Social media, a medium that enables us to interact with each other at the click of a button, to share our thoughts, opinions and events in our lives instantaneously. And while this trend has only become popularised in the past 11 years, it has dramatically changed our lives and the way we communicate, but over the years that it has become popular it has also shaped a generation that is becoming increasingly illiterate, conformist and gullible.

Today I’m going to discuss the concept that social media is producing a generation that does not think; a generation that is intellectually capable but through the effects of the internet and social media has become intellectually lazy.

In 2010 it was recorded that Australia used social media websites the most out of everyone in the world, with over 9 million users spending an average time of 9 hours online per month. And while that figure is really quite staggering; statistics show that 93% of teenagers between the years of 12-17 use social media every day.

When the trend of using social media burst into our lives, we were not only introduced to another way of communicating with each other but also a whole different language. This language associated with conversing through technology includes the shortening of words by excluding some letters, the creating of acronyms for commonly used phrases and sometimes even the implementation of numbers to replace a couple of letters. This language is destroying the correct way that tweens and even some children should be communicating. The new generations that will be raised with this language from a young age will be unable to tell the difference between the proper spellings of words and the uselessly shortened words because someone could not be bothered to take one extra second to press the y and o buttons to make “you” instead of just the letter u. The use of this language doesn’t just make people seem lazy, but also unintelligent.

We’ve heard of employers viewing the Facebook profiles of job candidates, so think of this. Do you think that the employer would be more likely to hire the profile that uses proper spelling, full sentences and appropriate punctuation or the profile full of unneeded capital letters, no punctuation and lists of useless hash tags at the end of a status? This tech language created by social media will only continue to evolve for many years to come and as it continues to teach people terrible spelling and horrible punctuation, let us hope that we as intelligent individuals may continue to use normal English. Furthermore while the trend of the language used on the internet has been evident for a long time, there are also other trends that have only recently come to life.

Another trend that has been popularised, mainly on Facebook, is the liking of pages. This trend has taught us to conform to the likes of others and not think for ourselves and value our own opinions or thoughts. Created to direct information related to the page to your newsfeed for example, the page of a band posting tour dates etc. This feature on Facebook has seemed to have lost its meaning. Now pages on Facebook are merely phrases that somebody looks at and things either “Ha that’s funny!” or “Oh my god! I hate it when a mosquito bites me too!” to which that person likes the page and never hears from it again or gets their newsfeed flooded with pointless photos or even advertisements. Pages like the one for the CSIRO, where they share developments or news about their discoveries, has 23,000 likes, which is hugely overshadowed by a page like “I love my mum” which has 5 million likes. It really seems like today’s generation feels the need to reinforce their feelings through the liking of a page. Why do we need to like a page to reassure ourselves that we really do love our mothers? The use of pages on Facebook is yet another example of how social media is producing a generation that does not think and in this case likes pages to which they can make the slightest and mundane connection to. And while the pages on Facebook freely post information on various topics, many consumers are unaware of a big problem that many people don’t take into account.

This problem is the problem of misinformation that occurs not only on social media but throughout the whole internet; one of the biggest problems that we face today when reading anything online. Through the effects of social media we have been made gullible and unaware of these dangers. In this new age where we hear about news stories through social media faster than traditional means like news sites and television, it can make it extremely difficult to find the truth among lies, especially when many of the posts on social media are filled with personal opinions and bias, rather than facts.

There have been multiple cases where celebrities have been rumoured to have died, or disasters have occurred, to which that rumour continued to spread because rather than simply entering what they have heard in google, they took a post at face value without thinking that it may or may not be true. In Braden’s speech we saw how easy it is for the media to be fooled by a bunch of teenagers, so imagine how easy it is to fool people. In addition, programs such as Photoshop or others, if wielded by the right people can create amazingly realistic images that you wouldn’t even suspect are fake. Now, I would like to show you some photos. Look closely and tell me if you think they’re real images or computer generated.

(Slideshow photos)

So as you can see not everything is always as it seems. And while you can be fooled by images you can be just as easily fooled by text, if one doesn’t review their legitimacy. This ability to fool people and spread rumours so easily is highly destructive, especially when users of social media are unaware of the truth. Generations are being brought up more and more closely with social media and yet they still seem to be unaware of how easy it is to be fed lies and they do not think to even challenge the validity of the words they read.

While some would argue that social media has benefited our generation by allowing us to make friends that we wouldn’t have been able to have before, in truth it has only trivialised relationships. It has in turn, reduced a friendship down to a number. Social media has trivialised our real world relationships by making it easier for us to interact. For example wishing each other “Happy Birthday” through an emotionless message rather than picking up the phone or saying it face to face to our friends. And while you may have 400 friends on Facebook, studies have shown that you can only properly maintain 150 friends in total. So next time you look at your list of 400 Facebook friends think, “Would I invite this person into my home?” Social networking has taught our generation that interactions on the internet carry the same social worth as interactions between each other in the real world; clearly this view has promoted laziness and neglect for face to face interaction.

The introduction of social media has impacted our lives in ways that are not entirely positive. It’s teaching us that the simple action of typing out a whole sentence isn’t necessary, that we should like meaningless pages just to add them to our profile because we feel a mundane connection to them and finally, leaves us unaware of the dangers of misinformation and how easy we can be lied to through text and images. Our generation faces a time where we are being intellectually restrained due to overuse of social media and as Einstein once said: *“Any man who reads too much and uses his own brain too little, falls into lazy habits of thinking”.* So honestly ask yourselves, is overuse of social media having a negative impact on you?