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Social Media: Its Effects on Female Digital Natives

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Abstract

With the presence and popularity of social media at a non-stop increase, there is a plethora of research aimed to decide if this digital world is positive or negative for society. This research takes a narrower approach as it looks at how social media specifically affects females who have grown up having access to and using it. Female digital natives are positively impacted by the relationships, self-concept, and body positiveness that social media builds. However, they are negatively impacted by the harmful effects that come from cyberbullying and self-image issues. Do the impacts of the positives outweigh the negatives, or vice versa? Is social media good or bad, or can it be both? A survey taken by 64 females ages 14-35 shows that even females feel split on this answer with 55% of females finding it more positive and 45% finding it more negative. Even so, each of these females are not blind to the opposing argument. This survey and an interview conducted establish that these social media users have experienced both the advantages and disadvantages of their online worlds. Consequently, having a clear-cut explanation is nearly impossible. The fact is that social media is not going anywhere, and it is essential that female digital natives are aware of the power social media has on them and others. Taking this knowledge into consideration, it is up to females to decide what kind of role social media will play in their lives.
Social Media: Its Effects on Female Digital Natives

Social media is nothing but a series of likes, comments, and shares, right? Not exactly. There is so much more to the digital world than meets the eye. Social media affects most of the population that owns a smartphone, but it especially affects the lives of digital natives. A digital native in this context refers to someone who has grown up during a time of having access to and using social media. More specifically, this includes the millennial and Gen-Z generations, which together make up almost half of the US population (US Population by Age and Generation, 2018). Unlike older generations, digital natives are accustomed to a unique way of communicating digitally. So, what is it that makes social media so important to digital natives?

Olivia Valentine (2018) from Global Web Index explains that the number one motivation behind using social media is staying in touch with what friends are doing. The second is staying up to date with news and current events, the third is to fill spare time, and the fourth is to find funny content. These reasons seem simple enough on the surface, innocent actually. But when looking into the research behind the effects on those who use social media, these reasons fade away. What’s left is the impact of them, and that is what truly becomes the forefront of this whole phenomenon.

While both genders are affected by this new type of lifestyle, this research will dive into the ways that social media affects females especially. A survey taken of 64 girls between the ages of 14 and 25 showed that 100% of them owned some sort of social media account. On top of that, the survey shows that these girls checked the account daily (Ewald, 2019). This demonstrates that these social media accounts are not just apps collecting dust on a female’s phone. Actually, “the proportion of teens who use social media multiple times a day has doubled over the past six years” (Rideout & Robb, 2018). The constant interaction with them makes
social media’s effects inevitable whether an individual admits it or not. While social media can be a very positive thing for female digital natives, it can also become very damaging if it is not used for the right reasons. This research will dig deeper into the specific advantages and disadvantages of this social-media-centered world that the last couple generations have created for themselves. It will also present advertising in relation to its relevancy in social media and the major role it has played in affecting the lives of female digital natives.

**CYBERBULLYING AND ITS EFFECTS**

One of the biggest negatives of social media that has given it such a bad reputation is cyberbullying. It is a topic that has become so serious that forty-eight states that have laws against it (Team Rawhide, 2018). What’s alarming is that a female’s chance of being cyberbullied is double a male’s (Team Rawhide, 2018). While girls are stereotyped to be the more “drama filled” gender, this statistic is eye-opening. If individuals aren’t experiencing it themselves, they are definitely witnessing it. In fact, “59% of U.S. teens have been bullied or harassed online” (Anderson, 2018) and “70% of teens say they have seen someone be mean or cruel to another person on social media” (Team Rawhide, 2018). The sad part is that 95% of them admit to doing nothing about it and knowing others that ignore it as well (Team Rawhide, 2018). One might suggest that the logic of it all just isn’t there. Knowing something is wrong, experiencing the wrong, seeing the wrong, and still choosing to do nothing. Why can’t it just end altogether?

The fact of the matter is that bullying online is so unique compared to bullying in person. A platform is provided—one that can make the smallest rumor spread like wildfire in a matter of minutes. What makes cyberbullying so harmful to females is the “stress to face an anonymous perpetrator and the potential for the victimization to be witnessed by a larger audience of peers”
Being a victim of in-person bullying allows one to see their bully and see who is witnessing it as well. But how does one stop a cyberbully when that cyberbully has gained an army of others—an army behind a screen that’s ready to pounce at their next victim? With the power technology has, this army could be a network of people the victim doesn’t even know!

