



The Associated Press-NORC  
Center for Public Affairs Research

# AMERICAN TEENS ARE TAKING BREAKS FROM SOCIAL MEDIA; SOME STEP BACK DELIBERATELY, BUT OTHER BREAKS ARE INVOLUNTARY

**TEENS REPORT SOCIAL MEDIA AS A NET POSITIVE IN THEIR LIVES, BUT WHEN THEY STEP AWAY FROM PLATFORMS, THEY MOST OFTEN REPORT BENEFITS.**

A new study from The Associated Press and NORC at the University of Chicago surveyed 790 American teens age 13 to 17 about their social media, messaging, and video content habits. The focus of the study was to understand if and why teens take breaks from the social media platforms that are so prominent in teenagers' digital lives.

The report finds that teens do take breaks, both of their own volition and not. The circumstances motivating these breaks have major impacts on how teens evaluate the experience. In the end, most teens do return to these digital social platforms and find that not much about the environment has changed—for better or worse.

The data for this report were collected in a nationally representative survey fielded between December 7 and 31, 2016, using the AmeriSpeak® Panel, the probability based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 790 teens 13 to 17 years old after consent was granted by a parent or guardian.



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## Three Things You Should Know

About How American Teens 13-17  
Take Breaks from Social Media:

- 1) While many teens report that social media makes them feel more informed, and connected to friends and family, 58 percent say they have taken some type of break from their platforms.
- 2) 65 percent of teens have taken a voluntary break from social media; half left their social media platform involuntarily.
- 3) Teens who have NOT taken breaks say they stay on social media because they don't want miss out on what is going on (56 percent) or because social media is how they find out what is happening in the world (44 percent).

## Summary of Findings

### TEENS VALUE THE CONNECTIONS TO PEOPLE AND INFORMATION THAT SOCIAL MEDIA PROVIDES.

American teens value the feeling of connection to family and—especially—friends that social media provides. A smaller number associate it with negative emotions like being overwhelmed or overloaded, or the need to show their best selves to an ever-present social media audience.

- 78 percent of social media using teens say it makes them feel closer to friends, and 40 percent of teens say social media makes them feel closer to family.
- 49 percent of teens say social media makes them feel more informed.
- 15 percent of teens say it makes them feel like they always need to show the best version of themselves.
- 10 percent of teens say it makes them feel overloaded with information.

Less than 10 percent of teens report that using social media makes them feel overwhelmed, like they are missing out, or alone.

### Teen boys are more likely to feel overloaded with information by social media, while girls are more likely to feel like they must always show the best version of themselves.

While teen boys are more likely than girls to say that social media makes them feel overloaded with information (14 percent vs. 7 percent of girls), teen girls are more likely to say it makes them feel like they always need to be the best version of themselves (21 percent vs. 9 percent of boys).

### 58 PERCENT OF TEENS HAVE TAKEN A BREAK FROM AT LEAST ONE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM.

But regardless of how social media makes teens feel, many have left social media at some point, often multiple times and for extended stretches.

- 58 percent of teens who use social media have taken at least one break from the platforms.
- 23 percent of teens who have not taken a break from social media have wanted to take one.
- 60 percent of teens who have taken breaks from social media have taken three or more; 22 percent have taken two, and 18 percent have taken just one break from the platforms.
- About half of teens say their social media breaks are typically a week or longer.
- Boys are more likely to take longer breaks, with 36 percent of boys taking breaks of two weeks or longer from social media, while 22 percent of girls reported breaks of similar length.

### Lower income teens are more likely than wealthier teens to take breaks and to take longer ones.

Teens from lower- and middle-income households are more likely to take social media breaks, and their breaks tend to be longer.

- 69 percent of teens from households earning less than \$50,000 annually say they have taken a social media break, compared with 53 percent of teens from households earning more than \$50,000 each year.
- 58 percent of teens from households earning less than \$50,000 a year say their breaks last a week or longer, while just 39 percent of teens from households earning more took a break of that duration.

**Among those taking a social media break, 65 percent did so voluntarily, while 49 percent did not have a choice.**

Teens took breaks for a variety of reasons—some voluntary in nature and some involuntary.

65 percent of those teens who took a social media break, did so voluntarily. Among the voluntary reasons:

- 38 percent said it was getting in the way of work or school.
- 24 percent were tired of the conflict and drama.
- 20 percent were tired of having to always keep up with what was going on.
- 5 percent wanted to get away from a friend or a current or past boyfriend or girlfriend.
- 4 percent said they were tired of it, it is stupid, or it's boring.
- 3 percent were being bullied and harassed.
- 3 percent reported that their friends left the platform.

49 percent of those teens who took a break from social media, didn't have a choice. Among the involuntary reasons:

- 38 percent said their parents took their phone, computer, or device.
- 17 percent said their phone was lost, broken, or stolen.
- 4 percent lost connectivity due to camp or vacation.

**TEENS WHO LEAVE SOCIAL MEDIA VOLUNTARILY FEEL MORE POSITIVE ABOUT THEIR TIME AWAY; TEENS ON INVOLUNTARY BREAKS FELT ANXIOUS AND DISCONNECTED.**

The circumstances under which teens step away from social media impact how they feel about the experience.

Teens who took breaks for voluntary reasons reported more positive feelings about their time away, while teens who were pushed off social media involuntarily reported greater feelings of missing out and disconnection from important people in their lives.

Teens who took a break were asked if a number of voluntary, involuntary, or other factors were reasons why they took their break. Those who cited any of the voluntary reasons were more likely than those who did not cite voluntary reasons to say they:

- Had more time to do other things (43 percent vs. 29 percent of those without voluntary reasons)
- Were glad to have had a break (40 percent vs. 18 percent)

- Felt relieved (36 percent vs. 15 percent)
- Felt more connected to important people in their lives (23 percent vs. 11 percent) and news and information (8 percent vs. 1 percent)

On the other hand, those who mentioned any of the involuntary reasons for a break<sup>1</sup> were more likely than those who did not cite an involuntary reason to say they:

- Felt anxious they were missing out (38 percent vs. 13 percent of those who did not give any involuntary reasons for taking breaks)
- Wanted to get back on as soon as possible (35 percent vs. 11 percent)
- Felt less connected to the important people in their lives (27 percent vs. 12 percent)

## **MOST TEENS SAY THINGS DIDN'T CHANGE MUCH FOR THEM ONCE THEY RETURNED TO SOCIAL MEDIA AFTER A BREAK.**

Nevertheless most teens eventually returned to social media, and most report that their behavior on social media did not change much once they logged back on.

