

<http://socialnetworking.procon.org/>

PRO:

Social networking sites spread information faster than any other media. Over 50% of people learn about breaking news on social media. 65% of traditional media reporters and editors use sites like Facebook and LinkedIn for story research, and 52% use Twitter. 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%). Twitter and YouTube users reported the July 20, 2012 Aurora, CO theater shooting before news crews could arrive on the scene, and the Red Cross urged witnesses to tell family members they were safe via social media outlets.

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. 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.

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, and increased online communication strengthens relationships. 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.

Social media sites help employers find employees and job-seekers find work. 64% of companies are on two or more social networks for recruiting 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. One in six job-seekers used 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.

Social networking sites help senior citizens feel more connected to society. 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%. Seniors reported feeling happier due to online contact with family and access to information like church bulletins, community programs, and social groups.

Social networking sites help people who are socially isolated or shy connect with other people. 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). Youth who are "less socially adept" report that social networks give them a place to make friends and typically quiet students can feel more comfortable being vocal through a social media platform used in class. Shy adults also cite social media as a comfortable place to interact with others.

Social networking sites offer teachers a platform for collaboration with other teachers and communication with students outside the classroom. A study found that 80% of US College and university faculty use social media; more than 50% use it for teaching; and 30% for communicating with students. 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. Edmodo, an education-specific social networking site designed for contact between students, teachers, and parents, reached over ten million users on Sep. 11, 2012.

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CON:

Social media enables the spread of unreliable and false information. 49.1% of people have heard false news via social media. 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. 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.

Social networking sites lack privacy and expose users to government and corporate intrusions. Approximately 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. The US Justice Department intercepted 1,661 pieces of information from social networking sites and e-mails in 2011. 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.

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. College students' grades dropped 0.12 points for every 93 minutes above the average 106 minutes spent on Facebook per day. Two-thirds of teachers believe that social media does more to distract students than to help academically.

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

Social networking sites harm employees' productivity. A study found that 51% of people aged 25-34 accessed social media while at work. Two-thirds of US workers with Facebook accounts access the site during work hours. 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. About 51% of American workers think work productivity suffers because of social media.

People who use social networking sites are prone to social isolation. Social networking can exacerbate feelings of disconnect, and put children at higher risk for depression, low self-esteem, and eating disorders. The "passive consumption" of social media (scanning posts without commenting) is related to loneliness.