

Is Social Media Good for Society?

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Pro 1: Social media promotes community, security, and safety, both online and off.

Through social media, people can have friends with similar interests in multiple cities, states, and countries. Closer to home, social media can help people find each other in a busy world, from mom groups and soccer leagues to book clubs and hobby groups. Social media also serves a vital community function, from publicizing civic events and public safety concerns to locating lost pets and ranking and recommending local businesses and services. “[M]ost young people will say that social media and networked games are a lifeline to supportive connections with friends and loved ones. This was critical during the [COVID-19] pandemic when schools and sports were off limits. Social media can also be a way for young people to connect with others with shared interests and identities, which can be a lifeline for youth,” explains computer science professor Mizuko Ito.

As media professor Keith Hampton adds, while social media is not a substitute for in-person contact, “Relationships that might previously have gone dormant now persist over time [online]. As such, social media users tend to report that they have access to more social support and have lower psychological distress.” Studies have shown that not only does social media participation not completely obliterate in-person friendships as once feared, but that online relationships are a key supplement that add to one’s well-being. People are able to share more of their lives with friends and family and may receive crucial support from groups they do not have in offline life.

Some 80 percent of teens felt more connected to friends, 67 percent felt they had people to support them, and 58 percent felt more accepted because of social media.

Shy, introverted, or socially reticent people can use social media to reach out to potential friends with lowered barriers and risks. Further, people with medical ailments can find and benefit greatly from online support communities.

Pro 2: Social media encourages civic and political responsibility.

“Many of today’s youth take to digital spaces to develop their civic identities and express political stances in creative ways, claiming agency that may not be afforded to them in traditional civic spaces. The key difference between civic engagement by youth today and older, more traditional forms of action is the availability of digital technology, which provides a low-barrier-to-entry canvas for young people to create content that is potentially vastly scalable,” according to a 2020 UNICEF report.

Social media creates a more equitable point of entry and space for continued civic and political activity than traditional spaces. This easy access “contributes to a sense of socio-political empowerment,” which, in turn, makes young people more likely to participate in offline political activities, including voting. Meanwhile, many young people are taking responsibility to properly vet information they share.

Social media allows for political activists to fundraise, partner with influencers to boost the message, promote events including marches, share stories, and spread awareness of their chosen issue(s). For example, social media use fueled political protests including the Arab Spring, Black

Lives Matter, #LoveWins, #MeToo, and Occupy Wall Street.

15 Presidents Obama and Trump both used social media to an unprecedented degree to communicate with both US citizens and people abroad. "Social media not only enables the politicians to directly communicate with the citizens but also encourages political participation of citizens in the form of feedback via comments on social networking sites," according to researchers.

Pro 3: Social media bolsters inclusivity and diversity, both online and off.

Social media brings everyone together into one online space. With tools including hashtags and groups, people from diverse backgrounds who have similar identities, interests, or goals can find each other easily. For instance, "social media sites offer critical opportunities for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and other sexual and/or gender minority (LGBTQ+) youth to enhance well-
5 being through exploring their identities, accessing resources, and connecting with peers."

Similarly, people can explore people, cultures and ideas with which they are unfamiliar without judgment from their offline communities. Pew Research Center found that in a "survey of adults in 11 nations across four global regions ... in many key respects, smartphone users – and especially those who use social media – are more regularly exposed to people who have different
10 backgrounds."

Furthermore, many companies have extended their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies to online spaces, allowing not only employees but also diverse customers, clients, and others to be included equitably. For example, "bilingual social media content has emerged as a tool used to increase diversity and rights for minority groups. Nonprofits are currently producing bilingual
15 content across the globe to increase equality further internationally. Bilingual social media content is now becoming a marketing tool for organizations to learn about other cultures worldwide," according to Maria Ochoa, founder and CEO of Emprender Creative.

Creating a diverse online space can translate into a diverse work environment as employees and customers of diverse backgrounds feel included and, in turn, interact better with the
20 company.

Con 1: Social media spurs digital addiction, cyberbullying, and mental health issues.

Digital addiction is "a harmful dependence on digital media and devices." Social media has been shown to act like gambling or recreational drugs: "the constant stream of retweets, likes, and shares from these sites cause the brain's reward area to trigger the same kind of chemical reaction seen with drugs like cocaine," according to the Addiction Center. In fact, the U.S. Surgeon
5 General, Vivek H. Murthy, recognizing that social media is as addictive as cigarettes, called for a warning label on the platforms and asked Congress to pass legislation to "shield young people from online harassment, abuse and exploitation and from exposure to extreme violence and sexual content that too often appears in algorithm-driven feeds."

Pew Research Center found 59 percent of American teens had been bullied online, including
10 offensive name-calling (42 percent), false rumors (32 percent), unsolicited receipt of explicit images (25 percent), "someone other than a parent constantly ask where they are, who they're with or what they're doing" (21 percent), physical threats (18 percent), and non-consensual sharing of explicit images of the teen (7 percent).

However, not only teens engage in cyberbullying or experience the effects. Kids as young as
15 ten face cyberbullying, specifically racist attacks, globally. And 41 percent of American adults
reported being harassed online, ranging from offensive name-calling (31 percent) to stalking (11
percent). 75 percent of adults who have been cyberbullied indicated the harassment happened on
social media. The harms carry over into offline life. Digital addiction can lead to anxiety,
depression, mood swings, and a lack of interest in the real world, while cyberbullied victims were
20 more than twice as likely to “self-harm and enact suicidal behavior” than non-victims and are
subject to mental, emotional, and physical harms.

