

For Release

# Teen Social Media Use and Media Literacy 2025: A Pilot Study of Rhode Island Eighth Grade Students

By: Mary Anderson, Madeleine Esch, Devon Torres, Cathleen Carr

Mary Anderson, PhD. Brodsky Chair U.S. Constitutional Democracy and Culture and Professor of Political Science, Salve Regina University

Cathleen Carr, Executive Director, newportFILM

Madeleine Esch, PhD. Department Chair and Associate Professor of Communication, Department of English, Communications, and Media, Salve Regina University

Devon Torres, Community and Education Manager, newportFILM

For media or other inquiries, please contact Julie Miller, Salve Regina University, [julia.miller@salve.edu](mailto:julia.miller@salve.edu) and Jess Walsh, newportFILM, [jwalsh@newportfilm.com](mailto:jwalsh@newportfilm.com)

About Salve Regina University:

Salve Regina University, a private Catholic institution of higher education founded by the Sisters of Mercy, seeks wisdom and promotes universal justice. The University, through teaching and research, prepares students for responsible lives by imparting and expanding knowledge, developing skills, and cultivating enduring values.

About newportFILM:

Founded in 2010, newportFILM is Rhode Island's only organization dedicated exclusively to presenting current documentary films. Serving more than 20,000 attendees annually, newportFILM curates year-round screenings, education programs, and community partnerships that foster media literacy, learning, and connection across the state.

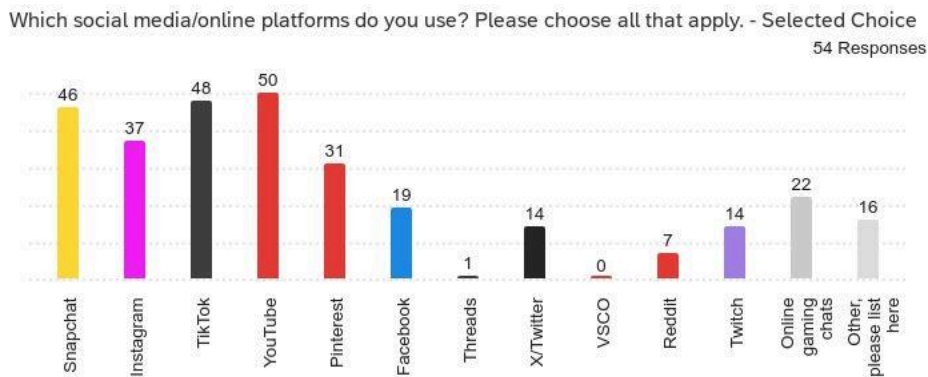
A Student-Centered Collaboration.

Salve Regina and newportFILM created this pilot study to understand Rhode Island teens' use of social media and media literacy. Under the supervision of Dr. Mary Anderson, Salve students created and conducted a survey of eighth grade Rhode Island students enrolled in a public middle school. The survey was conducted from November 6-November 10, 2025, using Qualtrics. In consultation with the principal, parents and students consented to the survey and a field trip to the campus of Salve to engage in hands-on learning and receive the results of the survey. The full questions used in this report can be found in the appendix. The survey used in this research was reviewed and approved by the Salve Regina University's institutional review board (IRB) to protect the rights of research participants.

The data presented in the figures below are choice counts. We have calculated percentages in our analysis when it makes sense to do so. A total of 55 students consented to and responded to the survey; not every student responded to every question. The number of responses is displayed in the right-hand corner of each figure.

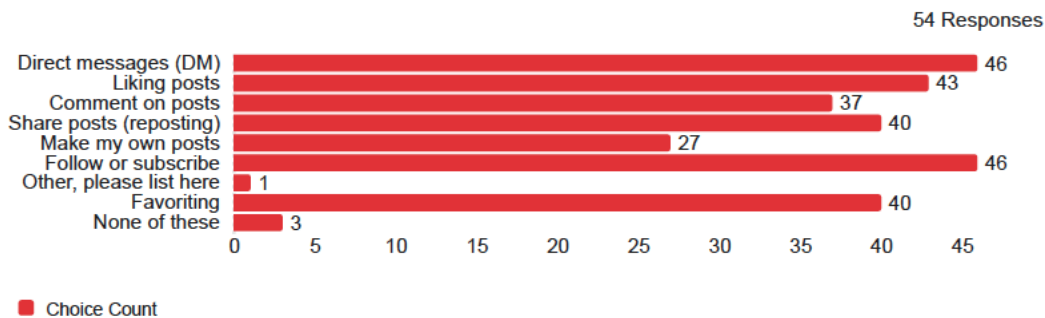
## Student Engagement on Social Media

Students use a variety of platforms but the top three most used include YouTube (93%), TikTok (88%), and Snapchat (85%). Over half also use Instagram (68%) and Pinterest (57%). Facebook, online gaming chats, X/Twitter, and Twitch are used less.



