

Your Shortcut to... Social Media

It started more than two decades ago, it connects people around the world, and it can be both fun and risky. This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to Social Media—the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the big news stories. I'm Christie Kijurina.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Bryce, have you noticed how many people are glued to their phones these days?

"What... oh yep...hang on a sec....let me ...just....hit....like.

Oh, hey, Christie... what were you saying?"

I was just saying how people seem to be glued to their phones these days.

Oh yeah! It's like everyone's phones are their best friends."

I know, but in the olden days, when we grew up, there was no social media [GASP].

You're making me feel old, Christie. But your right! And today, it's ubiquitous (meaning that it's everywhere) and there's been a lot of chat in the news recently about kids needing to be protected from it. So what's that all about? I thought it was just dance challenges and sharing videos with friends.

It turns out there's a lot more to it than that, Bryce.

Today, we'll log into the world of social media and find out how long it's been around, why people love it so much, and what we should be careful of when using it. So put down your devices, and let's get started.

Listen carefully - there's a S'Quiz at the end!

HOW

Alright Bryce, so although it might seem as though social media has always been a thing, it's actually relatively new. When I was a kid, social networking meant going over to your parents' friends' place for a barbecue on a Sunday afternoon. How about we take a trip down memory lane and see where social media, as we know it today, began?

Let's do it! So, the story of social media didn't start with videos, apps, or endless scrolling. It kicked off with big, boxy computers and dial-up internet connections that whirred and screeched at you. Way back in the 1970s and 80s, text-based Bulletin Board Systems, or BBS for short, allowed users to dial in, post messages, and share tiny data files. They were super basic but were the beginning of online communities where people with similar interests could connect.

That's right, Bryce! Then, the first real social networks came about in the late 1990s and early 2000s with platforms like Six Degrees and Friendster. These were some of the first places where you could create a profile and have a friend list. But, even though millions of people created accounts, very few had internet access, so engagement was really limited. Imagine... no internet!

No internet? That's crazy! And then in 2003, a little platform called MySpace was launched. By February 2006, 54 million people had profiles on MySpace. You could customise your profile, share your thoughts in a weblog (which was kind of like an online diary), share photos and music, and connect to friends and friends of friends. Starting to sound familiar?

Definitely! And in 2004, a platform called Facebook was launched as a way for college students in the US to connect. It quickly grew beyond colleges, and soon people all over the world were using it to stay in touch, share photos, and see what their friends were up to. And, with the launch of Apple's first iPhone in 2007, people could now carry their social media accounts around with them in their pockets.

And that's not all! Around the same time, other platforms started popping up too. Twitter, now known as 'X', was launched in 2006. It let people share short updates or "tweets." Instagram, which came out in 2010, was all about sharing photos and videos. And then came Snapchat in 2011, where messages and photos disappear after they're viewed.

Exactly, Bryce. And have you ever heard of a little app called TikTok? Launching in 2016 TikTok became super popular for its short, fun videos. So, from the early days of BBS to the rise of all these different platforms, social media has really changed the way we connect and share our lives.

Wow, what a journey! From those noisy dial-up connections to the sleek apps on our phones today, social media has come a long way. And it should be noted here - and we'll talk about a bit more later - that there are age restrictions for being on social media - meaning kids really shouldn't be on it, at least not unsupervised. But before we get there Christie, let's look at why people love social media so much?

WHY

One of the big reasons people love social media is that it helps them stay connected with friends and family, no matter where they are in the world. Did you know that there are over 4.5 billion people using social media worldwide as of 2024? That's more than half of the world's population!

Whoa, that's a huge number! And it's not just about staying in touch. Social media is also super fun and entertaining! You've got hilarious memes, cool videos, and even games. It's like a never-ending amusement park in your pocket.

Absolutely, Bryce. But there's a flip side to all this fun. Have you ever heard of FOMO?

FOMO? Is that some kind of new dance move?

Not quite! FOMO stands for Fear Of Missing Out. It's that feeling you get when you see friends hanging out without you or when you think you're not in the loop with the latest trends. Social media can make this feeling worse because you're constantly seeing what everyone else is doing.

Oh, I get it. And there's also the endless scroll, right? Sometimes, you just keep scrolling and scrolling, and before you know it, hours have passed!

