



Social media's generation gap

A post-election survey in 2012 by [Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life](#) studied almost 2,000 people and found that 83 percent of 18-29 year olds used social media. Usage dropped to about three-quarters for 30-49 year olds, down to about half for the 50-64 year olds and about a third of those 65 and older. People making less than \$30,000 a year used more social media (72 percent) than those who made more money (66 percent). People who live in urban areas used more social media (70 percent) than those who resided in suburbs (67 percent) or rural areas (61 percent).

Activities:

Flashlight: As a class project, have students create their own social media survey at their school. Which social media are popular? Has social media become the major source of “breaking news” in the lives of students? How often per day or week do students consume news via social media? Is it mostly local, national or international? Is it mostly public affairs, special topics or human interest? Discuss and explain the results.

Spotlight: Research the question of social media becoming a major source for “breaking news.” Research Andy Carvin's NPR social media experience from his book [Distant Witness](#). Two-page papers can take on the topic: Is social media the new home for breaking news? What do the experts say? What does the trend mean for traditional media?

Searchlight: How do we know if what we get via social media is accurate? An understanding of digital media literacy, news literacy and civics literacy all fall under “21st Century literacies” — and some argue all of those are under-taught in schools. [Read this report](#) from researchers Stephanie Craft, Adam Maksl and Seth Ashley. Do they cover all the bases? In class or in papers, discuss or report the key questions you would ask to determine whether people can be effective cyberspace citizens.

Extra Credit: Another survey, called [“The Infinite Dial,”](#) says that heavy use of one medium does not necessarily mean less time with others. Is that true in your experience or that of your class? Can students find other surveys that confirm or refute this?

