

Are Social Networking Sites Good for Our Society? (ProConn.org)

Pro

1. Social media spreads information faster than any other media. 78.5% of traditional media reporters polled used social media to check for breaking news. [\[190\]](#) 59% of Twitter users and 31% of Facebook users polled followed breaking news on these sites. [\[191\]](#) Social media sites are one of the top news sources for 46% of Americans, compared to 66% for television, 26% for printed newspapers, and 23% for radio. [\[192\]](#) Social media users have been responsible for reporting events before traditional media outlets, including the Paris attacks in France on Nov. 13, 2015 (Twitter, Facebook, and Vine), [\[193\]](#) the Ebola outbreak in Nigeria and Sierra Leone in July 2014 (Twitter), [\[194\]](#) the Boston marathon bombing on Apr. 15, 2013 (Twitter), [\[195\]](#) and the Aurora, CO, theater shooting on July 20, 2012 (Twitter and YouTube). [\[3\]](#) President Donald Trump said that the immediacy that Twitter affords him is the reason why he tweets, noting that press conferences and press releases take too long to reach the public. [\[271\]](#)

2. Law enforcement uses social media to catch and prosecute criminals. 73% of federal, state, and local law enforcement professionals surveyed think "social media helps solve crimes more quickly." [\[196\]](#) A survey by the International Association of Chiefs of Police found that 85% of police departments use social media to solve crimes. [\[199\]](#) The New York Police Department was one of the first forces to add a Twitter tracking unit and use social networking to arrest criminals who have bragged of their crimes online. [\[6\]](#) Social media sites have helped in the prosecution and conviction of a number of crimes, including: a professional soccer player charged with inappropriate activity with a minor in the UK in 2016, [\[197\]](#) a gang charged with the beating of a gay couple in Philadelphia, PA, in 2014, [\[198\]](#) and rioting hockey fans in Vancouver (Canada) in 2011. [\[7\]](#)[\[8\]](#)

3. Social media sites help students do better at school. 59% of students with access to the Internet report that they use social media to discuss educational topics and 50% use the sites to talk about school assignments. [\[9\]](#) After George Middle School in Portland, Oregon, introduced a social media program to engage students, grades went up by 50%, chronic absenteeism went down by 33%, and 20% of students school-wide voluntarily completed extra-credit assignments. [\[10\]](#)[\[11\]](#) A Jan. 2015 study published in the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* said college freshman should use social networking sites to build networks of new friends, feel socially integrated at their new schools, and reduce their risk of dropping out. [\[182\]](#)

4. Social media allows people to improve their relationships and make new friends. 93% of adults on Facebook use it to connect with family members, 91% use it to connect with current friends, and 87% use it to connect with friends from the past [274] 72% of all teens connect with friends via social media. [200] 83% of these teens report that social media helps them feel more connected to information about their friends' lives, 70% report feeling more connected to their friends' feelings, and 57% make new friends. [200]

5. Social media helps empower business women. Being able to connect on social networking sites gives business women a support group not readily found offline, where female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies are outnumbered by male CEOs 474 to 26. [201] Many social media sites are dominated by women: 80% of Pinterest users, [202] 70% of Snapchat users, [204] 68% of Instagram users, [203] 64% of Twitter users, and 58% of Facebook users, are women. [205] Business women use Twitter chats to support each other, give and receive peer knowledge, and have guest "speakers" share expert knowledge. [17] One.org helps African women entrepreneurs connect on social media to grow their businesses. [18]

6. Social media sites help employers find employees and job-seekers find work. 96% of recruiters use social media in the recruiting process; 87% use LinkedIn, 55% use Facebook, and 47% use Twitter. [206] 48% of job-seekers credit social media for helping find their current job. [207] 67% of job-seekers use Facebook for the job search, 45% use Twitter, and 40% use LinkedIn. [208] 69% of students use social media when finding internships. [209]

7. Being a part of a social media site can increase a person's quality of life and reduce the risk of health problems. Social media can help improve life satisfaction, stroke recovery, memory retention, and overall well-being by providing users with a large social group. Additionally, friends on social media can have a "contagion" effect, promoting and helping with exercise, dieting, and smoking cessation goals. [22]

8. Social media facilitates face-to-face interaction. People use social media to network at in-person events and get to know people before personal, business, and other meetings. [23] Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project found that messaging on social media leads to face-to-face interactions when plans are made via the sites and social media users messaged close friends an average of 39 days each year while seeing close friends in person 210 days each year. [24]