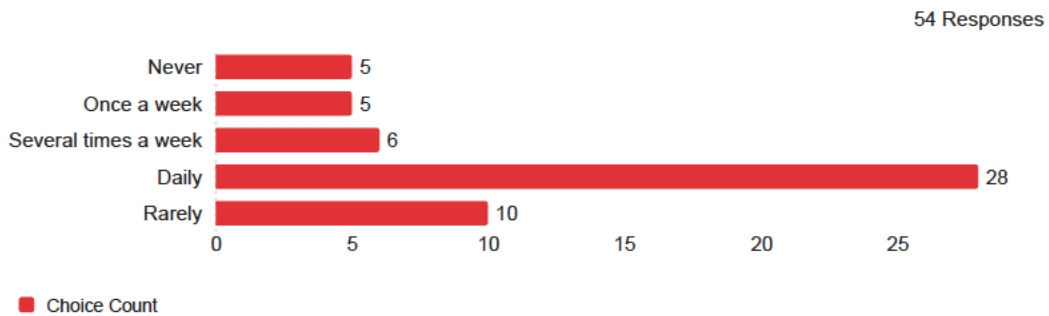
Students are actively engaged when they are using social media. Students DM or direct message (85%), follow/subscribe (85%) and like posts (77%) more than they use social media for commenting or making their own posts.

How do you engage on social media? Please check all that apply. - Selected Choice



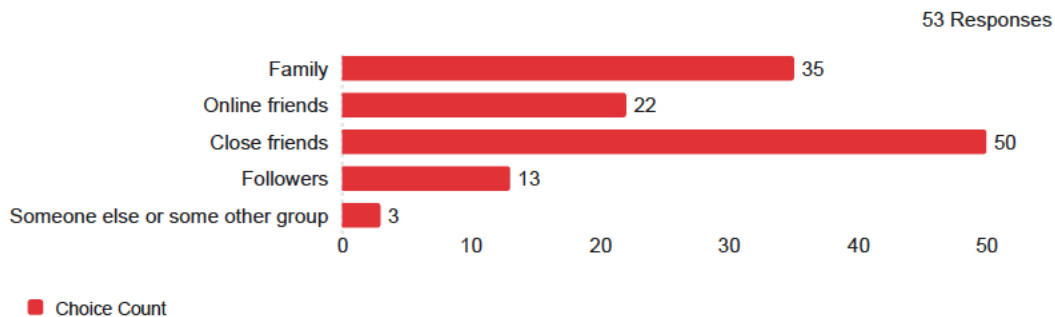
When it comes to sharing content that they've seen online with others, over half of them share daily (52%). Meanwhile, 37% share rarely, once a week, or never.

How often do you share content that you have seen on social media with others online?



They share social media content mostly with close friends (94%) and family (66%).

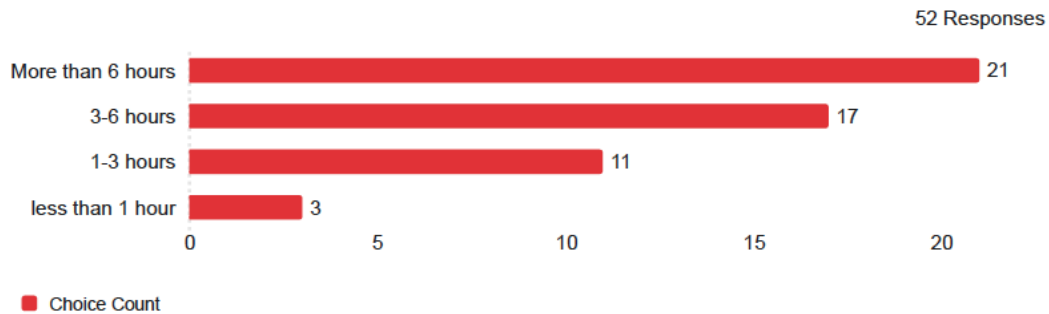
Who do you share social media content with? Please check all that apply. - Selected Choice



## Time Spent on Social Media

Students are spending a lot of time on social media every day. Forty percent spend more than 6 hours a day on social media; thirty-three percent spend between 3-6 hours a day. Cumulatively that adds up to nearly one full work week (40 hours a week) that students are on social media.

