Technology's Impact on Our Daily Interactions

Rebecca Sinnatamby

As technology advances and becomes a more influential part of our lives, it is important to consider its impact. Technology has undeniably changed the way that we live our lives, and it has become more apparent than ever before that it has also changed the way that we interact on a daily basis. Many do not realise how strong of an impact technology has had on our lives and how greatly it continues to influence everything we do. The way that we interact with each other determines the outcome of every single aspect of our lives including our education, career, and relationships. This is a critical issue that many scholars have researched; however, that research is preliminary and will certainly need to be added upon. The limited research on the issue of technology and how it impacts our everyday interactions seems to suggest that this may not be a very important, or timely issue. However, the reality is that this is a matter that will only continue to progress, and have its effects be magnified, as technology and social media become more widespread and integrated into our lives. Technology as a whole has had a negative effect on our everyday interactions, as evident through its impact on our interpersonal skills, our familial relations, and wider societal interactions.

Technology has had an undeniable impact on our interpersonal skills. Many scholars who study the relationship between technology and communications have found that technology, and social media in particular, allow people to maintain connections, regardless of distance and other outside factors (Blakemore and Agllias 204). They also argue that technology has created the opportunity for those who otherwise may never meet, to interact, share ideas, and network. Blakemore and Agllias agree with this in their article discussing how social media plays a role in social work education, as evident when they write, "Digitisation has created significant

opportunities to connect with clients" (Blakemore and Agllias 204). Technology has also given

those with difficulties like social anxiety the opportunity to form connections that may not be

possible with face-to-face communications. Valkenburg and Peter argue just this in their article

discussing the effects of technology on adolescents' social skills: "The reduced audiovisual cues

of the internet may help adolescents overcome the inhibitions they typically experience in real-

life interactions" (Valkenburg and Peter 4). On the other hand, in their article discussing the

implications of wearable technology on face-to-face interactions, Bowman et al. suggest that

wearable technology leads to the wearer being less attentive during conversation. In essence,

they consider that the other person in the interaction may feel as though their conversational

partner's attention is shared with a piece of technology, which may have a negative impact on

their relationship. Along the same lines, in their own study, Pettegrew and Day found that

"Fourteen percent understand [computer-mediated communication] is a distraction from [face-to-

face] interaction" (Pettegrew and Day 132). What they meant here, was that in their study,

fourteen percent of participants acknowledged how distractive technology can be when partaking

in face-to-face interactions. Overall, few are fully aware of how technology interferes with their

interactions, and even those that choose not to let this awareness affect their habits. Considering

how communication in existing relationships is affected by technology, in their article titled

"Information and Communication technologies in Personal Relationships," Stafford and Hillyer

suggest that relationships may actually be strengthened by text-based communication because of

the "relative anonymity" (Stafford and Hillyer 296) that it provides. Many argue that the

internet's guise of privacy creates a positive impact on our interpersonal skills because people

are more likely to disclose personal information. In their article titled "From perception to

behaviour: Disclosure reciprocity and intensification of intimacy in computer-mediated

communication," Jiang et al. argue that "[computer-mediated communication] participants perceive partners' disclosures to be more intimate" (Jiang et al 139). On the other hand, I would argue that this guise of privacy creates a deeper problem. The reality is that messages sent through social media and other online mediums are impersonal, and without all of the non-verbal cues that are apparent during a face-to-face conversation, it can be hard to read between the lines and understand someone's true intent (McQuillen). People, particularly those that are older and less familiar with technology, are also more likely to be scammed or taken advantage of in some way because of this perceived sense of privacy and intimacy.

