UNDERSTANDING THE META-PROBLEMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITIES

VOCABULARY

Civic Engagement:

active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future." (David Crowley, n.d.)

A community is best defined as a group of people who, celebrating the diversity of their perspectives, accept and transcend their differences, enabling them to communicate effectively and openly to work together toward goals identified as being for their common good. (Community builder's common, n.d)

Meta-Problems:

Phenomenon that underlies severa problems, and understanding of which is essential to finding the solution to those (Businessdictionary, n.d.)

STAKEHOLDERS

Community Builders, Community members,

Decision makers

Social System of **Communities Boundary:**

bridging, bonding and linking. Geographic community systems In a social system of communities

there exist a social "contract" according to which an Individual act to support a social world that, in turn, acts to support the individual, qua individual. (Lerner, 2004). This can be understood as a mutually-influential, symbiotic

personal and external barriers. The knowledge or information. personal constraints for individuals

Social Contract:

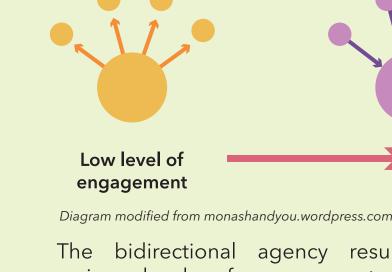
Bi-directional Relationship

The barriers to civic engagement for of personal responsibility, lack of Some of the external barriers include:

Overcommitment and burnout culture within a community, religious/ which result in lack of *energy*, time ideological *differences*, lack of alignment of vision and values which platforms for communal activities, in return causes lack of *interest*, lack lack of *networks*, lack of *transparency*, and others.

EMPOWER

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENTS

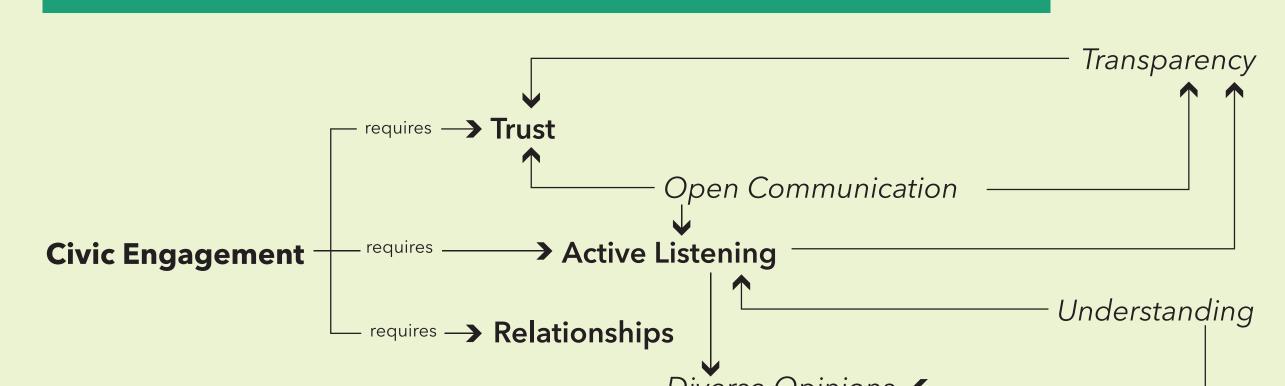


The bidirectional agency results in 'collaborate.' As the diagram shows, in the flow of information from community to various levels of engagement of an case of 'inform' the flow of information is individual, individual to the community, individual with the community and other one dimensional i.e. from the community and among individual of the community. individuals in it. Depending on the type — to the individual. It is a form of top-down — This can entail the concept of shared and intention of participation, the levels relationship, where the decision makers leadership and shared responsibility in a range from 'inform' being the least form — in a community decide the direction and — community. The individuals are a part of

and 'empower' being the highest form of give out information to the individuals. In the decision making process and engagement. Other levels in between the maximum level, 'empowerment' is receive and share information and include 'consult,' 'involve' and seen as a result of a multi-dimensional knowledge.

