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Simulate Me:
A Study of Computer-Mediated Communications in a
Contemporary Society

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“Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding...” (Gibson 1984). The internet and cyberspace has become an increasingly accurate characterization of what our society has become today. With the induction of new technological products such as laptop computers and cell phones, individuals are constantly connected. One is able to communicate with another whether they are at home in bed or in an airplane, thousands of miles in the air. “The Internet is the first major medium of communication that allows people to establish new social contacts outside the face-to-face context as well as to maintain existing ties formed in corporeal co-presence” (Zhao 2006). It has taken our society on a revolutionary drive towards infinite possibilities.

Through the use of a medium to communicate with others, a new form of communication was developed, in order to ensure a smooth transition from a complete visual and vocal form to an entirely text based one. This new form is called computer-mediated communication. Computer-Mediated Communication or “CMC” can be defined as a style of communication between two or more individual people through a technological medium such as the internet or connected network software. CMC is primarily text-based and has grown from being just another form of communication to an entirely new language. New characters, symbols, and acronyms have been created to format this language to a user’s preference. This medium has made such a dramatic change upon our cultural make-up that internet networks are making this phenomenon more accessible and affordable to “install” into our everyday lives. So accessible and

affordable that it is beginning to break down the hierarchical boundaries that most technologies put up. This is the first time in our history where humans can communicate without physically being present and we are taking advantage of that to every extent.

However, as perfect as this medium may sound, speculations have been brought up, questioning its flawless persona. Questions arise inquiring, “Are we relying on this communication too much?” or “Am I getting so used to this communication, that I prefer typing on a machine over speaking face to face?”. Dependency is beginning to develop on technology as a form of communication that society no longer needs to interact face to face (FTF). If everyone in the world has access to a communication device such as a cell phone or a computer, all interaction can be achieved through those means. “In the fast-paced modern world, we had become severely restricted in both the quantity and quality of communication with our social network,” (Nyiri 2006). With a language that is as easy to learn as it is to access, what better and more convenient way to communicate? There have been numerous studies that argue the drawbacks of this new communication device. Accusations are thrown stating that chances of miscommunication and misunderstanding are greater, because of its lack of nonverbal cues. Also, because of the lack of nonverbal cues, there is a greater lack of intimacy within relationships. Individuals are engaging in depthless relationships because of the lessened amount of physical presence. There is also the general point that people are beginning to use this medium as an excuse to hide behind the computer screen as opposed to communicating face to face. By conversing primarily through technology, there is a loss of closeness between human beings. By indulging in this form of language, humanity learns that personal interaction can materialize and “with a click of the mouse, the traditional way

people once perceived closeness, personal awareness, and social contact can mutate before our very eyes,” (Carter 31). Sure, it can seem as though it is real, because individuals continue to communicate, but where is the intimacy in that? Are people just using this way of communication, because of its immediacy and convenience or would they be more comfortable interacting behind a computer screen? Like any form of revolutionary technology, Computer-Mediated Communication comes with its pros and its cons. Due to its extensive list of advantages, CMC’s many downfalls are disregarded. In this essay, I will argue that the rising dependence on CMC causes alienation from FTF interaction as well as a lack of depth within personal relationships. My argument will consist of an analysis of the benefits which stem from the revolutionary impact of CMC, through the uses of Instant Messenger, e-mail, internet relay chat, discussion boards, virtual communities and text messaging, which then leads to my disputing argument that states the increasing levels of alienation from face-to-face interaction. From there, I will then describe the theories which argue the favorable aspect of CMC, but how its cons outweigh the pros in severity.