Using the comfort of being behind a screen where they will not have to face confrontation, users get courageous by saying awful words that probably would have never been said in person. Claire Callahan (2019) explains further by saying that “girls are socialized to behave in a less confrontational manner than boys, and thus they often express their aggression in more underhanded ways.” Additionally, with the many different social media platforms, females are at risk to be bullied from many different channels. Unsurprisingly, due to the statistics leading up to this, girls are more likely than boys to experience multiple types of bullying—more than double the boys when it comes to “being the target of at least four of these online behaviors” (Anderson, 2018). This has to do with the fact that female cyberbullying is normally geared towards the destruction of relationships—exactly what females thrive on (Callahan, 2019). Online bullying is way more psychological in nature because of the obvious lack of confrontation that in-person bullying provides. The manipulation of females on other female’s minds is long lasting and very impactful.

This seemingly endless cycle of cyberbullying has led to concerning repercussions. For females affected that are still in school, there is a direct correlation of cyberbullying and school absences. When “64% of students who claim to have been cyberbullied explain that it negatively impacted their feelings of safety and ability to learn in school” (Team Rawhide, 2018), is it no secret why attendance is down. No one wants to go to a place where they don’t feel welcome. As a teenage girl, feeling a sense of belonging is already hard enough to find without social media’s
impact. It’s no wonder why females wouldn’t want to go to a place where they have to be around a cyberbully that has been causing emotional damage to them (Callahan, 2019).

Depression is among the most common side effects of cyberbullying. Females demonstrate higher chance of depression even if the bullying happens sparingly. This just goes to show that even the smallest of occurrences effect and stick with girls (Callahan, 2019). These depressed feelings caused by cyberbullying lead to extreme feelings of loneliness. The scariest consequence of them all is suicide. Cyberbullying has shown to lead to more suicidal thoughts than traditional bullying with “bullied kids being two times more likely to commit suicide than non-bullied kids” with 1 in 10 attempting it (Rawhide Team, 2018). For any girl, but especially a teenage girl, the littlest hit to their pride or reputation can cause a domino effect of dark, permanent thoughts. What is online does not just stay online but follows a female wherever she goes—even into adulthood. Is social media itself pushing females to the point where they don’t want to live anymore? No, but putting social media in the hands of the immature teenage minds comes with a lot of risk that needs to be taken seriously.

**BODY IMAGE ISSUES AND ITS EFFECTS**

Imagine being a female digital native who grew up looking at other women’s highlight reels all day. It is important to emphasize “highlight reel” because that is exactly what social media feeds are—the best possible pictures posted to make it seem like an individual is living their best life ever. This includes women posting pictures of themselves at their best angles with photoshopped edits—blurring their blemishes away, trimming their waistlines, giving their faces the perfect filter to make their features pop. Is presenting only the best version of oneself on social media really a crime? No, but that doesn’t mean that it doesn’t continually affect women
every day as they compare themselves to the other women they see on their screens—even the ones that know photos can be fake!

That is why body dissatisfaction becomes such a huge problem when it comes to social media. Body image and self-esteem are things that develop at a very young age. It’s at this critical time that a female decides how she is going to feel about herself, and in return, how the world will portray her. No pressure, right? “Over 50 percent of 9- and 10-year-old girls feel better about themselves if they are on a diet, even though the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that only 18 percent of adolescents are really overweight” (Farrar, 2014). At this age, the only thing these young girls should be worried about is their homework. Because of unattainable goals given to these girls at young age because of their exposure to social media, they are now choosing to diet when the numbers show that they clearly shouldn’t have to. This is when the obsession begins of building a profile that upholds an image of looking nothing short of perfect. A study done evaluating 100 seventh grade girls showed that the more invested and up to date a girl was with her social media, the lower her self-esteem was (Makwana, Lee, Parkin & Farmer, 2018). This whole process now seems counter-productive. Girls spend ample time editing and sharing their day to day lives with other people thinking it will give them personal satisfaction, and they end up feeling worse about themselves.

