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Faculty of Electrical Engineering  
and Communication

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# BRNO UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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## DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

ÚSTAV JAZYKŮ

## EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

VÝVOJ SOCIÁLNÍCH MEDIÍ

### BACHELOR'S THESIS

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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# Bachelor's Thesis

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**Evolution of Social media**

## INSTRUCTION:

Social media has become an integral part of our everyday lives. Describe the evolution of social media and their current state, not just from the technical point, but also their impact on society and features they introduced. Evaluate their benefits and negatives from several perspectives and synthesize the results into a conclusion.

## RECOMMENDED LITERATURE:

Scolari C.A., ed. (2023), # On the Evolution of Media: Understanding Media Change (Routledge Studies in New Media and Cyberculture), Routledge, 302 pages, ISBN-13 978-1032102191

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis, history and examples of the most popular social networking sites are analyzed. Social media have become a significant part of modern life over the last few years. They changed the pace of human life and interactions between people. The history of social media from its origin to modern times is covered in this thesis, describing the evolution of individual platforms and providing reasons for their success or, on the other hand, extinction.

In addition, the thesis concludes the current state of the media and also provides research, which is focused on social media users in the Czech Republic. The research is not only focused on the social media platforms usage, but also the experience of users with social media with focus on addiction. The addiction is described in the thesis, as well as social media advantages and disadvantages and also security risks, which users can experience while using social networking sites

## **Keywords**

Social media, History of social media, Current state of social media, Addiction, Security risks

## **Abstrakt**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá historií sociálních médií a příklady těch nejznámějších a nejpoužívanějších z nich. Sociální média se v posledních letech stala neodmyslitelnou součástí moderního života a změnila nejen jeho tempo, ale i mezilidské vztahy. Práce popisuje sociální média od jejich vzniku až po současnost a popisuje vývoj jednotlivých sociálních sítí a přichází s důvody jejich úspěchu, či naopak neúspěchu.

Práce se navíc zaměřuje na současný stav sociálních sítí a zároveň poskytuje výzkum zaměřený na uživatele sociálních sítí v České republice. Výzkum se zabývá kromě využívání jednotlivých platforem také zkušenostmi uživatelů se závislostí na sociálních médiích. Tato závislost je v práci dále rozebrána. Práce se zaměřuje na výhody a nevýhody využívání sociálních sítí a také na bezpečnostní rizika s nimi spojená.

## **Klíčová slova**

Sociální sítě, Historie sociálních sítí, Současný stav sociálních sítí, Závislost, Bezpečnostní rizika

# Rozšířený abstrakt

Tématem této bakalářské práce jsou sociální média, především jejich vývoj a dopady na společnost. Sociální média se v posledních letech stala neodmyslitelnou součástí moderního života a změnila nejen jeho tempo, ale i mezilidské vztahy. Práce popisuje sociální média od jejich vzniku až po současnost a popisuje vývoj jednotlivých sociálních sítí a přichází s důvody jejich úspěchu či naopak neúspěchu. Kromě teoretické části obsahuje práce i výsledek průzkumu, jehož cílem je zjistit, jak jsou sociální média využívána určitými skupinami lidí a zároveň, která sociální média jsou v České republice nejvyužívanější. Výstupy průzkumu jsou následně porovnány s celosvětovými statistikami sociálních médií s největším počtem aktivních uživatelů. Výsledek porovnání ukazuje velké rozdíly u některých platform, jako je například X, Snapchat a TikTok. Důvody těchto rozdílů jsou v práci detailněji rozebrány.

Teoretická část práce začíná samotným vznikem a vývojem sociálních médií od jejich předchůdců, jako je například BBS (Bulletin-board Systems). V kapitole o vývoji jsou rozebrána důležitá sociální média, která i přes to, že nejsou v dnešní době využívána velkým počtem lidí, nebo dokonce již vůbec neexistují, přinesla do světa sociálních médií některé důležité nápady a inovace, jež jsou nyní platformami využívány. Typickým příkladem takové sítě je MySpace, který byl ve své době velmi populární a zásadně ovlivnil budoucí sociální sítě. Navzdory prudkému počátečnímu rozvoji se však síť MySpace nepodařilo dostatečně reagovat na vývoj internetu, což se stalo jedním z důvodů jejího konečného neúspěchu. Kromě samotného popisu platformy je v práci také zmíněna rivalita Facebooku a MySpace, ze které nakonec vyšla lépe prvně jmenovaná sociální síť.

Bakalářská práce se v teoretické části dále zabývá ostatními významnými platformami, které sehráli důležitou úlohu v počátcích vzniku sociálních médií. Mezi ně patří také síť Friendster, jež položila základy seznamovacích aplikací. Oproti své konkurenci se vývojáři této sítě rozhodli zvolit jiný přístup ke způsobu propojování a doporučování profilů, než jaké je většinou využíván, a ten je dále v práci detailněji rozebrán. Tento přístup byl však jedním z mnoha důvodů zániku Friendsteru, ve své době velmi populární, platformy.

S ohledem na rozšíření a popularitu Facebooku je této sociální síti věnována značná pozornost. Facebook je v současnosti nejpopulárnější sociální síť s více než třemi miliardami aktivních uživatelů. Mimo inovací, které tato síť přinesla, je v této práci

popsána přeměna společnosti Facebook Inc. na Meta Platforms. Ta kromě Facebooku spravuje i další známé sociální sítě, které jsou oblíbené po celém světě, jako například Instagram nebo WhatsApp, které používají každý měsíc více než 2 miliardy uživatelů.

Sociální sítě, které nespádají pod společnost Meta Platforms, jsou rozebrány v další části. Nachází se zde i platformy, které za dobu své existence přitáhly velkou mediální pozornost kvůli některým rozporuplným aspektům. Značně kontroverzní byl například prodej Twitteru v roce 2022 Elonu Muskovi, jednomu z nejbohatších lidí na světě. Musk změnil v Twitteru mnohé věci, mimo jiné i název platformy na X. Jedna z nejdůležitějších změn, kterou nový majitel provedl, je změna způsobu ověření profilů na placenou funkci. Dopady této změny jsou podrobněji rozepsány v práci. Jiným příkladem kontroverze je již zmiňovaný TikTok. Podle některých zdrojů je tato platforma úzce napojena na čínskou vládu a představuje proto možnou bezpečnostní hrozbu s ohledem na případné úniky osobních informací uživatelů. Důsledkem toho je varování mnoha institucí, včetně Vysokého učení technického v Brně, ohledně možných rizik spojených s využíváním sociální sítě TikTok. Druhou zmiňovanou čínskou sociální sítí je WeChat, který je specifický svou geografii. I přes jednu miliardu aktivních uživatelů, je mimo Čínu velmi málo využívanou platformou, což je potvrzeno mnoha statistikami, včetně výzkumu této bakalářské práce, kde pouze jeden ze 158 uživatelů z České republiky uvedl používání této sociální sítě.

Od popisu vývoje sociálních médií se práce dále přesouvá k jejich aktuálnímu stavu. Zde jsou využity výstupy první části dotazníku, jež se snaží nastínit, které platformy jsou v České republice nejvíce využívány. Za pozornost stojí výsledky sítí X, TikTok a Snapchat, které v České republice zaznamenaly menší procentuální zastoupení uživatelů v porovnání s celosvětovými statistikami. Kromě těchto platform, se používání ostatních sociálních sítí od zbytku světa neliší. V práci jsou také rozebrána specifika některých regionů, které se týkají například Afriky nebo Asie.

Poslední část této práce se zabývá výhodami a nevýhodami sociálních sítí, včetně možných rizik spojených s jejich používáním. Zmíněné výhody a nevýhody vyplynuly z dotazníku této práce, ve kterém uživatelé uváděli své pozitivní a negativní zkušenosti spojené se používáním sociálních sítí. Dle výsledků dotazníku uživatelé na sociálních sítích nejvíce oceňují možnost propojení s ostatními lidmi a často je využívají jako zdroj zábavy a k získávání aktuálních informací. Na druhou stranu respondenti uvedli řadu

negativních vlivů souvisejících s využíváním sociálních sítí. Mezi nejčastěji zmiňované nevýhody patřilo zhoršení spánku, narušení pozornosti a snížení produktivity. Dotazník se také snaží postihnout míru závislosti uživatelů na sociálních sítích a čas, který na nich respondenti tráví. Bylo zjištěno, že téměř polovina uživatelů stráví na sociálních sítích více než čtyři hodiny denně. Dále bylo zjišťováno, zda se uživatelé cítí být závislí na sociálních médiích. Navzdory výsledkům dotazníku, z kterých vyplývá výrazné každodenní využívání sociálních sítí, a to i během rutinních činností, se že většina uživatelů se necítí být na nich závislá.

V závěru práce jsou popsána bezpečnostní rizika a hrozby spojené s využíváním sociálních médií. Práce vzhledem ke svému rozsahu nemůže postihnout všechna rizika, a proto jsou diskutována pouze ta nejfrekventovanější. Mezi ně patří phishing a profiling. Kromě těchto dvou zmíněných rizik je riskantní i samotné chování některých uživatelů, kteří často bez rozmyslu o sobě zveřejňují citlivé údaje. V případě některých hrozeb obsahuje práce i návod, jak takové riziko rozpoznat podle jeho typických znaků, a uvádí konkrétní příklady podvodných stránek.

Sociální média, i přes svou poměrně krátkou existenci, výrazně ovlivnila společnost a její chování, a přinesla s sebou mnoho užitečného, ale na druhou stranu i spoustu nových hrozeb, které by neměly být opomenuty.

## **Bibliographic citation**

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## Author's Declaration

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**Topic:** *Evolution of Social Media*

I declare that I have written this paper independently, under the guidance of the advisor and using exclusively the technical references and other sources of information cited in the project and listed in the comprehensive bibliography at the end of the project.

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Brno, May 12, 2024

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author's signature

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Encyclopaedia Britannica (2024a) defines social media as *“a form of mass media communication over the Internet through which users share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content.”* Social media these days appear on most of electronic devices with access to the Internet, such as computers, tablets, and mobile phones. In comparison to its historical predecessors, communicating and obtaining information via social media is significantly faster and more convenient. Therefore, social media contribute to the increasing pace of the modern world.