Given that many teens report that the value of social media is in the connections to friends, family, and information that they receive through the platform, it is not surprising that 53 percent of teens say not much changed on their return to their social media haunts. Still some teens did make modest changes:

- 19 percent of teens who took breaks say they visited the platform less often than before.
- 17 percent say they posted less to the social media platform after they returned; just 4 percent say they posted more.
- 13 percent say they were more careful about what they shared.
- 10 percent say they reduced the number of people they followed, who followed them, or who they were friends with.
- 7 percent of teens never returned to some or all of their platforms after a break.

## **THOSE WHO HAVE NOT TAKEN BREAKS FROM SOCIAL MEDIA CITE CONCERNS ABOUT MISSING OUT AND DISCONNECTING FROM FRIENDS.**

While almost 6 in 10 teens have taken a break from social media, 35 percent of teens have not. Among this group, 23 percent say they have wanted to take a break but have not.

Of teens who wanted to take a break from social media but have not done so, more than half cite reasons related to their friends.

- 59 percent stay on social media because their friends are there.
- 56 percent say they don't want to miss out on what's going on.
- 52 report they stay connected to social media to find out what is happening in their friends' lives.
- 44 percent say they stay on social media because it is how they find out what's happening in the world.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes teens who only left social media for involuntary reasons as well as those who cited both involuntary and voluntary reasons.

- 21 percent say they need to use it for school, and 22 percent need it for extracurricular activities.
- 7 percent say they are addicted and unable to stop using social media.

## INTRODUCTION

Social media has been a vital part of young adults' social world for more than a decade. Teenagers forge, conduct, and cement important peer relationships in these digital spaces. And at times, the social and informational flow between teens' online and offline lives is nearly seamless. Parents, educators, and teens themselves have mused with varying degrees of concern about how dependent adolescents are on social media, and how deeply and seemingly constantly engaged they are with the platforms and the people and information available on them.

But what happens when teens leave these platforms, even for a little while? While researchers, activists, and thinkers have promoted the idea of a digital Sabbath or "detox" from the lure and urgencies of our digital devices, do teens ever take them? And what of teens with phones that are lost, stolen, or confiscated by parents?

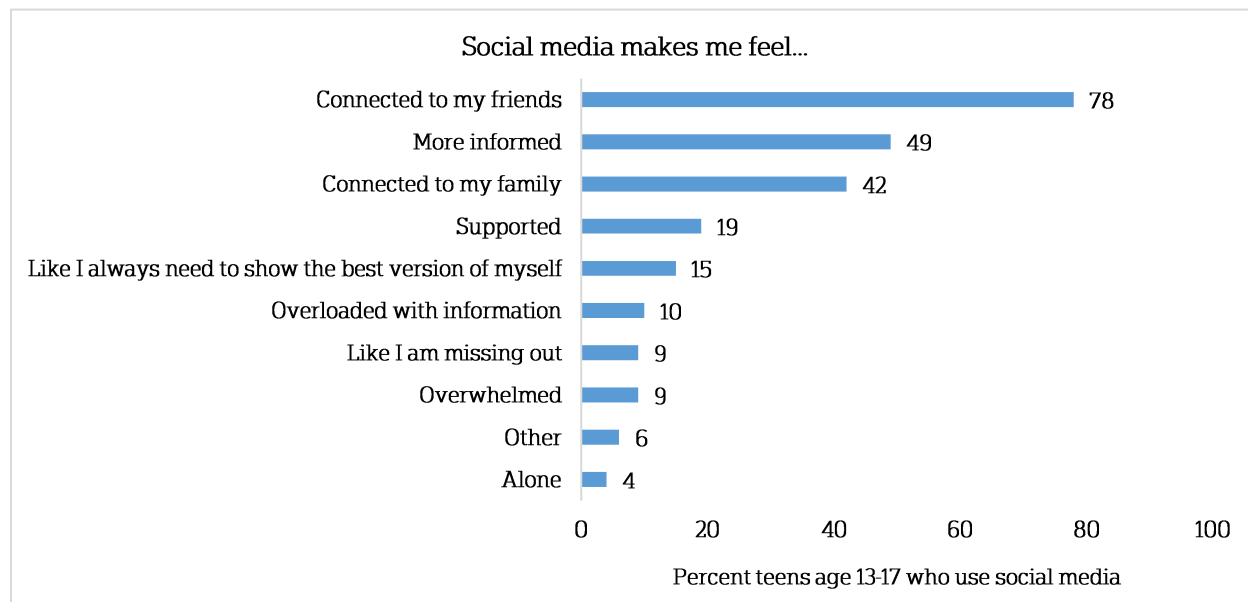
This new study, conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research interviewed 790 teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17 about their social media habits. The study examines whether, how, and why teens take breaks from their social media platforms, and how they feel about both the platforms and the experience of disconnecting from them.

The data for this report were collected in a nationally representative survey fielded between December 7 and 31, 2016, using the AmeriSpeak® Panel, the probability based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with teens after consent was granted by a parent or guardian.

## TEENS SAY SOCIAL MEDIA MAKES THEM FEEL CONNECTED TO THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILY AND MORE INFORMED, WITH POSITIVE FEELINGS OUTWEIGHING NEGATIVE FEELINGS OVERALL.

Among the vast majority of teens who use social media, most are positive about the role and impact of the platforms in their lives. They most often say it makes them feel connected to other people. This is especially true with regards to their friends (78 percent), but also with family (42 percent). And, it plugs them into the larger world, with nearly half (49 percent) saying it makes them feel more informed. Nearly 2 in 10 also say it makes them feel supported.

Fewer teens report negative feelings about social media, but about 1 in 10 say it makes them feel overloaded with information, like they are missing out, overwhelmed, or like they always need to show the best version of themselves. Another 4 percent say social media makes them feel alone.

**Teens say social media makes them feel connected to their friends and family and more informed.**

Question: How does social media make you feel? Select all that apply.

Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted December 7-31, 2016, with 790 teenagers age 13-17 nationwide

**Teen boys are more likely to feel overloaded with information by social media, while girls are more likely to feel like they must always show the best version of themselves.**

Teen boys are more likely than girls to say that social media makes them feel overloaded with information (14 percent vs. 7 percent), while teen girls are more likely to say it makes them feel like they always need to be the best version of themselves (21 percent vs. 9 percent).

Teenagers in families earning \$50,000 a year or more are more likely to say social media makes them feel overloaded with information than those in families earning less (13 percent vs. 6 percent). And white teens are more likely than Hispanic youth to say social media makes them feel connected to friends (82 percent vs. 62 percent).

**Civically engaged teens are more likely to feel overwhelmed or overloaded with information on social media.**

Teens who have participated in a civic activity on their own time, such as volunteering for a cause they care about or attending a peaceful protest, are more likely than those who have not engaged in such activities to say social media makes them feel overwhelmed (10 percent vs. 2 percent) or overloaded with information (11 percent vs. 3 percent). Those who say they have learned civic skills in school, like learning about people with different backgrounds or discussing how to tell if information online is trustworthy, are also more likely to say they feel overloaded with information compared to those who say they have no such civic education (11 percent vs. 2 percent).



