WHAT EFFECTS ARE SOCIAL MEDIA HAVING ON TODAY'S TEENAGERS?

The teenage years represent a time of growth, physically, emotionally and mentally. Regardless of the period in history that this growth is taking place, all human beings must go through the process that takes them from being a young child to a grown adult. As young people begin the search for their own identity, the potential external influences that can be had on them are too many to count. In today's global society this statement becomes all the more true, as young people are not only influenced by their immediate physical surroundings, but by all of the things that they have access to via the internet.

The creation and growth of the internet has begun to influence the nature of human interaction. Today's societies can be defined by groups of individuals who were born before the internet existed and those who were born after; by those who have internet access, and those who don't. This division between groups can become even greater when one takes into consideration the following; some people have chosen to embrace the benefits that the internet can bring by using it as a positive tool for research and communication, while others feel that the access to internet is providing an overabundance of information that people (especially younger ones) are unable to properly process and understand how to use effectively.

Internet communication has given rise to social media. Social media can be defined as "the social interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks"[1]. Programs and applications like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube, and more have given people a forum to interact with others in the virtual world who, in reality, can be anyone from anywhere on the planet. The ability to communicate in this way can be empowering for those sending the message, especially teenagers, as there will likely always be an audience for the message they would like to send. However, these tools can also provide the ability for illusion, as there is no certainty that those receiving the message are who they claim to be.

As these social media tools continue to be introduced at an alarming rate, there is not enough time to create a set of social norms, values, moral rules and/or principals that are directly related to them. In other words, it is hard to determine what is the right or wrong way to use these tools properly. The pre internet generation attempts to place their standards and morals onto how to effectively use these tools however, by the time the message is heard, the social media tool often becomes obsolete. The internet generation have not yet developed an understanding or appreciation for social norms and values that extend beyond their immediate social circle. Often times the virtual world is far more real to them, than the physical world that they occupy.

Teenagers are being given social media tools to help them feel in control, a feeling that has been desired by teens of any generation. They can create their own identity (or identities) and send it out into the virtual world in an attempt to be heard. These messages can be sent unedited and uninfluenced by others in a variety of formats, allowing for a feeling of true self expression. These tools have the ability to provide instantaneous feedback as the number of people who "Like", "Follow", "View", "Share", "Re-Post", or "Re-Tweet", amongst other things, are counted and seen by all. The challenge for teens is to understand the value and meaning behind all of the feedback. Unfortunately, in spite of being connected to so many virtually, it is nearly impossible to get an honest interpretation of the feedback because of the physical distance between the person sending the message and the person receiving the message.

As a teenagers' identity is often generated through validation, the number of "Likes" etc. that are potentially going to be received, often influence what teens choose to "post" and "share" via social media. Unfortunately (or fortunately depending on your perspective) the prevalent message in today's society is that reckless and/or silly behavior along with flaunting sexuality are what garners the most attention. As teens often mimic what they interpret as being popular or cool, these sexual images and silly behaviors are what is being posted by teens everywhere.

Not long ago, it was believed that teenagers were being heavily influenced by the behavior of celebrities exclusively. Traditional media (magazines, television, movies and music) were considered to be at the centre of the "problem" by highlighting the negative behaviours of the celebrity "role models". Although these media formats still exist, the ability for teens to provide their own content (pictures, videos, etc.) via social media that can be seen by other teens, has allowed for them to become like celebrities themselves. This interaction between teens and "celebrities" (real or otherwise) provides further validation, and encourages them to continue along the same path.

The first social media network was created in 1994. It will take quite some time before we find ourselves in a generation where everyone has been living with, and exposed to the positives and negatives of social networking. It is not until everyone has had the opportunity to see some of the long term repercussions of the choices being made that a set of norms can be established. Until that time we will be unable to identify the values that will truly reflect the needs of a generation. The question remains, at that point will those values still be relevant, or will they become obsolete due to new technology which we have yet to see?

NAME: _____

Directions: You are asked to write a minimum of 1 page assessment (350 words min.) of how teenagers are using and affected by one or more forms of social media today

1. What is the Social Media Tool that you have chosen? Why have you chosen it? Describe how is it used?

2. Using some ethical concepts in your response, describe the effect social media tool has on teens. Your response may include some of the following:

   a. Positive or Negative effects on teenagers
      i. Provide Examples
   b. Reports in the media about the influence on teenagers
   c. How does the social media tool affect you personally?

   ➢ Use the space below to write your draft
   ➢ Your draft must be handed in
   ➢ Your assessment must be typed with a cover page

Name of Social Media Tool _____

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