

## Covid-19 and sociovirtualization: Exploring new ways to socialize

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### **Abstract**

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the globe has seen unheard-of modifications in many facets of daily life, including how we socialize. A term used to characterize the use of virtual platforms and technologies for social contact, sociovirtualization has become more prevalent due to the requirement for physical separation and gathering constraints. Research on the effects of Covid-19 on socialization and the emergence of novel digital modes of communication and interaction is crucial.

This article examines socialization in the future, seeing sociovirtualization as the standard in our interpersonal interactions. In order to promote real human connections, it highlights the necessity of a well-rounded strategy that incorporates both virtual and in-person contacts. Through a thoughtful embrace of sociovirtualization, we can make sense of the situation now and get ready for a time when virtual and real-world interactions can coexist peacefully.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, sociovirtualization, socialization, virtual platforms, digital interactions



<https://doi.org/10.31039/ljss.2024.7.186>

## 1. Introduction

One of the most remarkable and extensive global disasters in recent memory is the Covid-19 pandemic. Beyond its immense impact on public health, healthcare systems, and economies (Getachew, 2023; Metzl et al. 2020), it has wrought profound changes in the fundamental fabric of human society (Davies&Hobson, 2023; Pandit&Annamraju, 2023) how people interact and socialize.

When the pandemic first started, it forced governments and health organizations all over the world to enact strict regulations meant to curb the virus's spread. Chief among these measures was the promotion of physical distancing, which entailed maintaining a safe distance from others, often set at around six feet, to reduce the risk of viral transmission (Andoniou, 2023; Metzl et al. 2020). To stop the virus's spread, further measures included gathering bans and the closing of a number of public areas, such as bars, theaters, restaurants, and social gathering places. Despite being crucial for public health, these policies had a significant negative effect on social interaction. The old ways of socializing, which depended on physical closeness, were suddenly reduced. Simple gestures like greetings, handshakes, and get-togethers with loved ones become dangerous. The practice of meeting colleagues and loved ones over coffee, sharing meals, attending parties, and celebrating life's milestones was dramatically altered (Marinoni et al. 2020).

In an attempt to lower their chance of contracting a virus, people started to restrict their social connections to a small circle of reliable acquaintances, a phenomenon known as "social bubbles." Many people found themselves confined to their homes, practicing isolation to protect themselves and others (Khoury et al. 2023). The pandemic also reduced face-to-face encounters by causing a noticeable rise in distant work and learning. In response to these challenges, people turned to technology as a lifeline to maintain connections (Bellon et al. 2023; Kurt& Izgi 2023). Virtual platforms became the bridge over the chasm created by physical distancing. Video conferencing, social media, instant messaging, and online gaming platforms became the new avenues for social interaction, giving more attention to the term "sociovirtualization" (Kurt, 2012). The term was first used by Kurt and a master thesis was written about the term "sociovirtualization" in 2021 (Şengül, 2021).

The pandemic forced a reevaluation of the very essence of human connection. It spurred innovation in how individuals seek and maintain relationships (Jeffrey&Thorpe, 2023; Sola, 2023). Although sociovirtualization provided support during these difficult times, it also raised concerns about the direction that social interaction will take. Can the richness of in-person connections be totally replaced by virtual interactions? How is the feeling of community impacted by these changes?

The Covid-19 pandemic, in its disruption of traditional social interaction and the rise of sociovirtualization, serves as a unique and evolving case study in how societies adapt to unforeseen challenges (Kurt, 2023). It emphasizes how enduring human relationships are and how inventive people can be when faced with a major world disaster.

This paper investigates the advent of sociovirtualization as a fresh means of bridging the physical divide and maintaining meaningful human connections, as well as the transformative impact of Covid-19 on socialization. It aims to dissect the complex web of social interaction

during the pandemic and speculate on how it can influence society and interpersonal relationships in the future.

### **Methodology**

In order to investigate pertinent studies, research articles, and academic publications that clarify the notions of sociovirtualization and its consequences for socialization, the literature review approach is used in this study.

With a focus on the use of virtual platforms and technology to promote social connections, the review examines the definitions and traits of sociovirtualization. The features of several virtual platforms—such as social networking, video conferencing, and online communities—are covered.

The literature review also explores the benefits of sociovirtualization, including its capacity to break down boundaries based on geography, offer chances for international contacts, and guarantee safety in the event of a pandemic. It also looks at the drawbacks and restrictions of sociovirtualization, including the digital divide, potential effects on social ties, and technological obstacles.