9. Social media increases voter participation. Facebook users reported they are more likely to vote if they see on social media sites that their friends voted. [25] Amongst students who are somewhat, not sure, or unlikely to vote, 35% stated that social media was most likely to influence them to vote in the 2016 presidential election; this was higher than all other mediums including television (30%), radio (14%), print (9%), and direct mail (6%) or email (5%). [210] During the 2012 presidential election, 22% of registered voters posted about how they voted on Facebook or Twitter, 30% were encouraged to vote by posts on social media, and 20% encouraged others to vote via social networking sites. [27]

10. Social media facilitates political change. Social media gives social movements a quick, no-cost method to organize, disseminate information, and mobilize people. [28] Students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, used social media to mobilize a gun control movement following a deadly shooting at their school. The student activists used Twitter to promote nationwide protests on Mar. 24, 2018 that drew over one million participants and registered thousands of new voters. [280][281][282][283] The 2011 Egyptian uprising (part of the Arab Spring), organized largely via social media, motivated tens of thousands of protestors and ultimately led to the resignation of Egyptian President Mubarak on Feb. 11, 2011. [29] A July 4, 2011 tweet from @Adbusters with the hashtag #occupywallstreet started the American Occupy movement. [30][211] In 2015, the Black Lives Matter grassroots campaign addressed racism and police brutality in the United States and successfully pressured the 2016 presidential candidates to publicly address the issue. [212]

11. Social media is good for the economy. Social media sites have created a new major industry and thousands of jobs. [31] A McKinsey Global Institute study projected that the communication and collaboration from social media added between \$900 billion and \$1.3 trillion to the economy through added productivity and improved customer service. [32] A report by Deloitte found that "Facebook added \$227 billion and 4.5 million jobs to the global economy in 2014." [214] Facebook posted \$5.38 billion for first quarter 2016 revenue, up from \$3.54 billion for first quarter 2015 earnings. [213] Snapchat was valued at \$24 billion the day its stock began trading on the New York Stock Exchange. [270]

12. Social media sites empower individuals to make social change and do social good on a community level. Social media shares popularized nine-year old Scottish student, Martha Payne, and her blog, "Never Seconds," which exposed the state of her school's lunch program prompting international attention that resulted in changes to her school and the formation of "Friends of Never Seconds" charity to feed children globally.

[35][141] Jeannette Van Houten uses social media to find owners of photographs and mementos strewn from houses by Hurricane Sandy. [36] Hillsborough, CA, freshman varsity soccer goalie Daniel Cui was blamed for and bullied about a losing season until over 100 of his teammates and classmates changed their Facebook profile photos to one of Cui making a save, silencing the bullies and building Cui's confidence. [37][38]

13. Social media helps senior citizens feel more connected to society. According to a 2015 Pew Research Center study, the 65 and older age group is one of the fastest growing demographic groups on social media sites, with usage rising from 2% of seniors in 2008 to 35% in 2015. [215] Seniors report feeling happier due to online contact with family and access to information like church bulletins that have moved online and out of print. [39][40]

14. Social media helps people who are socially isolated or shy connect with other people. More than 25% of teens report that social media makes them feel less shy, 28% report feeling more outgoing, and 20% report feeling more confident (53% of teens identified as somewhat shy or "a lot" shy in general). [14] Youth who are "less socially adept" report that social media gives them a place to make friends [43] and typically quiet students can feel more comfortable being vocal through a social media platform used in class. [44] Shy adults also cite social media as a comfortable place to interact with others. [45]

15. Social media allows for quick, easy dissemination of public health and safety information from reputable sources. The US military and Department of Veterans Affairs use social media to help prevent suicide. [46] The World Health Organization (WHO) uses social media to "disseminate health information and counter rumours," which was especially helpful after the Mar. 2011 Japanese earthquake and nuclear disaster when false information spread about ingesting salt to combat radiation. [47] The Boston Health Commission used social media to get information to its 4,500 Twitter followers about clinic locations and wait times for vaccines during the H1N1 outbreak. [48]