Furthermore, another apparent benefit of social media and technology when it comes to communication and the development of our interpersonal skills is that it gives a voice to those who traditionally have truly little power or influence. As Picard states in his article discussing the shifting power dynamics that media has created, "The emergence of the internet and the development of social media are often perceived and portrayed as … restoring voice to the public" (Picard 33). This is a very real idea, as we can see demonstrated through social media like Twitter, where ideas can be presented by anyone, and have the potential to become viral. However, an issue with this, presented by Picard himself, is that social media encourages "belligerent venting of anger and malicious public shaming" (Picard 38). While what many have coined to be "cancel culture" seems like something that is harmless: simply faceless accounts on social media getting upset about something and temporarily ceasing support of whichever celebrity is in the news, recent studies have shown that there may be very apparent negative impacts of this. In an article discussing just this, Norris proposes the idea that "For fear of social isolation of loss of status, academics may be hesitant to express authentic opinions on sensitive issues" (Norris 26). In essence, Norris is worried that those who may actually be well-informed

on a topic may not speak up and get involved in the discussion, for fear of being "cancelled." With the idea of technology giving people a voice also comes the issue of cyberbullying and unwanted messages. Many scholars on the topic have concluded that cyberbullying, something that is only possible because of technology, "has led to psychological problems and suicides" (Picard 38). The wider impact that this has on society will be further touched on later in this paper.

Looking beyond our individual interactions and interpersonal skills, we must consider the impact that technology has had on our familial relationships. One of the biggest benefits that technology has introduced us to when it comes to families is the ability to track locations and stay up to date on others' whereabouts. As Stafford and Hillyer discuss in their paper, "parents use technology as a way of staying connected to their younger children" (Stafford and Hillyer 296). This kind of technology allows for parents to grant their children some sense of independence and personal responsibility while maintaining safety. While this is an obvious benefit to technology when it comes to strengthening our familial interactions, conversely, there are some ethical issues around tracking children, especially as the children grow older. Beyond that, with all of the data breaches that are prominent in media now-a-days, the concern over the true safety of these location tracking apps must be considered. Sure, it can be helpful and safe for a parent to see their child's location, but who else might be able to access that information? Considering the technology itself, Stafford and Hillyer also suggest that technology may cause children and parents to pay less attention to each other. They cite a study which found "that every hour in which adolescents engaged in [computer-mediated communication] while at home equated to 24 fewer minutes of time with their parents," (Stafford and Hillyer 298). The idea that children are distracted by technology and use it as an excuse to avoid communicating with their

parents is nothing new, but Stafford and Hillyer also suggest that "parents might also create such distance" (Stafford and Hillyer 298). Related to this is the idea that "the desire for this new technology places a heavier financial burden" (McQuillin 617) on families, proposed by McQuillen in his article discussing humanity's growing dependence on technology. He suggests that it is this financial burden that has driven the increasing commonality of dual income families.

Additionally, associated with the progression of technology in our daily lives is the ability to work from home. This has particularly developed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, it has been around, in this sense, for many years. Technology allows people to work remotely, which allows people to spend more time in their homes and, in turn, with their families. While this has many apparent benefits including less time, energy, and money spent on commuting, along with the additional time available to spend with family or on the development of personal skills, in contrast, working remotely has also harmfully blurred the lines between what is "work time" and what is "personal time." As Stafford and Hillyer note in their paper, "employees indicated that they are expected not only to be available at home, but to complete tasks from home" (Stafford and Hillyer 304). And while technology may not be the true culprit of this situation, that would be the overwhelming capitalistic expectations of the corporate world, it has undeniably helped perpetuate and develop this problem.

Finally, we must consider the impact that technology has had on our wider societal interactions. One blatant benefit briefly touched on earlier in this paper is that social media can be used to network and progress career-wise. Through inventions like LinkedIn, it is easier than ever to connect with recruiters and develop your career without ever leaving your house. In addition to this benefit, many scholars identify the environment that social media has developed

