

▲ FIGURE 7-12 Social networks allow users to connect in many ways. How have they changed the way people interact with one another on a daily basis?

The Role of Social Media in Communication

Once upon a time, you had to write a letter, put it in an envelope, stamp it, and bring it to the post office. If it was going to a local friend, it would arrive in a few days. Anything further could take a week or more to arrive at its destination. Today, the same thoughts you would have put in that letter can be easily typed into a computer keyboard or smartphone keypad and will arrive at your friend's inbox within seconds...even if he or she lives in Australia!

This change in communication began with email and has since evolved to include social media. Social networks such as Facebook have changed the face of communication. Within a few minutes, you can create a profile that shows, among other information, your photo, the names of the bands you like, and whether you're liberal or conservative in your views. The more about yourself you reveal on social networks, the greater the connections you can make. Family, friends, and strangers can search for you by your name and send you a request to be their "friend."

For many people on social networks, the number of friends they have is a badge of honour. Having more online friends than your peers makes you appear more popular and socially desirable. But how close can you really be to 500 people? Some people add new people to their friends list after having met them just once, just for the sole purpose of augmenting their totals.

Social network friends can write on your wall—the public area in your profile that everyone can see—or send you a private message. This communication sometimes takes the place of email, especially for casual conversation. For many, it's a great way to share photos with friends and family, especially when those people don't live close by. However, it's important to consider what types of photos are being posted on social networks. Posting lots of photos of yourself partying can come back to haunt you if a potential employer should happen to stumble upon them.

? How has technology changed the way people communicate?

Open for Debate

Many companies today are using online media to learn about job applicants. Should they have the right to look at your social network profile to determine if you would be a suitable candidate? Is this an invasion of privacy or just another tool available to make a good hiring decision?

More to Know

You learned about Durkheim in Unit 1 and Unit 2.

The Transmission of Social Norms

Change does not need to occur or start in the physical world. Virtual landscapes provide opportunities for people to meet and exchange ideas, create friendships, and network across the world. Technology gives people the opportunity to take on a new identity and become what they want to be. As you've read, Emile Durkheim believed that the increased transmission of social norms has the ability to increase social cohesion, thereby reducing anomie. Virtual communities serve the same function as live groups in terms of socialization and the reinforcement of norms and values. Communication speeds have increased over the years and digital information transfer can reach all over the world. Remote areas are connected to large urban centres and the distance between these places is now only a click away.

People flock to the Internet to get away from their daily lives and to network with other people. Sites like Second Life allow the user to assume a new identity in the form of an avatar. This avatar can look and act any way the user wants. Choosing living arrangements, exploring new jobs, and making the most of their social life are all part of the avatar experience. People are able to do things in the virtual world that they could never do in real life. Only their imagination limits this experience. The physical and virtual distance between users allows for a sense of safety and security when interacting on sites like this. Entire lives and storylines can be created in a virtual world. This begs the question: if everything is happening in the virtual world, then what happens in real life?

What will be the impact of time spent in virtual worlds on Canadian teenagers' social skills when interacting face-to-face in the real world? Behaviour is learned through interaction and watching for cues from the other person. In the virtual world, people lose the benefit of behavioural cues to help them understand how the recipient thinks and feels about the interaction. More accurate language or increased description must be incorporated into conversations to provide meaningful feedback. This is where emoticons and short forms such as LOL or ;) come into play. They help provide the tone of a person communicating via the information superhighway. Whenever an adaptation takes place, new behaviours must be practised and become integrated into the new interaction to make meaningful communication. Once users adapt, the virtual world and communication continue along their merry way...until the next adaptation is required.

avatar:
a visual representation of an online user's alter ego



▲ **FIGURE 7-13** Users select customized avatars to fit the life they feel. Would your avatar represent who you are or who you would like to be?

The Cultural Materialist Viewpoint

Cultural materialism examines material conditions like food, geography, climate, and communication to explain human culture. According to Marvin Harris, through cultural materialism the causes of differences and similarities among societies and cultures can be researched because human social life is simply a response to practical problems. Canadian society has evolved with communication technology. Online communication etiquette, the expectation for immediate information, and the idea that finding an answer is only a “Google” away have become part of Canadian society. Socialization and work use the same World Wide Web and information posted has the ability to reach many people with the speed of a click. Information is immediate and transmitted to many Canadians simultaneously. Psychologically speaking, geography becomes smaller when Canadians can communicate seeing the face of the other person on a screen. Customs, cultures, and even recipes can be shared to provide a richer cultural understanding of other people living in Canada and around the world. Technology’s ability to transmit and make accessible information at any time from many access points influences culture through the information we access.