This leads to the “social grooming” phenomenon. Social grooming is described as “liking, visiting, and commenting on friends’ photos” (Makwana, Lee, Parkin & Farmer, 2018). This infatuation with others’ posts and feeling the need to interact with so many photos daily makes a female equally focused on others doing the same for her. Associate designer at Ann Taylor, Emily Bryngelson opened up about her social media experience in an interview with Elle Magazine. She admits that she will delete a picture of herself that she posted if it does not
receive enough attention or “likes” (Makwana, Lee, Parkin & Farmer, 2018). The anxiety that some females face when it comes to social media is unbearable. To them, social media puts them on a stage where everyone is watching. If their performance does not produce the right results, they feel they have failed. There is even such a thing as the “100 Club” for teen girls. This is the need for them to get at least 100 likes on a picture they post, or the humiliation of not getting those likes will make them take it down. (Choate, 2015). It has caused females to have a need for instant gratification about their appearance. When that instant gratification is not received, the not-good-enough, self-critical feelings settle in.

In an era of self-comparison, it is no surprise that eating disorders in females have continued to be a serious problem. While social media itself doesn’t directly cause these disorders, it has a heavy influence on them. Eating Disorder Recovery Specialists is a meal support and coaching program that is nationwide. Its founder, Greta Gleissner, explains that as the use of social media has rapidly climbed, it has become “increasingly difficult to avoid the constant pressure surrounding the ‘ideal body type’” (Gleissner, 2019). The problem with this is that defining a “perfect body type” is nearly impossible. There truly is no perfect body type when there are so many differing opinions on what is beautiful. Females are setting themselves up for constant disappointment as they try to achieve something that doesn’t exist. The National Eating Disorders Association (2018) conducted a study that proved “social media use is linked to self-objectification.” It explains that using social media for just thirty minutes a day can change the way someone sees their body and that they are “significantly more likely to internalize a drive for thinness and engage in body surveillance.” This obsessive monitoring of oneself and self-comparison is exactly what leads to anorexia being the “third most chronic illness among adolescents” (Eating Disorder Statistics, 2018). The media has a force that is extremely
underestimated. Clearly its control is guiding many females in the opposite direction that it should be. But for as powerfully as the media can harm some, maybe it is possible that it has just as much power to do good.

**BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**

While many are under the impression that social media is hurting the population’s relationships, facts say otherwise. “Experts say that social media helps relationships about 13% more than it hurts them” (Tucker, 2019). Research also points to the fact that it makes females feel less lonely (Rideout & Robb, 2018). Seeing the positives of relationship building in an online context explains why so many female digital natives choose to use it when creating and maintaining their relationships.

According to Larry Magid (2015), “64% say they’ve made an online friend via social media,” with girls a lot more likely to do so at 78 percent verses boys at 52 percent. So, why is the idea of online friends so attractive to females in comparison to males? Girls have the tendency to want to get to know their friends’ lives better, quicker, and at a deeper level. Social media speeds up the process of meeting a new friend because an individual’s social media profile is constantly updating its followers on their day to day activities and milestones. According to Amanda Lenhart (2015) from Pew Research Center, girls start to feel more connected to each other’s lives even if they are not physically present for the actual moment.

While it is a great platform to meet new friends, it is also one of the best ways to keep existing friendships thriving. Almost all, 94 percent, of teens say that they “spend time with friends on social media” (Lenhart, 2015). Notice the worse of words in this finding. People aren’t just interacting with friends or keeping up with people, but feel that social media helps them “spend time” with their friends. This quality communication can help friends stay close whether
it is squeezing that time into a busy schedule or helping physically distant friends stay connected to each other. Staying close to a network of online friends means easier access to emotional support when times are challenging. With 73 percent of girls feeling like social media has helped them feel supported at a low point in their life (Lenhard, 2015), it is easy to see why female digital natives find social media a positive in their lives.

