



# TERMS OF SERVICE

THE REAL COST OF SOCIAL MEDIA

CHRIS MARTIN

Chris Martin has established himself as one of the foremost Christian thinkers when it comes to digital technologies in general, and the social internet in particular. In this book, he demonstrates why it is so important for Christians to think well about these world-changing, heart-shaping, soul-forming technologies. I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to better understand how we can take back what they've so eagerly taken from us.

**Tim Challies**, author and blogger

With great insight, Chris shows us how the social internet we carry around in our pockets has shaped the world and is shaping us. If you hold angst for the alarming and adverse impacts of social media, this book will give language to your concerns and provide hopeful and helpful solutions. Chris's wise counsel to admire beauty, walk in humility, and value silence and accountability is an important challenge for all of us, including parents, ministry leaders, teachers, and anyone who in a role to influence others.

**Eric Geiger**, senior pastor, Mariners Church

The internet may be financially free, but it has other costs. In *Terms of Service*, Chris Martin skillfully unpacks the trade-offs of life in the digital age—helping us become more attentive to the hidden costs of the social internet. This is a valuable read for any Christian who spends significant amounts of time online—which is pretty much all of us these days. We're aware of the ways the social internet is remaking the world. But are we alert to the ways it is remaking us? This book helps us carefully consider this question, and gives us tools for moving forward in health.

**Brett McCracken**, senior editor at  
The Gospel Coalition, author of *The Wisdom Pyramid:  
Feeding Your Soul in a Post-Truth World*

*Terms of Service* is a terrifying book—which is exactly why you must read it. With charity and clear-headedness, Chris Martin guides us through the world that we all inhabit but few of us

understand. His personal knowledge and extended study of how the internet is shaping us will benefit pastors, parents, and anyone who cares of about the discipleship of souls. So put down your phone and pick up this book.

**Hannah Anderson**, author of *All That's Good: Recovering the Lost Art of Discernment*

*Terms of Service* will annoy you. If you are already reaping the neurochemical rewards of the social media echo chambers of your own choosing, I recommend that you do not read this book. Who reads books anymore anyways? I mean, if it is longer than 280 characters, why would any . . .

**Read Mercer Schuchardt**, associate professor of communication, Wheaton College, PhD, New York University under Neil Postman, bestselling author of *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

If anyone should write the book on how social media (or the “social internet,” as Chris so wisely calls it) has affected us all, it’s Chris Martin. He has been in the trenches of social media for over a decade and observed what’s going on from that vantage point, not an ivory tower. *Terms of Service* will help anyone looking to understand how and why our online behaviors have shaped us and what it means to move forward in a digital world with a kingdom mindset.

**Julie Masson**, director of External Engagement, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

It’s not hard to offer negative critiques of the social internet. What is hard is giving sustained attention to those problems and following it with sound guidance on how to live faithfully in the real world. Chris’s years of experience in digital ministry and careful personal practices make him a worthy guide.

**John Dyer**, professor and VP of Educational Technology, Dallas Theological Seminary, author of *From the Garden to the City: The Place of Technology in the Story of God*

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This is why.



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# Introduction

**T**his is a book about fish.

Not literally but metaphorically.

David Foster Wallace, American author and novelist, once wrote: “There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, ‘Morning, boys. How’s the water?’ And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “‘What’s water?’”<sup>1</sup>

The “moral” of this parable, if you will, is that most people are not aware of certain features of the world around them, despite how intertwined those features are in their lives. This is my attempt to be the older fish, except I am not asking you how the water is. I’m here to tell you that the water is poisoned.

My fear is that most people who use social media are like the two young fish in David Foster Wallace’s parable. Social media has become so woven into all of our lives that, like a fish in water, we don’t even notice it anymore. We just consume content on social media constantly without ever stopping to

consider the puppet strings that are being pulled behind all the content on our screens. We consume content and content consumes us. This is my plea for you to stop scrolling for a moment and consider the state of the pixelated water in which you swim.

We easily swim through our lives today without considering the effects of social media on ourselves and the world around us. We spend our Friday nights scrolling Instagram while watching Netflix, and we don't even think twice about it. We fight with strangers about politics on Twitter *because it's just what you do*. We post pictures of our loved ones and life updates to Facebook without even considering the privacy implications of posting that information.