More to Know
You were introduced to cultural materialism in the Prologue.

The Small World Experiment and Beyond

In 1967, psychologist Stanley Milgram designed an experiment to measure the level of connection between people's social networks. This became known as the "small world experiment" as it tried to determine the likelihood that two random people would know each other. Each of the study's 296 participants received a postcard whose final recipient was a man in Boston. They were instructed to send the postcard to someone they knew who they believed would know this man. This chain was to continue until the postcard arrived at its destination. Although not all postcards arrived, of those that did, the average number of intermediate persons between the initial participant and the final destination was found to be five. This led to the phrase "six degrees of separation," indicating that any two people in the world are separated by no more than five acquaintances, in addition to themselves, which makes the sixth degree.

However, because the Internet has the ability to connect people worldwide in a much more timely and efficient manner, researchers have sought to determine if this number has shrunk. Milgram's experiment was repeated by researchers in Milan in 2001, only this time email was used to circulate the message to a specific destination. The experiment yielded the same results as Milgram's original experiment. Facebook, in conjunction with researchers at the University of Milan, undertook its own research in 2011, using its 721 million users as subjects. At the time of the research, there were 69 billion "friendships" on Facebook. Over the course of one month, researchers used algorithms to analyze the numerous sample paths between Facebook users. The research suggests that 92 percent of its user pairs are connected by five degrees, one fewer degree than just by mail or email. The conclusion? A friend of your friend probably knows a friend of their friend.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

1. What information are you frequently asked to provide while surfing the Internet? What are the dangers of providing such information?
2. What defines social media "friend"? If Facebook's research had been limited to those people with whom regular communication took place, how do you think the results would have differed?
3. Hypothesize about how people's social skills may be affected by a reduction in the amount of face-to-face communication they experience.
4. What services are now provided online that would have been provided through face-to-face interaction in the past?

Having access to the Internet means having access to a vast pool of information and resources. Social networking opportunities, online medical advice, legal help, and government agency forms can be accessed through online portals. Government agencies are moving toward an online interface, so that even people visiting the physical agency office building are being instructed to use the computers inside the building to access the proper forms to receive the services needed.

In 2010, eight out of ten Canadian households had access to the Internet (Statistics Canada, 2011). Of the Canadians living in metropolitan areas identified in the Census, 81 percent had Internet access, compared to Canadians living in rural areas where only 71 percent had Internet access. The distinct advantage for those living in an urban area is more immediate access to public services; thus, city dwellers are able to meet their personal needs in a much more efficient manner. The introduction of kiosks connected to the Internet that provide access to online information broadens the difference. Such kiosks are available throughout larger city centres to increase the access to and availability of information for people living in urban areas.

Households with Internet Access	2010 %
Canada	79
Alberta	83
British Columbia	84
Manitoba	73
New Brunswick	70
Newfoundland and Labrador	74
Nova Scotia	77
Ontario	81
Prince Edward Island	73
Quebec	73
Saskatchewan	76

▲ **FIGURE 8-2** As more services and resources move online, what are the consequences of not having Internet access?

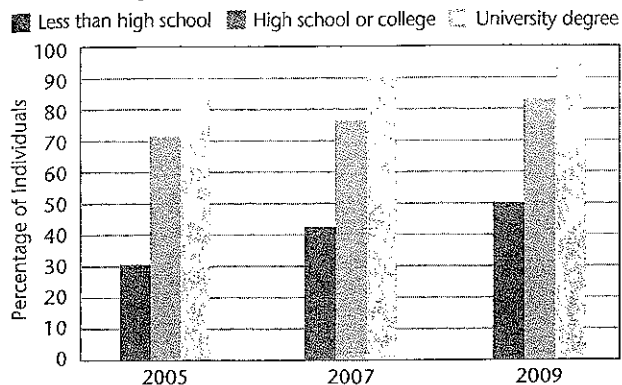
The Advantages of Being Connected

Having an Internet connection provides distinct advantages to users. These advantages include a limitless resource for information, increased personal empowerment, an understanding of people from varied backgrounds, and economic success (Rehm, Allison and Johnson, 2003). Access to information provides the opportunity to solve problems and gives users a sense of empowerment when they are able to advocate for themselves and solve their own problems. The Internet allows for a wide variety of opinions and cultural beliefs to be posted. Reading and experiencing different viewpoints offers a more complete understanding of another person and how his or her situation can be influenced by the immediate surroundings. More content and government services are being moved to Web sites for convenience and to reduce the amount of time (and person power) to get the correct files to the recipient. Using the Internet is also a factor in increasing economic success. Companies are able to offer better deals to online shoppers because the companies require only limited storage and overhead to house and protect their product. Better deals can also be found when comparative shopping at various Internet sites. E-coupons are offered to further reduce the price of items bought on the Internet. The increased speed of the Internet allows for video images and sounds to be broadcast in real time, further deepening the user's understanding of what the people in the images are



