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Mr. Turquoise

H English Period 4

Fall 2011

T 2010 Person of the Year

Only Connect. Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook are changing how we interact—and what we know about each other

BY RICHARD STENGEL

*"On or about December 1910, human character changed."
—Virginia Woolf, 1924*

SHE WAS EXAGGERATING—BUT ONLY A LITTLE. WOOLF saw a fundamental shift in human relations taking place at the beginning of the 20th century "between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children." Those changes, she predicted, would bring about transformations in every sphere of life, from religion to politics to human behavior. Few would say she got it wrong.

A century later, we are living through another transition. The way we connect with one another and with the institutions in our lives is evolving. There is an erosion of trust in authority, a decentralizing of power and at the same time, perhaps, a greater faith in one another. Our sense of community is more variable, while our sense of privacy is expanding. What was once considered intimate is now shared among millions with a keystroke.

More than anyone else on the world stage, Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg is at the center of these changes. Born in 1984, the same year the Macintosh computer was launched, he is both a product of his generation and an architect of it. The social-networking platform he invented is closing in on 600 million users. In a single day, about a billion new pieces of content are posted on Facebook. It is the connective tissue for nearly a tenth of the planet. Facebook is now the third largest country on earth and surely has more information about its citizens than any government does. Zuckerberg, a Harvard dropout, is its T-shirt-wearing head of state.

Evolutionary biologists suggest there is a correlation between the size of the cerebral neocortex and the number of social relationships a primate species can have. Humans have the largest neocortex and the widest social circle—about 150, according to the scientist Robin Dunbar. Dunbar's number—150—also happens to mirror the average number of friends people have on Facebook. Because of airplanes and telephones and now social media, human beings touch the lives of vastly more people than did our ancestors, who might have encountered only 150 people in their lifetime. Now the possibility of connection is

accelerating at an extraordinary pace. As the great biologist E.O. Wilson says, "We're in uncharted territory."

All social media involve a mixture of narcissism and voyeurism. Most of us display a combination of the two, which is why social media are flourishing faster and penetrating deeper than any other social development in memory. Social media play into the parts of human character that don't change, even while changing the nature of what once seemed immutable.

Like two of our runners-up this year, Julian Assange and the Tea Party, Mark Zuckerberg doesn't have a whole lot of veneration for traditional authority. In a sense, Zuckerberg and Assange are two sides of the same coin. Both express a

desire for openness and transparency. While Assange attacks big institutions and governments through involuntary transparency with the goal of disempowering them, Zuckerberg enables individuals to voluntarily share information with the idea of empowering them. Assange sees the world as filled with real and imagined enemies; Zuckerberg sees the world as filled with potential friends. Both have a certain disdain for privacy: in Assange's case because he feels it allows malevolence to flourish; in Zuckerberg's case because he sees it as a cultural anachronism, an impediment to a more efficient and open connection between people.

At 26, Zuckerberg is a year older than our first Person of the Year, Charles Lindbergh—another young man who used

technology to bridge continents. He is the same age as Queen Elizabeth when she was Person of the Year, for 1952. But unlike the Queen, he did not inherit an empire; he created one. (The Queen, by the way, launched a Facebook page this year.) Person of the Year is not and never has been an honor. It is a recognition of the power of individuals to shape our world. For connecting more than half a billion people and mapping the social relations among them (something that has never been done before); for creating a new system of exchanging information that has become both indispensable and sometimes a little scary; and finally, for changing how we all live our lives in ways that are innovative and even optimistic, Mark Elliot Zuckerberg is TIME's 2010 Person of the Year. ■



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Contemporary Topics Questions
Social Media Article #1

