

Editor's Note

This essay is also a profile of a trend, this time about Facebook (see “Can Txting Save Engl?”). Lindsey Wagner says Facebook “acts like a chameleon, always changing into something different and new.” Does this simile help you understand the author’s point more deeply?

Wagner exposes many of Facebook’s downsides. What are they? Do you agree or disagree? Are there other dangers to social networking sites that the author doesn’t include or any benefits of Facebook that are not addressed?

The author argues that Facebook threatens what we currently think of as friendship and that could leave us isolated. How is friendship defined in the text? On Facebook? Consider how friendship might be changing. Is the Internet isolating us? Examine what kind of evidence the author uses to make this point. Does Facebook take more time or less time than regular interactions?

The Evolution of Communication

Lindsey Wagner

What started in the dorm room of a Harvard University undergraduate named Mark Zuckerberg, in 2004 (“Statistics”), now stands in the number one spot for websites in the United States (Smith). Ask any teenager or young adult and he or she can name this social network in a heart beat: Facebook. With only five years in the business, Facebook is worth fifteen billion dollars (Chan), and has accumulated over two hundred million active users (“Statistics”). This trendy site has attracted many people from all different ages and ethnicities. The site’s main purpose sought to assist college students in networking with their fellow college classmates. Five years later, Facebook’s purpose has shifted to a place where not only college students, but teenyboppers and senior citizens also enjoy the attributes the site offers. Unfortunately, the people who now use Facebook are beginning to communicate with their friends differently. For instance, one user may send his or her friends Facebook messages instead of phone calls. With the drastic number of people joining Facebook and the site’s rapid popularity growth, Facebook is changing the way we communicate with our friends.

The site offers many different things for each user. For example, a Facebook user can update his or her status, take a quiz revealing the date of when he or she will get married, how he or she will die, or send an electronic gift to his or her friend. These special attributes available on the site have helped create a sense of instant gratification for each user. For instance, each time a user signs onto Facebook some-

thing new has happened. This sense of surprise and suspense keeps Facebook users craving and yearning for more of the site. This characteristic Facebook holds draws people in, because there is always something different to look at each time the user signs onto the site. Whether the user has a new friend request or someone has posted pictures up from last night's party, Facebook acts like a chameleon, always changing into something different and new. This element of change makes Facebook enticing.

Facebook has left a huge mark on the young adult generation. It has tweaked how the users define friends, and how the users communicate with his or her friends. Ten years ago, a friend could be defined as a person you can talk to and spend quality time with, but Facebook has created a new definition of the word friend. According to the nature of this site, a friend does not have to be someone you are familiar with or someone you feel comfortable saying hello to at the store. The trend of the site has turned into the idea of, "Add anyone and everyone." Nancy Baym, an associate professor of communications studies at the University of Kansas, states:

You can ask somebody, 'Of your 300 Facebook friends how many are actually friends?' and people will say, 'Oh, 30 or 40 or 50,' But what having a lot of weak-tie relationships does for you is it gives you access to a lot of resources that you wouldn't otherwise have. (qtd. in Myron)

This concept of a friend does not have the same meaning it did even a few years ago: this fact is devastating. Thanks to Facebook, a friend can now be looked at as someone you can see on your Facebook account. This social network has quickly diminished the true meaning of a friend. What will the next generation of children think of when they use the word friend? With the way things are looking now, a friend will soon turn into someone they can see on a computer screen. If this trend of a Facebook friend continues people will eventually lose all human connection. Children and young adults will not understand the basics of how to hold a face-to-face conversation with another person because they will have no prior experience talking to others in person. Sadly, communication will become nonexistent without the assistance from our technology gadgets.

This website has attracted almost everyone, whether they consider themselves daily users or not. According to my personal interview with Jessie Ysunza, a daily Facebook user and college freshman at Cal Poly State University:

People feel left out when they do not have a Facebook. I did not have one until the end of my senior year in high school. I felt out of the loop when my friends would discuss

the new photos uploaded from last weekend's party or about so-and-so broke up. Facebook for the teenage and young adult generation is a must have in our social world.

This social network currently acts as the new way to socialize with your friends. People no longer call their friends or God-forbid go to their houses anymore. Why go to a friend's house or use the phone when you can get on Facebook and talk to multiple people simultaneously? This era was born into technology, and sadly enough, they do not know how to function without it. Facebook has given this generation exactly what they looking for: a technical way to communicate with friends. What more could this generation ask for? The site provides a fast and quick way to communicate with other people. Not to mention, this style of talking to others appears quite convenient, because the user can access this social network right in his or her home. Within minutes, the user can talk to multiple people at once, look at newly posted pictures, and update their status all in the comfort of his or her house.

