

Social Media Networking Sites: Free Response Question

Much attention has been given to the ubiquitous presence of social media networking sites. Our daily lives seem to be saturated with Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram, to name just a few of the most common social media networking sites.

Many people praise the ability of such networking sites to connect us with others in personal and meaningful ways. At the same time, however, some critics worry that the widespread use of social media is eliminating face-to-face conversations, alienating people from each other. Do social media networking sites connect people in meaningful ways, or do they alienate people from each other?

Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then write an essay arguing whether or not social media networking sites connect or alienate people. Your essay must synthesize information from at least three of the sources.

Manage your time carefully so you can

- plan your essay;
- write your essay; and
- revise and edit your essay.

Be sure to

- include a claim;
- address counterclaims; and
- use evidence from at least three sources.

Do not over rely on one source.

Source A (Turkle)

Source B (Sterling)

Source C (Relatives Gather)

Source D (Alvarez)

Source E (Bradbury)

Source F (Rideout)

Source A

Turkle, Sherry. "The Flight from Conversation." *The New York Times*, 21 April 2012. Web.

The following is an excerpt from Sherry Turkle in the opinion section of a national newspaper. Turkle's new book, Alone Together, explores the ways online social networks and texting culture are changing how people relate to society, their parents and friends.

WE live in a technological universe in which we are always communicating. And yet we have sacrificed conversation for mere connection. At home, families sit together, texting and reading e-mail. At work executives text during board meetings. We text (and shop and go on Facebook) during classes and when we're on dates. My students tell me about an important new skill: it involves maintaining eye contact with someone while you text someone else; it's hard, but it can be done.

Over the past 15 years, I've studied technologies of mobile connection and talked to hundreds of people of all ages and circumstances about their plugged-in lives. I've learned that the little devices most of us carry around are so powerful that they change not only what we do, but also who we are.

We've become accustomed to a new way of being "alone together." Technology-enabled, we are able to be with one another, and also elsewhere, connected to wherever we want to be. We want to customize our lives. We want to move in and out of where we are because the thing we value most is control over where we focus our attention. We have gotten used to the idea of being in a tribe of one, loyal to our own party.

A 16-year-old boy who relies on texting for almost everything says almost wistfully, "Someday, someday, but certainly not now, I'd like to learn how to have a conversation."

In today's workplace, young people who have grown up fearing conversation show up on the job wearing earphones. Walking through a college library or the campus of a high-tech start-up, one sees the same thing: we are together, but each of us is in our own bubble, furiously connected to keyboards and tiny touch screens.

In the silence of connection, people are comforted by being in touch with a lot of people — carefully kept at bay. We can't get enough of one another if we can use technology to keep one another at distances we can control: not too close, not too far, just right. I think of it as a Goldilocks effect.

Texting and e-mail and posting let us present the self we want to be. This means we can edit. And if we wish to, we can delete. Or retouch: the voice, the flesh, the face, the body. Not too much, not too little — just right.

We are tempted to think that our little "sips" of online connection add up to a big gulp of real conversation. But they don't. E-mail, Twitter, Facebook, all of these have their places — in politics, commerce, romance and friendship. But no matter how valuable, they do not substitute for conversation.

Connecting in sips may work for gathering discrete bits of information or for saying, "I am thinking about you." Or even for saying, "I love you." But connecting in sips doesn't work as well when it comes to understanding and knowing one another. In conversation we tend to one another. We can attend to tone and nuance. In conversation, we are called upon to see things from another's point of view.

Face-to-face conversation unfolds slowly. It teaches patience. When we communicate on our digital devices, we learn different habits. As we ramp up the volume and velocity of online connections, we start to expect faster answers. To get these, we ask one another simpler questions; we dumb down our communications, even on the most important matters. It is as though we have all put ourselves on cable news. Shakespeare might have said, "We are consum'd with that which we were nourish'd by."