1. The subject of this article is Mark Zuckerberg and the ubiquitous presence of Facebook.
2. The article provides a brief background into Zuckerberg's life, but focuses on the evolution of Zuckerberg and Facebook over the last 7 years. While Zuckerberg and Facebook are housed in Palo Alto, California, the span of Facebook is global. The article examines the global impact of Facebook.
3. The expansion of Facebook is debatable because Facebook has made once private lives very public. While Zuckerberg proposes making everything public based on "trust" Zuckerberg's own life is actually very private. Facebook is such a behemoth that Zuckerberg has personal meetings with President Obama. It is debatably a monopoly on private lives. Additionally, it is changing how consumers behave.
4. Users of Facebook should be concerned about what private information is made available to the public without their realizing it. Nonusers of Facebook are also involved parties because a vehicle they are not using is transforming how the world uses the internet. The parties that should be most concerned are governments all around the world. Governments should be concerned because vehicles such as Facebook have the ability to be tools of revolution or even terrorism. Social Media can also be used to create fraudulent personalities that may be tools to commit financial to violent crimes.
5. The article seems to present Zuckerberg in some very positive lights. Grossman describes Zuckerberg as "monastic for some whose personal fortune was estimated by *Forbes* at \$6.9 billion...he works constantly" (51). So Zuckerberg is very modest in one view. On the other hand, Grossman notes that the profiles on Facebook "still fall far short of our true selves, and confusing our Facebook profiles with who we really are would be a terrible mistake" (69). Facebook addiction is even being considered a "diagnosable ailment" by psychiatry (69).

Grossman, Lev. "2010 Person of the Year Mark Zuckerberg." *Time* 27 December 2010: 43-75. Print.



ights Watch

Mauled on MySpace

Federal courts curb the power of school officials to punish student Internet speech.

Two landmark decisions this summer have greatly expanded the free speech rights of students in cyberspace. Unfortunately, educators who are the victims of vicious personal attacks posted on the web by spiteful students may have little legal recourse. Both cases arose in Pennsylvania and were decided by the Third Circuit Court of Appeals on June 13, this year.



In the first case, *J.S. v. Blue Mountain School District*, an eighth-grade student was ticked off because her principal, James McGonigle, had twice punished her for violating the dress code. So she created a fake profile of McGonigle and posted it on MySpace using her parents' computer.

In a vulgar assault on McGonigle and his family, J.S. accused him of having sex in his office, "hitting on students and their parents," and being a "sex addict." In addition to using obscene language about the genitals and GLBT persons, she wrote that the principal's wife, a school counselor, "looks like a man" and that his son "looks like a gorilla."

Confronted by McGonigle, J.S. admitted creating the profile as a "joke." She later sent a written apology to McGonigle and his wife. Unmoved, McGonigle suspended her for 10 days.

J.S. then sued McGonigle and the school district claiming a violation of her right to freedom of speech.

She won.

In the second case, *Layshock v. Hermitage School District*, Justin Layshock, high school senior, also took to MySpace to belittle his principal, Eric Trosch. He used his grandmother's computer to create a "parody profile" of Trosch, using a photo of the principal he had copied from the school's website.

In addition to using vulgar language and homophobic slurs, Layshock accused Trosch of being a "drunk," smoking a "big [marijuana] blunt," using illegal drugs, and shoplifting.

Based on rumors, Trosch called Layshock and his mother in for a chat. Layshock admitted creating the profile and later apologized. His parents grounded him and took away his computer access.

The school district subsequently suspended Layshock for 10 days, transferred him to an "alternative" high school, banned him from all extracurricular activities, and prohibited him from participating in the graduation ceremony.

Claiming a free speech violation, Layshock and his parents sued Trosch and the school district. On June 13, he too won his case.

How is that possible? Are school officials powerless to punish this type of vulgar, demeaning, and wildly disrespectful speech posted by students on the Internet? The answer's a little complicated.

This much we know: students can be punished for their off-campus speech, such as Cyberspeech, if their speech is likely to cause a substantial disruption of the school, e.g., a Facebook posting calling for a student walkout during school.

And the same rule applies to student Internet speech that threatens harm to employees or fellow students.