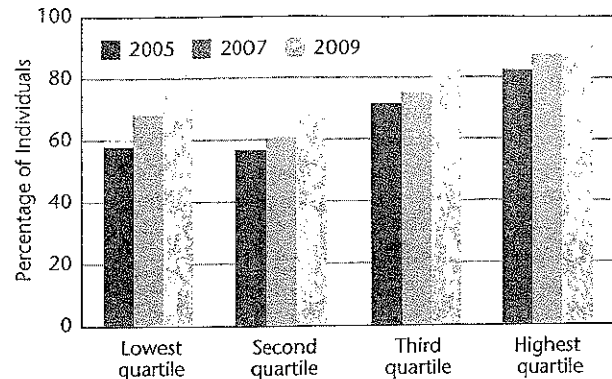
▲ **FIGURE 8-3** This elderly couple is using a tablet to fill a prescription. How has being connected influenced the lives of Canadians?

Internet Usage by Level of Income



Source: Statistics Canada, 2010

Internet Usage by Personal Income (Quartile)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2010

▲ FIGURE 8-4 What do these graphs reveal about the growth of the Internet?

feeling. Given these distinct advantages, it behooves every Canadian family to get online. But who is gaining access to the Internet? What factor(s) increase or decrease the rate of Internet access for a family?

When examining Internet access relative to family income, clear distinctions occur between the digital haves and have-nots. If a family earns more than \$87,000 per year, they have a

97 percent likelihood of having Internet access (Statistics Canada, 2011). Families earning less than \$30,000 per year have only a 54 percent chance of having Internet access in their home. Households in this income range reported cost of service and cost of equipment as major reasons (24 percent) for not having home Internet access (Statistics Canada, 2011).

SKILLS PRACTICE

Internet access varies according to a number of factors. Keep this in mind as you investigate the growth of the Internet throughout the country through the following activities.

- Using Figure 8-2, create a graph and interpret the findings. What inferences can be made from the data?
- Using a map of Canada, write the percentage values in the corresponding province. What does this tell you about Internet connectivity within Canada?
- Assuming that having Internet connectivity provides an advantage to people who can access it, make three statements about the trends and/or patterns you see on the map you created in question #2.

- Using Figure 8-4, write two statements of fact shown by the graphs.

An example of a sentence that can be written could be: Looking at the lowest income quartile, there was an increase of 17.5 percent in Internet access rates from 2005 to 2009. This increase could be due to the proliferation of new devices that are able to access the Internet in addition to the traditional desktop computer and laptop, i.e., smartphones, game devices, etc. Alternatively, the rapidly declining prices of technological devices may be providing more people with monetary access to purchasing these devices.

SOCIALIZING AND TECHNOLOGY

Staying in contact is important. This fact is highlighted by the duration and frequency of communication sent through technology devices. Social networking sites fill this need and allow for communication to take place with immediate results. Social status is closely tied to the ability to communicate and be part of the virtual social networks. Face-to-face communication is no longer necessary to be part of a group of friends.

Social Networks

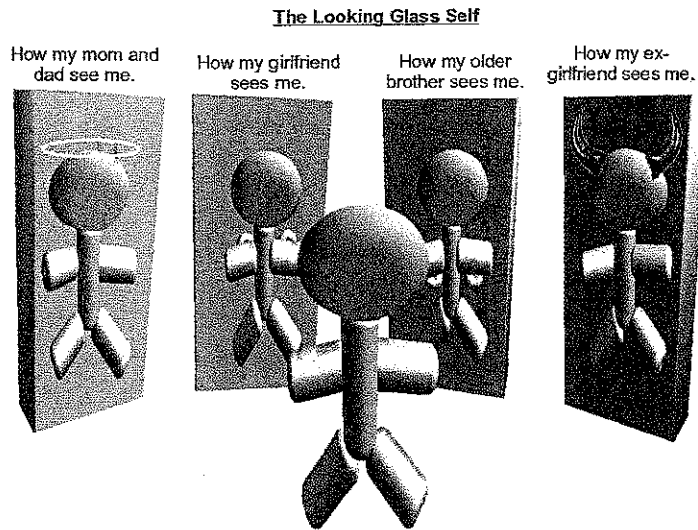
Humans are naturally social animals. The need to interact and communicate seems to be written into our DNA. From a young age, we are socialized and encouraged to interact with family and friends.

