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COVID Online: The Influence of Online Technology on Social Interactions during COVID-19

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Abstract

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in relationships due to quarantine and social distancing can be observed through the use of technology to keep in touch. A survey was given to college students to gather data about their online technology use before and during the pandemic.

Results show that the use and frequency of use of technology and social media has increased, and relationships have been maintained, yet quality of them hasn't improved much. It is suggested that future work continue to investigate how relationships beyond college students are influenced by technology.

Motivation and Background

Due to COVID, **traditional social support is difficult to achieve (**Saltzman et al., 2020).

The APA has called for research to be done exploring how technology may "improve the social outcomes of the current pandemic" (Saltzman et al., 2020).

Although current work explores social isolation during COVID-19 among older adults (Marston et al., 2020), this work aims to **explore how technology contributes to social interactions of college-aged students during the pandemic**.
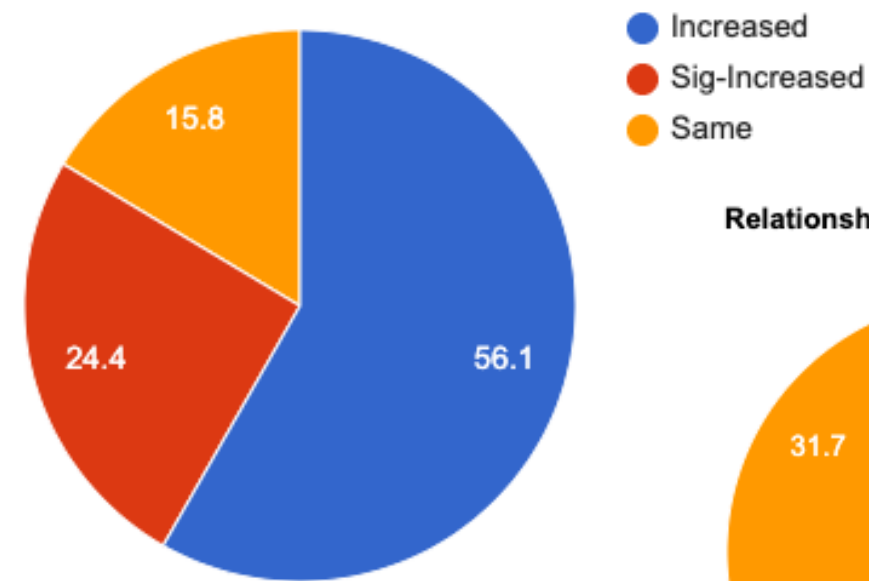
Design

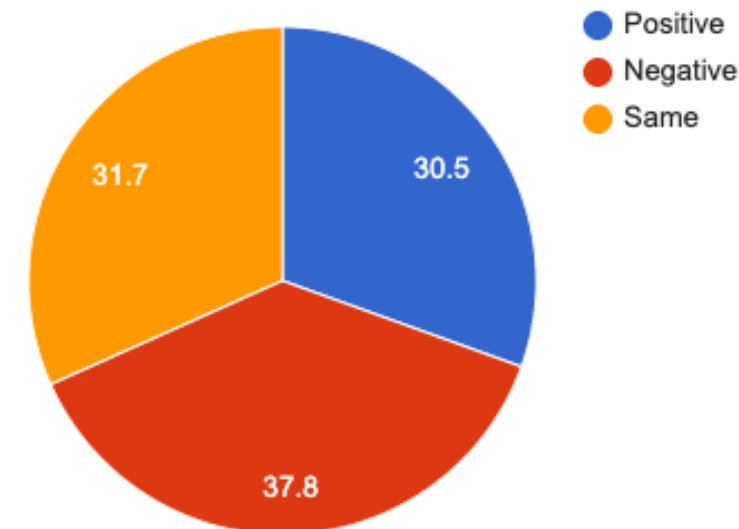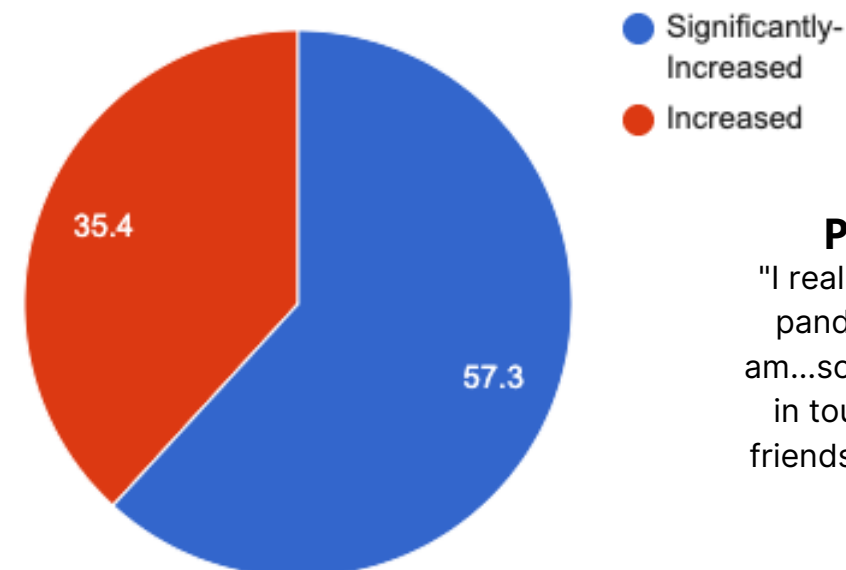| Population:	College students at the University of Delaware
Methodology:	Survey asking online technology impact on relationships
Data:	Quantitative (likert scale) and qualitative (free-response) questions

Results

Frequency of Virtual Interactions Since March 2020
- Increased — 56.1
- Sig-Increased — 24.4
- Same — 15.8

Relationships Impact Due to COVID-19 Restrictions
- Positive — 30.5
- Negative — 37.8
- Same — 31.7

The Use of Various Social Media and Video Calling Platforms have ... Since March 2020
- Significantly-Increased — 57.3
- Increased — 35.4

Participant Response

"I really wasn't a heavy user before the pandemic, but now I would say that I am...social media has allowed me to stay in touch with a wide group of college friends that I would have lost touch with otherwise."

Evaluation

The population was 90% junior and senior-level college students, 80% female, and over 80% white. The ability to generalize our findings vary due to these demographics.

Conclusions and Future Work

Today's world has proven that technology and social media have become a prominent means of creating and maintaining relationships. Given the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, our usage of these services has increased, as well as our frequency of virtual interactions.

However, this does not mean that the quality of relationships has been maintained. Study participants have reported a decrease in relationship quality and a lack of ability to read social cues and body language virtually. In the future, we suggest continuing research focusing on how relationships of people other than college students are affected by technology, as well as different relationship categories.

References

Saltzman, L. Y., Hansel, T. C., & Bordnick, P. S. (2020). Loneliness, isolation, and social support factors in post-COVID-19 mental health. Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy.

Marston, H. R., Musselwhite, C., & Hadley, R. A. (2020). COVID-19 vs Social Isolation: the impact technology can have on communities, social connections and citizens. The British Society of Gerontology.