But what about student Internet speech that does not cross the substantial disruption or threatening speech line, i.e., speech that "merely" ridicules or demeans school employees?

Emphasizing that the fake profile did not disrupt the school, all 14 judges on the Layshock court declared, "We do not think that the First Amendment can tolerate the School District stretching its authority into Justin's grandmother's home and reaching Justin while he is sitting at her computer after school."

The vote in the J.S. case was much closer, eight-six. The majority ruled that schools can't punish students for posting nondisruptive speech on the Internet, even if it is "lewd, vulgar, and offensive."

The dissent argued that the profile was disruptive because it interfered

with the ability of McGonigle and his wife to do their jobs. The court's ruling, they said, "allows a student to target a school official and his family with malicious and unfounded accusations in vulgar, obscene, and personal language." We "fear that our Court leaves schools defenseless to protect teachers and powerless to discipline students for the consequences of their actions."

Educators who are victimized by insulting and mean-spirited online attacks are not entirely "powerless" to respond.

The first thing Principal McGonigle did was to tell MySpace that an imposter had posted a fake profile of him. MySpace promptly removed it. Both Facebook and MySpace have rules prohibiting fake profiles and bullying or harassing others.

Next, McGonigle contacted the police, who called in J.S. and her mother to discuss the matter. No criminal charges were filed, however, and based on two recent court decisions from Arizona and Georgia, criminal prosecution probably is not a viable option, even when a student calls a teacher, to her face, a "f---ing bitch" or shouts the F bomb at a teacher in school.

Eric Trosch filed a lawsuit against Justin Layshock for libel and identity theft. But libel actions are hard to win, and students usually don't have any money.

The Supreme Court eventually will have to decide the extent of student free speech on the Internet. And it may be sooner, rather than later. School officials in the J.S. case already have announced that they will ask the High Court to overturn the circuit court decision.

—Michael D. Simpson, NEA Office of General Counsel

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Contemporary Topics Questions
Social Media Article #2

1. The subject of this article how social media was used by students to slander educators.
2. Two Pennsylvania cases explored freedom of speech on the internet. In both *J.S. v. Blue Mountain School District* and *Layshock v. Hermitage School District* students used MySpace to create websites pretending to be educators at their schools. Students pretending to be educators wrote obscene to criminal things about their principals. The students were angry over suspensions.
3. Both court cases are controversial because freedom of speech is at question here. But what are the limits to freedom of speech? In the dissenting opinion of the *J.S. v. Blue Mountain School District* case, the judge wrote, "our Court leaves schools defenseless to protect teachers and powerless to discipline students for the consequences of their actions" (Simpson).
4. The obvious affected parties include students and educators. Students are affected because what they say may be censored. Educators are invested because they can be slandered with no recourse. But internet users at large should also be invested. The issues around this article focus on social media's abuse of individuals, but there is also the larger issue of fraudulence online. MySpace, e-mail, Facebook can be used not just to abuse individuals, but fraudulently create nonexistent personalities. These fake personalities can be used to for various criminal activity, from stealing money to kidnapping.
5. The article is taken from *National Educational Association*, so it would appear that the bias is to limit what a person can say about educators. However, the article does try to see both sides of the issue. The end of the article suggests what educators can do to defend themselves against libel, implying more support for educators than abusive social media users. The title "Mauled on MySpace" also indicates a bias supporting educators. "Mauled" carries a negative violent connotation, suggesting that such use of social media is inhumane.

Simpson, Michael. "Mauled on MySpace." *National Education Association*. Web 13 Jun. 2011.

<<http://www.nea.org/home/46469.htm>>.

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H English Period 4

4 March 2011

Contemporary Topics Questions
Social Media Article #3

1, The subject of this article is backlash against social media by academics. Critics of social media see it as warping people's perception of reality and humanity. Harris cites one author, Sherry Turkle, as suggesting that social media can go so far as to allow behaviors that were once seen as "pathological" as being seen as "typical" with the rise in the use of social media.