The results of the literature review contribute to the conversation about methods for removing obstacles to the sociovirtualization process. These tactics consist of boosting digital literacy initiatives, developing more user-friendly virtual features, and upgrading digital infrastructure. The review also looks at how sociovirtualization affects weighing the advantages of keeping social ties as well as the possible drawbacks of excessive screen time and little in-person engagement.

Considering the knowledge gathered from the literature review, the article's conclusion expects a day when sociovirtualization is accepted as the standard in social interaction. It highlights how crucial it is to take a well-rounded strategy to fostering real human connections, combining virtual and in-person contacts.

This article's use of a literature review technique offers a thorough grasp of the idea of sociovirtualization in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. It provides insights into new approaches to socializing in the digital age by highlighting the benefits, difficulties, and potential future ramifications of sociovirtualization.

## **2. Understanding sociovirtualization**

The word "sociovirtualization" became increasingly well-known following the Covid-19 outbreak due to the significant shifts in how people communicate and engage. It represents a fundamental shift in the dynamics of human relationships with spending more time in online, brought about by the utilization of virtual platforms and digital technologies to engage in social activities (Kurt, 2012).

At its core, sociovirtualization encapsulates the idea that individuals can maintain and even nurture social connections through digital means, irrespective of physical distance (Kurt, 2023). It includes a broad range of digital communication platforms and techniques, all of which are intended to promote community and real-time connection.

Platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, and Google Meet have become integral tools for both personal and professional interactions (Hurts, 2020). They make it possible for people to interact in person and in groups, overcoming distances and adding a personal touch to online interactions.

Online Chat Rooms and Messaging Apps are also used for communication. Instant messaging apps like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Slack provide quick and convenient ways to maintain ongoing conversations with friends, family, and colleagues (Nouwens et al. 2017). Emojis, group conversations, and sharing of multimedia files make these exchanges more meaningful. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and other social media platforms have developed from being just places to share information to becoming active centers of social interaction. People can participate in discussions, share life moments, and connect with others who share similar interests or experiences (Akram&Kumar, 2017).

On the other hand, users of virtual connections also like participating in online gaming groups. During the pandemic, multiplayer internet games and gaming communities have flourished. Gamers can communicate and cooperate with fellow players worldwide, forming bonds that extend beyond the gaming world (McCarthy et al. 2023).

In the digital realm, people have also planned webinars and virtual gatherings related to the topic of communities. The pandemic has driven the proliferation of virtual events, conferences, and webinars (Kramer et al. 2023). These platforms promote networking and knowledge exchange by enabling people and organizations to organize and attend events globally.

Recognizing the importance of sociovirtualization in reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation frequently brought on by physical distancing measures is essential to understanding it. In situations where face-to-face encounters are constrained, it has become an indispensable means of preserving social ties.

In addition to changing the way individuals connect, sociovirtualization has put preconceived ideas about proximity and presence in relationships to the test. It underscores the adaptability of human beings in using technology to transcend geographical boundaries and to foster a sense of belonging in an increasingly digital world (Kurt, 2023).

Essentially, sociovirtualization is a revolutionary force that has the capacity to completely reshape how we establish and maintain connections in the digital era, rather than only being a reaction to a problem. It emphasizes how people may use technology to sustain human social connection needs even in the face of physical obstacles, demonstrating their tenacity and inventiveness.

### **3. Advantages of sociovirtualization**

Particularly considering the Covid-19 pandemic, sociovirtualization—the use of digital platforms and technologies for social interaction—has become a transformational force with a number of noteworthy benefits. These benefits have helped sociovirtualization become a widely accepted and adopted method of social interaction.

The fact that sociovirtualization is not limited by geography is one of its greatest benefits. Remote users can communicate in real time, no matter how far apart they are—they could be

across town or on the other side of the globe. This has made it possible for coworkers, friends, and families to stay in touch and develop bonds despite their physical distance from one another. Through sociovirtualization, one can access a worldwide community. Others can interact with others of different origins, cultures, and viewpoints. This global reach fosters cross-cultural understanding, promotes diversity, and expands one's horizons, making it possible to build relationships and collaborate on a global scale (Zyl et al. 2023).

Sociovirtualization offered a safe way to socialize during the pandemic. It lessened the possibility of viral spread, enabling people to keep up social ties without endangering their health. This safety aspect was particularly critical during times of lockdowns and high infection rates (Hanna, 2023). Sociovirtualization made it easier to plan different online conferences, workshops, seminars, and events. Experts, professionals, and enthusiasts were able to exchange knowledge and thoughts through these platforms without having to meet in person. These kinds of gatherings not only kept the momentum going but also raised participation and accessibility. Virtual platforms offer flexibility in scheduling interactions (Galway et al. 2023). People can connect whenever it's convenient for them, which eliminates time limits and travel-related hassles. People juggling job, family, and social obligations or those with hectic schedules can particularly benefit from this flexibility.