When practicing this relationship building in one’s personal life, females can then use it as a tool to help them build a network of professional connections. (Shultz, 2014). With the career world being extremely online nowadays, finding a job is truly all about who a person knows which makes these professional relationships so vital. This is because “in a professional setting, relationship-building helps create opportunities for individuals to collaborate, idea share, get feedback and reduce stress through social support” (Shultz, 2014). Female digital natives already have so much practice when it comes to interacting online throughout their lives, that this will give them a level-up in the professional setting. These authentic social media profiles give insight into the background of an individual and validate to others that an individual is who they represent themselves to be. The aftermath of this is that connections made online become just as esteemed as in-person connections (Schultz, 2014). Not everyone met online is going to be a best friend, of course, but there is value that comes from any connection made through social media, big or small. For example, “weak ties can hold great benefits; such as a greater diversity of perspectives and thus more innovative collaboration and idea generation” (Schultz, 2014). Strong connections that an individual has are normally with people they know very well and think alike with. While these connections are beneficial, there is sometimes greater value in connections that are going to challenge one’s views and open one’s mind. This professional brainstorming and collaborating aspect of social media is a concept that not many people think of right off the bat.
Social networks provide the opportunity and platform for professionals to “publicly recognize successes” which “increases that party’s sense of belonging, self-worth and security” (Schultz, 2014). In return, this makes females more motivated to keep up with their online lives as they see it affecting them so positively.

**BUILDING SELF CONCEPT**

After the information of self-image destruction was presented previously, how can social media possibly be good? If used the correct way, it can be just that. Rideout & Robb (2018) explain that there is a power to social media. With this power, one can “radiate kindness and goodness and gratitude through posts.” This includes the potential for social media to strengthen females’ self-concept. New York Times best-selling author and educator, Julie Lythcott, (as cited in Ridout & Robb, 2018) explains how social media helped her find herself. As a child, she struggled with very low self-esteem. Through the power of social media, she was able to connect with a community of people that were going through the same struggles as her. She was able to find healing in these connections and suggests to others to do the same. So why does one need social media for this? What happened to this “irreplaceable” in-person connection that so many people say is lacking nowadays? The thing is, Julie was able to connect with people she would have never met in her normal life. Social media has a unique way of uniting people through different channels, groups, hashtags, and shares. Because of these lasting relations Julies created, she “began to heal as a black woman and finally love herself.” President of the Child Mind Institute, Harold Koplewicz (as cited in Rideout & Robb, 2018) describes this concept as well when he explains that many females benefit from “interacting freely and practicing social skills in a safe place online” with a supportive community. It’s interesting to think of online conversation strengthening social skills when one would instinctively think oppositely. Like
previously mentioned, the nature of females is to be less confrontational. While there are many female personalities that are exceptions to that notion, social media provides an option for females to interact with people in a way that minimizes pressure. Online, individuals have more time to think about their interactions—getting the opportunity to ask themselves who they are, how they want to be portrayed, and how they will succeed in that. It’s almost like an individual’s trial run.

Supporting this idea is Uhls, Ellison, & Subrahmanyam (2017) saying that those who “communicated more online had greater self-concept clarity, which is the ability to understand who one is clearly and stably.” It’s valid that the ability to create and post on a personal profile gets one thinking more deeply about who they truly are. It is “thus a good forum to practice skills related to identity development.” Think of social media as a résumé and life interaction as the interview. When constructing a résumé, one reflects on the most positive things about themselves, digging deep into finding those focal points that make them unique. This process takes time and careful consideration as they are deciding what they want their future employer to see in them. But that’s only a steppingstone before they must execute who they are in person to the interviewer. This is what social media is essentially doing but in a more laid-back manner of course. It is challenging an individual to build a profile exclusive to them, showcasing who they are and what they’re about. After all, “social media provides safe identity exploration” (Uhls, Ellison, & Subrahmanyam, 2017). Thisenforces autonomy in a person and can be a fun way to figure out how to express oneself. Then, because “today’s online environments reflect, complement and reinforce off-line relationships, practices and processes” (Uhls, Ellison, & Subrahmanyam, 2017), it’s important to stay true to that profile and identity that a person has created for themselves after going out into the world and interacting with others.
Along with building self-concept, social media has a way of simply making females feel better about themselves. Take “selfies” for example. 64% of females say that looking at the picture they posted of themselves on social media gives them more confidence. (Dahl, 2014). A selfie that is posted is normally a picture that an individual feels good about. But there is a process behind the picture taking and posting process. Deciding whether or not to post a selfie to the world can cause anxiety to females. It takes confidence and courage for a female to share what they think is beautiful without knowing if others will think the same. 40 percent of females say they like them because it helps “being their best face to the world” (Dahl, 2014). In a world where a lot of things cannot be controlled, females are attracted to an entity that they can. By controlling the way others see them and how they see themselves, women feel empowered. Social media is not only just a way of expression, but a way to reach self-efficacy (Dahl, 2014). Of course, having a social media account isn’t going to instantly give females unshakable confidence every day of their lives, but it is a tool that can be used in the process of females learning to love themselves.

