



# SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT

## ON YOUR CAREER AND PERSONAL LIFE

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## CONTEXT OVER THE SPAN OF 25 YEARS

Like many things in life, social media is both a blessing and a curse. Some twenty-five years in the making, from the time the first social media platform was launched in 1997 (Six Degrees, which provided profiles, friends lists and school affiliations, though networks were limited due to limited internet access)<sup>1</sup>, retrospective and prospective reviews of the impact of social media paint an interesting picture of the good and bad.

Most people cannot imagine a world without technology and all that it brings, with 24/7 virtual connectivity via cellphones, tablets, computers, all of which are ever-evolving and improving, becoming faster and offering more and more features. Yet, this virtual world causes many people to feel lonely, with less and less opportunity for personal interaction.

At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Professor Sherry Turkle founded and directed the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self. She wrote the book, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less from Each Other*, the third in a series on the effects of technology on society, based upon fifteen years of research on the digital realm, including hundreds of interviews.<sup>2</sup>

Turkle pointed to the ability to reinvent oneself

through the use of the very technology that connects us: posting the best photos, enhanced by the app, and providing only the most interesting and enticing online updates. But the online presence often does not reflect the reality of our lives, and in fact, leads us to believe the fanciful lives of others are real.

Given the reach of social media, a cautionary approach seems merited. For example, Facebook has an estimated one billion active users, and LinkedIn has approximately 756 million users. “I definitely think that social media has had a very deep impact on our lives. The world that we see on Facebook and other social media sites is not a true and real world. It’s a creation of people,” Dr. Ali Jazayeri, associate professor of clinical psychology at the Chicago School of Profession Psychology (Los Angeles campus) explains.<sup>3</sup>

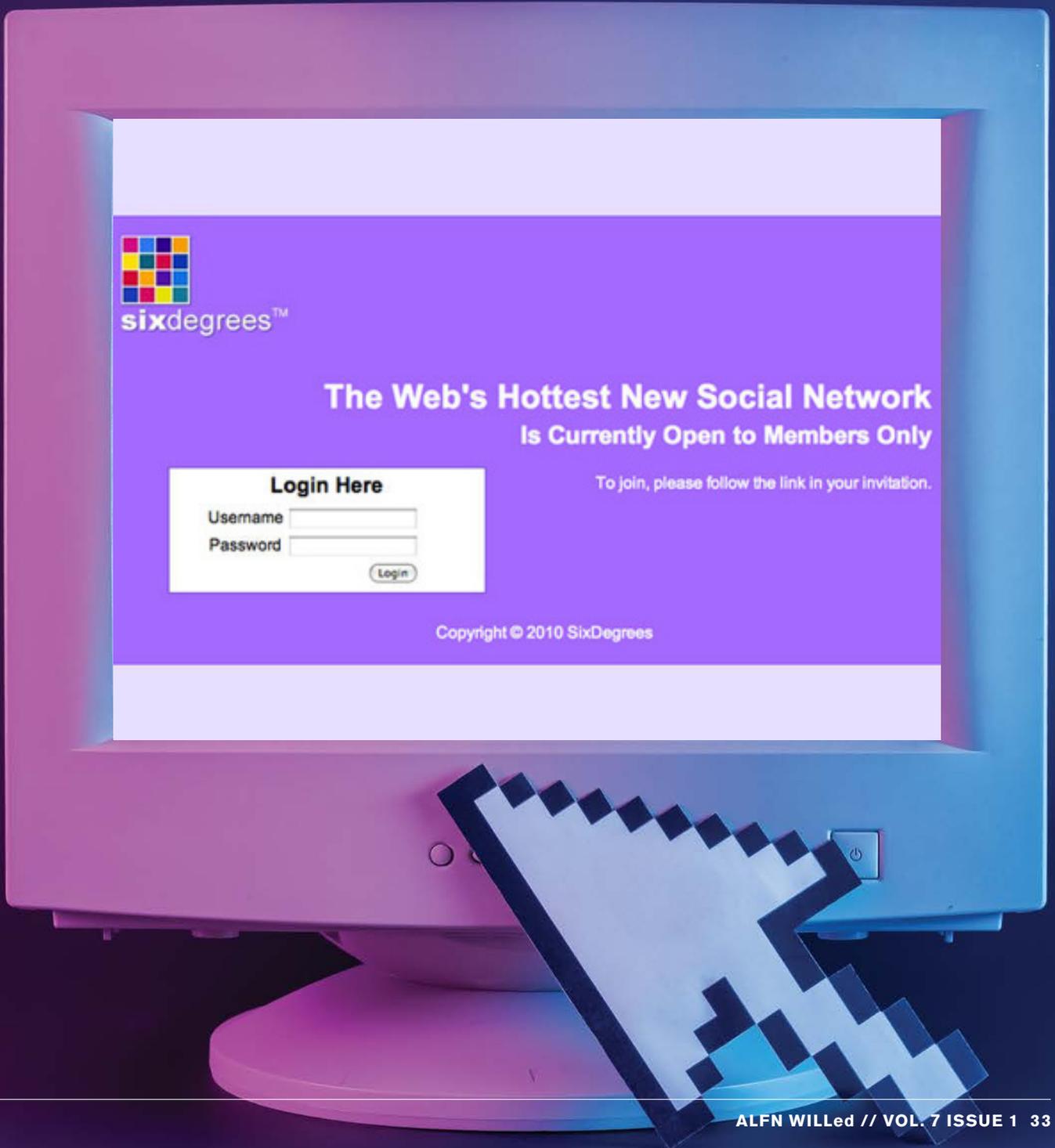
Jazayeri continued, “Among other dangers that Facebook might possibly pose in our lives, such as lack of privacy, is this habit of always comparing ourselves to others. People, when they are happy, post a lot of happy things. But when I’m not happy I will consciously, or unconsciously, compare myself to others. As a result, I create a world that is not a true world because I imagine that everybody is happy in that world, except me.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/then-and-now-a-history-of-social-networking-sites/2/>