Costs have decreased as a result of the sociovirtualization movement. Travel expenses for meetings, conferences, and social gatherings have been reduced or eliminated (Wu et al. 2022). Sociovirtualization has become a desirable alternative for companies, people, and organizations trying to simplify their budgets because of this financial advantage. Reduced travel associated with sociovirtualization has a positive impact on the environment (Versteijlen et al. 2017). Reduced flights and commutes translate into lower carbon emissions and smaller environmental footprints. This promotes more environmentally friendly social interactions and is in line with sustainability objectives.

The process of sociovirtualization has promise for improving inclusivity and accessibility. It can make social interactions more inclusive for everyone by accommodating those with disabilities. It also provides chances for people who might otherwise not have been able to take advantage of them because of physical or geographic restrictions. Relationship maintenance was greatly aided by sociovirtualization during periods of physical distance. It prevented feelings of isolation and loneliness, ensuring that individuals remained connected with their support networks, friends, and loved ones (Ellis et al. 2020). Social activity innovation has been spurred by sociovirtualization. Themed events, gaming evenings, and virtual parties have become popular substitutes for more conventional get-togethers. These meetings have shown that internet communication may be just as interesting and pleasurable as face-to-face communication.

Even though sociovirtualization has these major benefits, it's crucial to understand that in-person relationships still have significance. Instead, it enhances them by providing an adaptable and varied means of interacting and interacting with people. The future of sociability is expected to be shaped by the coexistence of virtual and in-person contacts, giving people a variety of options for sustaining meaningful ties in a constantly changing world.

#### 4. Challenges and limitations

Recognizing the difficulties and constraints associated with this revolutionary approach to social interaction is crucial, since sociovirtualization has become an indispensable aspect of our social environment. Although it has many benefits, it also has drawbacks and issues that need to be resolved along with its difficulties.

There can be some technical barriers. Not everyone has access to the necessary technology or a reliable internet connection (Ferri et al. 2020). A major prerequisite for sociovirtualization is reliable internet connectivity and digital equipment, which might be difficult for people in rural or underdeveloped areas to get. Inequitable involvement in virtual socialization may arise from this digital gap.

Another thing that limits people is not being physically present. Virtual interactions lack the physical presence and non-verbal cues that are integral to in-person communication (Gómez-Moreno, 2023; Kurt&Agayev, 2009). Because subtleties in body language, facial expressions, and physical contact are lost in virtual interactions, this absence can have an impact on the depth and quality of social connections. The depth of social bonds may be impacted by an over-reliance on virtual socialization. Some argue that digital interactions lack the intimacy and authenticity of face-to-face encounters, potentially leading to shallower relationships (Prusty&Ahmed, 2023).

Paradoxically, loneliness and isolation might result from a reliance on sociovirtualization too much. An excessive amount of screen time combined with a physical distance might make one feel detached from relationships and experiences in the real world. In-person interactions often involve serendipitous encounters and spontaneous moments that are challenging to replicate in virtual settings (Schulte-Römer&Gesing, 2022). Forging connections and encouraging creativity can sometimes depend on the spontaneous, informal exchanges that take place in real-world social settings.

Additionally, there can be an effect on mental health. Sociovirtualization can help people feel less alone, but it can also exacerbate mental health issues. Excessive screen time, digital fatigue, and the absence of physical social interactions have been linked to stress, anxiety, and depression (Amran&Jamaluddin, 2022; Kurt&Devecioğlu, 2015). Maintaining a healthy balance between virtual and face-to-face interactions is essential for mental health. However, prolonged use of virtual worlds can cause a condition known as digital weariness. It might be mentally taxing to constantly need to be online for business, socializing, and recreation. The ability to detach and reenergize is crucial for general wellbeing.

Concerns about privacy and security are pressing matters. Virtual platforms are not impervious to threats to privacy and security. Concerns over the security of online interactions have been raised by instances of hacking, data breaches, and privacy violations. Users need to be vigilant about protecting their personal information and ensuring the security of their virtual social spaces (Huang et al. 2023). Additionally, it may result in a digital dependency. Digital dependence, in which people rely primarily on technology for social connection, can result from sociovirtualization. Concerns are raised by this dependence over people losing their capacity to interact meaningfully with others in person and to function in social circumstances.

A balanced approach to socializing that incorporates the advantages of sociovirtualization with in-person contacts is necessary to address these obstacles and constraints. It also calls for initiatives to improve digital literacy, close the digital divide, and create rules for responsible and secure online behavior. A sustainable and satisfying social future is probably going to depend on the cohabitation of virtual and physical socialization.