BODY POSITIVE MOVEMENT

So, the real question is just that. Can social media help females truly love themselves? Research has shown that social media has a huge hold on hurting body images. But many believe this is turning around with the Body Positive Movement. This movement is drawing awareness to “normal bodies” all over the nation in hopes that this positivity will drown out all the unrealistic expectations and negativity that makes females ever question themselves.

The movement “aims to challenge narrow beauty ideals and encourage acceptance and appreciation of bodies of all shapes, sizes, and appearances” (Cohen, Slater, & Fardouly, 2019).
This is accomplished through the works of everyday people, but more notably by influencers and celebrities. Actresses, singers, and models like Jennifer Lawrence, Amy Schumer, Demi Lovato, Chrissy Tiegen, and Ashley Graham are some of the standouts that go beyond their work to bring self-acceptance to attention. When females see these successful people opening up about their own insecurities and telling them it is okay to not be perfect, it slowly begins to resonate with them.

Body positive posts, unrealistic “ideal” body posts, and content neutral posts from Instagram were presented to 195 women ages 18-30. Their body satisfaction and mood were rated before and after each viewing. The results of this study state that “women who viewed body positive posts felt more satisfied with their bodies, were more appreciative of the unique functions and health of their bodies and had a more positive mood” (Cohen, Slater, & Fardouly, 2019). In contrast, “those who viewed idealized Instagram posts had poorer body image and mood” (Cohen, Slater, & Fardouly, 2019). When females can actually see themselves in the posts that they view, the gap between the beauty ideal and the individual closes in. It is up to the social media user to decide what accounts to follow for their own mental health. Honing in on following people with genuine intentions that want to share their truth and their real self is essential. This will ensure that female digital natives stay positive, and in return, empower each other.

**ADVERTISING**

Finally, one of the biggest things affecting female digital natives, in regard to social media, are advertisements. According to Adobe’s State of Digital Advertising 2018 report, “50 percent of Gen-Z and 42 percent of millennials think social media is the most relevant channel for ads” (as cited in Cooper, 2018). Clearly, social media is the exact market for companies to
target female digital natives. Companies are definitely seeing the value and return on it too, which is why they have begun heavily budgeting for it. Market News Updates (2016) informs that the money going into ads on social media grows by 20 percent every year. This new advertising phenomenon has pushed companies to be new and innovative with their marketing. Putting ads into the social media feed has allowed advertising to “blend more seamlessly into the news feed, and therefore make them more effective than interruptive banner formats, especially on mobile devices” (Market News Updates, 2016). Because these ads are not the in-your-face type, consumers are led to subconsciously be affected by the advertisement rather than annoyed with a message getting in the way of what they are trying to accomplish on their phone. A female digital native could stop and pay more attention to the ad and what it’s selling or scroll through it more quickly. Either way, they are influenced by it whether they like it or not.

