

Technology and Society Work Sample

The following articles discuss the impact certain types of technology make on people's lives. Read the excerpts then answer the provided questions. When you finish, complete the multi-paragraph prompt without using outside resources.

Source 1: "Is Technology Making People Less Sociable?" PRO/CON Article from the Wall Street Journal

YES: Connecting Virtually Isn't Like Real-World Bonding

By Larry Rosen

So that I won't be branded a Luddite, I will start by saying that I have embraced technology in my life and in my 40 years of teaching. I talk to parents about responsible technology use and educators about enhancing its classroom efficacy.

As a research psychologist, I have studied the impact of technology for 30 years among 50,000 children, teens and adults in the U.S. and 24 other countries.

In that time, three major game-changers have entered our world: portable computers, social communication and smartphones. The total effect has been to allow us to connect more with the people in our virtual world—but communicate less with those who are in our real world.

Our real and virtual worlds certainly overlap, as many of our virtual friends are also our real friends. But the time and effort we put into our virtual worlds limit the time to connect and especially to communicate on a deeper level in our real world. With smartphone in hand, we face a constant barrage of alerts, notifications, vibrations and beeps warning us that something seemingly important has happened and we must pay attention. We tap out brief missives and believe that we are being sociable, but as psychologist Sherry Turkle has so aptly said, we are only getting "sips" of connection, not real communication.

Worse, we don't even need a beep or vibration to distract us anymore. In one study of more than 1,100 teens and adults, my fellow researchers and I found that the vast majority of smartphone users under 35 checked in with their electronic devices many times a day and mostly without receiving an external alert.

Anxiety drives this behavior. As evidenced by a rash of phantom pocket vibrations, our constant need to check comes from anxiety about needing to know what is happening in our virtual worlds.

In one study, we monitored anxiety levels of smartphone users when we wouldn't let them use their phones, and found that the heavy smartphone users showed increased anxiety after only 10 minutes and that anxiety continued to increase across the hourlong study. Moderate users showed some anxiety, while light users showed none.

If we are constantly checking in with our virtual worlds, this leaves little time for our real-world relationships.

A second issue is the difference between connecting and communicating. While we may have hundreds of Facebook friends—people we never would have met otherwise, with whom we can share many new things—do they really provide the kind of human interaction that is so essential to our emotional health?

Psychologists define social capital, or the benefit we derive from social interactions, in two ways: bonding and the more superficial bridging. Research shows that virtual-world friends provide mostly bridging social capital, while real-world friends provide bonding social capital.

For instance, in one study we found that while empathy can be dispensed in the virtual world, it is only one-sixth as effective in making the recipient feel socially supported compared with empathy proffered in the real world. A hug feels six times more supportive than an emoji.

We need to examine our technology use to ensure that it isn't getting in the way of our being sociable and getting the emotional support we need from the people who are closest to us.

We need to put our phones away in social settings and consider making phone calls when we want to contact people instead of a series of brief texts.

We need to learn to check in less often and seek out face-to-face contact more often.

NO: Relationships Are Being Enhanced, not Replaced

By Keith N. Hampton

Don't believe the hype. New technologies, including cellphones, the Internet and Facebook, are not making us less social.

Yes, some things have changed—but maybe not as much as you might think. Consider “what a strange practice it is...that a man should sit down to his breakfast table and, instead of conversing with his wife, and children, hold before his face a sort of screen on which is inscribed a world-wide gossip.” These words ring as true today as when they were written, in 1909. They were the observations of one of America's first and most renowned sociologists, Charles Cooley, about how morning delivery of the newspaper was undermining the American family. Thank goodness the scourge of the newsman is in decline.

We are now no more addicted to communication and ignore our relationships as a result than we did 100 years ago. In studies with my students and collaborators, we have found that Internet and cellphone users, and especially those who use social media, tend to have more diverse and a larger number of close relationships. What has changed is that communication technologies have made many of our relationships more persistent and pervasive. This, in turn, is transforming how we relate to those around us, in what are mostly positive ways.

Social ties that we once would have abandoned as we left high school, changed jobs and moved from one neighborhood to another now persist online. Today, high-school friends stay with us on Facebook in a way that they wouldn't have done in the past. The same is true for professional acquaintances, distant relatives and friends from all phases of our life. In our closest relationships, today's technologies don't replace in-person interaction, they supplement it.

It is tempting to dismiss as trivial many messages exchanged online. But together, the small sips that come from the steady contact of social media can add up to a big gulp of information about the activities, interests and opinions of the people we connect with. They communicate mutual awareness and closeness along with information that we wouldn't otherwise receive.