16. Social media can help disarm social stigmas. The Sticks and Stones campaign uses Twitter to reduce stigmas surrounding mental health and learning disabilities. [49] The Stigma Project uses Facebook to "lower the HIV infection rate and neutralize stigma through education via social media and advertising." [50] Gay people speaking openly on social media, like Facebook site Wipe Out Homophobia, help achieve a greater social acceptance of homosexuality. [51][52] Jenny Lawson, author of the blog "The Bloggess" and *New York Times* bestseller *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*, has made public her

struggles with OCD, depression, and anxiety disorders, which has lessened the stigma of the diseases for others. [53]

17. "Crowdsourcing" and "crowdfunding" on social media allows people to collectively accomplish a goal. A mother was able to find a kidney donor for her sick child by posting a video on her Facebook page. [54] Planethunters.org, a science social media site, have discovered new planets via crowdsourcing. [55][216] Crowdrise, a social network devoted to crowdsourcing volunteers and crowdfunding charity projects, raised \$845,989 in the 18 days following Hurricane Sandy. [56][57] The Ice Bucket Challenge fundraising campaign for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) went viral on social media, raising \$100.9 million in donations in one month alone. [218] Pencils of Promise used social media for crowd funding, which has helped the non-profit build 329 schools and educate 33,000 children. [217]

18. Social media provides academic research to a wider audience, allowing many people access to previously unavailable educational resources. Information previously restricted to academia's "ivory tower" can now be shared with the public who do not have access to restricted journals or costly databases. Researchers from a wide variety of fields are sharing photos, providing status updates, collaborating with distant colleagues, and finding a wider variety of subjects via social media, making the research process and results more transparent and accessible to a larger public. [59][139]

19. Corporations and small businesses use social media to benefit themselves and consumers. 85% of fans of brands on Facebook recommend the brand to others and 71% of internet users are more likely to purchase from a brand that they are following on social media. [220] Almost 90% of big companies using social media have reported "at least one measurable business benefit." [61] In 2015, 98% of Fortune 500 companies used social media. [219] Amongst these corporations the most popular sites were LinkedIn (used by 93% of companies), Glassdoor (87%), Twitter (78%), Facebook (74%), and YouTube (64%). [219] Benefits for the consumer often include special promotions, product information, technical support, and customer service. [221]

CON

1. Social media enables the spread of unreliable and false information. 64% of people who use Twitter for news say that they have encountered something they "later discovered wasn't true," and 16% of Twitter news users say that "they had retweeted or posted a tweet they later discovered to be false." [227] A study

published in the journal *Science* found that lies spread six times faster than the truth on Twitter, and "fake news" is retweeted more often than true news. [278] In the three months prior to the 2016 US presidential election, false news stories about the two candidates were shared a total of 37.6 million times on Facebook. [269] A federal grand jury indictment announced in Feb. 2018 by special counsel Robert Mueller said that a Russian group created phony social media accounts "to reach significant numbers of Americans for purposes of interfering with the U.S. political system." [279] A University of Michigan study found that even when false information is corrected, the number of people who see or share the correction via social media is lower than number who saw or shared the false information in the first place. [272]

2. Social media lacks privacy and exposes users to government and corporate intrusions. 81% of people surveyed feel "not very" or "not at all" secure when using social media sites to share private information. [228] 48% of people reported some difficulty in managing their privacy settings. [229] 13 million users said they had not set or did not know about Facebook's privacy settings. [81] The US government submitted 36,812 requests for data from Facebook and 7,036 requests from Twitter in 2015, approximately 80% of which were honored at least in part. [230][231] The National Security Agency (NSA) can monitor social media activity and read the content of private social media messages simply by entering a person's username into their system. [232] Contego Services Group, which specialize in worker compensation claims, has a unit dedicated to social media monitoring to detect fraud. [233]

3. Students who are heavy social media users tend to have lower grades. 31% of teens say that using social media during homework reduces the quality of their work. [235] Students who used social media had an average GPA of 3.06 while non-users had an average GPA of 3.82. [84] Students who used social media while studying scored 20% lower on tests. [84] College students' grades dropped 0.12 points for every 93 minutes above the average 106 minutes spent on Facebook per day. [85] One study found that in schools which introduced a ban on cell phones, student performance improved 6.41%. [234] Another found that grades began a steady decline after secondary school students reached 30 minutes of daily screen time. After four hours, average GPAs dropped one full grade. [184]

