



Motherhood Without Social Media

What it Was Like and Why it Was Better

By: Julia M. Chiarella-Genoni | Image by: freepik

As a mom-to-be, you've probably heard it all. How to lose the baby weight, find time to exercise with a baby...it goes on and on. Conversely, the other hot take is to love your body as it is, stretch marks and all. Well. I'm here to be the voice of reason from a slightly earlier era of motherhood. It may seem like a radical idea in this day and age, but what if you just...ignored all of it? I began my parenting journey without a smartphone and I loved it so much because of it. Consider my experience as a possible way to see what motherhood can be and perhaps it might help you love your body a little differently.

I distinctly remember the moment when my husband suggested that I upgrade my cell to a smartphone, for convenience. And I remember being so hesitant. Why? Because I knew it would change everything forever.

I'm sure you've heard it before—how Gen Xers and millennials are grateful that their college life existed before we

documented everything on social media, where it could be forever held against us as leverage. Doing stupid stuff, making bad fashion choices and living your young life only existed in printed photos that could be discarded for good. But the life of college kids now is much different.

I would argue that I have the same nostalgic feeling from my time as a young mother because of the lack of social media. While postpartum depression and anxieties existed for me regardless, I would still claim that I was more relaxed and my time as a young mom was more fulfilling and fun. To explain this, I will take you back in time and I don't mean ages ago, with your grandparents and 'back in their day' parenting. I'm taking you back to 2007.

Motherhood Before Social Media

I was a brand-new mom in 2007. It's difficult to imagine, but way back then, I started my motherhood journey

Research On Social Media and Pregnancy

In a study conducted by the journal, *Midwifery*, women were recruited to evaluate their social media use at multiple times in their pregnancy.

- Previous studies have indeed demonstrated associations between social media use during pregnancy and more negative affect, self-criticism, lower quality of life and even higher levels of depressive symptoms (Muskens et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2020).
- A possible explanation for these associations is that pregnant women might have specific motivations to use social media.
- According to earlier research, the main reasons for women to use social media during the perinatal period are the need for social support, emotional support and information (Archer and Kao, 2018; Baker and Yang, 2018; Lupton, 2017; Smith et al., 2020).
- However, when seeking support online, women can be confronted with misinformation (Chee et al., 2023), judgment (Abetz and Moore, 2018) and unrealistic representations (Liechty et al., 2018).

The result of this study showed a significant increase in social media usage causing more pregnancy-related worries, concluding that healthcare professionals should be aware of the intensity of social media use during pregnancy.

Source: www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S026661382300308X

without a smartphone. And for those of you asking what a smartphone is (because now it is just called a phone), it was a cell phone with the capabilities we now have on all phones. E-mails, social media...in fact, social media wasn't really developed yet. I used my cell phone for calls, texts and the occasional low-quality photo share. Apps? Not yet. It was all still foreign and as a new mom, home with my baby, it was glorious.

To prepare for my pregnancy and new baby, I read textbook-type books on child development and the occasional website. *What to Expect When You're Expecting* was the cooler, motherhood go-to book, long before it morphed into an app and subsequently the cute movie with the same name. There were no parenting memes, no reels with tips and tricks. It was not bite-sized in any way. Even then, I remember some friends of mine saying they were putting away the books so they could feel less stress about underperforming or overthinking each aspect of motherhood.

Can you imagine?

In today's world, with social media apps at the ready, could you picture yourself just putting it all away?

Facebook had been on the scene for a while, since 2004. But the notion of everyone being on it was still uncommon in 2007. There were most definitely Facebook users and you could find your high school friends and share almost anything you wanted, but it wasn't like it is now. First, most people had to log into Facebook from their computers, so it was not a fluid all-day every-day check-in.

"In 2008 Facebook surpassed Myspace as the most-visited social media website." – Britannica.com

Before I knew it, social media was everywhere. This was around the time that Twitter gained popularity, but I wasn't there yet. I was blissfully in my motherhood bubble.

With Baby, Alone

I read more than necessary to prepare myself for my first child. I am a researcher at heart, so to me, learning about the ups and downs of parenting was a way to put my mind at ease. I researched every scenario of pregnancy and childbirth, I read about a baby's first year with a fine-tooth comb. I also read so much about the pregnant body and how it develops to hold a baby; what to eat and be my most healthy, how to listen to your body while all these changes happen, as well as the natural recovery of childbirth. There was nothing in those books about "bouncing back to your pre-pregnancy size," or "how to

exercise with a newborn." These were not major concerns in the books I read and I'm thankful for that.

Instead, my baby and I would rest together, I would talk to him for hours, he would babble, my husband and I carried him in the baby carrier around the home and for walks outside, we danced, we sang, we played on the floor from the time he was born.

Spending time mothering without social media was peaceful. If I wanted distraction or comfort, I would watch a show with my husband, or read a book. I listened to music, I went for walks, I called my mom. It was wonderful.

Social Media and Body Image

Knowing what we know now about social media, it is clear that our self-worth, judgment and criticism can

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be directly affected by what we consume daily online. Growing up, I remember TV segments on body image criticizing magazines and the size of models for being too unrealistic. That was nothing compared to social media today. Now, we can't get away from it. The ads are abundant and ongoing. It's nearly impossible to go a day without being reminded of how to improve your body in some way, thanks to Instagram ads. As a new mom, I didn't think about my weight. In fact, I'm fairly certain I wore my maternity clothes long after I gave birth to my son because they were comfortable after my c-section.

Of course, there were personal times when I felt uncomfortable in my changed body. So much had transformed, but for the most part it didn't matter to me. I wasn't taking pictures and videos of me being a mom to show the internet. I was just in it for my baby. Losing weight happened naturally as I nursed, went for long walks and played with my son. I'm sure it took longer than most, but I didn't care. The only time I was ever judged was by a random old-school thinking relative or perfect stranger. In those moments, it was clear that they were the ones with the issue, not me. But imagine how different the scenario is if almost everything coming at you online is filled with critical aunties and judgemental strangers. It is a lot to handle and for some it is just too much.

Other Outlets with a Positive Result

It may sound like I hate social media. On the contrary, I work on social media daily. However, I made a conscious effort at the start to consume vigilantly. As a social media creator, I was hyper-aware of what I was putting out online as well as what I was consuming. Thankfully, social media apps have begun to show their concern for consumers and you can now track your time online. Creating timers to limit your intake is a great way to enjoy social media with a limit.

Talking to my mother about motherhood was one of my biggest joys. We sat and talked, we prepared for the arrival of my son together, we physically shopped in stores

and we communicated face-to-face. Thank God for those times; they were some of the last years I had with her and they were wonderful.

Nowadays, it is too easy to hide away on social media and get lost in unhelpful discussions. As a new mother, social media can seem helpful and positive. After my twins were born, Twitter was a fantastic source for me to make online connections and meet other new moms. But times have changed. The amount of content pushed out each day with so many messages to change, to conform, to consume can be overwhelming.

If you can reach out in other ways, the motherhood journey will be more positive and less self-deprecating. Find smaller, physical groups in your area to meet face-to-face or even via Zoom. Call a friend and dive deeper into your worries, your wins and the whole motherhood journey. As much as the internet has the ability to connect us with people around the world, there is incredible value in being together in person. Make sure you give yourself time and space to switch off your phone, close your laptop and be present with others. **B**

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