The first part of the thesis describes the history and evolution of social media from its predecessors to the most popular modern social media platforms in recent years. The thesis describes some of the most popular platforms throughout the history of social media and also outlines the features of individual platforms, as well as reasons for their success or, on the other hand, unsuccess or even extinction.

The next part of the thesis focuses on the current state of social media. Statistics about social media geographics and demographics are discussed and evaluated. Given by the fact that different regions do not have similar platforms preferences, some of the most interesting regions, as regards social media, are described. This part also includes research on social media usage in Czech Republic, conducted via a survey with 158 answers representing various groups from high school students to senior citizens. The survey also collects data on social media usage among these groups with focus to their possible social media addiction. Such data will be used in the last part of the thesis.

The most important chapter of this thesis is the part about social media advantages and disadvantages. In the beginning, more general advantages and disadvantages of social media are described. The thesis takes most types of advantages and disadvantages from the survey, where users were asked to describe positive and negative effects of their social media usage. This part can be, therefore, considered a compilation of advantages and disadvantages that a user can experience on a daily basis, while using social media platforms.

Later on, the thesis focuses more on risks, that are connected to social media usage. The part about security risks describes possible security hazards connected to social media usage, focusing mainly of possible data leaks, as well as the results of what could

possibly happen, had such data been misused. The last chapter of this thesis uses the most important part of the research, concerned with social media addiction. Using 158 answers from different age groups of people living in the Czech Republic, the research can, with a decent level of accuracy, determine the time that users from the Czech Republic spend on social media. In addition, the survey collects opinions from users about their possible addiction. The results may indicate the possible addiction of people from the Czech Republic to social media.

This Bachelor's thesis does not use Artificial Intelligence in any way or form.

## **2. HISTORY**

### **2.1 First social media**

#### **2.1.1 Predecessors to Social Media**

Bulletin-board systems (BBS) can be considered the first predecessor to social networking sites that are commonly used nowadays. This system was used to exchange messages or files between users. According to Zydyk (2005), “*the BBS became the primary kind of online community through the 1980s and early 1990s.*” BBS, unlike modern social media, did not require a user to be connected to the Internet. In order to post a message, a computer and a modem dial a phone number of the hosting computer to verify the user, enabling them to successfully post a message on BBS. The verification process became significantly faster on the modern social media platforms.

#### **2.1.2 MySpace**

The first globally used Internet social medium, MySpace, brought a lot of new inventions to the world of social media, but failed to keep its popularity up to this date. It can be considered a pioneer in the field of social media and a predecessor to platforms which are used by the majority of people nowadays. Since its launch in 2003, MySpace has been a place for artists and musicians to share their work and that was possibly the reason for its failure. MySpace’s audience was limited to music and entertainment lovers, while, for example, Facebook, another social media platform, which will be described later, focused more on connecting people.

In the early stages of social media, MySpace and Facebook competed for the spot of the most popular platform. According to Wise (2023), “*Myspace was more popular until its peak in 2008 when it had more than 300 million registered users.*” After this peak, MySpace’s popularity started to decline rapidly. Many users changed to some other, more convenient platform.

The first possible reason for MySpace unsuccess was that MySpace failed to match the evolution speed of social media. It was focused solely on a limited audience of music and art lovers and did not succeed in being a traditional social media platform. MySpace also did not develop as fast as other platforms and failed to bring sufficient number of new features. Facebook, on the other hand, was more successful in these areas.

An important step which Facebook took was an expansion to portable devices. Facebook matched the evolution of social media by focusing on portable devices, which proved to be a correct step, as users access social media by mobile phones more frequently than by computers.

### **2.1.3 SixDegrees**

As it was previously stated, MySpace was the first globally used social medium in the world but it was not the first social medium to exist. After a deeper look in history, some unsuccessful attempts to connect people using social media on the Internet can be found. The first attempt to create an online social network was in 1997 with a website called "SixDegrees". *"While SixDegrees attracted millions of users, it failed to become a sustainable business and, in 2000, the service closed."* (boyd and Ellison, 2007, p. 214) As stated by the founder of this site, A. Weinreich, published in the study by boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 2014), *"SixDegrees was simply ahead of its time."* In 1997, the majority of population was not using the Internet on daily basis, unlike in recent years, when the Internet is a vital part of modern life.

### **2.1.4 Friendster**

A similar example to SixDegrees was a social network called "Friendster". The goal of Friendster was, however, slightly different than the one of previously mentioned SixDegrees or MySpace. While these two sites were focused more on social groups and keeping in touch with friends or former school classmates, Friendster was designed to meet new people. However, it was not a typical dating site with which the majority of users is familiar nowadays. At the time of its launch in 2002, the Internet already had some dating sites like "Match.com". This profitable dating website was based on a different concept than Friendster. While Match.com was, like many traditional dating platforms, connecting people based on their common interests, Friendster matched people based on their mutual friends. The concept was based on a belief that friends-of-friends would make better partners than strangers would. This interesting idea, however, caused some unwanted connections, for example between work colleagues or family members.

Despite this problem, the concept became popular and Friendster's audience experienced a rapid growth. The growth became a significant problem, as Friendster was not technically prepared for a worldwide audience. *"Friendster's servers and databases*

*were ill-equipped to handle its rapid growth and the site faltered regularly*” (boyd and Ellison, 2007, p. 215). Besides technical difficulties, another reason for the extinction of this site were fake profiles, called “Fakesters”. At that time, dating websites did not have such sophisticated user verification as they do nowadays (e.g. face photography verification used by Tinder). Friendster decided to deal with fake profiles by deleting them, which also led to the deletion of many real profiles. As boyd (2006) concluded, the reasons for the Friendster’s unsuccess were a *“combination of technical difficulties, social collisions, and a rupture of trust between users and the site.”* From this example, it is obvious that the concept of meeting friends-of-friends is effective only for a smaller group of users and is probably not sufficient for global use. Therefore, most of today’s dating sites use connections based on shared interests rather than mutual friends.

### **2.1.5 ICQ**

One of the most popular social media platforms at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is ICQ. The name ICQ comes from the phrase “I seek you.” According to Knight (2022), *“the reasons for ICQ’s mass popularity are features such as multi-user chat and async offline messaging.”* The ability to create chat groups and chat with multiple users at the same time has been implemented into most social networking sites used nowadays. Each ICQ user profile had an individual number that enabled other users to distinguish between multiple accounts with identical names. This feature can also be found in current social media sites. Despite delivering many advancements to the world of social media, ICQ failed to maintain its popularity, which peaked in 2001. Unlike many social media that have stopped being used by most users, ICQ’s services remain active up to this day.

## **2.2 Facebook**

### **2.2.1 The Emergence of Facebook**

Facebook is, according to statistics published on Statista.com in 2023, the largest social networking site with more than 3 billion active users and it is also one of the oldest social networks. In comparison with the previously mentioned examples, Facebook did not suffer from the same problems. MySpace, SixDegrees, and Friendster all failed in the transition from a medium used by a small group of users to a global social networking site. All of the mentioned social media were rapid in their development and tried to adapt



to the exponential growth of their user bases. On the other hand, Facebook took a different approach. It initially started as a college network, allowing only Harvard students to open an account and only a few years after its creation the site opened to a larger audience by allowing students from more universities to join. Then, some of the most important companies, such as Apple or Microsoft, and their employees gained access to Facebook, and in 2006, *“the site was opened allowing anyone above 13 years of age with a valid e-mail to join Facebook.”* (Sivakumar, 2023).

The fact that Facebook was closed to the mass public for the first two years of its existence is one of the reasons for the bigger popularity of MySpace in the early stages of social networks. MySpace gained popularity quickly and grew its audience exponentially but did not handle the growth. Facebook, with a different approach, managed to technically adapt to its slower growth and maintain its audience, and no longer than two years after its opening to the public, it overtook MySpace in the number of active users.

### **2.2.2 Development of Facebook**

Facebook brought many innovations, that made the site more popular for its audience. One of the first big innovations was the News Feed. A function that created a homepage where the user could see all the posts from their friends and favorite sites in one place in chronological order. *“Before this users had to hop from one user profile to another to look at their latest posts.”* (Sivakumar, 2023) This function transformed Facebook into the way users are familiar with nowadays. It became a medium enabling user to see everything important in one place in just a few seconds instead of just a list of their friends.

With the invention of smartphone many users started using Facebook on portable devices, which gained a lot of popularity at that time, which was confirmed by Facebook team (2010) in their update notes: *“Last August we launched our Facebook iPhone website, and almost a year later it has over 1.5 million people using it regularly.”* The previously mentioned MySpace failed to match the interest in portable devices and was still available only in the web browser – MySpace launched an iPhone application in 2013, five years later than Facebook. Besides the ability to take a picture with a smartphone camera and directly post it online on Facebook, the application introduced a function that became the predecessor to Messenger called Facebook Chat. *“Whenever*

*you are, you'll be able to see which of your Facebook friends are online and chat with them for free.*" (Facebook, 2010)

Facebook Chat became such a popular that it transformed into a stand-alone application in 2011 named Messenger. *"The instant messaging app allowed Facebook users to send messages, photos, videos, and documents to others using the internet."* (Sivakumar, 2023) In 2012, Facebook and Messenger separated so that users were no longer required to have a Facebook profile to use Messenger. More than ten years after the separation of Facebook and Messenger applications, Messenger is used by over one billion users worldwide, becoming the seventh most used social media application, according to Dixon (2023b).

### **2.2.3 Meta platforms**

One of the biggest milestones in Facebook's history is the rebranding of Facebook Inc. to Meta. Mark Zuckerberg, the co-founder and owner of Facebook, decided to connect all of the social network sites that belong to Facebook Inc. under one company – Meta Platforms. Apart from the previously mentioned Facebook and Messenger, Meta also includes WhatsApp, Instagram, and Threads.

