

Imagine,

and Act

Connect,



Idealist's Roadmap for Building
Community in a Disconnected World

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● For more information and to join us, visit idealist.org

An Introduction to Idealist

Helping Build a Better World Since 1995

Idealist's mission is to help build a world where all people can lead free and dignified lives by inviting individuals everywhere to imagine, connect, and act. We carry out our mission by actively connecting individuals with opportunities to do good, enabling people the world over to have a positive impact on their community.

While we continue to be *the* online space for nonprofit career and volunteer opportunities, through the decades, we have evolved.

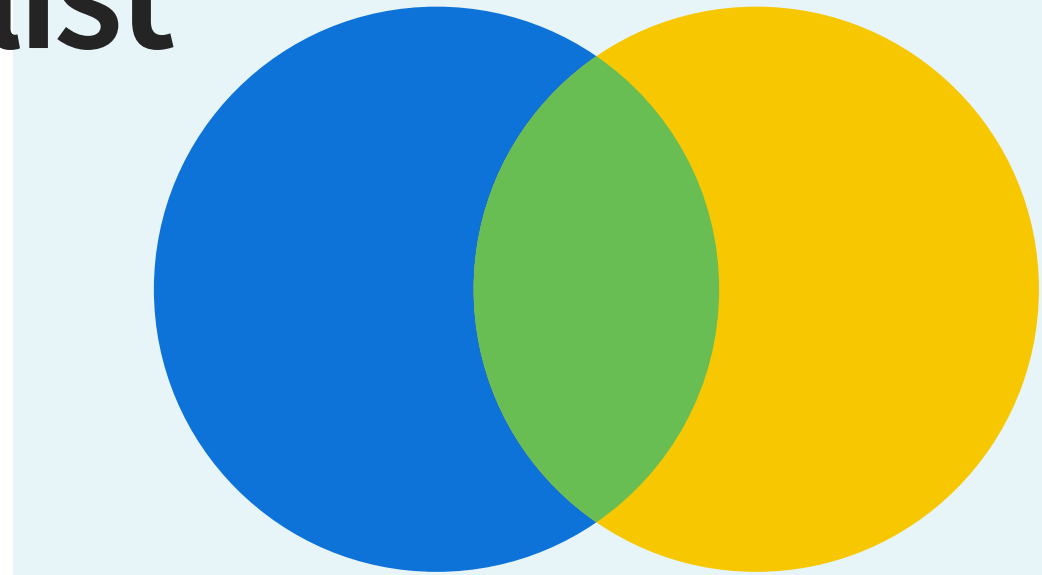
Never straying from our original mission, we have integrated programmatic, technical, and philosophical components to meet the changing needs of our sector, as well as the shifting interests of our diverse audience. Over the years—and especially since 2020—Idealist

has considered how to offer space and social permission, at scale, to individuals who want to make that critical move from intention to action.

We see a world full of good intentions waiting to be realized, meaningful connections waiting

to be made, and big ideas waiting to be shared. To close the gap between what we know in our hearts to be possible and the reality we see around us, it will take a movement built on community, kindness, and trust. We believe that Idealist can

play a pivotal role in making the move from intention to action more accessible, community-driven, and scalable, and we're confident that we already have the essential elements of a digital ecosystem in which this movement can take root.



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Join Us in Connecting Communities and Celebrating the Good

The Isolation Epidemic

A Troubling Decrease in Human Connection

and diversity of relationships that create a sense of belonging, and being cared for, valued, and supported.³ And while we may not all feel the same urge for connection, we would be remiss to ignore the degree to which social connectedness impacts every aspect of our lives. Indeed, our sense of connection and civic responsibility affects individual health and wellbeing as well as the health and resilience of our respective communities.

By nature, we as humans are community driven¹. Over thousands of years the creation of social and cooperative communities has played a vital role in our survival, and it is widely accepted that our need for social connectedness “is as fundamental as our need for food or water.”²

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) “Social connectedness is the degree to which people have and perceive a desired number, quality,

Over recent decades however, researchers have observed a distressing lack of social connectedness. In the wake of COVID and bearing in mind growing political polarization, the issue has only intensified. One need only consider the extensive research conducted by institutions like the CDC and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to begin to understand the magnitude of the decline of social

connectedness. From classifying the issue as an “epidemic” to quantifying associated health risks, countless studies have shown that the impact of loneliness and isolation is real, measurable, and in need of

The impact of loneliness is real, measurable, and in need of community-driven mitigation.

thoughtful and community-driven mitigation.