**Frequent Instagram users feel closer to friends and family via social media, but also more pressure to be the best version of themselves.**

Among social media users, those who use Instagram more frequently are more likely to report feeling more connected, but also more pressure to be the best version of themselves, compared to those who use it less frequently. Those who say they use Instagram daily or more are more likely than those who use it less often to say social media makes them feel more connected to friends (85 percent vs. 71 percent) and to family (47 percent vs. 27 percent). But 18 percent of Instagram users also feel like social media makes them feel like they always need to be the best version of themselves compared to just 8 percent of less frequent users.

**Frequent Facebook users are more likely to feel connected to family, while Twitch users are less likely to feel connected to family.**

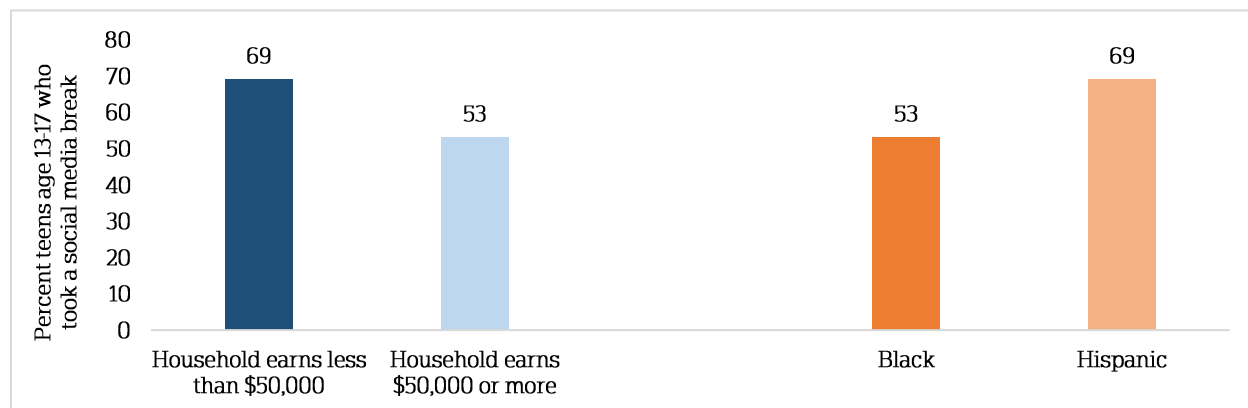
Frequent Facebook users are also more likely to feel connected to their family compared to less frequent users (55 percent vs. 36 percent). And those who use Twitch at any level of frequency were less likely than users of other social media platforms to say social media makes them feel connected to their family (33 percent vs. 45 percent).

**DESPITE GENERALLY POSITIVE FEELINGS TOWARD SOCIAL MEDIA, A MAJORITY OF TEENS SAY THEY HAVE TAKEN A BREAK FROM AT LEAST ONE PLATFORM AT SOME POINT.**

Even though teens mostly report positive feelings about social media, many have left platforms or had the desire to do so at some point. Among all teens, 58 percent say they have taken a break from social media. Of those who have not taken a break but use social media, 23 percent say they have wanted to. All told, 66 percent of American teens have taken a break or wanted to take a break from social media.

**Lower-income teens are more likely to have taken a break than wealthier teens.**

Teens from households earning less than \$50,000 a year were more likely to say they have taken a break from social media than those from families earning more (69 percent vs. 53 percent). Hispanic teens are also more likely to say they have taken a break from social media than are black teens (69 percent vs. 53 percent).

**Lower-income teens and Hispanic teens are more likely to have taken a break from social media.**

Question: Have you ever taken a break from social media?

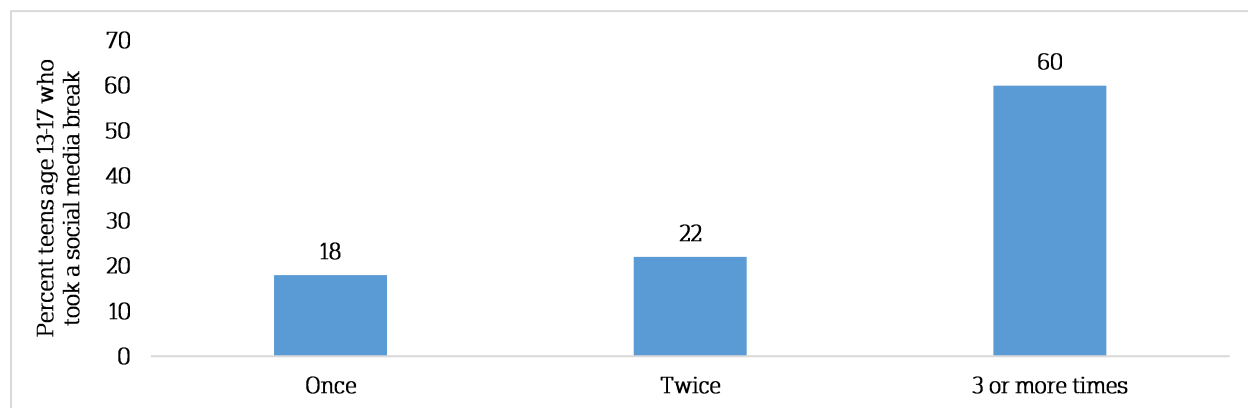
Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted December 7-31, 2016, with 790 teenagers age 13-17 nationwide

Teens who say social media makes them feel more connected to friends are less likely than those who do not say social media makes them feel that way to say they have taken a break (55 percent vs. 70 percent).

### Teens who take breaks from social media often do so more than once.

Among teens who have taken a break, many have taken more than one. Just 18 percent say they have taken one break, while 22 percent say they have taken two, and 60 percent say they have taken three or more.

### Teens who have taken social media breaks have often done so multiple times.



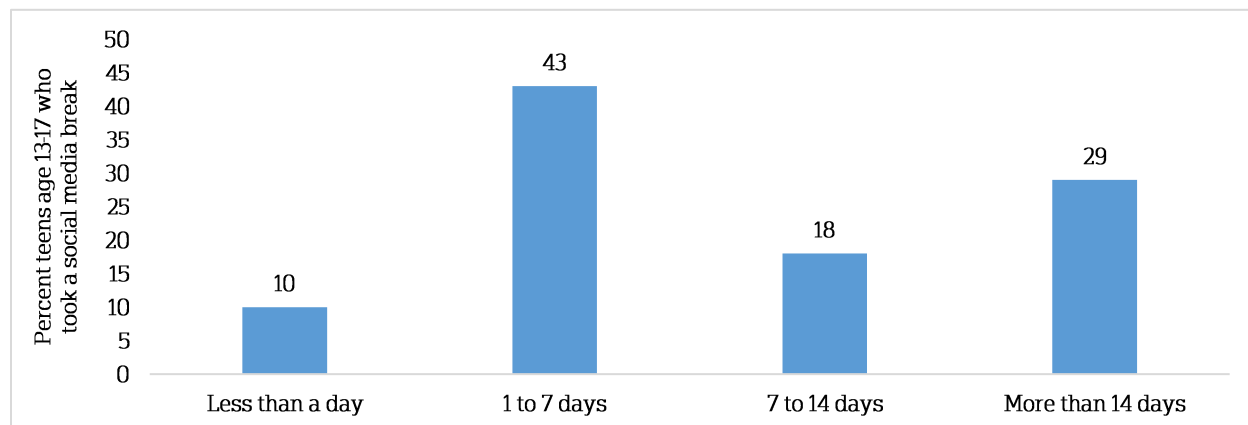
Question: How many times have you taken a social media break?

Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted December 7-31, 2016, with 790 teenagers age 13-17 nationwide

### Teens' social media breaks are typically a week or longer; boys take longer breaks.

These breaks are not typically just for an hour or two here and there. For about half of teens, their social media break lasted a week or more. Nearly 3 in 10 say their break lasted more than two weeks. Just 1 in 10 say it lasted less than a day.

### About half of teens' most recent social media break lasted a week or more.



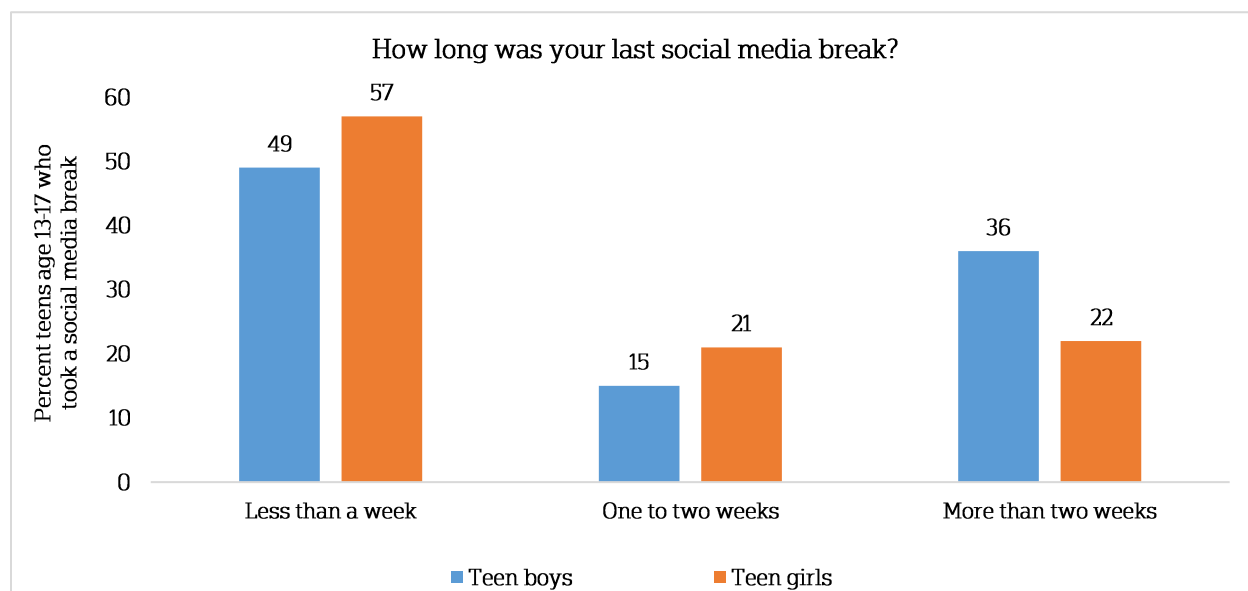
Question: Thinking about the most recent time you took a break from social media, how long were you completely off the platform?

Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted December 7-31, 2016, with 790 teenagers age 13-17 nationwide



Teen boys' breaks were different from girls' breaks. They were longer, with 36 percent of boys but just 22 percent of girls saying their social media break lasted longer than two weeks.

### Teen boys' breaks from social media last longer than the breaks of teen girls.



**Question:** Thinking about the most recent time you took a break from social media, how long were you completely off the platform?

**Source:** AP-NORC Center poll conducted December 7-31, 2016, with 790 teenagers age 13-17 nationwide

### Lower-income teens are more likely to take longer breaks than wealthier teens.

Teens from higher-income households are less likely to take social media breaks, and their breaks are shorter when they do take them. Nearly 6 in 10 teens from households earning less than \$50,000 a year say their last social media break lasted a week or more compared to just 4 in 10 teens from households earning \$50,000 or more a year.

### Largest group of teens who take breaks makes a clean one—leaving all platforms and not checking back in.

For teens, taking a break from social media often means leaving all the social media platforms they use. Forty-four percent say they left all platforms during their most recent break. Just 19 percent say they left only one platform, 18 percent say they left two, 12 percent say left three, and 4 percent say they left four. White teens were more likely than Hispanic teens to say they left every platform they use (48 percent vs. 31 percent).

More than half of teens who took a break from social media say they refrained from checking back on their social media platforms while on their break (62 percent), while 38 percent say they did check back during their break. Young teens age 13-15 were more likely to say they checked back during their break than older teens age 16-17 (45 percent vs. 26 percent). Those who have learned civic skills in school are more likely than those without such education to say they checked back in, as well (39 percent vs. 22 percent).

**Teens are no more or less likely to take breaks based on the number of platforms they use.**

While teens were no more or less likely to take breaks from social media based on the number or type of platform they use, Instagram users are more likely to take shorter breaks, with 60 percent saying their break lasted less than a week compared to 33 percent of users of other platforms.