COLLABORATE

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

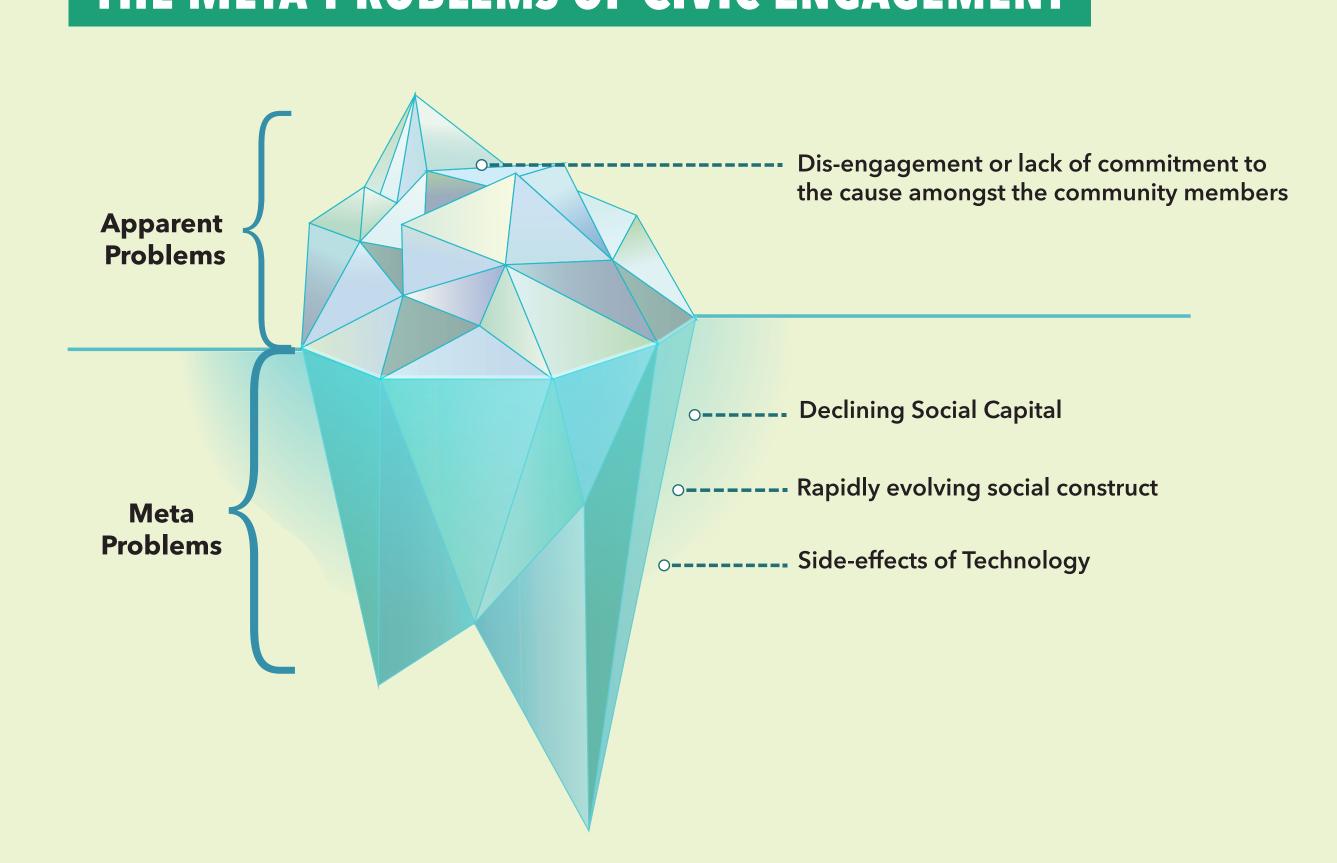


engagement. These guiding principles engagement directly depends." (Russell, can be categorized as secondary and 2011) In the diagram below, trust, active

strategies, which are a means to achieve principles (trust, relationships, and active secondary. strategies geared towards positive civic listening) are those upon which civic

Russell (2011) defines principles as primary principles. Secondary principles listening and relationships are identified "efforts meant to supplement the civic implying the ones that support in as core principles and diverse opinions, engagement process". He suggests that achieving primary/core principles, and transparency, open communication, these are actions undertaken and not are influenced by them. "The core and understanding communities are

THE META-PROBLEMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



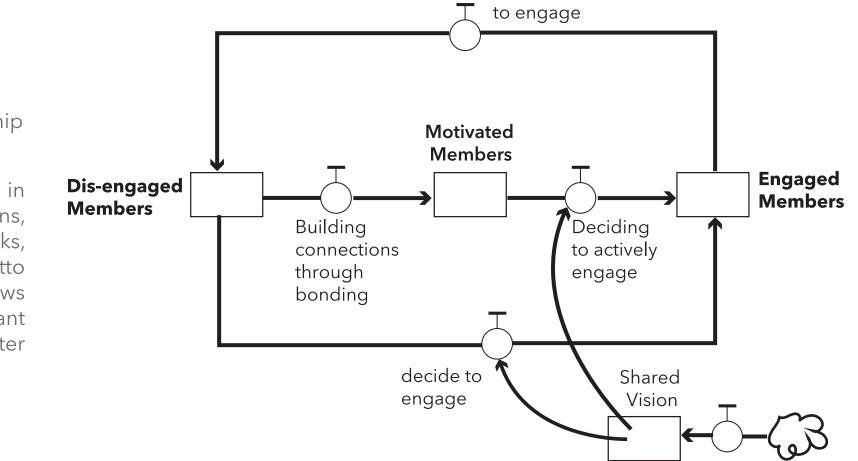
HOW MIGHT ACTIVE COMMUNITIES BETTER UNDERSTAND THE UNDERLYING META-PROBLEMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TO ENCOURAGE AND ENHANCE INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITIES?