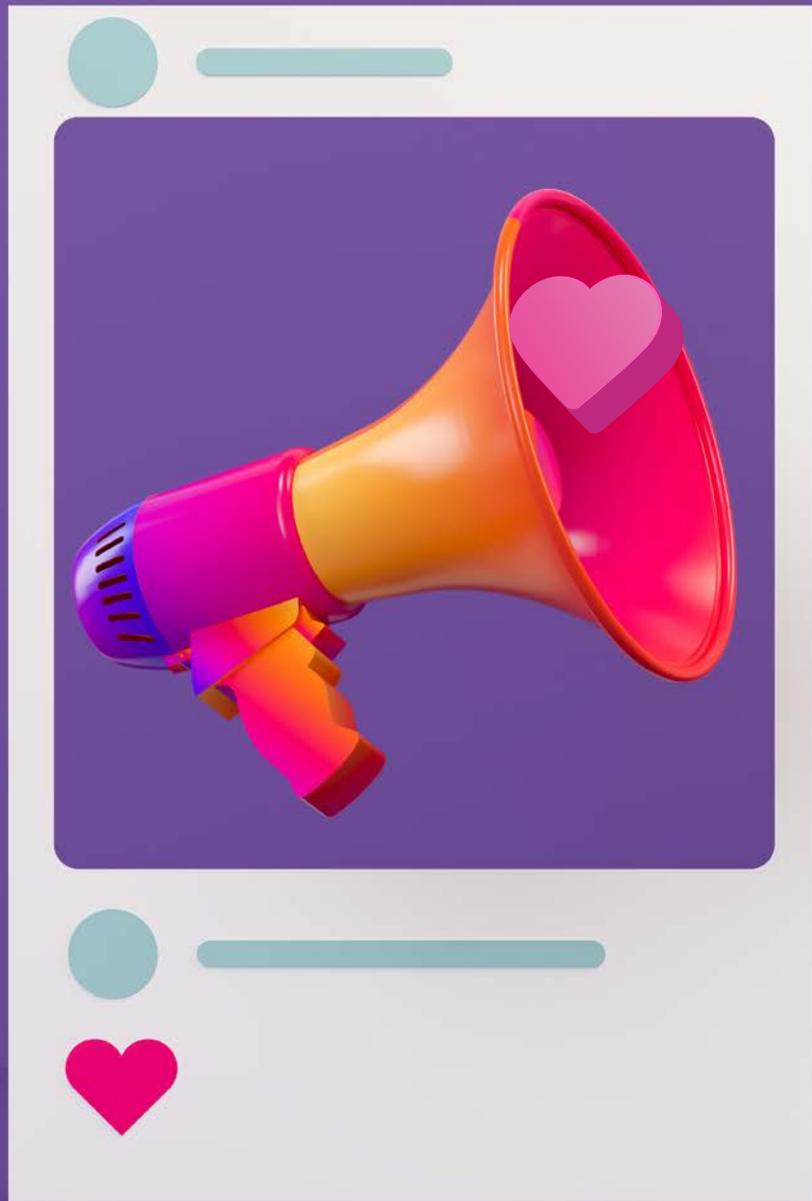
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/Alone-Together-Expect-Technology-Other/dp/0465031463>; <https://mitpress.mit.edu/contributors/sherry-turkle>

