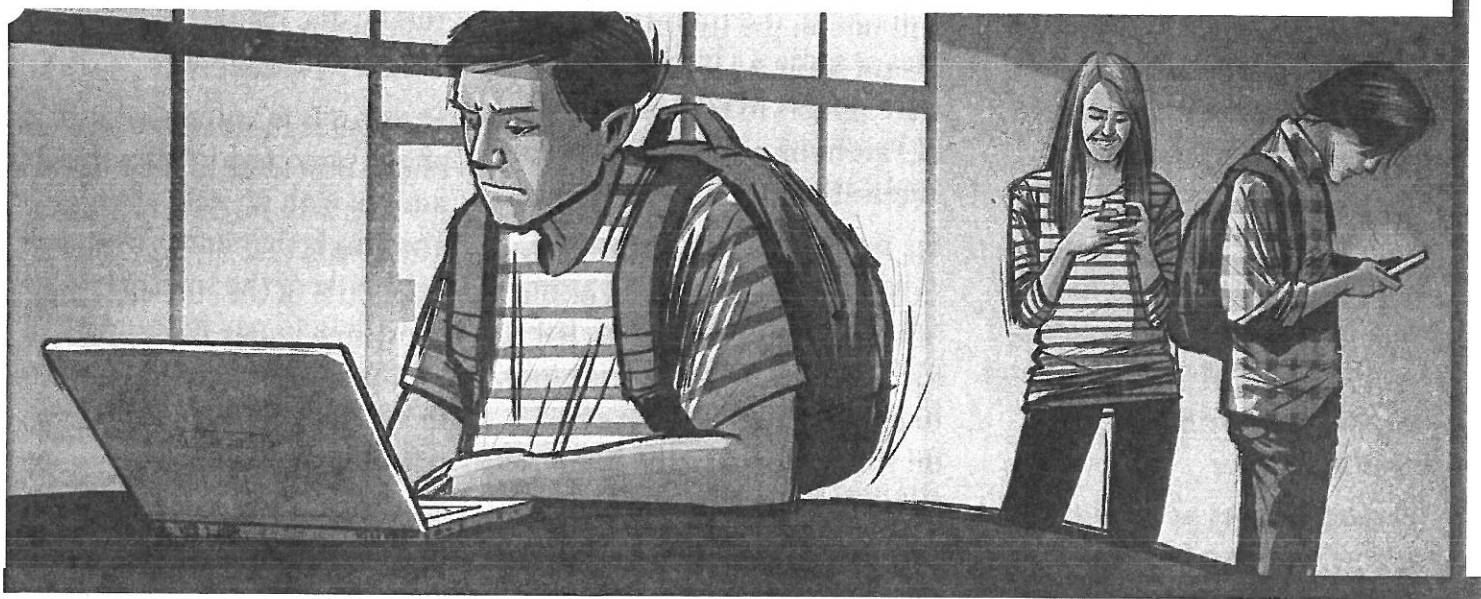




THE FACEBOOK PHENOMENON



Do you view and post updates on Facebook? If so, you're not alone. Facebook is the world's largest social **network**. It has 1.5 billion users around the globe. In Canada, some 14 million people check their accounts at least once a day.

TIMELINE

Facebook's story began 11 years ago. That was when 19-year-old student Mark Zuckerberg created a computer program at Harvard University. Within 24 hours, 1,200 Harvard students had signed up to his network. It soon expanded to include students at other universities and high schools. By 2006 anyone with an email address could join.

Since then, Facebook has grown explosively. Nearly every business, organization, politician or celebrity now has a Facebook page. They all want you to 'like' them. Many pay money for ads on the site to help promote what they have to offer.

MONEY-MAKING MACHINE

Over time, that's meant huge **profits** for Facebook. In 2014 alone, the company made \$12.5 billion from advertising.

Mr. Zuckerberg, of course, has benefited, too. Thanks to Facebook, he became the youngest billionaire in history at age 23. Now he's the 8th richest person on the planet.

THUMBS DOWN

Not everyone is a fan of Facebook. Privacy and cyber-bullying are real concerns for site users. People have lost jobs when embarrassing photos of them have been posted. Others have had their lives destroyed by hateful words. And many people are unhappy that Facebook takes information from users' data and posts to customize the advertising that they see.

Researchers have begun looking into other concerns, too. For example, does Facebook encourage **narcissism**? How much time do people spend on Facebook? (The global average is just over 20 minutes. That's about 20 percent of all time that humans spend online.) How

DEFINITIONS

NETWORK: a group or system of interconnected people or things

NARCISSISM: personality disorder characterized by self-preoccupation, need for admiration, lack of empathy, and unconscious deficits in self-esteem

PROFIT: money that remains after all costs have been paid



many people are addicted to the site? And does Facebook discourage more meaningful face-to-face conversation?

Some say Facebook can cause jealousy, loneliness and depression. People tend to post what they want other people to see. Friends read these posts and feel that their own lives don't measure up.

"Facebook gives us a limited view of our friends' lives," says researcher Dilney Gonçalves, "and that view tends to be unrealistically positive."

THUMBS UP

At the same time, for many people, social sharing on Facebook can be empowering, educational and fun.

Teachers create Facebook pages to help students learn. Politicians use it to mobilize supporters. Grandparents use it to connect with grandchildren. Activists use it to organize protests. People with medical conditions find Facebook support groups, and health educators post life-saving information.

INTERNET.ORG

Mr. Zuckerberg strongly believes in the benefits of Facebook. Yet when his company reached its tenth anniversary, he realized that two-thirds of the world was

still not on the Internet. That meant some 4.3 billion people were unable to take advantage of Facebook and other sites and applications.

So, he launched a new project, called Internet.org. It's a group of technology companies, led by Facebook, who are working to connect the world. It's based on the belief that "The more we connect, the better it gets."

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Internet.org has three main challenges to overcome to reach its goal.

One is technical. About 15 percent of the world's population doesn't use the Internet simply because there is no connection where they live.

The second is financial. In poor countries, people can't afford a phone or data plan. So Facebook is trying to simplify its services so they work on basic hardware and are easy to transmit.

The biggest hurdle is social. Some people don't see how the Internet could better their lives. So Mr. Zuckerberg wants everyone to have free access to a set of basic Internet websites via an Internet.org app. It might include a weather website, health information, farming tips,

Wikipedia, Google search and, of course, Facebook.

The plan is to convince local cell-phone providers to offer the app for free with no data charges.

The idea is that once customers see a little of the Internet, they'll be willing to pay for more. Cell-phone providers could then invest more in their networks, reaching more people.

BETTER FOR WHOM?

Some people are skeptical of Mr. Zuckerberg's new project. They say he just wants to increase the reach of Facebook ads so he can make more money. Mr. Zuckerberg responds that you can't profit from ads shown to those who have nothing to spend.

Other critics wonder whether people without food, water and medicine really need the Internet. Mr. Zuckerberg says it's not a case of 'either/or.' He points to Zambia, where local officials asked Internet.org to include websites where people could learn about HIV. That's a case where connectivity helps improve people's health.

The goal, he insists, is to use the Internet to transform lives.

"That is why Facebook is here on this planet," he says. ★

DEFINITIONS

SKEPTICAL: having doubts about something that other people think is true or right