to widely and effortlessly spread information about events, activities, and social issues. While this can be a remarkable thing, as we have seen through the growing size of progressive protests and marches around the world, there is another side. Social media has given people of influence including politicians an immense amount of power and an almost effortless way to directly or indirectly radicalise their followings. This is something we saw through the way that the January sixth attack on the Capitol building played out. Beyond this, in his article, Picard argues that social media has allowed for a shift in the power structure, taking the media away from the public sphere of the past (newspapers), and instead into the hands of specific private spheres (often the ultra-rich, large corporations, etc). Yet, I would argue that every aspect of our lives has always been controlled by these private spheres, even before the rise of technology. Similarly, Picard mentions the striking idea that "a very small number of enterprises control the functionality of the digital sphere" (Picard 36). What he means here is that a few large companies control nearly every aspect of the internet, along with the technology we use. A quick search will prove this when you consider how many companies a select few powerful people own, like Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, and the creators of Google themselves. The reality is that these few powerful people control so much of our society and hugely influence everything around us, including our perception of reality. Picard also suggests that social media has left us "vulnerable to hysteria and moral panic" (Picard 38), because of how easy it is to post and garner a reaction without critically thinking through the content. While Picard's conclusion might be a bit extreme, he is correct when it comes to the issue that this spreads mass misinformation. As Wang et al. conclude in their paper, "The accumulation of individual beliefs in these unfounded stories, conspiracy theories, and pseudoscience can give rise to social movements, such as the anti-vaccination movement" (Wang et al 5), and "there is a broad consensus that misinformation

is highly prevalent on social media and tends to be more popular than accurate information"
(Wang et al 5). These insights demonstrate just how greatly technology has influenced our world.
Without social media and the way that misinformation has come to spread through it, we would
not have the same prevalence of conspiracy theorists and vaccine-deniers that harmfully plague
our world today. Some argue that these extremist views have no true impact on our daily lives,
but the reality is that in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the vaccine deniers that leave
the world a dangerous place for those who are most vulnerable to disease.

   Along the same lines is the issue of how TV and other mass media have created and
encouraged harmful stereotypes. As McQuillin discusses in his article, the way that TV shows
have problems introduced, developed, and solved in the span of only 30-60 minutes has
encouraged the idea of "simplistic solution[s] to complex human problem[s]" (McQuillin 618).
In addition to that, TV has forever sanctioned harmful gender-based stereotypes. McQuillin
discusses that in women, eating disorders and low self-esteem are encouraged, while men are
only portrayed to be "strong, successful, and sexual" (McQuillin 618). I would argue that women
are, and have always been, sexualized to a much higher degree than men, but at its core, what
McQuillin is saying is undeniably true. Since the beginning of media, society has been exposed
to these harmful stereotypes and they have had indisputable consequences on our society. Many
scholars have reported findings that back up this idea. This can be seen in a study by Appel and
Weber where they found that while "Negative stereotypes in the media have no negative effects
on people who do not belong to the negatively portrayed group" (Appel and Weber 169), there
was a negative effect on those within the group that was negatively portrayed. Another study
done by Dong and Murrilo, which examined white Americans' biases towards Hispanic
Americans, "when they depend on television to learn about them" (Dong and Murrillo 41) found

that the stereotypes were completely influenced by what was portrayed on TV, and that "the more negative images are shown on television, the more likely the viewers pick up the images and develop their stereotypes" (Dong and Murrillo 41). The research clearly shows that we are highly likely to pick up ideas encouraged through the media, and with all of the negative stereotypes portrayed in the media, it has a negative impact on our societal interactions. These sorts of stereotypes lead to racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. While many of these stereotypes have a largely face-to-face negative impact on our society, it is also easier for people to express racist, sexist, and other negative opinions through the use of technology. This can be considered to be cyber-bullying, as was touched on earlier. It is much easier for people to be sexist or racist when hiding behind a screen, generating obvious negative impacts on our society, similar to the ones mentioned earlier in this paragraph.