I grew up on social media, using AOL Instant Messenger as early as the first grade. I have spent about ten years deep-sea diving in this ocean by merit of my daily work and personal study. This is my attempt to steal your attention away from the Silicon Valley geniuses who have spent their lives trying to harness it so I can alert you to just how harmful it may be for your heart and your mind.

The social internet is brilliant and obscene. It sharpens the mind and dulls it. It brings nations together and tears them apart. It perpetuates, reveals, and attempts to repair injustice. It is an untamed beast upon which we can only hope to ride but never quite tame. It is hard to see it now, but the social internet is not just the latest iteration of the printing press or the television. The pervasiveness and invasiveness of the social internet can be likened to an alien invasion. You can't stop it;

you must learn to live alongside it, whether you like it or not. You may delete your Facebook account, but a friend will ask you if you have one. You can stay off Twitter, but you will hear about what happened there on the evening news.

We may be able to log off the social internet, delete our accounts, and never participate, but we can never escape its influence. What is it doing to us?

## **What's the Point?**

You can easily become discouraged when you are exploring the depth of negativity wrought by social media and our relationship with it. Whether it's the rampant privacy concerns that average users ignore or the mental health effects that go untreated or the blurring of the line between "truth" and "fiction," when you start to notice the toxins in the water and no one else seems to care, it can be disorienting to the point of despair. This is why I have kept the "What's the point?" question at the fore of my mind all along.

My goal is not to tell you to delete your social media accounts. Though that is a fine application of what you will read. Nor is the point of this to call out the unethical practices of social media companies in their perpetual harvesting of user data for profit. Though that does happen in here.

So then, what *is* the point of this book?

The point is simply to help you see that the water is toxic. The goal is to help you recognize that social media is changing the way you think, feel, and live. Like water to a fish,

social media has come to pervade the lives of everyone. As a fish cannot live apart from water, we cannot live apart from social media, even if we delete our accounts! My grandma has never used social media in her life. She might read this book because she loves me, but this book will be utter nonsense to her because she has never logged onto any social media platform. Guess what, though: in our weekly phone calls, she often mentions something her friends saw on Facebook. Social media is inescapable.

Because we cannot escape social media, my goal is not to call you to delete your accounts and log off. I simply want you to recognize that social media is changing how you think and feel about life and largely in negative ways. Whether this book leads you to delete your accounts or use them with greater discernment and care doesn't matter to me. My hope is that your perspective is reoriented enough to at least examine your relationship with social media and not simply scroll on mental autopilot anymore. I provide some action steps in part 3, but those are optional applications of a bigger purpose: to *know* that the water is toxic.

In order to accomplish that purpose, though, I need something from you.

### **What This Book Requires of You**

In his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman writes about Lewis Mumford, a twentieth-century American writer and thinker:

Lewis Mumford . . . has been one of our great noticers. He is not the sort of a man who looks at a clock merely to see what time it is. Not that he lacks interest in the content of clocks, which is of concern to everyone from moment to moment, but he is far more interested in how a clock creates the idea of “moment to moment.”

“The clock,” Mumford has concluded, “is a piece of power machinery whose ‘product’ is seconds and minutes.” In manufacturing such a product, the clock has the effect of disassociating time from human events and thus nourishes the belief in an independent world of measurable sequences.

Moment to moment, it turns out, is not God’s conception, or nature’s. It is man conversing with himself about and through a piece of machinery he created.

In Mumford’s great book *Technics and Civilization*, he shows how, beginning in the fourteenth century, the clock made us into time-keepers, and then time-savers, and now time-servers.<sup>2</sup>

If my book is to accomplish its purpose, to get you to recognize the noxious nature of the social media waters in which

we swim, I need you to help me by being a “great noticer” like Lewis Mumford.

The product of a clock is its seconds and minutes; the product of social media is the content we consume. Like Mumford looked beyond the seconds and minutes produced by the clock, so we must look beyond the funny cat videos and family photos produced by our Facebook feeds. Man made the clock to serve man, but man ended up serving the clock. Man made social media to serve man, but man has come to serve social media.

I will serve you better if you read this book with the mind of Lewis Mumford, attempting to be a “great noticer” who looks beyond the surface of our most consuming pastime to the depths of how it is affecting every facet of our lives.

