

Are Social Networking Sites Good for Our Society?

A Critical Thinking Seminar with ProCon.org

Critical Thinking Criteria

- **Clarity** - Are the statements clear? Well-stated? Easily understood? Scientific or emotional? How much do those things matter?
- **Strength** - Does the person make a great point even if they do not articulate it well? Is the reasoning convincing? Is it logical? Does it feel right in your heart?
- **Source Quality** - Is the source an expert on the subject? Does the degree, job title, publication, or article title influence your view of the source's expertise?
- **Age** - Is the statement current? Does it seem relevant to the debate today? Is age a factor in your view of the arguments made?
- **Editing** - Is the presentation of information itself biased? Does the editing, length, relative strength of the sources, dates of the statements, or anything else suggest the presentation is not neutral?
- **Bias** - Does the person use extreme language to make their point? Does the person give a limited view of the topic or make any faulty conclusions? What might the person's biases be?

"The importance of social media in informing us is that it provides a channel for those excluded by the news... to have their voices and issues heard... Social media is critically important in giving voice to communities who've been systemically excluded from the media..."

Social media invites all of us to become opinion leaders, at least for our circle of friends, and make the process entertaining, gamifying our role as influencers by rewarding us with up to the second numbers on how our tweets and posts have been liked and shared by our friends...

The power of social media to raise money for candidates, recruit people to participate in marches and rallies, to organize boycotts of products or overthrow of governments if one of the best-documented- and most debated -powers of social media."

Ethan Zuckerman, PhD

- Associate Professor and Director of the Center for Civic Media at MIT
- "Six or Seven Things Social Media Can Do for Democracy," medium.com
- May 30, 2018

"I think we have created tools that are ripping apart the social fabric of how society works... The short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops that we have created are destroying how society works..."

[There is] no civil discourse, no cooperation; misinformation, mistruth. And it's not an American problem - this is not about Russian ads. This is a global problem..."

There was a hoax in WhatsApp where in some like village in India people were like afraid their kids were going to get kidnapped etc. And then there were these lynchings that happened as a result... Imagine like when you take that to the extreme where you know bad actors can manipulate large swaths of people to do anything you want. It's just a really bad state of affairs."

Chamath Palihapitiya

- Former Facebook Vice President of User Growth and Founder/CEO of Social Capital
- Talk given to the Stanford Graduate School of Business, youtube.com
- Nov. 2017

"Social media is a platform for sharing ideas, information and points of view. This can have important educational value: it extends the information young people can access while also giving them insight into how others think about and use that information..."

For those children who feel marginalised in their local community, social media can help them connect with other people who share the same interests or outlook on life.

In some cases, teenagers with critical problems can turn to social networks for fast support and guidance. There are plenty of groups that offer such help online.

Social media is also an important platform for driving social issues, such as racial issues, to greater national and international attention."

Joanne Orlando, PhD

- Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at the University of Western Sydney
- "When It Comes to Kids and Social Media, It's Not All Bad News," theconversation.com
- July 19, 2017

"Harvard University revealed that it had rescinded admissions offers to at least 10 students who shared offensive images within what they thought was a private Facebook group chat. The students posted memes and images that mocked minority groups, child abuse, sexual assault and the Holocaust, among other things..."

Sharing videos, images and memes creates the opportunity for an instantaneous positive feedback loop that can perpetuate poor decision making. In an environment where teens spend around nine hours using some form of online media every day, it doesn't take long for them to be influenced by an 'all-about-the-likes' sense of values that can potentially lead to life-altering decisions..."

The combination of social media pressure and an underdeveloped prefrontal cortex, the region of the brain that helps us rationalize decisions, control impulsivity and make judgments, can contribute to offensive online posts."

Ana Homayoun, MA

- Founder and CEO of Green Ivy Educational Consulting
- "The Secret Social Media Lives of Teenagers," New York Times
- June 7, 2017



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Group Discussion

Discuss as a group which side you think has the strongest argument. Write why you believe that side is stronger. Be sure to consider the 'Critical Thinking Criteria' on the other side.

Create Your Own Argument

Read the arguments below and as a group come up with as many new ones as you can. Come to a consensus about your best three Pro and Con arguments and write them below.

1. Social networking sites spread information faster than any other media.
 2. Law enforcement uses social networking sites to catch and prosecute criminals.
 3. Social media allows for quick, easy dissemination of public health and safety information from reputable sources.

1. Social media enables the spread of unreliable and false information.
 2. Social networking sites lack privacy and expose users to government and corporate intrusions.
 3. Social networking site users are vulnerable to security attacks such as hacking, identity theft, and viruses.

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

Scoring Session

Give each Pro and Con quote on the other side a score of 1-5 using the criteria below
 [5 = Outstanding, 4 = Very Good, 3 = Okay, 2 = Not Impressed, 1 = Terrible]

	Pro 1	Pro 2
• Clarity of Statement	_____	_____
• Quality of Source	_____	_____
• Age of Statement	_____	_____
• Editing of Statement	_____	_____
• Strength of Argument	_____	_____
Total	_____	_____

Added Totals
 Pro 1 & 2 _____
 Con 1 & 2 _____

	Con1	Con 2
• Clarity of Statement	_____	_____
• Quality of Source	_____	_____
• Age of Statement	_____	_____
• Editing of Statement	_____	_____
• Strength of Argument	_____	_____
Total	_____	_____