

Are social media actually making us less social?

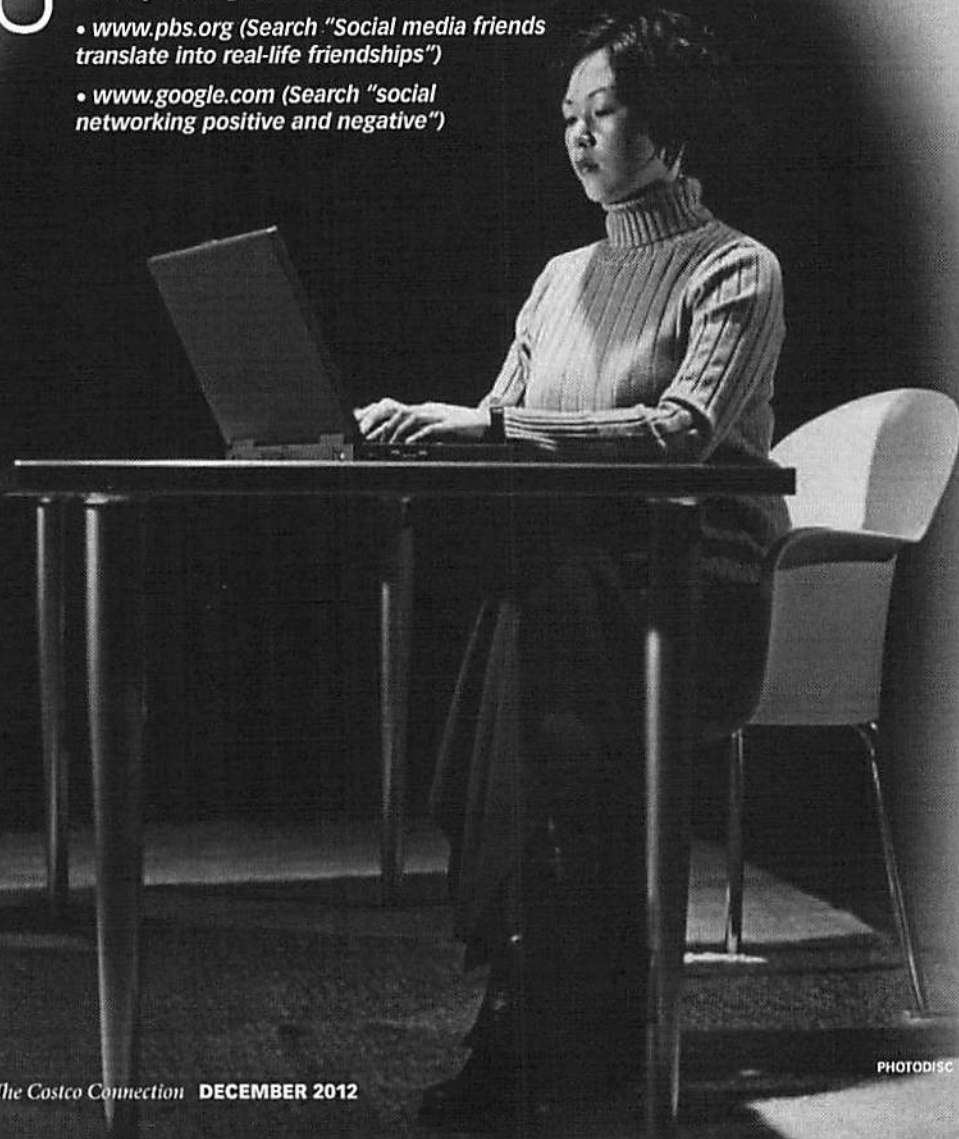
FACEBOOK, TWITTER AND other social media networks have changed the way people interact with each other. Some believe that while social media do make us more connected, this connection comes at the sacrifice of real conversation and close relationships. Others argue that these networks encourage us to have more close relationships and meet people with whom we share common interests.

What do you think?



Find out more about this topic on the Web:

- www.mashable.com (Search "Is social media actually making us less connected?")
- www.pbs.org (Search "Social media friends translate into real-life friendships")
- www.google.com (Search "social networking positive and negative")



YES

from members:

Kimberly Trask
Kapolei, HI



Ninety percent of communication is body language, and with the loss of visual communication a whole dimension of conversation is [lost].

Rachel Bowman
Sarasota, FL



People need to learn to communicate verbally so that issues and topics are not misconstrued through the written word.

Deborah Bailey
Howell, MI



People sit around texting to others, without interacting with those around them. The art of conversation is quickly fading.

