

Computer-mediated communication essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



The Internet has become an integral part of our lives. Online communication or CMC is one of the fastest growing modes of communication for individuals within and between organisations. We use CMC for social, educational, and business purposes (Mohan, 2008). Features of CMC will be presented and discussed in section 1. CMC is also used in online games, especially multi-player ones, as a powerful and effective way to enable the intense need of interaction. Computer games as an application domain is one of the most influential promoters of interactive applications. Neutral Ground which will be discussed in section 2, is one key point of CMC in games. In general, the feeling of presence and the level of psychological immersion are increased due to the communication, co-ordination and collaboration aspects these forms bring forward. Manninen (2004).

Section 1

Features of computer-mediated communication

“ Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a process in which human data interaction occurs through one or more networked telecommunication systems. ” Cory Janssen(2010)

In humans' history, we have used many different means to communicate with each other. Face to face speaking, letter writing, telegram, and telephone are just a part of examples of different media that we use. Computer mediated communication (CMC) is the latest one that arised. It could be carried out through e-mail, listserves, usenet groups, chat rooms, MUDs, or MOOs. Because of all of these different modes of communication by way of computers, Steve Jobs labels them “ interpersonal computers” rather

than “ personal computers” . Walther, J. B., & Burgoon, J. K. (1992).

Apparently, there are many factors of CMC that cause it to be different from face to face (FtF) communication, and it has been debated whether or not these differences render the communication more or less personal. “ Some of these aspects of CMC are the absence of context cues, the recordability of conversation, the rate of exchange, the level of formality, and the anonymity of the users. The main controversy surrounding CMC is whether these differences can help to improve communication and make it more personal, or whether they serve to diminish the level of intimacy that can be achieved.”

Rick Dietrich, Jill Grear, & Amber Ruth(1998). According to Walther & Burgoon(1992), the absence of social context cues, called the Cues Filtered Out Approach, is a major distinction that separates CMC from face to face communication. Because participants cannot see others’ facial expressions, gestures, voice intonations, appearance, or physical adornments; it is harder to interpret statements and responses they might make. For instance, communicating by emails has been a frequently-used means to connect to someone whoever he/she is your friend or a totally stranger. It is impossible for the sender to see the receiver in person while writing the email.

Therefore, no feedback can be received while delivering the message. Joseph Walther(1992) of Northwestern University explains this phenomenon by the Social Presence Theory, which contends that the personal nature of a relationship is determined by the salience of the participants. Because CMC has this lack of non-verbal elements or feedback cues, participants are less

able to get to know the person with whom they are conversing, thus leading to a less personal conversation.

Also, according to this theory, people pay less attention to the other participants because their interest can be absorbed elsewhere without the presence of the other person to restrain them. Walther & Burgoon(1992). However, many studies have showed that, these effects of the Cues Filtered Out Approach are restricted to only the beginning period of a CMC relationship. When studies are extended to examine longer amounts of time, it has been observed that many of these impersonal aspects disappear as participants exchange a greater number of messages. It seems that CMC groups can and do develop in relationally positive directions, as long as they can have sufficient time to mature (Walther & Burgoon, p. 76-77). Among the most influential approaches in early research on CMC were Social Presence Theory and Media Richness Theory. According to J. E. ShortandB. Christie (1976), social Presence Theory is concerned with the effect that different communicative media have on the degree to which their mutual presence in the interaction is salient to the interlocutors.

This social presence is seen as the quality of a given medium that is determined by the number of communication channels it supplies. Media Richness Theory, C. Galimberti and G. Riva. (2001), makes similar claims, in that it emphasizes the use of a large number of communication channels as a prerequisite for the processing of rich information, including a medium's ability " to interlink a variety of topics, render them less ambiguous, and enable users to learn about them in a given time-span. CMC has become

increasingly effective in both our real and virtual life, in the following of this essay I will mainly discuss about online games in which a large number of computer-mediated communications has taken place.

Section 2

Computer-mediated communication in online games

“ The boundaries between the real world and the imaginary realm of electronic play have already begun to blur.” Lucien King(2008). I believe that online games (computer games, mobile games), unlike sports games or card games, are sort of connections of the world around us and the world exists behind the screen into which the players can put some of their own imagination and memories. Actually, playing games is another way of socializing and communicating. It is much easier for a group of people to start a conversation when they share the same interest and experience. Sometimes, they don't even need to open their mouths, just because the players can simply communicate in the game which brings much more fun. According to Lucien King(2008), many people who don't know much about games assume they are socially isolating, that players always play against the computer/ mobile phone. However, the fact is, solo play is only one mode among many. “ Playing alone often becomes a way of honing skills that are then developed in shared competition.” Players need interaction with others while they are playing or have just finished some levels. One application has worked this out successfully - the Game Centre (iOS). It shows thousands of players the ranking lists of each game, and offers a platform that players can add friends, have a chat to each other, and organize some plays in a group.