The popularity of social networking is growing exponentially. Millions of Canadians log onto Facebook, the most popular social networking site, every day to catch up with friends and to find out the latest news in the lives of their “friends.” In an average month, nearly 15 million Canadians log onto Facebook—almost half of the population! Ontario alone has approximately 6.4 million users and Canada has about 9 million users that log on daily (Breikiss, 2011). In the virtual world, this is the popular place to “hang out.” Geographically, Canadian city centres are spread out, creating a physical barrier which can inhibit socialization between Canadians outside of their immediate area. Facebook shortens the physical distance between Canadians and has no additional costs associated with its use, unlike making a long-distance telephone call or even mailing a letter.

Canadians continue to be a friendly nation. The global average friend count of Facebook friends is 130 friends per user. In Canada, users have an average of 190 friends (Breikiss, 2011). This may be due, in part, to the large number of Canadians who have devices that can access Facebook accounts. Computers, phones, tablets, game systems, etc., are all Internet-ready. With a greater number of access points, comes a greater ability to communicate using Facebook.

Facebook: This Is Who I Am

Facebook is not just a social networking portal on the Internet; it serves a secondary purpose in helping to define who we are and how we are seen by others. Applying Cooley’s looking-glass self theory, we can see how this social networking program is a useful tool to help understand who we are. Cooley’s theory requires that a person have a belief about what others think of him or



▲ **FIGURE 8-9** How does your behaviour and self-perception change when you access social media like Facebook?

More to Know

Look back to Chapter 4 for more about Cooley’s looking-glass self theory.


SKILLS FOCUS

Log on to a social networking site and follow the posts on a single topic. Collect 15 responses to a single question and create four categories for these responses. Summarize the findings under each category heading into one sentence.

her. Facebook provides multiple opportunities to receive this feedback. Cooley would see this as a rich source of feedback to help create the social self from the reaction of others. It is not surprising the amount of time spent using this social networking site by teenagers that are in a transitory stage seeking identity and defining who they are as individuals. This would require a lot of feedback. Receiving postings on walls, ratings on images, discussions in private messages, being tagged in photos, posting links to other pages, or even writing comments about what others have posted are all ways that information about us is collected. Using this information, the user is better able to understand how other people perceive them. This program goes even further by linking people who have similar likes and interests on topics or through mutual friends to reinforce the idea that linking or showing an interest in something is accepted by this exterior group.

Recent studies have linked Facebook to depression as many see their lives as being boring compared to the lives projected by others on their Facebook friends list. Of course, as Cooley's theory suggests, what's on people's Facebook page is not really how they are, but how they wish to be seen. The looking-glass self continues throughout a person's life and is continuously modified through interaction. Facebook provides the necessary input to make these modifications with real-time feedback from a wide range of friends to provide more complete feedback from multiple inputs. This program goes even further by linking people who have similar likes and interests on topics or through mutual friends to reinforce the idea that linking or showing an interest in something is accepted by this exterior group.

The importance of this social media communication tool is reflected by the amount of time spent logged in. On average, each month, Canadians spend 400 minutes logged in to Facebook (Breikiss, 2011). This translates into approximately 20 minutes of each day spent communicating with friends. As a social priority in a busy world, this constitutes a significant amount of time. If half of this time was spent doing physical activity, Canada would be a healthier nation.

 How might Erikson's ideas about adolescence be used to explain the time teenagers spend on social networking sites?

Cellular Technology and Socializing

Technology has woven its way into every part of people's lives. Cellular technologies, including smartphones, continue to flood the marketplace. Adults and teenagers alike are becoming "wired" and accessing the vast amount of information available online through their phones.