4. Social media can lead to stress and offline relationship problems. 31% of teens who use social media have fought with a friend because of something that happened online. [236] A 2016 study found that overuse of social media as an adolescent may decrease success in relationships later in life as online communication hinders the development

of conflict management skills and awareness of interpersonal cues. [247] One study found that the more Facebook friends a person has, the more stressful Facebook is to use. [87] Researchers have found that "active Twitter use leads to greater amounts of Twitter-related conflict among romantic partners, which in turn leads to infidelity, breakup, and divorce." [238]

5. Social media can entice people to waste time. A survey of internet users aged 16-64 found that the average daily time spent on social media is 1.72 hours, which accounts for 28% of total time spent online. [239] 36% of people surveyed listed social media as the "biggest waste of time," above fantasy sports (25%), watching TV (23%), and shopping (9%). [90] When alerted to new social media activity, such as a new tweet or Facebook message, users take 20 to 25 minutes on average to return to the original task. In 30% of cases, it took two hours to fully return attention to the original task. [91]

6. Using social media can harm job stability and employment prospects. Job recruiters reported negative reactions to profanity (63%), poor spelling or grammar (66%), sexual content (70%), and references to illegal drugs (83%), guns (51%), and alcohol (44%) on potential employees' social media. [241] 55% of recruiters report reconsidering hiring applicants based on social media activities. [241] Anthony Weiner, former US Representative, was forced to resign after a Twitter sexting scandal. [93] Curt Schilling, former All-Star pitcher, was fired from ESPN for his Facebook comments about transgender people; he had previously been suspended for a tweet in which he compared radical Muslims to Nazis. [242]

7. The use of social media is correlated with personality and brain disorders. A University of Pittsburgh study found that social media use was "significantly associated with increased depression" amongst adults aged between 19 and 32. [243] Another study found that addictive social media use reflected increased narcissistic personality traits. [244] Researchers have found that "interruptions due to phone notifications can cause inattention and hyperactivity in the general population." [246] A UK government study found that 41% of children who spend over three hours on social media on a normal school day reportedly suffer from mental health difficulties compared with 21% who spend no time on the sites. [245]

8. Social media causes people to spend less time interacting face-to-face. A USC Annenberg School study found that the percentage of people reporting less face-to-face time with family in their homes rose from 8% in 2000 to 34% in 2011. [98] 32% reported using social media or texting during meals (47% of 18-34 year olds) [99] instead of

talking with family and friends. 10% of people younger than 25 years old respond to social media and text messages during sex. [\[100\]](#)[\[173\]](#)

9. Criminals use social media to commit and promote crimes. Gangs use the sites to recruit younger members, coordinate violent crimes, and threaten other gangs. [\[101\]](#) Sex offenders use social media sites to find victims for sexual exploitation.

[\[248\]](#)[\[249\]](#)[\[253\]](#) 78% of burglars "admitted they use Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, and Google Street View to select victims' properties," and 54% said that "posting status and whereabouts on social media is the most common mistake made by homeowners." [\[251\]](#) Social media has also led to the phenomena of "performance crimes," so called as participants film their crimes and upload them to social media. [\[250\]](#)

10. Social media can endanger the military, journalists, and activists. The US Army notes that checking in with location based services on social media like Foursquare or Facebook could expose sensitive whereabouts and endanger military personnel and operations. [\[104\]](#) In 2015 a freelance journalist and activist was executed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) for reporting on life under the regime via Facebook. [\[252\]](#) In 2015 and 2016, a number of Bangladeshi bloggers who posted their thoughts on atheism on social media were killed by religious fundamentalists who opposed their postings. [\[254\]](#) In 2011, a blogger was found murdered by a Mexican cartel with the note "this happened to me for not understanding that I shouldn't report things on the social networks." [\[106\]](#)[\[140\]](#)

11. Social media harms employees' productivity. A global online survey found that 50% of workers check or use social media at least once a day during work hours. [\[256\]](#) A survey of Irish workers found that 78% use a personal device to access social media at work. [\[257\]](#) Two-thirds of US workers with Facebook accounts access the site during work hours. [\[107\]](#) Even spending just 30 minutes a day on social media while at work would cost a 50-person company 6,500 hours of productivity a year. [\[108\]](#) A Pew Research Center study found that 56% of workers who use social media for work-related purposes think it distracts them from the work they need to do. [\[255\]](#)

