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Pew Internet & American Life Project

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Why Americans use social media

Social networking sites are appealing as a way to maintain contact with close ties and reconnect with old friends

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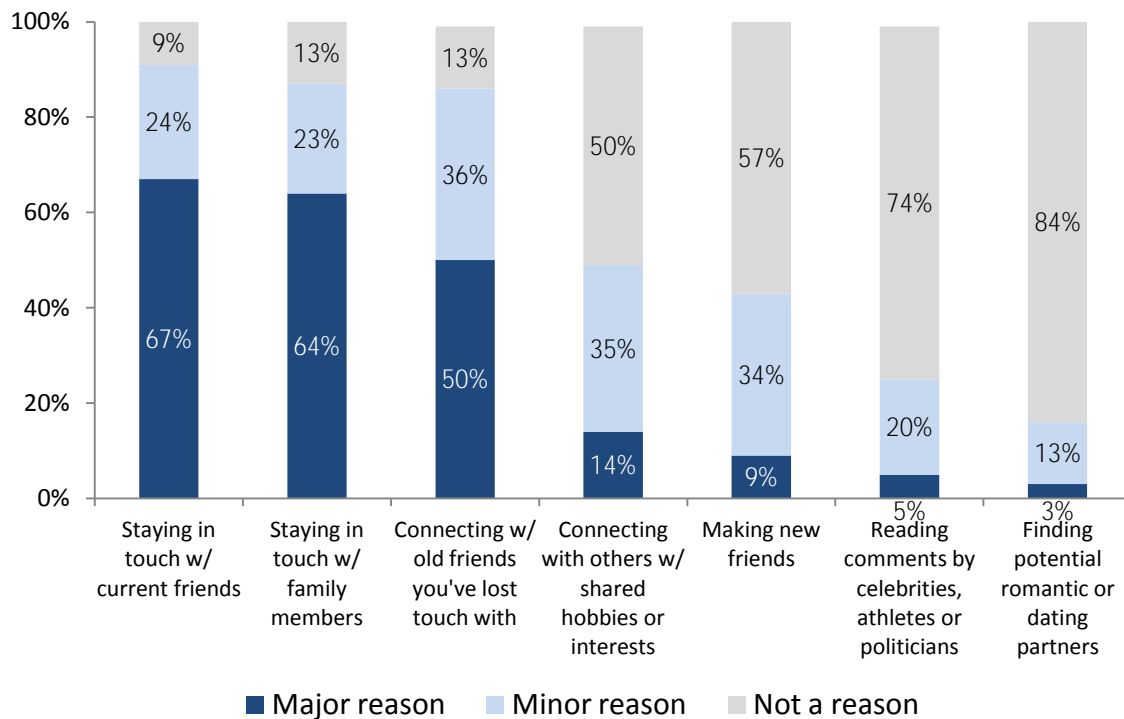
Why Americans Use Online Social Media Tools

Two-thirds of online adults (66%) use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace or LinkedIn.¹ These internet users say that connections with family members and friends (both new and old) are a primary consideration in their adoption of social media tools. Roughly two thirds of social media users say that staying in touch with current friends and family members is a major reason they use these sites, while half say that connecting with old friends they've lost touch with is a major reason behind their use of these technologies.

Other factors play a much smaller role—14% of users say that connecting around a shared hobby or interest is a major reason they use social media, and 9% say that making new friends is equally important. Reading comments by public figures and finding potential romantic partners are cited as major factors by just 5% and 3% of social media users, respectively.

Motivations for using social networking sites

Based on adults who use social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and/or Twitter



Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 26 – May 22, 2011 Spring Tracking Survey; n=2,277 adults ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-3 percentage points for SNS users (n=1,015)

¹ Throughout this report the term “social media users” refers to individuals who “use a social networking site like MySpace, Facebook or LinkedIn” (65% of online adults do this) and/or “use Twitter” (13% of online adults).

