

Chapter 2

Reflections of Technology Narratives

ABSTRACT

This narrative explores the changing role of technology during the pandemic while simultaneously offering strategies for managing stress caused by the overuse of technology. Technology brings people together who cannot see each other in person, such as families who live in different locations and students who attend online classes. Technology serves the dual role of keeping people connected, especially during events such as a pandemic, and making people feel disconnected due to distraction caused by devices.

CONSTANTLY CONNECTED

It feels amazing how quickly time can change things. A few years ago, I wrote about how technology creates stress and why people don't need to feel constantly connected to their phones and other forms of technology. In the current uncertain pandemic era, I feel differently. Now, more than ever, people need technology and crave constant connection.

TECHNOLOGY REFLECTIONS (2020)

As the virus COVID-19 alters the way people live, technology becomes a valuable resource of comfort and connection. The high school in Florida where I teach taught the teachers a new platform for online learning on a Wednesday and five days later on Monday morning, the school closed for in-person learning. Instead of talking to the students in my classroom, we all turn on the cameras and microphones on our laptops to chat with each other. As of this writing, I feel fortunate. My school and the families of my students have the technology to implement this idea, while other schools scramble to find resources. I overbought paper products at a sale two months before businesses began to close, but now thank my past self for having the insight (or perhaps impulsive shopping habit) to stock up on necessities. I feel sad that I cannot take my planned trip to Texas to meet my cousin's newborn son, but thanks to technology

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my cousin takes pictures on her phone and sends them to me. In a moment, all I write about now can change again. Will I long for this March moment a few weeks from now? Is this only the beginning to more life changes? I don't know the answers to the questions I ask on a daily (sometimes hourly) basis, but I do know that writing helps me find clarity.

TECHNOLOGY REFLECTIONS (2021)

March again. Almost a year since I wrote the words in the previous paragraph. A year since the pandemic began and life changed. My school began meeting back in person in September, in a world where everyone wears masks and everyone in the building surrounds themselves with plexiglass. My teacher's desk contains a large bucket of cleaning wipes and an assortment of hand sanitizers. The television in the back of my classroom connects to the technology platform Teams to welcome students whose families choose to keep them home. At least students at my school have a choice; some schools have not yet reopened for in-person instruction. I now live in a world where I visit my dad and stepmom who live less than an hour away and meet for "social distance visits" in their driveway because I don't want to touch them and risk getting them sick. I still wait to travel to Texas to meet my cousin's son, who just celebrated his first birthday. Thanks to FaceTime on my iPhone, I felt connected when my cousin helped him open the gifts I sent. I co-taught a class at my church on the online platform Zoom while joking that it was the first class I ever taught where I didn't need to wear shoes. I feel gratitude for the smallest moments which give me hope that life can and will change. My phrase "constantly connected" now means something different; it means using technology to stay connected to family, friends, teaching, and other people during an era when people truly need each other.

PANDEMIC DIARIES

As a writer, I capture this moment in time with my words. I write prayers and email them to the members of my church. I write lesson plans to ease the anxiety my students face. I conduct research and send the highlights to my friends in the medical field. I write a letter to my cousin's son and tell him about the first month of his life which thankfully he won't remember. I write to make myself slow down and breathe.

And I can thank technology for all of it. I still have electricity and a working laptop. I have a phone which keeps me updated on however much of the news I feel able to endure at any given moment. I use the same phone to text my friends and family to check on them. The technology I once described as causing stress now causes serenity.

Nevertheless, I don't regret writing the words I did in my previously published chapter from a few years ago where I critiqued technology. My mom used to tell me that if people knew how their life stories ended, they wouldn't take the journey. Ortberg (2014), believes, "for much of our lives, we live in the shallows. Then something happens – a crisis, a birth, a death – and we get this glimpse of tremendous depth. My soul becomes shallow when my interests and thoughts go no further than myself. A person should be deep because life itself is deep" (p. 57). Looking back, critiquing technology when all along I had the power to control that technology seems shallow, especially given the new social distancing society that is 2020. The depth exists in revisiting, reflecting, and perhaps even refuting old arguments. That chapter felt perfect at the time I wrote it, but now I find myself with a new perspective and more to

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