



Teenagers and social networking

Since 2007, the Pew Internet & American Life Project - the world's largest and most authoritative provider of data on the Internet's impact on the lives of 21st-century citizens - has been chronicling the use teenagers make of the net, in particular the huge appeal of social networking sites. It has also studied the way teens use mobile phones, including text messages.

This is what the Project says about the way US teens (and, by extension, teenagers in much of western Europe) communicate in an age of Facebook Chat, instant messaging and unlimited texts.

First, 75% of all teenagers (and 58% of 12-years-old) now have a mobile phone. Almost 90% of phone-owning teens send and receive texts, most of them daily. Half send 50 or more texts a day; one in three send 100. In fact, in barely¹ four years, texting has established itself as comfortably "the preferred channel of basic communication between teens and their friends". But phones do more than simply text, of course. More than 80% of phone-owning teens also use them to take pictures (and 64% to share those pictures with others). Sixty per cent listen to music on them, 46% play games, 32% swap² videos and 23% access social networking sites. The mobile phone, in short, is now "the favoured communication hub³ for the majority of teens".

As if texting, swapping, hanging out and generally spending their waking hours welded to their phones was not enough, 73% use social networking sites, mostly Facebook. Digital communication is not just prevalent in teenagers' lives. It *is* teenagers' lives.

There is a very straightforward⁴ reason, says Amanda Lenhart, a Pew senior research specialist. "Simply, these technologies meet teens' developmental needs," she says. "Mobile phones and **social networking** sites make the things teens have always done - defining their own identity, establishing themselves as independent of their parents, looking cool, impressing members of the opposite sex - a whole lot easier."

A recent survey found up to 45% of US companies are now checking job applicants' activity on social networking sites, and 35% reported rejecting⁵ people because of what they found. Universities and colleges, similarly, are starting to look online. That means you need to be careful and aware even at 14, because some information could easily get misunderstood.

These new communications technologies, Olivia Stamp, 16, says, are "an enhancement⁶, an enrichment actually. They bring people even closer, in fact, without replacing anything. We're not socially abnormal. Look at us!"

(Adapted from *guardian.co.uk*)

GLOSSARY

- 1 only
- 2 exchange
- 3 focal point
- 4 clear, precise
- 5 refusing
- 6 improvement

ACTIVITIES

1 Answer the following questions.

- 1 What is the Pew Internet & American Life Project?
- 2 How do teens communicate today?
- 3 What do teenagers use phones for?
- 4 Why are social networking sites so important for teenagers according to Amanda Lenhart?
- 5 What do companies check social networking sites for?
- 6 What does Olivia Stamp think about new communications technologies?

2 Match a term in the first column with a term in the second column, then provide the Italian equivalent.

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|------------|--------------|
| 1 Mass | A Specialist |
| 2 Mobile | B Sex |
| 3 Text | C Applicants |
| 4 Research | D Adoption |
| 5 Opposite | E Phones |
| 6 Job | F Messages |