Compounding our feelings of loneliness, many of us also navigate a daily barrage of news and social media, pushing us even further into a cycle of fear mongering and isolation. Whether we like it or not, media is a business predicated on clicks and engagement, and sadly the driving force of the attention economy is the very thing that leaves us feeling helpless and isolated in the first place; news and language that is

polarizing, incendiary, and even traumatic. Simply put, negativity drives increased consumption of online media⁴.

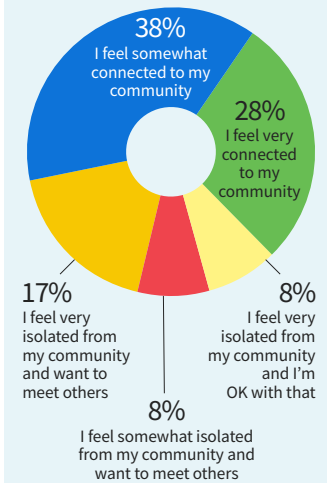
After countless conversations spanning many years and across

myriad platforms, we began to understand that people aren’t getting enough community connection, often resulting in feelings of social isolation, loneliness, and futility. We also learned that when they arise, these feelings aren’t just about the number of people you surround yourself with; it’s about the accessibility and quality of those relationships as well.

So what happens when one quarter of the American adult population reports feelings of isolation?

Our own study revealed several findings, and in order to build the foundation for a scalable solution, we at Idealist sought first to understand what people value and hold true.

How respondents describe their feelings around social interactions with others:



Key Findings

The Desire for Connection and the Belief That Change is Possible

Before we began to consider solutions to such a pervasive and layered social issue, we wanted to confirm our suspicions which, until recently, had been based mostly on qualitative or

anecdotal sources. In the summer of 2023, with the help of Wakefield Research, Idealist asked 2,000 American adults (ages 18 and up) questions about their sense of community connectedness and

civic duty, as well as questions on perceived barriers to each.

Our survey results paint a picture of a population optimistic about their potential for positive impact and increasingly attuned

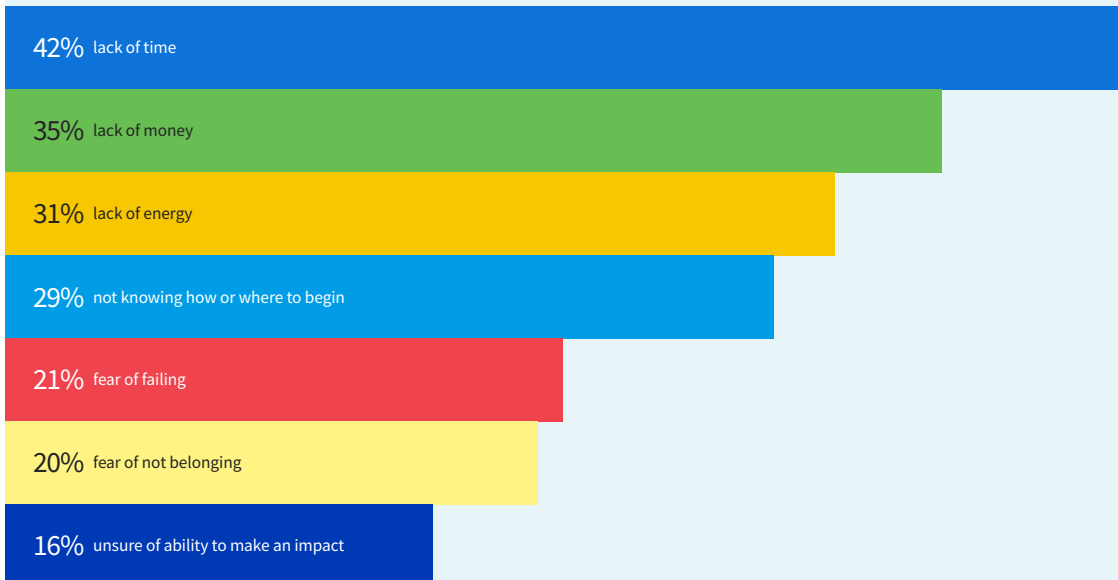
to the significance of community engagement. We were also able to identify the desire for more accessible entry points to action, while gleaned valuable insights into what inspires individuals to connect and take action in the first place.