**MANY TEENS WHO TOOK A BREAK FROM SOCIAL MEDIA DID SO FOR REASONS OUTSIDE THEIR CONTROL, BUT A GOOD SHARE ALSO CHOSE TO STEP AWAY.**

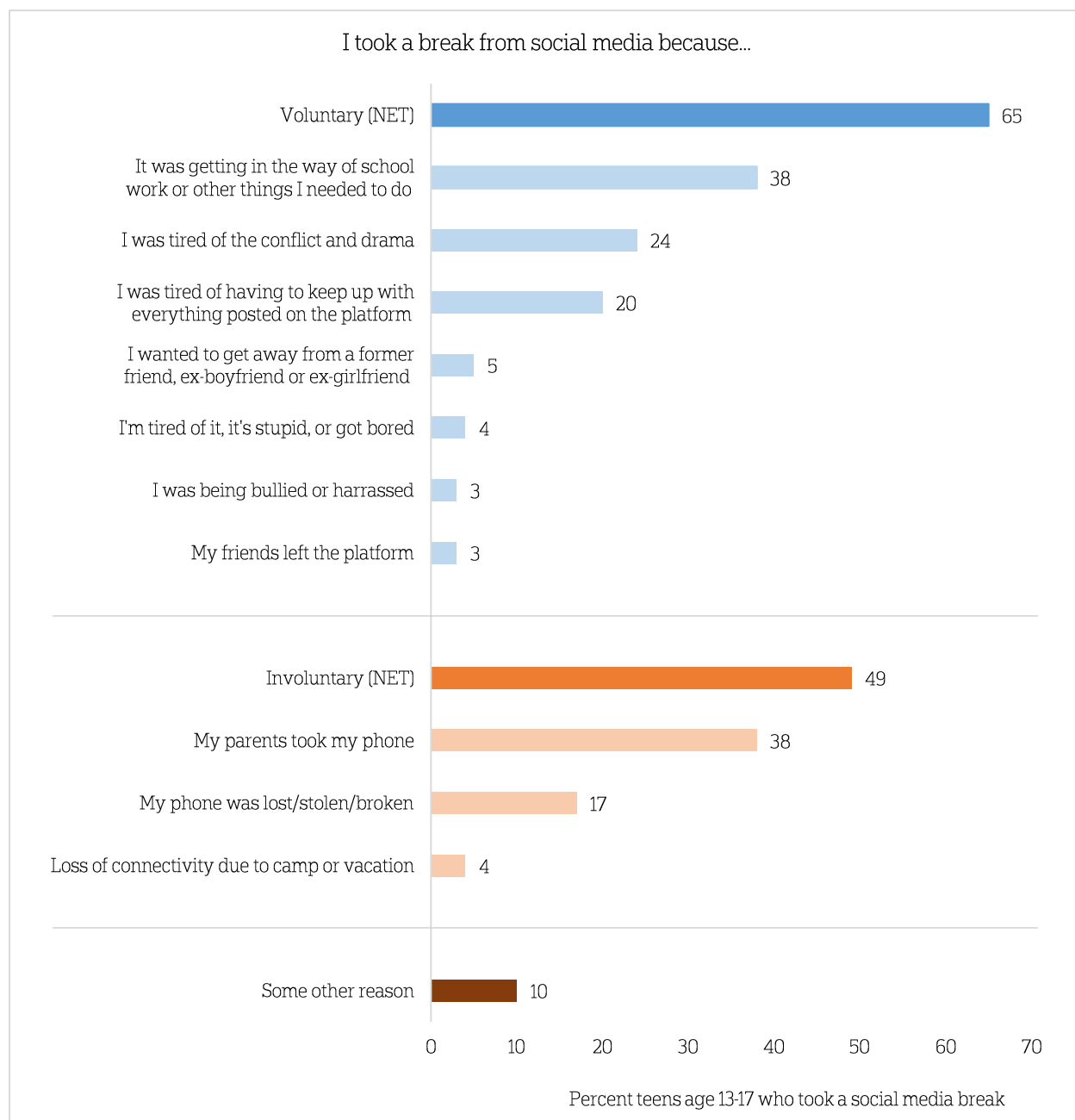
Among those who have taken breaks, many say it was for reasons beyond their control, such as their parents took their phone away (38 percent); their phone was lost, stolen, or broken (17 percent); or that they lost connectivity because they were away at camp or on vacation (4 percent). But a sizeable share of teens took breaks for more voluntary reasons. Many found social media to be obtrusive in some way, like it was getting in the way of school work or other responsibilities (38 percent), they were tired of having to keep up with everything posted on the platform (20 percent), or that they were simply tired of it or found it boring (4 percent).

Others left for interpersonal reasons, such as they were tired of conflict or drama (24 percent); to get away from a friend, ex-boyfriend, or ex-girlfriend (5 percent); their friends left the platform (3 percent); or they were being bullied or harassed (3 percent).

**65 percent of teens cite voluntary reasons for taking social media breaks, and 49 percent cite involuntary reasons for leaving.**

Overall, of those who took social media breaks, 65 percent cited any of the voluntary reasons for doing so, and 49 percent cited an involuntary reason. Forty-one percent took breaks for only voluntary reasons, 25 percent took them for only involuntary reasons, and 33 percent took them for a mix of the two.

**Teens most often say they took breaks from social media because it took up time they needed for school work or because their parents took their phones.**



**Question: Why did you take a break from social media? Please select all that apply.**

**Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted December 7-31, 2016, with 790 teenagers age 13-17 nationwide**

Teens on multiple platforms were more likely than those on fewer to say they took involuntary breaks from social media. Just 27 percent of those on just one social media platform said they took a break from social media for one of the involuntary reasons, such as their parents took their phone. But 55 percent of those on two or more platforms took breaks for involuntary reasons. Instagram users are more likely to take involuntary breaks than teens who use other social media sites (56 percent vs. 29 percent), and Twitch users are less likely than social media users who don't use Twitch to say they took a voluntary break (49 percent vs. 70 percent).

As for more specific reasons for breaks, younger teens age 13-15 are more likely than those age 16-17 to say they took a break because their parents took their phone (43 percent vs. 29 percent), while older teens are particularly likely to say they were tired of having to keep up with everything (29 percent vs. 15 percent). White teens were more likely than black teens to say they took a break due to a vacation or camp (6 percent vs. less than 1 percent). But, non-white teens were more likely to say they took a break because it was getting in the way of things they needed to do compared to white teens (47 percent vs. 30 percent).

Teens with smartphones took breaks for different reasons than those without smartphones. They were more likely to say they took a break because they were tired of the drama (26 percent vs. 8 percent), they were tired of keeping up with everything on the platform (22 percent vs. 3 percent), or their phone was lost, stolen, or broken (19 percent vs. 2 percent).

Differences emerged in the reasons teens gave for taking a break based on the social media platforms they used. Instagram users were more likely than users of other platforms to say their parents took their phone away (42 percent vs. 22 percent) or that they wanted to get away from a former friend or ex (6 percent vs. less than 1 percent).

## **TEENS SAY THEY FELT RELIEF AND WERE GLAD TO BE AWAY FROM SOCIAL MEDIA WHILE TAKING A BREAK, BUT MOST SAY THINGS WENT BACK TO HOW THEY WERE BEFORE WHEN THEY RETURNED.**

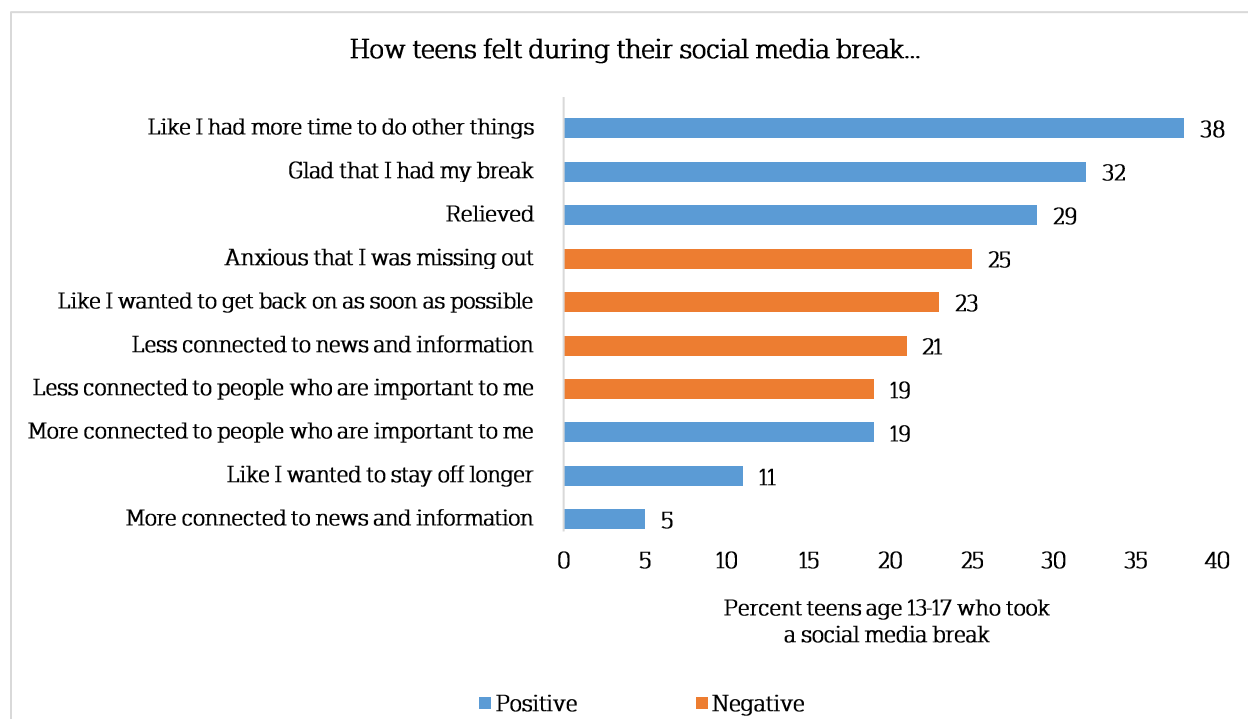
### **Many teens report having more time for other things and being glad to be away from social media during their breaks.**

Many teens describe the feelings of being away from social media in positive terms, but a sizeable share also admit to feelings of anxiety and disconnect during social media breaks. Teens most frequently say they felt like they had more time for other things during a break (38 percent), while 3 in 10 also say they were glad they had a break or that they felt relieved to be away. One in 10 even say they felt like they wanted to stay off longer.

### **Equal numbers of teens felt more or less connected to other people, but more teens felt less connected to information during social media breaks.**

But one key aspect of social media is the possibility of interacting with other people, and those connections motivated feelings in a sizable share of teens during their breaks. Roughly equal numbers of teens say their break from social media made them feel less connected to the important people in their life as say it made them feel more connected to them (19 percent each). But more (21 percent) say distance from social media made them feel less connected to news and information than say it made them feel more connected to what was happening in the news (5 percent). Overall, a quarter of teens who took a break say they felt anxious about what they were missing out on while away from social media, and nearly a quarter say they wanted to get back on as soon as possible.

**Teens who took a break from social media express mostly positive feelings about their time away, saying they had more time for other things and were glad they had a break.**



Question: How did you feel during your social media break? Select all that apply.

Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted December 7-31, 2016, with 790 teenagers age 13-17 nationwide

## HOW TEENS FEEL DURING THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA BREAK DEPENDS ON WHY THEY TOOK THEIR BREAK, THE PLATFORMS THEY USE, AND DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS.

Why teens took their breaks often affected how they felt about the break, with those who took breaks for voluntary reasons feeling differently about their breaks compared to those who took breaks for other reasons. Those who left their social media lives voluntarily were more likely to say they had more time to do other things (43 percent vs. 29 percent), were glad to have their break (40 percent vs. 18 percent), were relieved (36 percent vs. 15 percent), and felt more connected to important people in their lives (23 percent vs. 11 percent) and to news and information (8 percent vs. 1 percent).

On the other hand, those who took an involuntary break were more likely than those who took other breaks to say they felt anxious they were missing out (38 percent vs. 13 percent), wanted to get back on as soon as possible (35 percent vs. 11 percent), and felt less connected to the important people in their lives (27 percent vs. 12 percent).

How teens felt about their break related to the number of platforms they used. Teens who were users of fewer platforms were more likely to feel more connected to the important people in their lives during their break. Twenty-six percent of those who used one or two platforms say they felt more connected to those in their lives during their break. Just 14 percent of users of three or more platforms say they felt the same.

It was also related to the specific platforms used. Tumblr users were more likely to say they felt anxious they were missing out (41 percent vs. 21 percent) and like they wanted to get back on as soon as possible (35 percent vs. 19 percent) compared to users of other platforms. And, Instagram users were more likely to say they felt less connected to people important to them compared to those using other platforms (23 percent vs. 9 percent).

### Older teens were more likely to feel positive about their social media breaks.

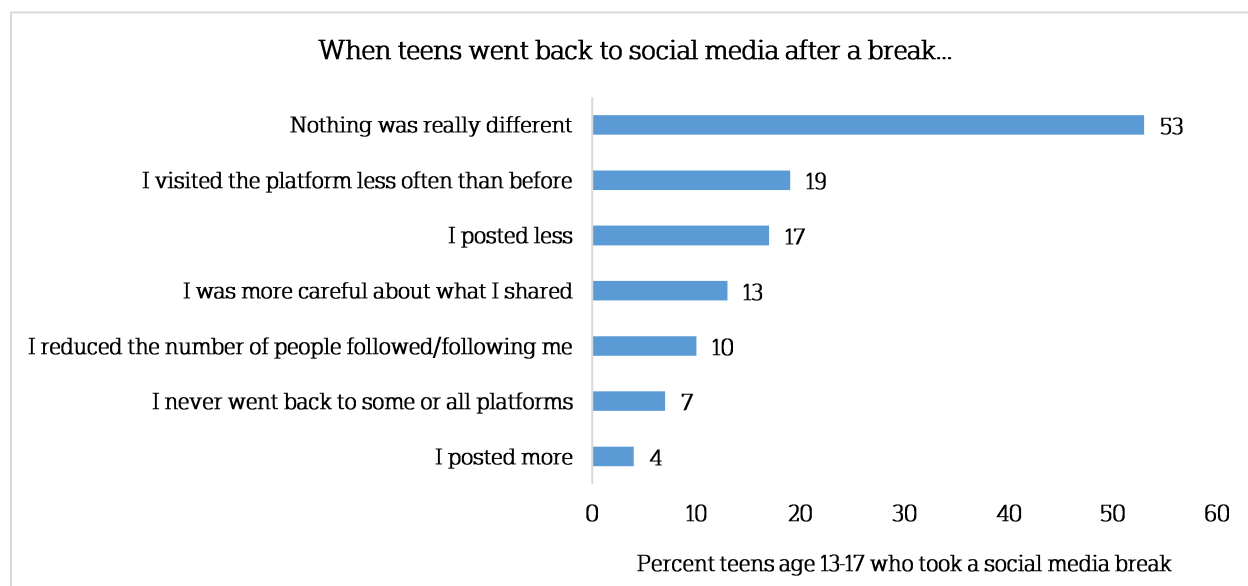
Older teens had different reactions to their break than younger teens. Those age 16-17 were more likely than those age 13-15 to say their social media break made them feel relieved (40 percent vs. 22 percent) and more likely to be glad they had their break (41 percent vs. 27 percent). They were less likely to say they wanted to get back on as soon as possible (15 percent vs. 27 percent).

Hispanic teens were also less likely than white teens to say they wanted to get back on social media as soon as possible during their break (12 percent vs. 26 percent).

### MOST TEENS SAY THINGS DIDN'T CHANGE MUCH FOR THEM ONCE THEY RETURNED TO SOCIAL MEDIA AFTER A BREAK.

Most teens who took breaks from social media ended up returning to the platforms at some point, and, though many report positive feelings during their breaks, a majority say that nothing was really different once they returned. Given that many report the value of connections to friends, family, and information that they receive through social media, it may not be surprising that teens mostly return to their old ways. Nevertheless, 19 percent of teen who took breaks say they visited the platform less often than before, and 17 percent say they posted less. Just 4 percent say they posted more. Thirteen percent say they were more careful about what they shared, and 10 percent say they reduced the number of people they followed, who followed them, or who they were friends with. Just 7 percent of teens never returned to some or all of their platforms after a break.

### A majority of teens who returned from social media after a break say things were not much different on social media for them once they returned.



Question: What was it like when you went back onto your social media platform(s)?

Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted December 7-31, 2016, with 790 teenagers age 13-17 nationwide

Teenagers in households earning less than \$100,000 a year were more likely to say they posted more compared to those in households earning more (5 percent vs. less than 1 percent). Instagram users were less likely than users of other platforms to say they did not return to some platforms (2 percent vs. 14 percent).

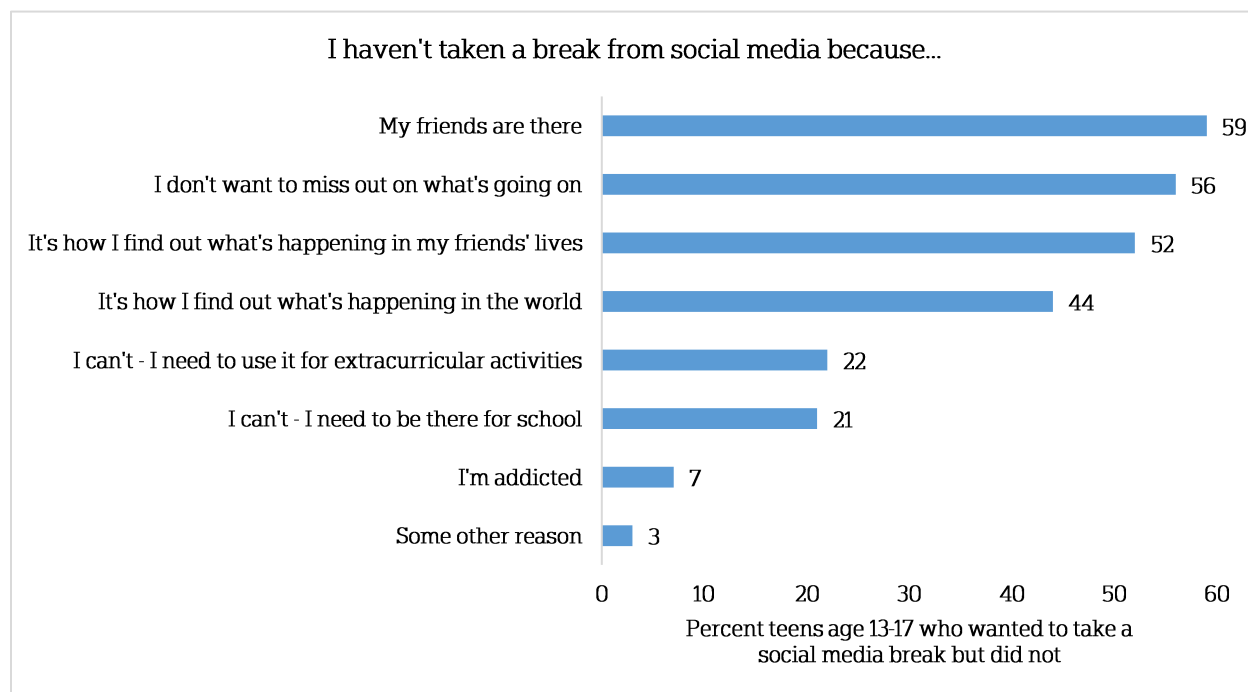
Teens who took involuntary breaks were more likely than those who took other types of breaks to say that nothing was really different when they returned to social media. Sixty-three percent of those who took involuntary breaks say they returned to social media and little changed compared to 43 percent of those who took other breaks. They were also more likely to say they posted more when they returned (6 percent vs. 2 percent). Those who took voluntary breaks, however, were more likely than those who took other breaks to say they visited platforms less often when they returned (25 percent vs. 8 percent).

## THOSE WHO HAVE NOT TAKEN BREAKS FROM SOCIAL MEDIA CITE CONCERNS ABOUT MISSING OUT AND DISCONNECTING FROM FRIENDS.

While almost 6 in 10 teens have taken a break from social media, 35 percent of teens have not. Among this group, 23 percent say they have wanted to take a break but have not.

Of this group of those wanting to take a break from social media, more than half cite reasons related to their friends—like that their friends are there or that they use it to find out what is happening in their friends' lives—as a reason they stay connected. A majority also say they don't want to miss out on what's going on, and nearly half say it is how they find out what's happening in the world. About 2 in 10 say they need to use it for school or extracurricular activities. Seven percent say they are addicted and unable to stop using social media.