WhatsApp, an application similar to Messenger allows users to text, video chat, and send documents or pictures to each other. Unlike Messenger, in order to create a WhatsApp account, a user is required to have a cellular mobile phone number. According to statistics by Dixon (2023b), the application is currently used by two billion users. WhatsApp was created in 2009 as an Apple iPhone application by Brian Acton and Jan Koum. *"While initially intended to track user's work statuses, notifying their contacts of their availability, it quickly morphed into a messaging platform, as its early user base took the app's ability to send notifications to other users."* (Martin, 2023) The first intentions were not a messaging app but rather a service that enabled users to share their current status or activity. Users wrote a short status (e. g. "I'm at the gym") and other users were informed about that by notifications, even when they were not using the application. However, because of the need for a messaging site, WhatsApp, throughout the time, developed into a regular messaging application. The function enabling to share status is no longer present in the application but it evolved into a simple green circle next to the user's name, informing about their availability. WhatsApp was purchased by Facebook Inc. in 2014 for 19 billion dollars, which was a record purchase

for Facebook at that time, *“though the company had lost \$138 million the prior year.”* (Martin, 2023)

The previous record purchase for Facebook Inc. was another application that belongs to Meta Platforms – Instagram. Instagram was created in 2010 by Kevin Systrom as *“a photo-sharing app that featured several filters and enhancements for photos taken on a mobile phone”* (Blystone, 2022). Instagram became a very popular application for iPhone and according to Siegler (2010), *“six days after its release, the service crossed 100,000 users.”* One of the most important features, Instagram Stories, was introduced in 2015. The concept of stories is based on sharing a picture that is visible only for a short period of time, 24 hours in the case of Instagram, and after this time, the picture is no longer visible to other users. Another popular feature, Instagram Reels, was presented in 2020. The concept of Reels is similar to TikTok, a social networking site that will be discussed later. Reels consist of short videos through which a user can scroll infinitely as the Instagram's algorithm recommends videos that are most suitable for each user., This concept has become so popular that it is present in several other popular platforms. According to Dixon (2023b), Instagram is used by over two billion active users, making it the third most popular social networking site.

Threads is the last social networking site belonging to Meta Platforms that has not yet been discussed. Abrahams (2023) describes the application as *“a rapid posting app where users are encouraged to share their thoughts, questions, and opinions throughout the day.”* The concept of sharing thoughts and opinions is similar to the concept of Twitter, which will be described in the next chapter. Threads was launched only in July 2023 and, therefore, it is difficult to predict whether it will be successful in the long term. Threads is closely linked to Instagram as the user is required to have an Instagram profile in order to access Threads. An advantage of the link with Instagram is, as Abrahams (2023) stated, that *“followers can be quickly carried over and profiles don't have to build up a following from scratch.”*

## **2.3 Other important social media**

### **2.3.1 YouTube**

In this chapter, six social networking sites that do not belong to the group of Meta Platforms will be discussed. First of them is a social network owned by Alphabet,

a company that is known to majority of Internet users as Google. YouTube was founded by Steve Chan in 2005 as a platform enabling users to share videos. In 2006, according to Sorkin & Peters (2006), Google purchased YouTube “for stock that it valued at 1.65 billion dollars.” YouTube did not start as a typical social networking site, as its primary goal was not to connect people but rather as an entertainment medium where people could watch and share videos. The fact users are able to publish any video on YouTube can bring problems such as violation of copyrights. YouTube attempts to fight copyright violations by deleting videos or banning accounts that have been found guilty.

Nowadays, YouTube shows more typical features of a social networking site than in its origin, when it was solely focused on video content. Two of those features that are implemented in most widely-used social media sites are “Stories” and “Shorts”. Both of the features were slightly changed to suit the overall format of YouTube, which serves as an entertainment platform. YouTube Stories, introduced in 2018, are typically used by content creators to attract viewers to their full-length videos by informing about the video’s release. YouTube Shorts is a function introduced in 2019 and corresponds to the trend set by TikTok. The concept is based on endless short videos, up to one minute in length, through which users can scroll infinitely, as the algorithm recommends more videos.

The ability to subscribe to certain accounts is characteristic of YouTube and has been on the platform since its origin. The content creators’ size is measured by the number of accounts that are subscribed to their content. Other important metrics to measure a success of a YouTube account are views, likes and comments. Views represent the number of how many times the video has been played, while likes are a feature that enables users to rate a video. Likes were implemented in 2010 when they replaced star rating (a user could rate a video on a scale from 1 to 5 stars). Each video has a like or dislike button for users to show whether they enjoyed the video or not. Previously, each of the buttons had their own counter but in 2021, YouTube decided not to show the number of dislikes. All of the mentioned metrics contribute to the overall popularity of each YouTube channel which is reflected in recommending videos for users.

As many media in history, such as television and newspapers, YouTube has the main income source from advertisements. YouTube a convenient place for businesses to advertise their services. The number of advertisements has increased over time.

Nowadays, the user will encounter at least one advertisement before their selected video starts playing and several more during the entire length of a video. This is mostly caused by the fact that YouTube has always been a free platform that does not generate income from users watching videos, unlike other services that require paid subscriptions, such as Netflix or Amazon Prime. In 2014, YouTube introduced an option for users that prefer a platform without any advertisements called YouTube Red. This service is available up to this date with a different name – YouTube Premium. Besides the absence of advertisements, YouTube Premium offers the ability to download videos and watch them later without necessity of having an Internet connection or playing videos in the background or with a turned-off screen on mobile devices for a periodical subscription fee.

### **2.3.2 Snapchat**

The next social networking site that will be discussed is called Snapchat. Released in 2011, Snapchat gained users' attention by a different approach than all other social media discussed before. The concept is based on sending photos and videos to other users, however, in the case of Snapchat, each “snap” (a picture or a short video) can be accessed by the receiver only once. Snapchat is popular mostly among teenagers; according to Dixon (2023a), 74% of teenagers in the United States aged 15 – 17 use Snapchat. This makes Snapchat one of the most used social networking sites in this group of people, more popular than Facebook, despite having only 25% of the number of monthly active users worldwide.

### **2.3.3 TikTok: The Most Controversial Social Medium**

A Chinese social networking site called TikTok can be called one of the most controversial ones. The site started in 2014 as a smartphone application called Musical.ly. As in the case of the previously mentioned Snapchat, Musical.ly gained most of its popularity among teenagers, especially because of its concept. The application is based on short videos, through which the user can scroll. New videos are recommended by an algorithm, which is designed to offer new videos perfectly selected for each individual user. This concept has been implemented by other social networking sites, such as Instagram or YouTube. The user is supplied with an infinite number of videos that match their interests, making the application attractive.

In 2016, Musical.ly was purchased by a Chinese company, ByteDance, and it was merged with their social networking site, TikTok, which had an identical concept. Throughout its existence, TikTok attracted a significant controversy. According to Treisman (2022), *“Chinese-based companies are obliged to share their data with the Chinese government.”* Several institutes, including Brno University of Technology, have acknowledged the threat of misuse of personal information about users. The university has prohibited BUT employees from using TikTok on their work devices, and many similar cases can be found in other institutes. Despite being well-known for possible personal data misuse, TikTok is still one of the most popular social media and has, according to Dixon (2023b), more than 1.2 billion active monthly users. TikTok is mostly popular among young audience, as the most significant user age group is younger than 25 years of age, as reported in survey by Ceci (2024a).

#### **2.3.4 WeChat**

The next social medium discussed is another platform based in China. Despite its little popularity in other parts of the world, WeChat is a popular platform in China. The application for mobile devices was launched in 2011 as a typical messaging platform, such as Messenger or WhatsApp. The number of WeChat functions increased significantly throughout the history, making it one of the most complex mobile applications. Besides messaging and video calls, the application offers WeChat Pay, E-Commerce, and Mini Programs.

WeChat Pay is a function enabling users to send or receive payments. According to The Charlesworth Group (2023), *“84.3% of all mobile payments in China are conducted via WeChat Pay, exceeding the number of payments using Apple Pay.”* The E-Commerce function creates a place for online shopping where users can find a variety of products. The last function discussed is Mini Programs. As the name indicates, the function consists of several small applications within WeChat. According to Dudarenok (2022), there are more than 3 million Mini Programs on WeChat. The list of the most popular Mini Programs includes Pinduoduo, Tmall, and Taobao. For example, Pinduoduo is an application that enables agricultural producers to sell products to customers. Tmall, with similar concept is focused on selling brand-name goods and Taobao offers smaller entrepreneurs a place to sell their services.

Despite the variety of functions and significant popularity, WeChat still attracts some controversies. The country of its origin causes the most important problem with WeChat. Social media in China are influenced by the Chinese government's censorship, which can look into each user's posts and private messages. As stated by Herman (2023), "*being banned from WeChat is no joke.*" A person who received the ban loses all the WeChat functions, including the ability to use mobile transfers and subscriptions.

### **2.3.5 Reddit**

Another interesting social media platform is Reddit, founded in 2005. The platform has slightly different concept than previously mentioned platforms. The popularity of individual posts is determined by users themselves rather than by an algorithm, as on, for example, Instagram or TikTok. The popularity is determined by a voting function, where users can upvote or downvote a post or a comment. There is another function called "karma" and serves as a rating metric of users. Whenever a post of a certain user receives an upvote, their karma rises, and the exact opposite in the case of downvotes.

In order to maintain a better orientation on the platform, there is a function called "subreddits". Subreddits are channels which group the posts with the same topic or content. Reddit is a popular platform, according to Ceci (2024b), the number of monthly active users exceeds one billion.

### **2.3.6 X (Twitter)**

The last social medium discussed in this thesis will be Twitter. Despite having a comparatively smaller number of active users according to statistics by Dixon (2023b), Twitter has attracted many controversies, especially since the platform's acquisition by a billionaire, Elon Musk, in 2022. One year later, in July 2023, the platform changed its name to X.

Twitter, as stated on Encyclopedia Britannica (2024b), "*emerged from the podcasting venture Odeo, which was founded in 2004.*" Two years later, the concept of the platform has been changed. Twitter enables users to share short messages of up to 280 characters (the number of allowed characters has been increased from the original 160 in 2017). The name for such messages posted on Twitter has been generally named "tweet", according to the platform's name. Throughout its history, Twitter has transformed from a regular social media, more into a news platform.

