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Social Media and the Workplace

New platforms can be tools for connection with colleagues and outside experts, but can also serve as distractions while on the job

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Social Media and the Workplace

New platforms can be tools for connection with colleagues and outside experts, but can also serve as distractions while on the job

Social media influences and permeates many aspects of daily life for Americans today, and the workforce is no exception. These digital platforms offer the potential to enhance worker productivity by fostering connections with colleagues and resources around the globe. At the same time, employers might worry that employees are using these tools for non-work purposes while on the job or engaging in speech in public venues that might reflect poorly on their organization.

A Pew Research Center survey of 2,003 American adults (including 795 who are currently employed on a full- or part-time basis) conducted Sept. 11-14 and 18-21, 2014, finds that social media plays some role in the lives of many American workers – but that role is not always clear-cut or entirely positive.¹

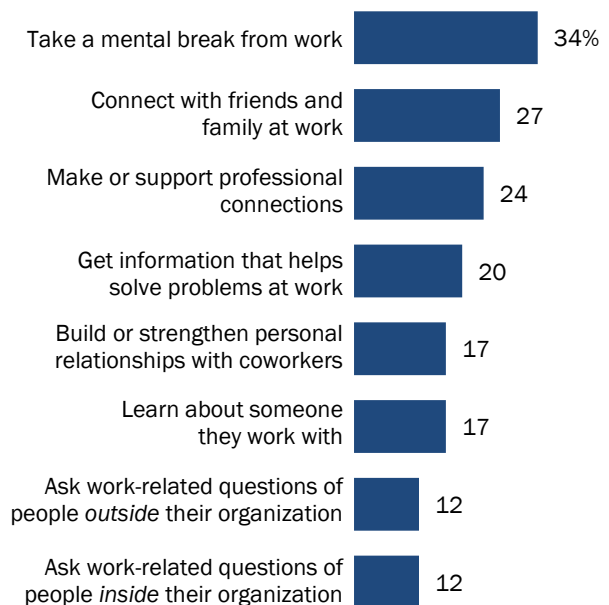
Workers turn to social media for a range of reasons while at work, with taking a mental break being among the most common

Today's workers incorporate social media into a wide range of activities while on the job. Some of these activities are explicitly professional or job-related, while others are more personal in nature. The survey asked Americans who are employed full- or part-time about eight different ways they might use social media while on the job and found that:

- 34% ever use social media while at work to take a mental break from their job
- 27% to connect with friends and family while at work
- 24% to make or support professional connections

Workers use social media at work for many reasons; taking a mental break is one of the most common

% of workers who ever use social media platforms to ...



Source: Survey conducted Sept. 11-21, 2014. "Social Media and the Workplace."

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¹ Social media users are defined as workers who said they use one of the five major social media sites studied here, see the topline for the full list.

- 20% to get information that helps them solve problems at work
- 17% to build or strengthen personal relationships with coworkers
- 17% to learn about someone they work with
- 12% to ask work-related questions of people *outside* their organization
- 12% to ask such questions of people *inside* their organization

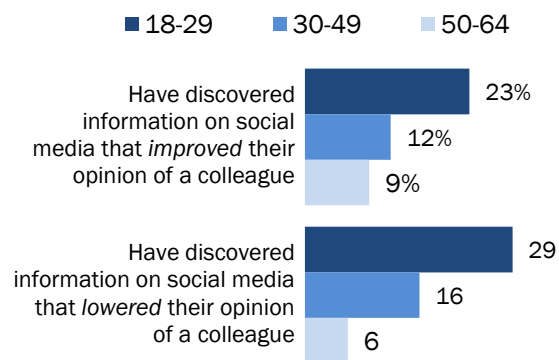
As noted above, 17% of workers say they use social media to build or strengthen personal relationships at work – but the transparency that social media facilitates comes with costs as well as benefits. Some 14% of workers have found information on social media that has *improved* their professional opinion of a colleague; at the same time, a similar share (16%) have found information on social media that has *lowered* their professional opinion of a colleague.

Younger workers are more likely than their older counterparts to say they have discovered information about a colleague on social media that lowered their professional opinion of them – but also are more likely than older workers to have found information that *improved* their professional opinion of a colleague.

Some 23% of workers ages 18 to 29 report that they have discovered information on social media that improved their professional opinion of a colleague. By comparison, just 12% of workers ages 30 to 49 and 9% of workers ages 50 to 64 have experienced this. Similarly, 29% of these younger workers have discovered information that lowered their professional opinion of a colleague: 16% of those ages 30 to 49 and 6% of those ages 50 to 64 indicate that this has happened to them.

