

# Online Relationships

This issue contributes to the academic discourses on the complex nature and characteristics of online relationships. It illustrates the variety of actors and the varied acts of mediation and mediatization of formed human relationships in virtual spaces. The collected articles have theorized the actuated and actualized electronic interactions differently, but an overarching framework exists: relationships need to be formed, performed, and permitted in order for these to be fruitful and meaningful. However, the contributors for this issue did not only tell us about the positive consequences of developed online relationships; they also provided us with the factors that may tarnish and diminish the formation of human connections in cyberspaces.

Five articles focus on **the role of the communicator in the formation of online relationships**. These articles tell us about the nature of the person as they create and communicate content. These articles also examine the nature of messages and their effects on the content creators themselves.

De Vera and Saludadez describe how technological access and use facilitate the potentials of connection using a person's lifeworld. The authors' work documents conscious communicative action that aims to produce sustained engagements in virtual spaces. Likewise, Labor and Alcazaren's findings establish the value of mediated personal connections among gay couples separated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers point out that mobile platforms have enabled rituals of romantic relationships, yet these are possible only to those who have continual access to the virtual

spaces. Solis' article sustains the argument that mediatization has changed the initiation of gay relationships. The author argues that online platforms are extensions of the offline spaces in finding and maintaining meaningful meaning-making among gay men. Further, Jalagat and Yapo looked into the use of language among dating application users who are in the process of forming short and long-term sexual and romantic online relationships. The researchers document the communication patterns embedded in the language of self-presentation and negotiations in the apps. Also, Aznar-Díaz, Kopecky, Szotkowski, and Romero-Rodríguez's article points out how young users' relationship with technology led to addiction. They argue that the youth's vested value on curated mediated content leads to problematic personal behaviors and even perverse social interactions.

Three articles interrogate **the role of technology in forming ambivalent relationships**, as exemplified by case studies in Indonesia, The Philippines, and Bangladesh. The authors have documented the function of social networking sites and social media and their affordances to facilitate ambivalent relationships: empowering individuals and groups, on the one hand, and reinforcing racism, populism, neoliberalism, and the digital divide, on the other.

Susilo and Sugihartati's work is hopeful on the role of technology in forming and ensuring nationalism. The article tells us how social media platforms empower the young to form and showcase nationalistic tendencies despite populism and racism in Indonesia. Still, despite the positive use of social media, the same tool could be weaponized to minoritize Chinese-Indonesians in the country. Crisostomo's research presents the vacillated formation of online relationships in the Philippines. The article highlights how solidarity is formed and lost in attempts to converge through a hashtag for a unified relational posture. She documents how online causes come and go, seemingly telling us about the instability of nationwide performative relationships that appear cathartic at first and diluted at the end, significantly when new discourses outweigh the call for cohesive forms of online solidarities. Choudhury's examination also presents the ambivalent role of technology in enacting online relationships. The work highlights the possibilities of assembling and expanding business among Bangladeshi women through social networking sites. On the one hand, the study argues that initiatives are sustained by capitalizing on women's positive ties among themselves, their families, and friends. On the other hand, lack of funds and technical crises still impede the growth of social networking site-based business and social relationships.

Three articles probe **the challenges in maintaining online relationships**. To this day, content manipulation for the sake of profit and

inaccessibility to the mediated public sphere are still issues that we must solve in order for us to realize the greater potentials of virtual spaces in enabling online relationships.

Alcantara and Demeterio document how relationships between content creators and their audiences could be manipulated due to questionable intent. The study asserts that problematic source-audience connection is due to the exploitation of the desires of susceptible viewers.

Dionisio, Evangelista, Heimerl, and Festin's article tells us that the formation of online relationships remains an elusive reality to those who are othered by technological improvement. For those who have access to a cellular network, there is still ambivalence on the social impact of this development. An inclusive network of the affective use of technology is essential in establishing valuable relations among technology users. Pinzon's article fleshes out the contested and negotiated online space in enabling the relationships of the Filipino family. The article discusses how the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and their children must uproot the rituals of family life and replant the practices in mediated spaces.

I thank the scholars who contributed their work to this issue. Your work indeed furthers the interest in the role of communication in building and sustaining different forms of relationships in online spaces.

I thank the reviewers for their comments and recommendations. Your wisdom enabled the articles to be positioned better with the current theories and debates on mediation and mediatization of human relationships.

Likewise, my heartfelt appreciation to the cover artist, Dale Magsino, for visualizing the intent and content of this issue through his art.



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