

TOPIC #11: Are social networking sites good for our society?

Proponents of social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, say social networks spread news faster and help law enforcement catch criminals, while opponents state that social networks spread false information that can cause panics and riots, and they can also prevent people from getting jobs.

In your response, analyze the two articles taken from www.procon.org to determine which position is best supported. Use relevant and specific evidence from both articles to support your response.

Article 1

- (1) Social networking sites spread information faster than any other media. Over 50% of people learn about breaking news on social media. Sixty-five percent (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.
- (2) Law enforcement uses social networking sites to catch and prosecute criminals. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of federal, state, and local law enforcement professionals surveyed think "social media helps solve crimes more quickly." In 2011 the New York Police Department added a Twitter tracking unit and has used social networking to arrest criminals who have bragged of their crimes online. When the Vancouver Canucks lost the 2011 Stanley Cup in Vancouver, the city erupted into riots. Social media was used to catch vandals and rioters as social networking site users tagged the people they knew in over 2,000 photos posted to the sites.
- (3) Social networking sites help students do better at school. Fifty-nine percent (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.
- (4) Social media sites help employers find employees and job-seekers find work. Sixty-four percent (64%) of companies are on two or more social networks for recruiting because of the wider pool of applicants and more efficient searching capabilities. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of job recruiters have hired employees through LinkedIn, 26% through Facebook, and 15% through Twitter. One in six job-seekers credits social media for helping find their current jobs. Fifty-two percent (52%) of job-seekers use Facebook for the job search, 38% use LinkedIn, and 34% use Twitter.

Article 2

- (1) Social media enables the spread of unreliable and false information. About 49% of people have heard false news via social media. On September 5, 2012, false rumors of fires, shootouts, and caravans of gunmen in a Mexico City suburb that 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 posting on Twitter 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.
- (2) Social networking lacks privacy and exposes users to government and corporate intrusions. Thirteen 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." Around 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.
- (3) 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.
- (4) Using social media can harm job stability and employment prospects. Job recruiters reported negative reactions to finding profanity (61%), poor spelling or grammar (54%), pictures of or with alcohol (47%), illegal drugs (78%), sexual content (66%), and religious content (26%) on potential employees' social media pages. Anthony Weiner, former US Representative, was forced to resign after a Twitter sexting scandal in 2011. Several athletes were banned from the 2012 Olympics because of their racist social media posts.