One of the main reasons the internet has taken off so rapidly is due to its extreme accessibility and comprehensible form of language. With practice, Computer-Mediated Communication becomes adaptable within everyday language. For example, the application, Instant Messenger, “offers two main functions unique in CMC: the ability to know who is connected to the shared space between or among friends, and the ability to conduct a text-based conversation in real time” (Hu et al. 2004). One can sign onto the application whether they are on a computer or a cell phone, so long as internet access is available. The accessibility of this application is also very high; being able to download

it easily and quickly from any search engine. From the moment the phrase, “Download Successful!” appears, one can create a unique handle or screen name, which allows an individual to be easily identified, as well as already begin to create an online persona (Example: My screen name is Illusions1984, the name of my favorite song and my year of birth). From there, one may begin to chat! Each member must create a buddy list which lists screen names of family, friends, co-workers, etc. This buddy list allows one to view when a buddy is available to chat, not signed on, away from their computer, or busy and unavailable to chat at the moment. One may also set up a list of preferences—outlining the order of your buddies, which alerts you to what you would like to be informed of, the type of font and background your Instant Message (IM) would like to be outfit with, etc. The possibilities are endless when creating your personal messaging system. This particular application is also free from most programs. Even if one can just barely pay off their internet bill, one is still able to invest in this application.

Another form of communication program that is internet-based is electronic mail or e-mail. With any form of internet communication program, the e-mail feature is offered. E-mail, like IM requires one to create a screen name as a way to identify oneself. From there, one may send a message to another user or group of users, if the receiver’s screen name is known. One is also able to outfit their e-mail program to the preferences they choose. These preferences include font, background, signature, choosing to send a message later, etc. One may also save messages that they receive or delete once they are finished reading them. They may also censor the messages themselves and create a list of those other users from whom they wish to receive “mail”.

This form of communication baffled society upon its introduction. There had been nothing else like it.

Chat rooms and discussion board forums are also forms of communication that use CMC. Both of these online applications take place within a group setting and it is usually a group discussion dedicated to a specialized topic. “CMC can foster new forms of work by providing the opportunity for people with common interests to connect, overcoming limitations of space and time” (Quan-Hasse et al 2005). A group of members from anywhere can gather together within a single place and discuss anything regarding the topic for which the chat room or forum was created. These group settings provide a channel for users to meet strangers from all over the world and be able to initiate conversation and learn about new cultures all in a solitary location. One can do this from their own home!

Even on the go, one can stay connected with their network of family and friends. Cell phones have recently added a new feature to their communication base. Text messaging has become increasingly popular among all ages. One may type in a message using their phone’s keypad and send it to another phone number. Like an e-mail message, this message can be received within minutes. However, users may only send text messages to cell phone users and to those whose number they already have obtained. Therefore, it is not possible to meet new individuals through text messaging.

The internet has also significantly changed work settings. The workplace has taken great advantage of the internet applications listed above. Since its start, e-mail has been frequently used within an office, allowing co-workers and their superiors to communicate on a regular basis, without having to leave their desks. To the dismay of

many workers, this got rid of the excuse for “lost memos”. With the popularity of Instant Messenger spreading, co-workers and their superiors can be connected at all times.

Many find that IMs are more appropriate to use when contacting a co-worker than phone use. In an article by Quan-Hasse et al., titled “Instant Messaging for Collaboration: A Case Study of a High-Tech Firm”, they state, “When work tasks are interdependent, input is often required in order for individuals to be able to continue their work. IM in this case breaks down social barriers and allows individuals to ask questions and tap into each other's knowledge. Therefore, being able to monitor others' availability is useful for people working interdependently” (Quan-Hasse et al. 2005). Employees feel more comfortable implementing this form of communication over telephone, because it also allows time for the receiver to answer a message. In a case study by Quan-Hasse et al, they study the use of Instant Messenger within a workplace. Their results include that, “KME employees also see IM as a useful tool because it creates distance between themselves and their superiors. When they have to deal with difficult decisions or discuss sensitive topics where they know that they may disagree with their superiors, they often prefer to communicate via IM rather than FTF. The reason is that IM allows them to reflect on their superior's opinions and provides them with time to think about their own reactions” (Quan-Hasse et al 2005). Being in constant contact with one another also breaks down feelings of formality within a workplace. Employees may now begin to chat with one another, in addition to the work they must accomplish. This permits an even higher level of cohesion amongst the workers, which could evidently lead to a more productive work environment.

