

## Pro & Con Arguments: "Are Social Networking Sites Good for Our Society?"

### PRO Social Networking Sites

1. **Social networking sites spread information faster than any other media.** Over 50% of people learn about breaking news on social media. [1] 65% of traditional media reporters and editors use sites like Facebook and LinkedIn for story research, and 52% use Twitter. [2] Social networking sites are the top news source for 27.8% of Americans, ranking close to newspapers (28.8%) and above radio (18.8%) and other print publications (6%). [1] Twitter and YouTube users reported the July 20, 2012 Aurora, CO theater shooting before news crews could arrive on the scene [3], and the Red Cross urged witnesses to tell family members they were safe via social media outlets. [4]
2. **Law enforcement uses social networking sites to catch and prosecute criminals.** 67% of federal, state, and local law enforcement professionals surveyed think "social media helps solve crimes more quickly." [5] In 2011 the NYPD added a Twitter tracking unit and has used social networking to arrest criminals who have bragged of their crimes online. [6] When the Vancouver Canucks lost the 2011 Stanley Cup in Vancouver, the city erupted into riots. Social media was used to catch vandals and rioters as social networking site users tagged the people they knew in over 2,000 photos posted to the sites.[7] [8]
3. **Social networking sites help students do better at school.** 59% of students with access to the Internet report that they use social networking sites to discuss educational topics and 50% use the sites to talk about school assignments. [9] After George Middle School in Portland, OR 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 networking sites allow people to improve their relationships and make new friends.** 70% of adult social networking users visit the sites to connect with friends and family [12], and increased

### CON Social Networking Sites

1. **Social media enables the spread of unreliable and false information.** 49.1% of people have heard false news via social media. [1] On Sep. 5, 2012 false rumors of fires, shootouts, and caravans of gunmen in a Mexico City suburb spread via Twitter and Facebook caused panic, flooded the local police department with over 3,000 phone calls, and temporarily closed schools. [79] Shashank Tripathi, tweeting as @ComfortablySmug, spread false information in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy by tweeting that the New York Stock Exchange was flooding and that the power company would cut off electricity to all of Manhattan; the bogus information was picked up by national news outlets including CNN and the Weather Channel. [80]
2. **Social networking sites lack privacy and expose users to government and corporate intrusions.** 13 million users said they had not set or did not know about Facebook's privacy settings and 28% shared all or nearly all of their posts publicly. [81] The US Justice Department intercepted 1,661 pieces of information from social networking sites and e-mails in 2011. [82] The 2009 IRS training manual teaches agents to scan Facebook pages for information that might "assist in resolving a taxpayer case." 4.7 million Facebook users have "liked" a health condition or medical treatment page, information that is sometimes used by insurance companies to raise rates.[81] [83]
3. **Students who are heavy social media users tend to have lower grades.** Students who use social media had an average GPA of 3.06 while non-users had an average GPA of 3.82 and students who used social networking sites 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] Two-thirds of teachers believe that social media does more to distract students than to help academically. [86] The Sep. 2, 2014 Learning Habit study published in the *American Journal of Family Therapy* found that grades began a steady decline after secondary school students reached 30 minutes of daily screen time (time spent using an electronic device such as a computer or mobile phone). After four hours of screen time, average GPAs dropped one full grade. [184]

online communication strengthens relationships. [13] 52% of teens using social media report that using the sites has helped their relationships with friends, 88% report that social media helps them stay in touch with friends they cannot see regularly, 69% report getting to know students at their school better, and 57% make new friends. [14]

#### 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 15 to 485. [15] Many social media sites are dominated by women: 72% of Pinterest users are women, 58% of Facebook users, 62% of MySpace users, 60% of Yelp users, and 53% of Instagram users. [16] 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.**

64% of companies are on two or more social networks for recruiting [19] because of the wider pool of applicants and more efficient searching capabilities. 89% of job recruiters have hired employees through LinkedIn, 26% through Facebook, and 15% through Twitter. [20] One in six job-seekers credit social media for helping find their current job. 52% of job-seekers use Facebook for the job search, 38% use LinkedIn, and 34% use Twitter. [21]