Digital addiction and cyberbullying can also have large-scale global implications. Amnesty
International accused Meta (parent company of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp among
others) of fueling the Rohingya massacres in Myanmar. The organization stated: “The mass
25 dissemination of messages that advocated hatred, inciting violence, and discrimination against the
Rohingya, as well as other dehumanizing and discriminatory anti-Rohingya content, poured fuel on
the fire of long-standing discrimination and substantially increased the risk of an outbreak of
mass violence.”

Con 2: Social media encourages the spread of misinformation and dangerous fads, some of them lethal.

Social media users frequently collect in echo chambers, where similarities among people
greatly outnumber differences. Users may share biases, political affiliations, gender, race, sexual
orientation, income, employment status, or any number of other demographic identifiers.

Echo chambers allow misinformation to flourish because users are less likely to fact-check a
5 post by someone with whom they identify and want to agree. Outside of an echo chamber,
someone is more likely to fact-check and stem the misinformation before it goes viral. Further,
within an echo chamber, extreme misinformation is more likely to go viral to encourage
engagement on the social media platform among the echo chamber’s participants. Social media
platforms exploit and manipulate the impulse for like-minded people to gather by programming
10 algorithms to show more information of the same vein and by not controlling the bots and trolls
that spread misinformation.

“Human biases play an important role: since we’re more likely to react to content that taps
into our existing grievances and beliefs, inflammatory tweets will generate quick engagement. It’s
only after that engagement happens that the technical side kicks in: If a tweet is retweeted,
15 favorited, or replied to by enough of its first viewers, the newsfeed algorithm will show it to
more users, at which point it will tap into the biases of those users too– prompting even more
engagement, and so on. At its worse [sic], this cycle can turn social media into a kind of
confirmation bias machine, one perfectly tailored for the spread of misinformation,” explained
Chris Meserole, Director of Research for the Brookings Artificial Intelligence and Emerging
20 Technology Initiative. According to a 2022 study, “[d]isaster, health, and politics emerged as the
three domains where misinformation [on social media] can cause severe harm, often leading to
casualties or even irreversible effects.... [For example,] misinformation in these areas has higher
potential to exacerbate the existing crisis in society.”

Director-General of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, noted about
25 the COVID-19 pandemic: “We are not just fighting an epidemic; we are fighting an infodemic,”

referring to the misinformation populating social media feeds about the virus. The same might be said about any number of topics populating social media feeds.

30 TikTok, the most downloaded social media app, is often at the center of these controversies. The site is notorious for fostering dangerous and deadly fads, such as the “Tide Pod challenge,” in which users (most of them kids) were encouraged to bite down on a laundry detergent packet, which led to the consumption of toxic chemicals that seriously burn the mouth, esophagus, and respiratory tract; the “Blackout challenge,” which dared kids to choke each other to the point of unconsciousness; and the “Coronavirus challenge,” in which users were instructed to lick public toilet seats and subway hand grips to see who could be the first to contract COVID. In September 35 2025, two Pennsylvania teens were arrested after driving cars in a TikTok- and social media-popularized stunt that left one teen dead and another one with “catastrophic head injuries that will be permanent in nature.” The kids were “car and table surfing” (surfing on the trunk of the car or on a table placed on the car).

40 Equally disturbing, an increasing number of kids are turning to “Dr. TikTok,” and social media in general, for medical guidance and their mental health. Yet, a lot of the medical information on social media is wrong if not dangerous. A 2025 study, for example, found that more than 50% of the information on TikTok about ADHD was inaccurate. Said one journalist, “While TikTok has democratized mental health discussions, it’s no substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.”

Con 3: Social media increases privacy risks across the Internet.

Social media is a hotbed of privacy risks including but not limited to phishing, data mining, malware sharing, and botnet attacks. Only 49 percent of Americans say they have confidence that social media companies could protect their private information, the least amount of faith afforded the organizations and businesses that collect private data including the federal 5 government, cell phone service providers, and retailers.

As the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) has argued, “the extraordinary growth of social media has given platforms extraordinary access and influence into the lives of users. Social networking companies harvest sensitive data about individuals’ activities, interests, personal characteristics, political views, purchasing habits, and online behaviors. In many cases this data is 10 used to algorithmically drive user engagement and to sell behavioral advertising– often with distortive and discriminatory impacts.” Further, as EPIC noted, “tracking and behavioral advertising by social media companies is not limited to the platforms themselves. Firms like Facebook use hard-to-detect tracking techniques to follow individuals across a variety of apps, websites, and devices. As a result, even those who intentionally opt out of social media 15 platforms are affected by their data collection and advertising practices.”

Thus, social media compromises everyone’s data across the Internet, including “location information, health information, religious identity, sexual orientation, facial recognition imagery, private messages, personal photos, and more.” Much of that information can be used for identity theft, in-person robbery, and any number of other crimes. And, as noted above in the argument 20 about cyberbullying, the release of such information could also result in stalking, outing LGBTQ+ people, and religious intolerance online. The information could also be used to influence opinions and spread misinformation among vulnerable people.