Younger workers more likely to find information on social media that changes their opinion of a coworker

% of workers in each age group who ...



Source: Survey conducted Sept. 11-21, 2014.
“Social Media and the Workplace.”

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Many employers have rules for how employees use social media at work

Many workers report that their employers have policies about social media use on the job, or about how employees may present themselves in various online spaces. Half of all full-time and part-time workers (51%) say their workplace has rules about using social media while at work (45% say their employer does not have these policies), while 32% report that their employer has policies

about how employees may present themselves on the internet in general (63% say their employer does not have these policies).

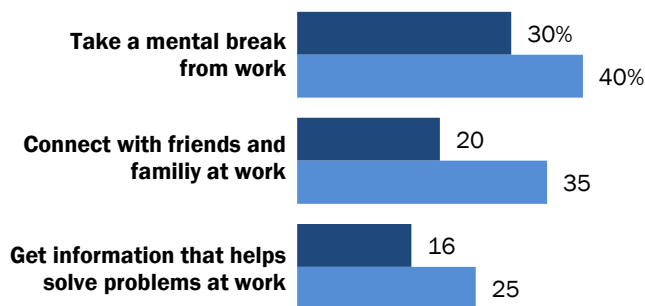
Policies that regulate how employers present themselves online outside of work may be expected to influence whether these workers use social media at all. However, this does not seem to be the case: Fully 77% of workers report using social media regardless of whether their employer has such a policy in place.

At the same time, there is some evidence that workplace policies concerning social media use while on the job may have an effect. Workers whose companies have policies regulating social media use at work are less likely to use social media in certain ways:

Workers whose employers have at-work social media policy are less likely to use social media for personal reasons while on the job

% of workers who indicate that they ever use social media while on the job in order to ...

- Among those who have a workplace policy about social media use at work
- Among those who do not have a workplace policy about social media use at work



Source: Survey conducted Sept. 11-21, 2014.
"Social Media and the Workplace."

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- 30% of workers whose companies have an at-work social media policy say they use social media while on the job to take a break from work, compared with 40% of workers whose employers do not have such policies.
- 20% of workers whose employers have at-work social media policies say they use social media to stay connected to family and friends while on the job, compared with 35% of workers whose social media use is not regulated at work.
- Only 16% of workers whose companies regulate social media at work say they use social media while working to get information that's helpful to their job, compared with 25% of those whose workplaces have no such regulations.

On the other hand, workers are equally likely to say they use social media for a range of purposes regardless of their workplace policy, including:

- Making or supporting professional contacts that help them do their job
- Learning more about someone they work with
- Building or strengthening personal relationships with coworkers
- Asking work-related questions of people *outside* their organization
- Asking work-related questions of people *inside* their organization

Relatively few workers use specific social media platforms for work-related purposes, and the impact of that use is not always clear-cut

A relatively modest share of workers say they have incorporated specific social media platforms into their day-to-day work lives:

- 19% of workers say they ever use Facebook for work-related purposes.
- 14% ever use LinkedIn for work-related purposes.
- 3% ever use Twitter for work-related purposes.
- 9% use a social media tool provided by their employer for work-related purposes.
- 5% use social media platforms other than the ones listed above for work-related purposes.

But among the group that answered yes to at least one of the items above – that is, the subset of workers who use at least one social media tool for job-related purposes – large shares see certain positive or beneficial impacts on their job performance:

- 78% of workers who use social media platforms for work-related purposes say social media is useful for networking or finding new job opportunities.
- 71% of these workers say social media is useful for staying in touch with others in their field.
- 56% say it is useful for connecting with experts.
- 51% say it is useful for getting to know their co-workers on a personal basis.
- 46% say it is useful for finding information they need to do their job.

On the other hand, these workers are divided on the utility of social media in other respects, especially when it comes to the impact of social media use on their own job performance:

- 56% of workers who use social media platforms for work-related purposes agree that *social media distracts from the work they need to do*, with 30% agreeing strongly. Some 42% of these workers disagree that social media is a distraction.

- 54% of these workers agree that *social media breaks help them recharge at work*. A statistically similar proportion (46%) disagree that social media breaks help them recharge while on the job.
- 51% of these workers agree that *social media use at work lets them see too much information about their coworkers*; 47% disagree with this statement.