As we get used to being shortchanged on conversation and to getting by with less, we seem almost willing to dispense with people altogether. Serious people muse about the future of computer programs as psychiatrists. A high school sophomore confides to me that he wishes he could talk to an artificial intelligence program instead of his dad about dating; he says the A.I. would have so much more in its database. Indeed, many people tell me they hope that as Siri, the digital assistant on Apple's iPhone, becomes more advanced, "she" will be more and more like a best friend — one who will listen when others won't.

During the years I have spent researching people and their relationships with technology, I have often heard the sentiment "No one is listening to me." I believe this feeling helps explain why it is so appealing to have a Facebook page or a Twitter feed — each provides so many automatic listeners. And it helps explain why — against all reason — so many of us are willing to talk to machines that seem to care about us. Researchers around the world are busy inventing sociable robots, designed to be companions to the elderly, to children, to all of us.

We expect more from technology and less from one another and seem increasingly drawn to technologies that provide the illusion of companionship without the demands of relationship. Always-on/always-on-you devices provide three powerful fantasies: that we will always be heard; that we can put our attention wherever we want it to be; and that we never have to be alone. Indeed our new devices have turned being alone into a problem that can be solved.

When people are alone, even for a few moments, they fidget and reach for a device. Here connection works like a symptom, not a cure, and our constant, reflexive impulse to connect shapes a new way of being.

Think of it as "I share, therefore I am." We use technology to define ourselves by sharing our thoughts and feelings as we're having them. We used to think, "I have a feeling; I want to make a call." Now our impulse is, "I want to have a feeling; I need to send a text."

So, in order to feel more, and to feel more like ourselves, we connect. But in our rush to connect, we flee from solitude, our ability to be separate and gather ourselves. Lacking the capacity for solitude, we turn to other people but don't experience them as they are. It is as though we use them, need them as spare parts to support our increasingly fragile selves.

We think constant connection will make us feel less lonely. The opposite is true. If we are unable to be alone, we are far more likely to be lonely. If we don't teach our children to be alone, they will know only how to be lonely.

I am a partisan for conversation. To make room for it, I see some first, deliberate steps. At home, we can create sacred spaces: the kitchen, the dining room. We can make our cars "device-free zones." We can demonstrate the value of conversation to our children. And we can do the same thing at work. There we are so busy communicating that we often don't have time to talk to one another about what really matters. Employees asked for casual Fridays; perhaps managers should introduce conversational Thursdays. Most of all, we need to remember — in between texts and e-mails and Facebook posts — to listen to one another, even to the boring bits, because it is often in unedited moments, moments in which we hesitate and stutter and go silent, that we reveal ourselves to one another.