2. Social media has increasingly become a part of daily life. It is even integrated into classroom and politics. As it has become a part of people's daily lives, a number of critics have risen with examples of social media as interfering with human connection. Social media is also new and unfamiliar to people. Now, it has been around long enough that some consequences of its daily use are becoming evident.

3. Regular use and the proliferation of social media is controversial because there have been some disturbing incidents on social media, such as the suicide note posted by Simone Back on Facebook. After her death, Back's Facebook followers continued to post messages in which they insulted one another, despite the recent tragedy. Social media is accused of popularizing tragedies. Defenders of social media argue that interpersonal communication has always been faulty, whether online or in-person. Kist, an education expert at Kent State University, counters that before the iPad or smart phone, people "just travelled in silence" on the bus or train, in contrast to now, when people have their headphones on.

4. Teens would be very interested in the conversation about social media. Teenagers are avid users of social media and probably would defend its easy, open access because they use social media so frequently. Parents, educators, and other youth advocates may be wary about the proliferation of social media because of its dangers. On the other hand, parents, educators, and other youth advocates may see social media as an outreach tool to help youth in crisis. The Silicon Valley in California and other internet developers have a vested interest in seeing social media continue to grow because it is their livelihood. Similarly, advertisers who use social media platforms to put their product before the public have a vested interest in seeing social media remain in demand.

5. Harris seems to have a bias against social media. More than two thirds of the article is devoted to highlighting the arguments of 6 social media critics in the United States and abroad. Just one voice defending social media, Kist of Kent State University, Ohio, is

cited. Kist does not exactly defend social media, only offers that social media is an inevitable part of contemporary life.

6. Harris, Paul. "Social Networking under Fresh Attack as Tide of Cyber-scepticism Sweeps US." *The Guardian*. 7 September 2011.

guardian.co.uk | TheObserver

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Social networking under fresh attack as tide of cyber-scepticism sweeps US

Twitter and Facebook don't connect people – they isolate them from reality, say a rising number of academics

Paul Harris in New York
guardian.co.uk, Saturday 22 January 2011 21:00 GMT

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An American student checks in on his smart phone. Critics of social networking say it is having an isolating effect on users. Photograph: Nialah Peanny/Corbis

The way in which people frantically communicate online via Twitter, Facebook and instant messaging can be seen as a form of modern madness, according to a leading American sociologist.

"A behaviour that has become typical may still express the problems that once caused us to see it as pathological," MIT professor Sherry Turkle writes in her new book, *Alone Together*, which is leading an attack on the information age.

[http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/jan/22/social-networking-cyber-scepticism-twitter/...](http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/jan/22/social-networking-cyber-scepticism-twitter/) 9/7/2011

Turkle's book, published in the UK next month, has caused a sensation in America, which is usually more obsessed with the merits of social networking. She appeared last week on Stephen Colbert's late-night comedy show, *The Colbert Report*. When Turkle said she had been at funerals where people checked their iPhones, Colbert quipped: "We all say goodbye in our own way."

Turkle's thesis is simple: technology is threatening to dominate our lives and make us less human. Under the illusion of allowing us to communicate better, it is actually isolating us from real human interactions in a cyber-reality that is a poor imitation of the real world.

But Turkle's book is far from the only work of its kind. An intellectual backlash in America is calling for a rejection of some of the values and methods of modern communications. "It is a huge backlash. The different kinds of communication that people are using have become something that scares people," said Professor William Kist, an education expert at Kent State University, Ohio.

The list of attacks on social media is a long one and comes from all corners of academia and popular culture. A recent bestseller in the US, *The Shallows* by Nicholas Carr, suggested that use of the internet was altering the way we think to make us less capable of digesting large and complex amounts of information, such as books and magazine articles. The book was based on an essay that Carr wrote in the *Atlantic* magazine. It was just as emphatic and was headlined: Is Google Making Us Stupid?