It came as no surprise that one out of every four adults surveyed shared that they feel isolated from others. Citing barriers including not enough time, money, or energy as well as “simply not knowing where to begin,” respondents explained that their level of disconnectedness was not by choice, but rather due to lack of resources (real or perceived) as well as a lack of accessible ways to engage.

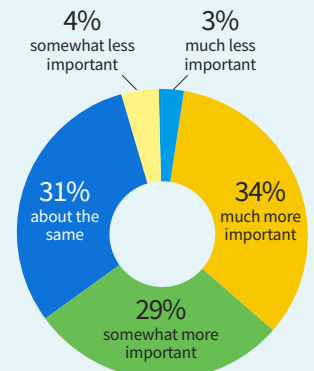
Even amidst evolving societal and global dynamics, our survey illuminates a compelling trend—63% of respondents

express a belief that lending a helping hand in their community is even more important now than it was five years ago, signaling a collective recognition of

What is stopping people from being more involved in their local community?



Compared to 5 years ago, respondents say the importance of lending a hand in their local community is ...



the power of grassroots efforts, and the urgent need for action. The survey also shed light on a refreshing sense of hopefulness regarding respondents' belief in their own potential for impact, with a substantial 67% of those surveyed expressing confidence in their ability to effect positive local change. This optimism suggests a belief in the efficacy of individual contributions and reflects a collective sense of agency in shaping the social fabric at the community level.

Delving further into our results, a resounding 80% of respondents

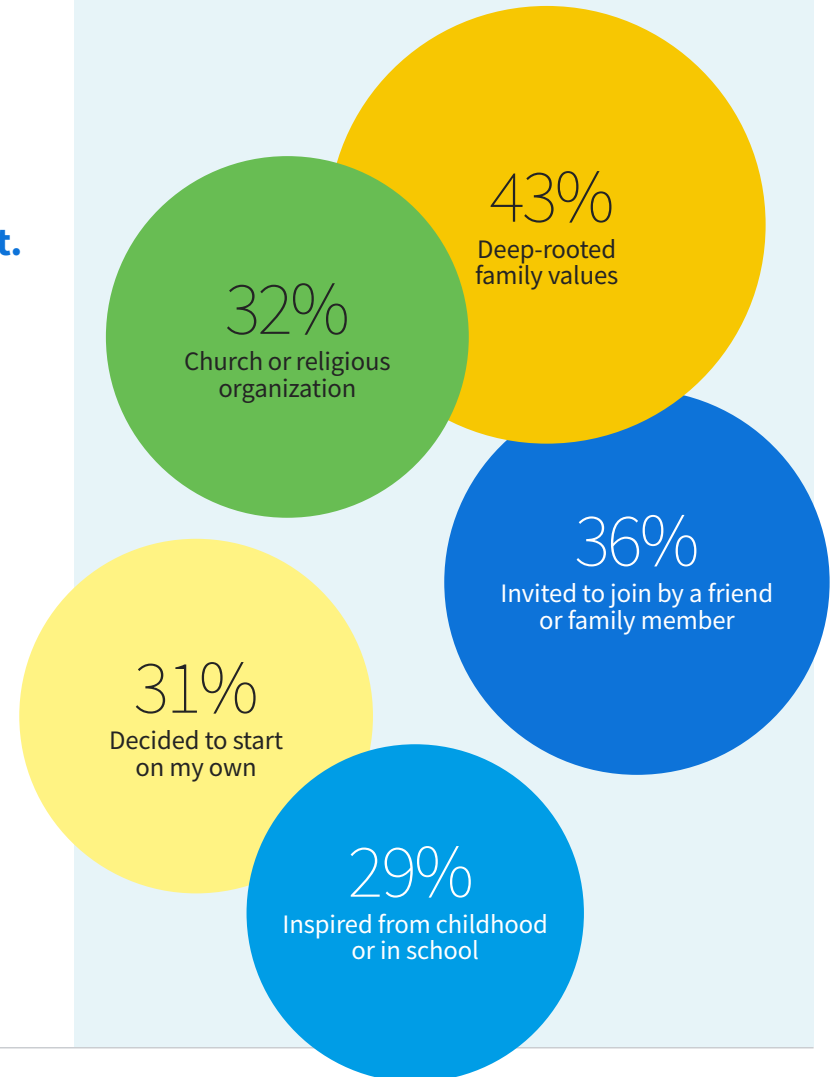
expressed a desire to be more actively engaged in their local communities, provided they receive specific guidance on how to do so. This finding suggests that while there is a genuine willingness to contribute and engage, potential barriers such as lack of clear avenues for involvement, may hinder individuals from realizing this aspiration. This only underscores the importance of establishing accessible pathways for community participation, as it is evident that a considerable portion of the population is eager to collectively build a better world.

