A Teenager's View on Social Media

Written by an actual teen

I read technology articles quite often and see plenty of authors attempt to dissect or describe the teenage audience, especially in regards to social media. However, I have yet to see a teenager contribute their voice to this discussion.   This is where I would like to provide my own humble opinion.

For transparency, I am a 19-year-old male attending The University of Texas at Austin.   I am extremely interested in social media's role in our society as well as how it is currently evolving.   Thus, the views I provide here are my own, but do stem from observation of not only my own habits but my peers' habits as well.

This article will not use any studies, data, sources, etc.   This is because you can easily get that from any other technology news website and analyze from there. I'm here to provide a different view based off of my life in this "highly coveted" age bracket.   That being said, I'm not an expert at this by a long shot and I'm sure there will be data that disproves some of the points I make, but this is just what I've noticed.

I think the best way to approach this would be to break it down by social media network and the observations/viewpoints I've gathered over the years.

First, Facebook.   In short, many have nailed this on the head.   It's dead to us. Facebook is something we all got in middle school because it was cool but now is seen as an awkward family dinner party we can't really leave.   It's weird and can even be annoying to have Facebook at times.   That being said, if you **don't** have Facebook, that's even more weird and annoying.   Weird because of the social pressure behind the question, "Everyone has Facebook, why don't you?" and annoying because you'll have to answer that to just about everyone in classes you meet who makes an attempt to friend you or find you on there.

Facebook is often used by us mainly for its group functionality.   I know plenty of classmates who only go on Facebook to check the groups they are part of and then quickly log off.   In this part Facebook shines—groups do not have the same complicated algorithms behind them that the Newsfeed does.   It is very easy to just see the new information posted on the group without having to sift through tons of posts and advertising you don't really care about.

Messaging on Facebook is also extremely popular among our age group, mainly because they provide the means to talk to those people who you weren't really comfortable with asking for their number but comfortable enough to send them a friend request.

Facebook is often the jumping-off point for many people to try to find you online, simply because everyone around us has it.   If I met you one time at some party, I'm not going to try to check Twitter or Instagram to find out who you are. Instead, many opt for the ease of Facebook and the powerful search functionality that gives you results of people who you actually have a chance of knowing.

Instagram is by far the most used social media outlet for my age group. Please note the verbiage there—it is the most *used* social media outlet.   Meaning, although the most people are on Facebook, we actually post stuff on Instagram.   It's always fascinating to me to see a friend with 1500 friends on Facebook only get 25 likes on a photo yet on Instagram (where she has 800 followers) she gets 253.   I have a few ideas as to why this could happen:

- I'm not terrified whenever I like something on Instagram that it will show up in someone's Newsfeed and they'll either screenshot that I liked it or reference it later. The same goes for commenting.

- I am not as pressured to follow someone back on Instagram, meaning my feed is normally comprised of content I actually want to see.   That being said, I will come back and scroll through an application that has content I enjoy rather than one where I have to find the occasional diamond in the rough.

- The content on Instagram is usually of higher quality.   People take time to edit their photos with filters, use different brightness/contrast settings (it's even one of the steps to posting a photo), etc., to make the pictures look the best they possibly can. This means the content on Instagram is normally "better" (photo-wise), so I am more likely to go back to the application.

- Instagram hasn't been flooded with the older generation yet, meaning it's "hip" and "cool" to the younger crowd.   However, it is popular enough that if you have a smartphone, it's almost unheard of for you not to have Instagram, if not to take pictures, but to at least tag people in photos.

- Another point: tagging.   I don't have to constantly check Instagram to make sure I wasn't tagged in any awkward or bad photos.   That's because *you can't easily see them in your feed*, making the whole experience seem way more private.   Am I looking weird in a photo you posted?   Who cares—I can just delete the tag if I really am that upset about it without fear that my friends from another social circle (who don't follow you) will get to it first.   I know Facebook has the ability to let you check every single photo tagged of you before it appears on your profile, but many people I know do not have that enabled or know it even exists.

- People do not post 10,000 times a day on Instagram.   Many are much more polite about posting, either doing once a day, a few times a week, etc.   This means that there isn't a constant flow of content being shoved down my throat every time I open the application, and it is possible to be "caught up" with my Instagram feed.