Teenagers are using this technology to support their social lives. According to a national survey from CTIA and Harris Interactive, cell phones have become so important that 47 percent of U.S. teenagers said their social lives would end or be worsened without their mobile phones (Marketing Charts, 2008). Of this group, 57 percent went on to credit their phones with improving their lives (Marketing Charts, 2008). Possession and use of a cell phone may lead to increased social behaviour, creating a better life for the teenager. This

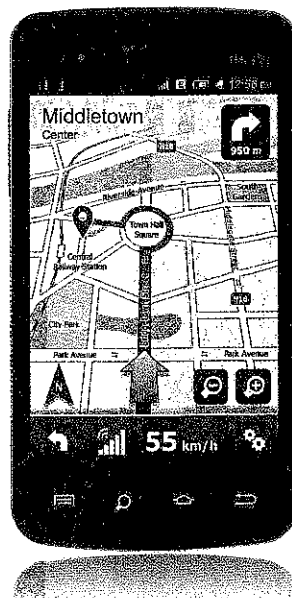
same survey reports that teenagers believe that a person's cell phone tells others a lot about their social status and popularity. While clothing is still used as sign of status, accessories like jewellery, watches, and shoes are not viewed as being as important as they once were when compared to a person's cell phone. Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929) studied what he called **conspicuous consumption** in 1899 and found that even then people purchased products to increase their status. However, what he found was that the person selling the product always got the most out of the transaction.

Cell phones are used for entertainment as well as socialization. One-third of teens play some type of game on their phone (Marketing Charts, 2008). Online content or games stored on phones can be played because many phones possess Bluetooth and/or WiFi technology to connect to Internet networks. Movies and television shows can be downloaded or streamed to the cell phone, turning it into a portable television set.

Cell phones are also considered an important part of a teenager's ability to stay safe. Remaining connected to friends, family, and a wealth of information provides a sense of security for teens. Eighty percent of U.S. teenagers report that cell phones provide a sense of security (Marketing Charts, 2008).

Communication among teenagers has also changed with the proliferation of the cell phone. In 2008, teenagers reported that they would rather text than call their friends. Without texting, over 47 percent of teens said their lives would be "worsened" (Marketing Charts, 2008). This was especially true among female teenagers (54 percent versus 40 percent) (Marketing Charts, 2008). The advantage to texting is that teenagers are able to multi-task, and it provides a fast and fun method of communication. However, there are also a number of disadvantages of texting. For example, the time required to follow a conversation can be longer than in other types of communication. Either participant may be interrupted while texting, causing a pause in the conversation. Waiting for a response is polite, but when you add up the time wasted in waiting, it can become significant. Other disadvantages can include causing a distraction during class time as well as being distracted while doing homework and not being able to concentrate on a task because of the attention needed to respond as soon as a message is received. Yet, more than one billion text messages are sent each day globally. This shows the significance of keeping in contact, even if the messages are only a few characters long. Keeping in touch is important for adults and teenagers, despite the distractions they cause.

 What impact does your cell phone have on your life? Do you see any potential issues with the fact that teens would rather text than call each other?



◀ **FIGURE 8-10** What can't a smartphone do? What features do you think will be standard in smartphones five years from now?

conspicuous consumption: the acquisition and display of expensive items in order to attract attention to one's wealth or to suggest that one is wealthy

More to Know

You learned about Hirschi's control theory in Chapter 6.

containment theory: a subset of social control theory which states that our personal values and social controls keep our behaviours in check

Containment Theory and the Internet

Ever wanted to cheat on a test and look to see where the teacher is to see if you could get away with it? You're not alone. Social control theorists like Travis Hirschi argue that humans are selfish and animalistic inside but are able to control these primal urges because of the internalization of values instilled to them by society. **Containment theory**, a subset of social control theory, indicates that there are two ways which this is done:

1. Inner containments: Our self-esteem and moral development
2. Outer containments: Social controls such as teachers, police, or parents

In our society the hope is that the agents of socialization in our lives have taught us the social norms and values so that we control ourselves by our own personal inner containments. Should those fail we have authoritative forces to keep us in check. It is a balancing act that is always going on in our society. Do we allow people the freedom to control themselves or do we risk giving the power to authorities and worry they might use it for their own benefit?

The Internet gives computer users the unique ability to hide from the outer containments in the privacy of their home. This personal power can be used to learn about various things, explore different identities, and even chat with people that would normally be seen as unacceptable by the authority figures in people's lives.

The growing development of the Internet also allows us to get access to copyrighted material without paying for it. In the past, a person would have to go into a store and steal a physical copy to unlawfully access this type of material. Such actions done in public would bring down outer containments, but the computer lets people perform them privately, without other people's knowledge or consent.