Staying in touch with family members is a major factor across a range of social media users, **but it's** especially important to women

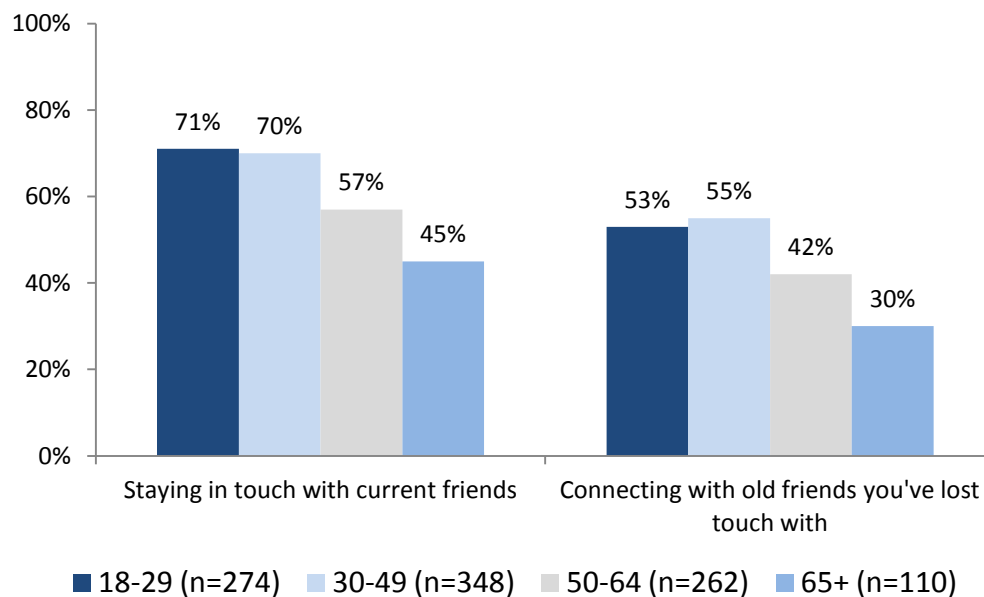
Those who say that keeping up with family members is a major consideration in their use of social networking sites are a demographically diverse group. Two-thirds of all social media users cite family connections as a major reason for their use of these tools, and there are no major differences on this question in terms of age, income, education, race/ethnicity, parental status or place of residence. The primary difference on this topic pertains to gender, as female social media users are more likely than male users to cite family connections as a major reason for using these sites (72% vs. 55%).

Staying in touch with current friends and reconnecting with old friends is most relevant for those under the age of 50

Compared with older adults, social media users under the age of 50 are especially likely to say that these tools help them keep up with existing friends and reconnect with old ones—roughly seven in ten users under the age of fifty say that staying in touch with current friends is a major reason they use online social platforms, and just over half say that connecting with old friends they've lost touch with is equally important. Each of these is significantly higher than comparable figures for users ages 50 and older, although a relatively large number of older adults point to connections with friends as a major reason for their social networking site usage as well.

Staying in touch with current friends and reconnecting with old ones

% of social networking site users within each group who say the following are a "major reason" for their use of social networking sites



Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 26 – May 22, 2011 Spring Tracking Survey; n=2,277 adults ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-3 percentage points for SNS users (n=1,015)

In addition to age, gender and parental status are linked with users' attitudes towards social media as a way to maintain connections with friends. Women are slightly more likely than men to say that staying in touch with current friends is a major reason for using online social tools (70% vs. 63%) while parents are more likely than non-parents to say that connecting with old friends is a major reason behind their use of these sites (56% vs. 47%).

Compared with keeping tabs on current friends or old acquaintances, users place much less emphasis on using social platforms to make entirely new friends—just 9% say this is a major reason they use these sites, and 57% say that it is not a reason at all for their online social networking activity. Groups that are more likely than average to use social media to make new friends include men (12% say that making new friends is a major reason for using these sites), African Americans (15%), those who have a high school diploma but have not attended college (16%) and those with an annual household income under \$30,000 (18%).