Exactly. The endless scroll was designed to keep people engaged for as long as possible. It's like a bottomless pit of content. And let's not forget about the addiction to likes. People often feel a rush of happiness when their posts get a lot of likes, but it can also make them feel bad if they don't get as many as they hoped.

That doesn't sound so great, Christie. It sounds like social media can be a bit of a double-edged sword.

It can be, Bryce. But, on the bright side, social media also allows people to express themselves and share their talents with a bigger audience. Whether it's art, music, or even just funny videos, people can find others who appreciate their creativity. It can also be a powerful tool for learning new things and staying informed about what's happening in the world.

So while social media has its ups and downs, it can be a wonderful way to connect, entertain, and express yourself—just as long as we use it wisely and don't let it take over our lives and balance things out. So what, Christie, should people be careful of on social media?

WHAT

You mentioned balance, Bryce, and that brings us to our next question: What should people be careful of when using social media?

Ah, the safety talk. Kind of like putting on your helmet before riding your bike!

Yep! First off, did you know that most social media platforms have age restrictions? They usually require users to be at least 13 years old. So none of you should even be on it.

So, um, why have we just spent the last eight minutes talking about it?

Well, because social media is a topic that's increasingly in the news - and especially the impact that it is having on young people. Because governments - here in Australia and overseas - are increasingly worried about the negative effects that being on social media can have on young, developing brains. In fact, there's currently a push by

governments to raise the minimum age limit for a social media account to 14 or even 16.

Why's that?

Because very little of the content on social media is regulated, meaning anyone can post anything, and that means kids might come across things that their brains aren't ready to handle. It's like wandering into a haunted house when you thought you were heading into a candy store.

Yikes! You do NOT want to end up in the spooky basement of the internet! And Christie, kids are like superheroes with a secret weakness—they can be more susceptible to the tactics used by advertisers because some ads are designed to trick you into buying things you don't need, like a third pair of those light-up sneakers, or even worse, expose you to stuff that's inappropriate or people who are not good. Plus, those endless scrolls are like a never-ending pack of your favourite chocolate or salty snacks—you just can't stop munching! - and while in the short term, that might feel good, in the long term, it's actually doing us harm.

Exactly, Bryce. Another thing to consider is that in the olden days, when you and I were kids, our homes and our bedrooms were safe spaces where we could escape anyone who might be mean to us. But now, with phones and social media, it's like inviting the school bully to a slumber party, every night—no thanks!

Yeah, nobody wants that party pooper. So, what should kids do before going on social media?

Well - first and foremost - if they are under 13, they should know that they shouldn't be on it. Or if they are on it - only with the permission of their parents.

Good advice. But what should kids do while they are waiting to be old enough to get on social media?

Well - in the same way an athlete trains their body for years and years before they go professional, kids have got to prepare their brains before they get on social media.

I think I know what you're about to say. The best way for kids to get their brains in shape before they launch themselves into the swirling sea of social media is to learn that not everything they see online is real. To Stop, Think and Check before believing everything they see, read or hear.

And the best way to do that, is to make sure your classroom is among the two-and-a-half thousand around the country who have signed up to do Newshounds - our free media literacy program for primary school kids - where Squiz-E the Newshound teaches kids to sniff out dodgy things online.

Nice plug, very subtle. And I suppose, at the end of the day, it's no different to learning to swim, or learning to cross the road, or learning about stranger danger. All of these things are considered really important life skills that we need to learn when we are in primary school - in time we're going to understand that media literacy - or being a careful, considered consumer of information in its many and varied forms - is just as important a life skill to learn when you're young ... and certainly long before you're anywhere near to having a social media account.

Yep -- and the other thing to remember when you get old enough to be on social media is to always involve your parents. Think of them as your social media sidekicks. Parents can help manage social media accounts and keep an eye on what's happening. Even for older teens, it's a good idea for parents to be aware of their social media activity to make sure they're safe. It's like being part of a superhero team—you might be the hero, but every hero needs a sidekick, right!?

Right! That makes a lot of sense. So, enjoy social media when you're old enough, but make sure you're using it wisely and with a bit of help from the adults around you.

Absolutely, Bryce. Social media can be a great way to connect, learn, and have fun, but it's important to be aware of the potential risks and take steps to protect ourselves.

And hey, if you're ever in doubt, just remember to ask yourself, "What would Squiz-E do?"