As mentioned previously, Twitter has been purchased by Elon Musk for 44 billion dollars. Many changes, including the new name of the platform, have been implemented since this acquisition. One of the most important changes was enabling users to gain “verification” for a monthly subscription fee. The verification feature helps users to distinguish between real and fake profiles of well-known users and to detect profiles that pretend to be official accounts. Elon Musk informed about this feature on his X page with a controversial tweet, that *“Twitter’s current lords and peasants system for who has or doesn’t have a blue checkmark is bullshit.”* (Elon Musk, 2022) This feature has, however, affected the validity of the “blue tick“ icon. After this change, anyone can pay for their account to be verified. This change can decrease the validity of the verification feature.

Elon Musk has tried to promote free speech on his platform by changing how X blocks users and inappropriate content. According to Encyclopedia Britannica (2024b), there are concerns that hate speech and violence are more likely to spread. The controversies surrounding Elon Musk can affect X as a reliable source of news and its popularity. X has experienced a decline of users and it remains unclear whether the platform can reach its previous popularity again.



### 3. CURRENT STATE

#### 3.1 Social media users

##### 3.1.1 Social media demographics

Social media is no longer only a tool for young people as it can be notice from figure 1. The graph shows statistics published by Sidoti (2024) and comprises only social networking sites discussed in this thesis. Each bar represents the percentage of respondents of each age group that have reported use of certain social media platform.

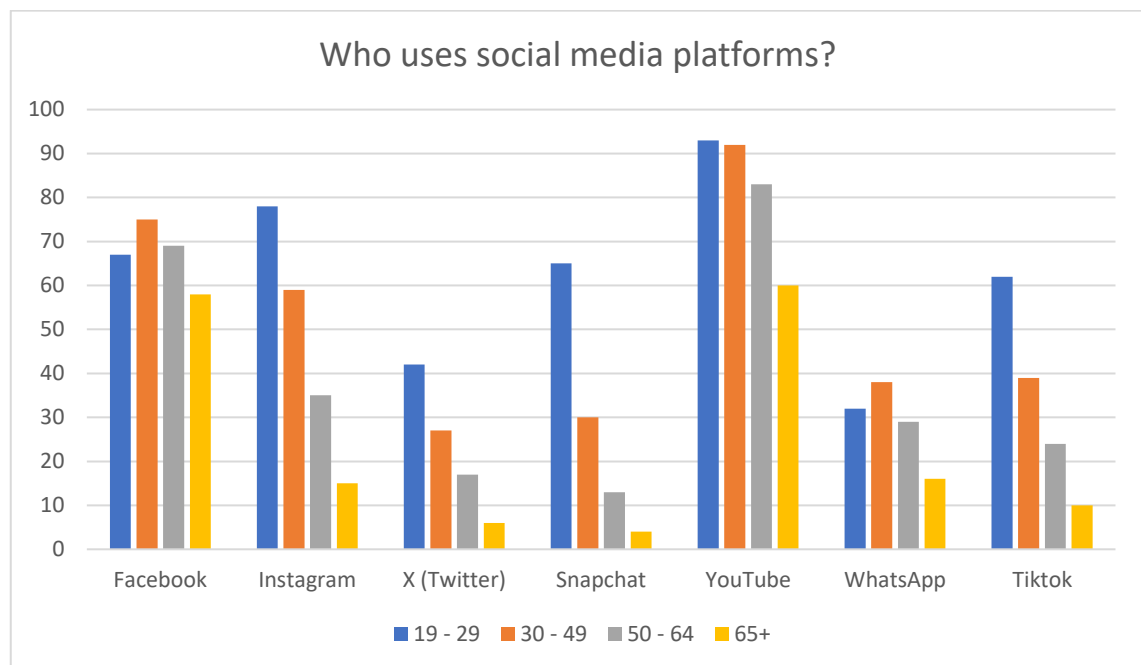


Fig. 1 Who uses social media platforms? (Sidoti, 2024)

As it can be seen that in majority of platforms, the youngest age group is the largest group of users. Certain social media report minimal usage by older users, such as TikTok, X, or Snapchat. This statistic can confirm the hypothesis that older users prefer longer format of entertainment, while the youngest group leads the statistics in platforms that focus on short pieces of content served in quick succession. Social media sites that have been able to offer both long and short content, such as Facebook or YouTube, have reported a similar percentage of users in all age groups.

Besides more suitable content, another reason for the popularity of Facebook and YouTube among older users might be the fact that these sites have been present for approximately two decades. Older users can experience fear of the unknown and, therefore, they might choose an older, time-proven social networking site rather than a new platform full of new functions that has been present only for several months or years.

### 3.1.2 Social media geographics

The next chapter will focus on the current state of social media. Differences between regions all over the world and demographics will be discussed. According to statistics from DataReportal (2024), social media is used by 5.04 billion people, which makes 62.3% of total population. Another statistic by Petrosyan (2024) shows that 5.44 billion people have access to the Internet. It is obvious that the majority of Internet users have at least one social media account. More than 94% of Internet users have used social media at least once in their life, which confirms the popularity of social media.

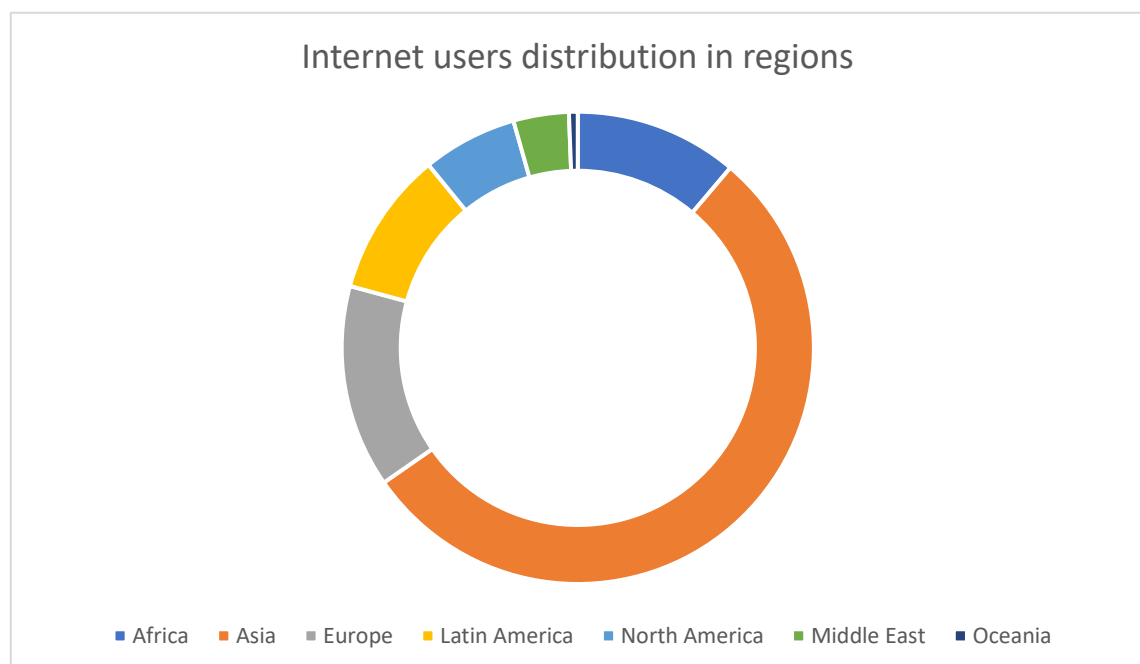


Fig 2 Internet user distribution in regions

The graph shows the distribution of Internet users among regions all over the world. The statistic shows that more than half of the total Internet users are from Asia. The distribution is similar to overall population distribution among continents, as can be

seen from figure 3. There are differences in Europe and Africa. While Europe creates a bigger part of the internet population than overall population, Africa is the opposite.

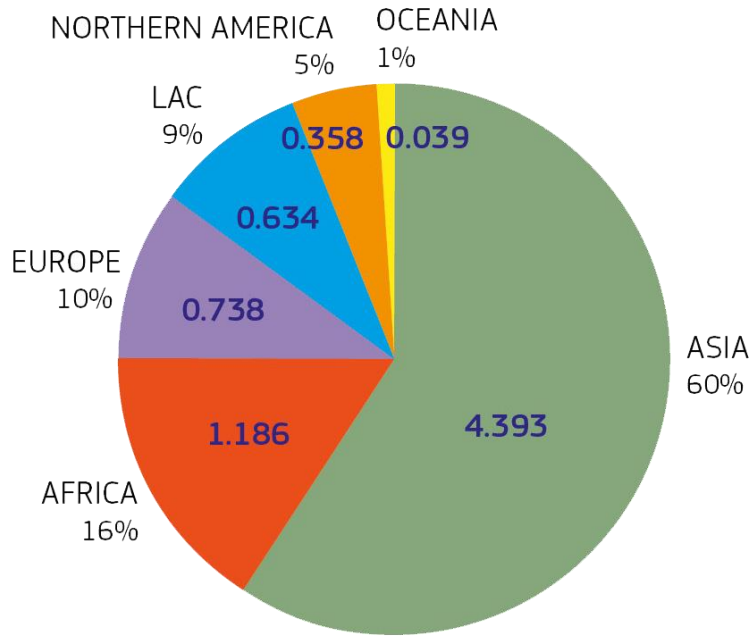


Fig. 3 Percentage of World Population in 2015

## 3.2 Social media usage in regions

This part is focused on some of the most interesting countries and continents, as regards social media usage. The United States of America and countries belonging to European Union will not be analyzed in detail as their statistic correspond to the previously mentioned statistic about monthly active users, discussed in the part about social media history, only with the exception of WeChat, which is mostly used in China. The focus will be on countries that differ from the general statistics, such as China, Russia, and India.

### 3.2.1 World's most popular platforms

Table 1 shows the world's most popular platforms that have been mentioned in this thesis. This table is included to serve as a comparison to the statistics of countries discussed afterwards.