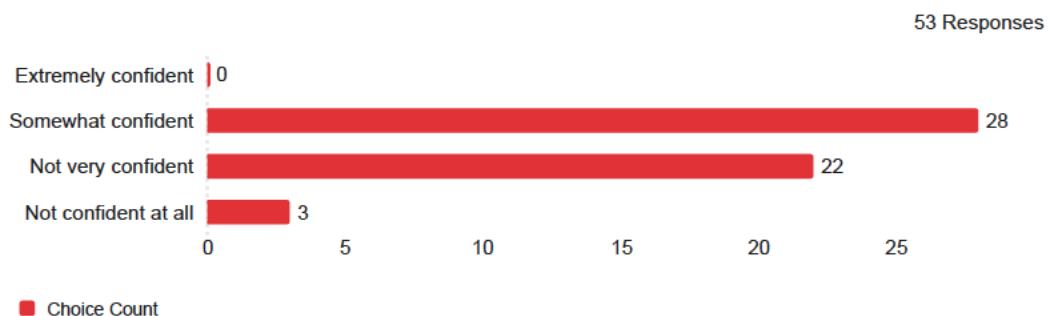
If you had to guess, on average, how much time do you spend on social media each day?



## Media Literacy

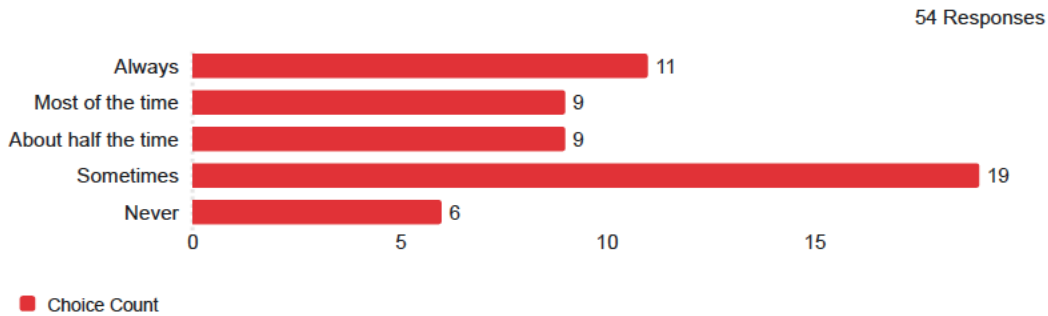
In an age where so much social media content is AI generated and often riddled with misinformation, students are wary of what they see online. None of them were extremely confident in the news they see on social media and just over half (52%) were somewhat confident that the news they see on social media is accurate. Forty-seven percent of students were not very confident or not confident at all that the news on social media was accurate. This suggests there is some critical thinking occurring among students when it comes to what they see on social media.

How confident are you that the news you see on social media is accurate?



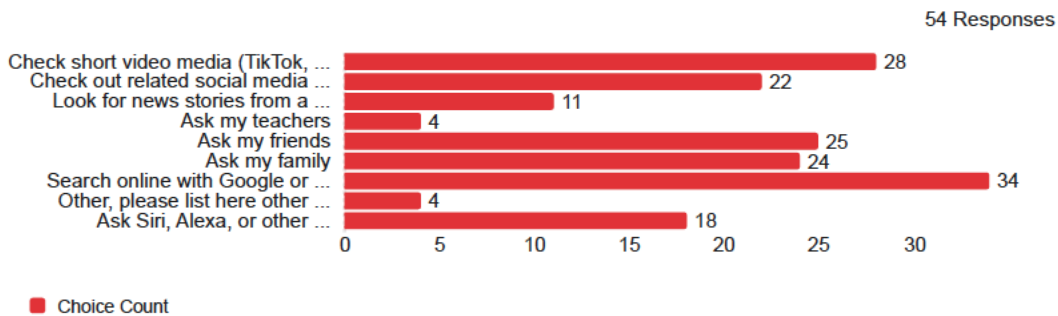
But despite the lack of confidence in what they see on social media, students are not checking very often to see if the stories they see online are true. Less than half (46%) sometimes or never check to see if the stories are accurate. Just over a third of them (37%) check always or most of the time.

How often do you check stories you see online or on social media to see if they are true?



When it comes checking if what they are seeing on social media is accurate, students employ a variety of strategies including checking short videos (52%) and other related social media (41%). They ask their friends (46%) and family (44%), and search online (63%) or use AI assistance (33%). The source they turn to the least often is teachers—only 7% indicated they asked their teachers if something that they saw on social media was accurate.