Where ads are not affecting females, there are social media influencers. Social media influencers are people that companies pay to sell their product or service. Since it is coming from an actual person’s account, it makes advertising more personal. Normally, a social media influencer “maintains an audience of at least 10,000 followers on one platform, if not more”, and uses this audience to “brand themselves within a specific industry by promoting content that coincides with their values and interests” (Meltzer, 2018). Since female digital natives are affected only by the influencers they already follow, it’s a given that these are individuals they already trust and respect as well. This gives the pictures and videos the influencer posts for a company that much more value to females. According to Emma Ockerman (2016) from Time Magazine, the girls she talked to think the whole thing is actually clever. Seeing a product being used by a favorite celebrity without a doubt would make someone want to know more about that product. One of her interviewees explains that it doesn’t mean she will go out and buy the
product right away, but that she will still listen to the celebrity’s opinion regardless. This seems manipulative and annoying to have ads on one’s feed all the time, but the positive is that the ads are able to reach a wide variety of audiences; a lot of which who are in the market for what they are being sold. Meltzer (2018) of CBS News predicts that it will be “rare to find a brand that doesn’t include influencers within its ad budget” in the future. After all, “social networks are the biggest source of inspiration for consumer purchases with 37 percent of consumers finding purchase inspiration through the channel” (Zote, 2019). With this new societal attitude of getting things immediately and at the touch of a fingertip, one can see the logic behind this hypothesis.

**Methodology**

The survey was administered online through NIU Qualtrics. It consisted of 10 questions designed to understand how social media is currently affecting female digital natives. It asked questions pertaining to the nature of their social media use, how positive and negative they felt it was, and how advertising influenced their accounts. The questions allowed for yes or no answers, as well as a couple of questions with other options. These answer choices were selected instead of open-ended questions so that the data collected were more clear-cut. The questions asked were also so direct that an individual would only be able to answer yes or no anyway. The survey was taken by 64 female digital natives ranging from ages 14-35. These women were drawn from various groups around Northern Illinois University and expanded to friends and family of them as well.

The in-person interview completed was given to five female digital natives. These individuals were hand-picked to fulfill the range of ages that were needed for this research. To make sure the Gen-Z to Millennial territory was covered, the five ages that were interviewed were as follows: 14, 18, 24, 29, and 35. The interviewer scheduled meeting times with each
person based on their schedule. They took place in a relaxed environment, a comfy living room, to promote interviewees to speak freely about their experience. The questions were designed to get a deeper insight on how the female digital natives felt about social media as a whole, and their personal use with it. All of the questions were open-ended. Each person’s responses were recorded on a laptop, and their answers were compared together. Since the responses of the females for each question were very similar, their answers were generalized resulting in a combined conclusion for each question.

**Results**

When 64 female digital natives were asked if they owned a social media account, 100% of them said yes. There was also a unanimous result when asked how often they interacted with social media with 100% of them saying they used it daily. Figuring out when their digital lives began, females were asked when they created their first social media account. The graph below demonstrates those results.

This graph exemplifies that most female digital natives made their first account in middle school with 73% of them choosing that option. When asked about the positives of social media, 100% said they felt it had the power to bring people together.
The female’s responses then started to differentiate when diving into deeper questions. The following graph shows the results for the question, “Do you find social media more positive or more negative?”

![Graph showing results for social media positive vs. negative]

As this graph exemplifies, the results are close with 55% thinking social media is more positive and 45% thinking it is more negative. The numbers contributing to people thinking it is more negative might have to do with the fact that 81% of people said they, or someone they know, has felt attacked on social media at some point. Also, that 89% of females admit to wishing they looked like someone else they saw on social media at some time in their digital life. On the other hand, results positively pointed out that 92% of females say they have felt better about themselves based on the responses they got to pictures they posted on social media.

With the advertising geared questions, 53% of the females said they bought something they normally wouldn’t have bought due to a social media influencer promoting it, and 95% of them said they notice advertisements when scrolling through social media.

The five interviewees ranging in ages 14-35 showed extreme similarities across the 4 questions presented to them. The first question asked what they thought the most negative part of social media was. All five expressed their concern for the “fakeness” of it. What they mean is the
unrealistic life other individuals portray on their social media by posting only the positive, sugar-coated, edited events of their life. The problem they expressed with this is that it causes others to compare their lives to these unrealistic and fabricated lives, resulting in people feeling worse about themselves.

The next question asked the females what they thought was the most positive thing about social media. All of their answers explained that connecting with people and ideas brought them the most joy. They said that social media gives individuals the opportunity to stay close with friends and family by sharing the events that are going on in their lives. They also value social media as being the thing that gives them a voice whether that be to spread awareness on a topic close to them, a life tip, or to share a funny story that will bring others joy. They thought that a platform of exposure for amazing travel locations, inspirational stories, and ideas for particular events was also extremely positive.