Middle-aged and older adults place a relatively high value on social media as a tool to connect with others around a hobby and interest

Compared with maintaining or rekindling friendships, the ability to connect with others who share a hobby or interest using social media resonates with a slightly older cohort of users. Sixteen percent of 30-49 year olds and 18% of 50-64 year olds cite connecting with others with common hobbies or interests as a major reason they use social networking sites, compared with 10% of 18-29 year olds.

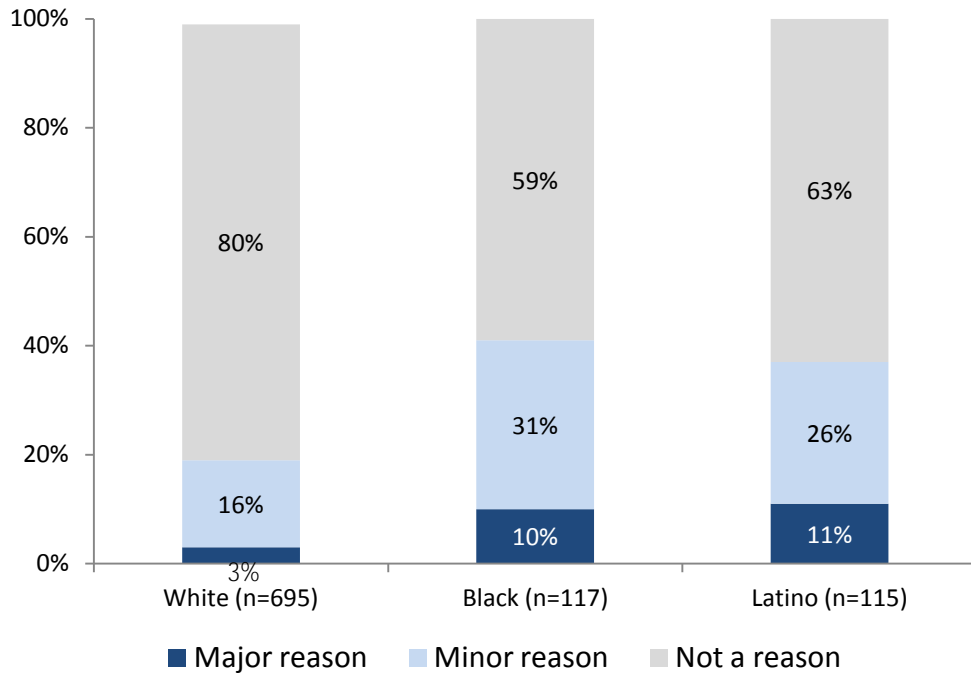
Additionally, men are a bit more likely than women to use these sites to connect around a hobby or interest—56% of male users say that this is either a major or minor reason for their usage of these sites, compared with 44% of female users.

Connecting with public figures online is relatively popular among Twitter users, as well as African Americans and Latinos

Among social media users as a whole, the ability to read comments by public figures such as politicians, celebrities or athletes does not come into play as a major factor—fully three quarters of users say that this plays no role whatsoever in their decision to use these sites. And while connecting with public figures has a relatively modest impact on users across a range of groups, both African Americans and Latinos show more interest in this activity than white users. One in ten black social media users (10%) and 11% of Latinos say that reading comments from public figures is a major reason for using these sites (compared with just 3% of white users). Black and Latino social media users are also more likely to say that this is a minor factor (31% of blacks and 26% of Latinos say this, compared with 16% of whites).

Reading comments by celebrities, politicians or athletes

Based on adults who use Twitter and/or social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace or LinkedIn



Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 26 – May 22, 2011 Spring Tracking Survey; n=2,277 adults ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-3 percentage points for SNS users (n=1,015)

Additionally, Twitter users are more interested in connecting with public figures than are social media users who do not use Twitter. One in ten Twitter users (11%) say that reading comments by politicians, celebrities or athletes is a major reason they use online social networks, and 30% say that this is a minor reason for their usage of these sites. Each of these is notably higher than the average for social media users who do not use Twitter (4% of these users say this is a major reason for using these sites, with 11% citing it as a minor reason).