Also, before we go any further, we have to do a bit of housekeeping in regard to terminology. I will use the term *social internet* more frequently than *social media*. I do this because I want us to think of the entire internet as social, not just the *social media apps* that litter our phone screens. The principles here apply to all the ways we interact with people

Man made social media to serve man, but man has come to serve social media.

online, not just through Facebook, Instagram, or other such platforms. Generally, I will use the term *social media* when I am referring to the apps and platforms we all use, and I will use the term *social internet* if I am speaking more broadly of all

the ways the internet is social. If the term *social internet* trips you up, just mentally substitute *social media* for it; it's not a big deal. But, given that this book is meant to broaden our understanding of the social aspects of the internet and how we are changed by them, I think it is important that we think in terms of the social *internet*, not just social *media*.

## The Terms of Service

Nobody reads the terms of service for new websites or software they sign up to use. For instance, if you're a Spotify user, when you checked the box in agreement with their terms, you provided them access to your photos and videos. Most Spotify users don't know that. Apple iTunes users, your terms indicate that you cannot use iTunes to construct a nuclear missile, so don't get any ideas! The terms of service (or terms and conditions, which is the same concept) to which we all agree when we sign up for a social media platform are often concerning in and of themselves.

We agree to a lot of conditions when we use social media that are not included in the terms of service we dishonestly say we have read when we sign up for these platforms. The terms of service we lie about reading do not mention the risk of mental illness or the insidious nature of cancel culture. There is no warning in terms of service agreements about rampant polarization or disfigured ideas of beauty.

When we chain ourselves to our preferred social media platforms, we give up more than we realize. Social media may not cost anything, but it isn't free.

I am concerned about the terms of our service to an invention that was originally designed to serve *us* but which *we have come to serve*. We are servants of the social internet. It governs our days and poisons our lives more than we recognize.

To what have we agreed? These social media apps may be free, but what do they *actually* cost us?

Let's find out.

PART 1

# How We Got Here



## CHAPTER 1

# How Did the Social Internet Evolve?

I'm a typical white, suburban, nineties kid. I was born in 1990 to Joe and Catherine Martin. My mom worked at a doctor's office early in my life but was soon at home being a full-time mom to me and eventually my brother, who was born in 1993.

My dad worked for IBM my entire childhood, and he spent most of that time working from home. Because my dad worked for IBM from home, we had a home computer before most of my friends at school did, or at least it felt that way. Working from home was so novel in the early nineties that a local newspaper came to our house and did a story on my dad's work-from-home setup, complete with a picture of me sitting on his lap in front of his chunky PC. I remember logging onto our beige-boxed Windows 95 IBM machine and heading

straight to [www.nick.com](http://www.nick.com), Nickelodeon's website, to see what the website of my favorite TV channel looked like. I also remember my mom asking me to "please get off the internet" when she was expecting a phone call and I was busy collecting virtual trading cards of my favorite Nickelodeon characters—similar to how I was collecting Pokémon cards off-line. Later in elementary and middle school, once the internet didn't clog up the phone line, I spent hours online nearly every day chatting with friends via AOL Instant Messenger (AIM), checking out peoples' Myspace pages, and playing video games.

All of us can recall some of our earliest experiences with the internet. Whether you were six years old, like me, or thirty-six years old, you likely remember what it was like when you first started exploring the virtual landscape of the World Wide Web.

For most of us, the first internet experiences we remember are social in nature. Sure, some of you may have first experienced the internet in college when you had to use it for a research paper. Others of you may have first used the internet to do some online shopping. But, for most of us, our first experiences with the internet were *social*. The most magical part about the internet was, and is, our ability to connect with other humans all around the world with different cultures, interests, and life experiences.

You and I may know where *our* stories begin with the internet, but where does the internet's story begin? Before we explore the modern-day social internet and its effects on us, I think we would be wise to spend a little bit of time studying

some internet history to discover how we got where we are today.

## **When the Internet Began**

The internet, even in its earliest, most primitive state, was meant to be social. The early prototype of the internet as we know it today was created as a government project in the late 1960s as a tool for more rapid communication during the Cold War, should an attack be made on the United States by the Soviet Union. The project was called the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, or ARPANET for short. It was a pretty simple form of communication between two computers, one at UCLA and one at Stanford, but it revolutionized communication from its inception.