The beauty of sharing is that a group of players can find something in common with each other—same game interest, same experience, similar skills. And that just provides an important feeling for all of us – we belong here. In this case, the need of sharing is the very beginning of the computer-mediated communication in online games. There is a definition of Neutral Ground, according to Steinkuehler, C., and Williams, D. (2006), third places are defined as neutral grounds where individuals can enter and leave as they see fit without having to ask permission or receive an invitation (as one might in a private space) and without having to “play host” for anyone else. “Compare, for example, weekday attendance at the workplace to happy hour attendance at the neighborhood tavern. The former is a second place, marked by financial obligation and rules that structure who is expected to be where and for how long; the latter is a third place, marked by relative freedom of movement.” CMC makes neutral ground possible in online games, so users can have the freedom to enter and leave their third places when they like to. In online worlds, interaction is mediated by the virtual avatars of the individuals who inhabit them. In another word, a user doesn’t need to show his/her real name unless he/she wants to do so.

This anonymity provides a safe haven beyond the reach of work and home that allows individuals to engage with others socially without entangling obligations and repercussions; it is the so-called “magic circle” of the game (Huizenga, 1949). Obviously, such “safety” is a big advantage of CMC in online games. Text-based interaction in neutral grounds is incessant and ubiquitous. There is not just one chat channel but multiple simultaneous ones: public, private, and various group channels. Together, these function

as both a one-to-many and one-to-one communicative space, as one informant called it, “ a souped up form of instant messenger” (Steinkuehler, 2005). Therefore, for online game players, especially players of massively multiplayer online games, CMC plays a big role in their game experience. It could even be the main pleasure for some sociable players. I mainly discussed the importance of CMC for online game players above. Actually, CMC is also essential for the development of computer game industry. By using computer-mediated communication, game companies are able to collect players’ feedback to understand the player characteristics and personality differences in their target audience, in order to make some right decisions about the development of their games with clear aims according to the feedback.

Section 3

“ Rich Interaction” games

In this section, I will discuss multi-player online games with rich interaction in CMC environment. “ We are entering an era where media will be everywhere and we will use all kinds of media in relation to each other.” Mark O. Millard (2010). No doubt, CMC is one of the most significant signs of the times. If the communication is taken to include not only text but also sound, then crucial parts of the “ Rich Interaction” outlined by Manninen(2001) can be implemented in multiplayer games. CMC enable a variety ways of interaction through different media. According to Manninen (2001), interactivity is the extent to which the user feels convinced of the mutual effect that he or she and the environment have on one another. Better interactivity produces a more pleasing, better-controlled interaction with the virtual environment.

Level of interactivity is a function of the speed of response, the range of possible user interactions and the mapping of controls (Nunamaker, 1997). Higher degrees of interaction allow the complex and intuitive combination of interaction sequences. Enriched interaction possibilities provide participants with flexible ways of communicating and acting within the virtual environment. Manninen T. (2004).

Therefore, in fact, CMC has become a big part of those multi-player games because it provides access to a wide interaction with many people who share common interests in the game world. Borries(2007) put forward the importance of immersion, this point is closely related to “ rich interaction” games. As we age, however, reality intervenes. We require more and stronger external stimuli to create a world in which we can immerse ourselves. Therefore, we turn to books, movies or games; almost any form of “ grow-up” entertainment requires a degree of voluntary immersion(Borries, 2007). Immersion is not merely a buzzword, but also a state of mind, it means to be completely absorbed in a make-believe world. Refer to immersion. Flow Theory is mentionable here. The common definition of the psychology term “ Flow” is: the mental state of operation in which a person in an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, involvement, and in which success seems easily attainable but not too easily attainable. Richard Wirth (2011).

As I mentioned, more interactivity, more pleasure in a game. In another word, with more interactivity, players are more likely to get immersed and experience “ Flow” in a game. In order to communicate, players of

multiplayer games use different communicative devices and interact in different forms. Now, players can use text-based or language-based communication through some programmes. Anolli (2001) claims that, among the different signalling systems, “ language has a prominent position, as it remains the most powerful, flexible and stable communicative device” . G. RivaWhile(2006) agrees this point of view and says , this is doubtlessly true for communication in computer games as well, one also has to consider non-verbal forms of communication that take place on the levels of spatial and ludic structure. Some players still prefer using text to communicate, because it is recordable and easy to recreate to personal forms of expression. While playing games, time constraints often lead to rather short sentences that tend not to comply with English grammar rules. The following table is an example of abbreviations and acronyms used in multiplayer games.

Even though players can use multiple ways to communicate and interact in games, it is clear that multiplayer games are not able to perform the same level of social presence that can be found in face-to-face situations. In multiplayer games, shared goals and shared situation models form an important part of cooperative interaction in team-based game modes. G. RivaWhile(2006), players do, however, not always share the same situation model. This is equally true for the model that refers to the ludic and the spatial structure as well as for the model that refers to the social structure of the game. Inappropriate cognitive representations of the spatial and ludic structure will prevent a player from successful cooperative interaction in the gaming space. Therefore, in some situations, miscommunication may occur.

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