



Pew Internet
Pew Internet & American Life Project

a project of the
PewResearchCenter

FEBRUARY 9, 2012

The tone of life on social networking sites

85% of the adults who use social media report that people are usually kind on the sites. At the same time, 49% have witnessed mean and offensive behavior and they usually respond by ignoring it

Lee Rainie

Director, Pew Internet Project

Amanda Lenhart

Senior Research Specialist, Pew Internet Project

Aaron Smith

Senior Research Specialist, Pew Internet Project

Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project
1615 L St., NW – Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone: 202-419-4500

<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Social-networking-climate.aspx>

Summary of findings

The overall social and emotional climate of social networking sites (SNS) is a very positive one where adult users get personal rewards and satisfactions at far higher levels than they encounter anti-social people or have ill consequences from their encounters. A nationally representative phone survey of American adults finds that:

- 85% of SNS-using adults say that their experience on the sites is that people are mostly kind, compared with 5% who say people they observe on the sites are mostly unkind and another 5% who say their answer depends on the situation.
- 68% of SNS users said they had an experience that made them feel good about themselves.
- 61% had experiences that made them feel closer to another person. (Many said they had both experiences.)
- 39% of SNS-using adults say they frequently see acts of generosity by other SNS users and another 36% say they sometimes see others behaving generously and helpfully. By comparison, 18% of SNS-using adults say they see helpful behavior “only once in a while” and 5% say they never see generosity exhibited by others on social networking sites.

At the same time, notable proportions of SNS users do witness bad behavior on those sites and nearly a third have experienced some negative outcomes from their experiences on social networking sites. Some 49% of SNS-using adults said they have seen mean or cruel behavior displayed by others at least occasionally. And 26% said they had experienced at least one of the bad outcomes that were queried in the survey. Those bad outcomes were:

- 15% of adult SNS users said they had an experience on the site that **ended their friendship with someone.**
- 12% of adult SNS users had an experience **that resulted in a face-to-face argument** or confrontation with someone.
- 11% of adult SNS users had an experience on the site that **caused a problem with their family.**
- 3% of SNS-using adults said they had **gotten into a physical fight** with someone based on an experience they had on the site.
- 3% of adult SNS users said their use of the site had **gotten them in trouble at work** because of something that happened on the site.

In addition, 13% of adult SNS users said that **someone had acted in a mean or cruel way towards them** on a social networking site in the past 12 months.

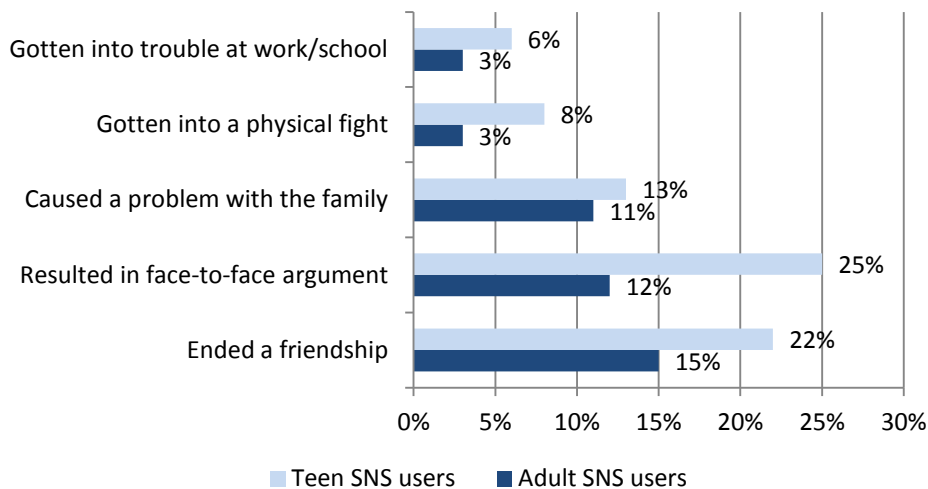
Adults are generally more positive and less negative than teens about the behavior of others and their own experiences on social networking sites.

This survey of adults was conducted in order to compare adult experiences on social networking sites to teenagers' experiences. The Pew Internet Project reported the teen findings in November 2011.¹

As a rule, more adults than teens reported positive results on SNS. For instance, a higher proportion of adults than teens say their experience is that people are mostly kind on social networking sites. And significantly smaller proportions of adults have had bad outcomes based on their SNS use such as confrontations, lost friendships, family strife, and fights. Overall, the two surveys show that 41% of SNS-using teens have had at least one of the bad experiences we queried, compared with 26% of the SNS-using adults.

Negative outcomes from SNS site use

% of SNS-using adults and teens who have had these experiences because of things that happened on SNS



Source: Adult data come from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 25 – August 26, 2011 Summer Tracking Survey. n=1,716 adults social networking site users and Twitter users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Teen data come from The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens 12-17 and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

¹ See "Teens, kindness and cruelty on social network sites" at <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Teens-and-social-media.aspx>.

When they see mean or aggressive behavior on social networking sites, adults are more likely than teens to ignore it and not get involved.

Compared with teen SNS users, adults are somewhat more likely to stand back, not get involved, and ignore the offensive behavior. For instance, 45% of adult SNS users who have witnessed problems say they frequently ignore offensive behavior online, compared with 35% of SNS-using teens who say they frequently ignore offensive behavior. Some 34% of adult SNS users say they never confront the person being offensive, compared with 21% of SNS-using teens who never take that step. Some 29% of adults who have witnessed problems never defend the person or group being attacked, compared with 19% of teens who never take that action.

At the same time, adults who have seen harassment on SNS are a bit less likely than teens to say they join in the harassment that they see occurring on social networking sites. Some 19% of teen SNS users said they at least occasionally join in the mean and offensive behavior that is being directed at another SNS user, compared with 15% of adults who say they join in at least occasionally.

Interestingly, there is a split when it comes to the behavior of men and women when they see a people acting meanly on a social networking site. Men are more likely to ignore a problem they see on a social networking site and women are more likely to respond.

- 26% of SNS-using women will frequently tell a person to stop attacking someone on a social networking site, but only 19% of SNS-using men will do that frequently. At the same time, 41% of men say they never tell someone to stop harassing another person on a social networking site, while only 29% of women say they never take action when they see a problem unfolding.
- Similarly, 28% of SNS-using women say they frequently defend a person or group that is being harassed or insulted, while only 19% say they will frequently do so. At the same time, 33% of SNS-using men say they never defend a person or group that is under attack on a social networking site, compared with 25% of women who say they never defend someone under attack.

Minorities, women, parents, and Millennials are most likely to witness offensive material on social networking sites.

Asked how frequently they see language, images or humor on SNS that is offensive, 73% of SNS-using adults said they encountered such offensive content or language only once in a while or never. There were several groups, though, that were more likely to encounter such material:

- 42% of black SNS users said they frequently or sometimes saw language, images or humor on SNS that they found offensive, compared with 22% of white SNS users. In addition, 33% of Hispanic SNS users said they encountered such material that often, notably higher than whites.
- 34% of Millennial generation SNS users – those ages 18-34 – said they frequently or sometimes saw language, images or humor on SNS that they found offensive, compared with 17% of SNS

users in GenX (those ages 35-46). Even smaller percentages of SNS-using Baby Boomers and retirees said they had encountered such material.