Finding potential dating partners is at most a minor element of the social media experience

Very few social media users say that finding potential romantic partners or people to date plays a role in their use of these sites—overall more than eight in ten (84%) do not use these sites for that purpose at all. Most of the remainder say that the prospect of romance is only a minor reason. Most differences on this question are quite modest—for example, men are twice as likely as women to say that finding potential dating or romantic partners is a minor reason for using online social platforms (17% vs. 9%) but overall few men say that this is a major factor (just 4% do so).

To be sure, many Americans are currently in relationships or may not otherwise be seeking dating or romantic partners in any venue (on social networking sites or otherwise). Among those users who identify themselves as single, separated or divorced, 6% say that finding romantic or dating partners is a major reason why they use these sites (an additional 27% say that this is a minor reason for their social media usage).

About this survey

The results reported here are based on a national telephone survey of 2,277 adults conducted April 26-May 22, 2011. 1,522 interviews were conducted by landline phone, and 755 interviews were conducted by cell phone. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish. For results based on social networking site users, the margin of error is +/-3 percentage points (n=1,015).

Survey questions

Spring Change Assessment Survey 2011

Data for April 26–May 22, 2011

Final Topline

5/25/2011

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

Sample: n= 2,277 national adults, age 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews
Interviewing dates: 04.26.2011 – 05.22.2011

Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on Total [n=2,277]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on internet users [n=1,701]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on cell phone users [n=1,914]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on SNS or Twitter users [n=1,015]

SNS10 People use social networking sites for a number of reasons. Please tell me if each of the following is a MAJOR reason you use these sites, a MINOR reason, or not a reason at all for you. (First,/Next,) [INSERT; RANDOMIZE].

[READ FOR FIRST ITEM, THEN AS NECESSARY:] Is this a MAJOR reason you use social networking sites, a MINOR reason, or not a reason at all for you?

Based on SNS or Twitter users [N=1,015]

	MAJOR REASON	MINOR REASON	NOT A REASON	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. Staying in touch with family members	64	23	13	*	*
b. Staying in touch with current friends	67	24	9	*	*
c. Connecting with old friends that you lost touch with	50	36	13	*	*
d. Making new friends	9	34	57	*	*
e. Connecting with other people who share your hobbies or interests	14	35	50	0	*
f. Reading comments or posts by celebrities, politicians or athletes	5	20	74	*	*
g. Finding potential romantic partners or people you might like to date	3	13	84	*	*

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 April 26 to May 22, 2011, among a sample of 2,277 adults, age 18 and older. Telephone interviews were conducted in English and Spanish by landline (1,522) and cell phone (755, including 346 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 2.4 percentage points. For results based on Internet users (n=1,701), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.7 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 weight is the product of two adjustments made to the data – a Probability of Selection Adjustment (PSA) and a Phone Use Adjustment (PUA). The PSA corrects for the fact that respondents in the landline sample have different probabilities of being sampled depending on how many adults live in the household. The PUA corrects for the overlapping landline and cellular sample frames.

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 January-June 2010 National Health Interview Survey. Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

Table 2: Sample Disposition

Landline	Cell	
32,909	19,899	Total Numbers Dialed
1,416	364	Non-residential
1,428	35	Computer/Fax
32	----	Cell phone
16,833	8,660	Other not working
1,629	287	Additional projected not working
11,571	10,553	Working numbers
35.2%	53.0%	Working Rate
543	96	No Answer / Busy
3,091	3,555	Voice Mail
53	10	Other Non-Contact
7,884	6,892	Contacted numbers
68.1%	65.3%	Contact Rate
489	1,055	Callback
5,757	4,618	Refusal
1,638	1,219	Cooperating numbers
20.8%	17.7%	Cooperation Rate
56	33	Language Barrier
----	426	Child's cell phone
1,582	760	Eligible numbers
96.6%	62.3%	Eligibility Rate
60	5	Break-off
1,522	755	Completes
96.2%	99.3%	Completion Rate
13.6%	11.5%	Response Rate

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 13.6 percent. The response rate for the cellular sample was 11.5 percent.