OUR FOCUS

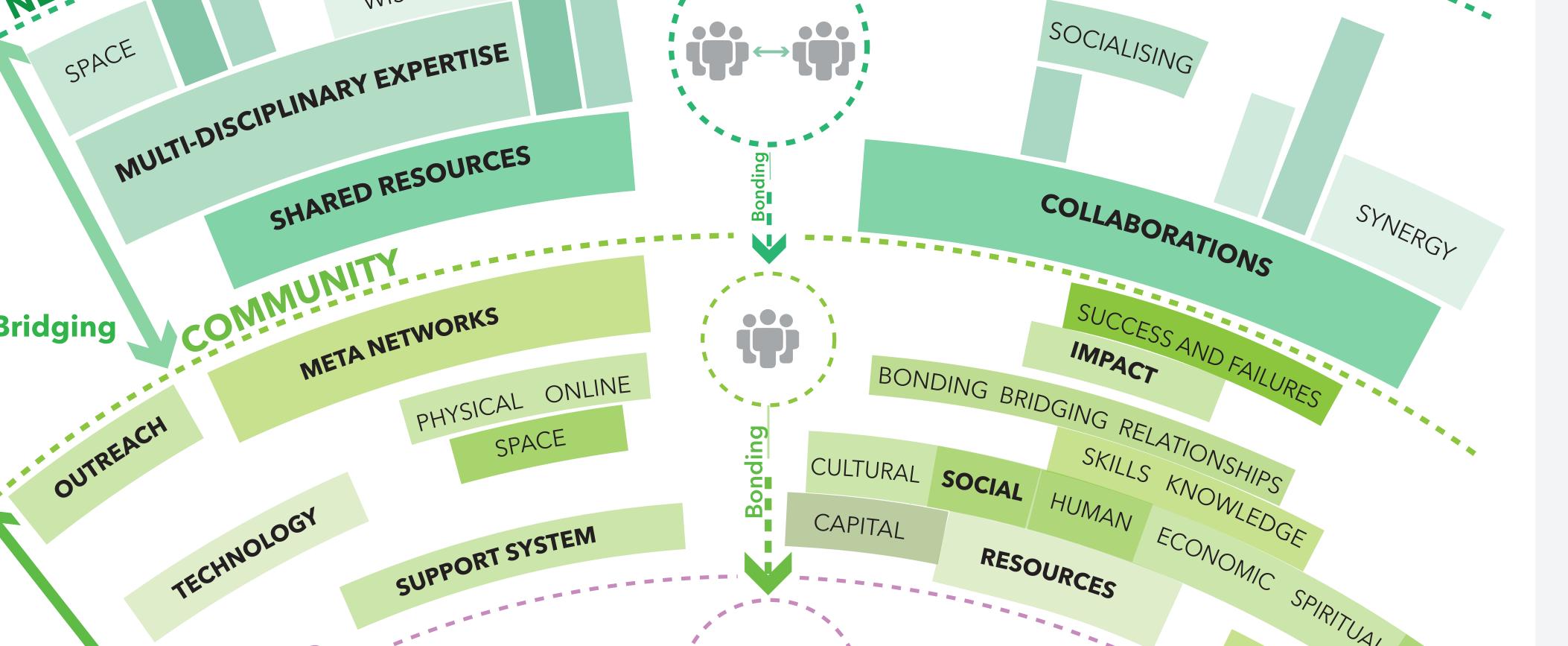
DECLINING SOCIAL CAPITAL and quantity" (World Bank, n.d.) of a community's social interactions such as

