

# The benefits non- benefits of online interactions

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



The Benefits/Non-benefits of Online Interactions 1. Introduction The internet has become a more and more relied upon medium in peoples' everyday lives over the past decades since its inception. People use it to do their shopping, do their taxes, research any number of topics, and engage in communications. People send emails to one another, receive online help with various problems, and carry on real time conversations using chat rooms and instant messengers. Several studies have been completed to test whether this seemingly increasing reliance on internet-mediated social communication is beneficial or detrimental to communication skills and social interaction. It has been found in these previous studies that the results are quite contradicting. Such studies that are developed to test the positive nature of this new communication medium have found that the internet is complimentary and that relationships borne online are healthy and have positive implications. One such study, " Online Chat Rooms: Virtual Spaces of Interaction for Socially Oriented People," found that online relationships are not only rich and genuine in character, but are more quickly set up and straight-forward than face-to-face encounters, cutting out the uncomfortable first meeting jitters that many people face. In an on-the-go society, this is very appealing and beneficial. Another study which revealed the positive attributes of internet-mediated communication is " Psychological Predictors of Internet Social Communication." This study concluded that online social communication is more likely to be an outlet for sociable persons, rather than a compensatory mechanism for the shy and anxious. Each study reveals that communication online is an extension of traditional social behaviors, not a replacement. Other proposals seek to find the relationship

between internet communication and diminishing social skills, also relating loneliness and depression to increasing dependency on the World Wide Web.

" Loneliness and Social Uses of the Internet" provides findings that the internet is associated with loneliness and social anxiety in a vice-versa relationship. It reports that loneliness often times leads to individuals' reliance on internet companionship, while also creating this detachment from the face-to-face social world. A similar correlation was made in the study entitled " Preference for Online Social Interaction- A Theory of Problematic Internet use and Psychosocial Well-Being." This study suggested that lonely and depressed people develop a predilection for internet contact, and would lead to negative results interrelated to their online time. This study's suggestions were backed by their findings. The results of these articles give a need for further study to determine the close relationship between amount of internet use and proficient social skills. This idea is important because of the growing importance put upon the internet, and its seeming replacement of traditional social interaction for the younger generations. In laymen's terms, how much is too much for the development of younger minds and their social skills. 2. Hypothesis/Variables For this proposal, the idea is that online interactions are complimentary to traditional, face-to-face relations, to a certain extent. When exceeded, it becomes a less personal, detrimental way of communicating, retarding customary social skills. With excess internet use, people, teens to young adults in particular, are becoming socially inept outside the realm of email and instant message. We hypothesis that internet use, and social skills, have a curvilinear relationship, where, communication, knowledge, relationships,

and other online interactions are beneficial for an individual's growth, to a point. Exceeding that point will cause a detrimental effect on social skills and outward interaction. (The Null Hypothesis states that there is not a relationship between number of hours spent on the internet and affect on social skills.) A secondary, more specific hypothesis to be tested is that the ratio of internet hours (hours spent communicating versus all other hours online) will determine social skills as well. The more internet time spent communicating with others, the worse the outward social skills. (The Null Hypothesis says that there is no correlation between internet hours spent communicating and social proficiency.) The independent variable in this study is the time spent on the internet in number of total hours per week. Reliant upon this variable, the dependent variable is social skills, conceptually defined as one's ability to personally interact with others, confidence, articulation, and minimal anxiety when interacting with people on a face-to-face basis.

3. Methodology To test our hypothesis, a nonrandom, convenience sampling technique will be administered to an entry level class, on a university campus, that is determined to have the necessary dynamics for the test. This technique is the best way to obtain samples that will result in an accurate representation of our hypothesis because it will provide the age group that has been, and is most influenced by the medium of the internet, and also provides an easily accessible number of both sexes, and a variety of demographic groups. This is important because results need to include people brought up in different surroundings, have the opposite sexes different views, and have the age where individuals are able to reflect on how the internet affects them socially. The sample created by this technique

