



Social Media: Net Good or Net Bad?

Lesson Overview

Essential Question:

Is social media a net good or a net bad for individuals and society?

Social media plays a powerful role in shaping communication, identity, politics, and culture. In this lesson, students examine key social media vocabulary, connect each concept to real-world examples, and evaluate whether the overall impact of social media is more positive or more negative.

Rather than treating social media as purely good or bad, students are challenged to **weigh trade-offs**, recognize nuance, and support conclusions with evidence.

Grade Level

- 8–12
- Especially well suited for:
 - Civics
 - Government
 - Psychology
 - Media Literacy
 - Speech / Communications

Estimated Time

- One 50–90 minute class period
(Can be extended into a writing or portfolio assignment)

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Define and explain key social media vocabulary
- Apply abstract terms to real-world examples
- Analyze positive and negative impacts of social media
- Collaborate to research and discuss contemporary examples
- Construct a written argument supported by evidence

Key Vocabulary & Definitions

Teachers may adjust or add terms based on course focus.

- **Algorithm**
A set of rules or calculations used by social media platforms to decide what content users see, often based on past behavior, likes, and engagement.
 - **Echo Chamber**
An environment in which people are exposed mostly to opinions that reinforce their own beliefs, limiting exposure to differing viewpoints.
 - **Filter Bubble**
A situation where algorithms personalize content so heavily that users are isolated from information that challenges their perspectives.
 - **Misinformation**
False or inaccurate information that is shared without the intent to deceive.
 - **Disinformation**
False information that is deliberately created and spread to mislead or manipulate people.
 - **Virality**
The rapid spread of content across social media platforms, often driven by emotional reactions rather than accuracy.
 - **Influencer**
An individual with a large or dedicated online following who can shape opinions, trends, or consumer behavior.
 - **Engagement**
User interaction with content, such as likes, comments, shares, or views, often used to measure a post's success.
 - **Anonymity**
The ability to interact online without revealing one's real identity.
 - **Cancel Culture**
The practice of publicly criticizing, boycotting, or withdrawing support from individuals or organizations due to perceived wrongdoing.
 - **Digital Footprint**
The lasting record of a person's online activity, including posts, comments, likes, and shared content.
 - **Confirmation Bias**
The tendency to seek out, interpret, and believe information that supports existing beliefs while ignoring opposing evidence.
 - **Polarization**
The process by which opinions move toward extremes, reducing compromise and increasing division between groups.
 - **Surveillance Capitalism**
An economic system in which companies collect, analyze, and sell user data to predict and influence behavior.
 - **Social Comparison**
The act of comparing oneself to others, often leading to feelings of inadequacy or pressure based on curated online images.
 - **Online Activism (Slacktivism vs. Activism)**
Efforts to promote social or political change online, which may range from meaningful action to minimal, symbolic participation.
-

Lesson Structure

1 Opening Question (Whole Class)

Pose the question to students:

Is social media a net good or a net bad?

- Students respond informally:
 - Raise hands
 - Stand on a spectrum
 - Quick-write (2–3 minutes)

Emphasize:

There is no “correct” answer yet — the goal is to examine evidence.

2 Vocabulary Exploration & Discussion

Introduce the vocabulary list.

For each term:

- Review the definition
- Discuss:
 - How does this concept operate on social media?
 - Does it push social media toward being a **net good** or a **net bad**?

Encourage students to recognize:

- Some terms can support **both sides**
- Context matters

3 Partner Activity: Real-World Examples

Directions (Student-Facing):

1. You and your partner will be assigned (or choose) **2–4 vocabulary terms**.
2. Find **real-world examples** of each term in action.
 - News articles
 - Social media platforms
 - Influencers
 - Political movements
 - Personal or observed experiences (no usernames required)
3. For each example, explain:
 - What is happening?
 - Which vocabulary term applies?
 - Does this example suggest social media is helping or harming society?

Teachers may:

- Provide curated links
- Allow student-driven research
- Require citations depending on grade level

Class Share & Synthesis

Pairs briefly share:

- One strong example
- Why it supports “net good” or “net bad”

As examples accumulate, guide students to notice:

- Patterns
- Repeated harms or benefits
- Contradictions

Optional:

- Create a T-chart or spectrum on the board

Written Response (Assessment)

Prompt:

*After examining social media vocabulary and real-world examples, is social media a net good or a net bad? Support your answer with at least **three specific concepts** from today’s lesson and real-world evidence.*

Requirements (Adjustable):

- Clear position
- Use of vocabulary
- Specific examples
- Thoughtful reasoning



Assessment Options

Formative

- Participation in discussion
- Partner examples
- Exit ticket: *Which term changed your thinking the most?*

Summative

- Written response
- Short essay
- Portfolio entry
- Presentation or debate



Differentiation & Extensions

Extensions

- Create a **personal digital footprint reflection**
- Debate: *Should social media companies be regulated?*
- Analyze algorithms on a specific platform
- Compare social media impacts across age groups

Differentiation

- Sentence starters for writing
- Reduced vocabulary list
- Small-group instead of partner work
- Graphic organizer provided