The earliest version of what we know today as email was created in 1965, before the ARPANET even came onto the scene. Users of a computer system at Massachusetts Institute of Technology shared files and messages on a single remote disk by accessing that disk via different computer terminals. However, Ray Tomlinson is often credited with “inventing email” because he was the first to send messages across a network (the ARPANET) in 1971. Tomlinson is the one who decided to use the “@” in email addresses to differentiate between the person to whom he was sending the message and the server receiving the file.

The creation of the ARPANET and the sending of the first modern(ish) email by Ray Tomlinson happened in pretty

quick succession in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Lots of developments and advancements were made to the prehistoric internet throughout the 1970s and 1980s, including the ability for small networks of computers to connect to other small networks of computers, but the next major change to the ever-evolving internet came in 1989 through the work of Tim Berners-Lee.

Tim Berners-Lee was a contractor for CERN, the Swiss science and technology research facility, when he proposed a project to his boss that would take the computer connections already happening and combine them with “hypertext,” to create the earliest form of a graphical user interface, which laid the foundation of an internet pretty similar to what we see today, relatively speaking. His boss approved of the project, and Berners-Lee created the first version of the World Wide Web, or our modern internet.

The World Wide Web, from which we get the “www” that has historically preceded website URLs, made it so that anyone can set up a server, host a website, and travel between websites. Before, only individual computers or networks of computers could communicate. Now, with the World Wide Web, individual people who were not computer scientists could access the internet with basic web browsers on computers that didn’t take years of training to operate.

The creation of the World Wide Web is regarded by many as the most important technological advancement in the twentieth century and perhaps modern history. It laid the groundwork for the modern internet. But before we examine

the status of the internet as it is today, we need to explore what happened when the internet moved from government projects and university computer labs into our homes.

## **When the Internet Invaded Our Homes**

With the creation of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee made the internet accessible to the masses. The internet was no longer a project reserved for government programs or university science projects. At the same time, Bill Gates was leading his company, Microsoft, to make computers accessible to the masses.

When Microsoft began creating easy-to-use operating systems and loading them onto desktop personal computers in the 1990s, home computer use skyrocketed. In 1991, *InfoWorld* reported that Microsoft sold four million copies of its Microsoft 3.0 operating system in its first year.<sup>1</sup> Those sales were impressive for the time, to be sure. Then, in 1995, *Popular Science* reported that Windows 95 sold forty million copies of its operating system in the first year it was available.<sup>2</sup> The internet invaded the home in 1995 in large part because the *computer* invaded the home in 1995. Without the easy-to-use, widely available Windows 95 operating system, the internet would not have made it into nearly as many homes as quickly as it did.

When the internet first invaded our homes in the mid to late 1990s, most people accessed it with a handful of different services that curated the internet for users, rather than letting

users browse the internet freely like we do today; these services were called “walled gardens.” The most widely used walled garden internet services in the 1990s were CompuServe, Prodigy, and America Online (AOL). CompuServe was for the more technically savvy and was the first widely available internet service, eventually purchased by H&R Block (yes, the tax company). It wasn’t very pleasing to the eye, and it never became widely popular because it was difficult to use for the average person. Prodigy and AOL were both for the more popular-level internet user and, thus, had a wider appeal in the long run than did CompuServe. Prodigy was a project shared by CBS, Sears, and IBM. The three companies hoped they could use Prodigy to deliver news from CBS, drive online shopping for Sears, and harness attention in order to sell it to advertisers—one of the earliest attempts at the practice which pervades the internet today.

AOL eventually dominated Prodigy and CompuServe, driving the former to shut down and eventually acquiring the latter. AOL became the dominant way Americans logged onto the internet in the nineties for a number of reasons. Namely, it was easy to use, it mailed millions of free trial discs, and, most of all, it emphasized the social connection afforded by the World Wide Web. Tim Wu writes in *The Attention Merchants*: “AOL had, over the 1990s, decisively proven that the surest allure of the new computer networks was social—the prospect of interacting with other people.”<sup>3</sup> CompuServe may have been first onto the consumer internet scene. Prodigy may have had shopping and been the first widely popular internet

service. But AOL was the first to offer easy-to-use internet for the masses that celebrated the social aspect of this novel phenomenon. Its emphasis on the social is what made AOL define a generation of internet use.