What are strategies that you use to check your information? - Selected Choice

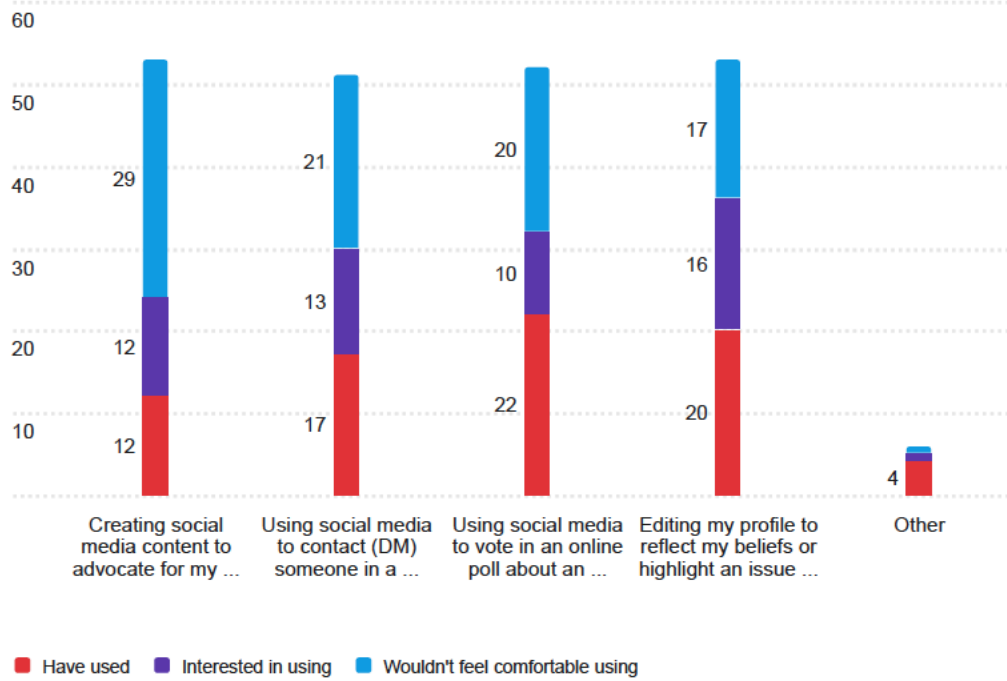


## Social Media as a tool for Civic Engagement

Social media is often used as a tool for advocacy and civic engagement, a place where people turn to share ideas with others, contact people in power such as elected officials, and raise awareness about issues that are important. More students have used social media to contact a person in power (33%), vote in an online poll (42%), and editing their profile to reflect their beliefs (38%), than had used social media to create content to advocate for an issue on social media (23%).

# Social media is a tool that you can use to advocate for an issue that matte...

52 Responses



## Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

Do you use social media or other online platforms?

Yes / No

Which social media/online platform do you use? Please choose all that apply.

Snapchat

Instagram

Tik Tok

You Tube

Pinterest

Facebook

Threads

X/Twitter

VSCO

Reddit

Twitch

Online gaming chats

Other, please list

How do you engage on social media? Please check all that apply.

Direct messages (DM)

Liking posts

Comment on posts

Share posts (reposting)

Make my own posts

Follow or subscribe

Favoriting

Other, please list

None of these

How often do you share content that you have seen on social media with others online?

Never

Rarely

Once a week

Several times a week

Daily

Who do you share social media content with? Please check all that apply.

Family

Online friends

Close friends

Followers

Someone else or some other group

How confident are you that the news you see on social media is accurate?

Extremely confident

Somewhat confident

Not very confident

Not confident at all

If you had to guess, on average, how much time do you spend on social media each day?

More than 6 hours

3-6 hours

1-3 hours

Less than 1 hour

How often do you check stories you see online or on social media to see if they are true?

Always

Most of the time

About half the time

Sometimes

Never

What are strategies that you use to check your information?

Check short video media (TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube shorts)

Check out related social media posts

Look for news stories from a newspaper or TV news app or website

Search online with Google or other search engine

Ask my teachers

Ask my family

Ask my friends

Ask Siri, Alexa, or other automated assistant

Other, please list here other places you seek out information

Social media is a tool that you can use to advocate for an issue that matters to you. Which of the following have you used in the past or are interested in learning?

Creating social media content to advocate for my beliefs

Using social media to contact (DM) someone in a position of power about a concern

Using social media to vote in an online poll about an important issue

Editing my profile to reflect my beliefs or highlight an issue important to me

Other