SOCIOMENTAL SPACES, CULTURES, AND SOCIETIES

When the environments in which we live and form relationships are digitized, they become potentially portable.

These spaces, and the activities, bonds, and connections formed within them, can also be described as *sociomental* because the connectedness is interpersonal (the *social* part) and relies on cognitive rather than physical activity for its creation and maintenance (the *mental* part).
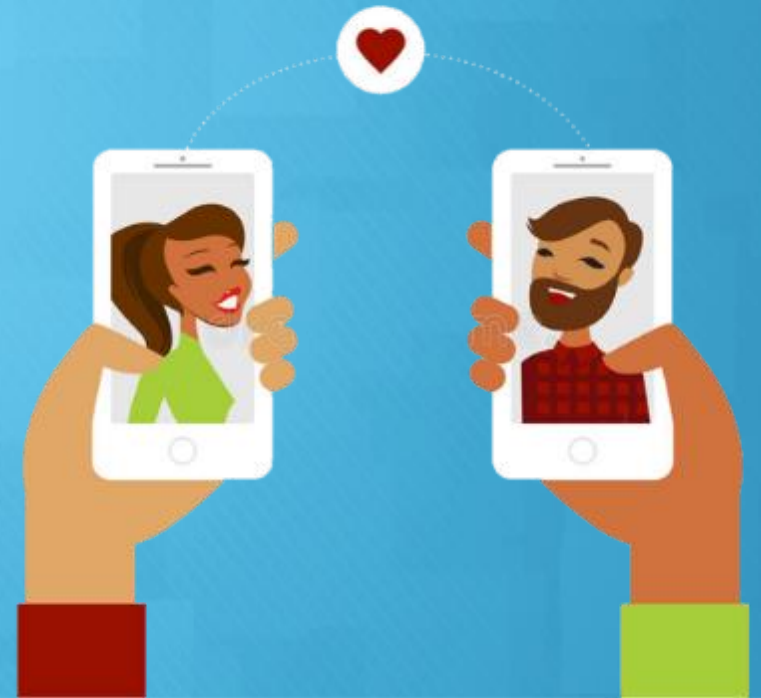
Image Source: Dreamstime.com

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SOCIOMENTAL SPACES, CULTURES, AND SOCIETIES

A society is made up of the thoughts, ideas, information, norms, values, beliefs, and morals of all of its members.

It is a kind of "soup" of these mental ingredients, plus the material products created by its members, such as art, books, buildings, and clothing.

Collectively, we call these mental and material products the *culture* of a society.

Image Source: Stockfresh.com

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SOCIOMENTAL SPACES, CULTURES, AND SOCIETIES

Digital experiences, and the spaces in which they take place, are totally real, with very real consequences.

Online classes can be taken for real course credit, real money is kept in online bank accounts, and real relationships and marriages have been destroyed by online infidelity.

Contrasting "digital life" with "real life," therefore, doesn't make sense. Modern life, and reality itself, is simultaneously "techno" and "social" – it is *techno-social.*

Image Source: WPClipart.com

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ONLINE COMMUNITIES, NETWORKS, AND NETWORKING

Communities are constituted of, and provide for their members, regular, patterned, personalized social interactions.

In them, people develop a shared identity, culture, purpose, and fate, and feelings of togetherness and belonging.

The internet and digital media readily inspire and facilitate the creation and establishment of communities.

Image Source: Pixabay.com

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CREATING DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS

Shared symbols, such as language, images, sounds, gestures, and avatars, help people envision, build digital environments.

Members of groups create and use symbols constantly:

- sports teams and schools have slogans, logos, and representative colors
- friends and families have favorite foods, nicknames, and catchphrases
- religions and nations have to icons, statues, pictures, and documents

These symbols help define the group so everyone knows who is in it, and help shape the environment by creating a kind of invisible boundary around it. If you understand the symbols, you're "in." Otherwise, you're "out."

Image Source: Freedesignfile

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CREATING DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS

A digital space called a *platform* is a computerized framework on which an application can run. Platforms can be blogging sites like Blogger and WordPress, social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, video-streaming sites like Netflix, Hulu, and YouTube, or audio sites like iTunes and Spotify.

Image Source: Vector4free.com

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CREATING DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS

Hashtags have real power to help people become grouped together in social media environments.

They facilitate the gathering of people in online spaces to talk about TV shows, current events, and take part in "Twitter chats."

They are also used to emphasize, critique, rally people together, identify characteristics of the writer, and specify and spread internet memes.

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REALITY, PRESENCE, AND PROXIMITY

Because online social connections are so often experienced as absolutely real and deeply personal, it is but a next step to perceive digitally encountered others to be present.

