Michel Foucault, a famous philosopher, argued and defined ‘panopticism’ as this idea that being watched had a more successful impact on the actions one would perform. However, panoptic methods usually involved architectural structures, such as watchtowers (Allen) that create a sense of being watched. This method of monitoring, according to Foucault, was popular and most effective in prisons (193). Also, its implications were put forth in schools and hospitals. However, as technology advanced further and the development of social media established panopticism also evolved. Social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, evolved with much more complexity, which hid the physical structures of observation. Media has also evolved and incorporated itself into millions of lives today. Thus, social media is the most effective enforcer of Foucauldian principles because of the panoptic methods it uses upon today’s individuals.

Social media enforces Foucault’s idea of panopticism with incredible accuracy. Although social media, in a simplistic sense, is virtual, meaning it has no physical structure, it imposes upon people similar effects of the Panopticon. The “Panopticon” (Foucault 184) was an architectural structure designed by Jonathan Bentham. Bentham’s Panopticon is the “architectural figure” (Foucault 184) of Foucault’s panoptic ideas. Although social media has no physical structure, besides contained in that of a computer, cell-phone, or camera, all other methods executed by panopticism are achieved. Foucault spoke about obvious techniques, such as a watchtower for view. In that manner, people are aware that they are being watched. However, social media has a quality that makes it more effective. It is not obvious to people how or when they are being observed. According to Caluya, in reference to the observation in the Panopticon, “What was important was
that they didn’t know when they were being watched” (624). Meaning a main strive for the
Panopticon was to make sure the prisoners were not aware of when they were monitored. Secretly,
dealing with social media, there are systems monitoring individual’s every move by tracking every
website they visit, hence computerized history. This dystopian society once predicted by George
Orwell and the phrase “Big Brother,” Nevrla argues individuals are more similar to “Little Brothers”
(Nevrla 6) due to their minor contributions impacted upon society. The use of this quiet control is
more effective “in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded”
(Foucault 182). Atop that, compared to a physical being that needs to watch every movement, the
computerized system is more effective because it is capable of maintaining every action taken.
Additionally, social media creates a “curated representation of a user’s actions that can be observed”
(Allen). Exemplifying specific selections are made upon a user. However, people themselves are not
unintelligent. Today’s society is fully aware of being monitored. This conscious state of knowing
further follows Foucault’s idea within panopticism.

One main rule, states, “One must never know whether he is being looked at at any one
moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so” (Foucault 187). This hidden surveillance
technique put forth by social media is a main reason it is considered the foremost enforcer in a
panoptic sense. Like the Panopticon, social media “is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen
dyad” (Foucault 187). Meaning, social media has an ability to monitor actions an individual takes
without the individual’s full attention or knowing as long as they volunteered in the participation of
social media. Yet, today’s society is fully aware of the monitoring that takes place. Due to constant
monitoring atop a fear of disobeying, “We have become more cautious as to what we present to the
world” (Allen). Furthermore, individuals are easily distracted and forget that they are constantly
being monitored. This fault in recognition of being observed is how social media takes advantage of its users. As Foucault related to the Panopticon, social media also follows the “continuous functioning, and its automatic mechanisms” (Foucault 192). In addition, social media is capable of “disindividualizing power” (Foucault 187). Meaning not one person can have control and media is capable of controlling that person. Furthermore, when one is aware they are being observed clenched feelings set in. The individual then chooses carefully what to say on a social media site and what to visit in fear of suffering consequences. This “state of conscious and permanent visibility” (Foucault 187) is what further initiates one’s actions and motives. In combination with a sense of being monitored and losing power people thus act differently and further obey rules set forth.