The next question was personal to them when it asked what they feel they use social media the most for themselves. The overwhelming response was to share what they are doing with others and to stay up to date with what those people are doing as well. One person described it as a world inside the world; an opportunity to feel like one is going somewhere without even leaving their bed. They felt that they feel more connected and heard to the world when they share with others and know what has been going on to the people they care about.

The last question asked if every girl should have social media. The females felt that it depended on how the person was going to be using it. They expressed their concern for vulnerable, low self-esteem individuals that would only use it for self-comparison. They also suggested against it for people that are addicted to what people think of them, who rely on others to make them happy. On the other hand, they suggested it for females that could use it in a
healthy way. They felt that using it healthily included staying connected with others, empowering others, and being authentic. They said that using it in this way provided an entertaining form of communication with the outside world that girls should be a part of!

**Discussion**

These results indicate that females are confused about whether social media is truly positive or negative. The bewilderment comes from the fact that females have numerous positive things to say about it, but also just as many negatives. Because social media is so specific to the individual, it is hard to find concrete evidence to go one way or another. What’s evident from these results is that if a female has access to the internet, they have some sort of social media. Females are starting young, too! With most starting their social media accounts in the critical development stage of middle school, it’s essential that social media is beneficial to the growth of their maturity and doesn’t hinder it.

Overall, females do find social media to be more positive. That doesn’t mean that the concerns with it aren’t real. It just means that females feel that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Possibly, the boost of confidence they receive when getting uplifting messages from people on their posts combats the body image issues they face when comparing themselves to others. Or maybe, the happiness they feel when staying connected to loved ones when distance makes it hard to outweighs the cyberbully that is trying to bring them down.

But even so, one can’t sugar-coat the truly harmful impacts that social media can leave. The results show an overwhelming percentage of people saying they have witnessed attacks on social media. There was also a huge percentage that wished they looked like someone else they saw on social media. Females should be self-loving every day, not logging onto a social media site just to be self-doubting.
A light in all the confusion is that female digital natives feel that social media has the power to bring people together. Whether this is to bring awareness about a topic or empower a group of people, the hope of this unity is what keeps social media alive. Social media influencers have a hand in this as well as they bring awareness to charities they are drawn to. With the social media conversation never ending, the options for togetherness are endless.

It is also a way for consumers to be uniquely influenced by advertisements. Female digital natives become consumers when they go on their daily social media binges. Individuals are seeing advertisements more casually and also having social media influencers sneak in product awareness to their feeds. The results prove that females have been purchasing products that they normally wouldn’t have because of influencers they like. Yes, this is great for companies, but this is also great for female digital natives who are being exposed to more things that interest them.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, social media differently impacts each female that uses it because every female is unique. Does social media have to be good or bad? Can it be both? There are so many gray areas in life that society chooses to accept. Should this be one of them? With the simple fact that its popularity and presence is increasing as one speaks, it’d be foolish to believe there’s even a choice. In the real world, females are constantly faced with having to weed out the negativity in life in order to stay sane. This doesn’t change when it comes to social media. Female digital natives need to be aware of how social media is making an impact on their lives, both positively and negatively, so that they can adjust and be proactive in making sure the experience in their virtual world is a favorable one.
References


adolescents. *Gateway, 140*(2). Retrieved from https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/140/supplement_2/s67


Appendix

Survey Questions

Do you have a social media account (Y/N)?

How often do you interact with social media (Never, Weekly, or Daily)?

Do you feel social media has the power to bring people together (Y/N)?

Do you find social media more positive or more negative?

Have you ever felt better about yourself based on responses you got to pictures you posted on social media (Y/N)?

Have you, or has anyone you know, ever felt attacked on social media (Y/N)?

Have you ever wished you looked like someone you saw on social media(Y/N)?

Have you ever bought something you wouldn’t normally wouldn’t have bought because a social media influencer/celebrity was promoting it (Y/N)?

Do you notice advertisements as you scroll through social media (Y/N)?

When did you make your first social media account (Elementary School, Middle School, or High School)?

Interview Questions

What do you feel is the most negative thing about social media?

What do you feel is the most positive thing about social media?

What do you use social media the most for?

Is social media something every girl should have? Why or why not?