AOL quickly became known for its iconic “You’ve got mail!” message delivered to users with new email upon log-on, so much so that a Tom Hanks movie was eventually built on the motto.<sup>4</sup> Beyond that, much of the allure of AOL revolved around its wide array of chat rooms, organized in a variety of ways: entertainment interests, cultural backgrounds, sexual preferences, and more. What AOL figured out in the nineties that other platforms struggled to understand was that what drew people to the internet wasn’t the fancy features of a particular internet service provider but the ability to interact with other people. AOL dominated the internet in the nineties because it got out of the way, compared to other platforms, and provided a playground for people to interact with other people. As Joanne McNeil writes of AOL’s role in the early days of the modern, social internet, “AOL was as much training wheels for the internet as it was a gateway drug to full-on internet addiction.”<sup>5</sup>

Eventually, around 2001, AOL began to lose traction as dial-up was phasing out and faster, broadband internet became the norm. More standard web browsers like you see today became the primary way internet users engaged online. Instead of hanging out in the AOL user interface, users were opening Netscape Navigator, Internet Explorer, or another early web browser and “surfing the web” on their

own. Millions of internet users who had been self-confined to the AOL ecosystem were now leaving their walled garden and exploring the wider internet, beyond AOL chat rooms and key-word searches. These internet users still wanted to be social, but it would look a bit different now.

Enter: early, modern social media platforms.

## **The Precursors to Our Modern Social Internet**

The two earliest modern social media platforms were GeoCities and Friendster, and each had its own solid community. The two were built a bit differently. GeoCities, most popular in the late 1990s, was a more geographically focused social media platform that centered community around literal cities, as you could guess by its name. It allowed users to create groups of web pages that were organized geographically. Users congregated around those web pages and built communities that were often connected to the cities around which they were virtually gathered. It eventually sold to Yahoo! in 1999 and lost traction slowly over the next few years as Friendster exploded in popularity.

Friendster, which hit its peak popularity in 2003, is much more like our modern social media platforms than anything that came before it. The purpose of Friendster was simply to give people a place to connect with their friends, and strangers, online. It had no city-focused gimmick like GeoCities. Ironically, what killed Friendster was its popularity. The company could not keep up with the demand its users were putting

on its servers, which resulted in slow-loading pages, frequent crashes, and ultimately a mass exodus from the service.

In the social vacuum being created by a malfunctioning Friendster, yet another social media platform was entering the scene, and it would be the most successful yet.

Myspace could accurately be called a “Friendster clone.” It was created by a few employees of an internet marketing company who used Friendster, saw its many flaws, and thought they could do better. They took the best features of Friendster and made a more reliable service to scratch the same itch. It worked.

Myspace was started in 2003, the year Friendster was at its peak popularity, and by the next year it had overtaken Friendster in user base. Myspace, being a Friendster clone, was built with the same goals as Friendster—to connect people online—but it was more reliable and included a tight relationship with the music industry, which was a huge perk.

Myspace was the first social media platform I used beyond AOL Instant Messenger (AIM), which was just a messaging service. When it launched, Myspace didn’t have an instant messaging component, so middle schoolers like me would often use Myspace to build our online personas while simultaneously communicating instantly with friends through AIM. By far the three biggest perks of Myspace for a teenage social media user like me were: (1) the ability to customize my profile page entirely; (2) the ability to rank my friends via Myspace’s “top friends” feature; and (3) the ability to add a song to my profile page.

Myspace, through its profile page customization and music features, generated a form of personal expression that even current social media platforms don't possess. You can add whatever content you want to your Facebook or Instagram profiles, but you can't customize how the page actually *looks*. That was a huge deal for moody middle and high schoolers who wanted every part of their social media platform to be a means expressing their inner teenage angst.

Today's modern social media platforms are stages on which we can perform. Myspace gave users the ability to design the stage to their liking. That was revolutionary and unique.