#### 7. **Being a part of a social networking 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 networking sites facilitate 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

#### 4. **Social networking sites can lead to stress and offline relationship problems.**

A University of Edinburgh Business School study found the more Facebook friends a person has, the more stressful the person finds Facebook to use. [87] According to a Feb. 9, 2012 Pew Internet report, 15% of adult social network users had an experience on a social networking site that caused a friendship to end, 12% of adult users had an experience online that resulted in a face-to-face argument, and 3% of adults reported a physical confrontation as the result of an experience on a social networking site. [88]

#### 5. **Social networking sites entice people to waste time.**

40% of 8 to 18 year olds spend 54 minutes a day on social media sites. [89] 36% of people surveyed listed social networking as the "biggest waste of time," above fantasy sports (25%), watching TV (23%), and shopping (9%). [90] When alerted to a new social networking site activity, like 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] 42% of American Internet users play games like Farmville or Mafia Wars on social networking sites. [92]

#### 6. **Using social media can harm job stability and employment prospects.**

Job recruiters reported negative reactions to finding profanity (61%), poor spelling or grammar (54%), illegal drugs (78%), sexual content (66%), pictures of or with alcohol (47%), and religious content (26%) on potential employees' social media pages. [21] Anthony Weiner, former US Representative, was forced to resign after a Twitter sexting scandal in 2011. [93] Several athletes were banned from the 2012 Olympics because of their racist social media posts. [94]

#### 7. **The use of social networking sites is correlated with personality and brain disorders, such as the inability to have in-person conversations, a need for instant gratification, ADHD, and self-centered personalities, as well as addictive behaviors.**

[81] Pathological Internet Use (caused or exacerbated by social networking use) is associated with feelings of loneliness, depression, anxiety and general distress. [95] The 2013 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) is evaluating "Internet

messaging close friends an average of 39 days each year while seeing close friends in person 210 days each year. [24]

9. **Social networking sites increase voter participation.**

Facebook users reported they are more likely to vote if they see on social networking sites that their friends did. [25] During the Nov. 2010 elections, Facebook users who visit the site more than once a day were 2.5 times more likely to attend a political rally or meeting, 57% more likely to persuade someone about a vote, and 43% more likely to say they will vote. [26] 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 networking sites give social movements a quick, no-cost method to organize, disseminate information, and mobilize people. [28] The 2011 Egyptian uprising (part of the Arab Spring), organized largely via social media, motivated tens of thousands of protestors for eighteen days of demonstrations 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, which gained traction in Sep. 2011 when protestors gathered at New York City's Zuccotti Park and remained there until Nov. 15, 2011. [30]

11. **Social networking is good for the economy.**

Social media sites have created a new industry and thousands of jobs in addition to providing new income and sales. [31] A McKinsey Global Institute study projects that the communication and collaboration from social media could add \$900 billion to \$1.3 trillion to the economy through added productivity and improved customer service. [32] Facebook posted \$1.26 billion for third quarter 2012 revenue, up from \$954 million for third quarter 2011 earnings. [33] Twitter, a private company, earned an estimated \$350 million in 2012 revenue. [34]

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

Addiction Disorder" for inclusion. A 2008 UCLA study revealed web users had fundamentally altered prefrontal cortexes [96] due, in part, to the fast pace of social networking sites rewiring the brain with repeated exposure. [97]

8. **Social media causes people to spend less time interacting face-to-face.**

A Jan. 2012 Center for the Digital Future at the 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] Offline crime, like home robberies, may result from posting personal information such as vacation plans [102] or stalkers gaining information about a victim's whereabouts from posts, photos, or location tagging services. [103]