- There are no links on Instagram, meaning I'm not being constantly spammed by the same advertisement, horrible gossip news article, or Buzzfeed listicle about the '*21 Pictures That Will Restore Your Faith in Humanity.*'

Those are some reasons why many people my age tend to *use* Instagram more than they do Facebook.   Everything about the application makes it less commercialized and more focused on the content, meaning more teens are inclined to visit it.   When we do visit the application it is a much more pleasant experience so we are more inclined to Like and interact with the posts more.   This increases our interaction with the application, meaning we will use it more, etc.

Facebook gets all of the photos we took—the good, the bad, etc—while Instagram just gets the **one** that really summed up the event we went to.   It is much more selective, and honestly people spend more time on the captions to make them relevant/funny.   On Facebook we just throw up everything we got so people can tag each other and show our family members that we're still alive.

Many of those younger than me (10–16 years old) who I've talked to about this matter don't even have a Facebook—Instagram is all that they need……..

Snapchat is quickly becoming the most used social media network, especially with the advent of My Story.   If I could break down a party for you in social media terms, here's how it would pan out:

- You post yourself getting ready for the party, going to the party, having fun at the party, leaving at the end of the party, and waking up the morning after the party on Snapchat.

- On Facebook you post the cute, posed pictures you took with your friends at the party with a few candids (definitely no alcohol in these photos).

- On Instagram you pick the cutest one of the bunch to post to your network.

Snapchat is where we can really be ourselves while being attached to our social identity.   Without the constant social pressure of a follower count or Facebook friends, I am not constantly having these random people shoved in front of me. Instead, Snapchat is a somewhat intimate network of friends who I don't care if they see me at a party having fun.

On no other social network is it acceptable to post an "I'm soooo bored" photo besides Snapchat.   There aren't likes you have to worry about or comments—it's all taken away. S napchat has **a lot less social pressure** attached to it compared to every other popular social media network out there.   This is what makes it so addicting and liberating.   If I don't get any likes on my Instagram photo or Facebook post within 15 minutes, you can sure bet I'll delete it.   Snapchat isn't like that at all and really focuses on creating the Story of a day in your life, not some filtered/altered/handpicked highlight.   It's the real you.

Another quick aside about Snapchat—I only know a handful of people (myself included) that believe Snapchat does delete your photos.   Everyone else I know believes that Snapchat has some secret database somewhere with all of your photos on it.   While I will save that debate for another day, it is safe to say that when photos are "leaked" or when there's controversy about security on the app, we honestly do not really care.   We aren't sending pictures of our Social Security Cards here, we're sending selfies and photos with us having 5 chins………

https://medium.com/backchannel/a-teenagers-view-on-social-media-1df945c09ac6#.3o0aexju9

An Old Fogey's Analysis of a Teenager's View on Social Media

Dana Boyd

Let me put this bluntly: teens' use of social media is significantly shaped by race and class, geography and cultural background.   Andrew's depiction of his peers' use of social media is a depiction of a segment of the population, not a full portrait of today's youth.   I'm not saying he's wrong; I'm saying his story is incomplete and the incompleteness is important.   Andrew is very visible about where he stands.   He's very clear about his passion for technology (and his love of blogging on Medium should be a big ole hint to anyone who missed his byline).   He's also a college student and talks about his peers as being obviously on path to college.   But as readers, let's not forget that only about half of US 19-year-olds are in college.   He talks about WhatsApp being interesting when you go abroad, the practice of "going abroad" is itself privileged, with less than 1/3 of US citizens even holding passports. Furthermore, this renders invisible the ways in which many US-based youth use WhatsApp to communicate with family and friends who live outside of the US. Immigration isn't part of his narrative……

I don't for a second fault Andrew for not having a perspective beyond his peer group.   But **I do fault both the tech elite and journalists for not thinking critically through what he posted** and presuming that a single person's experience can speak on behalf of an entire generation.   The fact that professionals prefer anecdotes from people like us over concerted efforts to understand a demographic as a whole is shameful.   More importantly, it's downright dangerous.   It shapes what the tech industry builds and invests in, what gets promoted by journalists, and what gets legitimized by institutions of power.   This is precisely why and how the tech industry is complicit in the increasing structural inequality that is plaguing our society…..

https://medium.com/message/an-old-fogeys-analysis-of-a-teenagers-view-on-social-media-5be16981034d#.tnm6abyj5