NO

from members:

Sameer Mullick
Orange, CT



There are more one-on-one interactions with friends. It helps us keep connected with lost friends and find new ones.

Adria Christy
Omaha, NE



I use social media to keep connected with people I wouldn't normally get to talk to in my daily life. It has no effect on my social life other than that.

Kip Kay Kapinos
Bozeman, MT



Email [allows] us to reconnect with old friends and classmates, but, socially, we see many of our favorite folks at Costco.

from an expert in the field:



Dr. Gregory Jantz (www.drgregoryjantz.com), is the author of *#hooked: The Pitfalls of Media, Technology and Social Networking* (Siloam, 2012).

THE ANSWER ISN'T rocket science; it's social science. Observe a group of people at a bus stop, in line for an event, at a restaurant or even around your family room or dinner table. Instead of interacting with those around them, chances are high that many are studiously ignoring the people in their immediate vicinity in favor of a mobile device. Society is becoming digitally drenched. According to recent studies, anywhere from 95 to 98 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds are online, with the majority using social media. The percentage of people online in older age groups isn't as high, but it's increasing. Social interactions are being translated into digital data points.

Some may argue that social media help people to be more social. It is true that people, especially women, use social networking to keep connected to family and friends, but what does that connection consist of? Captions under pictures? Snippets of thought no bigger than 140 characters? A truncated, alphabet soup of letters that must be decoded before being understood? The digital pool we swim in can be miles wide, but in reality it's often only inches deep.

Real social connection simply requires more

depth, made up of conversations, verbal give-and-takes where thoughts and opinions are exchanged. Deeper connection is face-to-face, body-to-body, with the non-verbal conversation so vital to true understanding. Much of social media is written. There are no expressions or gestures or body language to help enlighten. Real emotions can get lost in the translation to cartoonish emoticons.

Real social connection requires time. Technology was supposed to give us more time, but the inverse seems to be happening. The time we gained is increasingly sucked down a digital hole as we try to keep up with the breakneck pace of life. Often I see people put others on hold in order to connect with their devices. How much interaction are we missing to keep up with what we're missing?

The accessibility, control and anonymity of the digital age are compelling and hook people to their technology. If we're not careful, interacting with our devices will become the point, and the reason, connecting with people, will lose priority. People will lose priority and convenience will become king. A virtual life is not real life. It is a controlled construct with carefully crafted images and the ability at any time to delete or defriend. If we're not careful, our avatars will end up having more virtual friends than we have real ones. [E]

from an expert in the field:



Keith N. Hampton is an associate professor in the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University (<http://comminfo.rutgers.edu>), and a past chair of the American Sociological Association's Section on Communication and Information Technologies (www.asanet.org).

CONCERN ABOUT social media use is the latest example of the skepticism that accompanies the widespread adoption of most new technologies. Socrates, the Greek philosopher, argued that the written word threatened the intimacy and knowledge that come from communicating in person. In the late 1800s, some American scientists called for a prohibition on the use of electric streetlights, as they were believed to corrupt the morals of the young.

Between 2009 and 2012 I collaborated with the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project to collect data on large, representative samples of American adults to measure how the use of social media was related to participation in public life and interactions with family, acquaintances and close friends. The goal was to provide a series of snapshots of how most adults use social media and how it affects their everyday lives. The findings provide little evidence that the use of social media makes people less social.

When we examined friendship in the traditional sense—not "Facebook friends," but the presence of real friends—we found that social media users do not have more or fewer friends than other

people. However, Internet users in general, and Facebook users in particular, do have a larger number of close relationships. On average, Internet users have about 14 percent more close friends, and someone who uses Facebook a few times per day averages 9 percent more close relationships than other Internet users.

Social media use covers a large category of activities. Use of a number of specific technologies, such as blogging and photo sharing, is related to knowing people from more diverse backgrounds. People who use these tools more often know people from all walks of life. This trend has as much to do with the use of social media as it does with a pattern that people who use these technologies spend more time in public, are more likely to volunteer and spend time in parks and plazas. Social media are positively related to social engagement outside the home.

Extreme use of anything can be problematic. For most, this is not an issue. On the whole, social media users are less socially isolated and more politically engaged, and their relationships tend to be closer, more supportive and more diverse. There is no indication that life today is less social as a result of social media. In fact, the evidence is much to the contrary. [E]

NOVEMBER DEBATE RESULTS:

Should voting be mandatory?

23% YES **77% NO**

Percentage reflects votes received by November 15, 2012.

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OCTOBER DEBATE RESULTS:

Are "stand-your-ground" laws a good idea?

YES: 94% NO: 6%

Percentage reflects votes received by October 31, 2012.



See Dialogue pages for more debate responses

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