Another feature of these internet applications that causes users to stray away from FTF interaction is timing. Functions such as IM, chat, and text messaging are near synchronous. It allows users to feel as though they are having a FTF conversation, because of the prompt answers they receive. However, it does allow leeway for users to contemplate an answer and not be put on the spot. In an article titled “Virtual Speech Community: Social Network and Language Variation on IRC”, the John Paolillo writes, “What sets Internet Relay Chat apart from other modes of CMC is that interaction is conducted almost in real-time: all participants in an interaction must be electronically present at the same time, and messages are immediately transmitted through the intermediate servers to all participants, wherever they may be,” (Paolillo 1999).

Asynchronous chat takes place in functions such as e-mail and web forums. Riva and Galimberti state in their article, “Computer-Mediated Communication Identity and Social Interaction in an Electronic Environment”

“The commonest form of asynchronous CMC is E-mail, in which a sender leaves a message in a receiver's electronic letterbox, which the receiver must open before he can read the message. Another more sophisticated type of asynchronous CMC is Newsgroup, an electronic notice-board on which users can post messages referring to a specific topic or area of interest. Users can read the messages by opening the notice-board, and send their own messages in turn. As with E-mail, there is no real-time link between the computers of the interacting subjects,” (Riva and Galimberti 1998).

In either form, whether it synchronous or asynchronous, computer-mediated communication amongst users is time efficient yet set to your convenience.

Another benefit that CMC brings to the table is its expansive outlet for creativity. One may completely re-invent their personalities when speaking to others. Those that lean towards being more introverted, now have a channel through which to speak. In an

article titled, "Truth, Trust, and Telepresence" it is said, "When communicators create an online persona, they have the freedom to decide what degree of correspondence will exist between their online persona, physical presence, and FTF communication style. This freedom provides space for both creativity and duplicity" (Tompkins 2003). As was mentioned before, users have the ability to outfit their online preferences to however they see fit. One may choose their font, background color or design, and even choose an icon that best fits your personality. American Online Instant Messenger or AIM, now offers a feature to make an icon that resembles its user. Even when a member is not in front of their computer, their away messages can be a force of self-expression. "Away messages seemed to serve an overt self presentation purpose, as away messages were interpreted by participants as capable of providing a glimpse of the sender's identity" (Nastri et al 2006). There is a multitude of different options available to all users in order to personalize their online characteristics.

The internet is not only a place for the bubbly and outspoken personalities, but also a place for the timid. Many take comfort in the fact that the internet is completely text based and requires no form of FTF interaction. "CMC subjects tend to express themselves more openly and freely: 'People who interact via computer are isolated from social rules and feel less subject to criticism and control. This sense of privacy makes them feel less inhibited in their relations with others'" (Riva and Galimberti 1998). By having a computer screen separating one from another, allows for a more relaxed environment. Less pressure is put on each individual to make a good impression or to save face in case of miscommunication. Users have the ability to think before they type, hopefully causing for less incidences of miscommunication or to simply portray

themselves in a better light. “CMC users have the opportunity for selective self-presentation and can choose the positive aspects of their personality to disclose. However, because of the reduced social cues in CMC, these disclosure methods can idealize the perception of the user” (Hu et al 2004). Despite this form of misrepresentation, having this sort of anonymity, especially among strangers, within the internet also allows for a more relaxed environment for those who feel social anxiety.

“The internet can be a place to test social skills, overcome shyness in FTF interactions, and form personal relationships. Online social environments can be described as providing opportunities for role play for those who experience anxiety during normal conversation. The anonymity of the internet may provide opportunities for self-disclosure and some protection against social anxiety for shy individuals,” (Birnie and Horvath 2002).

For many, having this protective bubble allows for their social horizon to expand. Users will take advantage of this shield and possibly form new relationships, because of the comfort provided. CMC makes this buffer available as opposed to FTF interaction which throws individuals into immediate and personal contact with one another.