In February 2005, Myspace CEO Chris DeWolfe had a meeting with the founder of an upstart social media company called Facebook. DeWolfe and Mark Zuckerberg had a conversation about merging Myspace, the most popular website in history, and Zuckerberg's new Facebook project. Zuckerberg wanted \$75 million in the merger. DeWolfe declined. After a rocky middle of 2005 for Myspace, the two had a conversation again in the fall—Zuckerberg now wanted \$750 million. DeWolfe, again, declined.

Today's modern social media platforms are stages on which we can perform.

At its peak in early 2006, Myspace had 100 million accounts on its platform. It was seeing more visitors than Yahoo! and Google, two of the biggest websites at the time.

In July 2006 Myspace had 54 million unique visitors, but it would never get much better than that. Ultimately, Myspace would suffer from a litany of issues, the most pronounced of which was the mass exodus of young users from its platform to Zuckerberg's Facebook, once Facebook opened to users of all ages in September 2006. Myspace, despite being a more successful Friendster clone, would suffer the same fate as the platform it replaced—obsolescence at the hands of a hot, new platform young people loved.

### **The Modern Social Internet**

Facebook was made available to anyone in the world aged thirteen or older in 2006, as it had previously only been available to anyone with an “.edu” email address.<sup>6</sup> Almost immediately, millions of users left Myspace and made Facebook their primary social media platform, myself included.

I remember hearing rumblings about Facebook when I was in high school before it was available for anyone not in college, so as soon as I was able to join, I did. Many of my high school friends did the same. Most of us maintained a Facebook and Myspace page simultaneously for a while, but within the first year or so of using Facebook, almost all of my friends had left Myspace entirely. For most social media users, Facebook replaced Myspace as their “primary” social media platform around 2006–2007. But another service was breaking out around that same time.

Twitter was created in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams but didn't explode in popularity until the South by Southwest (SXSW) Interactive conference in 2007—not the first or the last hot start-up to gain traction at a SXSW event. Twitter was originally designed as an SMS-based (text-message-based) social media platform, designed for short, pointless messages. Where Facebook became the place for you to connect with *friends and family*, Twitter became the place for you to connect with *the world*.

Twitter quickly became a platform where everyday people could reach out to celebrities directly, where fans of a sport could interact around a big game like they were sitting next to each other in the stands, and where all other sorts of serendipitous interactions between people could occur, unlike on any other platform. I created my Twitter account in April 2008, my junior year of high school, just about a year after it debuted at SXSW Interactive, and used it to follow famous athletes, tech blogs, and other celebrities who were some of the earliest to the platform. Facebook felt like a virtual family reunion or party with friends. Twitter was a window to the wider world.

## **When the Internet Slipped into Our Pockets**

Before we highlight a couple of other major social media platforms, we have to pause here in 2007–2008. Until this point, almost all social media was taking place on laptop or desktop computers. Smartphones existed and were widely used by businesspeople, but teens, the world's social media power

users, were mostly still using flip phones, and their mobile communication was still primarily limited to texting and talking on the phone. The creation of our modern social media platforms was a seismic event unto itself; it allowed us to connect with our friends, our family, and the wider world in ways we never had before. But in 2007 social media experienced a dramatic shift that would massively amplify its influence.

When Steve Jobs announced the imminent release of the Apple iPhone on January 9, 2007, everything changed. Within the year the iPhone would release, and social media would jump from our desks into our pockets.

The iPhone revolutionized the social media industry, propelling it light-years forward, because of two major factors: (1) it made smartphones commercially popular beyond just businesspeople or wealthy teens, and (2) it led to social media being accessible anytime, anyplace. Soon a social media platform would be created specifically for the smartphone, unlike any social media platform had been before.

In 2009, Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger created an app called Burbn. The app was a location check-in app similar to Foursquare. In fact, the app was *too* similar to Foursquare, which was dominant in the space at the time. Systrom and Krieger decided to redesign the app around the photo sharing feature, which was its most popular feature, and rebrand the app “Instagram,” a mash-up of “instant camera” and “telegram.” This new app launched in October 2010, and it quickly exploded in popularity.