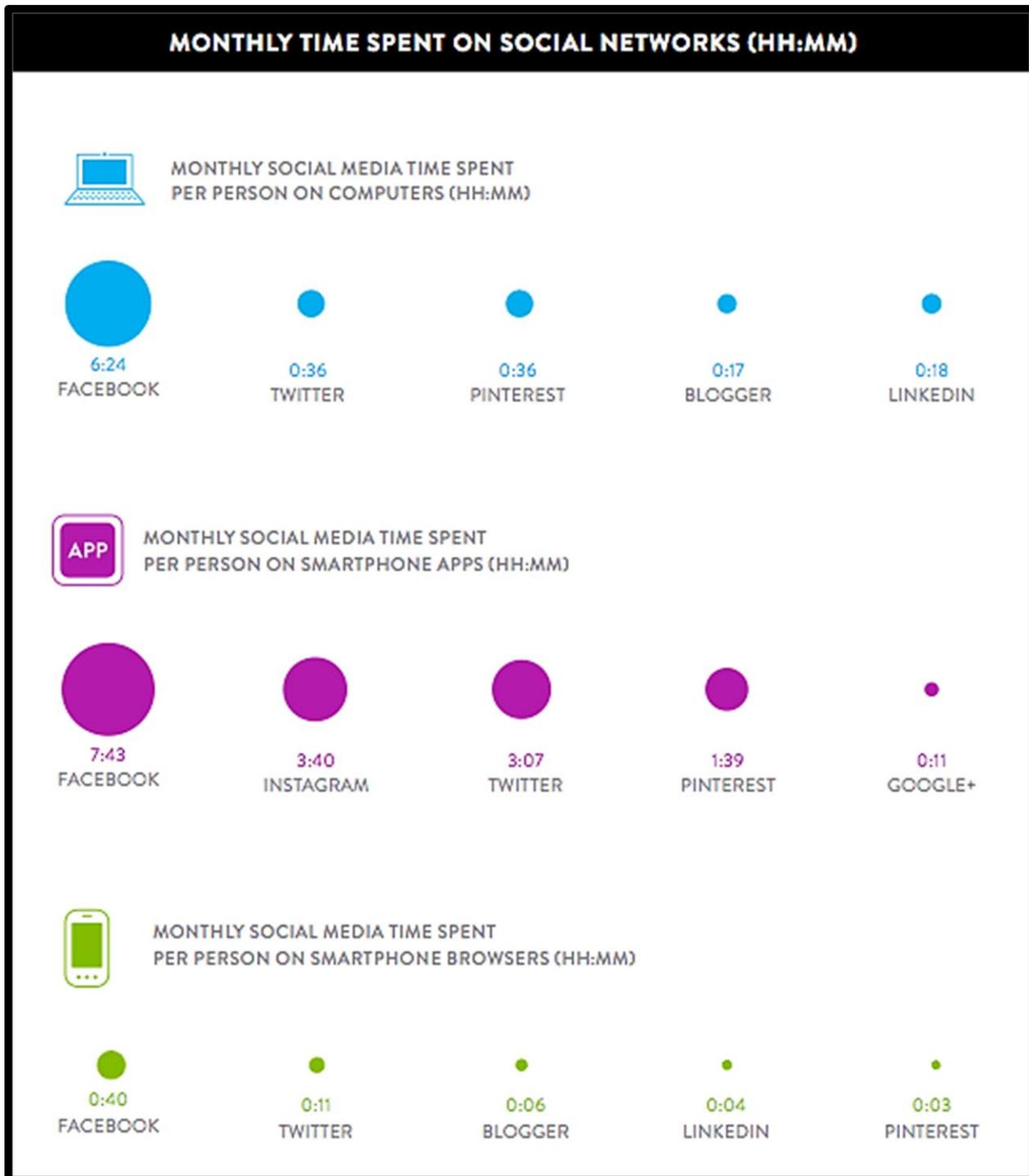
I spend the summers at a cottage on Cape Cod, and for decades I walked the same dunes that Thoreau once walked. Not too long ago, people walked with their heads up, looking at the water, the sky, the sand and at one another, talking. Now they often walk with their heads down, typing. Even when they are with friends, partners, children, everyone is on their own devices.

So I say, look up, look at one another, and let's start the conversation.

Source B

Sterling, Greg. "Nielsen: More Time on Internet Through Smartphones Than PCs." *MarketingLand*, 11 Feb. 2014. Web.

The following is an infographic based on the research Nielsen, the leading global information and measurement company.



Source C

“Relatives Gather From Across the Country to Stare into Screens Together.” *The Onion*, 25 Dec. 2013. Web.

The following is a fictional story published by The Onion, a digital media company and news satire organization.

OAK CREEK, WI—Turning on the television while unpacking tablets, iPhones, and laptops from their suitcases, members of the McPherson family communed from across the nation this holiday season for several straight days of staring into electronic screens while in the same room together, sources confirmed Friday. “Nothing puts me in the Christmas spirit more than sitting down on the couch with my parents and siblings, turning on the TV, and then proceeding to either look at the screen or gaze down into my glowing tablet display for hours on end,” 28-year-old Andrew McPherson told reporters, adding that he always felt most connected to his relatives when they were both silently gazing into glowing screens of some kind. “It’s just great to get home for a while and spend some quality time not speaking a single word to my relatives, whether that’s by sipping hot cocoa with my sister while we both check our emails, or by gathering the whole clan for a nice holiday meal where everyone is fixedly looking down at the text messages on their phones—’tis the season, you know?” McPherson noted he was sad, however, that Grandpa Sam would not be there to stare into screens with them this year.

