



by Emily Rose Cavendish

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR TEENAGERS

Threat or Asset?

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, Periscope, Youtube... by the time this article goes to print another social media platform could well have emerged and risen to the top of the digital pile. As a parent, this ever-shifting technological landscape might well seem foreign and hostile--and leave you feeling like an interloper in a fast-paced online community of innovative influencers, hashtag artisans, and real-time phenomena.

Perhaps that's why so many parents fear social media, and--more specifically--the effect it may be having on their children. Mainstream media is saturated with horror stories of online grooming, internet 'trolls' and inappropriate content. Apart from these extreme cases of psychological trauma and physical harm, a more general worry seems to be that children are being exposed to too

much, too soon and being forced to grow up too fast.

But you may be overlooking the positive effects that social media can have on teenagers.

The far-reaching nature of social media means that the potential for interpersonal connections is infinitely more extensive but, while the terrifying prospect of unhealthy relationships is often a blazing neon warning light flashing at the forefront of parental concern and discussion, it may be blinding you to the possibility of genuine, positive friendships.

Take Tavi Gevinson, for example. Tavi, now 19, is the founder and editor-in-chief of an online magazine for teenage girls. She says online socializing is "all about connection. I've made some of my closest friends online, through blogging communities."

Separate research by a US think tank supports the theory that social media doesn't replace human interaction. They found that the most avid teen texters are also the ones most likely to spend face-to-face time with their friends.

Another benefit some parents have noticed is a boost to their kids' confidence and creativity--particularly for students who aren't typically 'academic'--as they form original ideas, and create and publish their own content to the world. And it's not just parents who are noticing but employers too. Understanding how to communicate online, build a cyber profile, and grow a following is something a lot of employers are starting to view as a vital skill.

So perhaps the question parents should be asking is not if their teen should be using social media, but how they can use it best.