

# Social media use increased during COVID-19

Sophia Hsu  
Scroll Editor

Middle schoolers say they spend more time on social media because of COVID-19. From contacting friends, updating followers on their life in quarantine, or using their devices as a tool, it seems that home time is now screen time. In a poll conducted by The Scroll, more than 70 percent of students have said that their screen time and social media use has increased during the pandemic. Being stuck at home makes it hard to shake the temptation of going on your phone. However, is this increased usage used productively or wastefully? How have students' mental health and academic life changed, and are middle schoolers being respectful and kind online?

When some students get social media, their emotional life changes. You may not see it on the outside, but lots of kids are affected internally by what they see online. It's hard to avoid things on the internet as it is everywhere. Emotional change can be changing an emotion due to something you have seen, whether that be happy or sad. Around 32 percent of students have said their emotional life has changed because of social media, and 61 percent of students say it has not.

Lucas Marty, a seventh-grader said, "Social media has obviously affected my emotional mood depending on what I see online. If I find something very sad or depressing or serious, it'll probably make me feel worse. But if it's something that I'm surprised by and is good, it will make me feel better and might make the whole day better."

This was echoed by Ariana Van Hese, a sixth-grader who said, "Social media is a platform used a lot nowadays, and I really like it. It has affected me emotionally but in a positive way. When I get comments on my TikTok page or on Instagram they are supportive and that makes me feel better. I don't really post on Snapchat but I always text my friends on there so for the most part everyone is nice to me."

It seems like middle schoolers are affected by what they see online. Many other students also said that they really feel affected by social media when seeing posts that might make them angry, sad, happy, or jealous.

Along with the idea of emotions, middle schoolers also had a lot to say about the comments said online. Sanna Ekroth, a new student to ASL in grade-seven said, "Sometimes comments can be mean. They can be very upfront about something they don't like, or they can say it in a way that could seem sarcastic or a joke. But overall my comments on social media platforms like TikTok have been positive, and they can be very supportive and can make you feel a lot better about yourself. I think that comments could really help or

tear someone apart."

Going more in-depth about the mean things said online, Georgia Qaragholi, a sixth-grader said, "I was actually cyberbullied online. It really hurts, especially because I was so surprised by the person that was saying things about me. They commented on social media about my personality, looks, how I act, my friends, and my family. It's hard to get cyberbullied because it can really impact your life and it just makes you feel bad about yourself."

Sixty-two percent of students said that the comments toward them had been positive, 4 percent said they were negative, and the rest of the students said that they either didn't have social media or it was a mix.

Separate from the impact of comments on social media, some students' academic lives have also changed. Maya Daley, a seventh-grader said, "Well, I deleted TikTok... around when we started distance learning last year because I found it too addictive and distracting for my academic life. If I had any free time I would mostly go on TikTok, and when I was doing my homework it was distracting, so I deleted it, and now when I'm doing my homework I'm not as distracted."

Van Hese also said, "I always get my homework done, but most of the time I have



Illustration by Mia Mathias

to stay up pretty late to finish it and that is mostly because I might get a notification from someone that texted me or said something on Instagram. After I open my phone to see what it was, I get distracted and I'm hooked."

Along with Ariana, seventh-grader Charles Goshko said, "It used to be negative because I spent more time being online and on social media than doing my homework and sometimes I forget to do it," however,

Goshko said that social media isn't all bad. "It can be positive at times because it can help you with work and has helped me by having resources like my friends to remind me of homework I didn't write down but it means you have to have the right kind of balance."

Yasmine Rivera, a seventh-grader said, "Social media is nice to have, but in distance learning, it was distracting because I would always check my phone. It didn't have a huge effect since there were only two weeks of DLP this year, but last year it was a lot worse and affected my academic life a lot. It's

hard to concentrate on work when friends are texting you and you get notifications." But she also said, "Since I already experienced distance learning last year, my phone has been a lot less of a distraction because I now just don't bring my phone everywhere or I will keep it downstairs."

Phones and social media can be a big distraction, but other students think that they can help as well. Marty said, "Social media has helped me research things that you can't specifically get from Google search or something because it's too obscure or complicated."

Paola Ruffini in seventh grade said, "It distracted me before, but now I just silence my phone which really helped me. It can also help me with my work and being on time for Zoom classes."

Francisco Reis in fifth grade said, "I just work hard to focus on my homework and it is my top priority. I don't get that distracted."

The students who don't get distracted do things like silence their phones, put it away, or even just delete the app. They have a routine.

Students seem to be a mix of opinions when it comes to social media and screen time, but if you want to improve on how much you look at TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and much more, with a simple click of a button or leaving your phone downstairs, distractions can be saved with a little less screen time and social media.

**"I think that comments could really help or tear someone apart."**

— Sanna Ekroth, seventh-grade student