

The vast and wide world of the web is ever-growing and always changing. Developed over the span of almost sixty years, the Internet was invented to increase means of communication and quickly developed into a world of its own. Social media, as defined by [Merriam Webster](#), is “form(s) of electronic communication (as Web sites for networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content” (Merriam-Webster 2016). Social media sites such as, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were created to give their users outlets of expression, and by doing so, gave their users differing lenses to show themselves through.

According to [Statista](#), Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are among the top six social media outlets of 2016 (Statista 2016). Looking at these three social media sites in particular, they all three attract users in similar and differing ways. Facebook, a site used to keep in touch with friends and family via instant messaging, photo sharing, and more, has a primarily larger [demographic](#) of users ages 55-64 (Smart Insights 2016). Due to its older demographic, Facebook’s users, especially in the millennial age range, tend to tailor what they post; when Facebook users add family members or relatives who may be considered elders, there is an air of respect surrounding that elder, thus leading younger users to watch what they post.

Shortly after the explosion of popularity of Facebook amongst users, Twitter rose to claim its fame with Millennial and younger generations. Twitter, differing from all other social media outlets, was created as a means of a live news source by limiting its users to 140 characters per tweet. After its initial introduction to the masses, Twitter soon became an outlet of immediate sharing. Here, users are given the capabilities of tweeting, photo and video sharing, and instant messaging almost instantaneously. This outlet of intended news media is often used to “live”

tweet popular events in real time such as, the presidential debates and election, popular award ceremonies, and other current events that a certain majority cares about.

When users are not tweeting about the news or current events however, they are sharing personal thoughts, memes, culturally-relevant jokes, and even mere photos of their lives, creating a stream-of-consciousness-type timeline for tweeters to scroll through. Because of this, there is less of a filter or even a desire to filter the information users put out on their followers' timelines; users are more inclined to give the "pulp" of their opinions which can lead to inflammatory exchanges between followers.

Starkly contrasting with both of these outlets, Instagram, an outlet created specifically for photo sharing amongst its users, appeals to an [audience](#) whose age ranges from 16-24 (Smart Insights 2016). Instagram's younger population can easily be explained through a close look at its purpose—aesthetics and superficiality. While Twitter and Facebook require some sort of interaction and dialogue between its users, Instagram is only a photo-sharing website making it the most accessible and user-friendly to a younger audience.

According to the article "[The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families](#)," authors conclude social media allows its users, particularly children, to harvest their individuality and grow through connecting with other like-minded users on these various platforms. With platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, users are given a plethora of options to communicate and interact that vary among the differing age groups. Depending on which platform the user is interacting through, his depiction of self will change.

Since the eruption of social media, users have been directly affected by the cultures that are melded on the numerous platforms they have access to. When this happens, a new culture is

formed, thus creating almost a new digital world for its users that is quite overwhelming; with this digital world comes standards for its users to govern themselves by which differs between each platform. As aforementioned, users of each social media platform—Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—tailor their behaviors and words differently between outlets because of the contrasts between the platforms.

If social media manipulates human behavior in such a way that affects their behaviors between outlets, then it is safe to say those behaviors, or at least thought processes inhibited by the social media, are carried over into the non-virtual realm. Furthermore, these behaviors and thought processes developed by social media are easier adopted by adolescent users rather than adults. For example, an adult who uses Instagram is most likely not going to reference meme culture or know a lot about the Kardashian/Jenner family because those particular fields do not target older age ranges. Aspects of social media that target the 55-64 age range consist of things like videos, recipes, and news articles. These things are found and shared easiest to their users on Facebook. Although they could be shared on Twitter, Instagram, or even another outlet, if shared on Facebook, there is an immediate access to photos, an auto-play feature on videos, and direct links with page previews users can follow to other websites.

Because of this immediate access to communication and media sharing, there is the ever-growing concern of social media bringing out the worst in its users. Instant messaging capabilities allow social media users to send literally anything to anyone immediately. Created as a convenience and add-on for some sites, including Facebook, this feature creates a universal method of communication amongst its users. Additionally, social media outlets also give their users the freedom to post whatever they choose; sometimes that freedom is taken too far, and

users post derogatory or NSFW material however, the freedom to post is more or less a right on social media. This freedom to post often gets taken advantage of by other users, and various types of online harassment occur.

Social media allows its users to post essentially whatever they want, thus allowing them to create an online presence. Who users portray themselves as often differs from who they are in the real world; as aforementioned, portrayal between even the platforms differs. For example, a 21-year-old male will definitely approach Twitter differently than Facebook. Within this particular age group, there is a meshing of meme culture, pop culture, current events and news happenings, as well as common interests all to follow and keep up with on Twitter. Contrasting, Facebook will also expose this user to all of these things; however, it's only as his friends share or like them that they'll show up on his timeline, so the user is really relying on his friends to share common interests with him.

This example of the slight difference between a user's exposure to material on Twitter and Facebook explains the differences in what the user himself puts out for his followers, or friends. If this particular user is on Twitter, he can directly tailor what he follows and the information he is taking in. On Facebook, however, he must rely on friends to give him the media on his wall, and those friends rely on their friends, and so on. When the user has direct control over the media he takes in, such as on Twitter, he is also in control of the media he puts out, and can post in full confidence that he is tweeting in accordance with his followers. On Facebook, the user must take a few things into consideration: he is using a less-immediate platform of sharing, there is no longer a character limit, and his audience is much broader because Facebook is much more user-friendly, especially to older age groups.

Using the same example, a 21-year-old male, a comparison should also be made between Instagram and Twitter. Facebook and Instagram are very different—Facebook is very social-inhibiting and allows its users to chat, post statuses, share photos and videos, and even livestream videos. Instagram is literally only for posting photos and videos; most recently, the outlet has added a “story” feature where users are given the capability to add photos to a 24-hour long profile. The outlet also allows its users to direct message others however, its primary intention is not for communication, it’s for directly sharing photos and videos. Similarly, Twitter allows its users to share thoughts and other 140-character long updates with their followers as a news-like source.

Twitter is a lot like Instagram in the sense that it was created for one purpose, acting as a news source for its users. Just as Instagram enables immediate photo and video sharing, Twitter enables the immediate sharing of information in 140 characters or less. Additionally, Twitter also allows news and link sharing via embedded articles within tweets as well as photo and video sharing. What is unique to Twitter, though, is the users’ capability to share these different media with a tweet attached, and their followers can then retweet the entire comprisal of media and tweet. Because of Twitter’s immediacy and simplified Timeline, this source allows all its users to come together on one platform and share multiple streams of consciousness with the possibility of sharing some of those streams.

Social media’s sole purpose is to connect its users and create another dimension for them to interact with each other. Sometimes reality is really difficult to directly communicate in, whether it be because of long distance between users, social anxieties, or even certain disabilities. Social media creates connections and multiple platforms for its users to perform

upon, and these platforms can sometimes mold who its users are as people in reality due to the various pressures created by aspects of social media.