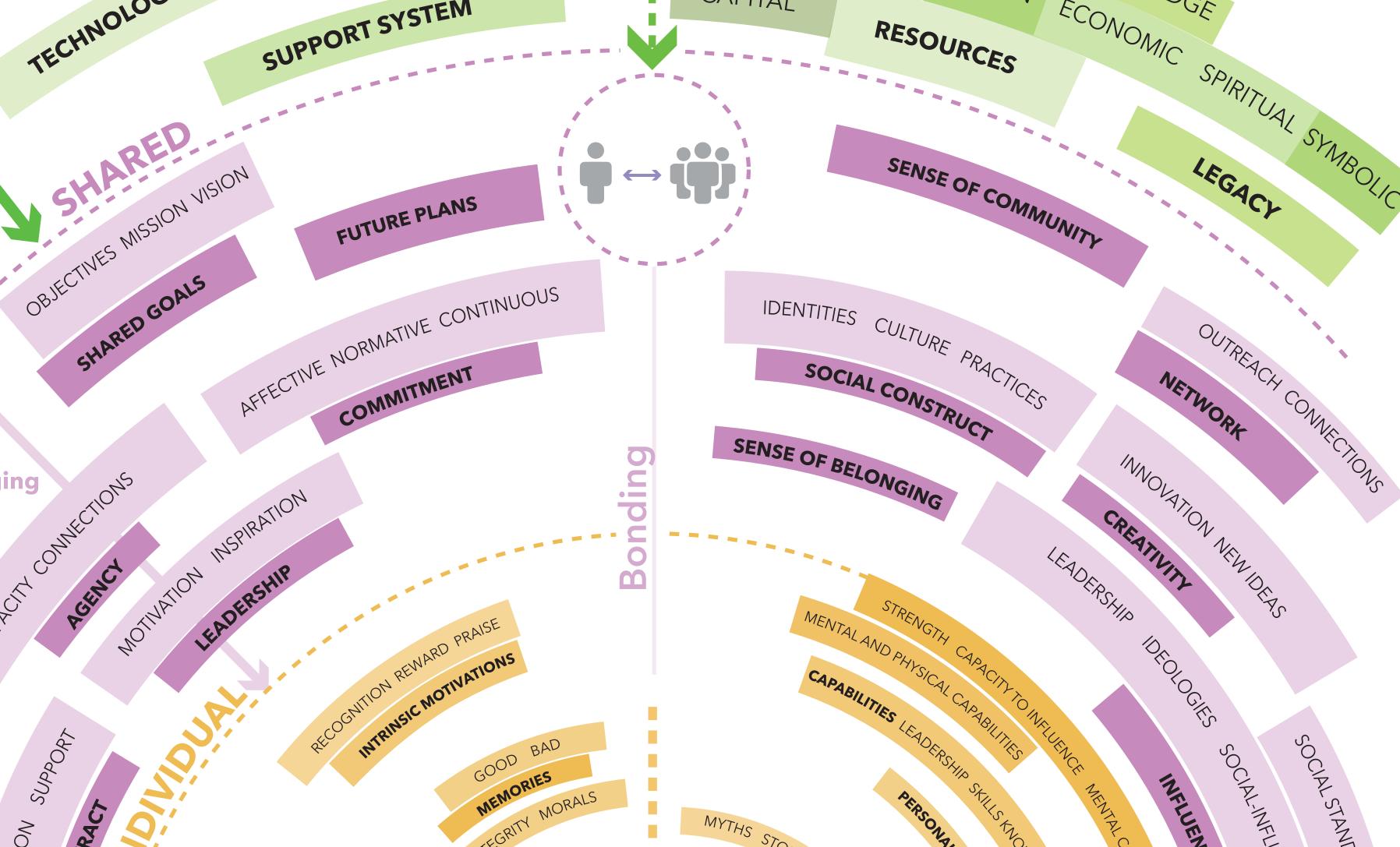
According to our synthesis, bridging and bonding are two important phenomenons that explain the kind of relationship developed between individuals in a community Bridging caters to the horizontal individuals to go beyond their limits "Social capital can be found in Dis-engaged

