Unit 1

Disconnecting People



James Whitaker/Getty Images

I am trying to make friends outside of Facebook while applying the same principles.

Therefore, every day I walk down the street and tell passers-by what I have eaten, how I feel at the moment, what I have done the night before, what I will do later and with whom.

I give them pictures of my family, my dog and of me gardening, taking things apart in the garage, watering the lawn, standing in front of landmarks, driving around town, having lunch and doing what anybody and everybody does every day.

I also listen to their conversations, give them the "thumbs up" and tell them I like them.

And it works just like Facebook! I already have four people following me: two police officers, a private investigator and a psychiatrist.

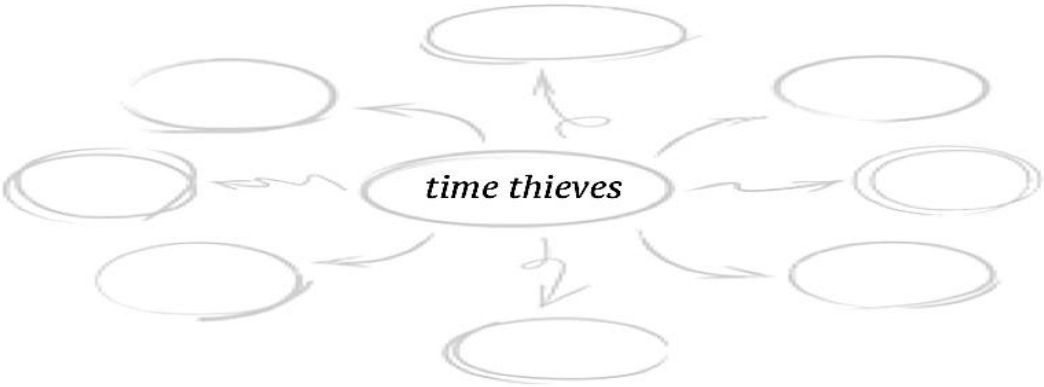
SECTION 1: WARM-UP

1. Discuss the question below with your groupmates.

NB! START by saying:
I'm convinced that …
I reckon that …
Well, in the first place… | What's more, …

- Do you think that keeping in touch with friends online is as good as seeing them face-to-face? What are the benefits & drawbacks of it?

2. What activities do you associate with the expression "time thief"?



3. Answer the questions.

- *Do you let time thieves steal from your life? How do you beat them?*
- *Do you agree that social networking is a waste of time? Why (not)?*

4. Watch the video episode and write down ways to beat time thieves.

- ……
- ……
- ……
- ……
- ……
- ……

5. **You are going to read an article entitled** *Will They Call Us "Generation Isolation"?*. **What do you think the article is about?**

6. **Brainstorm 3-5 problems that can be caused by dependence on social networks.**

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7. **Skim the article** *Will They Call Us "Generation Isolation"?* **and explain the meaning of the bolded words. Afterwards read the article writing down key words for each paragraph.**

SECTION 2: READING

8. **Read the article** *Will They Call Us "Generation Isolation"?* **and answer the questions**.

key words

§1 Retail sales of smartphones and game consoles are rising year after year. More people are spending sizable chunks of their lives in virtual worlds. And the use of social networking websites is continually increasing. Now, amid fears of the dangers of decreased social interaction, a backlash has begun. With parents and teachers alike **grumbling** about youngsters being stuck indoors by themselves, kids are being told to put away their game consoles and have more face-to-face fun with their friends. Likewise, kids are complaining about their parents taking work calls and e-mails during family time and so are forcing adults to rip themselves away from their cell phones and laptops. However, is there any scientific evidence to verify that we are, in fact, interacting less? Is it an **exaggeration** to say we are becoming "Generation Isolation"?

§2 According to psychologists, social isolation **occurs** when people have only **modest** amounts of interaction or no interaction with their peers. Frequent use of the Internet, video games might contribute to this. For example, results from a questionnaire sent out

to more than 4,000 American adults found that the more time the respondents spent online, the more socially **isolated** they became. Of those who spent five-plus hours per week online, approximately 10% **attended** fewer social events than they had in the past. Nearly 15% found that the time they spent with family and friends had **shrunk**. And nearly 25% spent less time talking to family and friends on the phone.

§3 Another study found that there are mounting numbers of people living by themselves, couples spending time apart, and parents spending time away from their children. In fact, face-to-face interaction has halved over the past 20 years, whereas use of electronic media has doubled. Likewise, the number of people with "core partners" (people with whom you discuss your most sensitive issues) is 30% lower than a generation ago.

§4 This **evidence** seems to suggest that if we limit the use of electronic media, we can avoid social isolation. Yet research shows that the occurrence of "severe social isolation" has not changed over the past 25 years. In fact, research indicates that technology users have larger discussion networks than non-users. For instance, if you own a smartphone, your number of core partners is likely to be 25% higher than if you don't, and your core partners are likely to be more **diverse**. For Internet users, the figure is closer to 15% and significantly more for those who use the Internet more frequently. Researchers also have discovered that using the Internet doesn't stop people from visiting public places, as originally thought. Because the Internet is such a **convenient** way to find information about places such as libraries, museums, and bars, Internet users are more **inclined** to visit these places - places where they are more likely to meet new and charming people from a variety of backgrounds.

§5 There is also evidence to suggest that social networking websites, blogs, and chat rooms are having a positive impact on democratic politics. This is because they are solutions to the so-called "spiral of silence" problem. Some people find it difficult to express their views face-to-face because they are **anxious** about what their peers may think. This is bad enough when it happens with children, but when it happens with adults, it can have a **devastating** effect on political engagement. It is **vital** that there be opportunities

for adults to share diverse ideas and opinions. Active participation in political debate is a key feature of a vigorous democracy. The advantage of communications technology is that it **facilitates** equal access to discussions and an equal right to be heard without sacrificing privacy. This, in turn, means greater social participation and decreased isolation.

§6 So, is the use of social networking websites putting us at risk of greater social isolation? It seems that there isn't a simple yes or no answer to this. As technology develops, it becomes ever more **sophisticated**, which allows greater social interaction. However, we need to remember that in order to send a friend an e-mail, text message, or chat invitation, we need to have met them in the first place. So perhaps this is as good a time as any to log off and go out.

Answer the questions:

1. How would you define "**backlash**"? According to the text, why has there been a backlash against online social interaction? Have you experienced this backlash yourself?
2. What evidence is given to support the idea that we are becoming "Generation Isolation"?
3. Why do you think people with smartphones and access to the Internet have more core partners?
4. How do you think social interaction will develop over the next fifty years?

9. Write a short paragraph, using the beginning given.

Social networks are a mixed blessing. On the one hand, ...