Instagram was the first social media platform in which photos were the stars. Combine the fact that Instagram was made for iPhones, taking full advantage of their amazing-at-the-time cameras, and the photo-based nature of the app, and you have a pretty-easy-to-predict success story. Facebook bought Instagram for one billion dollars in 2012, and many believed Facebook overpaid. As of 2018, Bloomberg estimates that Instagram is worth \$100 billion.<sup>7</sup> It has changed in many ways over the years, with its Snapchat-clone “Stories” function being its most revolutionary addition, but it has remained popular among a wide demographic of users, especially young women.

Lots of other social media platforms have been introduced in the smartphone era beyond those mentioned here, but we should conclude our short history of social media with a brief explanation of where we are today.

## **Where We Are Today**

Today most people view social media as the following: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and TikTok. Certainly other popular social media platforms exist, like Reddit and Pinterest, but they are not as widely used or considered in the mainstream.

Generally speaking, here is a brief explanation of how the platforms are viewed regarding their audiences and cultures:

- Facebook, the most widely used social media platform, is for the masses. Its most

active users tend to be older than the primary users of other platforms. A lot of content that originates on other platforms eventually finds its way here.

- Instagram is viewed as the most positive, least toxic social media platform. Its most active users tend to be younger than Facebook's, but more in the millennial range than even Gen Z. It's known for polish, not authenticity. It is the "Facebook," or primary social media platform, for younger audiences.
- Twitter is the most niche of the major three early modern social media platforms. It has fewer users than Facebook and Instagram and tends to be adored by journalists in a variety of fields. It still maintains its "window to the world" vibe and is the primary place social media users congregate to communicate about world events. In terms of the ages of its user base, it is pretty diverse.
- LinkedIn is best understood as Facebook for businesspeople. Owned by Microsoft, it is a powerhouse in its own right but not for the masses. It is made fun of by many, but also the primary social media platform for many. It's like a professional networking event gone digital. Primarily older,

professional audiences are here. It feels a bit like Facebook with a suit on.

- Snapchat is the dominant messaging app for young people. While technically a social media platform, it feels different from the others because of its emphasis on private messaging. It often feels more like an amped-up, image-driven messaging app with some traditional social media components. Typically made up of younger people, Instagram-age and younger.
- TikTok is the youngest social media platform out of all of these and the fastest growing. Owned by China-based ByteDance, TikTok is a video-based social media app that has quickly become the primary social media platform for Gen Zers. Its culture is unique. Its users are young. It will be around for a long time . . . unless more countries decide to ban it because of concerns about it being a China-based company.

Social media is ever-changing. Between the time this book is sent to print and the time you read it, there will surely be more platforms to add to this list. But what follows are applicable principles regardless of what social media platforms are popular when you read these words. Because when it comes

down to it, no matter which name on the list is your preferred platform, social media platforms are all made of the same stuff: engaging content served to you for the purpose of modifying your behavior.

Social media platforms are all made of the same stuff: engaging content served to you for the purpose of modifying your behavior.

*"I highly recommend this book."*

—Tim Challies



*"This is a valuable read for any Christian who spends significant amounts of time online—which is pretty much all of us these days."*

—Brett McCracken

*"Terms of Service will annoy you. If you are already reaping the neurochemical rewards of the social media echo chambers of your own choosing, I recommend that you do not read this book."*

—Read Mercer Schuchardt

**Social media** is brilliant and obscene. It sharpens the mind and dulls it. It brings nations together and tears them apart. It perpetuates, reveals, and repairs injustice. It is an untamed beast upon which we can only hope to ride, but never quite corral.

### What is it doing to us?

In *Terms of Service*, Chris Martin brings readers his years of expertise and experience from building online brands, coaching authors and speakers about social media use, and thinking theologically about the effects of social media.

#### AS YOU READ THIS BOOK, YOU WILL:

Learn how social media has come to dominate the role the internet plays in your life

Learn how the "social internet" affects you in ways you may not realize

Be equipped to push back against the hold the internet has on your mind and your heart



**CHRIS MARTIN** is a content marketing editor at Moody Publishers and a social media, marketing, and communications consultant. He has led social media strategy at Lifeway Christian Resources and advised some of the foremost Christian leaders and authors on digital content strategy. He writes regularly at [www.TermsOfService.social](http://www.TermsOfService.social). Chris lives outside Nashville, Tennessee, with his wife, Susie, their daughter, Magnolia, and their dog, Rizzo.



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