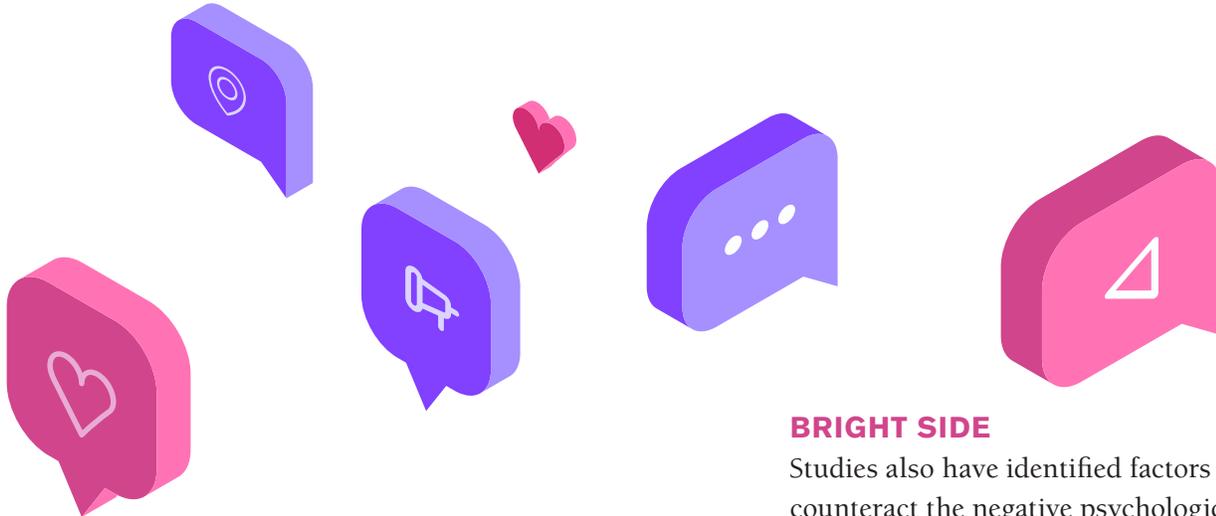
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thechicagoschool.edu/insight/from-the-magazine/a-virtual-life/>

<sup>4</sup> Id.



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### DEEPER DIVE

The impact of social media cannot be overestimated, as shown by its daily use as a platform for social and professional interaction. But how does social media use impact individuals' perceptions and emotions regarding their careers? A 2021 University of Tsukuba, Japan study used two surveys to assess the correlation between social comparison and social media use and its psychological impact.<sup>5</sup>

The first study was a self-reported survey of 309 Japanese employees, which found that viewing others' positive posts about careers could lead to career frustration through social comparison. The second study which was an analysis of 1,254 responses obtained from a 7 day experience survey had a similar finding, in addition to finding that the described career frustration was mitigated by casual interactions in face-to-face settings.

Other studies found that social media served as a platform for students to compare their situation to that of other students who were starting a job or building outstanding careers, which worsened their anxiety.<sup>6</sup>

### BRIGHT SIDE

Studies also have identified factors that counteract the negative psychological outcomes of social comparison on social media. One factor is companionship, which is defined as "shared leisure and other activities that are undertaken primarily for the intrinsic goal of enjoyment".<sup>7</sup>

In particular, companionship, as described above, rated more positively and most strongly predicted greater well-being and less distress.<sup>8</sup> A workplace study had similar results, whereby companionship, such as "having a pleasant conversation" or "laughing together" with a colleague or supervisor, suppressed negative emotions about stressful events.<sup>9</sup>

Given that companionship can mitigate daily stress, companionship could also reduce social media-induced stress. Research on anxiety reduction and work-related stress reduction, with companionship, means that it is conceivable that companionship alleviates anxiety and negative emotional states about one's career.<sup>10</sup>

As with all progress, social media will remain with us for the foreseeable future, albeit with a more balanced approach, in an effort to counter the negative effects. As we can extrapolate from the studies, nothing replaces a friend. **W**

5 <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.720960/full>

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8 Newsom, J. T., Rook, K. S., Nishishiba, M., Sorokin, D. H., and Mahan, T. L. (2005). Understanding the relative importance of positive and negative social exchanges: examining specific domains and appraisals. *J. Gerontol. Ser. B Psychol. Sci. Soc. Sci.* 60, 304–312. doi: 10.1093/geronb/60.6.P304

9 Buunk, B., and Verhoeven, K. (1991). companionship and support at work - a microanalysis of the stress-reducing features of social-interaction. *Basic Appl. Soc. Psychol.* 12, 243–258. doi: 10.1207/s15324834baspl1203\_1

10 Conwell, Y., Kimberly, A., Orden, V., Stone, D. M., McIntosh, W. L., Messing, S., et al. (2021). Peer companionship for mental health of older adults in primary care: a pragmatic, nonblinded, parallel-group, randomized controlled trial. *Am. J. Geriatr. Psychiatry* 29, 748–757. doi: 10.1016/j.jagp.2020.05.021