- 29% of women SNS users said they frequently or sometimes saw language, images or humor on SNS that they found offensive, compared with 22% of men.
- 29% of SNS users who are parents with minor children said they frequently or sometimes saw language, images or humor on SNS that they found offensive, compared with 24% of nonparents.

Part 1: Background

The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project has studied the social atmosphere of the online environment for many years because there is such widespread interest in the impact of the internet on people's relationships and their interactions with one another. This work has taken on more complexity in recent years because the rise of social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook and LinkedIn has facilitated new kinds of personal connections. In addition, such sites have vastly expanded the number of people who can observe social encounters and post their own comments and reactions to the proceedings.

There is special concern about the social and emotional tone that teenagers encounter on SNS, particularly in light of widespread news coverage of bullying and sexting. So, the Pew Internet Project did an extensive survey of those ages 12-17 and their parents about the social and emotional tone of social networking sites and reported the findings in November 2011.² Some of the most noteworthy survey results showed that most teen social networking site users (69%) say their peers are mostly kind to each others on the sites; but that 88% of such site users have witnessed others being mean or cruel at least occasionally. More than three-quarters of SNS-using teens (78%) reported at least one good outcome from their use of the sites and 41% reported at least one negative outcome. And 15% of teens say they themselves have been the target of online meanness.

The results reported here round out those findings by describing the adult side of the story, specifically, the social and emotional tone that adults encounter on social networking sites. In August 2011, we asked adult SNS users many of the same questions we asked teens in that earlier work. We queried adults about 1) what they observed about the way people treated each other on social networking sites; 2) how they themselves were treated on the sites; 3) how they and others responded when they saw anti-social and cruel behavior unfolding on the sites; and 4) some of the beneficial and harmful impacts they experienced in their lives because of their use of the sites.

This survey involved 2,260 adult respondents overall (ages 18+) and was conducted between July 25 and August 26, 2011. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and included 916 interviews on cell phones. The overall margin of error for the sample is plus or minus two percentage points. The questions asked of social networking users were given to 1,047 users of SNS and Twitter. The margin of error for that sub-group is plus or minus three percentage points.

A general portrait of adult social network users

In this survey, 64% of online adults use social networking sites – that amounts to half the full adult population. Among internet users, social networking sites are most popular with young adults under age 30. As of August 2011, there were no significant differences in use of social networking sites based on gender, race and ethnicity, and household income.

² See "Teens, kindness and cruelty on social network sites" at <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Teens-and-social-media.aspx>.

Who uses social networking sites

% of internet users within each group who use social networking sites

All internet users	64%
Gender	
Men	63
Women	66
Age	
18-29	87***
30-49	68**
50-64	49*
65+	29
Race/Ethnicity	
White, non-Hispanic	63
Black, non-Hispanic	70
Hispanic (English- and Spanish-speaking)	67
Household Income	
Less than \$30,000	68
\$30,000-\$49,999	65
\$50,000-\$74,999	61
\$75,000+	66
Education level	
Less than high school	63
High school grad	60
Some college	73*
College+	63
Geographic location	
Urban	69*
Suburban	64*
Rural	57

Note: * indicates statistically significant difference between rows. Extra asterisks mean differences with all rows with lower figures.

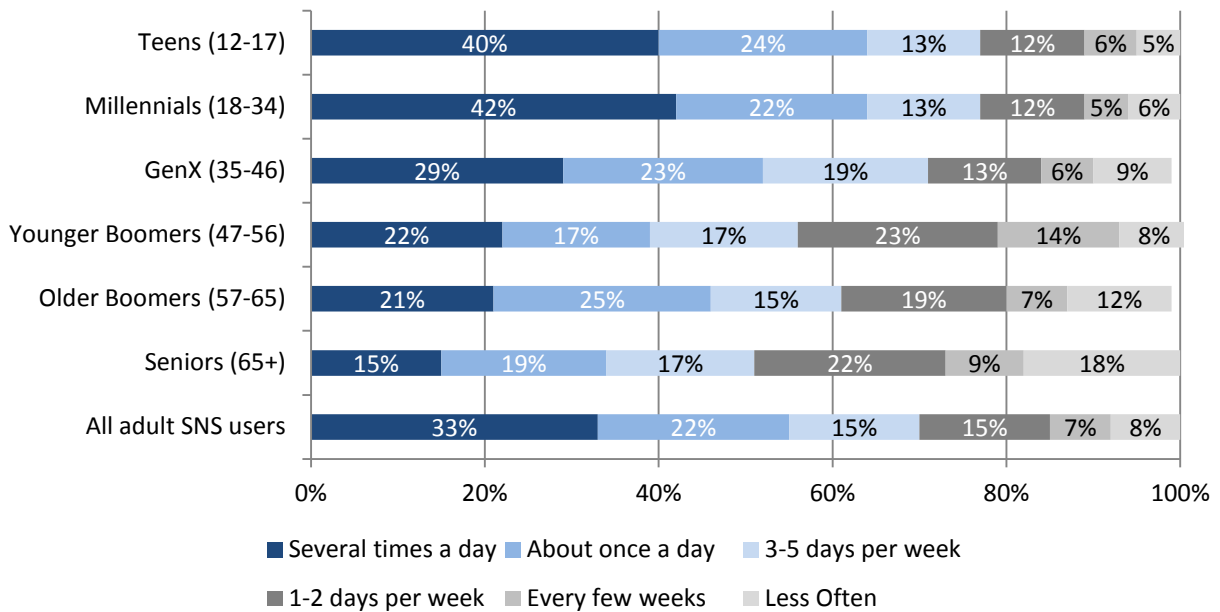
Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 25 – August 26, 2011 Summer Tracking Survey. n=1,716 adults internet users ages 18 and older, including 916 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

The survey found that 87% of SNS users have a profile on Facebook, 14% have one on MySpace, 11% use Twitter, 10% have a profile on LinkedIn and 13% describe using other social networking services.

When it comes to using SNS, the younger a user is, the more likely she is to log onto the site frequently.

Frequency of use of social networking sites

% of SNS users who use social networking sites this frequently



Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 25 – August 26, 2011 Summer Tracking Survey. n=1,716 adults social networking site users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Teen data come from The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens 12-17 and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones

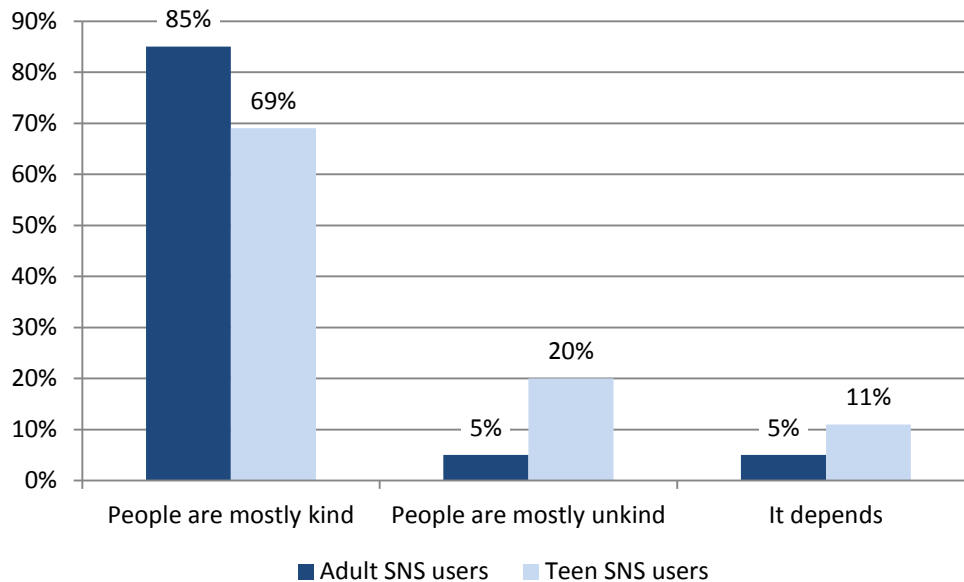
Part 2: The social climate of social networking sites

Fully 85% of adult SNS users say that in their experience people are mostly kind in social networking spaces. An additional 5% say their experience is that people are mostly unkind and 5% say their answer depends on the situation. The remainder of SNS users said they didn't know how to answer the question or refused to answer it.