The internet and digital media facilitate the perception and experience of proximity and presence in ways that transcend the physical.

When connecting online, those with whom we connect are often perceived to be "really there." This sense that the other is "really there" is called social presence.

Image Source: Allfreedownload

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REALITY AND THE BRAIN

The mind and body are intricately connected.

They affect one another continuously, as can be seen in physical illness that derives from psychological disturbance, or in mental confusion that results from physical fatigue.

Our minds and bodies "talk to" and inform one another all the time. They are a unit, finely meshed

Image Source: Vectorstock

REALITY AND THE BRAIN

Robots and *bots*—humanlike machines and web-based software applications that run automated tasks—are becoming in some cases interactive and seemingly personable.

Such machines and applications can be comforting and help people cope with challenges and even provide some forms of social support, although there are limits to the types of communication that the artificial intelligence of computers can perceive. Siri, for example, cannot detect sarcasm.

You could be chatting with a bot online or reading a story written by a bot and you might never know it.

9:41 AM   100%

"Show me photos from Utah last August"
tap to edit

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EMOTIONALITY AND INTIMACY

It is common for time spent online to have an intimate, emotionally rich dynamic.

Intimacies and emotions that arise in online interaction serve as a kind of "glue" for the relationships that form there.

This "emotional glue" is especially important in the absence of the "physical glue" that face-to-face interaction can provide.

Image Source: Alternatives

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SO, WHAT ABOUT PHYSICALITY?

Some people find the physical body to be a distraction and that in its absence they are better able to form honest, authentic relationships.

For some, thoughts and feelings may be more easily, comfortably, and authentically shared when physicality is absent.

According to communication researcher and theorist Joseph Walther, when physical cues are filtered out, we use our other senses to adapt and process information accordingly. This is his "Social Information Processing" theory.

Walther has also theorized that in some cases, online interactions can even exceed physical interactions in terms of desirability and closeness. When this happens, he calls such relationships *hyperpersonal*.
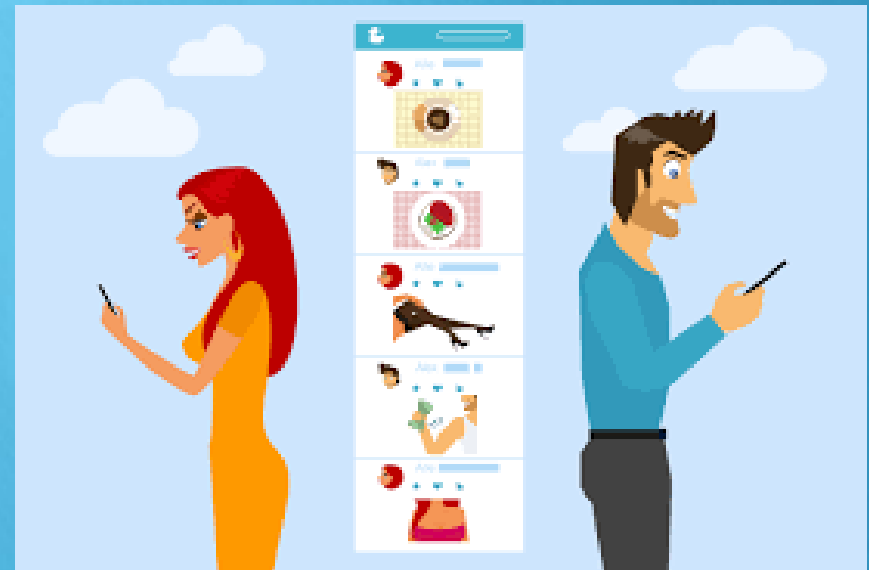

Image Source: ahlooupdate

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THE INTERSECTION OF THE ONLINE AND THE OFFLINE

It is tempting, and quite common, to assume that what we do online happens at the expense of or displaces the offline.

But most people utilize online connectedness to build, bolster, and give new dimension to face-to-face interactions and communities.

They choose their online friends from among their offline contacts and use both mediated and face-to-face means to sustain all their relationships.

Image Source: Calcative

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THE INTERSECTION OF THE ONLINE AND THE OFFLINE

One's lived reality with technology is generally experienced as a blending, a mixture, of the online and the offline, rather than as one or the other.

We do not tend to separate our lives into online vs. offline, or digital vs. real. We experience these realms as a single, enmeshed, techno-social reality.

Image Source: VectorStock

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THE INTERNET, DIGITAL MEDIA & TECHNO-SOCIAL LIFE, 2ND EDITION

MARY CHAYKO

SAGE