Marshall McLuhan

Marshall McLuhan believed that technology worked as an extension of the human being. Cars are an extension of our feet, televisions are an extension of our eyes, and the computer is an extension of our nervous system. With all evolutions in technology, he believed that there were positives but also negatives. He even suggested that a technology that was designed to solve a specific problem would often cause the very thing it was trying to solve. An example of this would be cars. They were designed to make people get from point A to point B more quickly, yet having too many cars on the road creates traffic jams, which delays the trip. In both the classroom and at home, people's lives are changing as technology extends use past what we can see and hear in the space we are in. If you're sitting in class or at the dinner table texting, where are you really?

VOICES

We shape the tools and thereafter the tools shape us.

—Marshall McLuhan

Social Networking and Bullying

With the expansion of Internet technology and the increase in digital access points, virtual meeting and socialization spaces are continually being created in cyberspace. When a connection is made between social network users, a place for socialization materializes in the cyber world. What happens in these spaces is not monitored consistently, if at all. The Internet's greatest strength is also its greatest weakness—its freedom. Internet safety is a concern and should be something that is taught to everyone.

On October 17, 2006, Megan Taylor Meier from Dardenne Prairie, Missouri, committed suicide. This happened three weeks before her fourteenth birthday. The catalyst for her final act was cyberbullying that occurred through the social networking site MySpace.

Megan was under the care of a psychiatrist and had been diagnosed with depression, attention deficit disorder, and had self-esteem issues about her weight. Megan was the neighbour of Lori Drew, 47, and her daughter. Megan allegedly spread rumours about Lori Drew's daughter. This gossip prompted Lori to create a false 16-year-old male person online, named Josh Evans, who she created to "befriend" Megan. Throughout their relationship, Megan never met "Josh" but they became close friends. Josh claimed to have recently moved to the area and did not have a phone yet. Their relationship grew over time and Megan was seen as acting positive and her demeanour was uplifted.

One day "Josh" decided to end the relationship with Megan and exact revenge for the alleged gossip spread about Lori Drew's daughter. The tone of the messages exchanged changed and became cruel. Josh taunted Megan and informed her that everyone at school disliked her and would be better off without her.

Twenty minutes after receiving the message, Megan took her own life.

Cyberbullying and the Law

Although Lori Drew was initially convicted of violating the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act in 2008, her conviction was overturned on appeal in 2009. In



◀ **FIGURE 8-11**
Megan Meier's mother holds photos of her daughter. Megan took her own life because of an online bullying incident orchestrated to humiliate her.

reality, there were no specific laws or regulations to deal with a case like this. Jurisdictions were motivated to make laws to address harassment over the Internet and cyberbullying.

In Canada, schools are having students sign computer use agreements that prohibit cyberbullying and the misuse of school board computer property for the purpose of harassment. Law enforcement agencies run seminars teaching parents and students about cyberbullying and the new laws making this practice punishable. The Ontario Ministry of Education has enacted legislation called the Safe Schools Act, which provides for the right of all students to learn in a safe environment as a basic right.

QUESTIONS

1. Do social networks make it easier for bullies to harass others? Why or why not?
2. At the time, there was not a specific law making the action of creating a false online persona illegal. Should a person be allowed to be charged with a crime if the law is created after the action has been committed? Explain.
3. Conduct research to find out the effect this case had on laws relating to cyberbullying.

POINT/COUNTERPOINT

Should Educators Increase the Use of Technology in the Classroom?

In an effort to engage students and bring new content to the classroom, educators look to new technologies to engage students in new learning materials. Internet content has expanded exponentially. Search engines and databases containing millions of pages of information can be accessed. Other technological devices, like MP3 players, tablets, interactive white boards, and so on, take learning into the twenty-first century. The question remains whether the technology enhances students' learning or if its benefits are negligible.

Yes

- Using the Internet in the classroom allows for access to different groups around the world. Networking with these groups gives students perspective and broadens student understanding of different viewpoints.
- Students are being prepared to use the technology demanded by industry and the business world. Students receive training in the programs and devices that are useful in both the work world as well as the next levels of education.
- Students are exposed to the proper use of this technology by an appropriate model.
- Individual education programs can require teachers to use technology in the classroom. Providing a differentiated experience in presenting information benefits the entire class and its unique learning styles.

No

- Technology can emphasize inequalities between students. Students who do not have access to the Internet at home or to the latest devices may be left out.
- Technology is a distraction for some students. The temptation to check email or check other social networking sites is a temptation students have difficulty managing.
- There is the potential to violate privacy rights of the students and the teacher. Digital devices have the ability to record and post images to the Internet. Posting information without permission is not allowed.
- Without proper training, technology is not used to its full potential. Investing in something and not using all of its functions and abilities is not a responsible use of funding.