Though there are many benefits to the whole idea of CMC, there comes an entire list of cons that should not steer one completely away from the medium, but to cause weariness upon its constant use. There are potential drawbacks to CMC’s widespread glorification that needs to be addressed. Some of these shortcomings include the increased miscommunication due to lack of physical presence, the relentless hiding behind a computer screen to avoid FTF contact, and the lack of depth within interpersonal relationships due to the lack of physical intimacy. Though I feel that our society has not reached a point of despair and urgency to flee from this form of communication altogether, I gather that based upon my observations, it is quite possible that we are heading towards a cultural and impersonal desert if this continues. I plan to

argue this issue based upon previously researched theories. The model to be followed in examining the negative aspects of CMC is the “Cues Filtered Out” perspective. The “Cues Filtered Out” perspective is the idea that the lack of non-verbal cues in CMC causes this form of communication to be more impersonal than FTF interaction. The theories that I plan to use to argue the limitations of CMC will follow this perspective.

An issue that I previously mentioned describes a potential drawback to society’s dependency upon Computer-Mediated Communication. This issue is the increased incidences of misunderstanding due to the lack of nonverbal cues. Without visual and aural cues, there is a higher chance to misunderstand the meaning transferred in the message by the sender. In any form of CMC, one cannot see or hear the facial expression or tone of voice of the sender. A message intended for humorous or serious purposes have the possibility of misunderstanding by the receiver. One concept that verifies this matter is the Social Presence Theory. Social Presence, as defined by its original theorists, is “a phenomenological variable more complex than the relatively simple variations in, say, amount of gaze. It is affected not simply by the transmission of single, nonverbal cues, but by whole constellations of cues which affect the ‘apparent distance’ of the other,” (Short et al 1976). Social presence is extremely important in the communication process. Without any form of visual or audio cues, there are certain limitations that keep CMC communicators from getting to know one another intimately. In an article by Sonja Utz titled “Social Information Processing in MUDs: The Development of Friendships in Virtual Worlds”, Utz states, “According to the Social Presence model, it should be more difficult to build relationships via CMC than via FTF-communication. If the communication is perceived as cold and impersonal rather than warm and sociable, the

communication partner would not be seen as a person who could be a friend” (Utz 2000).

There are many instances of that occurring within CMC, because one is unable to determine the tone a text-based message carries. This form of misunderstanding becomes relevant in the case of Social Presence Theory in that the amount of nonverbal cues contributes to the amount of information being transferred between communicators.

Short et al state,

“The capacity to transmit information about facial expression, direction of looking, posture, dress, and nonverbal vocal cues, all contribute to the social presence of a communications medium. How they contribute, the weights given to all these factors, is determined by the individual, because we conceive of the social presence of the medium as a perceptual or attitudinal dimension of the user, a ‘mental set’ towards the medium” (Short et al 1976).

But it is “communicating through text which makes CMC low in “social presence” given the absence of necessary social context cues like eye contact. A main concern of social presence theory is that SMS is deficient compared to f2f communication in social context clues like facial expressions, posture, dress, social status indicators, and vocal cues” (Birnie and Horvath 2002). Without feeling the physical social presence of another throughout conversation, there is a limited amount of intimacy shared. Individuals feel closer to their partners when they disclose personal stories or facts about themselves. The main route to social penetration is through sharing a wide range of topics and personally revealing information that is at the core of one’s self concept (Yum and Hara 2005).

However, the text-based medium can be deceiving. A medium can produce extremely similar portrayals to fellow CMC participants- representing how they look (AIM icon) and sound (typing informally to attain an accurate portrayal of self)

(Lombard and Ditton 1997). The reliability upon such mediums as a form of interaction and relationship building is low because one cannot trust its accuracy in portraying a true representation of a user. The lack of social presence is a contributing factor, because one cannot fully get to know someone without being in a situation of complete physical presence. One cannot view the facial expressions through a computer screen, nor can they hear the tone of voice by the user through a speaker. Confusion occurs due to the lack of verbal and facial cues. One can only infer the meaning transferred by the sender, but can never get a fully accurate report of that meaning, because of CMC's one dimensional form of conversation.