Another problem that Facebook has created is less personal relationships between people. People used to actually talk face-to-face with others. Today's society focuses solely on how to communicate through technology. The site acts as the new and modern way to talk to other people. This idea of "Facebooking" a friend to catch up has become an accepted way to socialize. Five years back, people barely knew how to communicate with their friends across town through a social networking site. With the attributes Facebook has provided the users, it has created an easier and less time consuming way to communicate. Instead of calling a friend or going by their house, you can just type them a quick message on Facebook and call it a day. Many people find joy in this style of communicating, because it matches with the rest of the world's lifestyle. Today's products are designed to be more efficient and less time consuming.

Although this popular idea of "faster is better" has a lot of people looking for the quickest way to get things done people are missing out on true and personal relationships with one another. Friendships and relationships with people have become less personal due to the obsession with Facebook. People experiencing this loss of physical interaction with others waste their time on Facebook instead of building personal relationships with other people. Some people do not even remember what a personal relationship feels like. They have lost the connection that direct interaction with another human being provides. The question that many wonder is why even go back to the old ways of communicating with friends? This new way of socializing provides a much faster way to communicate with others and gives each user the ability to talk to multiple people at a time. The answer comes down to the natural drive we as humans have to connect with other humans. Humans have an internal instinct to bond with other humans face-to-face. When people stop interacting with

other humans face-to-face, you lose that connection. Unfortunately, this lifestyle does not look like it will be stopping anytime soon since Facebook has rapidly accumulated hundreds and thousands of new users each day.

On the contrary, Facebook provides a few benefits. It can help long distance family members stay in contact more often, and a user can every once in a while find an old high school friend. Along with the benefits Facebook provides it has its share of negatives. The concern with Facebook is people have a tendency to abuse the site. Beginning with the purpose to locate classmates or long lost friends, people today have turned the site into the new “text messaging fad.” The site was not designed to replace our personal relationships we shared with others but allow our friendships to stay connected. The main concern affiliated with the site is that people are spending more time on the social network than with friends or family. This takes time away from building and keeping personal relationships lasting. People have turned it into an addictive game, spicing their pages up with “What character of Laguna Beach Are You?” and “What is Your IQ Score”? The site has morphed into a trophy stage for each person to brag about themselves and update their status every five minutes. Some people share every part of their day on this site. Personal information tends to spill out on this site. People have transformed the sites original purpose and butchered the real meaning for a social network by flushing their profile page with the latest quiz or what drink flavor they are most like. Without change in the system Facebook will continue to get more attractive, addictive, and popular causing our personal relationships with people to diminish.

In today’s society the fastest and latest technology tends to be what sells the fastest in all stores. Almost everyone has an iPod, computer, and or cell phone. This generation of teenagers and young adults lack the knowledge of how to function without technology. Let’s face it, technology advancements have helped us in the medical field and space exploration, but is this fad of faster and more convenient beneficial for our country in the future? If friendships continue to slowly diminishing now this issue could soon replace face-to-face interaction with people with computer communication. Whether Facebook or some other type of instant communication through technology, the way we communicate with coworkers, friends and family has forever changed and has no intention of stopping. Technology serves a great purpose in the society we live in today, but do not become part of today’s culture that is replacing the essences of human interaction with virtual communication.

Lindsey Wagner is a liberal studies major.

Works Cited

- Chan, Katrina. "How Much is Facebook Really Worth?" *The Motley Fool*. 14 February 2008. 3 May 2009 <<http://www.fool.com>>.
- Myron, Galia. "The Facebook Effect." *DemoDirt.com*. 2 April 2009. 26 April 2009<<http://www.demodirt.com>>.
- Smith, Justin. "comScore: Facebook #1 Social Network in 11 of 17 European Countries." *Inside Facebook*. 15 April 2009. 26 April 2009 <<http://www.insidefacebook.com>>.
- "Statistics." *Facebook 2009*. 26 April 2009 <<http://www.facebook.com/press>>.
- White, Patrick. "Facebook: watching the watchers." *The Globe and Mail*. 3 April 2009. 26 April 2009 <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/article763859.ece>>.
- Ysunza, Jessica. Personal interview. 20 April 2009.