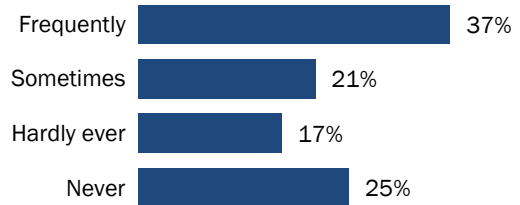
In the end, a majority (56%) of these workers believe that using social media ultimately helps their job performance. One-in-five (22%) believe that it mostly hurts, 16% feel that it doesn't have much impact either way and 4% see both the benefits and the drawbacks.

One-quarter of workers report that they never use the internet for work-related tasks in the course of a typical day

Even as the internet has embedded itself in numerous aspects of American life, many of today's workers make only marginal use of the internet for accomplishing work-related tasks. Indeed, some 17% of workers report that they "hardly ever" use the internet on a typical day for work-related tasks, while 25% report that they "never" use the internet for this reason.

25% of workers never use internet for job-related tasks

% of full- or part-time workers who use the internet to do work-related tasks in a typical day ...



Source: Survey conducted Sept. 11-21, 2014.
"Social Media and the Workplace."

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This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals.

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Methodology

The PSRAI September 2014 Omnibus Weeks 2 and 3 obtained telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 2,003 adults living in the continental United States. Telephone interviews were conducted by landline (1,002) and cellphone (1,001, including 594 without a landline phone). The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI). Interviews were done in English and Spanish by Princeton Data Source from Sept. 11 to 14, 2014, and Sept. 18 to 21, 2014. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Margins of Error for Key Demographic Groups

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
All adults	2,003	+/- 2.5%
Employed Module	795	+/- 4.0%
18-29	165	+/- 8.8%
30-49	221	+/- 7.6%
50-64	288	+/- 6.7%
Workers with a policy about social media while at work	404	+/- 5.6%
Workers without a policy about social media while at work	357	+/- 6.0%
Workers with a workplace policy about social media presence	272	+/- 6.9%
Workers without a policy about social media presence	479	+/- 5.2%

Source: Survey conducted Sept. 11-21, 2014.
"Social Media and the Workplace."

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Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Topline questionnaire

AMONG ALL ADULTS [N=2003]

EMPLOY Are you now employed full-time, part-time, or not employed?

- 42 Employed full-time
- 13 Employed part-time
- 45 Not employed
- <1 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
- 55 NET Employed**

AMONG ALL ADULTS [N=2003]

EMINUSE Do you use the internet or email, at least occasionally?

INTMOB Do you access the internet on a cell phone, tablet or other mobile handheld device, at least occasionally?

	USES INTERNET	DOES NOT USE INTERNET
Current (N=1,006)	87	13
Aug-Sept 2013	80	20
May 2013	85	15
December 2012	81	19
November 2012	85	15
September 2012	81	19
August 2012	85	15
April 2012	82	18
February 2012	80	20
December 2011	82	18
August 2011	78	22
May 2011	78	22
January 2011	79	21
December 2010	77	23
November 2010	74	26
September 2010	74	26
May 2010	79	21
January 2010	75	25

AMONG ALL INTERNET USERS [N=1597]

WEB1-A Next... Please tell me if you ever use the internet to do any of the following things. Do you ever... **[INSERT ITEMS; RANDOMIZE]?**

	TOTAL HAVE EVER DONE THIS	----- DID YESTERDAY	HAVE NOT DONE THIS	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
Use Twitter					
Current	23	n/a	77	<1	0
September 2013	18	n/a	82	<1	0
May 2013	18	n/a	82	<1	<1
December 2012	16	n/a	84	<1	<1
August 2012	16	n/a	84	<1	0
February 2012	15	8	85	<1	0
August 2011	12	5	88	<1	0
May 2011	13	4	87	<1	0
January 2011	10	n/a	90	<1	<1
December 2010	12	n/a	88	<1	0
November 2010	8	2	92	0	<1
Use Instagram					
Current	23	n/a	77	<1	0
September 2013	17	n/a	82	<1	0
December 2012	13	n/a	87	<1	0
August 2-5, 2012	12	n/a	88	1	0
Use Pinterest					
Current	28	n/a	72	<1	0
September 2013	21	n/a	77	2	<1
December 2012	15	n/a	83	2	0
August 2-5, 2012	12	n/a	87	1	<1
Use LinkedIn					
Current	28	n/a	72	<1	0
September 2013	22	n/a	77	1	<1
Use Facebook					
Current	71	n/a	28	0	<1
September 2013	71	n/a	29	0	0
December 13-16, 2012	67	n/a	33	0	<1

AMONG ALL EMPLOYED FULL OR PART TIME [N=795]

UM9 On a typical day, how much would you say you use the internet to do work-related tasks?