The numbers also offer a glimpse into what drives an individual to seek out community. A substantial portion of

Our survey shows a population optimistic about their potential for positive impact and community engagement.

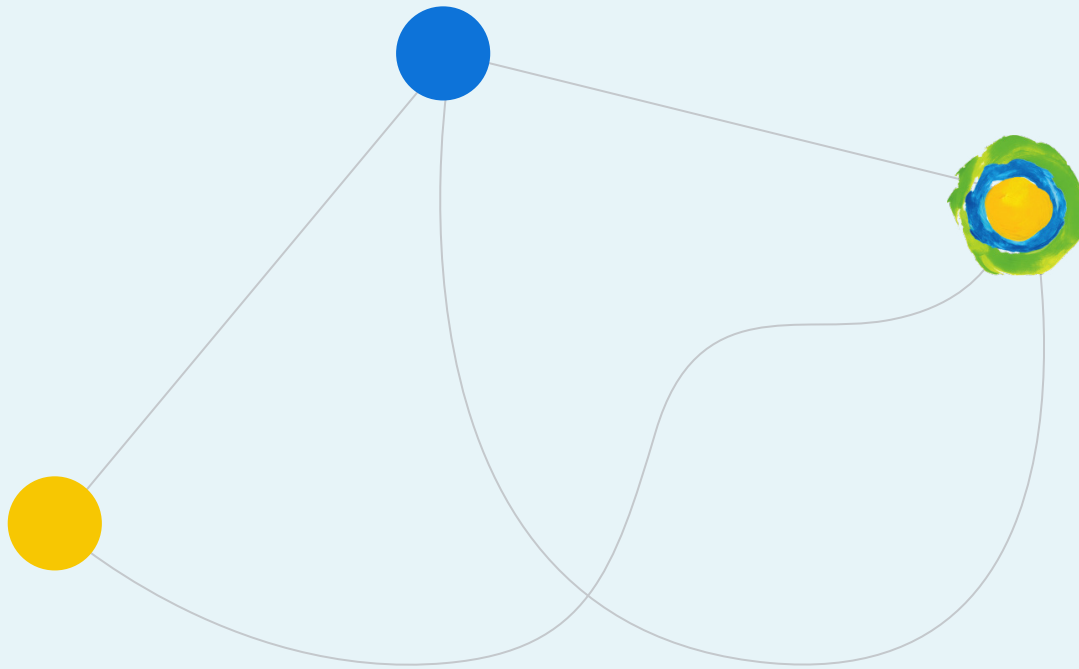
those actively engaged in community service revealed that their actions stem from deeply ingrained values, faith, or a childhood environment that affirmed the importance of altruism. These findings underscore the need for initiatives that facilitate connection and action, and present us with a rare opportunity. It is up to all of us—community leaders, teachers, change makers, elected officials, neighbors—to harness the growing desire for connection and channel it into concrete actions, strengthening the social fabric at the local level and ultimately, at scale.

Here's what moves people to start on their journey to community impact:



There's hope! People believe they can have the following levels of impact in their local community:





Introducing the Idealist Ecosystem

A Joyful, Inspiring, and Accessible Space Where Intention Becomes Action

As we have imagined it, the best way Idealist can make our vision a reality is to create the infrastructure on which a nascent movement can be built.

First, we are developing an accessible digital ecosystem through

which individuals can share good ideas, good news, and good attitudes. A virtual space where doers and searchers can recognize one another and realize a plan for impact, repeat a successful project at scale, celebrate the

wins, collectively investigate the challenges, and pursue meaningful connections.

