

Teens & social media



A new study suggests that although teenagers are keen users of social media, very few actually prefer it as a means of communication.

Research carried out by Common Sense Media looked at how teenagers in the US experience social media in their social lives. The study of more than 1,000 teenagers – aged 13 to 17 years old – across the US found that nine out of ten teenagers have used some form of social media, with Facebook being the most popular social network. Just over half of those involved in the study said that they visited social networking sites every day. What is surprising in this high-tech world, though, is that only seven percent said that it was their favourite way to communicate with their friends.

Despite a love of technology and the constant wish to get their hands on the latest gadgets – including smartphones and iPads – it seems that social media is not the most popular form of communication. The study showed that 49 percent of teenagers are still happy to get away from the computer screen and talk to their friends in person, and 33 percent prefer to text.

But why do teenagers still prefer face-to-face communication, when a digital method can be quicker? One girl who responded to the study said, 'It is the only real way to be with each other; 'moments' only happen in person.' Nearly four out of ten teens think that talking in person is simply more fun than talking on the phone or via the Internet. Other teenagers, 29 percent, said that it is easier to understand what people really mean in person – especially when words can be misunderstood online without body language or a voice. In addition, nine percent feel more comfortable talking about personal things face-to-face, and six percent can also talk more 'seriously' in person.

Interestingly, some teenagers think that there can be negative consequences of using social media rather than face-to-face communication. A third of teenagers agreed that using social media takes up time that they could otherwise spend with their friends and nearly half say that social media is distracting when they're with other people. One respondent said, 'It's really boring to talk to someone who has to check Facebook every five minutes.'

When you think about it, although today's teenagers are surrounded by technology and social media on a daily basis, it's not surprising when a quarter say they wish they could 'unplug' themselves from the Internet and go back to a time when Facebook did not exist.

Social media and mobile technology make it difficult to be 'unavailable', and it is all too easy to be constantly checking messages, but face-to-face communication may still be the best method to actually talk to people.

- 1** In the first paragraph, what does the writer say is surprising?
- a** that social media is not very popular among teenagers
 - b** that most teenagers like to use social media to communicate
 - c** that Facebook is the most popular site among teenagers
 - d** that so few teens prefer communicating through social media
- 2** What does 'get their hands on' in the second paragraph mean?
- a** own
 - b** try
 - c** hold
 - d** touch
- 3** What does 'it' in the third line of the third paragraph refer to?
- a** the study
 - b** face-to-face communication
 - c** a digital method
 - d** talking on the phone
- 4** In the fourth paragraph, what do 33 percent of teenagers say about social media?
- a** that it stops them spending more time with their friends
 - b** that it is a distraction when they are with other people
 - c** that they don't use it when they are with other people
 - d** that checking Facebook regularly is boring
- 5** What does the writer mean by 'unplug themselves from the Internet'?
- a** turn off their computer
 - b** stop checking social media and email
 - c** delete their Facebook accounts
 - d** answer their emails and online messages
- 6** What is the purpose of the text?
- a** to advertise social media as a form of communication
 - b** to persuade teenagers to talk to their friends in person
 - c** to explain why teenagers use social media
 - d** to report the results of research into teens' use of social media

