Positive And Negative Sides Of Twitter For Adolescents

Twitter is a social networking site that connects millions of people through sharing 140 character messages. Through the use of hashtags and retweeting, information on the site is able to generate quickly and reach the masses in a rather timely fashion.

Originally, the "microblogging" site created in March of 2006, was going to use a different name until co-founder Jack Dorsey came up with the word "twitter". He believes the term embodied the premise of the site because the goal is to provide "short burst of inconsequential information" similar to the "chirps from birds". However, while the original premise was to just connect friends, the website/app has surpassed such. On their homepage, Twitter uses the slogans "Follow your interests. Hear what people are talking about. Join the conversation. " and "It's what's happening". These slogans directly summarize the purpose but the potential has surpassed such, Twitter for many has become a news and networking source, as well as being a form of social gathering for many.

Twitter is a unique case of a service that appeals to almost everyone's interest, making its audience a rather large pool of individuals. While the app has an age restriction of 13 years old, this does not prevent most secondary students from joining the network and generating their own "twitter handle" in order to connect. By doing a simple search on the website, at the edge of their fingertips users are connected to any information they desire. This leads to large sums of the day being put towards screen time online which has a great influence on the children's development. While there are great advantages to adolescents engaging with Twitter there are also can be detrimental to development. Twitter can expose the youth to negative side-effects through time allotted in daily living to usage, have a poor effect on their self-esteem and ultimately be demeaning a child's mental health, yet when used in proper increments it can be very useful because it allows self-expression, is an effective modernized classroom tool that connects children in a more modernized way.

One of the biggest drawbacks when it comes to having the youth engage with the upcoming technological developments is the negative influence that screen time has on an adolescent. Screen time is simply defined as the amount of time spent using a technological device and has become in many ways inevitable to avoid in daily life, especially for young generations, as technology has integrated itself rather densely within the American society. This is largely due to the fact that mobile smartphone devices are at the point where they are nearly a necessity for daily living. For instance, in 2011, only 4% of a child's screen time was spent on a mobile device however as of 2017, about 35% of a child's screen time is devoted to a mobile device. This increase in accessibility has been proven by studies to be detrimental to human

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development due to the fact that humans primarily experience the world through using their five senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling). When we engage more with technology, getting information from such, the human brain is not being used to the best of its abilities. With children ages 12 through 17 using their phones via text message to communicate more than any other form of communication, including in-person face-to-face interactions the human brain is immensely held back from working to its full potential.

The negative effects of screen time have been an increasingly popular subject of study. The journal Computers in Human Behavior came to results on such based on a group of 6th grade students. When they were removed for five days without technology it was seen that they were "significantly better at reading human emotions than kids who had regular access to phones, televisions and computers". Due to these results organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) are encouraging parents to not expose their children to television or screen exposer until they are older than 2, and even monitoring exposer after their 2nd birthday.

In regards to Twitter, these negative effects of daily use are directly correlated. In a global study known as Unplugged, the International Center for Media and the Public Affairs joined with the Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change to study 1, 000 students from ten countries coming from five different contents and see if they would be able to "unplug" for 24 hours. After, the participants were asked a series of questions to show their strengths and weakness; many admitted to not being able to fully be successful and go the full 24 hours. When given the opportunity to say whatever comments they would like to add, one student said "140 characters of news is all I need" since this was all that the students interests and attention span could handle, directly referencing to Twitter's character limit. Others in the study shared how they believed that their social media accounts, like the ones they have on Twitter, had a direct correlation to their identity and were a part of their personality, requiring them to devote time to such in order to give a positive image to their peers. But while many are against children engaging in large increments of screen time, educators are encouraging it in their classrooms.

Teachers today, especially those in the secondary setting, seem to be encouraging the use of platforms like Twitter as they are engaging with adolescent's interests in a modernized way as well as relaying content. One reason is, that it is a great way to ask questions within the academic setting. The students are able to make short comments on what they find interesting in a classroom or even tweet about points in class that they do not understand. Through processes like this, Twitter a new technology incorporated into the classroom for communication purposes that tends to be much quicker due to the easy access via smartphone technologies. In class discussions and questions are recorded through the use of replying back and forth to tweets, allowing students to have easy accessibility when trying to reference back to material later. The use of Twitter in the classroom has also been seen as a new way of creating group projects by encouraging required communication through the application to create "digital

projects" that can be widely seen by simply sharing information under the same hashtags. Even some teachers compare the use of Twitter in the educational system similar to the way bolded text is used in a textbook. Key concepts can be brought to a student's attention while they simply are scrolling through their Twitter timelines. While incorporating the use of Twitter into the classroom requires more screen usage, it changes the usage from a social atmosphere to an academic atmosphere, providing students with a unique way of engaging with the curriculum.

Twitter is also beneficial to educators in regards to professional interactions. Teachers are increasingly connecting with one another through the use of Twitter to acquire new information that they can later apply within their classrooms. Studies have shown that "Teachers preferred Twitter over all the other SNSs [Social Networking Sites] because it allowed them to be in touch with other teachers or professionals from the educational field; they described their acquaintances on this SNS as their 'virtual colleagues'". By creating this professional connection, Twitter connects and engages people with information that they may not have acquired other wised. Social networking sites, in general, have become a vital resource within the education system. For instance, they allow family members to follow the interactions that go on within a classroom. Teachers are increasingly creating "classroom blogs" to connect and give an insider look at what is going on within the classroom setting.