<b>Platform</b>	<b>Monthly active users (in millions)</b>
Facebook	3,049
YouTube	2,491
WhatsApp	2,000
Instagram	2,000
TikTok	1,562
WeChat	1,336
Messenger	979
Snapchat	750
X (Twitter)	619

Tab. 1 World's most popular platforms – MAU (created according to statistics by Dixon, (2023b))

### **3.2.2 The USA and Europe**

The USA and Europe are the regions that mostly reflect the worldwide social media usage statistic. According to statistics from Gottfried (2024), YouTube is the most used platform with 83% of all adult population, followed by Facebook (68%) and Instagram (47%). Facebook remains the platform with most monthly active users in Europe, despite a decline in users in 2023, as reported in statistic by Dixon (2024). According to this statistic, Facebook reported 427 million active users at the end of 2021 and in 2023, this number decreased to 408 million users.

### **3.2.3 Africa**

According to Galal (2024), there are 384 million social media users in Africa, which makes 32% of total population. Compared to other regions, Africa is the continent with the smallest social media penetration. According to Galal (2024), Facebook dominates the African market as “*there were 271 million Facebook users in Africa*” (Galal, 2024). Other platforms report significantly less frequent usage compared to Facebook. Despite low Internet accessibility in Africa, the continent has developed significantly, as regards social media usage, in recent years and it can be expected to continue this growth. Furthermore, it is possible that other platform than Facebook will become more popular, as more users start using social media.

### **3.2.4 China**

In the part about social media history, two social media based in China, TikTok and WeChat, have been mentioned. TikTok is, however, not used in China but rather its

alternative Douyin with the same owner and identical features. According to Thomala (2024), Douyin is used by more than 750 million users every month, which is more than 50% of the total population of China. The most popular platform in China is WeChat with 1,075.72 billion monthly users, as reported by Dixon (2023b). The reason for WeChat popularity is probably, as mentioned in social media history part, its number of functions. Not only is WeChat a messaging platform but also a way to transfer money, offer services, shop various products, and other functions using Mini Apps.

Social media in China attract controversies as they are under influence of Chinese government. Users' posts and messages are likely to be closely monitored and any suspicious or users critical towards government might be banned from using these social media.

### **3.2.5 India**

India is the second most populated country in the world. The country is, however, underdeveloped especially in rural areas which causes a significantly lower internet penetration compared to other countries. According to the International Telecommunication Union (2021), only 46% of Indian population have access to the Internet. Despite this statistic, Wong (2024) reports that India has 448.1 million Facebook users. India is, therefore, the country with most Facebook users in the world. However, Facebook is not the most popular social media in India. According to Wong (2024), 74.7% of all Indian Internet users use Instagram, which makes 516.92 million active users. Besides Facebook and Instagram, other platforms experience little interest from Indian population.

### **3.2.6 Russia**

Russia is a specific country in terms of social media. While other regions, with the exception of China, to some extent resemble the worldwide statistic on social media platforms usage, Russia reports a little popularity of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. According to Melkadze (2023), VKontakte (VK) and Odnoklassniki are the two most popular platforms in Russia. VK is a Russian alternative to Facebook and Odnoklassniki, owned by VK, is a platform that enables current and former classmates to interact.

In Russia, platforms that are popular in the USA and West Europe are significantly less used than Russian alternatives. Such low numbers for platforms from the rest of the world might be caused by sanctions on social media that have been applied since 2022 when the Russian aggression on Ukraine started. It can be expected for the numbers to grow after the conflicts end; however, it is debatable whether Facebook, Instagram and other platforms will be able to compete with VK for the place of the most used platform in Russia.

### 3.3 Research

For the purpose of this thesis, research about social media usage in a form of an Internet survey has been conducted. The survey can be found in the appendix of this thesis. The first part focuses on demographics and geographics of social media users. The second part will be used later in the thesis, as it is focused on social media addiction, which will be discussed later. The first three questions are used to determine which part of society is represented in the further statistics shown in this part and also in the part about social media addiction. The results are shown in figures 3, 4, and 5.

Your age:  
158 odpovědí

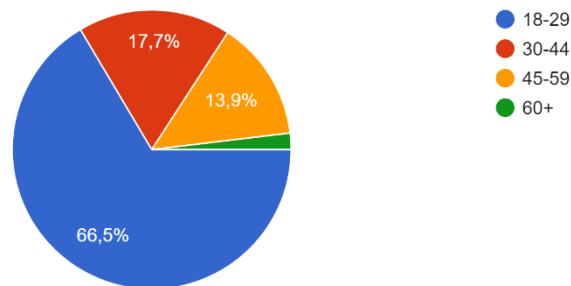


Fig. 4 Survey – age distribution of respondents

### Your current status

157 odpovědí

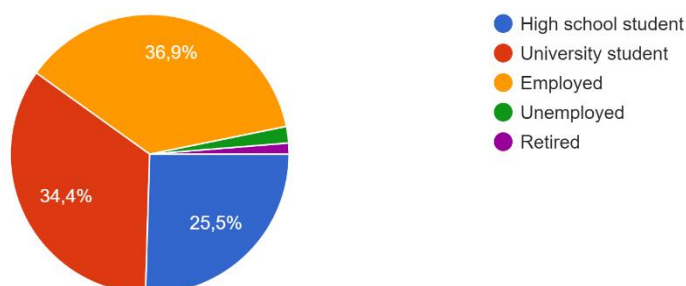


Fig. 5 Survey – social status of respondents

### Do you use social media?

157 odpovědí

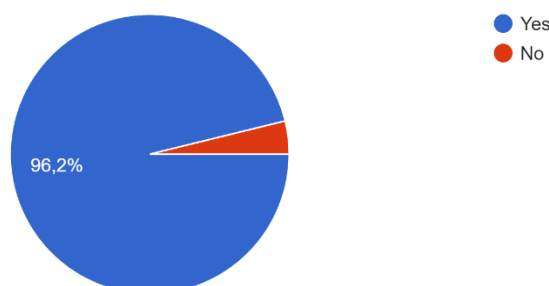


Fig. 6 Survey – social media usage by respondents

The question concerned with social media usage among people from the Czech Republic (shown in figure 7) can be used to outline statistics for this country. The aim of this part is to compare the results of the last question to the global user statistics obtained by Dixon (2023b) shown in Table 1.

In comparison to the global user statistics of individual platforms, it can be obvious, that some differences occur. The most significant difference can be noticed in the number of WeChat users. Out of 158 respondents, only one user reported to be using WeChat. That might be due to the fact that the platform is mostly popular in China. Some of the popular features of WeChat, such as shopping and advertising features offered by MiniApps are only available in China, and therefore unusable in the rest of the world.

There are two more platforms that significantly underperformed in the survey in comparison to the global statistics mentioned before. The first of them is another Chinese platform TikTok. That might be caused by the security problems, mentioned as its

disadvantage in the part about social media history. The concern about a possible personal data leak caused by TikTok and its close connection to the Chinese government has probably made many users consider not using the platform. Another underperforming platform is X, formerly called Twitter. This fact might confirm that the new ownership of X by Elon Musk and the new changes implemented by him, such as the change of the verification feature, which might have been harmful for the platform and led to the decline of X users in recent years.

Which platforms do you use?

155 odpovědí

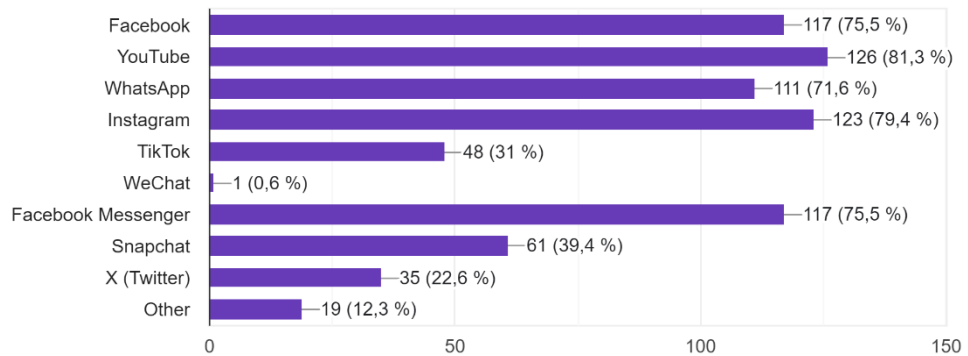


Fig. 7 Survey – Individual platforms usage by respondents



## **4. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES**

### **4.1 Advantages of social media**

#### **4.1.1 Connections**

The original reason for the creation of social media was the connection of people. The first platforms, as discussed in the part about social media history, were mainly focused on keeping people in touch. Never before the creation of social media has there been a more convenient way of connecting with friends, relatives and acquaintances. Social media offers a free connection with people anywhere in the world. Compared to phone calls, social media offers cheaper means of contacting other people, especially when calling a person who is located on a distant place. Phone connection is getting increasingly more expensive with the distance of the call receiver. As mentioned before, social media does not have such disadvantage.

Texting over social media is based on similar principle as SMS texting. The main advantage of social media texting is its price. While social media are free, texting over SMS service might become expensive, if the conversation consists of significant number of messages or if the message contains a large number of signs. Social media these days also offer additional services. Social media enable users to send pictures and files, while SMS does not. There is a possibility to send an MMS, which is, however, usually more expensive than SMS.

Another popular feature of social media, which SMS texting does not offer, is sending voice messages. This feature can be popular when the user wants to send a long information that would require writing a long piece of text or prefers speaking instead of texting. Compared to phone calls, which require the receiver to respond immediately, voice messages are available at any time after receiving and are also, as mentioned before, free of any charge. Social media texting also offers additional functions, which do not bring any significant advantages but are still popular among its users. Some examples of such functions can be sending stickers or GIFs or, in the case of Facebook Messenger, even play simple games built-in directly in the chat.

However, there is a disadvantage of social media texting compared to SMS texting. While social media require an Internet connection, SMS texting does not. In order to send an SMS, a user is only required to have access to a cellular signal, which is more

widespread than a mobile internet connection. According to Taylor (2023), the average world cellular coverage is 97.3 %. In highly developed regions such as Europe or the USA, this statistic is close to 100 %.