These answers paint an even more positive portrait of the emotional and social climate of social networking sites than the generally positive assessment offered by teens.

Are social networking spaces kind or unkind?

% of SNS users who answered the question: "Overall, in your experience, are people mostly kind or mostly unkind to one another on social networking sites?"



Source: Adult data come from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 25 – August 26, 2011 Summer Tracking Survey. n=1,716 adults social networking site users and Twitter users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Teen data come from The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens 12-17 and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

White adult SNS users were more likely than blacks to report their overall experience was one of kindness in social networking spaces (88% vs. 77%), and black SNS users were more likely than whites to report that unkindness was the prevalent tone (12% vs. 3%). In addition, suburban SNS users (87%) were somewhat more likely than urban residents (80%) to say that the overall tone of social networking spaces was that people were kind. And people who use SNS only sparingly are somewhat less likely than

others to report that kindness prevails and more likely to say they don't know which trait is most in evidence.

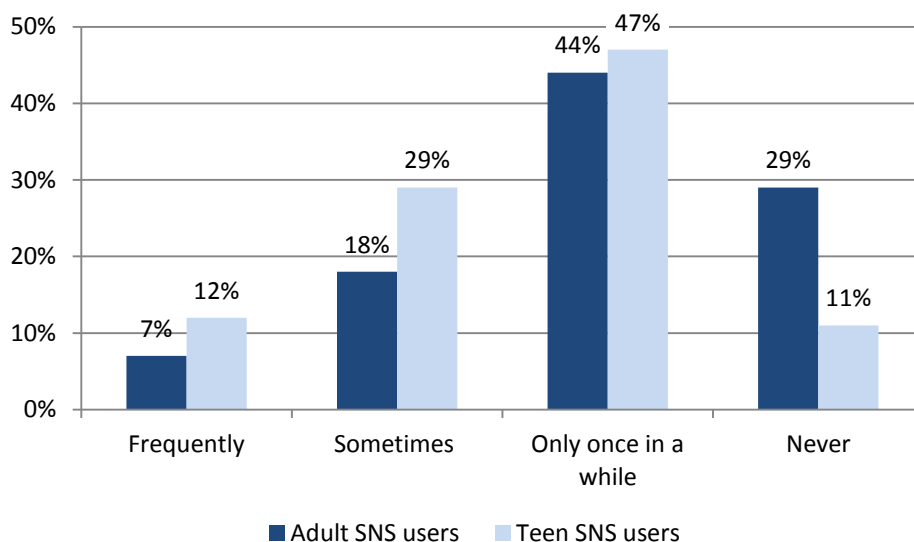
Altruism vs. nastiness

Adult SNS users were asked a question that did not appear in the teen survey: "When you're on a social networking site, how often do you see people being generous or helpful?" Some 39% of adult SNS users said they frequently saw acts of generosity, 36% said they sometimes saw it, 18% said they saw it "only once in a while" and 5% said they never saw it. The SNS users who were most likely to say they frequently saw people being generous or helpful included whites (41%), college graduates (45%), and those living in households earning \$75,000 and above (46%).

When it came to unpleasant behavior on SNS, adults have seen their share, but it tends to be evident to them far less frequently than it is to teen SNS users. Both groups were asked the same question: "When you're on a social networking site, how often do you see people being mean or cruel?" Some 49% of SNS-using adults said they saw mean or cruel behavior displayed by others at least occasionally, far lower than the 88% of SNS-using teens who said they had seen mean or cruel behavior at some point. Moreover, 29% of SNS-using adults said they had never seen mean or cruel behavior on the sites, compared with 11% of teens who said they had never seen it.

Teens are more likely than adults to see mean and cruel behavior on social networking sites

% who say they see bad behavior at this frequency



Source: Adult data come from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 25 – August 26, 2011 Summer Tracking Survey. n=1,716 adults social networking site users and Twitter users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Teen data come from The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens 12-17 and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Social network site users in the Millennial generation reported quite similar rates of witnessing mean and cruel behavior as their younger peers in the teen cohort: 9% of SNS-using Millennials said they frequently saw mean and cruel behavior; 25% of them see it sometimes; 48% see it “only once in a while”; and 16% said they never see it. Frequent users – those who use SNS at least once a day – are also more likely to see mean or cruel behavior more often.

Offensive language and images

We wanted to get an extra reading about the tone of content and conversation on SNS in addition to getting more specific readings on mean and cruel behavior. So, one of the questions we asked adult SNS users that was not asked of teens was: “How often do you see people using language, images or humor on social networking sites that you find offensive?”

Nearly three-quarters (73%) said they encountered such offensive content or language only once in a while or never. Specifically, the responses were:

- 11% of adult SNS users said they saw people using such language and images **frequently**
- 15% said they saw others using such language and images **sometimes**
- 38% said they saw others using such language and images **only once in a while**
- 35% said they **never** saw others using such language and images

Minorities, women, parents of minor children, and Millennials were the most likely to encounter offensive language, images, or humor.

- 42% of black SNS users said they frequently or sometimes saw language, images or humor on SNS that they found offensive, compared with 22% of white SNS users. In addition, 33% of Hispanic SNS users said they encountered such material with that level of frequency, which is notably higher than whites.
- 34% of Millennial generation SNS users – those ages 18-34 – said they frequently or sometimes saw language, images or humor on SNS that they found offensive, compared with 17% of SNS users in GenX (those ages 35-46). Even smaller percentages of SNS-using Baby Boomers and retirees said they had encountered such material.
- 29% of women SNS users said they frequently or sometimes saw language, images or humor on SNS that they found offensive, compared with 22% of men.
- 29% of SNS users who are parents with minor children said they frequently or sometimes saw language, images or humor on SNS that they found offensive, compared with 24% of nonparents.

