

Social media plays somewhat of a role in everyone's lives no matter how old you are. It plays a role in how kids in the younger generations are being raised all the way to the elderly and how they can keep up with the news on their handheld devices. Teens these days have the biggest roles in social media. From job opportunities to college applications and even to what goes on in the news. It can have an effect on our mental health and how we view other people. There is also the downside of being jealous and lashing out on others that people have been affected by. Being affected by social media which constantly surrounds me has been a struggle that I still have not overcome but am working towards.

Social media has helped me understand the world around me and how people are affected by it. I have become friends with people all around the world like Germany, Pakistan and many people around the U.S. just by some coincidence of liking the same stuff. I have learned how their world is different from mine and just how they navigate their world. I have learned about many different customs and cultures and how they differ from my own. My friend in Pakistan is dealing with some of her customs that require her to get into an arranged marriage and she follows through with those traditions. However that doesn't stop her from posting her beautiful artwork that she does and it helps her relieve some of her stress. I happened to create something that we both liked and I ended up messaging her and asked if we could be friends. From then on we continued to talk about our interests and grew closer as friends.

Talking to people around the world has also helped with my social skills as well. I learned that there are people out there who go through similar struggles even if they are across the world in a different nation. I joined a group server that had many other artists that had similar interests as I did and at first I felt shy and anxious that they did not want me there. I had been invited to join so in hindsight it was a ridiculous thought. Once I tried to interact with the other people I became more outgoing and I have overcome some of my social anxiety that has been

bothering me for years. I felt like I fit in even if I didn't have the strongest connection with the group

I've learned that there are challenges I face as a U.S. citizen that they see from an outsiders point of view and sympathize with me. They have also helped me overcome my struggles and worked with me through my low points. Having social media as the connection tool for meeting people around the world is great because I can form bonds with people that I may have just never met and eventually see them in person to form an even bigger connection. I happened to meet someone from Germany through a group server and since we both like similar things I messaged her to ask if she wanted to be friends. We have continued to talk and eventually plan to meet in person one day. We continue to support one another by sending encouraging videos or messages and we talk through our problems.

There have also been times where I had to deal with people fighting and having to deal with panic attacks. In the same chat there had been some drama that I was never involved in but I still had to help people deal with their struggles and eventually cut off ties and get removed from the group all together. Being stuck in the middle of the drama was difficult and I had to choose a side and help calm down the people who were panicking over the whole situation. I learned new ways to help someone overcome a panic attack and guide them through their attack as well. Eventually the group stopped messaging each other and I kept in touch with the people I sided with and gained some strong friendships. I also have had a friend who I met who struggles with anxiety as well and we work through our hardships and continue to encourage each other whenever we get a chance. We also talk over the phone when we get a chance and talk about how our lives have been going.

I have learned that maintaining friendships over social media is difficult and can take a ton of work as well as how careful you need to be when I talk about myself as well as how to not portray yourself as a victim and or someone who is untrustworthy. I have also learned that many

people also struggle with things similar to me and that they can help if I need it as well as how to create trustworthy bonds over social media.

Another way social media has played a role in my life would be finding opportunities for myself like the different jobs as well as volunteer opportunities. During the pandemic I found more and more job opportunities popping up around me while browsing my homepage on social media. I have also received many college opportunities as I get closer to graduation and find many opportunities to pay for college as well as all the programs that I can qualify for. This has helped me decide for myself what I want to do and follow a path that would help create a stable future for myself. Finding the many opportunities isn't always about school but also many ways to collaborate with others and create a name for myself in the world. I have worked with other artists to create pieces and overall just have fun exploring who I am as well as the work dynamic I have with others who I may not necessarily know.

Another big way that social media plays a role in my life is learning about what goes on in the world. Whenever I am browsing through sites I see ads for news articles and other important things. Social media has helped keep me informed so that way I can make informed decisions. I can use facts from different sites to make informed decisions and even learn about others. The news plays a role in what is seen by the public but with social media I can see more than what is played and learn about the struggles of people who are being shut down and find ways to help them.

Social media can also provide resources that I use to donate to many causes that I believe make the world a better place. There are many causes in the world that don't get shown in the news but when celebrities and creators use their platforms to spread awareness, they can get more people to donate and I use my art account to spread awareness for the causes I believe in. I can use my platform to help others and that is one of my main goals in life and social media can help me build myself into a place where I can help even more than just my

community. I can also create groups for the community so that people feel included and use social media to reach out to others to help them find a place in a community.