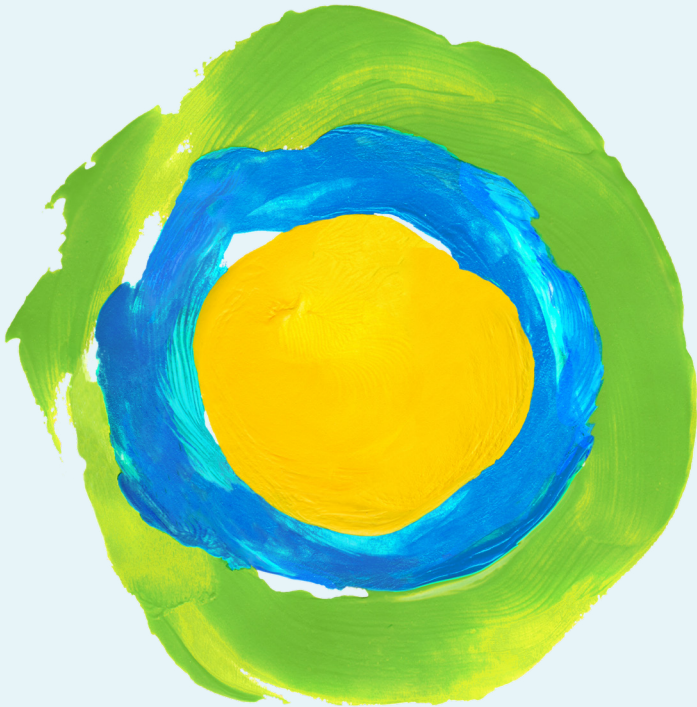
Next, we will seed the space with the tools and materials necessary for action and connection. Our plan is to crowdsource

the majority of these tools and templates, as we firmly believe that our role is to enable and lift up the work of others rather than creating our own prescriptive solutions. We aim to develop and support a network of human connections where imagination, action, and celebration can happen anywhere and beget more of the same, on an even larger scale and stage.

We're confident that for many, Idealist's virtual ecosystem will be enough to spark the initial move from intention to action. However, we're also prepared to offer additional tools for those who find confidence in a bit of structure. We're eager to meet people where they are and ensure that they have what they need to imagine, connect, and act—be it community, guidance, or the social permission to join in. To that end, we've also developed our own tools for action, Idealist Days and Recipes for Action, as well as a unifying

symbol to tie it all together.

We aim to create a space that encourages storytelling, inspires a movement, and eliminates the barriers to action most-referenced by survey respondents; time, money, energy, and a starting point. With obstacles removed and the reins squarely in the hands of social-impact seekers, we predict that good acts, genuine connection, and the celebration of others will flourish. Using Idealist Days as a launching pad and our symbol as a way to bring visibility to all of these good acts and good actors, we expect to see individuals take their imagining, connecting, and acting beyond our virtual ecosystem and out into the world, inspiring others to do the same. As we engage with and observe social-impact seekers in action, we will be well-positioned to develop additional tools—for the virtual space as well as “real life”—that support our community's continued good works and great ideas.



● **OUR VALUES AND OUR SYMBOL**

Since our inception, it has been Idealist's mission to work with others in a spirit of generosity and mutual respect to build a world where all people can lead free and dignified lives. And in recent years, the Idealist symbol has become the unconstrained calling card of this budding movement. The Idealist symbol—consisting of simple, concentric bands of color—is adoptable and adaptable; it is for everyone. We are honored to be able to offer this joyful symbol to the world, giving individuals an opportunity to proudly and

