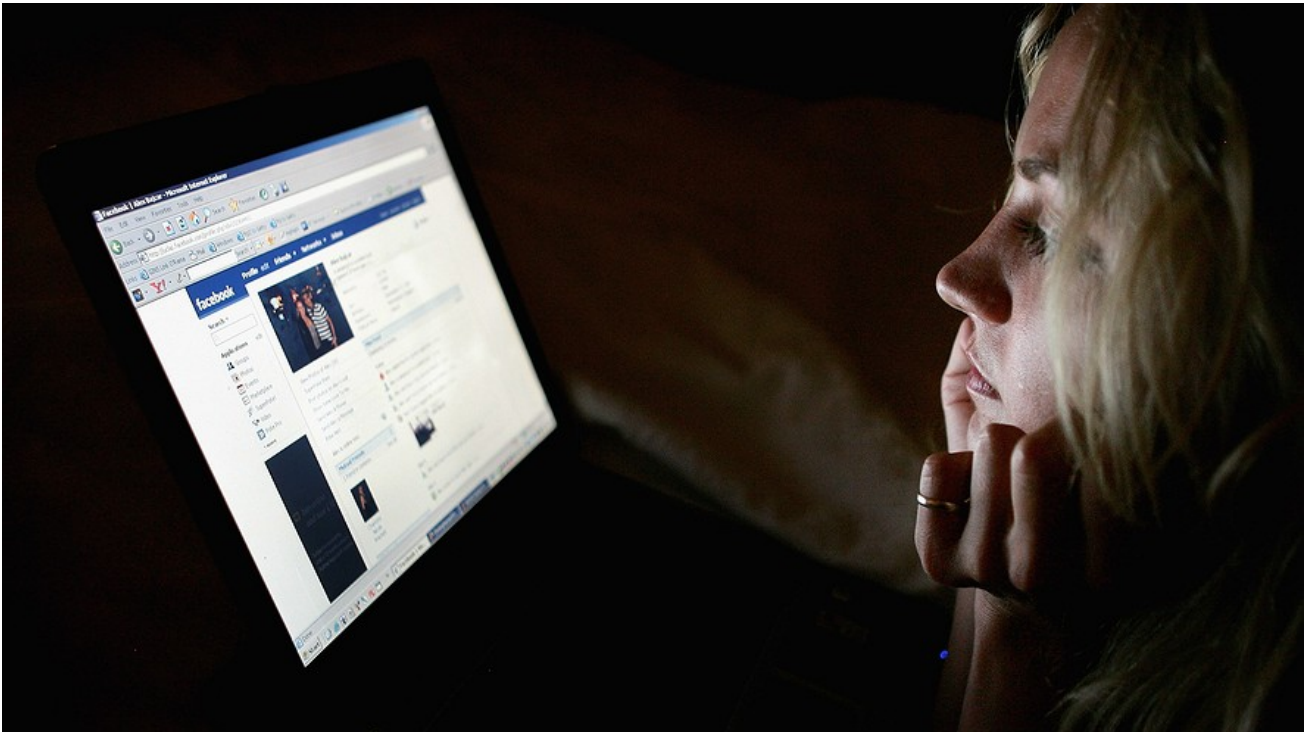


# Issue Overview: Are Social Networking Sites Good for Our Society?

By ProCon.org, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.29.16

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

Social networking sites are websites where people can create personal profiles, send messages to family and friends, and share photos, videos, articles and more. Three of the most popular social networking sites are Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

These sites have experienced a very fast rise in popularity. As of July 2015, more than three-quarters of U.S. adults who used the Internet also used social networking sites. That is a big jump from 2008, when only about one-quarter used these sites.

People who like social media say it is a good way keep in touch with family and friends. They say the sites are informative and help people share information quickly.

Those who don't like social networking say it keeps people from talking to each other in person. They argue that it is easy to spread incorrect information on social media. They also worry social media makes kids behave badly and could lead them to harm.

## **From SixDegrees To Instagram**

The first social networking site was SixDegrees.com. It existed from 1997-2001. Other social networking websites soon followed. MySpace was started in 2003, and Facebook was started in 2004.

Facebook quickly became the most popular social networking website. By late 2012, 1 out of every 7 people in the world used Facebook. Today, Facebook has more than 1.8 billion monthly users around the globe. According to Pew, a research company, nearly 8 out of 10 U.S. adults who use the Internet are Facebook users.

Facebook began as a site for college students. After two years it opened up to everyone. In 2014, the largest percentage of Facebook users were between 15 and 34 years old. Now, Facebook has more and more users who are 55 and older, too.

Social networking sites make their money by selling ads. In total, they are expected to make almost \$33 billion dollars on ad sales in 2016. This amount is expected to get even bigger in 2017.

## **World Leaders Use Social Media, Too**

Social networking has become an important part of politics. Many world leaders use it to spread their messages. In the 2016 presidential election, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump often campaigned through social networks.

The first time presidential nominees relied on social media was in the 2008 race between Barack Obama and John McCain. More than one out of every four U.S. voters under 30 said they learned about the 2008 election from social media.

In 2009, the White House announced it was joining Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Flickr. Obama said joining these sites would help make the government more effective, open and creative.

Other leaders seemed to agree. By 2011, 35 global leaders had Twitter accounts. They include the Buddhist leader the Dalai Lama and Pope Francis, who is the leader of the Roman Catholic Church.

## **Social Media Organizes Protesters**

Social networking websites have also been used by people involved in large and widespread protests. In 2010, people in the African country of Tunisia started protesting their government. This led to a string of protests known as the Arab Spring. Across the Middle East and North Africa, many people demonstrated against governments they did not believe to be fair.

Social media was an important tool for the protesters. They used it to share information quickly. Governments even threatened to shut down the sites. Hillary Clinton was the U.S. Secretary of State at that time. She said the United States strongly supports free expression, including the use of social media.

## **Social Media Dangers**

Companies are having a hard time managing their employees' use of social networking. Some people need to use social media to do their jobs. Others are just wasting time.

In 2012, 7 million households that use Facebook reported problems. These problems had to do with safety and privacy. Some people noticed that strangers were trying to log into their accounts. Others were threatened by strangers online. These are still concerns for people who use social media.

## **Wasting Time?**

The sites can also be distracting to students. In 2015, a study was published. It showed that students in their first year of college were spending two hours a day on Facebook. It also showed that this habit caused a drop in their grades.

Social media is widespread today. Existing social networks are growing, and more websites are created each year. They are all available 24 hours a day.

Supporters of social media cheer on the benefits to society that these networks may bring. On the other side, opponents worry that the dangers and wasted time cancel out any benefits.

*Source: [socialnetworking.procon.org](http://socialnetworking.procon.org)*