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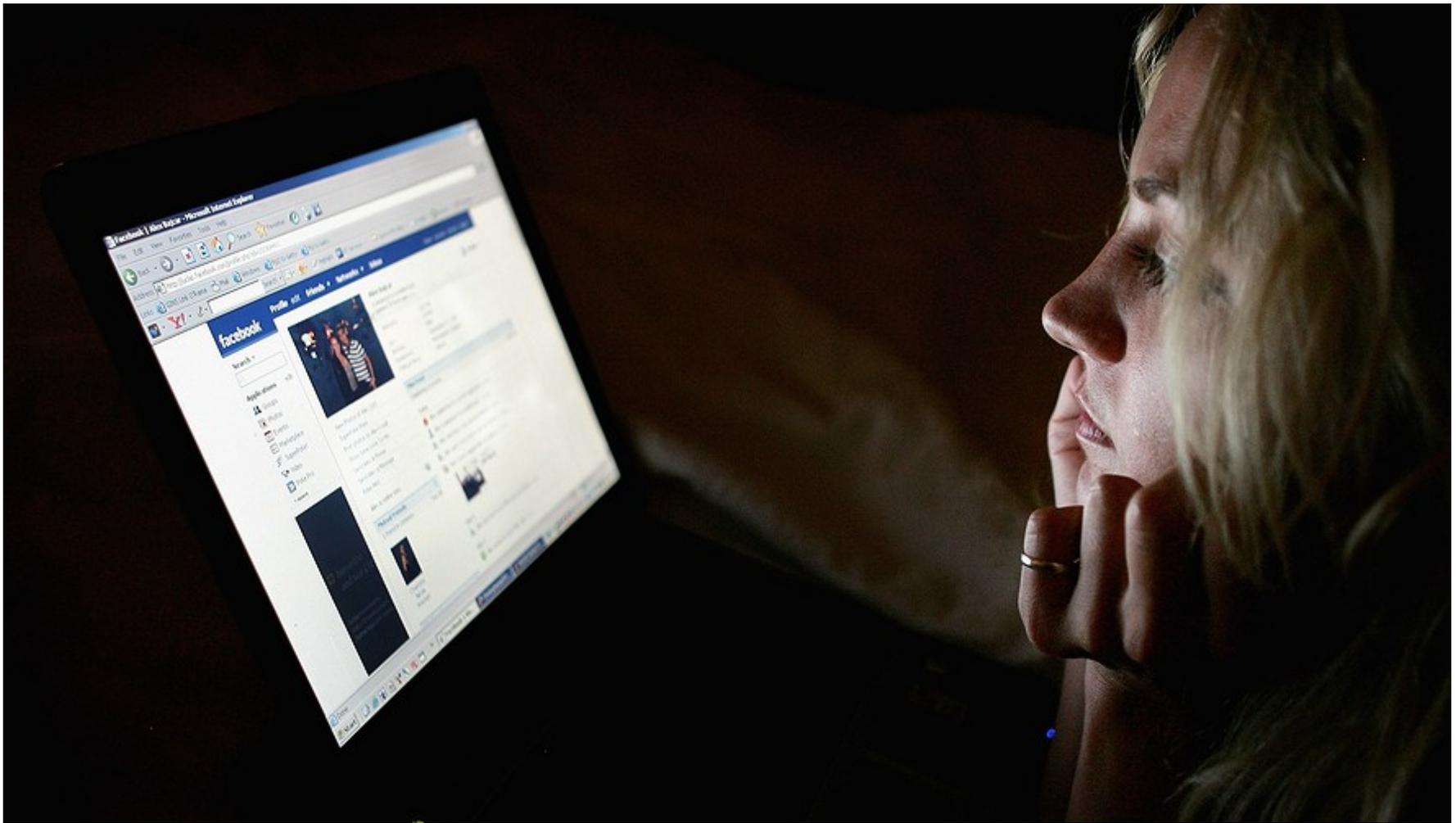
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A girl browses the social networking site Facebook on July 10, 2007 in London, England. Photo: Chris Jackson/Getty Image

# Issue Overview: Are social networking sites good for our society?

ProCon.org, adapted by Newsela staff

As of July 2015, 76 percent of American adults who use the Internet were using social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and Pinterest. This is up from just 26 percent in 2008. On social media, people can communicate with friends and

strangers, do research, and share thoughts, photos, links, music and information about themselves.

Supporters of social networking sites say that these online communities help increase communication with friends and family. They say that the sites offer access to educational materials and allow useful information to spread rapidly.

Opponents of social networking sites argue that the sites prevent face-to-face communication and negatively alter children's behavior. They say the sites help spread false or dangerous information, and can even expose users to harm.