## 5. Overcoming the barriers

Although sociovirtualization provides novel means of communication and interaction, it is imperative to tackle the obstacles and difficulties it poses. In order to improve sociovirtualization effectiveness, accessibility, and inclusivity, these obstacles must be removed.

The digital infrastructure needs to be addressed first and foremost. Governments, businesses, and communities need to make investments in bettering digital infrastructure if they want to close the digital divide. This includes expanding high-speed internet access to underserved areas, ensuring reliable connectivity, and reducing the cost of access (Valentín-Sívico et al. 2023). Encouraging public-private collaborations can be crucial to accomplishing these objectives. Ensuring Fair Access to Technological Resources can benefit the entire community. It is important to make sure that everyone has access to the tools and resources available through technology. Public access to computers and the internet can be provided by schools, libraries, and community centers, leveling the playing field for people who might not have access at home. Then, it could promote societal inclusivity. Social media sites and virtual platforms ought to be created with inclusivity in mind. This entails taking into account the requirements of people with impairments and making sure that everyone can participate in virtual interactions. Even while online contacts are important, offline interactions should also be promoted. Social media, messaging applications, and virtual events may all be leveraged to make meaningful in-person connections happen between people who communicate online.

Encouraging digital literacy initiatives is another crucial thing that people should do. They raise awareness of potential dangers. Digital literacy programs are essential for empowering individuals to navigate virtual spaces safely and effectively (Tinmaz et al. 2023). Online etiquette, privacy protection, and ethical technology use should all be included in these programs. People can learn more about potential risks and become more tech-savvy by participating in education and awareness programs.

For the sake of their mental health, people must balance the amount of time they spend in front of screens. Achieving a healthy balance between virtual and in-person connections is important for people to do since excessive screen usage has been linked to negative mental health effects. Setting boundaries, scheduling digital detox periods, and prioritizing face-to-face connections can contribute to overall well-being (Kurt, 2013; Oja, 2023).

For those who use the internet, it might be argued that there is a digital citizenship in the virtual world. Programs for digital citizenship can encourage moral and responsible online conduct. An online culture that prioritizes kindness, understanding, and respect can be established through virtual interactions. There is also requirement for regulatory measures in the virtual world for the safety of the digital citizenships (Al-Thubetat et al. 2023). Ensuring the security and privacy of virtual environments can be a responsibility of governments and

regulatory agencies. Trust in virtual platforms can be increased by putting laws into place and enforcing them that safeguard user data and stop cyberattacks.

The conditions in the virtual world can be improved by technological advancement. Sustained technological innovation, including developments in augmented and virtual reality, has the potential to improve the quality of virtual interactions. These developments have the potential to enhance the immersiveness of sociovirtualization and yield a more fulfilling experience.

The ongoing process of eliminating barriers to sociovirtualization necessitates collaboration from private citizens, public authorities, IT companies, and academic institutions.

The goal is to create a digital environment that is more balanced, inclusive, and accessible, where virtual interactions enhance and complement our in-person relationships. We can maximize the benefits of sociovirtualization while minimizing its drawbacks if we take these issues head-on.

## **6. The future of socialization: sociovirtualization as a norm**

Conversations concerning the future of socialization have been sparked by the extensive acceptance and adaptation of sociovirtualization that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although face-to-face communication will always be important for human connection, sociovirtualization has shown that it can take the place of in-person encounters in the changing social interaction landscape. Investigating the mechanics and effects of sociovirtualization as it permeates society is essential.

As an interactive method of human communication, sociovirtualization can be beneficial. Virtual and in-person contacts are expected to coexist in the future of sociability. In addition to in-person contacts, sociovirtualization will provide people with other options for interacting with others. It will become a crucial component of how individuals establish and preserve connections. Since it provides unmatched convenience and accessibility. It allows people to connect with friends, family, and colleagues regardless of geographical distance, time zones, or physical constraints (Jordan, 2023). Because of its convenience, virtual interactions will always be a desirable choice for people with hectic schedules.

Via their virtual network, the digital citizens are connected to people all over the world. Through sociovirtualization, people can interact with people worldwide regardless of geographical boundaries. Global networking will proliferate, leading to previously unthinkable levels of cross-cultural interactions, international friendships, and teamwork. Thus, scheduling interactions is flexible with virtual platforms. Connecting with others at their convenience facilitates juggling social obligations with other commitments. With its virtual workspaces, this flexibility will continue to be a crucial feature of sociovirtualization. The rise of remote work has reshaped traditional work environments (Al-Thubetat et al. 2023). With the help of sociovirtualization, remote teams will be able to communicate, brainstorm, and socialize with ease in virtual workspaces. Coworking spaces and virtual offices might proliferate.