#### **4.1.2 Entertainment**

The next main advantage of social media is that it can be used as a source of entertainment. Some platforms that have been mentioned before, such as Messenger or WhatsApp, focus solely on connections between people, however, most of the most popular social media sites these days focus on providing content to their users. The platform that is the most focused on being a source of entertainment from the platforms mentioned before is YouTube. This site does not have a direct communicating feature besides comments under individual videos. Instead of that, YouTube focuses on sharing and viewing videos. YouTube is originally focused more on long-format content but in recent years, YouTube shorts are a more popular feature, similar to videos that can be found on TikTok.

TikTok and Instagram are entertainment platforms that are focused more on short-format content. Creators are not able to post videos longer than one minute on TikTok, and while Instagram enables users to post longer videos, Reels are a more popular feature. A significant advantage is that the algorithm provides an endless sequence of short videos explicitly chosen for each user based on their preferences so they always have a new entertaining content to watch. The algorithm is influenced by the previous videos that the user viewed, liked, or shared. There is a disadvantage to this algorithm connected to its possible addictiveness.

#### **4.1.3 News**

Over the time, social media and other digital news platforms have become the most common source of information. As stated by Scolari (2023, p. 152), "*The emergence of the World Wide Web changed the rules of the news game.*" According to research from Liedke & Wang (2023) digital platforms have become the most popular source of news and the number of their users is growing every year, while other sources, such as television, radio, and printed publications experience decline in popularity. The most significant advantage of accessing news is its availability. News on electronic devices is accessible within a few seconds, and a user is able to access them any time if they carry

their portable devices with them. The biggest social media news accounts often publish the most important news immediately, and therefore, a user can discover the latest important events instantly after their publishing. Compared to printed publications, most of the electronic news is free of charge. However, there are some websites that require a monthly subscription fee in order to access some of its content.

From the most popular social media, X (Twitter) is the most used platform by official sources to publish news. There is, however, a major disadvantage of accessing news via social media, in form of fake news and propaganda. It is important to distinguish between real and fake news, although it may be difficult in some occasions. Social media platforms offer the official sources to get a “verification badge”, which is one of the indicators that the account is a serious source of information. However, in case of X, the verification feature has changed in recent years into a paid feature where an account is able to get verification for a monthly fee. Therefore, it has become more difficult to distinguish between a serious news account and a fake account.

#### **4.1.4 Education**

Besides connecting people and being a source of news and entertainment, social media can also serve as a source of valuable information. Despite having a significant amount of purely entertaining content, there are various social media accounts that may provide valuable information. Besides educational content, there are some educative applications that show some features of social media. The most well-known example is Duolingo, an application for learning languages. According to Ceci (2024c), Duolingo reported almost 90 million monthly active users in 2023. The application is focused on learning languages in the form of short lectures but also enables users to interact, motivate each other, or compete in challenges. Therefore, it could also be considered a social media platform. Besides language-learning applications, educational content can be found on almost all of the most popular social networking sites.

#### **4.1.5 Business and marketing**

It can be said that social media changed the way the marketing works. In comparison to its predecessors or alternatives mentioned before in this chapter, social media offers most of their services less expensively than their alternatives or even completely free. In case of marketing, social media offer cheaper and more convenient options than its

predecessors. For example, Facebook, according to the information by Facebook Team (2024) published on the official Facebook website, a user can set any price range they are willing to pay for the marketing campaign and also specify their ideal user.

Other means of marketing, such as advertisements in printed publications, billboards or in form of emails have a major disadvantage. There is no possibility to choose who will see the advertisement and, therefore, it could be difficult to address the target audience of a certain products or services. The possibility of targeting the potential customer is only in form of choosing a specific location for the advertisement, for example placing an advertisement of a medical product in hospital and several more examples, however, social media algorithms enable companies to address a specific group of people. Because of the algorithm which gathers data about users' preferences and their search history via cookies, it can be relatively easy to advertise products to the possible customers.

Many social media platforms offer various functions to the product sellers. For example, applications such as Instagram or TikTok offer them to specify the target audience and set the number of users that the advertisement will be shown to, which is directly reflected in the cost of the advertisement. Such advantage is present only in advertisement on social media or other online platforms as it is not possible to determine the number of people that will see the advertisement in printed publications or on a billboard.

#### **4.1.6 Inspiration**

Besides previously described advantages, social media offers some more advantages that may not be as well-known as the ones mentioned before. Social media may serve as a source of motivation and inspiration. Many platforms are used by successful people that may share their reasons for success or offer valuable information. Many successful users offer various coaching programs for users to get better at specific skills in more convenient and direct approaches than other media, such as books or articles.

In spite of being a great source of motivation, social media can trigger a feeling of underachievement and failure in users because of setting high expectations. Many social media creators present themselves in a way that may not always reflect the reality and therefore their lives may seem flawless and their followers might set such expectations on themselves. Such disadvantages will be discussed later in this thesis.

## **4.2 Disadvantages of social media**

### **4.2.1 Fake news and propaganda**

The first disadvantage is closely connected to the advantage described in chapter 4.1.3. While the emergence of social media created new, more convenient ways of publishing news and information, never before has it been easier to spread fake information that can influence a significant number of people. Fake news occurs in various forms, including news that is not harmful and serve as an entertainment or satire but also news that can influence the public political opinions. Such news is often published by websites or profiles that pretend to be well-known official sources of information. Their name is often almost identical to the real profile and is, therefore, difficult to distinguish from the real one.

In recent years, features of fake news that could help users to distinguish between a real and a fake information have become less obvious. For example, as mentioned before, any profile is now able to be verified on X (Twitter) for a monthly subscription fee. Therefore, the verification function can no longer be used to spot fake profiles. The invention of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has made fake news less recognizable and significantly more trustworthy. The AI offers the possibility to imitate the voice of any person based on only a few-second sample of their recorded voice. Such feature could be used to manipulate the public opinions about some important people, such as politicians and therefore discredit the person or even influence the elections results.

### **4.2.2 Setting unrealistic expectations**

A disadvantage of social media that might not be obvious on the first sight is setting unreal expectations. Many famous people post a big number of posts that may not be always real in order to seem to have a perfect life. On the other hand, few people share their imperfections and low points in life, so they may seem flawless and never have a bad day. However, that is not always the truth. Social media users might get a feeling of underachievement and failure for not having the same lifestyle, amount of money, or beauty as social media influencers. Comparing to a fictional perfect life might trigger depression and could even mentally harm a person who tries to achieve such a life and keeps failing.

One of many examples are social media beauty models that often use various filters and photo editors to make their pictures as perfect as possible despite looking differently in real life. Similar example are bodybuilders and fitness influencers showing a physique that cannot be achieved naturally without any illegal enhancers. Such disadvantage has been reported multiple times in the survey for this thesis. Many people reported being depressed because of having unreal expectations caused by social media. It is important not to believe that everything on social media is real and not compare yourselves to people described before.

#### **4.2.3 Bad sleep**

Usage of social media can negatively affect sleep. In a study published by Pirdehghan et. al. (2021), people reported decreased sleep duration the more they used electronic devices. The same study also reported higher depression levels with increasing social media usage. The study confirms that social media usage can affect user's sleep and mental health and therefore could be harmful. This problem is not only associated with social media but rather with electronic devices in general. However, social media are only accessible via electronic devices, and therefore, the statistic also applies on social media.

Due to the fact that social media can be addictive, users might tend to spend multiple hours a day on them, causing their users to experience problems with their sleep. In the survey for this thesis, multiple people mentioned bad sleep as a disadvantage of their social media usage. Another problem associated with bad sleep and electronic devices is sleeping in the same room with the devices turned on. In the study by Pirdehghan et. al. (2021), more than 60 % of the people reported to sleep in the same room with their electronic devices turned on. Electronic devices use various wireless signals to communicate and despite not being visible or audible, they may still be harmful for the human and their sleep. Other more disadvantage of this can be constant income of notifications from social media platforms that might disrupt person's sleep with noise.

#### **4.2.4 Sensitive content**

Sensitive content, especially pornography, has become significantly more available with the rise of the internet and social media. Pornography has been present in society long before the invention of the internet in various forms such as magazines, erotic stories,

and videos. Pornography might be addictive and should not be available to younger audiences. Because of weak restrictions for such age group, pornography is, therefore, practically accessible to anybody. According to a survey published on British news page The Guardian by Grant & Milmo (2023), 22% of children between 14 and 18 years of age reported to have watched pornography on multiple occasions. Watching pornography can have a negative effect on a person's mental health, especially on children. Pornography is, however, not a topic closely connected to social media. This chapter will therefore discuss some examples of pornography that occurs on social media.

The first example is sensitive content on platforms like Instagram or TikTok. There are accounts that publish pictures of models that are revealing their bodies. Some pictures could even be called soft-core pornography. The problem with this phenomenon is that platforms on which those pictures occur are available for users younger than 18 years of age, for example, platforms by Meta, which are accessible to anyone older than 13. Another example of pornography on social media occurs on streaming platform Twitch. This platform has not yet been discussed in this thesis. The platform is based solely on live streams. Content creators are able to stream video games and interact with their audience in real-time. This platform has become the main means of broadcasting esports tournaments. There are, however, some creators that do not use Twitch to stream video games. There is a category called "Pools, Hot Tubs, and Beaches," where mostly female creators in revealing swimsuits show their bodies. The problem with this content is that such content is, despite being restricted to audiences older than 18 years of age, relatively easy to access by underage users. Internet pornography, in general, is not difficult to watch for underage users as on most of the pages, the only age verification feature occurs in the form of a simple question such as "Are you older than 18 years of age?". Such streams often include a set of hypertext links to other social media accounts of the creator, sometimes including a link to their OnlyFans account.

The original function of OnlyFans was to serve as a social media platform. The concept of this platform enables content creators to receive money for their content as it is only accessible for a monthly subscription fee and sometimes even after paying this fee, a user is required to pay for individual pieces of content. There exist several more platforms with identical concept, such as Herohero, Patreon, Many Fans, and Fansly. Adult content creators also use some of these platforms to publish sensitive content.

