The role of technology in connecting people during the pandemic

The quarantine, lockdown and social distancing measures resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic mean we have been living in a time where, for a large proportion of the population, our in-person contact with one another is incredibly limited if not non-existent. Because of this, digital technology has taken on new importance and relevance in many people s lives, underpinning how we keep in touch with families, friends and colleagues even more so than it did before. Many people are adapting to new work, home and social lives that seem to be lived through a camera lens and a plethora of instant messaging, social networking, and video conferencing platforms. These platforms enable us to keep in touch with each other while at a distance; but they also help the public keep abreast of pandemic developments and allow information to be shared quickly amongst communities and networks.

As a researcher in the field of human-computer interaction, with an interest in how technology becomes woven into the messiness of people

come with problems easy for technology to become a crutch in these periods. Social networks give a sense that if you post a status update, send a tweet, or add a comment to a forum thread, then someone will respond. But , leading to an increased sense of not being listened to, heard, and being alone. nto making comparisons between yourself and others, possibly giving a sense that you are lacking in some ways. In our project, this is something that we saw a lot of among University students who were struggling to make new friends, and among new parents who were quick to judge their parenting abilities in relation to others. In these cases, seeing the experience

postcards with telephone numbers and if they are shielding or experiencing quarantine measures. Social network platforms have been critical in the uptake of these around the UK as people started to share templates for cards that can be created at home, alongside tips and advice for streets to self-organise in ways to support vulnerable, isolating and shielded households.

Instant messaging platforms have been critical to co-ordinating these endeavours, with WhatsApp and Facebook groups being created where households collaboratively keep a watch on others in their street, reporting to each other when certain residents may need more support, or raising concerns if a neighbour has

In summary, i but we must be careful not to see digital technologies as separate from the social practices that surround

be careful not to see digital technologies as separate from the social practices that surround them and that give them purpose and meaning. While the evidence at this time is entirely anecdotal, there are clear opportunities to learn from the ways that social networks are being formed and strengthened at highly local degrees of granularity in order to provide community-driven responses to the lockdown measures. Going forward, thinking about future crises and potential pandemics, it would put us in good stead to consider the ways such networks could be established and co-ordinated more effectively, especially within communities where residents are at higher risk. But also, we must not lose sight of the power of older, simpler, and often more familiar or reliable technologies like radio at times like this. The seduction of new technologies can lead to innovation for the sake of innovation, and simpler, cheaper and more effective solutions have been with us all along.