Social Context Cues Theory, similar to Social Presence Theory, supports the idea that the less social cues available within a medium, the less personal a conversation or relationship between another. Hu et al state, "Social Context Cues Theory show that the decline in contextual, visual, and aural cues should lead to decreased awareness and sensitivity, causing CMC to be more impersonal than F2F communication," (Hu et al 2004). Both theories show that CMC would be more appropriate in the use for more straightforward and formal conversations.

"We would expect to observe the greatest distortions compared with FTF communication when a medium having a low degree of social presence is used for a type of person-to-person interaction requiring a high degree of social presence. On the other hand, where the task does not require a high degree of social presence, we would not expect the social presence of the communications medium to be important. Such tasks would include information transmission and simple problem-solving tasks," (Short et al. 1976).

There is no need to decipher hidden meanings when CMC is employed for problem solving tasks as is mentioned in the article by Short et al. Those forms of communication

do not require a high degree of social presence or social context cues, because there is no further need to enhance a relationship if it is purely a formal, businesslike union.

Confusion would occur less frequently if the topic of conversation was strictly in the form of information transfer. However, personal relationship building involves a more in depth familiarization process in order to develop into a meaningful bond.

Another reason that Computer-Mediated Communication is so appealing attributes to its anonymity. Many feel a higher level of comfort communicating through a medium than through face-to-face, because “the internet provides another context and channel for people to meet with strangers for the first time, initiate meaningful and satisfying conversations, and build stable, long-term relationships, similar to face-to-face interactions,” (Yum an Hara 2005) whilst never leaving their home. Through the internet medium, there is more opportunity for selective self disclosure, because many of those one would meet online, there is little change of knowing outside of an e-mail/IM relationship. One may completely re-invent their persona to be more appealing to strangers. Through a more aural medium, such as a cell phone, text messages utilize the asynchronous time difference as a chance to deliberate over a response, in order to save face or just to better articulate one self. CMC allows numerous opportunities for one to idealize themselves to others. The idealization of oneself deceives their partner within a computer-mediated relationship, because of the lack of truth behind the bond.

The Social Approach Behavior Model demonstrates this dependency upon CMC as a way of assisting those who experience social anxiety. This theory states, “A user can isolate a specific use of chat online, he or she may rehearse their social behavior to better

approach face to face interaction in the future” (Campbell et al 2006). In the article, “Internet Use by the Socially Fearful: Addiction or Therapy?” it asserts

“Pathological users (high level users) averaged 8.5 hours of internet use per week and report mood swings and withdrawal symptoms considered mild to moderate in intensity. The second group averaged 3.2 hours a week and reported very low rates of mood swings and withdrawal symptoms. Those participants considered not to have any symptoms averaged 2.4 hours per week online. High level internet users were also significantly lonelier and used online games more than other users” (Campbell et al 2006).

This sort of behavior is only facilitated through the constant use of text based mediums to communicate. Those who continue to hide behind a computer or cell phone screen and stray away from FTF interaction will remain dependent upon this communication style if something is not done. “A problem that may occur is that users will spend more time using Socially Interactive Technologies (SIT) to form online relationships and will create a greater number of relationships, but will not provide the social support that strong, offline relationships will provide,” (Bryant et al 2006). Using a computer-mediated technology only takes time away from FTF interaction, it does not enhance it.

As was mentioned before in the article “Internet Use by the Socially Fearful: Addiction or Therapy?”, pathological users tend to frequent the role playing arena of the internet and social networking channels than those who use the internet considerably less. Multi-User Dungeons or MUDs are a form of online environment allowing users to role play in adventure and fantasy narratives. Users develop and simulate creative characters and interact with other MUD users through this medium. Sonja Utz describes, “Shy and inconspicuous persons profit by the anonymity of the Internet. They cannot be judged primarily by their appearance, they do not have to fear any consequences offline, and may therefore feel encouraged to approach other people... individuals who self-identified

as shy reported that they were less inhibited and less conservative in on-line environments,” (Utz 2000).