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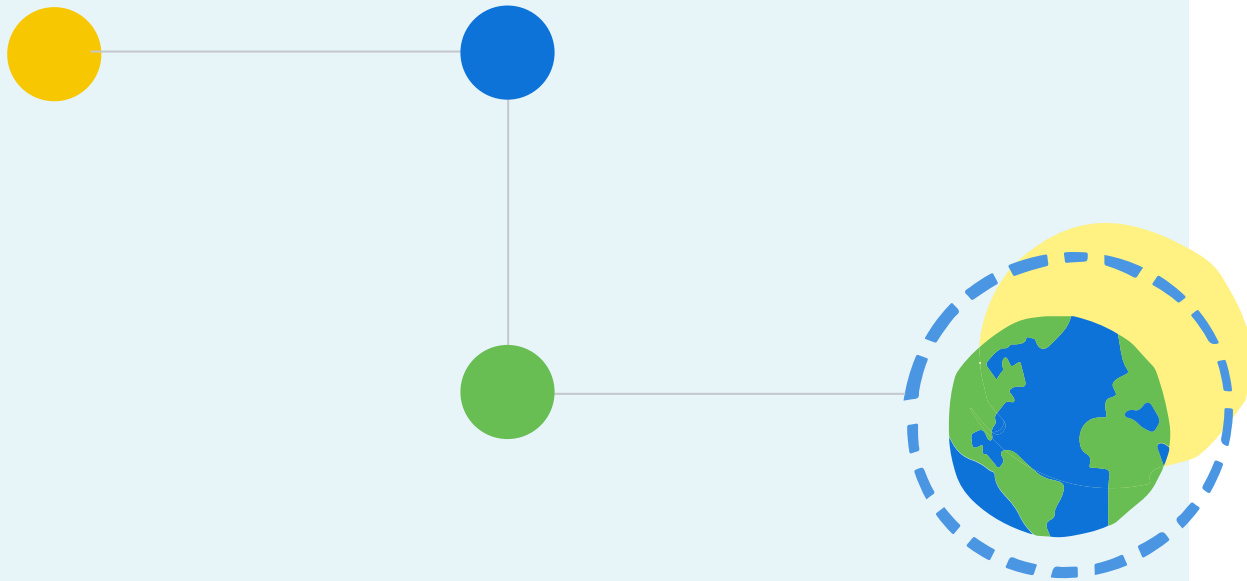
visibly declare, "I am here, and I share your deepest values. And if you stand for freedom and dignity, I will stand with you."

● **IDEALIST DAYS**

Over the years, we have developed and iterated on the concept of Idealist Days. Taking place monthly on the day for which the date and the month numerals are the same, e.g. 8/8, 9/9, 10/10, etc., we've designated these dates as moments not only to take action but also to celebrate the good works and the people behind them as well. This is a monthly opportunity to do something—lend a hand, connect with your community, launch a big idea, join in on somebody else's big idea, celebrate a kind act, thank a stranger—to make your corner of the world a little better.

● **RECIPES FOR ACTION**

Recipes for Action is a crowd-sourced database of kind and innovative ideas, curated to inspire positive change and make the world a better place, one action at a time. Featuring recipes that require anywhere from a few hours of your time to a year or more, we are developing a virtual space where good acts and great ideas can be tested, shared, celebrated, and joined in on. Our goal is to build a searchable library filled with ideas for impact that are action-oriented, affordable, and inclusive.



We believe we are all at a critical moment, standing at the forefront of a transformative mission to bridge the gap between intention and action, fostering a global community driven by the collective desire to create positive change.

Our journey, rooted in connecting individuals with opportunities to do good, has evolved into a comprehensive vision of a world where all people can lead free and dignified lives. The stark reality of the “Isolation Epidemic” accentuates the pressing need

for meaningful connections and community engagement, and our research reveals not just the prevalence of loneliness but also a profound yearning for connection.

As we move forward, our goal is clear—to create a joyful, useful, and accessible space that encourages storytelling, eliminates barriers to action, and inspires a movement. We call upon like-hearted leaders to join us in harnessing the growing desire for social connection and channeling it into concrete actions. Let us collectively strengthen our social fabric at the local level and, ultimately, at scale. Together, we can turn good intentions into meaningful actions, building a world where everyone can lead free and dignified lives. Join Idealist; imagine, connect, and act—for a better world is within our reach.

Join Us in Connecting Communities and Celebrating the Good

A World of Possibilities Awaits

● [Join us at idealist.org](https://www.idealists.org)



RESEARCH SURVEY METHODOLOGY The Idealist Survey was conducted by Wakefield Research (www.wakefieldresearch.com) among 2,000 Nationally Representative U.S. Adults Ages 18+, Summer 2023, using an email invitation and an online survey. Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. For the interviews conducted in this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 2.2 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

SOURCES 1. Psychology Today. (n.d.). Social Life. Retrieved December, 2023, from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/social-life> 2. Gareth Cook. Why We Are Wired to Connect. October 22, 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-we-are-wired-to-connect/> 3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Affect of Health. Retrieved December, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/emotional-wellbeing/social-connectedness/affect-health.htm> 4. Claire E. Robertson, Nicolas Pröllochs, Kaoru Schwarzenegger, Philip Pärnamets, Jay J. Van Bavel & Stefan Feuerriegel. Negativity drives online news consumption. March 16, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-023-01538-4>