Positive and negative personal outcomes

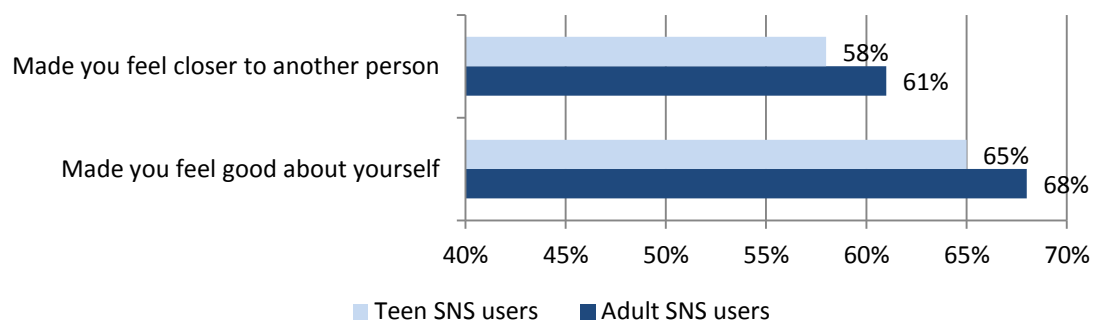
Social networking site users were asked several questions about the personal experiences they have had on the sites and they overwhelmingly reported that good outcomes had outnumbered bad outcomes. In broad terms, adult users of SNS were just as likely as teen users to have good things happen to them

and less likely to have unpleasant things happen to them. Some 76% of the SNS users said they had at least one of the positive outcomes we queried. Specifically:

- 68% of adult SNS users said they had an experience on the site that **made them feel good about themselves**
- 61% of adult SNS users said they had an experience that **made them feel closer to another person**

Positive experiences on social networking sites

% of SNS-using adults and teens who have had these experiences because of things that happened on SNS



Source: Adult data come from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 25 – August 26, 2011 Summer Tracking Survey. n=1,716 adults social networking site users and Twitter users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Teen data come from The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens 12-17 and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Interestingly enough, there were no notable demographic differences related to these positive outcomes. Among SNS users, women and men, blacks and whites and Hispanics, young and old, relatively well-off and relatively poor, highly educated and those with high school diplomas, rural and urban and suburban all reported similar levels of pro-social experiences.

On the negative side, 26% said they had experienced at least one of the bad outcomes that were queried in the survey. Again, adult experiences on SNS are less likely to be harmful than the teen experience: 41% of SNS-using teens reported they had at least one negative outcome. Specifically:

- 15% of adult SNS users said they had an experience on the site that **ended their friendship with someone**. That is somewhat less than the 22% of SNS-using teens who reported having this problem.
- 12% of adult SNS users had an experience **that resulted in a face-to-face argument** or confrontation with someone. Fully 25% of SNS-using teens said this had happened to them as a result of their using the site.

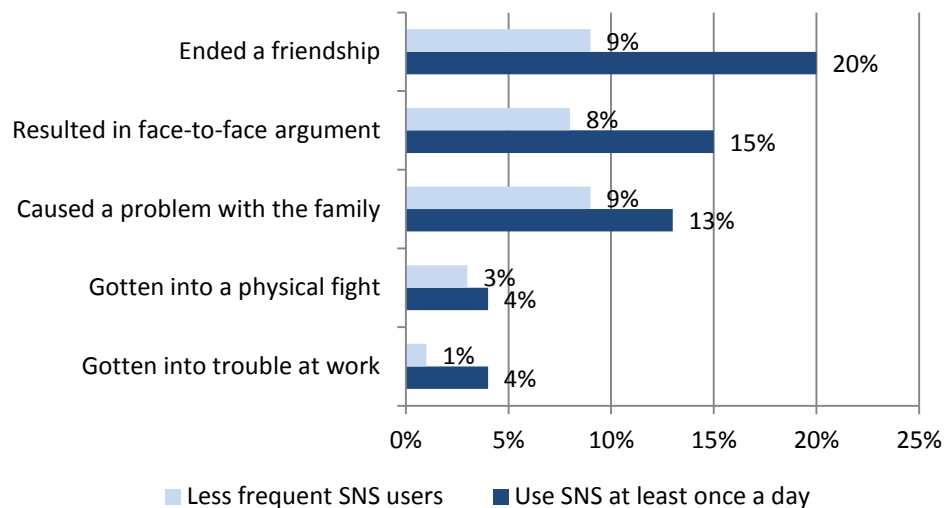
- 11% of adult SNS users had an experience that **caused a problem with their family**. Some 13% of SNS-using teens said their use of the sites had caused a problem with their parents.
- 3% of SNS-using adults said they had **gotten into a physical fight** with someone based on an experience they had on the site. Some 8% of SNS-using teens said they had gotten into a fight because of what happened on the site.
- 3% of adult SNS users said their use of the site had **gotten them in trouble at work**. Some 6% of SNS-using teens said they had gotten into trouble at school because of things that had happened on the site.

Among adults, some of these anti-social experiences are most prevalent among SNS users in the Millennials generation. This cohort of those between the ages of 18 and 34 was twice as likely as its elders to report that a friendship had ended because of an SNS experience – 21% of SNS-using Millennials said that had happened to them, compared with 11% of all other SNS users. In addition, 19% of SNS-using Millennials said an experience on the site had resulted in a face-to-face argument or confrontation, compared with 6% of other SNS users. Some 17% of Millennials said that they have had someone act in a mean or cruel way towards them personally on a social networking site in the previous 12 months, compared with 7% of other SNS users. And 6% of SNS-using Millennials said they had gotten into a physical fight because of an experience on the site, compared with 1% of other SNS users.

The same pattern holds for the most frequent users of social networking sites, who also happen to be relatively young. Those who use the sites multiple times a day are significantly more likely than less-frequent users to have had these negative experiences tied to their use of SNS: face-to-face confrontations, broken friendships, a problem in the family, gotten into trouble at work.

Negative outcomes occur more often to frequent SNS users

% of SNS users who have had these outcomes as a result of their site use



Source: Adult data come from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 25 – August 26, 2011 Summer Tracking Survey. n=1,716 adults social networking site users and Twitter users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Just as we found among teens, SNS-using adults from lower-income households were more likely than better-off users to have had bad outcomes. For instance:

- 23% of SNS users living in households earning less than \$30,000 had ended a friendship over something they experienced on a social networking site, compared with 12% of SNS users living in higher income households.
- 17% of SNS users living in households earning less than \$30,000 had a face to face argument over something they experienced on a social networking site, compared with 9% of SNS users living in higher income households.
- 6% of SNS users living in households earning less than \$30,000 had gotten into a physical fight over something they experienced on a social networking site, compared with 2% of SNS users living in higher income households.

Finally on the subject of negative experiences on social networking sites, 13% of adult SNS users said that **someone had acted in a mean or cruel way towards them** on the site in the past 12 months. This was the only question about a negative outcome where we included a timeframe in our question. Some 15% of SNS-using teens reported this problem.

What adults do when they see problems on social networking sites

As we noted above, 49% of adult SNS users at least occasionally see others being mean or offensive on the sites, a substantially smaller proportion than the 88% of teenage SNS-users who report they see such behavior at least occasionally. We asked the adults who had seen mean or offensive behavior on SNS what they do themselves in response. It turns out that compared to teen SNS users, adults are somewhat more likely to stand back, not get involved, and ignore the offensive behavior.

