Technologically Mediated Relationship Creation and Maintenance

Christopher Mascaro  
Drexel University  
cmascaro@gmail.com

Rachel Magee  
Drexel University  
rm348@drexel.edu

Elizabeth Thiry  
Pennsylvania State University  
exn152@psu.edu

Sean Goggins  
Drexel University  
outdoors@acm.org

Online dating sites have existed since the mid-1990’s and technologically mediated forms of dating existed for decades prior to that. Online dating sites are a unique laboratory for understanding human relationship initiation, development and self-identified success. Unlike traditional dating scenarios, the initial contact and much of the early relationship development and formation in online dating is technologically mediated, suggesting that much can be learned by applying findings from research analyzing technologically mediated communication more broadly to this domain.

Presently, online dating research is scattered across numerous disciplines as evidenced by the diversity of submissions and accepted papers to this minitrack. An integrated, interdisciplinary discourse of how technology mediates the initiation and maintenance of relationships is necessary to advance the research and development of information and communication technologies to support online relationship formation. For example, previous work suggests that there are different views of what a successful online dating relationship looks like, depending on the socio-technical context.

The works submitted to this minitrack exemplify the diversity of approaches required to develop a deeper understanding of how relationships and technology interact. The three papers that were accepted to this minitrack further our understanding and develop a discourse about how technology facilitates relationship creation. One theoretical paper describes a model of dyadic information behavior in online-initiated relationships, highlighting that information seeking practices can speak to couples’ compatibility, whether romantic or not. This model is being used as a foundation for further empirical work by the authors that is currently ongoing.

The other two accepted works in the minitrack are empirical work that feature deep analysis of the experiences of people with relationships mediated by technology. One paper focuses on Facebook use by Italian individuals reconnecting with people from their past, demonstrating that while privacy issues remain a significant concern, social media has allowed for rekindling or rethinking of relationships, resulting in new categories of social ties.

Rather than focusing on social media, the other empirical paper focuses on how couples experience video chat technology, and discusses the implications of the possibility or perception of technical issues as a way for individuals to explain or move on from their non-technical conversational difficulties.

The diversity of submissions illustrates how a variety of methodological approaches examining numerous technological platforms are needed to fully understand how technology affects relationship creation and maintenance. These papers represent only a small slice of the type of work that can be done in this domain. As our relationships continue to be created and mediated by technology, the importance of understanding these socio-technical experiences increases. This minitrack and these papers recognize the vibrancy and importance of study in this area, and lay the groundwork for dynamic, mixed-methods future work. We thank all of the authors for their thoughtful submissions and look forward to an interesting and productive emerging discourse in this space.