QUESTIONS

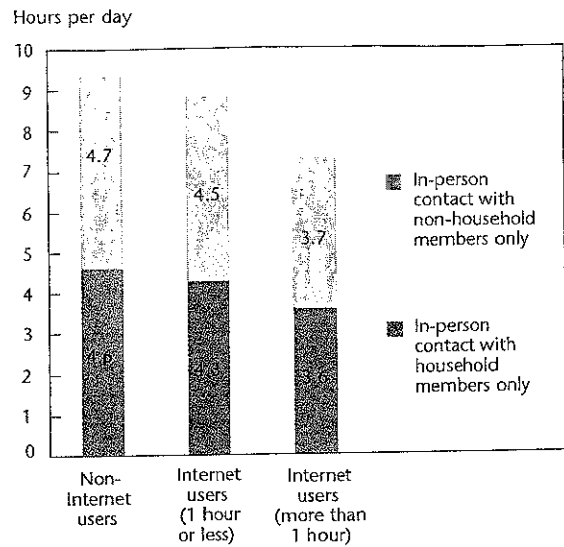
1. Choose the two most relevant arguments from one side of the argument. Collect more research on the points that were selected in preparation for a class discussion on the topic of technology use in the classroom.

The Impact of Technology on the Family

Computer technology and the family can be examined using the family systems theory. This theory conceptualizes the family as a dynamic self-regulating system where family interactions cannot be understood in isolation. Only when viewed as a large group can the relationships and interdependent nature of the relationships be understood. Each new generation of personal computer that is released on the market is more affordable and more user friendly. Today, programs are being created to engage toddlers in computer use, which means children are growing up using technology before they are even speaking in full sentences. As such, computer technology becomes integrated into their lives from such a young age that it is considered a normal part of everyday life.

What impact do computers have on family bonding time? Television commercials promote high-speed access allowing for multiple connections. Each person in the household can view the content he or she wants. But what happens to family sharing and bonding time when each person is off watching or playing in different rooms? Could computer technology be driving the family apart? Nie and Hillygus (2002) proposed a displacement hypothesis that states a finite amount of time exists in a day. Time spent using a computer and being on the Internet takes away from this time where a person can be socializing or engaging in other activities. Veenhof, Wellman, Quell, and Hogan (2008) found that Internet users spend less time engaged in face-to-face interaction with people outside the home. The Internet did not seem to have a significant impact on face-to-face interaction with people living in the home. Nie & Erbring (2000) and Nie & Hillygus (2002) found that Internet use led to intergenerational conflict while Internet use for educational purposes created stronger ties between adolescents and their parents. The purpose of Internet usage and how it is monitored in a household influence whether the Internet is seen as a benefit or a hindrance to maintaining family relationships.

Average Time Spent per Day, in-Person Contact with Household Members and Non-Members, Canada, 2005



Source: Statistics Canada, 2005.

▲ FIGURE 8-13 Does the Internet have an impact on face-to-face family contact time?

The Amish View of Technology

For Amish people, a religious group who often reject technology, cell phones are usable for business or emergencies but are left outside the home as phones are seen as rude to the other member of the family. Televisions are seen as a distraction from family time and are often seen as a corruptive force. So a personal computer with full Internet access in a child's room would, no doubt, be out of the question. In fact most Amish homes don't even have electricity. Amish people spend their evenings with their families bonding over shared activities.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

1. Put your cell phone away. How would your daily activities change? What does this tell you about the proliferation of technology in your life?
2. Describe what a friend is and the criteria to become your friend. Do all of your social media "friends" meet these criteria?
3. How has the Internet changed the way we view the right to download content?
4. Do you believe the Internet has changed the way we think and learn? Explain your answer.
5. When you're at home, who do you talk to more; your friends online or your family members that live in your home?

Democracy Watch is a non-profit organization that advocates for democratic political reform, government accountability, citizen advocacy, and corporate responsibility. Founded in 1993, this group has successfully lobbied for 110 legal changes to existing Canadian laws (Democracy Watch, 2011). Changes promoted by this group have impacted federal, provincial, and corporate practices, having a positive impact on Canadians. Transparency in practices, laws, and procedures is a major focus of this organization. Democracy Watch holds itself and the government to the same standard whereby information should be distributed in a fair and expedited manner to allow all interested parties time to read and participate in government decisions as they unfold. Another function of Democracy Watch is to bring together interested parties on a particular political reform issue.