We shouldn't fear information overload as a result. My recent studies have found that even the highest users of email, mobile phones and social media tend not to report higher levels of stress. In fact, for some, especially women, the exchange of informal support and opportunities for social sharing online contribute to lower levels of stress.

All that information also contributes to our awareness of the world around us. Social-media users are more likely to know people from many diverse backgrounds. Among real-life friends and acquaintances, topics that are traditionally taboo, including politics and religion, are suddenly visible online in the places people visit, the photos they share and the opinions they endorse. Of course, not all of this information is welcome or appreciated, or leads to better friendships—but it doesn't isolate us.

We all know of individual cases of technology use that might be problematic, such as that strange practice of some men, or women, sitting down to their breakfast and, instead of conversing with their spouse or children, holding before their faces an actual screen on which is inscribed a world-wide gossip.

But, for the majority of people, most of the time, communication is not a psychological ailment. Technology does not come between us. For most, the persistent contact and pervasive awareness made possible by technology provide a wide range of benefits we have never enjoyed before.

Source 2: Article from the Greater Good Magazine published by UC Berkeley

Does Technology Cut Us Off from Other People?

Three new studies paint a surprisingly complicated picture of the role of mobile devices in our social lives—and suggest steps we can take to make the most of technology.

By Lauren Klein | MARCH 12, 2014

I keep technology at a little distance, which makes me unusual among millennials. Four out of five of my peers—those born after 1980—own mobile devices, which are always on, always on us, and always connected to social media like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

But while all my friends seem wired into their smartphones 24-7, I've turned off notifications on my iPhone and I participate in the occasional technology Shabbat.

It's hard to shake the feeling that, although smartphones open the door to new kinds of social connection, they burn through precious social capital—the web of social networks that research says can help us to be happier, healthier, and better employed.

I'm not alone. In fact, Greater Good contributor Barbara Fredrickson published a study last year that suggests smartphone use may be taking a toll “on our biological capacity to connect with other people.”

But do digital devices and social media really disconnect us from the flesh-and-blood people in our lives? Or can mobile devices actually add to our social capital? Researchers are starting to explore these questions—and the answers suggest that our social media presence need not detract from our real-world social connections. In fact, technology can actually increase our social capital, if we know how to use it.

When it's smart to use smartphones

First up, do smartphones actually reduce our social capital?

To find out, a team of researchers at the University of Florida surveyed 339 students about the intensity of their smartphone use and online social networking. They found that, on average, participants reported spending about 100-200 minutes per day using the Internet and about 30-90 minutes using social networks. Then the students answered questions about four dimensions of social capital:

- **Trust**, measured with questions like, “Generally speaking, there is someone I can turn to for advice about making very important decisions.”
- **Organizational participation**, measured simply by their number of group memberships.
- **Political participation**, measured by how often they watched political debates or participated in demonstrations.
- **Network resources**, measured by the people of people they know who could provide different resources, such as a holiday homes abroad or access to professional journals.

The results? Across the board, heavy smartphone use was positively associated with all four measures of social capital. So it seems that all those people who are glued to their phones are not necessarily more socially isolated.

But this relationship only exists to the extent that the smartphones were being used for their social networking capabilities, as opposed to random Internet surfing. In other words, only those who used their smartphones for social

media like Google+ or Twitter knew more people, were more involved with organizations, participated more actively in politics, and perceived more trust among their peers.

This study was of young people. Do people on the other end of the age spectrum also benefit from online social networking?

Social media help older people stay connected

Studies have shown that older adults—those 65 years and up—who use social networking sites benefit from better health, reduce their chances of cognitive decline, and prevent premature death. But only four percent of Facebook users in the United States are over 65, which suggests that older adults may be missing valuable opportunities to strengthen their social ties through social media.

A team of Mexican researchers designed their own type of social media platform, called Tlatoque, which borrows many of its features from popular networking sites (e.g., it has a news feed, status updates, and photo sharing capabilities). After a few weeks, the researchers looked at how interactions through Tlatoque influenced social capital and interactions in the real world.

They found that the system significantly enriched these adults' relationships with close friends and family. The authors suggest that's because the system helped them become more aware of what their relatives were up to, enabling the sharing of information with friends and family who prefer social media to the "more traditional" ways of staying in touch. This catalyzed and enriched real-world conversations, according to the results.

While Tlatoque might not be coming to an app store near you anytime soon, this study is the first to suggest that we can use our online social capital to enrich our in-person encounters. It's a good first step toward understanding the relationship between online and offline social capital—and how both of these networks might influence one another.

It takes a village on Twitter

The results of these two studies seem conclusive: Together, smartphones and social media can increase your social capital.

