

Technology: From Connection to Conversation

Stance: Technology Makes Us More Connected

Researched Persuasive Writing and Speaking

Jyothylakshmi Manoj

Secondary Division

HOSA Chapter 61119

Clear Brook High School

Friendswood, Texas

In 2014, the Ice Bucket Challenge went viral on the internet. To participate, one would film themselves pouring a bucket of ice water over their head. Though it appears nonsensical, the challenge was created to raise awareness for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, also known as ALS. By the end of the campaign, the ALS association raised \$115 million. In the modern world, the sometimes-isolating effect of technology should not distract from its capability to bring people together and do good. Technology makes us more connected in directing change, providing support, and transforming healthcare.

Firstly, technology connects people in efforts to bring about change and raise awareness. According to Pew Research Center, 69% of Americans believe social media brings elected officials to act on important issues. (1). Students at Stoneman Douglas High School used social media activism to influence the passing of 123 laws addressing gun violence since February 2018 (3). Similarly, LGBT rights groups in 2015 reached over 4.5 billion people on social media through the hashtag “lovewins” (2). This endless connection offered by technology facilitates public health awareness and advocacy. In 2019, online crowdfunding programs helped pay almost \$32 billion in medical debt (8). Additionally, health organizations like the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence utilize Snapchat and Instagram to share public health information, bringing health education all around the globe (5).

Just as it brings change, technology connects those in need of social support. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, social connection is so necessary that a lack of it can be more harmful than obesity, smoking, and high blood pressure (6). In a study by the Portland State University, around 50% of teens with mental illness reported using technology to stay connected with their friends and family

(4). The Journal of Medical Internet Research explains that technology allows people to connect with others facing similar challenges, without the physical barriers of traditional conversation (10). In the COVID-19 pandemic, many have been forced to give up in-person interaction altogether for the safety of staying isolated. Despite this, a study by the Florida State University found that participation in peer support groups, such as the Brain Injury Association of America, has increased due to digital connection (9).

Finally, technology connects health care workers and patients, transforming the health industry in the process. Previously, the US healthcare system was purely reactive, meaning it focused on treating conditions rather than preventing them. However, technology has given patients a newfound autonomy over their health (13). In the COVID-19 era, over 45% of consumers report accessing medical services digitally, compared to 11% in 2009 (7). In addition, one in five US adults use health apps or wearable fitness trackers, which help prevent health complications before the need for treatment arises (11). Technology has also connected patients and healthcare workers in the effort to fight COVID-19. A study by the NYU School of Medicine found that COVID-19 cases made up over half of digital health appointments during the pandemic, keeping both healthcare workers and patients safe (12).

All in all, technology directs change, provides support, and transforms the field of healthcare by forming connections. However, they should be seen as just that – connections. Interactions on computer screens and keyboards are far from replacing the value human relationships that cannot be controlled by a press of a button. In the digital age, a connection is not a replacement for true human interaction – but rather a starting point for the bigger conversations: the ones that change the world beyond the screen.

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