The Negative Impacts of social media on Friendship

Tyler Cosley

Friendships have undergone a huge change over the past several years with the further development of social media apps. The word ‘friend’ itself has taken on a new meaning. Often, people active on their various social accounts do not even know all the individuals they call ‘friends’ in real life. Social media is just a way to keep tabs on people; it is a platform that causes people to judge one another and rate one another based on different aspects of what is popular at the time. The rise of the various social media platforms has helped cultivate a society that devalues true friendship, and instead focuses on comparing and being better than one another despite our differences. In this paper, I will argue that social media has a negative effect on friendship, and the Black Mirror episode “Nosedive” is a realistic representation of how society may develop in the future if it continues to let social media dictate how people think, feel, and act.

In this paper I will argue the various negative aspects of social media and how its abuse has contributed to a lack of substantial, real friendships. First, I must provide some background on the Black Mirror episode ‘Nosedive,’ as the storyline provides many plot elements that I will use as supporting arguments. ‘Nosedive’ is the first episode of the third season of the Netflix series Black Mirror. The story is set in a future world where people use an app to rate one another from a scale of one to five, and this rating system impacts their status in society. The main character, a woman named Lacie, is obsessed with the rating system. Lacie is invited to be the maid of honor at her childhood friend’s wedding, where many “highly rated” people will be. She sees this as an opportunity to boost her own ratings so she can afford a nicer house in a higher end neighborhood.

In ‘Nosedive,’ the main conflict of the story revolves around this aggressive form of social media. Social media has been a part of our everyday life for many years now, and while society has not reached the point of rating people in real time as we interact, I do feel it is an idea that could happen in the future. My first argument to support this claim lies in how much our society currently interacts and spends time on social media platforms. There are so many different social media accounts that people can have, and the most notable of these platforms are Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter. People spend hours upon hours interacting with these platforms every single day. Screen time announcements have been a new development on smart phones that show exactly how long people spend on each app, and the results are eye opening. Clearly, social media has a hold on society already, and this is evident in how much of our time is spent scrolling and interacting virtually. Because of the overwhelming amount of time people spend on social media, they spend much less time interacting with people face to face. Because of this, there is a lack of developing more meaningful, in person friendships. This lack of personal connection is the driving story element in the entirety of the Black Mirror episode.

Throughout the story, Lacie has very few meaningful relationships. Her number one priority is the rating system so she can grow her societal status. Lacie finds meaning and importance in an unhealthy setting. One prime example of this is the scene in the elevator, where Lacie and another lady in her office complex have one of the most fake, unauthentic interactions I have ever seen. These people are too devoted to the rating system to form meaningful connections with one another; everything they know about each other comes from their social media platform. The only meaningful friendships that Lacie has in the episode are developed away from the social media rating system, and the kindhearted truck driver named Susan is a prime example of this. Susan does not care about the rating system and has left behind the idea of social media dictating her life. She treats Lacie with kindness simply because it is the right thing to do. This sliver of hope in the episode illustrates the idea that without this heavy social media presence, people would have the opportunity to develop real, meaningful friendships. But because they do let social media dictate their lives, they are left to fend for themselves in a society that has no regard for what friendship really is.

The word friendship has almost gotten to a point where it has lost its meaning. True friends are hard to come by. I will argue that this is partly the result of the concept of ‘friends’ that is present on most social media platforms. You can be ‘friends’ on social media without even knowing one another. People want to have the most friends or followers because they obsess over the amount of likes they get on their posts. This is directly seen in Nosedive, when Lacie posts the picture of her stuffed animal, Mr. Rags, and then sits and waits for the post to receive likes. This concept is not far off from how society currently operates. Often, just like Lacie’s picture of Mr. Rags, people’s posts are ingenuine. People typically do not use social media to show the world their real, raw selves. They are fishing for compliments and fake attention. People find meaning in how many likes they receive, even from people they do not know, and they will sit and dwell on the number of people who have seen and liked their posts. The more likes the post receives, the more worth they find in themselves because they have been, to connect to the Black Mirror episode, rated highly.
 In the world of the episode Nosedive, the friendships are fake and driven by a desire to have a high socioeconomic status. Ultimately, this constant pressure of perfection breaks Lacie, and causes her some severe emotional trauma. When she arrives at the wedding, she is at her lowest point. She is dirty, her dress is ruined, and her makeup is running. Her physical presence, amongst many beautiful and ‘put together' people, represents her own inner turmoil, and it represents her own character development as she bares it all in a crowd of people who continue to fake their perfection. A person who she thought was her friend, has proved she never cared for Lacie at all. The pressure of constantly needing approval has had an immense negative impact on Lacie and her own mental health and wellbeing. She has no true best friend, and the relationships she did have were ruined because of her obsession with her ratings. This is an element of Nosedive that was all too real, because in our society, so many mental health struggles are linked to social media. Social media is a weight in people’s lives. It is a constant reminder that people must uphold a level of perfection to be welcomed and treated the way they want to be treated by people who don’t even care to be their real friend. Ultimately, this has an impact on people much like Lacie, leading people to very dark places of loneliness, insecurity, and anger.

The episode ends with Lacie being taken to a jail of some sort, where she is stripped away of any connection to the abhorrent social media platform of her world. Here in jail, she meets a man, and they proceed to cuss and yell at one another, but they are smiling. Finally, Lacie has made a relationship without the pressure of ratings or social media presence. The relief on their faces is crystal clear; they have found a friend in one another. The Black Mirror episode “Nosedive” is unfortunately a realistic representation of how society may develop in the future if we continue to let social media rule society, but it mainly serves as a warning. The negative impact social media has on friendship is clear, but if we stop moving down our current path and release the pressures of social media we can form more meaningful friendships, the way they were intended to be.