BRAHME, SHARVARI

The past few months of 2020 have been absolutely chaotic, new, and unpredictable due to the Coronavirus. In times of quarantine and social distancing, the world is truly relying on social media and virtual platforms to feel human connection. While human and social interaction is a very large concern during this pandemic, it is the least of worries for people who are greatly at risk of losing their job, catching COVID-19, and are trying to live through the stigmas brought by it. Firstly, it is not unknown that humans rely on their friends and family during times of unrest or stress. Unfortunately, that is not the safest option during a global pandemic. One piece of advice that has really stuck with several citizens during quarantine season is to be "physically distant" but "socially connected". Social connection can be performed through video chatting, texting, and even sending each other snapchats throughout the day. Lots of communities and families are encouraging virtual events so that there's an excuse for people to come together and enjoy each other's company. After all, what matters most is being in the presence of smiling faces and encouraging words. It seems as if our society and communities are really taking this to heart and are trying to make video calls something fun and productive. Some suggest to host a game during a family video call or have sharing time. With the expansion of technological possibilities, the virtual world is an oyster! Still, social interaction does not solve a lot of the problems caused by COVID-19. Due to this virus, many people are living in fear of losing their jobs and being unable to support their family. It is in times like these where resiliency is truly tested, and when the meaning of community matters the most. Right now, more than ever, it is so crucial for our communities to come together and stock local food pantries, support local businesses, and donate to local funds. It is vital that communities work together in order to provide a sense of security to those who need it the most during times of unease. There are also those who are in fear of catching COVID-19 (essential workers) or those who have caught it. While the world experiences a terrifying era, the community has to do more than provide materialistic items. It is not a time to differentiate or stigmatize; it is a time to support and shown compassion. Several essential workers have essentially been risking their lives by showing up to work, only to get treated poorly by their own community members. Inclusivity is essential because it is the foundation of establishing a strong community. Within this realm, social media plays a large role in promoting a more inclusive community. Through quarantine, social medias have recognized essential workers for their bravery and have encouraged community members to be kind to them. This is a use of technology that genuinely promotes human beings coming together during a crisis. Getting rid of a stigma definitely means expanding inclusivity, and it is a domino effect that takes place with the help of social media. Sadly, the stigma isn't exclusive to just essential workers or those who have been diagnosed with COVID-19. It is also falls upon those who struggle with mental health. Due to the lockdown orders, mental health has taken its toll for many people around the the world. Quarantine has made people more susceptible to loneliness, depression, suicidal thoughts etc. Now, more than ever, it is important to address the mental health stigma and let citizens know that they are not struggling alone. The use of technology can be seen in this instance as well as many online platforms are serving as crisis hotlines or suicide hotlines. Communities need to be aware of its people and provide resources for them through technology such as a hotline or a virtual support group. These resources are so valuable to so many individuals that are

considered at risk and can truly save lives. Most importantly, technology should be promoted for its source of information and education. These are times of an unknown and the goal of each and every person should be to become more educated on the pandemic. It is simply ignorant to not try and understand what is happening in the world, and this is where the social media or technology should make its presence the most. Educating the population on tips to stay healthy or latest research updates is so valuable to its safety and well-being. Education should also encompass statistics on recovery from COVID-19 and make sure that it is not isolating those who have been diagnosed. After all, education is the only remedy to ignorance and the stigmas that are formed because of it. COVID-19 has swept up the world in its appearance and has caused tension around the globe. Still, communities have a fighting chance through staying connected via video calls and the growing social media platforms. Through all of this, it's exceptionally amazing that people are showing resiliency and are gaining strength from their communities in numerous ways. In order to truly come together as one, these populations must stay informed on social media and promote compassion amongst those who need it the most. They must also learn to rely on one another to provide materialistically and emotionally for the people around them and understand that this is not a time to let differences cause a drift. Rather, they must understand that strength is always in the numbers whether it is virtual or in person.