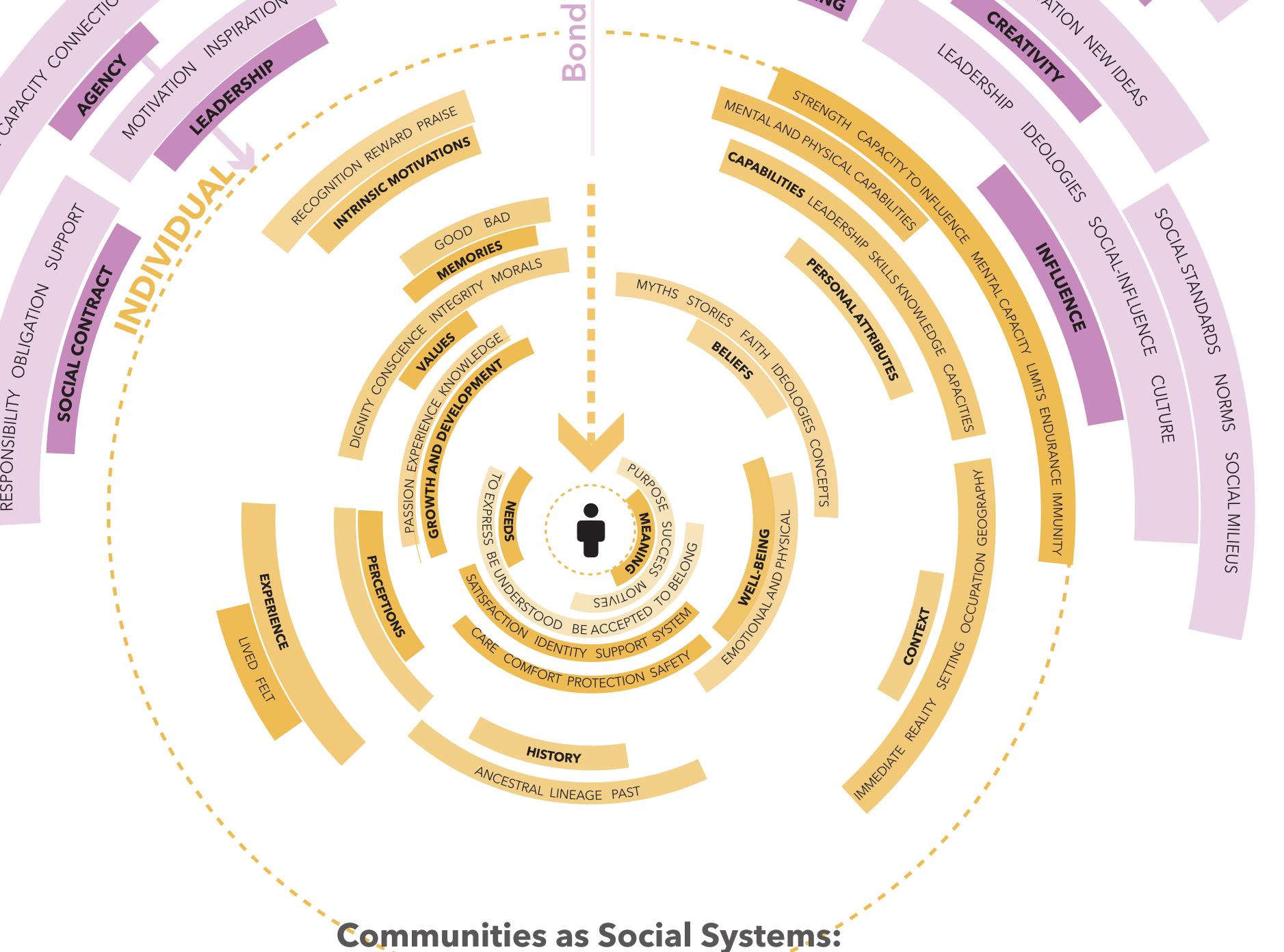
relationship across collective identities and participate for the betterment of neighborhoods, civic associations, which enables individuals to relate to the community. As already discussed, churches, schools, friendship networks, each other, while **Bonding** is an 'relationships' are one of the core bridge clubs, and even bars. The motto outcome of vertical deep seated principles for active civic in Cheers "where everybody knows connection built amongst individuals engagements. the quality of these your name" captures one important in a community. It is the deeper, vertical relationships can affect and result in aspect of social capital." (better



connection that encourages the decline of social capital.







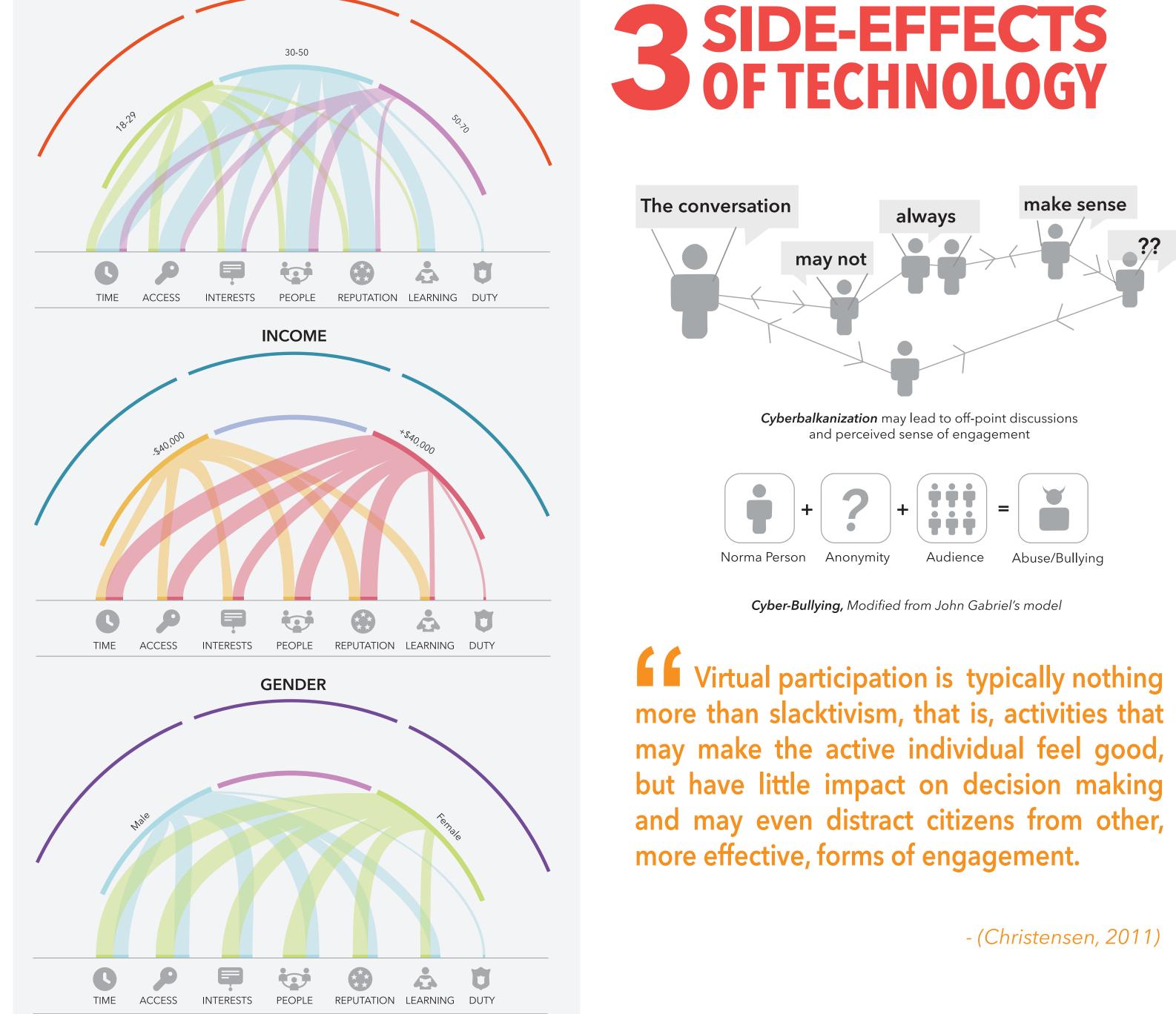
Influence diagram showing the symbiotic relationship between individuals and communities

