Socializing Reshaped

SUMMARY: Social media, telecommuting, digital entertainment, and shifting social norms are reshaping patterns of socializing, both online and in person. A growing percentage of social interaction is now digitally mediated. Work life and social life are increasingly occurring in the context of online social tribes and communities. The need to change one's physical location to socialize and work with others is declining.

Forecasts

- The line between work and personal life will continue to blur as technological mediation allows activities associated with either sphere to be accomplished from anywhere.
- With most work and social activities partially mediated by online tools, the providers of these tools will have tremendous amounts of user data and information, giving them influence over what users see and do and how they perceive the world.
- As digital interactions reshape social behaviors, these new patterns will be adopted by workers—increasingly changing how work is done and how offices are managed. The "I'll text if I'm coming" ethos could play havoc with scheduling freelancers, while sick days could be supplanted by "ghosting." Managers will need to be ready for this new flavor of blurred work and social lives.
- As new ideas about socializing and social networks take hold and work and leisure forums blur, co-workers could be seen as just another social cohort. This could lead to headaches for HR as workers begin to forget or ignore the fact that there are special behavioral rules governing office interactions.

Key Uncertainties

Effects of privacy concerns

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Rising backlash against working from home or remotely

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Level of integration of physical and online social lives

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People's need or desire for physical company

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Role of automation in reshaping work life

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Degree of resistance to expanding role of algorithms in all facets of life

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Supporting Trends

- **Algorithmic socializing.** Algorithms are increasingly mediating social interactions. Facebook and Twitter use programs that create social feeds designed to keep the user interested, but these are not fully reflective of information shared by the user's friends.
- **Connecting online and real-life lives.** People are taking their online friendships offline into the real world via apps.
- **Working from home**. Despite recent retrenchment by several large companies, the number of Americans telecommuting and working from home continues to rise.
- **Living single in America.** Single households, once largely the province of divorcés, widows and widowers, or bachelors, are now a primary part of the American social fabric.
- **Virtual volunteering.** More volunteering is happening online. Younger volunteers are engaging through social media or extending advocacy or fundraising campaigns to their social networks.
- **U.S. social media use growing.** Americans' social media use continues to grow.
- **Staying in, not going out.** Home theaters, better food-delivery options, and easier food ordering may all be contributing to Americans staying in. Online streaming service Netflix has over 56 million subscribers in the United States, and Amazon Prime has over 100 million subscribers globally.

Related Drivers of Change

- Personalized Artificial Intelligence
- Nichification
- The Next-Gen Professionals
- Work Redefined

Notable Data Points

YOUTHFUL SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media continues to be a young person's game:
88% of 18–24-year olds use social media
versus 78% of 30–49-year olds, 64% of 50–64-year olds, and only 37% of those 65+.

Source: Pew Research Center

LIVING SINGLE

The number of people living in single-person households in the U.S. in 2017 was
35 million, up from about 7 million in 1960.

Source: Statista

TELEWORK

As of 2017,
43% of U.S. workers work remotely at least "occasionally,"
a number that has risen from 9% in 2007.

Source: Flexjobs

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Strategic Insights

- Expectations for interaction with organizations will continue to be reshaped by evolving social life. The move to greater online interaction will require some internal functions to be fundamentally rethought. There may be significant generational differences in expectations, habits, and preferences for how members interact with organizations and with each other.
- As more members and employees work offsite, new systems will be needed for maintaining trust, as relationships will not be face-to-face but mediated through various online services.
- The ease of getting things done online means that face-to-face meetings are a big deal. They need to be compelling enough to inspire people to travel. This means conferences and meetings need to provide even more value to avoid the dreaded "Just send me the link to the livestream and the PDF."
- Online work and life could lead to new ways for identifying or appointing leadership. New leadership could rise organically via members' networks, based less on votes than on followers. The kinds of leadership positions that align well with these new methods, versus those that require a more traditional approach, will have to be studied.
- Interfacing online may provide new leadership opportunities for employees and members who might feel blocked from leadership in real-life milieus, whether due to introversion, language barriers, or physical abilities. An online world could unlock unused potential of employees or members.

Timing

- **Stage:** Growth, although under way since the mid-1990s
- **Speed:** Relatively rapid, and accelerating

Potential Alternative Futures

- **A small measure of privacy:** As life is increasingly lived online, a backlash develops as some people seek to regain control of privacy. This has social repercussions.
- **People are scary:** The oblique and screen-based communication styles of contemporary social life strongly reshape work and commerce away from face-to-face interactions.
- **The F2F movement:** People tired of staring at screens all day insist on more face-to-face interaction with friends and co-workers.

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Take Action

- **Set an objective and strategies for social media.** Despite widespread adoption, these are still early days. Align social media with your core mission and strategies to maintain control of your brand, content, and community. Why and in what ways do people need to socialize around products and services?
- **Engage members anytime, anywhere.** Many associations now recognize that how engaged members are matters more than how many there are. Social media give people with less time and ability to travel a powerful way to feel connected to their association and each other. Associations can monitor what matters to members as they converse and collaborate online.
- **Foster peer-to-peer learning.** Online communities make it easy for members to share knowledge and answers in real time. Adult learners like learning while working with others doing similar work. Associations can crowdsource conversations and projects around emerging issues. Mentoring programs flourish when people can connect regardless of location. Associations can copyright and trademark intellectual property in ways that protect their value yet facilitate member sharing.
- **Train staff and leaders to use social media wisely.** Social media blur the boundaries between what's public and personal, bringing instant visibility to what people say and do. People acquire large networks to advance their interests or vent their concerns. Before things turn ugly, establish rules on who can speak for the association and guidelines for appropriate communication and behavior. Social media afford volunteers and staff a great deal of autonomy to demonstrate leadership and advance the association when used wisely.

Keyword Search

To continue researching this change driver, use combinations of these search terms:

online socializing, online communities, social media, social life, social networks, event retail, online work, remote work, working from home, third spaces, declining marriage rates, delayed marriage, millennials and social life, digital socialization

Who Will Be Affected

Social media and online interaction are communication technologies affecting all organizations and businesses. They are becoming powerful tools in effective association operations. Different platforms and tools will emerge and become popular while others decline. As more people work, learn, and play using these social technologies, they will reshape cultural norms and societal values.

About ASAE ForesightWorks

ASAE ForesightWorks is a deliberate, evidence-based research program and emerging line of products to provide association professionals with a *continual* stream of intelligence about the changes facing the association industry, including:

- regularly updated action briefs;
- tools for applying insights from the research in your association;
- guidance in performing environmental scans; and
- opportunities to engage with peers around the research.

Ultimately, the program's mission is to empower association leaders to create a culture of foresight in their associations and to lead their organizations confidently into the future.

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