12. Social media facilitates cyberbullying. 52% of students have reported being the victim of cyberbullying with 84.2% naming Facebook as the site through which they have been bullied, followed by Instagram (23.4%), Twitter (21.4%), and Snapchat (13.5%). [\[259\]](#) 17.5% of male students and 21.3% of female students have admitted committing bullying behavior online. [\[259\]](#) 54% of teens have witnessed cyberbullying including on sites such as Facebook (39%), Twitter (29%), YouTube (22%), and Instagram (22%). [\[258\]](#) Middle school children who are victims of cyberbullying are almost twice as likely to attempt suicide. [\[46\]](#) Adults can also be victims of

cyberbullying, with social, familial, or workplace aggression being displayed on social media. [\[111\]](#)

13. Social media enables "sexting," which can lead to criminal charges and the unexpected proliferation of personal images. Almost 40% of teens report "sexting" - posting or sending sexually suggestive messages - with 22% of teen girls and 18% of teen boys posting nude or semi-nude photos. [\[261\]](#) As a result, teens and adults are being charged with possessing and distributing child pornography, even when the teen took and distributed a photo of him/herself. [\[113\]](#) 88% of private self-produced sexual images posted to social media are stolen by pornography websites and disseminated to the public, often without the subject's knowledge. [\[114\]](#)

14. People who use social media are prone to social isolation. Social media can exacerbate feelings of disconnect (especially for youth with disabilities), and put children at higher risk for depression, low self-esteem, and eating disorders. [\[42\]](#) The "passive consumption" of social media (scanning posts without commenting) is related to loneliness. [\[115\]](#)

15. Social media aids the spread of hate groups. A Baylor University study examined Facebook hate groups focused on President Barack Obama and found a resurgence of racial slurs and stereotypes not seen in mainstream media in decades. [\[119\]](#) A study of English-language Twitter posts found that around 10,000 tweets per day contained racial slurs, 30% of which were deemed derogatory. [\[264\]](#) Social media can create a "radicalization echo chamber" where followers reinforce for each other extremist propaganda and calls for violence," says John Carlin, JD, Assistant Attorney General at the Justice Department. [\[263\]](#) The Christian Identity, a faction of the white supremacist group Aryan Nations, uses social media to recruit members [\[121\]](#), and Die Auserwählten, a skinhead crew founded in Nebraska, was created by people who had met each other on social media. [\[264\]](#)

16. Children may endanger themselves by not understanding the public and viral nature of social media. The 2012 film *Project X*, about an out of control high school house party due to social media promotion, prompted copycat parties across the US resulting in arrests for vandalism, criminal trespassing, and other offenses. [\[122\]](#) Up to 600 Dutch riot police had to be called in to break up a teen's birthday party to which about 30,000 people were accidentally invited after a Facebook post thought to be private went viral.

[123] A similar incident happened in Los Angeles and resulted in the teen host beaten and hospitalized. [124]

17. Social media enables cheating on school assignments. Students in California, New York City, and Houston posted photos of standardized tests to social media sites, allowing students who had not yet taken the tests to see the questions (and potentially find answers) ahead of time. [82] The SAT has had similar problems with students posting parts of the exam to social media. [125][126] In Mar. 2015, two students in Maryland were accused of cheating on the 10th grade Common Core tests by posting questions on Twitter. Pearson, a company that administers standardized tests, identified 76 cases of students posting test materials online spanning six states in the first three months of 2015. [185]

18. Social media sites' advertising practices may constitute an invasion of privacy. An ExactTarget marketing report tells companies, "When a user clicks on a [Facebook] like button belonging to your brand, you're immediately granted access to additional information about this customer, from school affiliation and workplace information to their birthdate and other things they like... [M]arketers can access and leverage data in ways that will truly alarm customers." [127] From social media sites, simple algorithms can determine where you live, sexual orientation, personality traits, signs of depression, and alma maters among other information, even if users put none of those data on their social media profiles. [128]

19. Social media can facilitate inappropriate student-teacher relationships. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) opened 222 cases about "inappropriate relationships" between educators and students in the 2015-16 school year; 86 cases were investigated in 2007-2008 and education experts blame the rise of social media for this increase. [124][265] Pamela Casey, a District Attorney in Alabama who has prosecuted teachers who had relationships with students, says that social media adds to the problem: "We say and do things on social media and cell phones that we wouldn't say and do in person... As a result, there's a wall that's been removed." [130][186]