Ideas of Right & Wrong4 Sense of belonging Ideas of Right & Wrong Intrinsic Motivations Sense of belonging Bridging

FACTORS AFFECTING INDIVIDUAL'S DECISION TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITIES

Sense of Belonging

An online survey was conducted to capture a range of perceptions by people from varying backgrounds, including participants ranging from actively engaged to those who are least engaged in community building activities. 50 responses were received. The diagram shows how some factors change based on gender, income, age and occupation, which may limit and affect individuals participation. Successful communities incorporate and consider these factors in their processes and interactions to encourage or enhance participation of individuals in



RAPIDLY EVOLVING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS

The term **Social Construct** is defined by structs and reorganization of commu-

IDENTITIES

Identities play a very important role in individuals civic participation. An unfolding phenomenon as a result of globalization is the identity crisis. As we can see in the Panarchy of Identities in relation to geographic community systems, there are layers of identities an individual associate with. Each layer has its influence on individuals sense of belonging and commitment to the community of his/her practice. Each horizontal layer is a link of relationship under a collective identity. When Lower levels ensure stability, the levels above ensure unity and solidarity of the levels below. Research shows, the age unfolding is that of un-settlement, with individuals traveling from one country to another, resulting in dissolving National (geographic) Identity. Some individuals who do not associate with National identities, may want to associate with ideological or religious identities. But the absence of a complete level ensuring horizontal ties below at National level, may be de-stabilizing. Whereas, some other individuals may want to associate with Global identities, but for identities to exist there is an intrinsic need of the "other", which raises another problem at the Global level, where the quest of "Who is the other in the Global identity" leads to Identity crisis, and individuals may not feel belonging or attachment

This emerging phenomenon may be an indication establishing a need for reorganisation, or restructuring within communities. Anew social construct beyond National boundaries, may be a way forward to bring the balance in the

OF TECHNOLOGY

Cyberbalkanization may lead to off-point discussions

and perceived sense of engagement

Norma Person Anonymity Audience Abuse/Bullying

Cyber-Bullying, Modified from John Gabriel's model

Re-configuration of

Communities

Brain-Drain

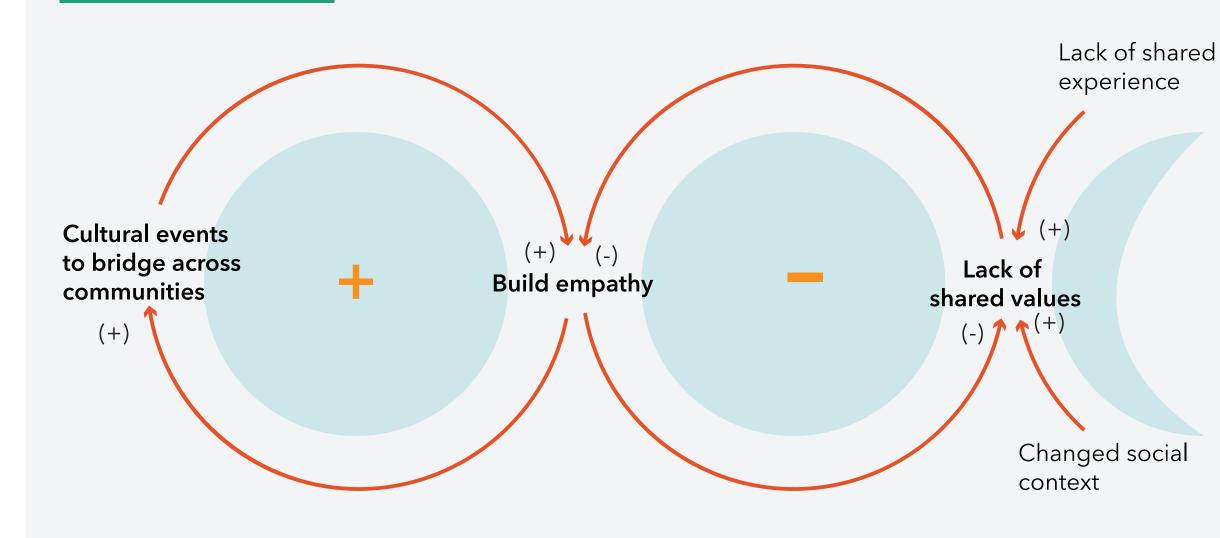
the Oxford Dictionaries as "a concept nities has increased, the pace and or perception of something based on quantity of Brain Drain has also the collective views developed and increased in today's world. Brain drain maintained within a society or social affects the community in terms of quantity and quality of human capital, which means a reduction in the