will be a group of 250 subjects, half men and half women, 18 to 26 year old college students. The group reflects a sample size that is adequate for good representational results, and the construct and age range will give the most telling results. Other techniques, such as random sampling, including systematic sampling, would give us to broad of a range of people, those that wouldn't give us the responses necessary to prove or disprove our posed outcome. The younger and older people that would be included using this technique would not be able to discern how the internet has affected them in the way we are testing, because in case, the internet has been too much of an influence and not enough of an influence, respectively. The independent variable in this study will not be manipulated to obtain the results that are intended. The participants that will be partaking in the tests determine the variance of the independent variable, through reporting their weekly internet use. Assessing the independent variable will use a ratio level data scale, where the participants will fill out how many hours per week that they spend on the internet. This will give a value to be deterministic of social skills. To test the ratio of communication internet hours versus total online hours, the subjects will fill out a multiple section questionnaire to determine internet experience, overall internet use, and reasons for internet use. Examples of each section will be as follows: How many hours do you spend using email or instant messenger?; How many for work/research?; How many for entertainment?; How many are used to stay current on events and news? These questions will give us values for hours spent online and why. The value given to these results will give us information on the healthy number of hours spent online communicating. The dependent variable, social skills

and proficiency, will be determined using the same questionnaire, in a section that will record their opinions and feelings of their own social skills. A 20 question Likert-type scale will be used to give value to each question on a 5 point scale, with 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree. The types of questions will include: I get anxious when talking to new people.; I am able to give confident class presentations.; I go out of my way to talk in class.; and I go out of my way to confront/meet new people. This type of data collection method is an interval type, which has a scale with meaningful space between points, but lacks an absolute zero. The results of this section will be assessed, and a value for overall social skills determined. As stated before, the benefits of using this type of sampling is the control given to selecting participants for the study. We are able to get subjects that will be best able to understand and articulate the affects that the internet has had on them overall and socially, and draw from large pool, and a variety of backgrounds and opinions. However, this technique does have a generalizability flaw, or external validity problem, where, although the subject pool does offer a wide variety of demographics, it is still from a certain area that has its own influences and resulting characteristic traits specific to the region. Even with this as a possible flaw, we feel that the subject participation and variety in demographics is significant enough to draw the conclusions we are testing for. In regards to the actual testing method, the personal reflection questionnaire gives us the most easily gathered information, and most telling and accurate reflection of the individual's internet involvement, and their perception of their own social skills. This can also pose an internal validity problem, where a subject may

have a perceived social level that is not accurate with the established scale. This action for measurement is still a very good plan of action, because other measurement methods, such as outside observer techniques, will be too time consuming, more complex than needed, and gives too much room for interpretation. Using an internal results questionnaire will be most efficient and accurate. In terms of reliability, a test-retest approach will provide the stability over time necessary for a reliable method, administering the test one week later to the same, or very similar, group of people. Because we will be administering the questionnaire in a big lecture hall, the problem we could have with reliability is the fact that a slightly different group of people could be in class on the second day the questionnaire was given out. Though the group could be somewhat different, it should still give the results we are looking for, because we are testing such a variety of people, and there shouldn't be much variance in the results of the large group of people. 4. Statistics The testing methods used above will give us two sets of data that will be plotted on separate graphs, and then inputted into curvilinear and linear regression statistical tests. The two graphs will be the total internet hours compared to perceived social skills, and the hours of online communication time compared to perceived social skills. The internet hour's coordinates are the X values (independent), and the social skill variable is the Y (dependent) value. Based upon the predicted inverted U-shaped curvilinear relationship of the variables, the more hours spent on the internet results in an increase in social skills, but passed a certain point, will result in a negative affect on social skills. The other graph should support the linear negative graph, where more time spent communicating on the internet will

decrease traditional social skills and proficiency. To both data sets, a regression test will be used to determine a correlation and then the best fit, or most beneficial number of hours spent on the internet. For the total number of online time, a quadratic curvilinear equation will be used to find the optimal value for X based upon the best value for Y, or the peak of the curvilinear graph. The reason for this approach is that there is a set of values that are the best fit for maximizing social skill based on internet use, and will show a positive side to total hours and also a negative side. The second hypothesis requires a simple linear regression, where if hypothesized correctly, will result in a negative ( $r$ ) value, and negative correlation. This correlation will tell us if in fact our prediction was correct. Then, with this regression method, one is able to predict their level of social skill based upon an online communication input. Results of each method are best understood and applied using regression equations, because a beneficial number of online hours can be determined. Because an association was set up in our hypothesis, stating a relationship between online hours and social skill, indicating that there was a direction of the relationship, the derived ( $F$ ) values will be compared to one-tailed critical values to determine relevancy. If our hypotheses were correct these tests should show that there is a number of total hours spent on the internet which is most beneficial to social skills, and that the increase of online communication will decrease one's face-to-face interaction ability.