Source D

Alvarez, Alex. "7 Amazing Instances of Social Media Helping Us Connect Offline." *ABC News*, 29 May 2013. Web.

The following article is taken from ABC News.

Plenty of groan-eliciting jokes have been made about how "social media" breeds anti-social behavior. Of course, people who make such jokes are one, terrible and have no friends, and two, tend to forget that people have always gone to great lengths to avoid one another, from cavemen frantically blowing out their cave fires so that their cave neighbors will think they're not home, to present day twenty-somethings who spend their weekends lurking, invisible, on Gchat while pretending to be out. Also, this charge simply isn't true. If anything, social media -- which has the name it does for a reason -- makes it harder to avoid people than ever before. On a more optimistic note, it also allows us to better connect with people who share their interests and enrich their lives.

1. Facebook Pays it Forward

When Tom and Nicole Lamb shared a Facebook post about spontaneously deciding to pay for the meal of the person behind them at the drive-thru window, they had no idea that they'd be setting off a chain of events that'd result in thousands of people "paying it forward" across the U.S. The couple was still reeling from the death of their eight-year-old son, Jayden, who had succumbed to cancer, when they decided to perform a kind act as a 'thank you' to the community that had supported them and their son.

In the weeks following their post, people shared their own stories of being inspired to pay it forward, "Jayden Style," with kind acts ranging from paying for a stranger's cup of coffee to donating a diamond engagement ring to a local Salvation Army. Facebook helped both launch and draw attention to the campaign, as well as offer a simple and well-organized means of spreading people's stories about paying it forward.

Here, then, are examples of how social media sites like Facebook, Twitter or other online platforms with social capabilities, have helped people around the world connect to one another offline.

2. Long-Lost Sisters Find Each Other Online

Samantha Futerman, an American actress, was surprised to find a Facebook message from a French stranger who happened to have her exact same face. The young woman was an aspiring fashion designer named Anaïs, and she had written to tell Samantha that a friend of hers had seen the actress in a YouTube video and thought the two girls shared an uncanny resemblance. "I then checked your name on the case," Anaïs wrote, "stalked you A BIT, and found out that you were born on the 19th of November, 1987." Not to be "too Lindsay Lohan," she continued, but "I was wondering where you were born?" The two soon discovered that they'd been born in South Korea on the same day, later adopted by two different families -- one in the U.S. and the other in France. The two then worked together on a Kickstarter campaign to fund a documentary about meeting for the first time in person and taking DNA tests to prove for sure that they are, in fact, twin sisters separated at birth.

As Samantha explains, this "ever-expanding, social media-obsessed world we live in has given me the chance to reconnect with a person whom I knew only from a nine-month extravaganza inside my biological mother's womb."

3. 72 Years Later...

Facebook seems like a pretty good place to find a long-lost sister, actually. It worked for two Bosnian sisters, 88-year-old Tanija Delic and 82-year-old Hedija Talic, who had been separated in 1941 at the start of World War II. Talic ended up in an orphanage, unsure of what had become of her family members. Years later, her son found his

cousin through Facebook, and the two sisters -- having discovered that they now lived about 120 miles apart from one another -- were finally reunited.

4. Man Kidnapped as Child Uses Google Maps to Find Family

After Luo Gang was abducted from his family at age five, he would envision his childhood home in his mind before bed so that he wouldn't forget the place he'd been taken from. One specific image that had been etched into his memory was of two bridges that crossed his hometown.

Twenty-three years later, he decided to use what he had remembered of his home to draw a map, which he shared online. Soon, someone reached out to him, telling him about a couple who had lost their son 23 years prior. Luo looked up the couple's town on Google Maps and, sure enough, saw the bridges he had remembered since childhood. He eventually reunited with his birth family, proving that Google Maps can be used for so much more than stalking or scaring the living crap out of people.