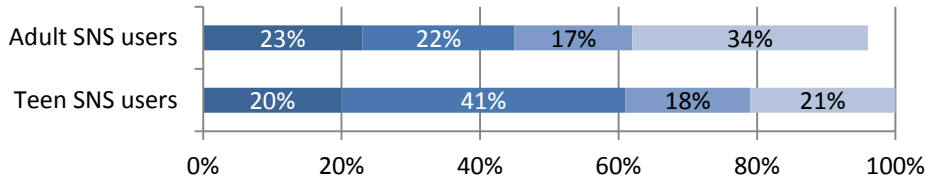
For instance, 45% of adult SNS users who have witnessed problems say they frequently ignore offensive behavior on social network sites, compared with 35% of SNS-using teens who say they frequently ignore offensive behavior. Some 34% of adult SNS users say they never confront the person being offensive, compared with 21% of SNS-using teens who never take that step. Some 29% of adults who have witnessed problems never defend the person or group being attacked, compared with 19% of teens who never take that action.

At the same time, adults who have seen harassment on SNS are a bit less likely than teens to say they join in the harassment that they see occurring on social networking sites.

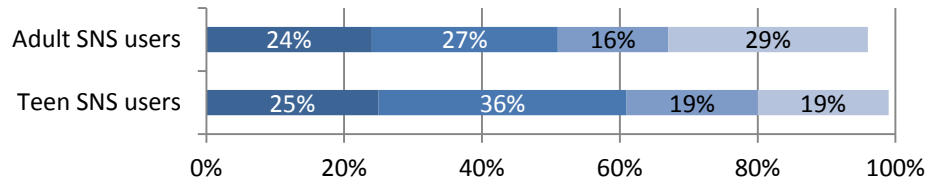
When people on SNS are being mean or offensive, how often do you respond this way ...

% of those who have witnessed bad behavior who say they take these steps

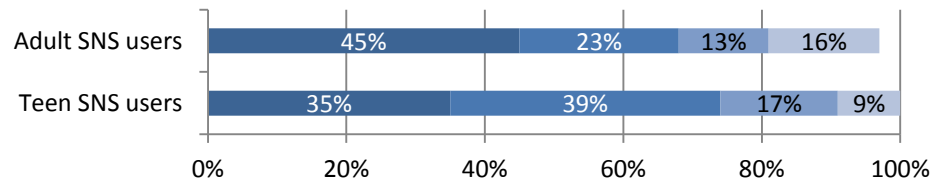
Tell person who is being offensive to stop



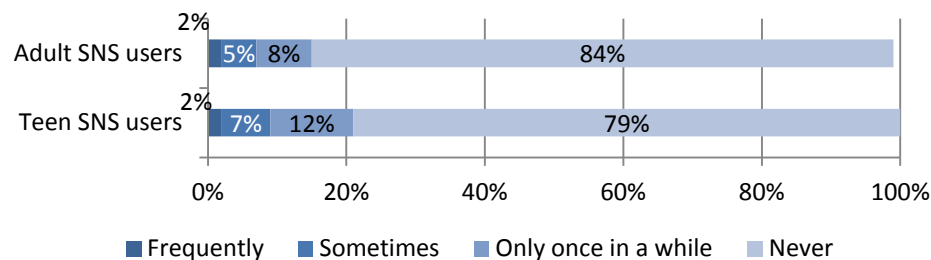
Defend the person/group being attacked



Just ignore what's going on



Join in the mean or offensive behavior



■ Frequently ■ Sometimes ■ Only once in a while ■ Never

Source: Adult data come from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 25 – August 26, 2011 Summer Tracking Survey. n=1,716 adults social networking site users and Twitter users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Teen data come from The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens 12-17 and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Unlike many other aspects of social networking site use, age does not matter when it comes to people's personal responses when they witness mean or offensive behavior. Young and old have similar patterns of response. However, there is a split when it comes to the behavior of men and women. Men are more

likely to ignore a problem they see on a social networking site and women are more likely to respond. For instance:

- 26% of SNS-using women will frequently tell a person to stop attacking someone on a social networking site, but only 19% of SNS-using men will do that frequently. At the same time, 41% of men say they never tell someone to stop harassing another on a social networking site, while only 29% of women say they never take action when they see a problem unfolding.
- Similarly, 28% of SNS-using women say they frequently defend a person or group that is being harassed or insulted, while only 19% of men say they will frequently do so. At the same time, 33% of SNS-using men say they never defend a person or group that is under attack on a social networking site, compared with 25% of women who say they never defend someone under attack.
- Women who use SNS (87%) are also somewhat more likely than SNS-using men (81%) to say they never harass someone who is being harassed on a social networking site.

What SNS users see others doing when someone comes under attack on a social networking site

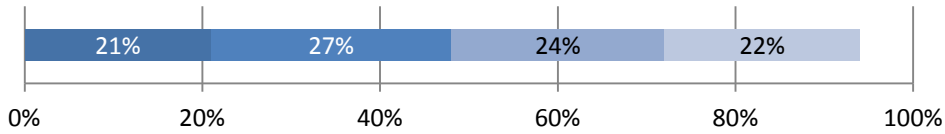
When it comes to the general tone of conversation and interactions on social networking sites, adults often see others ignoring the problems: 45% of SNS-using adults who have witnessed mean or offensive behavior say it is frequently their observation that others just ignore the offensive behavior and another 28% say that others sometimes ignore the offensive behavior. Teen SNS users were even more likely than that to say they observed that others ignored the harassment: 55% of the teens who had seen mean behavior on SNS said that was frequently the response they witnessed.

Some 36% of SNS-using adults who have seen social problems on the site say they see others at least sometimes join in the harassing behavior; while 54% at least sometimes see others defend the person under attack and 48% at least sometimes see others tell the harasser to stop.

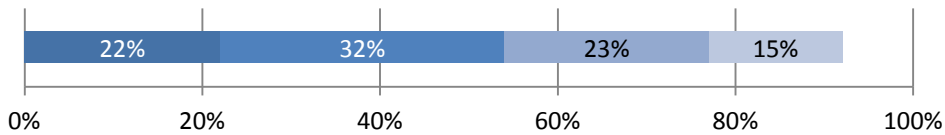
When people on SNS are being mean or offensive, how often, if ever, do others respond this way ...

% of SNS-using adults who have witnessed bad behavior who say they have seen others take these steps

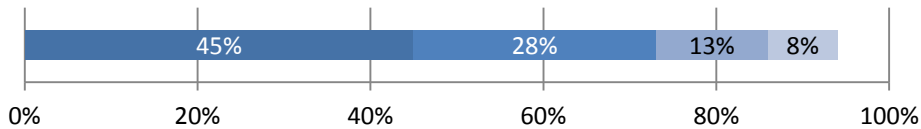
Tell person to stop



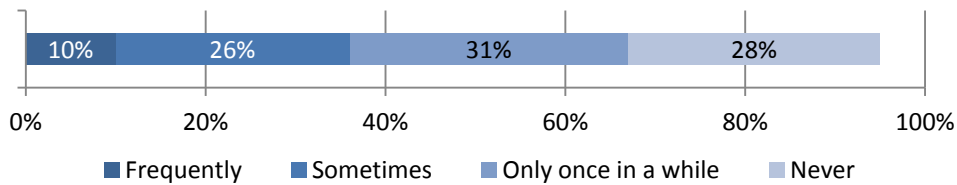
Defend person/group being attacked



Just ignore what's going on



Join in mean or offensive behavior



Source: Adult data come from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 25 – August 26, 2011 Summer Tracking Survey. n=1,716 adults social networking site users and Twitter users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

The one noteworthy demographic factor here is that younger SNS users who had witnessed anti-social behavior on the sites are much more likely to see others join in harassment of someone on SNS than older site users.

