

Massucci's Take: Is social-media making us less social?

[Anthony Massucci](#) 

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Recently, I noticed I'm using fewer cell phone minutes as I spend more time on Twitter and Facebook. It has me wondering, is social media making me less social?

How about President Barack Obama?

Will he be less likely to speak his mind in public after [ABC News reporters used Twitter](#) to spread his off-the-record comment about Kanye West acting like a "jackass" on MTV's video music awards show? TMZ.com, owned by *DailyFinance*'s parent company AOL, then published [audio](#) and [video](#) of those comments. Will such incidents cause celebrities and non-celebrities to be more on guard for fear that their every move may be made public via social media?



Melanie Kramer, AOL

It seems plausible, especially as more of us walk around with cell phones equipped with cameras, voice and video recorders. Fact is, we're all in danger of having embarrassing behavior broadcast to the world.

And it's only going to get worse. The number of cell phones offering such features are multiplying, says [Ilya Laurs, CEO](#) of San Mateo, California-based GetJar Inc., which helps develop cell phone applications. According to GetJar, [mobile phones are reaching audiences that other media can't](#) and the number of people getting information from the mobile internet will triple by 2014. Already, the company says that 72 percent of consumers report that they now use mobile internet more than PC-based internet. So imagine yelling at the manager at your local grocery store for a worthwhile reason. Now imagine having that discourse posted on [YouTube](#) and having it seen by your grandmother and countless people half-a-world away - in a very different context. You might get the 15-minutes of fame you've always, or never, wanted. Would you have been better off swallowing your pride and avoiding the altercation?

Dr. Pamela Rutledge, director of Boston-based Media Psychology Research Center, says fears caused by social media are no different than those sparked by other technology changes seen in history. Socrates didn't like it when people started writing, she says, because he thought it would take away our ability to remember. Some people, such as Rutledge's grandmother, worried after the telephone was invented that people would no longer visit her.

"People don't like change much," Rutledge says. "Biologically, we're wired to worry about change. We like things to stay the same because that's how we find stability."

No wonder, then, that people now fear that social media sites such as [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) will actually make us less social.

But maybe those people have it wrong. [Jeff Pulver](#), who co-founded [Vonage](#) and hosts [Twitter conferences](#) in cities including Los Angeles, New York and Tel Aviv, argues that social media should be celebrated, not feared. "Social media helps increase self-expression," he says. "It provides a platform for everyone's voice to be heard. People who are not confident about their voice, discover that their voice matters."

Pulver argues that President Obama's "jackass" comment may have been shared over [CompuServe](#) or AOL's [AIM](#) instant-messaging service even a decade ago. So don't blame Twitter. It just happens to be the forum used in 2009. In some ways, Twitter has had a transformative power the way the telephone or radio did when they were introduced.

"No one at Twitter envisioned that it would be a change-agent for politics or that it would be a platform allowing celebrities to talk to their fans or that Hollywood producers would live in fear each time a movie opens," Pulver says. That's because folks on Twitter can quickly praise or condemn a new release to thousands of people, possibly leading to the film's success or demise.

Perhaps a better question is whether social media is actually making society *more* social? Laurs, Rutledge and Pulver think that's the case - and they may be right. Even so, the next time you think you may [flip your lid](#) in public, be aware that there may be a camera or microphone pointed your way.

Now, excuse me while I update my Facebook status.

Anthony Massucci is a senior writer and columnist for DailyFinance. You may follow him on Twitter at [hianthony](#).