

The Evolution of Interpersonal Relationships and Group Formation

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Abstract- This paper presents the role that Computer Mediated Communication plays in creating relationships among individuals and in facilitating the move of those relationships off-line to a real world environment. The advantages and potential disadvantages are pointed out. The paper extends the formation of individual on-line relationships to on-line group relationships. The effects of on-line group behavior are pointed out, as they can vary widely. Behavior of virtual groups can vary significantly because such organized actions can be severe due to the various factors surrounding their very nature, such as anonymity, irrelevance of time and space and the large impact that small size activities can have in an on-line world.

Keywords- Computer Mediated Communications; Group Formation; Social Networking

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the invention of the Internet, social relations have become increasingly complex. We are amidst an Internet revolution and entering a phase of superior digital connectivity. It is this connectivity and diffusion of technology that is changing our social relationships in dramatic ways. This change is apparent all over the world as technology has become increasingly accessible globally. The Internet is becoming increasingly essential to families and to society at large [9]. Now, it is common to have online acquaintances in addition to offline friends. In fact, the Internet has become so embedded in everyone's life that it contributes to his/her social status, well-being and levels of social capital. Prior to the Internet, group relationships and interpersonal relationships only had few choices when it came to communication.

Today, relationships can be built in many different ways and using many different media. Email, electronic invitations and social networking sites support the maintenance and strengthening of existing social ties, the formation of new and the rediscovery of long lost relationships. Technology has become a medium through which people share their interests and relationship goals. Some relationships that initiate online may turn romantic where romantic relationships were once limited to individuals who came in contact with each other face to face. Now potential relationships are extended to those who can communicate via the Internet. The influx of social networking websites like Facebook, Orkut, MySpace etc. have facilitated the development of not only virtual but actual real-life relationships.

Group interactions differ when members collaborate using computer-mediated communication versus those who work together face-to-face. Technology has increased our ability to form contacts and allows us to collaborate with groups around the world. Many people however, believe that interactions based online versus those face-to-face differ tremendously. Technology certainly has a substantial impact on these two aspects of society: the establishment of relationships and the

formation of groups. These interpersonal relationships among large groups who communicate via computer-mediated communication have been modified greatly due to technological enhancements in the workplace.

This paper will differentiate between online communications and how they differ from other types of communications both in interpersonal relationships as well as group formation.

II. THE EVOLUTION OF RELATONSHIPS

The ways in which people are meeting their marriage and their informal, recreational partners are changing. In earlier times, people chose their partners from their immediate environment. They usually met and married the boy or girl next door. Traditional matchmaking is not a new concept; it has been well established for decades. Not only does it continue to evolve but it is thriving in today's environment. Only the media and resources have changed. Today, computers and compatibility matching software act like matchmakers rather than interfering parents or respected clergy.

Traditional ways to meet a partner included either being introduced by friends, meeting at work, socializing at a bar, attending church, or meeting at other social gatherings. Another way to meet a potential companion was through personal ads but that, for the most part, was thought to be reserved for hopeless individuals. Offline dating agencies do exist, but to be known as a user of a dating agency carries a risk of having labeled 'loser'. Men especially are reticent when it comes to admitting that they are using such agencies for their relationships [7].

In 1992, something happened that changed the dynamics of seeking personal relationships. "The advent of the Internet expanded partner seeking opportunities. The first online personals firm, started in 1992..." [18, p. 3]. At first, this option was seen as desperation and people preferred to meet one another through chat rooms. By meeting in a chat room, individuals could "avoid the social stigma of being on an online personals site, which at the time was considered appropriate only for the truly desperate" [18, p. 3]. However, many of these online activities that individuals engaged in became the seeds for major social transformational processes. These online technological options led to the formation of new practices and behaviors, new social relationships and new communication patterns [9].