But are all forms of social capital created equal? Another study, recently published in the *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, looked at how the micro-blogging platform Twitter builds different types of social capital.

On Twitter, all messages posted are publicly available in the global feed of "tweets." But to filter this feed, users can choose to follow other users. That's a great way to learn about a new job, read about different experiences and opinions, or feel like part of a group that's bigger than yourself.

These types of bonds, which are largely informational, are described by researchers as bridging social capital, which the authors loosely define as, "the formation of rather weak ties between people from different networks." *Bonding social capital*, on the other hand, has a more emotional tone. Bonding happens in homogenous groups of like-minded individuals, like friends or family. So if bonding capital is about connecting more deeply, then bridging capital is about connecting more widely.

If you were to guess, which one would you say Twitter helps to build?

The researchers had a hypothesis that it was both. So they asked 264 Twitter users to report their number of followers and followees, estimate the number of minutes they spend on Twitter on an average day, and answer a few questions that would approximate a measure of both bridging and bonding social capital. A typical question for bridging social capital asks if "interacting with people on Twitter makes me feel like part of a greater community"; a question for bonding social capital asks if, on Twitter, "there are several people I trust to help solve my problems."

Twitter did indeed seem associated with both bonding and bridging social capital—but only if the number people you interact with on Twitter fell within a goldilocks zone of not too few and not too many.

For example, people who spent the most time on Twitter and followed more users reported more bridging capital. This is because the more you follow, the more opportunity you have to gain exposure to new ideas—or, as the authors say, to “expand your horizons” beyond your “narrow daily existence.” So is it best to follow as many people as possible? The answer is no, according to this study—when we follow too many people, we risk information overload. As the authors caution us, “There can be too much of a good thing.” More is better, but only up to a point.

When it comes to bonding social capital, a similar principle applies. They found that a user with an engaged and dedicated audience of followers is likely to feel a great sense of emotional support. But if that user’s follower network becomes too large, it becomes an abstract faceless mass, “which increases the user’s psychological distance from his or her followers.”

So to build the most bridging and bonding capital on Twitter, you want a village of followers, not a teeming metropolis.

What might this have to do with our offline social capital? While it wasn’t the main focus of this study, researchers found that those who feel more connected in their everyday lives also seemed to feel more connected to their online peers, not unlike the elderly participants of Tlatoque. So in some way, there is a relationship between your offline self and your online profile. The Tlatoque study even suggests that online connections can support the offline ones.

Taken together, these three studies hint at a compelling story—that social networking services can be a significant way of developing, maintaining, and strengthening our social connections, both online and in person. Using social networking services builds social capital in a number of ways: greater emotional support, lower levels of loneliness, and more feelings of connectedness. But these studies also contain a note of caution: Too many followers and too much participation can lead to information overload, depression, and feelings of disconnectedness.

The bottom line? I’m going to keep my iPhone and my Facebook account—but I think I’ll also keep setting limits.

Source 3: Article from The Telegraph (a UK news publication)

Young People are Lonely - But Social Media Isn't to Blame

By Theo Merz | July 2014

Have you heard about the “epidemic of loneliness” among people in their 20s? Loneliness is, apparently, “a silent plague that is hurting young people most,” stalking the streets of Britain and leading to increased stress, depression, paranoia and anxiety. All this can push our odds of an early death up by 45 per cent, according to one study.

We are told that 18- to 34-year-olds are more likely to feel lonely often or feel depressed because of loneliness than people aged over 55. And, if an ONS report last month which found that Britain is the loneliest country in Europe is to be believed, we are at the centre of the epidemic. Helplines are suggested as a short-term cure, along with making more of an effort to speak with colleagues and maintain our real-life friendships outside of work.

I say real-life friendships because the source of this plague is thought to be, like all of Generation Y’s supposed ills, social media. The Guardian article which revisited loneliness among younger people this week quoted Dr Grant Blank, a survey research fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute, who said that while social networks can help us keep in touch with distant loved ones, there is a danger that we are replacing real-life relationships with superficial, online communication. It’s not an original observation, though it’s one explored in more depth by the American psychologist Sherry Turkle in this compelling TED Talk, *Connected, But Alone?*

Tied in with this is the idea that seeing idealised versions of our friends’ social lives on sites like Facebook makes us feel worse about our own, and therefore more isolated. FOMO - Fear of Missing Out, brought on by seeing friends having a

good time on social media – has now been replaced by MOMO, the Mystery of Missing Out, where we worry that because someone has suddenly disappeared from Facebook they must be having a better time than us. (Truly, the monster eats itself.)