10. **Social media can endanger the military and journalists.**

The US Army notes that checking in with location based services on social networking sites like Foursquare or Facebook could expose sensitive whereabouts and endanger military personnel and operations. [104] In 2011 a Mexican journalist was murdered by the Zetas drug cartel because she used Twitter to report on cartel crime. [105] A blogger was found murdered by a Mexican cartel in 2011 with the note "this happened to me for not understanding that I shouldn't report things on the social networks." [106] [140]

11. **Social networking sites harm employees' productivity.**

51% of people aged 25-34 accessed social media while at work. [147] 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] 51% of American workers think work productivity suffers because of social media. [109]

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 networking sites help senior citizens feel more connected to society.** [39]

[40] According to a 2010 Pew Internet & American Life Project study, the 74-year old and older age group is the fastest growing demographic on social media sites with the percentage quadrupling from 2008 to 2010, from 4% to 16%. [41] 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]

14. **Social networking sites help people who are socially isolated or shy connect with other people.** [42]

More than 25% of teens report that social networking 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 networks give 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 networking 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]

12. **Social networking sites facilitate cyberbullying.**

49.5% of students reported being the victims of bullying online and 33.7% reported committing bullying behavior online. [110] 800,000 minors were harassed or cyberbullied on Facebook according to a June 2012 *Consumer Reports* survey. [81] Middle school children who were victims of cyberbullying were almost twice as likely to attempt suicide. [46] Adults can also be victims of cyberbullying, from social, familial, or workplace aggression being displayed on social media. [111]

13. **Social networking sites enable "sexting," which can lead to criminal charges and the unexpected proliferation of personal images.**

Once restricted to cell phone texts, "sexting" has moved to social media with teens posting, or sending via messaging, risqué photos of themselves or others. In 2008 and 2009, US law enforcement agencies saw 3,477 cases of youth-produced sexual images with 2,291 agencies seeing at least one case. [112] As a result, teens and adults are being charged with possessing and distributing child pornography, even if 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 networking sites are prone to social isolation.**

Social networking 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 networking sites encourage amateur advice and self-diagnosis for health problems which can lead to harmful or life-threatening results.**

One in five Americans uses social media for health care information. [116] An *American Journal of Public Health* study revealed that, "Social media may also pose a hazard to vulnerable people through the formation and influence of 'extreme communities'—online groups that promote and provide support for beliefs and behaviors normally unacceptable by the social mainstream such as anorexia, suicide, and deliberate amputation." [46] A North Carolina blogger was criminally charged with "practicing dietetics or nutrition without a license" for offering

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 networking sites, 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, discovered a planet on Oct. 16, 2012 via crowdsourcing. [55] Crowdwise, a social network devoted to crowdsourcing volunteers and crowdfunding charity projects, raised \$845,989 (as of Nov. 20, 2012) for Hurricane Sandy victims. [56] [57] Followers of Pencils of Promise on social media have helped the non-profit build 74 schools (with 26 more in progress and 7 more planned as of Nov. 19, 2012) and educate 4,500 children. [58]

18. **Social networking 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.** Small businesses benefit greatly from the free platforms to connect with customers and increase visibility of their products or services. [60] Almost 90% of big companies using social media have reported "at least one measurable business benefit." For example, large chain restaurants are using social media to quickly

potentially dangerous nutritional advice about the Paleo diet while posing as an expert. [117] Jeffrey Benabio, MD, searched for "eczema" on Twitter and found, in the first 100 results, 84 were spam and other gave harmful and sometimes bizarre advice like using toothless fish to eat eczema affected skin. [118]

16. **Social media aids the spread of hate groups.** A Summer 2012 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 like blackface images and comparisons of President Obama to apes. [119] Social networking sites allow hate groups to recruit youth and to redistribute their propaganda. [120] According to the Southern Poverty Law Center the Christian Identity religion, a splinter faction of the white supremacist group Aryan Nations, uses social media to recruit members. [121]

17. **Children may endanger themselves by not understanding the public and viral nature of social networking sites.** 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 (quickly moving on to Twitter and YouTube as well). As a result, at least three people were hurt and 20 people were arrested for vandalism, looting, setting cars on fire, and damaging lampposts. [123] In 2012, a similar incident happened in Los Angeles and resulted in the teen host beaten and hospitalized. [124]