Second thoughts about posting on social networking sites

We asked all the online adults in our sample if they had ever decided not to post something online because they were concerned that it might reflect badly on them and 45% reported they had made that kind of decision. Interestingly enough, a greater share of online teens – 55% – had made a similar decision.

Among the online adults who were most likely to decide not to post something because of its impact on their reputation: Millennials (59%), those who live in households earning \$75,000 or more (54%), and those with college degrees (51%).

Methodology

This report is based on the findings of a survey on Americans' use of the Internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International from July 25 to August 26, 2011, among a sample of 2,260 adults, age 18 and older. Telephone interviews were conducted in English and Spanish by landline (1,344) and cell phone (916, including 425 without a landline phone). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2.3 percentage points. For results based on Internet users (n=1,716), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.6 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all adults in the continental United States who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were selected with probabilities in proportion to their share of listed telephone households from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but was drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. The sample was released in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger population. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. At least 7 attempts were made to complete an interview at a sampled telephone number. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Each number received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone available. For the landline sample, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult male or female currently at home based on a random rotation. If no male/female was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult of the other gender. For the cellular sample, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone. Interviewers verified that the person was an adult and in a safe place before administering the survey. Cellular sample respondents were offered a post-paid cash incentive for their participation. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

Weighting is generally used in survey analysis to compensate for sample designs and patterns of non-response that might bias results. A two-stage weighting procedure was used to weight this dual-frame sample. The first-stage corrected for different probabilities of selection associated with the number of adults in each household and each respondent's telephone usage patterns.³ This weighting also adjusts for the overlapping landline and cell sample frames and the relative sizes of each frame and each sample.

³ i.e., whether respondents have only a landline telephone, only a cell phone, or both kinds of telephone.

The second stage of weighting balances sample demographics to population parameters. The sample is balanced by form to match national population parameters for sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region (U.S. Census definitions), population density, and telephone usage. The White, non-Hispanic subgroup is also balanced on age, education and region. The basic weighting parameters came from a special analysis of the Census Bureau's 2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) that included all households in the continental United States. The population density parameter was derived from Census 2000 data. The cell phone usage parameter came from an analysis of the July-December 2010 National Health Interview Survey.⁴

Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

Sample Disposition		
Landline	Cell	
27,999	21,600	Total Numbers Dialed
1,138	323	Non-residential
1,348	54	Computer/Fax
2	----	Cell phone
13,357	8,166	Other not working
1,565	262	Additional projected not working
10,589	12,795	Working numbers
37.8%	59.2%	Working Rate
522	87	No Answer / Busy
3,398	4,396	Voice Mail
35	8	Other Non-Contact
6,634	8,304	Contacted numbers
62.7%	64.9%	Contact Rate
521	1,331	Callback
4,700	5,475	Refusal
1,413	1,498	Cooperating numbers
21.3%	18.0%	Cooperation Rate
36	49	Language Barrier
----	509	Child's cell phone
1,377	940	Eligible numbers
97.5%	62.8%	Eligibility Rate
33	24	Break-off
1,344	916	Completes
97.6%	97.4%	Completion Rate
13.0%	11.4%	Response Rate

⁴ Blumberg SJ, Luke JV. Wireless substitution: Early release of estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, July-December, 2010. National Center for Health Statistics. June 2011.

The disposition reports all of the sampled telephone numbers ever dialed from the original telephone number samples. The response rate estimates the fraction of all eligible respondents in the sample that were ultimately interviewed. At PSRAI it is calculated by taking the product of three component rates:

Contact rate – the proportion of working numbers where a request for interview was made

Cooperation rate – the proportion of contacted numbers where a consent for interview was at least initially obtained, versus those refused

Completion rate – the proportion of initially cooperating and eligible interviews that were completed

Thus the response rate for the landline sample was 13 percent. The response rate for the cellular sample was 11.4 percent.

Survey questions

August Tracking Survey 2011

Final Topline

8/30/2011

Data for July 25–August 26, 2011

Princeton Survey Research Associates International
for the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project

Sample: n=2,260 national adults, age 18 and older, including 916 cell phone interviews
Interviewing dates: 07.25.2011 – 08.26.2011

Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on Total [n=2,260]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on internet users [n=1,716]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on cell phone owners [n=1,948]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on SNS or Twitter users [n=1,047]

INTUSE Do you use the internet, at least occasionally?

EMLOCC Do you send or receive email, at least occasionally?⁵

	uses internet	Does not use internet
Current	78	22
May 2011	78	22
January 2011 ⁱ	79	21
December 2010 ⁱⁱ	77	23
November 2010 ⁱⁱⁱ	74	26
September 2010	74	26
May 2010	79	21
January 2010 ^{iv}	75	25
December 2009 ^v	74	26
September 2009	77	23
April 2009	79	21
December 2008	74	26
November 2008 ^{vi}	74	26
August 2008 ^{vii}	75	25
July 2008 ^{viii}	77	23
May 2008 ^{ix}	73	27
April 2008 ^x	73	27
January 2008 ^{xi}	70	30
December 2007 ^{xii}	75	25
September 2007 ^{xiii}	73	27
February 2007 ^{xiv}	71	29
December 2006 ^{xv}	70	30
November 2006 ^{xvi}	68	32
August 2006 ^{xvii}	70	30
April 2006 ^{xviii}	73	27
February 2006 ^{xix}	73	27
December 2005 ^{xx}	66	34
September 2005 ^{xxi}	72	28

⁵ Prior to January 2005, question wording was “Do you ever go online to access the Internet or World Wide Web or to send and receive email?”

June 2005 ^{xxii}	68	32
February 2005 ^{xxiii}	67	33
January 2005 ^{xxiv}	66	34
Nov 23-30, 2004 ^{xxv}	59	41
November 2004 ^{xxvi}	61	39
June 2004 ^{xxvii}	63	37
February 2004 ^{xxviii}	63	37
November 2003 ^{xxix}	64	36
August 2003 ^{xxx}	63	37
June 2003 ^{xxxi}	62	38
May 2003 ^{xxxii}	63	37
March 3-11, 2003 ^{xxxiii}	62	38
February 2003 ^{xxxiv}	64	36
December 2002 ^{xxxv}	57	43
November 2002 ^{xxxvi}	61	39
October 2002 ^{xxxvii}	59	41
September 2002 ^{xxxviii}	61	39
July 2002 ^{xxxix}	59	41
March/May 2002 ^{xl}	58	42
January 2002 ^{xli}	61	39
December 2001 ^{xlii}	58	42
November 2001 ^{xliii}	58	42
October 2001 ^{xliv}	56	44
September 2001 ^{xlv}	55	45
August 2001 ^{xlvi}	59	41
February 2001 ^{xlvii}	53	47
December 2000 ^{xlviii}	59	41
November 2000 ^{xliv}	53	47
October 2000 ⁱ	52	48
September 2000 ⁱⁱ	50	50
August 2000 ⁱⁱⁱ	49	51
June 2000 ^{liii}	47	53
May 2000 ^{liv}	48	52