It is, of course, true that over-reliance on social media can exacerbate feelings of loneliness in people at whatever age. Aside from the research cited by the likes of Sherry Turkle, anyone who has ever logged on to Facebook will have discovered this for themselves: I, too, have experienced the exquisite agony of hearing about a friend's new book deal, baby or super fun holiday as I sit alone in my flat, scraping around the bottom of a large pot of Onken yoghurt (which always seem to be on special offer. When not consumed by FOMO I sometimes wonder how the good people at Onken manage to make any money.) I, too, have found myself thinking during a catch-up drink with an acquaintance that I would rather we were doing this via messenger so I could just close the window for a while and pretend I was offline.

But I think it's too easy to say that Facebook or Instagram are what's making us feel more isolated. We ask why people in their late teens to early 30s are reporting feeling lonelier than those in old age - we see the difference between those two generations is that one grew up with social media, social media contributes to feelings of isolation in some cases, and so social media is to blame. Isn't it just that one's twenties are generally a period of change and so are more likely to feel like an isolated time?

It takes time to adjust to the move from university friendships – when you are often in the same place, doing similar things, and everyone knows everyone – to the start of professional life, with friends spread out over a city or even across the world. Some are focussed on their career, some focussed on their partner, a few on a baby, and a social life is to be fitted in where possible. People often talk about the period after leaving education as a time to make mistakes and work out what you want to do. Which takes a bit of introspection, which can lead to periods of loneliness.

If we do feel more isolated than previous generations at the same age, surely it's because it's becoming harder to build up a career and live independently – the latest Government advice is to become one's own boss in an attempt to combat unemployment – and so we're putting more energy into making a living than we are our social lives. Generally, it doesn't help to medicalise a natural part of growing up, labelling it an "epidemic". But in the extreme cases when it does need to be addressed, the roots go much deeper than social media.

Source 4: Article from Foundation for Economic Education (FEE)

Technology is Making Us Less Lonely, Not More

Cathy Reisenwitz | July 2016

Pokemon GO, the app that lets players combine real-life activities with a virtual game, is taking over the world. In and amongst crazy stories like the woman who found a body while playing, or robbers using Pokemon to target victims, or concerns about privacy, is a story you might have missed.

Pokemon GO is doing what no video game has done before. It's getting people to leave their houses and talk to strangers. Players are tweeting that the game is alleviating their depression. "Pokemon Go is literally reversing Putnam's Bowling Alone," Sam Hammond remarked in a tweet.

Part of what's so surprising is that technology, especially mobile phones, is usually cast as a social isolator. According to TIME, many social scientists say technology is increasing the risk of loneliness. "Technology like texting and social media has made it easier to avoid forming substantive relationships in the flesh and blood."

But I think that takes too narrow a view of both tech and loneliness.

The Problem of Loneliness

New research is revealing that being lonely is even more dangerous to your health than being overweight.

Loneliness can increase your risk of dying by 26% according to a recent review of studies. Research has shown that social isolation — or lacking social connection — and living alone can respectively increase mortality risk by 29% and 32%. According to the Independent, “Recent research indicates that this may be the next biggest public health issue on par with obesity and substance abuse.”

By contrast, a recent JAMA study found that grade 1 obesity (BMI 30-<35) was not associated with any greater mortality, than being normal weight (BMI 18.5-<25). In fact, people who weigh up to 30 pounds more than those within the “normal” BMI range for healthy weight have a lower risk of death.

We’re constantly fretting over the so-called “obesity epidemic,” but why is no one talking about a loneliness epidemic?

One reason is that unlike body weight, loneliness can be easy to hide. And easy to miss. While you likely know how much you weigh, sometimes it’s hard to realize your depression is also loneliness.

Is Tech Isolating Us?

Everyone from the New York Times to Social Media Week is asking: Does technology make us lonely?

It’s not difficult to wonder why. Everyone has been the victim of a date or group activity that consisted of more screen staring than real-life conversation. Or had someone stop a meal to take a photo.

There’s even research to back up the idea that screen time is negatively associated with social connection. "Forty-two per cent of Australians who used an average of four methods of technology to communicate [such as email, SMS, Facebook, Twitter] were lonely compared with 11 per cent of people who used only one," Sue Miller, a manager at Relationships Australia Queensland, told ABC.

The Truth

Technology is isolating people in two distinct ways. First, it’s giving us a compelling reason not to talk to each other. It’s difficult for our brains to put down the constant stream of captivating information and affirmation and distraction to just be present in a social interaction.

Our brains are wired to love distraction, to crave the validation of notifications, and to follow shiny objects. And companies love to give our brains what they want in exchange for sweet, sweet data they can sell to advertisers. The problem is that what our brains want in the short term isn’t what’s good for us in the long-term.