5. Twitter Reunites Long-Lost Brothers

You might recognize the name Matthew Keys, particularly if you follow Reuters or are in some way ensconced within the online media bubble. Much of Keys' career has unfolded online, and his personal life has in a big way as well. One day, as he was prepping for bed, Keys checked Twitter and saw a message from someone named Adam Smith asking whether his mother's name was Jackie. The two, who had crossed paths online before, got to talking and began to realize that they were brothers.

"After telling our story on Facebook, we were flooded with people e-mailing and posting to our wall about similar lost and found stories involving biological and adopted siblings and relatives," Keys said about the online reunion. "It was extremely touching."

6. Collaborating & Creating

You know Joseph Gordon Levitt, right? Handsome actor, rocker of suits? Well, he's launched an "open-collaborative production company" called hitRECORD that allows writers, videographers, illustrators, musicians, and other creative people to collaborate on all sorts of projects. You can browse the site and check out both finished video, audio, image, and text "records," as well as projects in the process of being made. Artists can also search for projects that require their unique vision and skill sets to be completed. It's great! The company will also exist on TV as a collaborative, user-generated variety show showcasing all the great art people create together.

At the risk of sounding incredibly cheesy, this is the entire point of social media -- connecting people and ideas online.

7. facebook.com/okpets

The devastating tornado that hit Moore, Oklahoma on May 20 left death and destruction in its wake. Families felt broken, belongings were destroyed, and homes and businesses were completely decimated. The massive storm also resulted in pet owners losing track of their animals, including a woman whose dog happened to be located right in the middle of her TV news interview.

Now, there's a Facebook page designed to help people locate lost pets by posting pictures and descriptions of animals they have either lost or found. The page notes that it is manned by volunteers who "utilize social media and other offline resources to help reunite lost pets with their owners in the aftermath of disasters."

Source E

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. New York: Del Rey, 1991.
Print.

The following is excerpted from Ray Bradbury's dystopian novel Fahrenheit 451, first published in 1953. The protagonist, Guy Montag, is having a discussion with his wife, Mildred, about her obsession with television and television characters. In this dystopian setting, TV screens literally cover all four walls.

"It's really fun. It'll be even more fun when we can afford to have the fourth wall installed. How long you figure before we save up and get the fourth wall torn out and a fourth wall-TV put in? It's only two thousand dollars," [Mildred said].

"That's one-third of my yearly pay," [Guy said].

"It's only two thousand dollars," she replied. "And I should think you'd consider me sometimes. If we had a fourth wall, why it'd be just like this room wasn't ours at all, but all kinds of exotic people's rooms. We could do without a few things."

"We're already doing without a few things to pay for the third wall. It was put in only two months ago, remember?"

"Is that all it was?" She sat looking at him for a long moment. "Well, good-bye, dear."

"Good-bye," he said.

* * *

Well, wasn't there a wall between him and Mildred, when you came down to it? Literally not just one wall but, so far, three! And expensive, too! And the uncles, the aunts, the cousins, the nieces, the nephews, that lived in those walls, the gibbering pack of tree-apes that said nothing, nothing, nothing and said it loud, loud, loud. He had taken to calling them relatives from the very first. "How's Uncle Louis today?" "Who?" "And Aunt Maude?" The most significant memory he had of Mildred, really, was of a little girl in a forest without trees (how odd!) or rather a little girl lost on a plateau where there used to be trees (you could feel the memory of their shapes all about) sitting in the centre of the "living-room." The living-room; what a good job of labelling that was now. No matter when he came in, the walls were always talking to Mildred.

* * *

He stared at the parlour that was dead and grey as the waters of an ocean that might teem with life if they switched on the electronic sun.

"Now," said Mildred, "my `family' is people. They tell me things; I laugh, they laugh! And the colours!"

"Yes, I know."

Montag stopped at the door, with his back turned. "Millie?"

A silence. "What?"

"Millie? Does your `family' love you?"

No answer.

"Millie, does--" He licked his lips. "Does your `family' love you, love you very much, love you with all their heart and soul, Millie?"

He felt her blinking slowly at the back of his neck.

"Why'd you ask a silly question like that?"