To complete their work, Democracy Watch requires technology and all its advantages to change the Canadian political landscape. Embracing social media provides a means to participate in the Canadian political process. Social media allows for a large amount of information to be made available at almost no cost. Information can be posted, sent through an email notification system, and read within moments of being posted. This political advocacy group utilizes Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to help get its messages out and to organize its supporters. Democracy Watch promotes accountability, with an emphasis on input from the people the laws represent. One successful

campaign focused on having Canadian banks disclose in clear and plain language what the cost is to borrow when using a credit card. The regulations came into effect in September 2010.

Protecting Whistleblowers

Obtaining information is necessary to build cases. What happens to the people who provide the information? Potentially, the people being honest and giving information could be fired from their jobs or incriminated as an accessory to the illegal actions. To protect these people, called whistleblowers, Democracy Watch has successfully lobbied for protection measures for people providing information under the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act (PSDPA) created in 2007 (Hutton, 2012). Under this legislation, the PSDPA has in place a whistleblower protection system with a designated senior official and effective channels for internal reporting of suspected wrongdoing. Having a system check up on itself is important for both accountability as well as protection for people protecting the existing social and legal structures created to make a fair Canadian society.

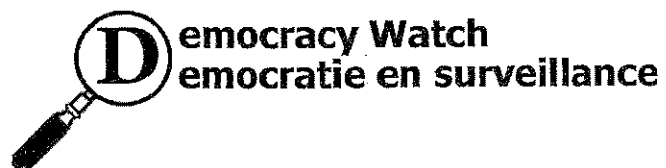
non-profit organization:

an organization whose goal it is to help a particular group or provide a service; shareholders do not benefit financially from revenues

transparency:

clarity in the actions of a corporation or government, such as through providing annual reports and allowing public access to them

► **FIGURE 8-22** Democracy Watch promotes accountability in Canadian politics. Who is protecting Canadians' democratic rights and freedoms?



Experiencing Canadian Politics and Being Part of an Advocacy Group

It is important to be part of the political process and to have a voice. All levels of government and industry should be accountable for their actions because the direct impact falls upon Canadian citizens.

Social media provides an inexpensive and broad-reaching opportunity to influence a potential audience. Messages can be read or heard and transmitted at the click of a mouse. Whether creating groups using social networks or making a video to explain your position, it is important to spread a message in digital format to maximize its impact. It also allows for the message to be transmitted to a multitude of smart devices.

When making a video, the goal of an advocacy group is to have it viewed by as many people as possible, especially by those with influence. “Going viral” requires something that will catch the attention of net surfers. Creating a parody of a popular advertisement is one way to make a video go viral. The power of fame should not be underestimated. Using the “star power” of a famous person to promote a cause can be helpful as the celebrity will recruit his or her fans to help to spread the message.

Advocacy efforts also have to reach those in power who can make change happen. Public officials or private company entities are moving toward a model where they are in closer contact with their constituents or customers. The idea is that being too far removed from the people has impeded the ability for a company or government to meet the needs of the people. People also feel better when they can contact and communicate their ideas to someone who can effect change. For example, following the tweets of a government official allows the advocate a unique understanding of the concerns of the office on a specific topic.

This information can be used to better position your request, which increases the chance that it will be read and taken seriously. Also, having a direct link to a person (or group) that can effect change empowers an advocate to make change because of the feeling that someone is listening.

The Challenge

In small groups, choose a current Canadian issue that interests everyone. You can log on to the Democracy Watch Twitter and Facebook accounts and navigate to the issue that interests the group or research other organizations concerned with your issue.

Read about the current state of your issue and research current campaigns lobbying for change. You may want to review any relevant videos posted online or any print campaigns.

Consider the following questions:

- What aspect of your issue needs the most attention?
- Why is your issue important?
- Why is change necessary?
- What can people do to create change?
- What is the most effective way to draw attention to your issue (i.e., social networking page, Twitter, Web site, videos, email campaign, online petition)?

Your Task

Using social media, create an advocacy campaign that explains and highlights the importance of your issue. Present your issue to the class, including why this change is necessary and your group’s views. Next, present your social media plan, which can include prototypes of your Web site, storyboard for your video, or a draft of your email campaign, depending on which advocacy strategy you selected. Collect feedback from your peers and include their suggestions in your final product.