A combination of strong and weak ties is what makes us happy. People are happiest when they are both tightly integrated into a small, close-knit community and have a wide network of acquaintances they can call upon.

The second way tech isolates us is that it makes it easier for us to survive without talking to other people. Right now, technology makes it possible to work, eat, and even go to the doctor without leaving your home. While most people still have to interact with other people in order to get their basic needs met, soon tech will advance to the point where no one has to talk to anyone anymore.

The Way Forward

People who worry about the isolating effects of tech are only seeing half the picture. They’re seeing the stick, but not the carrot. They see the distraction, but not the facilitation.

It’s true that tech lures us away from meaningful connections and makes isolation more practically feasible.

But in what future will technology end the need to get out of your house (the stick) without providing an equally powerful incentive to do so anyway (the carrot)? Look at Pokemon GO. Thousands of people outside their homes not

because they have to be outside, but because a game developer found a way to profit from making walking around outside more fun than it was before.

Technology isn't just a distraction from what matters. It's also a solution for what isolates.

Look at Virtual Reality for an unlikely example. When virtual reality gets good enough, technophobes warn, no one will live in reality. But sometimes reality isn't worth living in, and VR can help keep people alive and sane until it is. For example, burn victims must undergo multiple incredibly painful wound cleanings daily. One solution? VR games to distract patients. You'd be surprised how well they work. We've known since the early aughts that an overloaded brain literally has less capacity to process pain. But it's only been since innovation has brought down the price and portability of VR that it's been cost-effective to test VR for pain reduction.

The irony of seeing tech as an isolator is that it ignores all the isolators tech can replace. For example, the standard treatment for helping burn victims deal with the cleanings is opiates. If you've ever talked to someone on powerful painkillers, you'll understand that it's way harder to connect with someone high off their gourd than someone who looks at their phone too often.

We can't end loneliness by putting down our devices. Human connection requires presence, patience, and persistence.

Presence means you're not distracted. You're not thinking about your to-do list when someone is talking to you. You're listening and empathizing and remembering. Patience means you're not looking for the next quick-hit of dopamine, ramping up the relationship, but taking people as they are. Persistence means giving people a chance. You're not going to be immediate besties with everyone you meet. You need to hang out with people in a few different contexts over time to really know whether you'll be friends.

Technology facilitates all those things by freeing up your time, money, and energy so you can put more of it into being present, patient, and persistent. Innovation means you spend less time on surviving and more on thriving. Innovation means you can get more of the stuff we want from the stuff we have and all we have to do is to peacefully exchange what we have for what we want.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have Pokemon to catch.

Reading and Performance Task

PART 1: After you reviewed the articles above, use what you've read to answer the questions below. These questions will help you think about the information and will eventually assist you in formulating your own argument.

1. In **Source 1**, the writers take opposing sides regarding technology and its impact on our lives. What opinions do each express? What facts or evidence does each use to support himself? Fill out the following table to address these questions.

YES: Connecting Virtually Isn't Like Real-World Bonding By Larry Rosen	NO: Relationships Are Being Enhanced, not Replaced By Keith N. Hampton
Opinion:	Opinion:

Evidence 1:	Evidence 1:
Evidence 2:	Evidence 2:

2. In **Source 2**, Lauren Klein discusses three different studies that measured the effects of technology on “social capital”. Explain (1) what she means by “social capital,” (2) how the studies she cites show the effects of technology on “social capital,” and (3) the conclusions she draws from her analysis.

3. In **Source 4**, Cathy Reisenwitz asks: “Does technology make us lonely?” How are the two connected? What evidence does she provide that illustrates this point? What argument does she provide that refutes it?

4. Using the table provided, identify specific examples of how technology impacts peoples' social well-being.

Source	Technology's impact on peoples' social well-being
<p><i>Is Technology Making People Less Sociable?</i> (PRO/CON Article from the Wall Street Journal)</p>	<p>CON:</p> <hr/> <p>PRO:</p>
<p><i>Does Technology Cut Us Off from Other People?</i> (From the Greater Good Magazine published by UC Berkeley)</p>	
<p><i>Young People are Lonely - But Social Media Isn't to Blame</i> (From The Telegraph)</p>	
<p><i>Technology is Making Us Less Lonely, Not More</i> (From Foundation for Economic Education)</p>	

PART 2: Argumentative Essay

Using the provided articles as sources of evidence, write an argumentative essay on whether or not you believe technology enhances connections with others and our social well-being.

Use information from the resources; you do not have to use each of the sources, just those with information that supports the claim you are making.