In the Age of global communication and mobility, next door may be thousands of miles away. People have a much wider choice of potential mates. They can select from all over the world, reaching thousands of possible partners across all kinds of cultural boundaries. This is the product of a much more mobile population where people can travel from one

continent to another with relative ease. The web became the perfect medium for speedy sifting through human data and rapid creation of online relationships. Individuals started seeing the Internet as a viable and convenient option for enhancing their social capital and interactions.

Today matchmaking is not solely for the purpose of finding a mate or marriage partner. It is also used in the business world to find businesses that would work well together, or mutually benefit one another and to recruit employees who will be a good fit in an organization. It is a service used to help line investors up with small businesses they may be interested in, and more. Matchmaking as a whole has changed significantly, but the idea is still the same: to line two entities up that ought to be compatible.

III. CHANGES IN PERCEPTION OF ONLINE RELATIONSHIPS

Over time the perception of online dating has changed. Once looked at as a meeting place for despairing individuals, online relationships have become a common part of our culture. According to Pew Internet and American Life Project^[14] some 31% of American adults say they know someone who has used a dating website and 15% of American adults—about 30 million people—say they know someone who has been in a long-term relationship or married someone he or she met online. Familiarity has led to an acceptance of online personals as another avenue to meet a possible partner and begin a relationship. Using online dating agencies is widely popular these days. One of the reasons is that individuals know that these agencies rely on psychographic profiling and the latest technology to match prospective partners. Individuals do feel that with the help of such a medium couples may be able to stay together longer, making relationships more successful. Another reason as to why relationship seekers are embracing these websites is that people are working harder and longer hours, so they have less time to engage in the hunt for a mate^[7]. The online medium is one of the more pragmatic and convenient ways of seeking a partner with lower rejection repercussions and higher success rates than that of face-to-face encounters.

Social networking websites add another dimension to relationships both on the professional as well as the social personal front. Individuals are able to draw resources and enhance their social capital from other members on such networks. These resources can take the form of enhancement in personal relationships or the capacity to organize into groups^[4]. The computer-mediated interactions have a very positive effect on community interaction, involvement and healthy relationship formation. Thus, individuals look to the Internet and social networking as an opportunity to elevate their levels of social well-being but also for enhancing their professional and social connections.

IV. ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE RELATIONSHIP FORMATION

Using online personals and computer-mediated communication (CMC) to meet a partner can be effortless and convenient but also complicated. “The advances in technology alter the ways we interact with each other. For some, the use of technology can facilitate a relationship, for others it can complicate aspects of a relationship”^[8, p. 445]. One drawback to online communication is not being able to decipher the body language or social cues that would be possible in offline

interaction. These social cues can determine whether a potential partner is interested simply in a conversation or in pursuing further relations. The absence of the actual identification of the online individual may promote deceitful or pretend communication. The anonymity aspect of online interactions can lead an online participant to mask their true identity and simulate situations, emotions and beliefs that one does not actually have^[1]. However, sometimes the anonymity factor can encourage participants to reveal themselves truly without anxiety or fear. This may lead to the risk of revealing personal information too soon or speaking disapprovingly, which a person would not otherwise do in an offline encounter. “Text-based communication has lower social presence and reduced social cues. In addition, CMC may lead people to say negative things they would not otherwise say in person or perhaps reveal personal information too quickly”^[21, p. 774].

It is easier for some people to become aggressive when communicating through technology, and to make threats which can be really frightening for the person at the receiving end. Since users of social networking websites or online dating websites may not reveal their real names or whereabouts, it gives these individuals the opportunity to hide behind an online persona. It is the absence of immediate and face-to-face feedback that seems to promote such a communicative pattern in online relationship management^[1]. One of the other blaring issues that has surfaced, due to increasing use of dating websites, is the impact it has had on already existing primary relationships. Internet infidelity is on a rise and is being perceived as real betrayal, affecting relationships as much as an offline betrayal would. It is the sign of how online relationships have assumed importance in people's lives. The technological progress has made it easy for individuals to seek intimacy outside their primary relationships. This would have probably happened without the Internet but the Internet makes it easier to do. Access to cybersex, online gambling, sleazy chatting websites and pornography have become easily accessible with Internet and communication technologies. It has been established that online relationships do have a potential of harming primary existing relationships.