In social networking channels such as MySpace, Facebook, Friendster, etc. individuals have more opportunities to meet and interact with strangers as well as keep in touch with those they are already acquainted. These channels allow users to post pictures and personal information about themselves, as well as completely personalize their age using outside layout generators. The simplicity of creating a profile and posting it through these means has grown as its developers attempt to accommodate younger and newer internet users. The bandwagon approach, which states its theme “everybody-at least all of us- are doing it” and thereby tries to convince the members of the group that their peers are accepting the program and that we should all jump on the bandwagon rather than be left out. This is utilized in this medium, because the more people, who are a part of this site, encourage their personal social networks to join as well. The popularity of these sites skyrocketed within the last couple of years. In a survey done by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, “55 percent of American kids aged 12-17 claims to visit social networking sites” (Shields 2007). Due to its growing popularity, dependency upon these sites is also beginning to grow. On a more personal note, I have found that the popularity and frequent visits by my social network has gotten out of hand. Arguments and misunderstandings have occurred over the most trivial of issues- who’s who on one’s Top 8, wall commenting frequency or lack thereof, friend acceptances or rejections, etc. I feel that these types of sites have become more of a hindrance to building friendships than assistance.

Atop the misunderstandings due to lack of nonverbal cues and reliance on a medium to interact because of social anxiety, relationships are affected because of its constant use. I have mentioned numerous times the tendencies to selectively self disclose information about oneself to other users. I have also made mention of how the reduced amount of social context cues and social presence reduces the lengths one can achieve of getting to know another. Media Richness Theory adheres to both of these drawbacks. Media Richness Theory “discusses how CMC has a narrower bandwidth and less information richness than FTF communication. CMC is more appropriate for task-oriented activities, but a weak medium through which to develop interpersonal relationships,” (Hu et al 2004). The original theorists conclude that “FTF is the richest form of information processing, because it provides immediate feedback. With feedback, understanding can be checked and interpretations corrected. The FTF medium also allows the simultaneous observation of multiple cues, including body language, facial expression, and tone of voice, which convey information beyond the spoken message,” (Daft and Lengel 1984). Minus the nonverbal cues, there is a reduced amount of information transferred from the sender to receiver. Therefore, making the information less rich through a text based medium. This affects relationships, because it limits the amount of disclosure between individuals. If communicants rely primarily upon a text based means to communicate, the depth of the relationship will plummet instead of flourish. Not being able to experience the feeling of seeing an individual, hearing their voice, or through touch and embrace, lessens the intimacy within that relationship.

Our society has come to refrain from FTF contact, “because computers use natural language, interact in real time, and fill traditionally social roles (e.g., bank teller

and teacher), even experienced computer users tend to respond to them as social entities,” (Lombard and Ditton 1997). Through the application of the Media Richness Theory, there is a form of scale that determines the resonance of the information transferred. According to Daft and Lengel, FTF communication is richest in its disclosure methods. This is followed by telephone conversations, personal written memos, formal written memos, and finally, formal numerical computer output (Daft and Lengel 1984). However, since the premise of this article is somewhat outdated, incorporating personal computer based conversation was not an option. I feel that CMC would be classified somewhere between personal written memos and formal written memos in the information richness scale. The tone of the text conversation depends upon the execution of the user, however, because of the lack of aural cues, determining the tone of the conversation is much more difficult. CMC can either be categorized as formal or informal. Either way, “written communications are less rich still. Feedback is slow. Only the information that is written down is conveyed so visual cues are limited to that which is on paper (or on screen). Audio cues are absent” (Daft and Lengel 1984). Even though a computer may be responding back to your typed statements, does not mean that the presence is stronger. The reduced bandwidth of a text based medium takes away from the richness of its information, therefore causing for a diminished intensity of conversation, which later affects the depth of a relationship.