WEB1 Next... Please tell me if you ever use the internet to do any of the following things. Do you ever use the internet to...[INSERT; RANDOMIZE]? / Did you happen to do this yesterday, or not?⁶

Based on all internet users [N=1,716]

	total have ever DONE THIS	----- DID YESTERDAY	have not done this	don't know	refused
Use a social networking site like MySpace, Facebook or LinkedIn ⁷					
Current	64	43	35	*	0
May 2011	65	43	35	*	0
January 2011	61	n/a	39	0	0
December 2010	62	n/a	38	*	0
November 2010	61	37	39	*	*
September 2010	62	39	38	*	0
May 2010	61	38	39	0	0
January 2010	57	32	43	*	0
December 2009	56	33	44	0	*
September 2009	47	27	52	*	*
April 2009	46	27	54	*	*
December 2008	35	19	65	*	--
November 2008	37	19	63	0	0
August 2008	33	17	67	*	--
July 2008	34	n/a	66	*	--
May 2008	29	13	70	*	--
August 2006	16	9	84	*	--
September 2005	11	3	88	1	--
February 2005	8	2	91	1	--
Use Twitter					
Current	12	5	88	*	0
May 2011	13	4	87	*	0
January 2011	10	n/a	90	*	*
December 2010	12	n/a	88	*	0
November 2010	8	2	92	0	*

Q20 Thinking about how you use social networking sites... On which social networking site or sites do you have an account? [PRECODED OPEN-END]⁸

⁶ Prior to January 2005, question wording was "Please tell me if you ever do any of the following when you go online. Do you ever...?/Did you happen to do this yesterday, or not?" Unless otherwise noted, trends are based on all internet users for that survey.

⁷ In December 2008, item wording was "Use a social networking site like MySpace or Facebook." In August 2006, item wording was "Use an online social networking site like MySpace, Facebook or Friendster". Prior to August 2006, item wording was "Use online social or professional networking sites like Friendster or LinkedIn"

⁸ May 2011 question was asked of SNS or Twitter users who have an SNS profile and wording was: "[IF HAVE PROFILE ON ONE SNS SITE:] On which social networking site do you currently have a profile? / [IF HAVE PROFILES

Based on SNS or Twitter users

current		May 2011	SEPT 2009	
%	87	Facebook	93	73
	14	MySpace	23	48
	11	Twitter	11	6
	10	Linked In	11	14
	2	Yahoo / Yahoo Messenger	2	1
	2	Google Buzz	1	n/a
	2	Google/Google Plus	n/a	n/a
	1	YouTube	2	1
	1	Tumblr	*	n/a
	*	Tagged	2	1
	*	My Yearbook	1	n/a
	*	Classmates.com	*	1
	0	Ustream	0	n/a
	0	Flickr	*	1
	n/a	Bebo	0	*
	n/a	Digg	0	*
	n/a	Last.FM	*	*
	5	Other (SPECIFY)	9	10
	4	Don't have my own profile on a social networking site	n/a	n/a
	2	Don't know	1	1
	2	Refused	2	3
	[n=1,047]		[n=975]	[n=680]

Note: Total may exceed 100% due to multiple responses.

Q21 About how often do you visit social networking sites? [READ 1-6]

Based on SNS or Twitter users [N=1,047]

current	
%	33
	Several times a day
	22
	About once a day
	15
	3 to 5 days a week
	15
	1 to 2 days a week
	7
	Every few weeks
	8
	Less often
	*
	(DO NOT READ) Don't know
	*
	(DO NOT READ) Refused

ON MULTIPLE SITES:] On which social networking sites do you currently have a profile?" September 2009 question was asked of SNS users only and wording was "On which social networking site do you have a profile? / On which Social Networking sites do you have a profile?"

Q22 Overall, in your experience, are people mostly KIND or mostly UNKIND to one another on social networking sites?

Based on SNS or Twitter users [N=1,047]

		current
%	85	People are mostly kind
	5	People are mostly unkind
	5	Depends (VOL.)
	4	Don't know
	1	Refused

Q23 When you're on a social networking site, how often do you see people being generous or helpful... frequently, sometimes, only once in a while or never?

Based on SNS or Twitter users [N=1,047]

		current
%	39	Frequently
	36	Sometimes
	18	Only once in a while
	5	Never
	2	Don't know
	*	Refused

Q24 And when you're on a social networking site, how often do you see people being MEAN or CRUEL... frequently, sometimes, only once in a while or never?

Based on SNS or Twitter users [N=1,047]

		current
%	7	Frequently
	18	Sometimes
	44	Only once in a while
	29	Never
	2	Don't know
	*	Refused

Q25 How often do you see people using language, images or humor on social networking sites that you find offensive... frequently, sometimes, only once in a while or never?

Based on SNS or Twitter users [N=1,047]

		current
%	11	Frequently
	15	Sometimes
	38	Only once in a while
	35	Never
	1	Don't know
	*	Refused

Q26 When people on social networking sites are being mean or offensive, how often, if ever, do others [INSERT FIRST ITEM; RANDOMIZE]... frequently, sometimes, only once in a while or never? How often do others... [INSERT NEXT ITEM]? [READ AS NECESSARY: Frequently, sometimes, only once in a while or never?]

Based on SNS or Twitter users who have seen others being mean, cruel or offensive on SNS [N=825]

	frequent-ly	sometime	once in a while	never	don't know	refused
Tell the person to stop	21	27	24	22	6	1
Defend the person or group who is being harassed or insulted	22	32	23	15	7	1
Join in the mean or offensive behavior	10	26	31	28	5	*
Just ignore the behavior	45	28	13	8	6	1

Q27 And how about you personally? When people on social networking sites are being mean or offensive, how often do you....[INSERT FIRST ITEM; RANDOMIZE IN SAME ORDER AS Q26]? How often do you...[INSERT NEXT ITEM]? [READ AS NECESSARY: Frequently, sometimes, only once in a while or never?]

Based on SNS or Twitter users who have seen others being mean, cruel or offensive on SNS [N=825]

	frequent-ly	sometime	once in a while	never	don't know	refused
Tell the person to stop	23	22	17	34	2	1
Defend the person or group who is being harassed or insulted	24	27	16	29	3	2
Join in the mean or offensive behavior	2	5	8	84	1	*
Just ignore the behavior	45	23	13	16	2	1

Q28 In the past 12 months, when you have been on a social networking site, has anyone been mean or cruel to you personally?

Based on SNS or Twitter users [N=1,047]

current	
%	13
	Yes
	86
	No
	1
	Don't know
	*
	Refused

Q29 Have you, personally, ever had an experience on a social networking site that [INSERT ITEMS; RANDOMIZE]?

Based on SNS or Twitter users [N=1,047]

	yes	no	don't know	refused
Resulted in a face to face argument or confrontation with someone	12	88	*	*
Caused a problem with your family	11	88	*	*
Resulted in a physical fight with someone else	3	96	*	*
Ended your friendship with someone	15	85	*	*
Made you feel closer to another person	61	38	1	*

Got you in trouble at work	3	97	*	*
Made you feel good about yourself	68	31	1	*

Q30 Have you ever decided NOT to post something online because you were concerned that it might reflect badly on you?