## **The Early Days Of Social Media**

SixDegrees.com is considered the first social networking site. It existed from 1997-2001. It allowed users to create personal spaces online. Other social networking sites soon followed. These included MySpace in 2003, Facebook in 2004, Twitter in 2006 and Pinterest in 2009.

Facebook rapidly became the most popular social networking site in the world. By October of 2012, it had one billion monthly users worldwide. That's about 1 in every 7 people on the planet. Today, Facebook reports more than 1.8 billion monthly users around the globe.

According to Pew Research Center, 79 percent of U.S. adults who go online also use Facebook. The site logs 4.5 billion "Likes" and over 300 million photo uploads every day. As of November 2016, 36 percent of online adults in the U.S. were on Instagram, and 24 percent were on Twitter. Over 500 million tweets are sent daily.

## **Who Uses Social Media And How?**

As the sites have become more popular, the user base has expanded. The first users were teenagers and young adults. Now, more people over the age of 50 are using social network sites, too. The total amount of time users spend on social media has increased from year to year.

Facebook began as a site for college students. After two years it opened up to everyone. As of 2014, the largest percentage of Facebook users were between 15 and 34 years old, but about 16 percent of Facebook users were 55 and older.

Two in 5 Americans admit that they have used social media at work. One in 5 admits having logged into social media while in the bathroom.

Social media's largest source of revenue is advertising. The revenue from social media ad sales is expected to reach \$32.9 billion by the end of 2016. It could reach about \$41 billion by 2017.

## **Social Media And Politics**

Social networking sites play a large role in shaping the political landscape. In the 2016 presidential race, candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump consistently campaigned via social network sites. The first presidential election to be significantly affected by social media

was the 2008 presidential race between Barack Obama and John McCain. More than a quarter of U.S. voters younger than 30 reported that they obtained information about the election from social media.

On June 12, 2009, the White House announced it was joining Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Flickr. President Obama said joining the social media sites would help "reform our government so that it is more efficient, more transparent and more creative." As of 2011, 35 global leaders had Twitter accounts. More than 40 percent of world religious leaders, like the Dalai Lama and the pope, were on Twitter as well.

In 2010, widespread anti-government protests began in Tunisia, a country in Africa. This sparked the Arab Spring, a wave of revolutionary demonstrations across the Middle East and North Africa. Social media was an important and useful communication tool for protesters as the Arab Spring spread through many countries. The governments of those countries even tried to shut down the social media sites. In response, Hillary Clinton, who was the U.S. Secretary of State at that time, said the United States strongly supports free expression, including the use of social media.

## **Concerns About Safety, Health**

Companies worldwide struggle to manage employees' social network use at work. Some businesses may benefit from having employees on social media, but others worry that employees are just wasting time. In 2012, more than half of employees surveyed reported visiting non-work related websites at work. Many businesses also fear that social media puts the safety and security of their business at risk.

Seven million households that use Facebook reported safety- and privacy-related problems in 2012. These ranged from someone using a login without permission to being threatened online or in person.

A January 2015 study published in the Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology found that college freshmen averaged more than two hours a day on Facebook. It also showed that the habit harmed their grades. Sophomores and juniors only experienced a negative impact on their grade point averages when they used Facebook while studying. By senior year, the time spent on social media was not affecting their grades.

Social media is widespread in our world. Existing social networks are expanding, and new social media sites are popping up regularly. They are all accessible 24 hours a day via computer, tablet and smartphone.

Proponents of social media cheer on the benefits and possible advances to society that these networks may bring. Meanwhile, dissenters worry that the dangers and wasted time far outweigh any benefit.



# Quiz 1090L

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1

GRADE 7, ANCHOR 2: **CENTRAL IDEA**

**Which statement would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?**

- A** Social media is an important part of life in America.
- B** As social media use rises, many wonder if the benefits are greater than the risks.
- C** Social media allows people around the globe to learn about one another.
- D** As social media use has grown, citizens have become more interested in politics.

2

GRADE 7, ANCHOR 3: **PEOPLE, EVENTS & IDEAS**

**According to the article, how did the use of social media affect the Arab Spring?**

- A** It slowed the Arab Spring by giving demonstrators the wrong information.
- B** It strengthened the Arab Spring by giving protesters a way to organize with one another.
- C** It slowed the Arab Spring by encouraging actions that the U.S. government would not support.
- D** It strengthened the Arab Spring by helping governments in Arab countries recognize the value of online networks.

3

**Which paragraph from the section "Concerns About Safety, Health" BEST supports the central idea that using social media can put people in danger?**

[Click here to start.](#)

4

**According to the article, why did President Obama create social media accounts for the White House?**

- A** to ensure that he would reach enough voters to help him win reelection
- B** to make the government more accessible and accountable to the citizens
- C** to encourage citizens to apply for technology-related careers in his administration
- D** to allow the government to communicate and negotiate with other global leaders

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