The platforms also enable the member of the audience to request creating specific videos for a significant amount of money.

#### **4.2.5 Productivity and Procrastination**

As reported later in the thesis, many people use social media for a significant part of their day. Spending time of social media can be enjoyable, however, in many cases, it is not as productive as other activities and also can prove to be harmful because of the reasons mentioned before. Social media usage can mean various activities including education and socializing but in the case of, for example, mindless scrolling through TikTok and Instagram Reels consuming low-quality content, the time spent on social media can be considered procrastination.

In the case of avoiding performing more important tasks in order to spend time on social media, such usage can prove to be harmful for a user. Therefore, it is important to find a balance between the time spent performing important tasks and the time spent on social media. In that case, social media are not as harmful as mentioned in the previous example and can serve as a good type of entertainment and education.

#### **4.2.6 Attention span**

The last disadvantage mentioned is the possible shortening attention span caused by the development of content on social media. As mentioned before, with the emergence of platforms such as TikTok and newer functions of platforms, for example Instagram Reels or YouTube Shorts, there has been a significant popularity of short content. Those platforms offer users to watch short pieces of content, usually up to one minute of length. The algorithm, which is learning preferences of individual users and can determine the perfect videos for them, creates an endless sequence of videos through which a user can scroll infinitely.

It is easier for a user to spend more time on the platform because they can scroll through videos without interruption and the necessity of choosing the next piece of content they are going to watch. The long sequences of scrolling cause the user to focus on individual videos only for a short period of time, often not exceeding a few seconds. A user could therefore experience trouble focusing on longer pieces of content, which provides less stimulation than shorter content.



## 4.3 Security risks

One of the most significant advantages of social media, which is the ability to share information and data with others, can become one of its biggest disadvantages. As stated by Senthil Kumar et.al. (2016, p. 115), *“by utilizing social networking sites, people open themselves to different sorts of dangers that have the regular impact of breaking their privacy.”* It would be difficult to describe all types of security risks that occur on social media, as there is a large number of them. This chapter will, therefore describe three of the most common examples that the user can experience.

### 4.3.1 Phishing

The break of privacy can become really dangerous in case of leakage of such information as bank account details. In this case, phishing is the most common example. Nieves et. al. (2017, p. 21) define phishing as *“an email-based attack intended to trick individuals into performing an action beneficial to the attacker.”* The action beneficial to the attacker usually presents typing private information, especially bank account details. The example of bank account numbers stealing is not a typical case on social media platforms but rather on unverified internet shops. The fraudulent site is often almost perfectly similar to the real website it pretends to be. Some social media sites offer paid services to their customers, as in previously mentioned examples (e.g. YouTube Premium).

More frequent case of phishing on social media is stealing account information, such as passwords or email addresses linked to the profile. The phishing sites are designed exactly like the login screen of the social media platform, which makes them difficult for the user to distinguish between a real and a fake website. After acquiring the account, hackers often use stolen profiles to share fake news or another link to a phishing website on the user’s profile or via direct messages to the user’s contacts.

### 4.3.2 Defence against phishing

The figure 7 shows an example of a phishing website, which pretends to be a Facebook login. The design of the website makes it extremely difficult to distinguish between a phishing and a real website. The only feature that can help the user verify, whether or not the website is real, is, in this case the address of the website. The name “viewerstart.com” indicates, that the website only pretends to be Facebook. Users should always check such features in order to be sure that they are not a victim of a phishing

attack.

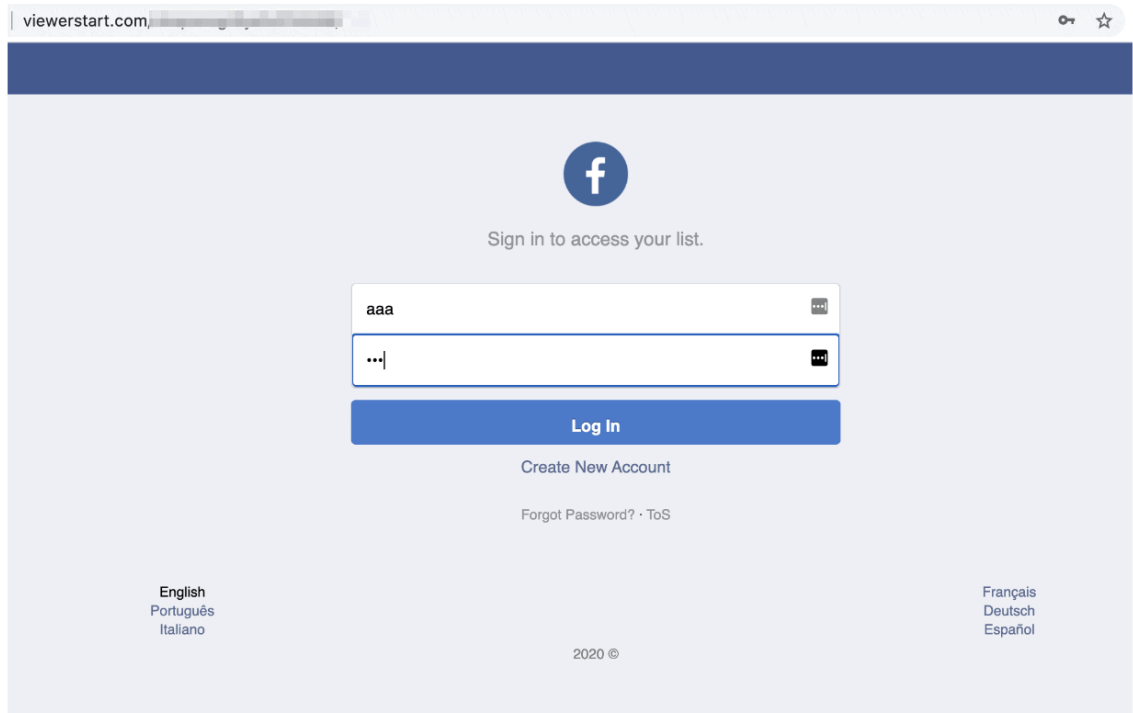


Fig. 8 Example of phishing 1

The names of websites that are completely different from the websites, they pretend to be, are not difficult to distinguish, however, the name of the fake website can vary only slightly, which makes it extremely difficult to spot. Such example is shown in figure 8, where a fake PayPal login can be seen. In this case, an important feature, that can be used to spot the fake website is the use of two hyphens in the address. The two hyphens are not easy to notice in case a user does not specifically look on the website name. Another example, that is hard to distinguish from the real website name, can be just a slight change in one of the letters in the address (e.g. Facebook.com).

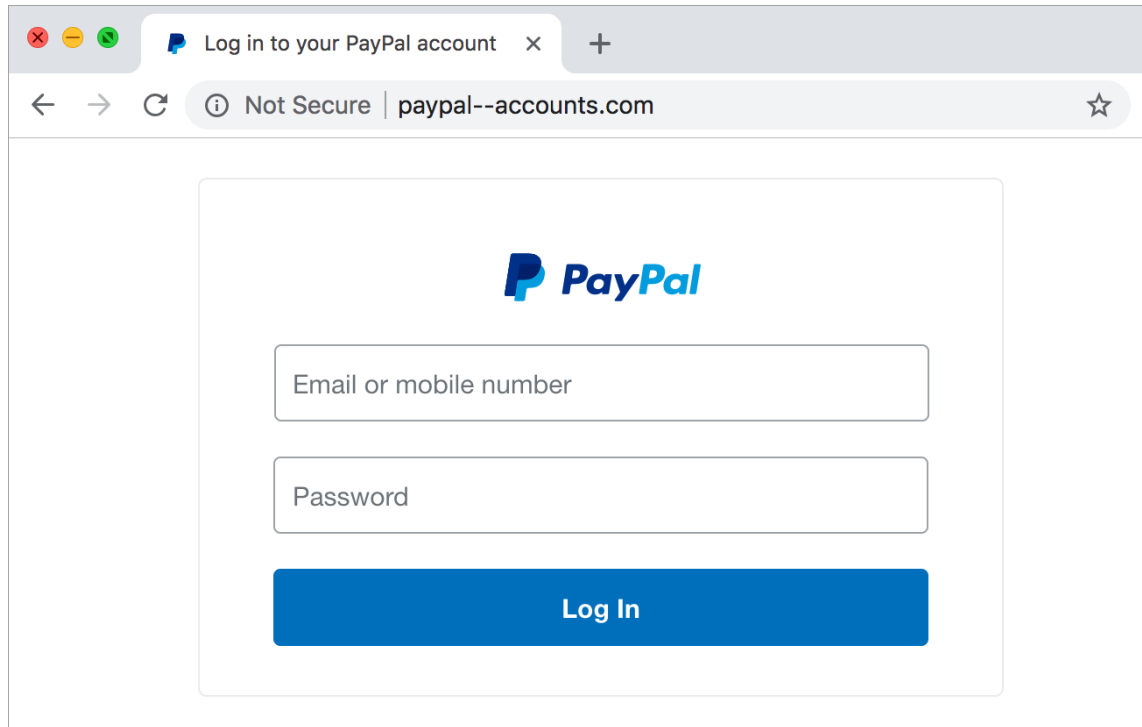


Fig. 9 Example of phishing 2

### 4.3.3 Voluntary loss of information

The second example of security hazard is specific in the way that it does not require a hacker or a fake website to leak personal information about user. Social media users often underestimate effects of the information they post on social media. People often think, that only their friends and families see their posts and do not realize the consequences of their action. A common example from the real life can be sharing the address of the house, in which the user lives. It is not required to explicitly provide the address, for the thief or the hacker to find the exact location of the house. Such information can become really dangerous when the user shares the information about when they are going to leave for a vacation. This information can make the theft of the user's valuables significantly easier for the thief.

That was an extreme example of what could possibly happen to users that tend to overshare information on social media. Another example can be sharing of private information, such as email address or telephone number. After collecting enough private information, the thief can impersonate the user in a bank or another institute. The examples mentioned show the importance of keeping privacy on social media, as the voluntary sharing of private information can become really dangerous.

