

## 8.1 Technology Today

### Use of Technology and Social Media in Society by Individuals

Do you own an e-reader or tablet? What about your parents or your friends? How often do you check social media or your cell phone? Does all this technology have a positive or negative impact on your life? When it comes to cell phones, 67 percent of users check their phones for messages or calls even when the phone wasn't ringing. In addition, "44% of cell owners have slept with their phone next to their bed because they wanted to make sure they didn't miss any calls, text messages, or other updates during the night and 29% of cell owners describe their cell phone as 'something they can't imagine living without'" (Smith 2012).

Cell phones are one type of technology that most people own in the U.S., therefore the majority of people's lives here are influenced by this device. While people report that cell phones make it easier to stay in touch, simplify planning and scheduling their daily activities, and increase their productivity, that's not the only impact of increased cell phone ownership in the United States. Smith also reports that "roughly one in five cell owners say that their phone has made it at least somewhat harder to forget about work at home or on the weekends; to give people their undivided attention; or to focus on a single task without being distracted" (Smith 2012).

The majority of adults in the U.S. use technology to participate in social networks and this impacts how their time and attention is spent. A new survey from the Pew Research Center reported that 73 percent of adults engage in some sort of social networking online. Facebook was

the most popular platform, and both Facebook users and Instagram users check their sites on a daily basis. Over a third of users check their sites more than once a day (Duggan and Smith 2013).

With so many people using social media both in the United States and abroad, it is no surprise that social media is a powerful force for social change. You will read more about the fight for democracy in the Middle East embodied in the Arab Spring in Chapters 17 and 21, but spreading democracy is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to using social media to incite change. For example, McKenna Pope, a thirteen-year-old girl, used the Internet to successfully petition Hasbro to fight gender stereotypes by creating a gender-neutral Easy-Bake Oven instead of using only the traditional pink color (Kumar 2014). Meanwhile in Latvia, two twenty-three-year-olds used a U.S. State Department grant to create an e-petition platform so citizens could submit ideas directly to the Latvian government. If at least 20 percent of the Latvian population (roughly 407,200 people) supports a petition, the government will look at it (Kumar 2014).

Research shows that the use of technology to engage in social networking is a widespread practice. There is evidence of both positive and negative impacts of this aspect of modern life. Over time, the technology and people's use of it will continue to evolve and the impacts will need to be evaluated in order to reduce the negative effects on individual human lives as well as on the societal level.