Based on all internet users [N=1,716]

	current	
%	45	Yes
	54	No
	1	Don't know
	*	Refused

Endnotes

- ⁱ January 2011 trends based on the Pew Internet Project/Project for Excellence in Journalism/Knight Foundation “Local News survey,” conducted January 12-25, 2011 [N=2,251, including 750 cell phone interviews].
- ⁱⁱ December 2010 trends based on the Social Side of the Internet survey, conducted November 23–December 21, 2010 [N=2,303, including 748 cell phone interviews].
- ⁱⁱⁱ November 2010 trends based on the Post-Election Tracking Survey 2010, conducted November 3-24, 2010 [N=2,257, including 755 cell phone interviews].
- ^{iv} January 2010 trends based on the Online News survey, conducted December 28, 2009 – January 19, 2010 [N=2,259, including 562 cell phone interviews].
- ^v December 2009 trends based on the Fall Tracking “E-Government” survey, conducted November 30 – December 27, 2009 [N=2,258, including 565 cell phone interviews].
- ^{vi} November 2008 trends based on the Post-Election 2008 Tracking survey, conducted November 20-December 4, 2008 [N=2,254].
- ^{vii} August 2008 trends based on the August Tracking 2008 survey, conducted August 12-31, 2008 [N=2,251].
- ^{viii} July 2008 trends based on the Personal Networks and Community survey, conducted July 9-August 10, 2008 [N=2,512, including 505 cell phone interviews].
- ^{ix} May 2008 trends based on the Spring Tracking 2008 survey, conducted April 8-May 11, 2008 [N=2,251].
- ^x April 2008 trends based on the Networked Workers survey, conducted March 27-April 14, 2008. Most questions were asked only of full- or part-time workers [N=1,000], but trend results shown here reflect the total sample [N=2,134].
- ^{xi} January 2008 trends based on the Networked Families survey, conducted December 13, 2007-January 13, 2008 [N=2,252].
- ^{xii} December 2007 trends based on the Annual Gadgets survey, conducted October 24-December 2, 2007 [N=2,054, including 500 cell phone interviews].
- ^{xiii} September 2007 trends based on the Consumer Choice survey, conducted August 3-September 5, 2007 [N=2,400, oversample of 129 cell phone interviews].
- ^{xiv} February 2007 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted February 15-March 7, 2007 [N=2,200].
- ^{xv} December 2006 trends based on daily tracking survey, conducted November 30 - December 30, 2006 [N=2,373].
- ^{xvi} November 2006 trends based on Post-Election tracking survey, conducted Nov. 8-Dec. 4, 2006 [N=2,562]. This includes an RDD sample [N=2,362] and a cell phone only sample [N=200]. Results reflect combined samples, where applicable.
- ^{xvii} August 2006 trends based on daily tracking survey, conducted August 1-31, 2006 [N=2,928].
- ^{xviii} April 2006 trends based on the Annual Gadgets survey, conducted Feb. 15-Apr. 6, 2006 [N=4,001].
- ^{xix} February 2006 trends based on the Exploratorium Survey, conducted Jan. 9-Feb. 6, 2006 [N=2,000].
- ^{xx} December 2005 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 31, 2005 [N=3,011].
- ^{xxi} September 2005 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted Sept. 14-Oct.13, 2005 [N=2,251].
- ^{xxii} June 2005 trends based on the Spyware Survey, conducted May 4-June 7, 2005 [N=2,001].
- ^{xxiii} February 2005 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted Feb. 21-March 21, 2005 [N=2,201].
- ^{xxiv} January 2005 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted Jan. 13-Feb.9, 2005 [N=2,201].
- ^{xxv} November 23-30, 2004 trends based on the November 2004 Activity Tracking Survey, conducted November 23-30, 2004 [N=914].
- ^{xxvi} November 2004 trends based on the November Post-Election Tracking Survey, conducted Nov 4-Nov 22, 2004 [N=2,200].
- ^{xxvii} June 2004 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted May 14-June 17, 2004 [N=2,200].

-
- xxviii February 2004 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted February 3-March 1, 2004 [N=2,204].
 - xxix November 2003 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted November 18-December 14, 2003 [N=2,013].
 - xxx August 2003 trends based on 'E-Government' survey conducted June 25-August 3, 2003 [N=2,925].
 - xxxi June 2003 trends based on 'Internet Spam' survey conducted June 10-24, 2003 [N=2,200].
 - xxxii May 2003 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted April 29-May 20, 2003 [N=1,632].
 - xxxiii March 3-11, 2003 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted March 3-11, 2003 [N=743].
 - xxxiv February 2003 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted February 12-March 2, 2003 [N=1,611].
 - xxxv December 2002 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted Nov. 25-Dec. 22, 2002 [N=2,038].
 - xxxvi November 2002 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted October 30-November 24, 2002 [N=2,745].
 - xxxvii October 2002 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted October 7-27, 2002 [N=1,677].
 - xxxviii September 2002 trends based on daily tracking survey conducted September 9-October 6, 2002 [N=2,092].
 - xxxix July 2002 trends based on 'Sept. 11th-The Impact Online' survey conducted June 26-July 26, 2002 [N=2,501].
 - xi March/May 2002 trends based on daily tracking surveys conducted March 1-31, 2002 and May 2-19, 2002.
 - xii January 2002 trends based on a daily tracking survey conducted January 3-31, 2002 [N=2,391].
 - xiii December 2001 trends represent a total tracking period of December 1-23, 2001 [N=3,214]. This tracking period based on daily tracking surveys conducted December 17-23, 2001 and November 19-December 16, 2001.
 - xiiii November 2001 trends represent a total tracking period of November 1-30, 2001 [N=2,119]. This tracking period based on daily tracking surveys conducted October 19 – November 18, 2001 and November 19 – December 16, 2001.
 - xlv October 2001 trends represent a total tracking period of October 1-31, 2001 [N=1,924]. This tracking period based on daily tracking surveys conducted September 20 – October 1, 2001, October 2-7, 2001, October 8-18, 2001, and October 19 – November 18, 2001.
 - xlvi September 2001 trends represent a total tracking period of September 1-30, 2001 [N=742]. This tracking period based on daily tracking surveys conducted August 13-September 10, 2001, September 12-19, 2001 and September 20 – October 1, 2001.
 - xlvi August 2001 trends represent a total tracking period of August 12-31, 2001 [N=1,505]. This tracking period based on a daily tracking survey conducted August 13-September 10, 2001.
 - xlvii February 2001 trends based on a daily tracking survey conducted February 1, 2001-March 1, 2001 [N=2,096].
 - xlviii December 2000 trends based on a daily tracking survey conducted December 2-22, 2000 [N=2,383].
 - xliv November 2000 trends based on a daily tracking survey conducted November 2, 2000 – December 1 [N=6,322].
 - l October 2000 trends based on a daily tracking survey conducted October 2 – November 1, 2000 [N=3,336].
 - li September 2000 trends based on a daily tracking survey conducted September 15 – October 1, 2000 [N=1,302].
 - lii August 2000 trends based on a daily tracking survey conducted July 24 – August 20, 2000 [N=2,109].
 - liii June 2000 trends based on a daily tracking survey conducted May 2 – June 30, 2000 [N=4,606].
 - liiv May 2000 trends based on a daily tracking survey conducted April 1 – May 1, 2000 [N=2,503].