Another strand of thought in the field of cyber-scepticism is found in *The Net Delusion*, by Evgeny Morozov. He argues that social media has bred a generation of "slacktivists". It has made people lazy and enshrined the illusion that clicking a mouse is a form of activism equal to real world donations of money and time.

Other books include *The Dumbest Generation* by Emory University professor Mark Bauerlein – in which he claims "the intellectual future of the US looks dim" – and *We Have Met the Enemy* by Daniel Alst, which describes the problems of self-control in the modern world, of which the proliferation of communication tools is a key component.

The backlash has crossed the Atlantic. In *Cyberbia*, published in Britain last year, James Harkin surveyed the modern technological world and found some dangerous possibilities. While Harkin was no pure cyber-sceptic, he found many reasons to be worried as well as pleased about the new technological era. Elsewhere, hit film *The Social Network* has been seen as a thinly veiled attack on the social media generation, suggesting that Facebook was created by people who failed to fit in with the real world.

[http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/jan/22/social-networking-cyber-scepticism-twitter/...](http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/jan/22/social-networking-cyber-scepticism-twitter/) 9/7/2011

Turkle's book, however, has sparked the most debate so far. It is a *cri de coeur* for putting down the BlackBerry, ignoring Facebook and shunning Twitter. "We have invented inspiring and enhancing technologies, yet we have allowed them to diminish us," she writes.

Fellow critics point to numerous incidents to back up their argument. Recently, media coverage of the death in Brighton of Simone Back focused on a suicide note she had posted on Facebook that was seen by many of her 1,048 "friends" on the site. Yet none called for help – instead they traded insults with each other on her Facebook wall.

Turkle's book has also hit home because her previous works, *The Second Self* and *Life on the Screen*, seemed more open to the technological world. "*Alone Together* reads as if it were written by Turkle's evil Luddite twin," joked Kist.

But even the backlash now has a backlash, with many leaping to the defence of social media. They point out that emails, Twitter and Facebook have led to more communication, not less – especially for people who may have trouble meeting in the real world because of great distance or social difference.

Defenders say theirs is just a different form of communication that people might have trouble getting used to. "When you go into a coffee shop and everyone is silent on their laptop, I understand what she is saying about not talking to one another," Kist said. "But it is still communicating. I disagree with her. I don't see it as so black and white."

Some experts believe the debate is so fierce because social networking is a new field that has yet to develop rules and etiquette that everyone can respect and that is why incidents such as Simone Back's death appear so shocking. "Let's face it, I see no sign of anyone unplugging," said Kist. "But, perhaps, we need to involve a 'netiquette' to deal with it all."

He also pointed out that the "real world" that many social media critics hark back to never really existed. Before everyone travelled on the bus or train with their heads buried in an iPad or a smart phone, they usually just travelled in silence. "We did not see people spontaneously talking to strangers. They were just keeping to themselves," Kist said.




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H English Period 4

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Contemporary Topics Reflection
Social Media



While I am not against Facebook and other forms of social media, I find both to be very dangerous. Too much time is spent creating virtual versus real relationships. I do not look forward to a world where a technology can synthetically and artificially provide me the experience of smelling summer jasmine or tasting rich chocolate. Most importantly, while I like to take advantage of tools such as Skype to see relatives and friends that live distantly, I never want to replace the experience of being in another human's presence with the relationship I can create with a person online. The woman with the Facebook addiction could not sit through an interview without checking her Facebook on her phone. Rather than be present with her interview, she was distracted by social media. She was focused on a world that *might* be happening as opposed to a world that *was* happening.



Social media is a powerful tool to connect people, but also a dangerous tool to abuse people. Facebook, e-mail, Twitter and text messages make bully and slandering ordinary, defenseless people far too easy. Freedom of speech protected a student's right to slander the principal on MySpace in the *J.S. v. Blue Mountain School District* case. Imagine the outrage if a teacher created a similar website about a student. There appears to be a hypocrisy in the implementation of the law regarding social media.