mental health concerns have become a predominant topic of conversation over the past decade more than ever. With the introduction of social media, we are constantly putting ourselves on a pedestal to either be praised or taken down. Yet, we do not do this with hopes of receiving the later, yet some people on the internet face their own insecurities and feel it necessary to bring others down emotionally because they know they have the ability to do so right in their hands. We have entered a world of convenience; human beings find themselves only focusing on themselves and how they look. The reality of competition has also been heightened due to the increase of exposure with so many more people. Before the age of technology, a person was only in direct contact with those around them. Now they are communicating with those on a global scale seeking their validation, quite possibly because they are not receiving it from those who are merely inches away from them in the physical world. This digital source can be a great source of comfort, but it can also be a vindictive weapon for others. It is important to know that human beings are the ones in control, we are the ones who are holding the device, not the other way around. It is easy to fall in the trap of feeling as if you are trapped in the social media web. Finding the right communities, blocking out the "haters", taking the world in moderation, and not letting a number define you are ways that human beings can

control the self-validation they feel from an inanimate object. We are only given one life to live, which is a scary feeling. However, instead of trying to capture each moment the focus should try to be shifted of experiencing each moment. A photo can only tell a thousand words, a user can only like once, a comment can only have so many characters. An experience, now that is something with infinite emotion, memory, and impact. Yes, from that the first thought is to try and share that with the world, but why don't we try to keep some things just for selves. However, the self-validation should not come from those who are scrolling past the image on their phone. It is called self-validation, it should come from the person who is seeking it, "self."

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