
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Is social media dead?



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil

Hello, this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Pippa

And I'm Pippa. Whatever you think of social media, in less than a generation it has changed the internet. Facebook, Twitter, now known as X, and in the early days MySpace used to be places to post messages to friends or share photos of your breakfast. But with the rise of AI, the fun of connecting with friends changed into something much stranger, as Tristan and Asma, presenters of BBC World Service programme The Global Story, found out.

Tristan Redman

Oh... What is this?

Asma Khalid

I think it's a man who's supposed to look like Jesus...

Tristan Redman

It's a man who looks a bit like...

Asma Khalid

...who also looks like his dog.

Tristan Redman

He's been AI-ed, right?

Asma Khalid

Has to be AI-ed.

Tristan Redman

He's holding his dog and his face looks like his dog, so he's half Jesus, half dog.

Neil

A half-dog, half-Jesus photo is generated by AI and posted online. It's an example of how the use of AI in social media has evolved so much that today it's hard to know what's created by humans and what's not.

Pippa

In this episode, we'll discuss how social media is changing in the age of AI and, as usual, we'll learn some useful new words and phrases. And remember, you'll find all the vocabulary along with a transcript on our website bbclearningenglish.com.

Neil

But first, I have a question for you, Pippa. You mentioned MySpace as one of the earliest social media platforms, but the first electronic message was actually sent much earlier, in 1844, using a series of dots and dashes tapped out by hand on a telegraph wire. So, what was this new form of communication called? Was it:

- a) semaphore,
- b) dial-up, or
- c) Morse code?

Pippa

I think Morse code.

Neil

OK. We'll find out the answer later. The introduction of AI has turned some users away from social media. Indeed, a recent report found that social media activity peaked in 2022 and has been going down ever since. Millennial and digital native Kyle Chayka is a writer specialising in social media. He spoke about the problem to Tristan Redmond for BBC World Service programme The Global Story.

Tristan Redman

OK. Kyle, was there a moment for you when you felt like social media changed?

Kyle Chayka

Oh man! I mean... In 2015/2016, I think, in the United States, when Twitter became the hub of election discourse, it kind of **shattered the illusion** that the internet was a space you could go to, just like, have fun and express yourself and find cool friends and discuss the latest **cultural happenings**.

Neil

Kyle uses the informal expression, "**Oh man!**" – an exclamation showing excitement or enthusiasm. He remembers the internet in 2016, when Twitter was full of angry political debate about the US elections. For Kyle, this **shattered the illusion** that the internet was fun. If something **shatters your illusions**, it destroys a false belief you hold, making you realise an unpleasant truth.

Pippa

Kyle thinks social media was friendlier before – an online space to make friends, have fun and discuss the latest **cultural happenings**. A **cultural happening** is an event that embodies the values and interests of a particular group at a particular time in history. For example, the hit television show Game of Thrones was a **cultural happening** for millennials in the 2010s.

Neil

So, what's the future of social media? Will the amount of AI-generated content continue to grow? Here's Kyle Chayka again, sharing his thoughts with BBC World Service's The Global Story:

Kyle Chayka

We see the large social networks and the tech **behemoths** leaning into generated content, and I think users don't actually want that. I think it's a **novelty** for now and people will drift away from it. So instead, I see people **gravitating towards** smaller online spaces, connecting more closely with individual voices, like creator types, and just posting less in general.

Pippa

Kyle thinks the tech **behemoths**, meaning large and powerful companies, will continue pushing AI. However, many people want content which is more personal and meaningful. They think AI is a **novelty** – something which is new and unusual and therefore exciting, but which probably won't last.

Neil

Instead, Kyle thinks people will **gravitate towards** smaller online communities. If you **gravitate towards** something, you are naturally drawn or attracted to it.

Pippa

Social media has changed fast and is still in motion. It's come a long way from the first electronic messages of 1844 which you mentioned in your question, Neil. So, did I get the correct answer?

Neil

I asked what this new form of communication was, and you said that it was c) Morse code. And that, Pippa, is the correct answer. OK. Let's recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with the exclamation, "**Oh man!**" used to show excitement or enthusiasm.

Pippa

To **shatter an illusion** is to destroy someone's misconceptions, causing them to realise an unpleasant reality.

Neil

A **cultural happening** is an event that embodies the values and interests of a particular social group at a particular time.

Pippa

A **behemoth** is an extremely large and powerful company or organisation.

Neil

A **novelty** is something which is new and unusual and therefore exciting.

Pippa

And finally, if you **gravitate towards** something, you are naturally attracted to it. Once again, our six minutes are up, but if you're still using the internet, head over to our website, bbclearningenglish.com, where you'll find a worksheet and quiz for this episode. See you again soon but, for now, it's goodbye!

Neil

Goodbye!

VOCABULARY

oh man!

(informal) spoken exclamation used to show excitement or enthusiasm

shatter an illusion

destroy someone's false belief or misconception, causing them to realise the unpleasant truth

cultural happening

event that embodies the interests and values of a particular cultural group at a particular time in history

behemoth

extremely large and powerful company or organisation

novelty

something which is new and unusual and therefore exciting

gravitate towards (something or someone)

be naturally drawn or attracted to something or someone