

Poll: Most teens have taken social media break

April 27 2017, by Barbara Ortutay



In this Monday, June 4, 2012, file photo, a girl looks at Facebook on her computer in Palo Alto, Calif. Most teenagers have taken a break from social media, according a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The breaks are both voluntary and involuntary, such as when a parent takes their phone away as punishment. (AP Photo/Paul Sakuma, File)

The common stereotype has teens glued to their phones 24-7. But nearly

60 percent of teens in the U.S. have actually taken a break from social media—the bulk of them voluntarily, a new survey found .

The poll, from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, surveyed teens aged 13 to 17 and found that most value the feeling of connection with friends and family that social media provides. A much smaller number associate it with negative emotions, such as being overwhelmed or needing to always show their best selves.

The survey, released Thursday, found that teens' social media breaks are typically a week or longer, and that boys are more likely to take longer breaks.

Teens were allowed to cite multiple reasons for their breaks. Nearly two-thirds of teens who took a break cited at least one voluntary reason. Amanda Lenhart, the lead researcher and an expert on young people and technology use, said she was surprised by this, as it counters the broader narrative that teens are "handcuffed" to their social media profiles.

Today's teenagers might not recall a time before social media. MySpace was founded in 2003. Had it survived, it would be 14 years old today. Facebook is a year younger. Instagram launched in 2010. For an adult to understand what it might be like for someone who grew up with it to step back from social media, consider disconnecting from email—or your phone—for a couple of weeks.

Among the teens who took voluntary breaks, 38 percent did so because social media was getting in the way of work or school. Nearly a quarter said they were tired of "the conflict and drama" and 20 percent said they were tired of having to keep up with what's going on.

Nearly half of teens who took a break did so involuntarily. This included 38 percent who said their parents took away their phone or computer and

17 percent who said their phone was lost, broken or stolen.

The involuntary break "is sort of its own challenge," Lenhart said. "They feel that they are missing out, detached from important social relationships (as well as) news and information."

About 35 percent of teens surveyed said they have not taken a break, citing such worries as missing out and being disconnected from friends. Some said they need social media for school or extracurricular activities.

"I like to see what my friends and family are up to," said Lukas Goodwin, 14, who uses Instagram and Snapchat every day. He said he took a break from Instagram "a few years ago" but not recently. Now, he says, "I wouldn't want to take a break from them."

Among the survey's other findings:

— Lower income teens were more likely to take social media breaks than their wealthier counterparts, and their breaks tended to last longer. The study points out that educators who use social media in the classroom need to understand that not every teen is online and connected all the time.

— Boys were more likely to feel overloaded with information on social media, while girls were more likely to feel they always have to show the best version of themselves.

— Teens who took breaks typically did so across the board, checking out of Facebook, Snapchat and all other services all at once. And they were no more or less likely to take breaks from social media based on the type of services they use.

— Although they felt relief and were happy to be away from social

media for a while, most teens said things went back to how they were before once they returned to social media.

The AP-NORC poll was conducted online and by phone from Dec. 7 to 31. A sample of parents with teenage children was drawn from a probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Parents then gave permission for their children to be interviewed. The panel, AmeriSpeak, is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.6 percentage points.

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Online:

AP-NORC: www.apnorc.org

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