#### **4.3.4 Profiling**

According to Information Commissioner's Office (2022), "*profiling analyses aspects of an individual's personality, behavior, interests and habits to make predictions and decisions about them.*" Profiling is a common feature of social media algorithms, which were described regarding individual platforms, such as Instagram or TikTok in the part about social media history. These algorithms are typically used to determine the type of content a specific user is interested in. Another example of profiling use is in social media marketing and advertisements. The information gathered by profiling can be used to recommend such products or services, that users are more likely to purchase based on their interests and preferences.

The danger associated with profiling is connected to the loss of privacy. Users are often not completely aware of the profiling and do not often realize that something is taking and storing information about them. Another risk arises in case such data storage is hacked, causing private information leakage. Hackers may use the data to impersonate users, as described in the part about phishing, or even use them to blackmail users with their private information.

### **4.4 Social media addiction**

The chapter about social media addiction uses the second part of the survey conducted for the purpose of this thesis. This part consists of four questions regarding social media addiction in order to determine whether or not social media users in the Czech Republic are addicted or not.

The first question in the survey is concerned with the time spent on social media per one day. The answers cannot be taken completely seriously as some users might underestimate or on the other hand, overestimate the time they spend on social media. Despite the possibility of being inaccurate, the answers can still provide a rough estimate the time spent on social media.

According to the answers to the first question, shown in the figure 9, almost 85% of responding users spend more than one hour a day on social media. Approximately 39% of users reported to use social media more than four hours every day. In the case of deducting eight hours of sleep from the total 24 hours in a day, it can be said that 39% of users spend one quarter of their day on social media, which could possibly be considered

as an addiction. Nevertheless, the results confirm that social media make a big part of our lives.

How much time do you spend on social media per day?  
158 odpovědí

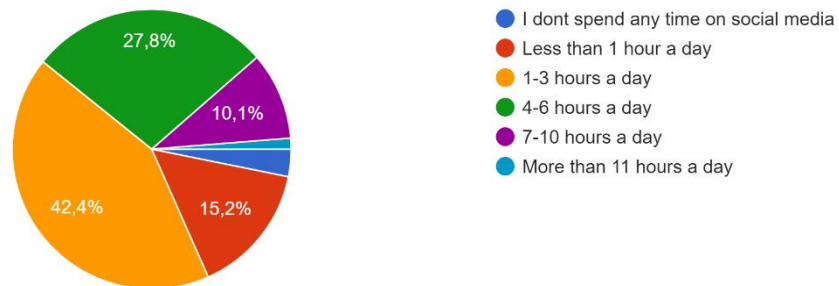


Fig. 10 Survey – time spent on social media

The second question, shown in the figure 10 is more directly concerned with the social media addiction. The question is solely based on user opinions and is interesting when compared to the first question as well as the following ones. According to the results, more than 53% of respondents feel they are not addicted to social media. In comparison with the results of the first questions, it could be almost accurately stated that users who reported using social media for less than three hours a day do not feel addicted to social media. However, using social media for approximately two or three hours could possibly be questioned as an addiction.

Do you feel addicted to social media?  
158 odpovědí

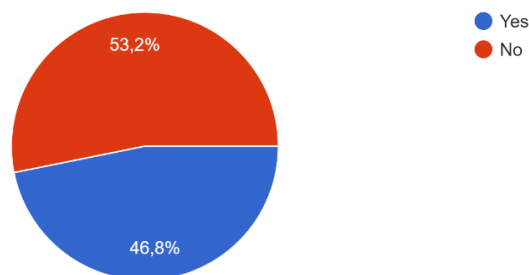


Fig. 11 Survey – social media addiction (opinion of respondents)

The answers to the third question, shown in figure 11, contrast with the previous question. It was reported by 69% of users that they use social media while performing basic daily tasks, such as cooking or going to the bathroom. Spending time on social media while performing daily basic tasks could be, in some cases, considered an addiction. It can be tempting for users to be on social media while performing less entertaining and less enjoyable tasks such as those mentioned before. However, such usage of social media can be harmful in the way of developing addiction and can lead to not being able to perform such tasks without the stimulation provided by social media.

Do you use social media while performing basic daily tasks? (Cooking, going to the bathroom,...)  
158 odpovědí

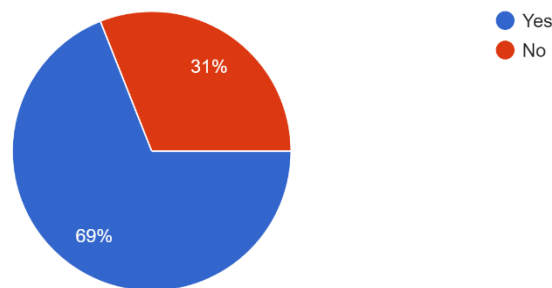


Fig. 12 Survey – social media usage during basic daily tasks performance

Despite the number of respondents using social media during daily tasks, the majority of people believe that they would be able to avoid using social media for at least one day. However, the answers are solely based on the user's feelings and therefore cannot be fully considered a fact. It would be interesting to see the results obtained by an experiment that restricted access to social media for a certain group of people to verify the results of this research.

Would you be able to go completely without social media for a day?

157 odpovědí

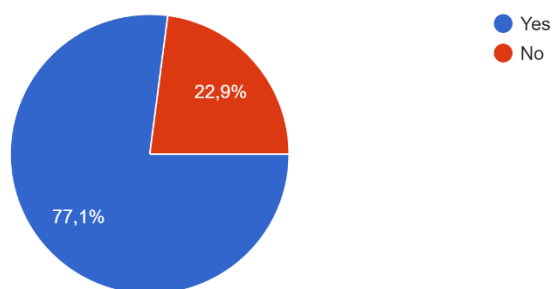


Fig. 13 Survey – break from social media (opinion of respondents)

## 5. CONCLUSION

The main objective of this thesis is to cover social media from different perspectives. The first chapter describing social media history not only describes the evolution of social media from their predecessors to application that many people know these days and use on a daily basis, but also tries to depict the most important features regarding the most important social media platforms in the last few years. In addition, some significant disadvantages concerning individual platforms, predominantly the most controversial ones, such as X or TikTok, are described.

Later on, the thesis focuses on social media users, rather than the platforms. Examples of the most interesting countries and continents, as regards social media usage, are shown, as well as the comparison of such regions to the global user statistics. The next statistic shows the user age groups in order to answer the frequently asked question, whether or not is social media only used by younger generations.

The current state chapter then focuses on a statistic of worldwide monthly active users of the most important social media platforms these days. This statistic is used as a comparison for results of the research, which was conducted via an internet survey, collecting 158 answers. The research was concerned with users from the Czech Republic and, therefore, noted some significant differences in usage of individual platforms. The differences were discussed and their reasons were depicted.

The last part, concerned with social media advantages and disadvantages, also uses the information provided in the form of answers in the survey by the users from the Czech Republic. The most frequent advantages and disadvantages, that users experience by social media usage are described. Important risks of social media usage, that users may not notice, such as security risks and social media addiction are described at the end of this thesis. It would certainly difficult to describe all security risks a user can experience on social media. Therefore, the thesis focuses on the most common examples, such as phishing or profiling, and, in some cases, provides practical solutions and advices, how to defend against them.

Regarding social media addiction, the answers from the survey are used to find out opinions of users from the Czech Republic about their experience with social media addiction. Using graphs and statistics, the thesis tries to show the addiction level of users



and their opinion of, whether or not they are addicted to social media. Even though the majority of respondents reported that they do not feel addicted to social media, the thesis discusses these opinions using the answers to other statistics. It is possible, that more users are to some degree addicted to social media and might not be aware of such situation.

This Bachelor's thesis describes social media from different perspectives. The first part about social media history can serve as a theoretical background for future studies about social media or individual platforms, as the principles and history of various social media platforms is described. The research for this thesis creates statistics of social media usage for the Czech Republic. For more accurate statistics, more answers would be necessary, however, the research can be used to estimate the statistics for this region. The results of the second part of the research may indicate the possible addiction of users from the Czech Republic on social media, especially alarming are the statistics about the time spent on social media. The research is only based on user's opinions and, therefore, indicates the necessity of further research on social media addiction. Furthermore, the thesis may be used as a simple guide for social media risks for users and provides the way of avoiding such risks.

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## **APPENDIX**

The appendix includes the survey that was conducted as a part of the research for this thesis. The survey can be found on <https://forms.gle/faPrUqcqP2PmtiE38>.

# Social media (Bachelors thesis)

Hi, thank you for filling this survey that will help me with my Bachelors thesis.

\* Označuje povinnou otázku

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## 1. Your age: \*

Označte jen jednu elipsu.

18-29

30-44

45-59

60+

## 2. Your gender:

Označte jen jednu elipsu.

Male

Female

## 3. Your current status

Označte jen jednu elipsu.

High school student

University student

Employed

Unemployed

Retired



4. Do you use social media?

*Označte jen jednu elipsu.*

Yes

No

5. Which platforms do you use?

*Zaškrtněte všechny platné možnosti.*

Facebook

YouTube

WhatsApp

Instagram

TikTok

WeChat

Facebook Messenger

Snapchat

X (Twitter)

Other

6. How much time do you spend on social media per day?

*Označte jen jednu elipsu.*

I dont spend any time on social media

Less than 1 hour a day

1-3 hours a day

4-6 hours a day

7-10 hours a day

More than 11 hours a day

7. Do you feel addicted to social media?

*Označte jen jednu elipsu.*

Yes

No

8. Do you use social media while performing basic daily tasks? (Cooking, going to the bathroom,...)

*Označte jen jednu elipsu.*

Yes

No

9. Would you be able to go completely without social media for a day?

*Označte jen jednu elipsu.*

Yes

No

10. What are the biggest benefits of social media for you? Why do you use them?

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11. Are you experiencing any problems or difficulties caused by your social media usage?

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Obsah není vytvořen ani schválen Googlem.

**Google** Formuláře