Overall, technology has had a negative impact on our daily interactions, as evident through its impact on our interpersonal skills, our familial relations, and our wider societal interactions. This topic is more important than ever, and research into it may very well determine the future of our society; because of this importance, more research is needed into the topic. As the technology and world around us develop, its impact on us develops too. It will be particularly important to consider the implications that technology will have on future generations as it becomes increasingly integrated into our lives. Currently, the youngest generation are the first to be fully immersed into the technological world from the day they are born, as we have seen with the emergence of so-called "iPad kids." Because children are our future, this topic is of dire need to be researched as there very well may be lasting effects beyond the daily interactions that I have discussed here.

Works Cited

Appel, Markus, and Silvana Weber. "Do Mass Mediated Stereotypes Harm Members of

   Negatively Stereotyped Groups? A Meta-Analytical Review on Media-Generated

   Stereotype Threat and Stereotype Lift." *Communication Research*, vol. 48, no. 2, 12 July

   2017, pp. 151-179. *Sage Publications, Inc.,*

   https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0093650217715543.

Blakemore, Tamara and Kylie Agllias. "Social media, empathy and interpersonal skills: social

   work students' reflections in the digital era." *Journal of Social Work Education,* vol. 39,

   no. 2, 27 May 2019, pp. 200-203. *Taylor and Francis Online,*

   https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2019.1619683.

Bowman, Nicholas, et al. "Through the Looking Glass (Self): The Impact of Wearable

   Technology on Perceptions of Face-to-Face Interaction." Communication Research

   Reports, vol. 33, no. 4, 14 October 2016, pp. 332-340. Taylor and Francis Online,

   https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2016.1224168.

Dong, Quigwen and Arther P. Murrillo. "The Impact of Television Viewing on Young Adult's

   Stereotypes Towards Hispanic Americans." *Human Communication*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp.

   33-44. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Marilyn-

   Murrillo/publication/228984764_The_impact_of_television_viewing_on_young_adults'_

   stereotypes_towards_Hispanic_Americans/links/02e7e515d896f65a53000000/The-

   impact-of-television-viewing-on-young-adults-stereotypes-towards-Hispanic-

   Americans.pdf.

Jiang, L. C., et al. "From perception to behavior: Disclosure reciprocity and intensification of

   intimacy in computer-mediated communication." *Communication Research,* vol. 40, no.

1, 24 May 2011, pp. 125-143. *Sage Publications, Inc.,*

https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0093650211405313.

McQuillin, Jeffery S. "The influence of technology on the initiation of interpersonal relationships

(1)." *Education*, vol. 123, no. 3, spring 2003. *Project Innovation (Alabama),*

link.gale.com/apps/doc/A100806953/OVIC?u=mckendree&sid=bookmark-

OVIC&xid=fb327736.

Norris, Pippa. "Cancel Culture: Myth or Reality?" *Political Studies*, 11 August 2-21. *Sage*

Publications, Inc., https://doi.org/10.1177%2F00323217211037023.

Pettegrew, Loyd S. and Carolyn Day. "Smart Phones and Mediated Relationships: The Changing

Face of Relational Communication." The Review of Communication, vol. 15, no. 2, 8

June 2015, pp. 122-139. Taylor and Francis Online,

https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2015.1044018.

Picard, Richard G. "The humanisation of media? Social media and the reformation of

communication." *Communication Research and Practice,* vol. 1, no. 1, 1 May 2015, pp.

32-41. *Taylor and Francis Online,* https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2015.1042421.

Stafford, Laura and Joshua D. Hillyer. "Information and Communication technologies in

Personal Relationships." *The Review of Communication*, vol. 12, no. 4, 21 May 2012, pp.

290-312. *Taylor and Francis Online*, https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2012.685951.

Valkenburg, Patti M. and Jochen Peter. "Social Consequences of the Internet for Adolescents."

Current Directions in Psychological Science, vol. 18, no. 1, February 2009, pp. 1-5. *Sage*

Publications, Inc., https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1467-8721.2009.01595.x.

Wang, Yuxi, et al. "Systematic Literature Review on the Spread of Health-related

   Misinformation on Social Media." *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 240, November 2019.

   Science Direct, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112552.