As communications technologies continue to infiltrate our lives, their ramifications on human interactions and relationships is becoming more and more evident. The Internet has certainly contributed to strengthening of interpersonal connections but on the flipside people have started becoming too heavily reliant on these technologies—almost as crutches:

Rather than engaging with people face-to-face for a drink, they may say ‘Oh I am all caught up on your life through twitter, so I don't really need to try to catch up with you face-to-face’. We can definitely say that CMC can be a detriment to our face-to-face relationships. Since people are getting more and more glued to these technologies, they are putting less value on face-to-face human relationships^[15, p. 26].

On the other end, there are numerous advantages of utilizing computer-mediated communication. Technology and online social networking tools have opened up relationship seeking for individuals who are otherwise shy in forming and exploring relationships. In a classroom setting we have all encountered the shy student who responds with hesitation to a direct question from the instructor (thus forming a relationship with the entire class.) Yet, the same student is neither shy nor hesitant in posting statements, comments and responses on

Facebook sites. These individuals have the allowance of additional time to respond in a more intimate or sympathetic way^[19]. The Internet especially helps individuals who have low self-esteem due to weak social ties. "Some of these forms of computer-mediated communication can lower barriers to interaction and encourage more self-disclosure, enabling relationships and connections that would have otherwise not occurred" (Ellison et al., 2007). Online matchmaking websites like eHarmony, Match.com etc., and social networking websites like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter etc. have provided individuals with varying levels of self-esteem, a platform to socialize and find their mates. "In initial interactions via a computer, the exchange of ideas, feelings, thoughts, beliefs and individual orientations towards self and others can be communicated without undue influence of appearance and demeanor"^[11, p.375]. These technologies are especially helpful in the forming or beginning stages of a relationship and can help "One can take the time to communicate or respond to the other's 'turn at talking' and therefore possibly respond in a more thoughtful way"^[21, p. 774]. Important personal matters and preferences can be expressed early in the relationship without fear of face-to-face rejection. "A related advantage could be an atmosphere in which questions may be asked without inhibitions"^[11, p. 376]. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) makes it easier for a shy individual to communicate because individuals are able to hide behind a computer and tell someone how they feel^[19]. For a shy individual, CMC is a way to share his or her innermost thoughts without the embarrassment of being face-to-face with a potential partner. CMC can enhance open and honest communications whereby individuals can express their relationship desires and idiosyncratic preferences with greater ease. These online mediated relationships can evolve into healthy and successful real-life relations with fewer misunderstandings and disappointments than otherwise can be experienced in the search for love, companionship and matrimony.

Another significant benefit of using computer-mediated communication for meeting a potential partner is that the pool of partners becomes potentially larger than it would be without the Internet. The wide selection provided through the Internet can substantially reduce the quantity (filter out quickly non-compatible individuals) improve the quality of contacts, minimize the risk of stigmatization and can initiate relationships ranging from casual dating to marriage^[11]. CMC gives individuals the ability to communicate with people around the world. Conceivably a partner match could come from individuals from different backgrounds and cultures that never would have met without computer-mediated communication and the Internet. The Internet has allowed more meaningful relationships between people separated by great physical distances. They can select from all over the world, reaching thousands of possible partners across all kinds of cultural and physical boundaries. This is the product of a much more mobile population where people travel from one continent to another with relative ease. The world is not only flat in the business sense, but flattens romantic relationships as well^[5].

Social networking has also enabled students to maintain relations and high school connections as they move from one offline community to another. Such relationships have strong pay-offs in terms of jobs, internships and other opportunities. These networking technologies are being exploited currently by many educational institutions and organizations for

maintaining their alumni networks, social databases and student relations.

V. DATING BEHAVIOR

Online websites have become an alternative meeting place for some couples. Although relationships that begin on this medium may make some uneasy, warranting leads both parties to feel more comfortable in pursuing an online relationship. The view of warranting plays a key role in an online relationship. Warranting, or how easily the offline personality corresponds with the online personality portrayed, is based on the amount of honest self-disclosure given. Individuals trust information that is not easily faked. The receiver's perception is what researchers focus on, due to the fact that information may or may not be entirely true. Online partners will use warranting more when they anticipate future interactions^[24]. CMC has also allowed individuals to join multiple sites and enjoy dating as a lifestyle choice. It is becoming more and more acceptable to date multiple people before settling down, and this opportunity is provided by multiple online avenues like online dating websites, matchmaking websites and social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace etc.. With the astounding increase in divorce rates especially in western countries, individuals are willing to place their bet on matchmaking websites, where they believe they have a chance of meeting their potential match based on compatibility pairing technology used by such sites. However, one has to be wary about the fact that both men and women tend to misuse the anonymity aspect of online dating to lie about their profile. Online, men lie most about their age, height and income. Women, on the other hand lie most about their weight, physical build and age^[16].

The other major transformation has been observed in dating behavior of women in particular. As women become increasingly more wired and connected, the Internet is providing unique forums for women to create relationships ranging from friendship to dating to matrimony. Women are also rapidly forming communities where they can share their ideas, knowledge, and experiences with other women around the world. Female-focused dating websites are springing up to provide the now tech-savvy women with opportunities to fulfill their relationship requirements. For some women, the Internet is the portal towards a matchmaking rainbow where a myriad of sites offer everything from flirting in chat rooms to serious relationship formation. More and more single women, who lead hectic lifestyles, are maximizing their social needs by turning to chat rooms to search for cyber romance. The Internet is quickly equalizing the 'knowledge and dating' playing field between genders^[2].

VI. BUILDING RELATIONSHIP ONLINE AND MOVING OFFLINE

Self-disclosure is an important part of personal relationships that occur in both online and offline relationships. Self-disclosure is defined as sharing intimate details with others, and the timing may differ based on how individuals communicate. In this stage of a relationship, partners become more intimate. When people meet in person, individuals tend to be cautious about initially revealing too much information. In contrast, people that meet online reveal intimate details about themselves within the first few encounters^[3]. This point is further illustrated by the social information processing theory (SIP). The SIP theory suggests that online relationship development might require more time

to develop than traditional face-to-face communications. Once they become established, online personal relationships demonstrate the same relational dimensions and qualities as face to face relationships. Individuals get to know each other online for an extended period of time so couples would have the same impression as if those individuals had initially met offline ^[26].

From the beginning of a relationship, when individuals look for an online relationship to lead to a face-to-face relationship, people are more honest with each other. Indeed a real relationship can start online and eventually migrate successfully to an offline face to face relationship. This has been shown to be the case when the two (or more) interacting people share a common value such as membership in the same fraternal organization, civic club or interest group. When both parties know that they will eventually meet, this leads them to present themselves in the best way without lying. The offline encounter will be easier and more comfortable as they are familiar with each other's personality through their online interactions. Engaging in self-disclosure can help to establish a long lasting relationship. One gets to know the real person in online relationships. Getting to know the real person and liking that person thereafter make relationships more successful, as it is probable that online dating will result in selecting a partner on real characteristics rather than outward appearances and superficial traits. *Online Dating Magazine* ^[17], estimates that there are more than 120,000 marriages a year that result out of online dating. This shows how successful the online dating platform has become in the formation of successful relationships.

VII. COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS SETTINGS

Outsourcing allows companies to utilize talent all over the globe. Projects or tasks of strategic importance can now be allotted to the best combination of professionals around the world. Technology has enabled these experts to work simultaneously on a project, thereby making these operations cost and time effective as well as productive. Flexible and temporary teams can be formed to resolve specific or urgent issues. Work is being easily sent from one part of the globe to another. Technology has also enhanced the concept of temporariness or impermanence. This temporariness created by the influx of technology has its own pros and cons. Temporariness has led to the development of a more unpredictable and insecure job environment for professionals. This could lead to enhanced productivity and superior employee performance, as professionals realize that they face stiff competition from a global workforce and that they need to put their best foot forward in order to succeed. On the other hand, this temporariness has led to high insecurity, lower motivation and higher levels of job attrition rates in firms around the world, thereby raising efficiency concerns.

Friedman ^[5] argues that computer-mediated communication is flattening the world, and it creates problems that face-to-face groups may not encounter. Technology is making it easier for people to communicate with each other around the globe, creating problems that never transpired in interpersonal group formations because it allows individuals to remain anonymous. Additionally, groups who use virtual communication to communicate can often form subgroup identities. This can create a bias between the in-group and out-group ^[13]. The in-group behavior can cause members to create positive attitudes towards those in their group and negative attitudes towards those members in the out-group ^[25].

Although this behavior will also occur in groups that meet in person, it is less noticeable in those that meet in cyberspace. Visual anonymity as well as isolation will further incite group identification and group polarization and when members view themselves as part of a group instead of individuals, differences become further amplified ^[12]. This can be detrimental to interpersonal relationships within organizations. When group identity is more salient, members will identify with the group ^[25].

VIII. ONLINE GROUP FORMATION

Online group formation has become more common over the past decade as technology has improved and outsourcing has increased. The use of technology has enabled formation of groups across borders and geographical barriers. It has bridged the gaps of time differences thereby allowing groups to collaborate online more conveniently ^[5]. This has enabled organizations around the world to increase their productivity and has also allowed them to exploit their human talent more efficiently. Online work groups however, can also be dysfunctional. In contrast to personal relationships built online, Internet groups take different forms than groups that meet face-to-face. The self-categorization theory of social influence (SIDE) model explains why group attitudes can be amplified online ^[20]. The concepts of anonymity, de-individuation, group polarization, and flaming can elucidate what happens when people with similar beliefs are grouped together.

The social identity aspect of the SIDE model states that people relate to others based on common shared social identities. The model also explains the behavior of online groups. The more similar beliefs people hold, the more likely they will get along and form a group, either in person or online. People with common social identities conform to group norms in order not to be excluded from the group. This can lead to group polarization, which occurs when the majority of the people in a group feel a certain way about an issue. An individual with preferences like the group, when visually anonymous, is more likely to polarize to the group norm ^[13].

As the group identity becomes more important, people who do not share similar opinions, known as the out-group, become disliked ^[24]. Hate groups are particularly troublesome and become more amplified when online. It is likely that these groups start out less hateful but as they become more anonymous due to missing online cues, these groups could be pushed into more extreme ways of thinking ^[13]. It becomes easier for people to become more aggressive or offensive when communicating via technology due to the anonymity and distance aspect. A person, who identifies with the morals of a group, while online, could resort to flaming and using abusive language towards non-members due to his anonymity. The de-individuation element of the SIDE model explains that when members of a group are anonymous, they tend to ignore social norms that act as controlling factors as they think their actions are unidentifiable. By remaining unknown, members are able to freely express their views and do something that they may not normally do ^[13]. Although team members are not anonymous, when they work across the globe they do not have the same effect as a person sitting across the table. Communicating online gives people the ability to assume new identities. A person can form a completely new identity online, be more anonymous, expressive and participative than usual. The more participation, the stronger the group identity

becomes. The SIDE model shows that when participants are anonymous they are more attracted, committed, and thus more conformed to the group norms.

IX. TECHNOLOGY AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Virtual teams offer more flexibility than those who meet face-to-face^[23]. Technology has had a considerable impact on organization behavior and group behavior in particular. Technological tools have led to the formation of Value Added Partnerships (VAPs) that have resulted in effective sharing of information not only within the firm but across organizations as well. The sharing of information and access to each other's work has led to increased transparency among group members. This transparency has enhanced the accountability and responsibility of group members therefore making them more productive. The transparency and open communication have enabled more understanding and respect towards group co-workers. Group workers are more aware of individual member contributions than ever before. Feedback processes have also become faster and more efficient leading to better group productivity. All these factors contribute to the development of cohesive and healthy interpersonal relationships.

However, technology has its own perils on group and interpersonal behaviors. Often individuals are not aware of the challenges being faced by group members who they do not come in face-to-face contact with. Body gestures and nonverbal cues cannot be interpreted when using technology as means for collaboration and communication, generally leading to loss of information richness and the human element of communication. Conversations between group members have also been shortened. Emails have a potential to sound abrupt and perhaps even rude if written hastily. This can result in miscommunication or misconstrued messages leading to group conflicts. Since nuance and connotation cannot be 'heard' in the text format, CMC can potentially harm interpersonal relationships. Also, relational cues are typically given nonverbally, so by communicating via CMC the development of interpersonal relationships can be difficult. Trust diminishes when group communication is solely based online; trust is built more slowly online than when group members communicate face-to-face. Timing and frequency of messages becomes more important when members communicate solely online. Although technology augments the response and feedback mechanism within organizations, it can also create hurdles in completion of projects undertaken by virtual global teams. For example, if a group member emailed a group with a specific question and the group members did not give a response, this would affect the completion of the project^[23].

Computer-mediated group communication is beneficial but must be differentiated from interpersonal communication. One facet of group formation is the anonymity of group members online. In this globally dynamic environment, where one is matched up with different team members for different tasks, it is imperative for individuals to understand and embrace the cultural and behavioral diversity of the global team members. Technology has enabled organizations to utilize their workforce optimally but has also created challenges for individuals working on a global team. For instance, some professionals find it highly challenging to deal with cultures having high context and certain specific cultural backgrounds.

The other challenge in using CMC in-group behavior context is that people feel less compelled to share information when they're communicating with one another through email than they are face-to-face. People tend to use "the haggling script" i.e. they tend to hold information much closer to their chest. When interactions are purely online, people more easily escalate conflict which is the why flaming has become so popular in online communications. The online medium also poses difficulties in effective negotiations and reaching an agreement. With email, the most common outcome is impasse. It has been found that more than 50% of email negotiations end in impasse, only 19% end that way in face-to-face negotiations^[22].

Since all forms of interpersonal communication are not free from abnormality, it is important to study their implications in order to make them less of a problem. Instead of falling victim to groupthink, it is most important for online groups to establish personal identities. Overall, the Internet and electronic communication mechanisms have allowed diverse groups to work together and potentially benefit various projects or jobs but individuals must be aware of the different problems that working online can create and make sure to overcome these problems prior to the formation of online groups.

X. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The fact is that many companies have realized the importance of doing communication online and the face of the Internet has taken a distinctly social turn in recent years. Businesses that want to stay at the forefront of their industry need to adopt the social web into their own portfolio and way of corporate life. According to Gartner Inc., 20% of employees will use social networks as their primary business communication tool by the year 2014^[6].

Changing the way organizations undertake external and internal communication, marketing and advertising, has become inevitable, simply because the social media has delivered new instruments and the audience—especially younger generation—is expecting corporations to use them. Many a new tools is on tap, including Social Networking, blogs, syndication, wikis, rich media such as geo-localization, webcasts and Webinars, mashups, reputation systems (bookmarking and rating), virtual world events, interactive ads, applets and widgets. Now, the simple statement about the inevitable evolution of corporate communication needs much more complex thought regarding *how* to implement these new types of communication. The goal remains the same—strengthen the brand, engender loyalty and turn stakeholders into advocates, sell more, in a more profitable manner—companies could simply replace old newsletters, standard ads and such, which are losing impact, with these new tools.

A company website that is simply an online product brochure is a wasted opportunity. More progressive companies are using their websites to stimulate discussion and community around their brand, products and services, and are harvesting invaluable customer insight as a result. The next generation of employees will expect these types of tools to have positive impact on the business environment. Questions include: (1) how are some of these social networking services being used today for business purposes; (2) what does the future of business communication and collaboration look like based on these trends; and (3) what improvements to security, policy and existing business network infrastructure will be

needed to support these new forms of communication and collaboration?

The tools to answer these questions are here and they continue to improve. Twitter is incredibly quick and simple to use while one twelfth of the world's population has a Facebook account^[6]. This means that approximately 9% of the people in the world have basic understanding of how to login to Facebook and post a message.

Social networking is not just for young people. It is a collaborative style of communication that every business needs to understand and find creative ways to incorporate into their communication plans. For business-to-business communication, add podcasts, webinars and video presentations to marketing plans and get business development staff hooked into LinkedIn. For consumer-based communication, create Facebook, and Twitter accounts or create YouTube promotional videos. But beware! Social networking invites public comments so blatant sales pitches are highly discouraged as they may have a reverse effect. As equally significant impact of social networking is on the internal communication and collaboration. That workhorse of internal communication—email—is looking decidedly tired as more effective and more efficient communication and collaboration tools devised in the consumer realm work their way into corporate life.

Thus, implications for business are numerous. For one, social networking changes the way customers interact with one another and that demands a change in the way business communicates with their markets.

XI. CONCLUSION

Over time, human relationships have become more complex. The Internet has given relationships a new dimension. Interpersonal relationships formed online, over time can be the same as those relationships formed in person. Technology has expanded the scope of relationships but has also created this faction of individuals who may be incompetent and unsuccessful in creating *real* relationships. Lesser face-to-face communication has led to an exhibition of poor social skills in certain individuals which may deter the development of meaningful and long-lasting real-world relationships. Technology is essentially neutral, i.e. it has its own benefits and flaws regarding its influence on relationships. The benefits actually depend on how and to what extent technology is used. If used in moderation and as a facilitator, technology can augment the formation of healthy, long-lasting real-life relationships. Online communication and relationships are fine in moderation; however, if they are used as a predominant medium, then they actually can become a distraction in the development of real offline relationships. Physical connection is imperative for long-lasting successful relationships; that's why it is essential to meet your partner before any significant attachment is built up. Even if your minds link up perfectly online, lack of chemistry can lead to a fragile relationship. Thus, online dating mediums should be used as a screening mechanism for identifying the most compatible personality who can then become the perfect offline partner. The Internet is extremely beneficial in the beginning stages of a relationship; overtime, relationships that begin in this medium can be just as successful as those that begin offline.

The new era of social networking has created a platform for online relationship formation but has also raised several

issues with privacy advocates. Social networking websites have allowed users to share personal information, opinions, and thoughts with friends leading to new meaningful relationships. However this shared information often falls in the hands of marketers, online predators, social loafers, etc. who tend to misuse the available information without the user's knowledge. Thus, the digital media age has certainly bridged communication gaps but has also created concerns regarding privacy invasion and raised questions regarding privacy expectations.

Technology has certainly permeated through every aspect of organizational existence especially the online group formation and group behaviors. Technology has enabled better group productivity, faster communication and effective feedback mechanism but it has also led to issues like polarization, flaming and weakened inter personal relations. In order to capitalize on advantages of technology induced group formation, management needs to focus on individual goals and make sure that the group does not polarize towards a particular view. Polarization will create a group of people with the same opinion and little contribution regarding different views for fear of in-group/out-group conflict. This can actually lead to ineffective decision making in an organization. Overall, computer-mediated communication and group formation has made it easier for individuals across physical boundaries to collaborate effectively on various assignments, thereby scaling the efficiency bar upwards. However it has also led to certain inefficiencies due to communication and information overload. If organizations succeed in using technology optimally and in moderation, there are no limits to the benefits it can offer.

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