The effects of technology on relationships

[Technology](#)

From pornography o merely surfing the web, the Internet Is clearly the television of the 21 SST century, an electronic drug that often yanks us away from the physical world. Like any adulation, the real cost, for those of us who are truly addicted, is to the number and quality of our relationships with others. We may enjoy online relationships using social media sites like Backbone or Twitter, for example, but the difference between these kinds of interactions and interactions with people in the physical world is clearly vast.

As long as we expect no more from these online relationships than they can give, no good season exists why we can't enjoy the power of social media sites to connect us efficiently to people wed otherwise not touch. The problem, however, comes when we find ourselves subtly substituting electronic relationships for physical ones or mistaking our electronic relationships for physical ones. We may feel we're connecting effectively with others via the Internet, but too much electronic-relating paradoxically engenders a sense of social Isolation.

Making our meaning clear electronically presents extra challenges. For example, we rite things like " LOL" and " LAMA" to describe our laughter, but they're no real substitute for hearing people laugh, which has real power to lift our spirits when we're feeling low. Vive also observed people using electronic media to make confrontation easier and have seen more than one relationship falter as a result. People are often uncomfortable with face-to-face confrontation, so It's easy to understand why they'd choose to use the Internet.

Precisely because electronic media transmit emotion so poorly compared to in-person interaction, many view it as the perfect way to send such messages engender, which provides us the illusion we're not really doing harm. Unfortunately, this also usually means we don't transmit these messages with as much empathy, and often find ourselves sending a different message than we intended and breeding more confusion than we realize. As a result, Vive made it a rule of thumb to limit my email communications as much as possible to factual information only.

If I need to work something out with someone that feels difficult, uncomfortable, or unpleasant, I make myself communicate in person. In-person interactions, though more difficult, are more likely to result in costive outcomes and provide opportunities for personal growth. Whenever I hear stories of romantic break-ups, firings, or even arguments going on electronically, I cringe. We find ourselves tempted to communicate that way because it feels easier? but the outcome is often worse. ETIQUETTE For transferring information efficiently, the Internet is excellent.

For transacting emotionally sensitive or satisfying connections, it's not. My wife and I Joke that we use email messaging when we're sitting back-to-back in our home office, but we use it o keep a record of our schedule. When we have a conflict, we turn our chairs around and talk. Even when we're all careful to use the Internet only to exchange information, problems can still arise. People tend to delay answering emails when they don't have what they consider to be good answers or when they want to avoid whatever responsibility the email demands of them.

But this is like being asked a question in person and rather than responding, " I don't know' or " I'll have to think about it," turning on your heels and walking away in silence. It's far easier to ignore an email sender's request than a request from someone made in person because an email sender's hope to get a response or frustration in not receiving one remains mostly invisible. But it's every bit as rude. Our " emotional invisibility' on the Internet perhaps also explains so much of the vitriol we see on so many websites.

People clearly have a penchant for saying things in the electronic world they'd never say to people in person because the person to whom they're saying it isn't physically present to display their emotional reaction. It's s if the part of our nervous system that registers the feelings of others has been paralyzed or removed when we're communicating electronically, as if we're drunk and don't realize or don't care that our words are hurting others. Social media websites are wonderful tools but are often abused.

A few common sense rules for the electronic world apply: Don't say anything on email you'd feel uncomfortable saying to someone in person. If handling confrontation maturely. Consider yourself drunk every time you get online so that you take steps to monitor yourself carefully. If you find yourself tempted to behave like a boor, step away from your keyboard (you wouldn't drive drunk, would you?). Don't delay your response to messages you'd rather avoid. If someone has reached out to you, they care about your response. I'm sometimes guilty of this one myself, but I'm working on it.

Relationships are affected by online communication. It's much easier to injure friendships online than in person because of the ease of creating misunderstandings electronically. Non-verbal communication, after all, (argued by to some to represent up to 40% of our in-person communication) is completely absent. Be careful how you word every electronic message you send, in whatever context. Remember that every Internet message you send becomes a permanent part of your brand (whether you're trying to market something or not).

Balance time on the Internet with time spent with friends and family. It may seem too obvious to mention, but it feels qualitatively different to go out to dinner with friends than to spend several days engaged in back-and-forth email exchanges. So much communication and meaning is lost in the latter. And our effect on one another is much more intense when we meet in person. When a friend is going through a rough time, nothing substitutes for in-person communication.

A gentle smile or a heartfelt hug has far more power than the cleverest emoticon to lift another person's spirits. CONCLUSION The Internet is an amazing tool. But even as it's shrunk the world and brought us closer together, it's threatened to push us further apart. Like any useful tool, to make technology serve us well requires the exercise of good Judgment. For whatever reason, the restraints that stop most of us from blurting out in public things we know e shouldn't seem far weaker when our mode of communication is typing.

Unfortunately, typed messages often wound even more gravely, while electronic messages of remorse paradoxically have little power to heal. Perhaps we Just don't think such messages have the same power to harm as when we we say them in person. Perhaps in the heat of the moment without another's physical presence to hold us back, we Just don't care. Whatever the reason, it's clearly far easier for us to be meaner to one another online.