He felt he wanted to cry, but nothing would happen to his eyes or his mouth.

"If you see that dog outside," said Mildred, "give him a kick for me."

He hesitated, listening at the door. He opened it and stepped out.

The rain had stopped and the sun was setting in the clear sky. The street and the lawn and the porch were empty. He let his breath go in a great sigh.

He slammed the door.

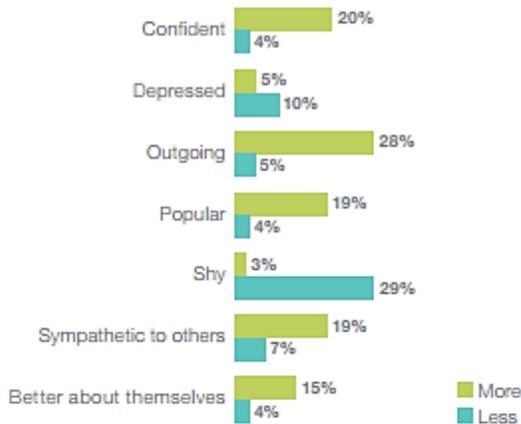
Source F

Rideout, Victoria. "Social Media, Social Life: How Teens View Their Digital Lives". *Common Sense Media*, 2010. Web.

The following charts report the key findings of Common Sense Media based on a survey administered to 1,300 13- to 17-year olds in 2012.

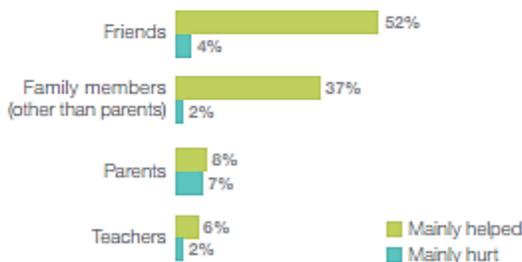
Perceived Effect of Social Networking on Social and Emotional Well-Being

Among the 75% of 13- to 17-year-olds with a social networking profile, percent who say social networking makes them feel more or less:



Impact of Social Networking on Relationships

Among the 75% of 13- to 17-year-olds with a social networking site, percent who say social networking has mainly helped or mainly hurt their relationship with their:



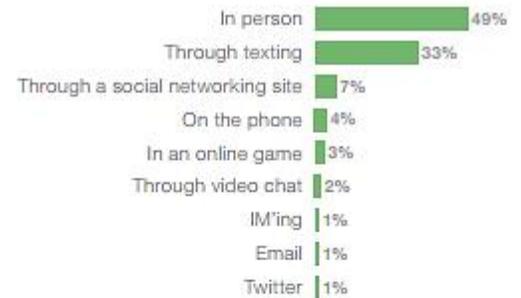
Social Networking and Friendships

Among the 75% of 13- to 17-year-olds with a social networking site, percent who strongly or somewhat agree that social networking has helped them:



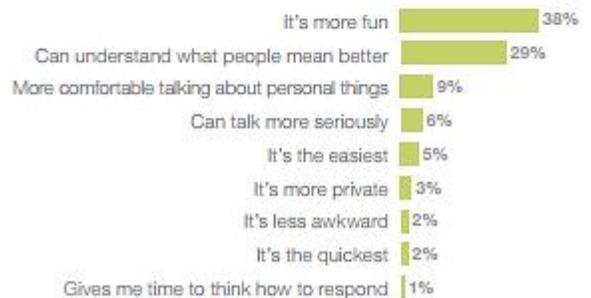
Favorite Way to Communicate with Friends

Among all 13- to 17-year-olds, percent who say their favorite way to communicate with friends is:



Why Face-to-Face Communication Is Preferred

Among 13- to 17-year-olds who prefer talking to friends in person, percent who say the main reason they prefer it is:



Going Back to a Time Before Facebook

Among all 13- to 17-year-olds, percent who sometimes wish they could go back to a time when there was no Facebook:



The Desire to Unplug

Among all 13- to 17-year-olds, percent who agree that they:

