# **“Social Media as Community”**

By Keith Hampton, *The New York Times*

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Dominique Browning and Eric Klinenberg extol the virtues of living alone. In so doing, Klinenberg correctly points out that living alone is only common in cultures where prosperity makes this arrangement economically feasible. However, this has not slowed arguments that social media is increasingly a part of these same prosperous societies, and that this new tool is responsible for a growing trend of social isolation and loss of intimacy.

Neither living alone nor using social media is socially isolating. In 2011, I was lead author of an article in [Information, Communication & Society](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1369118X.2010.513417) that found, based on a representative survey of 2,500 Americans, that regardless of whether the participants were married or single, those who used social media had more close confidants.

A recent follow-up study, “[Social Networking Sites and Our Lives](https://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Technology-and-social-networks.aspx)” (Pew Research Center), found that the average user of a social networking site had more close ties than and was half as likely to be socially isolated as the average American. Additionally, my co-authors and I, in another article published in [New Media & Society](https://nms.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/02/09/1461444810390342), found not only that social media users knew people from a greater variety of backgrounds, but also that much of this diversity was a result of people using these technologies who simultaneously spent an impressive amount of time socializing outside of the house.

A number of studies, including my own and those of [Matthew Brashears](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378873311000566) (a sociologist at Cornell), have found that Americans have fewer intimate relationships today than 20 years ago. However, a loss of close friends does not mean a loss of support. Because of cellphones and social media, those we depend on are more accessible today than at any point since we lived in small, village-like settlements.

Social media has made every relationship persistent and pervasive. We no longer lose social ties over our lives; we have Facebook friends forever. The constant feed of status updates and digital photos from our online social circles is the modern front porch. This is why, in “[Social Networking Sites and Our Lives](https://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Technology-and-social-networks.aspx),” there was a clear trend for those who used these technologies to receive more social support than other people.

The data backs it up. There is little evidence that social media is responsible for a trend of isolation, or a loss of intimacy and social support.

**“Is Google Making Us Stupid? YES”**

**Nicholas Carr**  
*The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*

Who doesn't love Google? In the blink of an eye, the search engine delivers useful information about pretty much any subject imaginable. I use it all the time, and I'm guessing you do too.

But I worry about what Google is doing to our brains. What really makes us intelligent isn't our ability to find lots of information quickly. It's our ability to think deeply about that information. And deep thinking, brain scientists have discovered, happens only when our minds are calm and attentive. The greater our concentration, the richer our thoughts.

If we're distracted, we understand less, remember less, and learn less.

That's the problem with Google—and with the Internet in general. When we use our computers and our cellphones all the time, we're always distracted.

The Net bombards us with messages and other bits of data, and every one of those interruptions breaks our train of thought. We end up scatterbrained. The fact is, you'll never think deeply if you're always Googling, texting, and surfing.

Google doesn't want us to slow down. The faster we zip across the Web, clicking links and skimming words and pictures, the more ads Google is able to show us and the more money it makes. So even as Google is giving us all that useful information, it's also encouraging us to think superficially. It's making us shallow.

If you're really interested in developing your mind, you should turn off your computer and your cellphone—and start thinking. Really thinking. You can Google all the facts you want, but you'll never Google your way to brilliance.

**“Is Google Making Us Stupid? NO”**

**Peter Norvig, Director of Research, Google Inc.**

*The New York Times Upfront*

Any new information technology has both advocates and critics. More than 2,000 years ago, the classical Greek philosopher Socrates complained that the new technology of writing "will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls because they will not use their memories."

Today, Google is the new technology. The Internet contains the world's best writing, images, and ideas; Google lets us find the relevant pieces instantly.

Suppose I'm interested in the guidance computers on Apollo spacecraft in the 1960s. My local library has no books on that specific subject—just 18 books about the Apollo missions in general. I could hunt through those or turn to Google, which returns 45,000 pages, including a definitive encyclopedia article and instructions for building a unit.

Just as a car allows us to move faster and a telescope lets us see farther, access to the Internet's information lets us think better and faster. By considering a wide range of information, we can arrive at more creative and informed solutions. Internet users are more likely to be exposed to a diversity of ideas. In politics, for example, they are likely to see ideas from left and right, and see how news is reported in other countries.

There's no doubt the Internet can create distractions. But 81 percent of experts polled by the Pew Internet Research Project say the opportunities outweigh the distractions.

Socrates was wrong to fear the coming of the written word: Writing has improved our law, science, arts, culture, and our memory. When the history of our current age is written, it will say that Google has made us smarter—both individually and collectively—because we have ready and free access to information.

# “More Americans Sense a Downside to an Always Plugged-In Existence”

# **By Marjorie Connelly,** *The New York Times*

**June 6, 2010**

While most Americans say devices like smartphones, cellphones and personal computers have made their lives better and their jobs easier, some say they have been intrusive, increased their levels of stress and made it difficult to concentrate, according to a New York Times/CBS News poll.

Younger people are particularly affected: almost 30 percent of those under 45 said the use of these devices made it harder to focus, while less than 10 percent of older users agreed.

Neil Erickson of Akron, Ohio, blames his lack of focus on his cellphone. “It’s distracting, but you never know if something is going to be important,” he said in a follow-up interview. Mr. Erickson, who is 28 and studying computer engineering, added, “I suppose I could cut down on checking e-mail and phone use, but I probably won’t.”

Technology has simplified life in many ways for Liz Clark, 49, a Realtor from Rye, N.Y., by allowing her to shop online, stay in touch with friends and keep tabs on her three children. “I can text them, and they get back to me immediately,” Ms. Clark said.

But while mobile devices and PCs have eased stress for some, just about as many said the devices had heightened the amount of stress they felt.

“Every single electronic device absolutely causes some stress,” said Warren Gerhard, 55, of Cape May, N.J. Because Mr. Gerhard, a retired member of the Coast Guard, is a volunteer E.M.T. worker, he cannot turn his cellphone off.

People seem to find it hard to shut down after work. Almost 40 percent check work e-mail after hours or on vacation.

Some people can’t imagine living without their computers. About a third of those polled said they couldn’t, while 65 percent said they either probably or definitely could get along without their PCs. The people who are most computer-dependent tend to be better educated and more affluent.

While most said the use of devices had no effect on the amount of time they spent with their family, a few were concerned. One in seven married respondents said the use of these devices was causing them to see less of their spouses. And 1 in 10 said they spent less time with their children under 18.