Teachers are also able to connect with real-life examples via video call through social networking sites, providing students with a new and different perspective without having to have the speaker physically come to the classroom. This creates a network for students much broader than the immediate location and gets worldwide perspectives on content. Also, by incorporating technologies like Twitter into the classroom at the secondary level, students are able to learn proper online adequate that will help prepare them on the best ways of engaging with these technologies even when they are no longer using them for academic purposes. Yet, while it seems that Twitter is a great resource within the classroom, others are still concerned about the effects it has on development beyond the classroom, specifically the effects it has on students' self-esteem. Due to the exposure that social media provides the youth during these extremely vulnerable years of development it has raised apprehensions towards new technologies. In the past, it was celebrities who had an increase of pressure from society to appear to the public in the highest standards of being "perfect". As social media became increasingly popular, this pressure to appear perfect has spread into the youth's daily life, impacting their development. Through extreme exposure to high profiles individual's lives via social media, classmates are feeling as if they now also need to hide their imperfections in order to fit in when exposing themselves online. For instance, reality stars like the Kardashians are one of the many groups that have exposed the youth to this pressure, hence why Kim Kardashian makes up to $500, 000 per a post. Companies increasingly are making marketing decisions based off of these self-esteem issues due to the insecurities that social media is perceived to offer assistance with.

On top of this urge to appear perfect, Twitter has been studied to be a "significant contributor" to stress that can in the long term be demining to self-esteem. A survey of 1, 800 people was conducted making the conclusion that women tend to report more often that they are more stressed than men. The study also provides that through exposure to peers who shared their stress over Twitter, they felt an increase in their own stress. At the secondary level, this should be specifically taken into consideration since they are even more susceptible to self-esteem issues which most often leads to academic issues. As they mature, self-image and confidence tend to be conflicting with one another. Statistics have proven that "over 70% of girls age 15 to 17 avoid normal daily activities, such as attending school, when they feel bad about their looks". Boys also struggle and it has been said that "40% of boys in middle school and high school regularly exercise with the goal of increasing muscle mass. As media and technological developments like Twitter increase in daily life, adolescent's self-esteem needs to be taken into account as it has huge effects on how they develop.

Contrary, Twitter is also seen as a resource that allows self-expression and for many a safe place. In an article titled, "Social Media: A Vital Tool In Teaching Contemporary Black American Protest" the author writes, "Twitters ability to connect the disenfranchised with voices of power in their communities" really summarizes the role that Twitter plays with self- expression. In the study mentioned previously regarding stress and the impact of Twitter it also came to the conclusion that media sites like Twitter are commonly used as a coping mechanism for many due to the fact that users can express themselves so openly. Dr. Martin Paulus, the scientific director, and president at Laureate Institute for Brain Research states: "What we've just seen is these kids at this age, they're already using social media as a communication tool. They are networked with their friends, they engage in more diverse activities, and in the prepuberty stage when you don't have all the teenager stuff going on, it truly is building a network community".

Rather than viewing media as a negative Paulus views it as a way of connecting with one another and engaging in a new atmosphere. Other examples of how people are able to express themselves on Twitter deals with their portrayal of their personality. It is said that from just 10 tweets with a decent amount of information a perceiver able to "accurately distill the person behind the message, particularly for impulsivity and self-esteem, while also eliciting generally normative and therefore positive perceptions". Essentially, people vary in the information they choose to publicly share on their social media accounts causing such a large platform to give users a sense of self-expression. Some users will share negative experiences like issues that are troubling them, others will choose to share more positive ones like life milestones and achievements, either way, this is the main reason Twitter is a self-expression based application.

Overall, while there are both pros and cons to the effects of Twitter on an adolescents developments, the gains within the classroom become superior to cons in a modern classroom setting. As shown through the above research self-esteem and the effects it has on

development was a very concerning issue. In order to boost this experience, one-way teachers could apply Twitter into the classroom includes using their page as their second voice. While a teacher can directly engage with families and friends of the student, post any changes or updates to the class material, they can also use it as a shout out board. By using a hashtag, teachers can tweet when they a student achieves something impressive or does something well. This way they giving their students a self-esteem boost by simply typing up a quick blurb in regards to this student. The teacher may also choose to allow others to use the hashtag allowing a larger conversation and encouraging peer engagement with one another which can help defeat the bullying epidemic in the United States public school system. Also mentioned earlier was how adolescents are making social networking one of their main ways of communication. Teachers can set up an account to post important dates while opening up the messaging feature of Twitter to allow private one-on-one direct instant messaging between themselves and their students.

On top of all of this, another major concern was the amount of screen time students are using Twitter for. Another way to apply Twitter in the classroom could include surprise tweets. A teacher may choose to randomly tweet extra problems on their account and if a student is scrolling through their timeline and sees it they can complete it and hand it in the next day for extra credit. Another similar situation includes the opportunity for a teacher to post sample questions and supplementary material in order to make the screen time more valuable. If a student has a big exam the next day, finds themselves distracted on Twitter and then comes across a sample problem they may refocus and bring their attention back to preparing for the exam. These are only a few of the many ways teachers can expand their classroom into the media world via Twitter.

One cannot ignore the fact that Twitter is not always used ideally and at times be a negative influence; however, the value that Twitter has on today's youth also cannot be ignored. While it is understandable why those who were around before Twitter are concerned of some of the side effects it brings, this is the direction that our world is going into. Rather than hiding the youth from resources like Twitter when they are developing and later just dropping them into the complex world that is called the internet, there is an opportunity to allow them to develop alongside these technological advances that ultimately will continue to be a large portion in their lives. Times have changed and rather than running away it is time to embrace media like Twitter and continue to try to incorporate it in a more positive way into a youth's development.