I also spread awareness about stuff my family is a part of, like my brother who has type one diabetes. People often joke about it but I talk to them to spread awareness that kids who have it are not all that different from kids who don't have it. I learn new things about it and I can use social media to help my parents find fun opportunities for my brother to be involved and spread awareness as well.

Some of the downsides that the role of social media has taken a toll on me would be the mental health side of my life. I try to get my content out to as many people as I can but that takes a toll on myself especially when I know that I have worked hard on something that doesn't reach the goal I had hoped to achieve with the specific content. It takes a toll because of how I approach the sites. If I cared less about the numbers it would not have an effect on my mental health but since I like to make people happy, a common trait in a person who pleases people, I still let the numbers get to me. Another impact would be how toxic and very open people can be. When I talk to people online I want to be treated with respect but some people downright are rude and disrespectful because they want to be. As previously stated there was a group that had people whose views I did not agree with and the group ended up breaking apart. It was a difficult time because I was unable to talk to anyone since I still hadn't fully connected to others in the group and many of the other people I had talked to were unavailable. It has helped me learn not to be a jerk online and how to treat others with respect online and not cyberbully people I don't know even if they frustrate me. This also ties in to not sharing personal info when I am talking to strangers or just things only my family should know. Previously in my life I have overshared stuff about my family and ended up worrying people close to us and I ended up causing more harm to my dad who had to tell people that my mother was ok because I had shown a picture of something that I should have kept to myself or talked to someone who I trusted, but I ended up sharing and getting attention that was not needed at the time. I very

quickly learned from my parents not to share information unless I trusted someone enough to talk about it and I understood the consequences of oversharing from then on out.

Another downside to social media in the role it plays in my life would be seeing others out having fun while I sit at home doing nothing. I see many posts online about how my friends go out with others and have fun. It shows up many times and most of the time I yearn to have fun with others. What I have learned from my own family is that many of those posts capture a single moment where everyone is happy and not the moments where people are arguing or just the boring moments of the trips they take. For example when I went on my trip to the Grand Canyon in June of 2021, we spent 2 hours at the canyon and most of the first hour consisted of arguing and bickering between my family members but those moments did not end up on my moms facebook post. What the post consists of also affects how I feel, even if I had a horrible trip. If the overall trip was not so great but people highlight the good parts then the trip would seem better and the overall mood from the trip would increase into a more positive trip.

On a positive note, some good things that social media has brought into my life would be identifying new identities. It has helped me learn about who I am as a person and what I identify with. A lot of my friends have many different identities and learning about them can be super amazing because of how little they are expressed in the media. It takes time to understand but by learning identities through social media it gives me a wide range of exposure and helps me learn quickly in order to understand how people feel comfortable on how they are identified in their lives. As mentioned before exposure to many of the issues surrounding communities, I feel that the LGBT+ community does deserve more recognition and finding people who are actually a part of the community but have smaller roles is important and that's why social media plays that role to bring out the smaller communities in the community itself. It gives not only me, but others the opportunity to learn about the different identities that people can identify with. Bringing out the smaller communities is important in my life because living in a small community or even interacting with smaller parts of groups is great because most of the people are very

kind, giving and honest to others in their own communities. It makes me realise there are people still in the world that are willing to be there for others in their own communities.

Another great thing about the communities is how they interact with their creators. Some of the big influences that inspire me to learn have been people who create things whether that be videos, music, series that may not be shows and many other things. Sometimes a creator interacts with their fans and when that has happened to me I have felt the best feeling of being treated with respect by someone I look up to. When I engage, I love how some of those creators engage in their communities to make some of their fans feel special.

Overall social media has become a must throughout my life even if I need breaks off of the different sites. Social media in general has seemed to take a toll but also improve my well being at the same time. I have made many new friends I could have never imagined making if I didn't have the opportunity to use it. It has helped me explore my creative output and even how I work with others. It gives me the opportunity to learn many new things that would be difficult to learn about. It can hurt my overall mental health as well as tear apart groups I have been in but even teach me how to work through the struggles people experience. It's given me the opportunity for self improvement and growth that could not have been achieved without the help of people around the world. It has become such a strong influence in how I learn things about the world through people I have met or watched. When someone I look up to engages it gives me the incitement to engage more in their communities or just engage with others in general. Learning new things and just being more open while still remaining anonymous is difficult but has definitely been a big learning curve as the culture of social media changes. In conclusion the most important way social media has had on me would be how I learn about the world around me.