**Teens were compelled not to take a break from social media even though they wanted to because they didn't want to miss out on what's going on or what their friends are doing.**



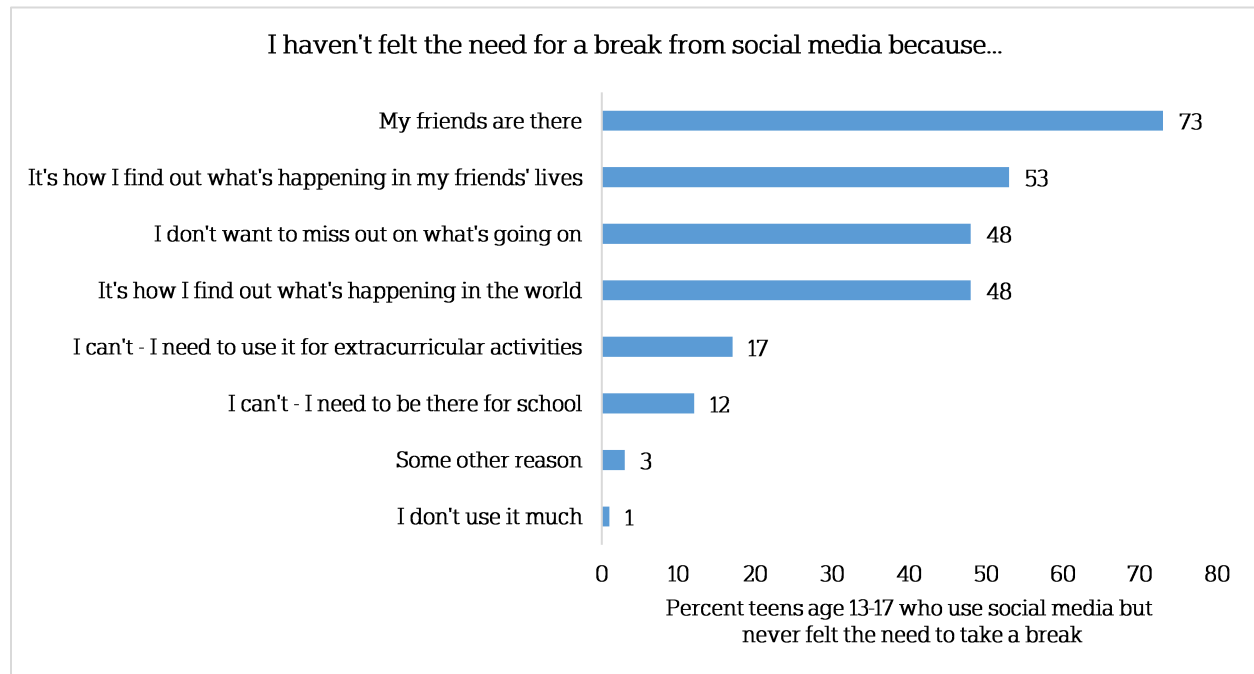
**Question:** Why haven't you taken a break from social media? Select all that apply.

**Source:** AP-NORC Center poll conducted December 7-31, 2016, with 790 teenagers age 13-17 nationwide



Many other teens who have not taken a break from social media say they have never had the urge to do so (68 percent). They cite largely the same reasons as those who want to take a break but have not, but more (73 percent) say they have not because their friends are there. About half also say they don't want to miss out on what's going on or that it is how they find out what's happening in friends' lives or the world. About 2 in 10 again say they need it for extracurricular activities, but just 1 in 10 say they need it for school. Teen girls are more likely than teen boys to say they have not wanted to take a break because they need social media for school (17 percent vs. 5 percent).

**Teens say they have not felt the need to take a break from social media because they see social media as where their friends are.**



**Question:** Why haven't you felt the need to take a break from social media? Select all that apply.

**Source:** AP-NORC Center poll conducted December 7-31, 2016, with 790 teenagers age 13-17 nationwide

The most popular reasons for either not wanting to take a break from social media or wanting to take a break but not doing so reflect how teens say social media makes them feel. Teens most often say social media lets them connect with friends and family and makes them feel more informed. Taking a break would mean they would forego these interactions with important people in their lives and miss out on what is going on in the world.

## IMPLICATIONS

### It's ok to take breaks from social media....

Many teens take them, more than once, and for a reasonably long duration. Teens often have very good reasons for managing and limiting their time on social media, whether that's fleeing toxic relationships or their own tendencies to spend more time in the space at the expense of other activities that are important to them and their families.

**...but taking them isn't without consequences.**

The flip side is that many teens don't want to take breaks from social media and feel anxious and disconnected from people and information when they are logged out for an extended period. For teens who are knocked off social media involuntarily, it can impact their connection to their peer group and their social world. And regardless of the reasons teens take a break from social media, the loss of connectivity can reduce teens' exposure to news and information. For parents who use social media as a discipline tool – it can be effective, but can also have broader consequences. Removing teens from social networks isn't necessarily about restricting access to friends as with old-school grounding. It can also reduce a teen's access to news and information, as this and [other research suggests](#) that social media is a prime site for youth to encounter and engage with news. This caution applies to digital grounding as well as loss of connectivity due to device loss or breakdown, too.

**Educators – a reminder that connectivity isn't constant or evenly distributed and that social media isn't simple.**

As this study makes clear, not every teen has access to social media all the time. Lower income teens are especially likely to be disconnected from social media and for longer periods. This has implications for educators hoping to leverage social media in the classroom. Setting aside youth who aren't connect because of device difficulties, often teens have disconnected from social media for very good social and emotional reasons. These are complex and sometimes exhausting emotional spaces for all of us, but especially for teens who are learning to navigate their peer relationships. Adding educational activities to social media can add extra complexity into an already complex space.

## ABOUT THE STUDY

### Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Data were collected using AmeriSpeak, NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings

Interviews for this survey were conducted between December 7 and 31, 2016, with teenagers age 13 to 17 representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Adult panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and after confirming that there were children of the appropriate age in the household, permission was sought from a parent or guardian to survey their teenager. If a given panelist had multiple teens at home, one teen was randomly selected to participate. Completed interviews were conducted with 790 teenagers, 739 via the web and 51 via telephone. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, depending on respondent preference.

The final stage completion rate is 31.5 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 34.3 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 95 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 10.3 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.6 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study specific sample design.

Poststratification variables at the adult level included age, sex, education, race/ethnicity, housing tenure, telephone status, and Census division. This produced a weight for each teen that was then adjusted so as to be calibrated to the external controls totals for age, sex, race/ethnicity, Census division, and household income for the U.S. population of teenagers age 13 to 17. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2016 Current Population Survey. The weighted data were used for all analyses.

All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or lower) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling.

A comprehensive listing of the questions, complete with tabulations of top-level results for each question, is available on The AP-NORC Center website: [www.apnorc.org](http://www.apnorc.org).

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## ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS-NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

The Associated Press (AP) is the world's essential news organization, bringing fast, unbiased news to all media platforms and formats.

NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest and most respected, independent research institutions in the world.

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.