18. **Social networking 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

disseminate information to managers, train employees, and receive immediate customer feedback on new items, allowing for quick revision if needed. [61] 80% of companies are expected to have customer service on social media by the end of 2012. [62]

20. **Social networking sites offer teachers a platform for collaboration with other teachers and communication with students outside the classroom.** [63] [64] [65] More than 80% of US college and university faculty use social media; more than 50% use it for teaching; and 30% for communicating with students. [66] Educators from around the world interact with each other and bring guest teachers, librarians, authors, and experts into class via social networks like Twitter and social networking tools like Skype. [67] [68] Edmodo, an education-specific social networking site designed for contact between students, teachers, and parents, reached over 49 million users in 2014. [69]
21. **Social networking sites offer a way for musicians and artists to build audiences even if they don't have a corporate contract.** [70] 64% of teenagers listen to music on YouTube, making it the "hit-maker" for songs rather than radio (56%) or CDs (50%). [71] [72] For example, pop star Justin Bieber was discovered on YouTube when he was 12 years old, and, in 2012 at 18 years old, Bieber's net worth was estimated at \$80 million. [73] [74] The National Endowment for the Arts found that people who interact with the arts online through social media and other means are almost three times more likely to attend a live event. [75]
22. **Colleges and universities use social media to recruit and retain students.** 96.6% of four-year institutions use Facebook to recruit students, 83.4% use Twitter, and 79.3% use YouTube. [183] Colleges and universities use Facebook apps and other social media tools to increase student retention. [77] Social networking sites are also being used to give students a support system at community colleges that consist mostly of commuter students. [78]

2015. [185]

19. **Social networking 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 networking profiles. [128]
20. **Social media can facilitate inappropriate student-teacher relationships.** The Texas Education Agency (TEA) opened 179 cases about "inappropriate relationships" between educators and students in the 2014 school year; 86 cases were reported in 2007-2008 and education experts blame the rise of social media for the increase in cases. [129] [187] [188] Social media allows for unsupervised interactions between students and teachers, which can easily escalate into sexual or otherwise inappropriate relationships. 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]
21. **Unauthorized sharing on social networking sites exposes artists to copyright infringement, loss of intellectual property, and loss of income.** Social media sites have copyright regulations but they can be difficult to enforce. [131] Pinterest relies upon the re-publication of images from the web and, if users do not use the site conscientiously, artists' content can be posted without license, attribution, or payment. [132] *Vogue Spain* was accused of stealing New York street photographer Sion Fullana's Instagram photos and posting them to their own Instagram feed without acknowledging the source. [133]

22. **Using social media can harm students' chances for college admission.** College administrators scan Facebook profiles for evidence of illegal behavior by students. [134] [135] A 2014 Kaplan Test Prep survey found that 35% of college admissions officers checked an applicant's social media to learn more about them, up from 10% in 2008. 16% of admissions officers discovered information that "negatively impacted prospective students' admission chances." Only 3% of students surveyed believed the content of their social media presence could hurt their prospects of admission. [76]
  
23. **Social media posts cannot be completely deleted and all information posted can have unintended consequences.** The Library of Congress has been archiving all public tweets from Twitter's Mar. 2006 inception forward. [136] Information about an affair posted on Facebook, for example, can lead to and be used against someone in divorce proceedings because the information, once posted, can never be completely deleted. Facebook was named as a source of information in one-third of all divorces filed in 2011. [137]
  
24. **Social networking site users are vulnerable to security attacks such as hacking, identity theft, and viruses.** Social networks do not scan messages for viruses or phishing scams, leading to large-scale problems like the 2012 virus Steckt.Evl spread from Facebook's chat window. [138] 68% of social media users share their birth date publicly, 63% share their high school name, 18% share their phone number, 12% share a pet's name; each of those pieces of information is frequently used for account security verification and can be used for identity theft. [103]