

WHY PEOPLE POST AND SHARE ON-LINE

Social media content now dominates the online world. According to the latest statistics, Twitter (X) saw a 29% annual increase in users, reaching an impressive 187 million people who send out more than 500 million tweets daily [2]. YouTube users upload 400 hours of video every minute, and Facebook attracts 2.8 billion active users each month, with the average user spending around twenty hours on the platform [4]. In just a short period of time, social media has reshaped the Internet and now is influencing how society functions. Due to these transformations, a typical morning of an average person begins with a scroll through Facebook, quickly browsing recent posts and liking those that grab their attention. Millions of people repeat this process every day. But what makes certain content stand out enough to be shared, while so much else is overlooked? Experts generally point to five key reasons behind what drives social media sharing.

1. **To Express Our Identity.** One of the most powerful reasons we share on social media is rooted in how we perceive ourselves, or to be more accurate, how we want others to see us. According to a survey by *The New York Times*, 68% of participants said they share content to help others understand who they are and what they stand for [3]. Psychologists explain this through the concept of two selves: the “*real self*” (our true nature) and the “*ideal self*” (the version we aspire to be). Much of our behavior is driven by the desire to align more closely with that ideal self. As a result, the posts we share can serve as a curated version of the person we want to present to the world. For example, supporting a political cause might signal our beliefs, a humorous post might reflect our wit, and sharing music could reveal our taste.

Additionally, social media platforms often reinforce this behavior through positive feedback. The more we post, the more we receive likes, comments, and followers – rewards that boost our self-esteem. This cycle confirms the identity we present online and motivates us to keep posting in search of more affirmation.

0. **To Maintain Relationships.** As social beings, we naturally seek to build and sustain meaningful connections. Sharing content online helps us do that. With our hectic schedules and limited time for face-to-face interaction, social media offers a quick and convenient way to stay in touch with friends and family. This role became especially significant during the COVID-19 pandemic, when physical separation was at its peak. In many ways, social platforms stepped in to fill the void, helping people reconnect and maintain their social bonds.

A survey found that 43% of participants felt that social media helped lift their mood during times of stress, anxiety, or depression. Among young people, nearly 90% said it was either “very” or “somewhat” important in staying in touch during the pandemic [5].

People especially like to share content that has specific relevance to a relationship or believe it might be interesting to their friends. For example, they often share content that captures a mutual interest, a shared experience, a private joke, or an idea for a future plan.

3. To Gain a Reward. Sometimes, person's motivation to share on social media is driven by the promise of a reward. Brands frequently use social platforms to engage with consumers by offering incentives – whether it's a free item, a discount, or a chance to win something. Many users will "like" a page or "share" a post specifically to access these perks. In fact, one study found that 67% of people who followed brand pages on Facebook did so just to receive exclusive deals [1]. On Instagram, contest-related posts tend to perform especially well, attracting 3.5 times more likes and 64 times more comments than typical content.

4. To Feel Connected and Accepted. Another reason users share content online is to feel connected and accepted by others. Positive reactions, i.e. comments and likes, can reinforce our *sense of belonging*. Most people would admit they feel better when a post is widely liked than when it's ignored. One study clearly demonstrated this: frequent Facebook users were told to use the platform as usual, but without knowing that no one would respond to anything they posted. No likes, no comments – just silence. By the end of the study, many participants reported feeling a drop in self-esteem and overall well-being.

This and similar studies highlight how important social validation is in the digital space. Feedback from others helps us feel seen and connected. However, the need for approval can also become a source of pressure. Many users start to feel they *must* post only content that will please others, which can lead to anxiety, stress, and even 'a disconnect' from their true self.

5. To Share Valuable or Inspiring Content. Many people are motivated to share content simply because they believe it has something worthwhile to offer – whether it's entertaining, insightful, or inspiring. In The New York Times study, 94% of participants said they think carefully about whether what they share will be useful or meaningful to others [3]. It might be a funny video, a thought-provoking quote, or an informative article – whatever it is, we often share with the hope that others will enjoy or benefit from it as we did.

Additionally, social media has become more than just a place to connect with others – it increasingly shapes how we view the world. Researchers note that it influences our perceptions and interactions, and many users now see social platforms as tools for creativity, learning, and exploring other cultures. By sharing content, we not only engage with our communities but also expand our awareness beyond our everyday surroundings.

Conclusion. Understanding what motivates people to share is key to creating content that resonates. The better you understand your audience's intentions, the more likely your content is to connect, engage, and be shared widely.

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