[READ]

- 37 Frequently
- 21 Sometimes
- 17 Hardly ever
- 25 Never
- 0 Don't know (VOL.)

<1 Refused (VOL.)

AMONG CURRENTLY EMPLOYED AND USE ANY SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS [N=592]

UM14 **[FOR FIRST ITEM: In your current job,]** do you ever use social media to...**[INSERT ITEMS; RANDOMIZE]?**

	Yes	No	Don't know (VOL.)	Refused (VOL.)
a. Get information that helps you solve problems at your job	26	74	<1	0
b. Make or support professional connections that help you do your job	32	68	0	<1
c. Keep you connected to family and friends while at work	35	65	0	<1
d. Take a mental break from work	45	54	0	<1
e. Ask work-related questions of people OUTSIDE your organization	16	84	0	0
f. Ask work-related questions of people INSIDE your organization	16	83	<1	<1
g. Build or strengthen personal relationships with coworkers	23	77	0	0
h. Learn more about someone you work with	23	77	0	0

UM15 Which of the following social media sites do you use for work-related purposes? Do you use...**[INSERT ITEMS IN SAME ORDER AS WEB1-A]** for work?

	Yes	No	Don't know (VOL.)	Refused (VOL.)
a. Facebook [Asked of Facebook users, n=505]	28	72	0	<1
b. LinkedIn [Asked of LinkedIn users, n=255]	48	52	0	0
c. Twitter [Asked of Twitter users, n=169]	15	85	0	0
d. A social media tool or site provided by your employer [Asked of those who use an employer-provided social media tool, n=112]	62	38	0	0
e. Another social media tool or site I haven't already mentioned [Asked of those who use Instagram, Pinterest, or another social media platform not mentioned here, n=319]	11	86	2	<1

AMONG CURRENTLY EMPLOYED AND USE ANY SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS [N=592]

UM16 Have you ever discovered information about a colleague through social media that improved your professional opinion of them?

18 Yes
82 No
0 Don't know (VOL.)
0 Refused (VOL.)

AMONG CURRENTLY EMPLOYED AND USE ANY SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS [N=592]

UM17 Have you ever discovered information about a colleague through social media that lowered your professional opinion of them?

21 Yes
79 No
0 Don't know (VOL.)

0 Refused (VOL.)

AMONG ALL EMPLOYED FULL OR PART TIME [N=795]

UM18 Does your workplace have policies about how you present yourself on the internet – for example, what you can post on blogs and websites, or what information you can share about yourself online – or does it not have policies about that?

32 Yes, has policies

63 No, does not

6 Don't know (VOL.)

<1 Refused (VOL.)

AMONG ALL EMPLOYED FULL OR PART TIME [N=795]

UM19 Does your workplace have rules about using social media while at work, or not?

51 Yes, has rules

45 No, does not

3 Don't know (VOL.)

<1 Refused (VOL.)

AMONG THOSE WHO SAID YES TO ANY ITEMS IN UM15 [N=262]

UM21 Thinking about your own work-related use of social media... Do you think social media is useful for **[INSERT ITEMS; RANDOMIZE]**?

	Yes	No	Don't know (VOL.)	Refused (VOL.)
a. Finding information you need to do your job	46	54	0	0
b. Staying in touch with other people in the field or type of job that you work in	71	29	<1	<1
c. Connecting with experts	56	41	3	0
d. Getting to know your co-workers on a personal basis	51	49	<1	0
e. Networking or finding new job opportunities	78	22	<1	0

AMONG THOSE WHO SAID YES TO ANY ITEMS IN UM15 [N=262]

UM22 In general, would you say that using social media for work purposes mostly helps or mostly hurts your job performance?

56 Mostly Helps

22 Mostly Hurts

4 Both (VOL.)

16 Neither (VOL.)

2 Don't know (VOL.)

<1 Refused (VOL.)

AMONG THOSE WHO SAID YES TO ANY ITEMS IN UM15 [N=262]

UM23 Thinking about your OWN use of social media... Please tell us if you agree or disagree with the following statements.

[READ FOR FIRST ITEM, THEN AS NECESSARY: Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat DISagree or strongly disagree?]

		Strongly agree	Some-what agree	Some-what disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know (VOL.)	Refused (VOL.)	Total Agree	Total Disagree
a.	Social media distracts you from the work you need to do	30	26	16	26	2	0	56	42
b.	Social media breaks help you recharge while you're at work	21	33	21	25	<1	<1	54	46
c.	Social medias lets you see too much information about your coworkers	19	31	26	21	2	1	51	47