Since people are aware that they are being tracked on social media sites they are careful to how they act. One will simply not put terroristic threats upon the site where millions of people are capable of seeing. These threats are capable of being recognized instantaneously and the individual who stated the threat has a possibility of suffering consequences. Social media, as described, matches Foucault’s statement directly. “Each individual is constantly located, examined, and distributed among living beings” (Foucalt 182). This “constant surveillance” (Foucault 184) is the defining mechanism behind panopticism. Social media follows this method directly and enforces it upon the users by monitoring their every click. According to Foucault, “every individual is then subjected” (184). Meaning every one impacted by media is exposed and is forced to act accordingly. Further enforcing the techniques used in panopticism. This enforcement is the driving mechanism behind the monitored feeling. More specifically, social media tends to monitor individuals over the Internet.
When on the Internet, specifically a social media site, individuals are aware that they are not the only ones seeing the same material, such as a news headline, or a friend’s wedding. Another advantage to social media sites is that numerous are involved. Unlike the Panopticon itself that was only capable of hypothetically holding a single prison’s worth, social media watches millions at a time. This advantage is what makes it the most effective panoptic structure. With every individual it is capable of “avoiding any physical confrontation” (Foucault 190), another important aspect with panopticism. This avoidance creates an aura that creeps inside the conscious states of individuals. The goal of this non-physical confrontation is to let the individuals ponder who or what is actually watching them. It creates a feeling of adrenaline where individuals wonder, “What is this mechanism capable of?” “Will it harm me if I disobey?” Through this, social media is capable of “perfecting the exercise of power” (Foucault 192). According to Foucault, panopticism can fully be obtained by, “Reducing the number of those who exercise it, while increasing the number of those on whom it is exercised” (Foucault 192). It further expresses panoptic ideals due to its few operators and automatic operational system. Furthermore, it enforces the idea that it must exercise on more than who exercise it. Since social media affects millions while monitored by few it is the most effective enforcer of panoptic ways. In addition, social media is capable of installing more than just fear.

Further following the panoptic ideals set forth by Foucault, social media is “polyvalent” (Foucault 191). Meaning, social media is fully capable of performing more than one action. It is able to track and monitor not only to obtain an insight on each individual but also to foresee actions. Social media is used often in society to predict threats. When an individual does disobey rules set forth by their government, such as the illegal threats of bombs, social media sites are capable of
noticing the actions quickly. According to Foucault, “It is possible to intervene at any moment and
because the constant pressure acts even before the offenses, mistakes, or crimes have been
committed” (192). This performance of quick observation to predict actions is hidden from the
individual society of users. Successfully, social media further follows the panoptic ideals initiated by
Foucault. A goal of the Panopticon was to reduce crime and initiate a process of thinking that
would later prevent the individual from performing the same action. While mimicking the action of
making the user aware they are being watched it further prevents more individuals from making the
same mistake. This “acts directly on individuals” (Foucault 192) themselves. This secretive
monitoring followed by consequences further prevents more individuals from disobeying. With the
occasional person who does disobey the laws set forth, look at the millions of individuals that do not
act or say what they really want due to the consequences. This further enforces that social media is
the best panoptic method in today’s society. It prevents millions of individuals from performing
dangerous acts due to the fear and consequences it invokes subconsciously. Thus, containing all of
the methods supposedly induced by panopticism. Atop that, social media is currently becoming
more and more popular in today’s society.

One goal of panopticism was to “spread throughout the social body” (Foucault 193) and
social media performs this action accordingly. Due to increasing popularity social media is spreading
rapidly to each and every individual that is capable of obtaining it. According to Foucault,
panopticism “was to become a generalized function” (193). This ‘generalized functioning’ is clearly
obtained. Social media is not difficult to operate, thus most of the population is capable of using it.
It is constantly operating at all hours of the day and has not once shut down. Consequently, “There
is something inescapable about the performative dimension of social media” (Allen). Furthermore,
social media has impacted most individuals in a way that they are dependent each and every day on it. Most use it to discover nearby events or to get an insight into other cultures or areas throughout the world. Social media has become a part of the user’s lives and will forever more be. Gilbert Caluya argues that, “This broad change in the social order is exemplified by the panopticon” (Caluya 623). Since social media reflects the Panopticon with vast similarity it is no wonder that media has altered the social order of contemporary society. The younger generations stay updated on sites such as Twitter and Facebook, while the older generation attaches to official media news sites. Media sites are fully capable of inducing older generations while influencing younger generations. They keep the individuals up to date on current events and influence them on current trends. Social media is furthering its effectiveness by continuously obeying the ‘polyvalent’ technique. It further acts upon “a multiplicity of individuals” (Foucault 192). This multiplicity is capable of affecting younger to older generations: each has a different ethnicity and personality. Due to the variations in the individuals, social media has more of an enforcing effect than the Panopticon ever would have.

However, social media does in fact have a downfall. Unlike the rules set forth by Foucault inadvertently arguing the Panopticon is involuntary, social media is mostly voluntary. They must create an account that accesses them to the social media or they must watch the oppressive news either on a television or laptop. On the other hand, social media is becoming more popular and being implemented into everyday use. Nevrla refers this voluntary contribution as “participatory panopticism” (Nevrla 7). Arguing that social media is more beneficial this way since individuals are forced to share their information if they want any other social contacts. In addition, contemporary society’s use of social media is becoming more involved in the search for jobs and college. A site known as LinkedIn gives companies access to an individual’s personality and accomplishments.
Additionally, due to the popularity social media is almost necessary for an individual to meet other people and discover new areas such as a college. Since humans are naturally social creatures the need for constant encompassment can act as a driving force that manipulates an individual into obtaining social media access. Social media contains capabilities that work with the needs of individuals thus making it the most effective panoptic method available.