Furthermore, in the virtual world, cultures have greater experience with adaptation and resilience during pandemics. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how adaptive and resilient

people may be when faced with hardship. The dynamic character of human connections and our capacity for invention in virtual reality are highlighted by our ability to adapt to sociovirtualization and embrace technology as a means of socializing. Advancements in virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) will further enhance the virtual socialization experience (Childs et al. 2023). More complex and captivating VR get-togethers, fully immersive virtual events, and AR-enhanced social interactions are anticipated. Through their VR experiences, people have learnt more, and advancements have given them access to additional alternatives and facilities for learning and education. With the advent of online courses, webinars, and virtual classrooms, education has undergone a digital makeover. Sociovirtualization will continue to be a vital instrument for education, offering chances for continuing education and skill improvement throughout life.

It could imply that boundaries regarding time, relationships, safety, mental health, etc. are hazy. The lines separating personal and professional life might become increasingly hazy as sociovirtualization permeates more facets of day-to-day living. People will navigate a digital landscape where work, socialization, and leisure are seamlessly integrated (Soto-Acosta, 2023). As a result, there are some difficulties and moral issues in this virtual environment. Sociovirtualization will create issues with cybersecurity, digital etiquette, and privacy as it permeates society more deeply. Regulations and continuing dialogue are required when it comes to data protection and the ethical usage of virtual technologies.

In conclusion, a hybrid model of socialization that combines in-person encounters and sociovirtualization is indicative of the future of socializing. Although online platforms give ease of use, accessibility, and worldwide connectivity, face-to-face interactions offer the depth of physical presence and nonverbal indicators. Incorporating sociovirtualization into our social norms is a paradigm shift in how we create and maintain relationships in a world where connections are becoming more and more intertwined, rather than merely a reaction to a crisis. It highlights how humans can easily use technology to create genuine connections, making sociovirtualization a long-lasting aspect of our social lives.

## **7. Discussion and conclusion**

The use of sociovirtualization in socialization has increased after the Covid-19 pandemic. In times of physical distance, virtual platforms have become essential tools for sustaining relationships and interacting with others. Numerous advantages of sociovirtualization include improved information sharing, safety, and global connectedness. But it also brings with it difficulties like the digital divide and technical problems. Maintaining mental health requires finding a balance between virtual and in-person connections.

Sociovirtualization will probably become the standard in our social life as time goes on, providing us with new opportunities to interact and connect with people.

The quick development of digital technology and the knowledge gained during the pandemic have shown how adaptive and resilient human social behavior can be. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, sociovirtualization has become more prevalent in socialization. Virtual platforms are becoming necessary tools for maintaining relationships and communicating with people when there is a physical distance. Sociovirtualization has many benefits, such as increased global connectivity, safety, and information exchange. However, it also carries with it

challenges like technological issues and the digital divide. Finding a balance between virtual and in-person contacts is necessary to maintain mental wellness. As time goes on, sociovirtualization will most likely become the norm in our social lives, giving us new ways to engage and form connections with others. The pandemic and the rapid advancement of digital technologies have demonstrated the adaptability and resilience of human social behavior.

Although face-to-face communication is still essential for developing strong bonds, sociovirtualization has added new layers to our social environment. It makes it feasible for us to build relationships and cross geographical barriers that would not have been conceivable otherwise.

When applied carefully and sparingly, sociovirtualization can be an effective strategy for preserving social ties. Still, it's critical to be conscious of its possible effects on mental health and take proactive measures to maintain a healthy balance between virtual and in-person relationships. Feelings of alienation and disengagement may result from an over-reliance on virtual relationships. As a result, wherever possible, people should emphasize in-person interactions.

The way we communicate is changing, and this has a big impact on how relationships work now and in the future. It asks us to reconsider our conceptions of community and connection, as well as conventional ideas of socialization. Technology is advancing, and society has to move carefully and thoughtfully through the changing sociovirtualization landscape. Shaping the future of human interaction in an increasingly digital environment will require striking the correct balance between the ease of virtual connections and the depth of in-person interactions.

Sociovirtualization has the potential to completely redefine how people interact, learn, and work together in the future. It is possible to establish a digital landscape that improves people's lives and societies while maintaining the richness of in-person relationships, when necessary, by resolving the difficulties and embracing creative solutions.

### **Acknowledgements**

This article was presented at the 10th London International Conference, held from November 15 to 17, 2023, in London, United Kingdom. It has been published in the proceedings of the London International Conferences under No. 8(2003).

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