Social constructs have been changing number of participation, and the through out the human development amount of knowledge and skills, and process, however, the pace of evolu- positive inspiration. When capable tion of social constructs in today's participants of a community leave, world is radical and unlike the one they cause a dearth of human capital before. It is sporadic and unpredict- and positive motivation in that comable, resulting in a pace of reorganiza- munity. Conversely, this results in an tion and disruption in communities increase of human capital for other hard to grasp and keep up with, which communities. Due to the rapid pace makes it an underlying meta problem and profuse, quantity of this increase of problems of civic engagement in and decrease, the scale of its impact communities. Some of the factors lead- on communities is ever-increasing ing to this exponential evolution and unpredictable, in turn causing an include technology, digital media, imbalance. Some communities end up having massively higher human capital and positive inspiration while

'Brain Drain' is another phenomenon other communities suffer because of of the evolving social constructs. Since its scarcity. the pace of evolution of social con-

Rapidly evolving social construct creating new boundaries within the organization Panarchy of Human Identities

For almost 150,000 years we were nomads, for the past 10,000 years we have been settled, unfolding moment is that of un-settlement"



Rapidly evolving social construct: Disengaged youth in Aboriginal communities **Archetype:** Limits to growth

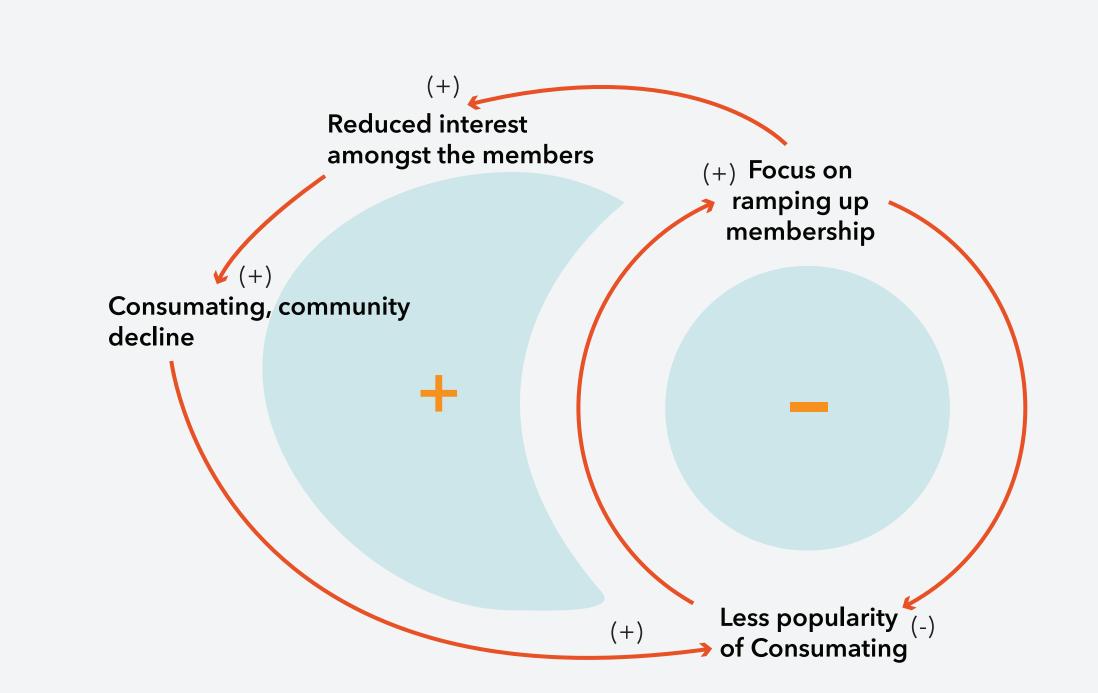
suffered the consequences of colo- values. On the other hand, their social

original community faces today is association. build empathy with the people who reduced sense of sharing similar