Media, especially social media is furthermore the most effective panoptic method due to its everyday use. Each individual involved with social media online or news through the television turns this into a life-style. Most base their lives around gathering information this way. The use of social media becomes second nature. In relation to the Panopticon Foucault stated, “It is a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men” (Foucault 192). This is further able to define how media, especially social media follows rules of the Panopticon. Its everyday use and popularity make it effective upon individuals and even populations themselves. Nevrla argued humans are “naturally curious” (8) and this in turn affects how often individuals will participate in social media. Simply due to the fact that individuals are curious about other lives they feel others are curious about them so more participation and less privacy occurs. Moreover, the ability for social media to make individuals forced to operate it due to its vast extensions through every life, make it more effective. Atop that, individuals eventually become less and less aware that they are being monitored but now subconsciously act accordingly. These acts of accordance meaning to follow orders, do not disobey, and to follow trends.

Social media further implements the methods of panopticism through its ability to force trends. Unlike the Panopticon where individuals were forced to manage their behavior and act correspondingly, media in general brings a new level of panopticism. Bentham’s Panopticon was
designed under the operation of someone in control. Meaning an individual seen as in more control altered how the lesser individuals would act. Social media has a special capability where it is even able to control the individuals in control of it. Its popularity has grown to where the individuals of higher power rely on the use of social media. Most presidents and leaders must follow the media. Likewise, the media follows them and reveals their actions to the general public. The downfall for the more studied individuals is that they must act accordingly. Remaining conscious of every action taken and to act appropriately in fear that a mistake can lead to mistrust and rebellion. Social media has achieved a position of “social quarantine” (Foucault 199). Emphasizing that every individual is under the control of the media’s panoptic methods. It acts as an imprisonment to individuals where they are constantly monitored and are unable to escape. Thus, the only way capable of fighting it is to follow the rules set forth. However, rebellion is not necessary. Although social media seems effective for negative reasons, the Panopticon’s intention was to better an individual for society.

Social media acts as a great influence upon contemporary societies. Since panoptic methods recognized by Foucault seem abstract most of the ideals to it appear negative. However part of the Panopticon’s intention was to better an individual for society. Social media is more effective in the positive uses of panopticism as well. The media is constantly full of advertisements and lately individuals cannot go a single day without seeing a “Stop bullying” sign. Social media greatly influences populations due to its popularity and abundance. It acts upon individuals to better them to what society feels fits. Additionally, the media is an effective use to prevent violence and threats from occurring. Although the mechanisms behind the apparatus for this appear rash, they better prevent an incident from occurring. According to Foucault, panopticism involves an “indefinite discipline” (208). This unending punishment would surely alter the behavior of an individual that is
to go against rules and create threats. Lastly, relating to an individual’s need for social involvement
social media fulfills this task to almost perfection. It is capable of letting that individual know
people from other cultures and all around the globe. With that stated, maybe social media’s
panoptic methods are to not only control an individual in a negative manner but to relate every
population and bring them together. Nevrla argued, “The act of shaping online identities will likely
become just as important as how we present ourselves in person” (11). However, if any mechanism
is to bring that about it would have to relate through media since media, especially social media is
the most effective panoptic mechanism.

Social media is the most effective panoptic enforcer due to a variability of strategies.
Although social media and the media that follows it are voluntary it has an impact on every
individual’s life. It is not only negative because it has capabilities of controlling individuals without
their knowledge by arising fear and bring upon the possibility of discipline. It has capabilities that
far surpass the Bentham Panopticon since it is capable of affecting billions of individuals at a time.
Media also creates a more effective conscious fear since individuals are fully aware they are being
monitored they just do not know how, why, or when. Thus it is capable of making every individual
on guard. Currently for this generation social media has made its biggest expansion and will
continue to spread. It is already being implemented for jobs, colleges, and social lives, which seem
necessary for human survival. The question is whether or not individuals should fear the
mechanisms behind social media. Do the negative effects outweigh the positive ones? What if the
overall method is to bring societies closer together? Should individuals rebel against or improve
upon social medias and implement them into more lives? All of these questions still remain and
individuals will strive to answer them. Thus, social media has attained a point where currently
observed individuals are consciously thinking how to better it. Unlike the Panopticon, social media’s panoptic methods influence its users to improve upon it. Thus, media, principally social media, is the most effective enforcer of Foucauldian panoptic techniques.
Works Cited