Due to the lack of information richness within a text based intermediary, the opportunity for misconception of the self is higher. This is in the case of both sender and receiver. Upon making a first impression, the sender may disclose and augment on their most positive attributes, in order to give an idealized perception of themselves. The

receiver may choose to accept this swelled reputation as truth and vice versa. This may occur in FTF communication as well, however, “time is the key element in this adaptation. While the multiple channels and cues available in FTF interaction speed the exchange of task and relational information, the process is slowed by the "reduced bandwidth" of CMC, that is, the inability of CMC to carry aural and visual cues. The important point, however, is not that CMC is unable to convey relational and personal information, but rather that it may take longer to do so,” (Parks and Floyd 1996). This occurrence happens frequently among CMC users. The geographical space between participants tends to develop a more constructive representation of both the sender and receiver; despite the potential flaws each user may envelope.

Despite the widespread adoration of Computer-Mediated Communication, come numerous obstacles which hinder one’s ability to getting to know another. Misunderstandings occur due to the lack of physical appearance, individuals use a computer or cell phone screen as a shield from FTF interaction, and there is an increased depthless within interpersonal relationships. The Social Presence Theory and Social Context Cues Theory convey the idea that due to the lack of visual and aural nonverbal cues causes relationships to be more impersonal and lower in intimacy. The Media Richness Theory suggests that mediums carrying fewer physical cues decreases the richness of information transferred. These theories support the idea that our dependency upon text based mediums causes for an alienation from FTF conversation and a weaker, less personal relationship between CMC users.

Theorists have hypothesized theories disputing my argument; suggesting that there are ways around the typical barriers from communication that is completely text

rooted. Such theories include the Hyperpersonal Communication Model and the Social Information Processing Theory. The Hyperpersonal Communication Model proposes the idea that

“At the level of sender, CMC partners may select and express communication behaviors that are more stereotypically desirable in achieving their social goals and transmit messages free of the ‘noise’ that otherwise comes with unintended appearance or behavior features. At the other end, CMC receivers take in these stylized messages, construct idealized images of their partners and relationships, and through reciprocation, confirm them” (Walther 1996).

There is a prominent focus upon selective self-presentation, which can then be misleading. This form of disclosure may be seen as stretching the truth and idealizing the perception of the sender, which I feel is not an accurate representation of the mentioned sender. One of the main elements of developing a relationship includes gaining the trust of your partner as well as learning to trust your partner. If one displays romanticized versions of their personality and completely throws their flaws out the window, where is the trust? “We may not be able to know with absolute certainty, but we can communicate to the best of our abilities and with truthful intent. The framework of truthfulness recognizes the difficulties of discerning authenticity, accuracy, reliability, sincerity, or deceitfulness in communication messages and communicators,” (Tompkins 2003). However, if one is trying to make that permanent first impression, will the framework of truthfulness always come through and shine your brightest light?

The Social Information Processing Theory indicates that “that CMC’s weaknesses due to channel deficiency and reduced cues could be overcome over time if interaction occurs frequently and is sustained for an extended period of

time,” (Yum and Hara 2005). There is potential in the accuracy of this theory, however, I feel that building and developing a relationship completely through text would still be impersonal, because there are no visual or aural cues to judge. What kind of relationship would that be if you have never heard seen them in person, heard their voice or simulated some form of physical contact? Social Information Processing Theory’s original theorist, Joseph Walther feels that the continued interaction will eventually lead to a somewhat parallel degree of personable communication that FTF interaction brings. He states,

“This framework acknowledges that there is less social information per message in CMC because of the absence of nonverbal cues. It also recognizes the potential for users to adapt to the linguistic code as the sole channel for relational communication and refers to a number of verbal strategies in the impression formation and interpersonal interaction literature known to affect interpersonal attributions,” (Walther 1996).

Regardless of this idea, time is still an issue within this medium. The slowing down of conversation, due to its asynchronous nature, can never give a completely accurate portrayal of the individual with whom you are conversing.