EXAMPLES

One of the challenges that the ab- nization at the same time there is no context of the youth has changed due forcing loop where members do aboriginal community leads to the lower levels of participation.

to various reasons such as exposure to the disengagement of the youth or However, a pattern can be seen un- the new media, urbanization, informathe millennial with the community. derlying this challenge, which points tion technology, etc. Thus the changing Cultural events organized by the out the archetype of 'limits to growth'. social context further adds to the lack of community leaders and activists in Today's aboriginal youth has not had shared values in the youth, and acts as a an effort to bridge the gap and first hand experiences of atrocities limiting condition. These two factors increase youth participation are suc- and discrimination that the previous become a hurdle for the aboriginal cessful in developing a sense of generations have faced and hence the youth in building a deeper sense of relatability amongst the members. lack of shared experiences of the association with their community. Thus As seen in the diagram, this is a rein-youth with the previous generation of resulting in their disengagement and



Side effects of Technology + Declining Social capital: Consumating an alternative dating community declined, Technology used to increase outreach resulted in dis-engagement amongst community members. **Archetype:** Fixes that Fail

ly focused on ramping up the mem- Consumating for good.

Consumating, is an alternative The community indeed grew from CNET's focus on rapid growth sucked dating community. In 2005, CNET 5,000 members to 60,000. It also suf- the air from the community. Consumatbought Consumating. The media fered a backlash from prior members ing's success was rooted in the fervor of giant wanted the next popular social and a lack of interest from new mem- the community itself-how often memnetworking website and immediate- bers. In 2008, CNET shut the doors on bers contributed, how they interacted, how they connected-rather than its overall size. (Silverman M., n,d.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

face to face ties."

The influx of information at a rapid pace is not giving space for people to synthesize the information through reflections that lead of knowledge and wisdom. This has also caused people to have shorter attention spans and illnesses such as ADHD. It has reduced the retention of information since we are more reliant on technologies for retaining knowledge. In the case of civic engagement, it has enabled people to commit to various virtual communities at the same time, which results in over- commitment and less It is also hard to determine the level of civic engagement on the online platforms. People can easily portray a false also become a barrier because English is the most used language online and many people with a lot of wisdom and knowledge can not share it using the online tools. Infact in many cases, not having technology and digital access has completely pulled people out of the new knowledge and updates-these are the disconnected individuals.

Active Dialogue: Dialogue involves nity to cooperate with each other in active listening and building a order to survive and prosper irrespecshared understanding of the issues tive of caste, gender, race, ethnicity, that if technology is to by being open to communication. economic status, etc. It also helps in Through dialogue, communities can mitigating disparity and discrimination succeed, it will have to build bonding and enhance the between different groups and ecoquality and quantity of connections nomic classes. By accommodating groups. Ensuring a safe space for all and social identities communities can types of conversations and maintain- ensure social cohesion and become

> is ensured by having space for new stake-holders. ideas, and new people to co-create new possibilities

informal gatherings and meet-ups to changing social constructs communication and bond with the Choosing the tools wisely to ensure members at personal level. Provision smooth communications. "When deof physical spaces enables commu- ciding what kind of tool to use, it is imnities to utilize open forums for interportant to consider how accessible it is actions and lets community mem- to the intended audience and how well Social ties stemming from informal intended civic engagement aim. networks are often stronger and Whether the technology uses real-time

social capital by creating new ties profoundly affect the quality of the disand strengthening old ones. These cussion." connections may increase individual well-being and provide opportuni- Anonymity in online discussion forums ties by linking people strongly to can be both helpful and harmful in entheir local community and to the suring safe environments for healthy larger societal resources. (betterto- conversations. Communities should

moderate and facilitate dialogue in online discussion forums. willingness of members of a commu-

- (Christensen, 2011)

networks. In the case of accessibility, both physical and virtual access have improved because of technology. It has made it easier for people to not only have the information about different communities on the globe but to be able to reach places with more ease and in less time. In the case of communication and connections, technology has enabled people to build networks, relationships and connects despite physical distances and concerns. However, this ever- beneficial technology

Technological development is one of

the biggest hallmark of our era. In the

case of civic engagement it has en-

connections and the existence of virtual

abled accessibility, communication,

has its downside for civic engagement.

time and quality per commitment.

Social cohesion is defined as the

ing healthy communication by ac- resilient to the changing social conknowledging the contributions of structs by accommodating memberfellow members is an important ships across demographics and social aspects of successful dialogue. Creativity and innovation are key in Shared leadership and participatory keeping the communities alive. This decision making, inolving various

Reorganisation and restructuring i need may be, by re-vising existing Spaces and platforms to encourage structures and processes in response

plan for communal events. its technological features match the

Strategic Foresight and Innovation • April 2016 Komal Faiz • Graciela Guadarrama • Manpreet Juneja