Reciprocal disclosure is also another form of getting to know an individual. It is said that if “people who receive intimate disclosure feel obligated to respond with a personal disclosure of equal intimacy” (Nass and Moon 2000). If one discloses a personal tidbit of information to another through electronic means, it is possible that the receiver will also disclose a personal fact of themselves. However, the possibilities of the accuracy of this confession vary widely as well as the probability of one disclosing personal information to a complete stranger.

Assuming the ideas I have stated within this essay are correct, the aforementioned theories can be deemed as fairly disputable. I find the Hyperpersonal Communication Model to be a fairly inaccurate form of disclosure. Simply stated, I feel that this theory encourages the act of lying. A part of developing relationships with individuals involves getting to know all sides of their personality- positive and negative. If one merely accentuates their positive attributes, it is a false representation of that person. We all cannot be Dr. Jekylls!

In an article by Dana R. Fisher and Larry Michael Wright, titled, "On Utopias and Dystopias: Toward an Understanding of the Discourse Surrounding the Internet", they state two opposing views regarding the influence of Computer-Mediated Communication upon society. The utopian view states that the "internet will facilitate civic engagement by increasing the ease of communication among citizens by transcending geographic and social boundaries... This network provides communicative interaction, democratic participation and a sense of community are facilitated," (Fisher and Wright 2001). The dystopian view states that, "the internet affects communication by negatively altering the practices and spaces of communication. The social fabric of society becomes fragmented and people become more isolated from one another. Similar fragmentation will result if F2F interactions are substituted with mediated ones," (Fisher and Wright 2001). Based on the tone of this essay, one will assume that I side with the dystopian view of this communication form. Throughout my extensive research of this type of communication, I feel that our society is heading towards a social wasteland. If we continue on as we are, our physical make-up might as well have a computer or cell phone attached to our bodies. I cannot make an argument without shedding light to the good of this prospect, because in

many ways, I feel that this form of communication and these mediums have benefited our society. I just think that our society is growing to become too dependent upon this medium and there needs to be limits imposed to ensure that FTF interaction will still continue. In my personal opinion, FTF interaction will always be the primary form of communication, because it gives an accurate portrayal of the information transferred. Nonverbal communication is extremely important, because of its uninhibited depiction of one's personal opinion and feelings towards a topic. Without this, it becomes extremely difficult to get to know someone without learning these types of cues.

With the introduction of new information technologies, our entire social network software has been made over. The new features of computers and cell phones have allowed us to be connected day and night. It has also broken down many boundaries, enabling access to individuals of varying social classes. However, the significant changes it has brought to society have begun to demonstrate a severe shift towards a more isolated communal make-up. Computer-Mediated Communication has taken the world by storm and it continues to as individuals grow to become more and more reliant upon this medium. I fear that this need to communicate through a medium is causing severe anxiety towards face-to-face interaction. Based upon the theories of prestigious Communication Studies theorist, I argue the issue that the growing dependency upon Computer-Mediated Communication has caused an increasing alienation from face-to-face interaction which results in the loss of depth within interpersonal relationships.

As a sheep to this present era's trail to complete technological takeover, I too have succumb to the overwhelming influence of Computer-Mediated Communication. Despite my unconscious immersion into the postmodern culture, I feel that it is inevitable

to happen for all those connected to it. I mean, when computers first became groundbreaking, no one knew just how groundbreaking it would be. The need to use something as rudimentary as pen and paper is no longer, because, well, typing on a keyboard is so much faster and more efficient. Our society has put so much focus upon the convenience and efficiency of products. When a technological medium such as computers and cell phones allow us to communicate and work wherever we go, of course, our society will jump at this opportunity. However, will this integration of technological learning cause for our future generations to lose the typical interaction with their peers if the advancements of technology cause for a completely online learning experience? I hope not. We need personal interaction. Despite its negative points, its initial intention was for good and convenience. Hopefully, one day our society will begin to see through the utopian perspective it seems to portray and fight to keep our interactions personal as well as in person.

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