Aspects of social computing essay

The Issue of anonymity, interpersonal relationships, and class restrictions are all consequences that come without the Internet as a medium? Would it be possible for the ordinary person to be known around the world for his or her opinion? The answer to that question is a relatively easy one. No, it wouldn't be possible for the regular person to get the kind of exposure that comes with the Internet. By taking a look at both the positives and the negatives of social computing as a medium, it is quickly seen that the positives outweigh the negatives. Society has truly benefited from the use of the Internet as a means of self-expression.

This benefit is largely due to the Internet being used as the method to bring expression to its full potential, communication. Communication that can take many different forms such as support, notoriety, and even success. Expression reaching its full potential comes with very clear advantages even if they come with some consequences as an inherent result of any technological advance. Individuals and society benefit from social computing as a medium for expression because social computing has so many avenues for expression and every avenue has worldwide exposure.

The ability to use Youth as a method of reaching out could e used as an example of this fact. The story of a Youth video called " My Story (Anorexia)" is a video in which a teenage girl discusses her struggle with Anorexia with the world. " This Youth phenomenon shows the Internet's powerful ability to facilitate the self-expression of young adults (and others), and to do so in a way that allows them to reach out to a large number of others in the process" (Livingston, 2008). This facilitation comes with disadvantages as well as powerful advantages.

The drawback can be linked to the fact that, while in an effort to find a support group, the aerators of the video divulged personal medical information that will always be viewable by society. That being said, the advantages are overwhelming.

The ability to express freely and that a person can post videos, pictures, poems, and other personal forms of expression to the Internet for the entire world to view is a tough advantage to ignore. The avenues for expression are clearly present, but can they make a positive impact on a person's life?

The story of Harry Knowles, a movie critic, will show Just how powerful social media and the Internet can be when it comes to improving the life of Just one person. In 1994, Harry was run over by a memorabilia cart that weighed over 1, 000 pounds which injured his back and left him bedridden (Booth, 2012). This made it impossible for Harry to go to comic conventions or to participate in his love of movie going. With an inheritance from his mother, Harry was able to buy a top of the line computer and Internet service. This allowed Harry to participate in newsgroups that allowed him to exchange gossip with other fans of upcoming film releases.

By 1996, Harry launched his own website called Anti it Cool News. This website has made Harry famous. A name that has brought major media sources begging for Hardy's opinion on newly released and upcoming films. By 2000, Harry was ranked #95 in the Forbes Power List (Booth, 2012).

Based on the information that Harry was bedridden, it would be difficult to say that he could have risen to such fame without the Internet. Despite his injury, social media still allowed Harry to participate in his hobbies. Movie

watching was a hobby that ended up being a career with prestige and notoriety that couldn't have been attained in any other way.

Another example of this type of exposure leading to business success is Hoses Jan University with a degree in neuroscience in 1995. The thought that he would later become an Internet sensation would seem unlikely. In 2001, Frank created a unique birthday invitation which included Flash based video of humorous dance moves.

This invitation was forwarded like crazy, and the invitation soon generated over a million hits and over 100 gigabytes of daily traffic to Franks personal Web site (Leigh Bureau, 2012). This traffic allowed Frank to grow the website to include interactive group projects, short films, animations, and even video games.

Frank even won a 2002 Webby award for Best Personal Website (Leigh Bureau, 2012). Frank is now working on a web-based comedy show that will air three times a week.

Franks success can clearly be attributed to a number of different social media tools that were used. Franks ability to self-express was so successful because he made a Flash video and emailed the link to this invitation to his friends. This communication allowed for the video to become a viral web hit. It also shows the power of self-expression and communication on the Internet.

With these two stories of exposure, it is clear that the Internet provides social media websites for any topic whether it be for movies or Youth

expression. These websites have distinct advantages to expression. Like most technology, however, there are disadvantages that must be looked at even if they are minor consequences. The disadvantages to the Internet for expression are both the interpersonal social interaction issue and the monetary class restriction. These consequences can prove to be a fatal flaw of the Internet as a medium for self-expression.

First, let's take a look at the interpersonal social interaction issue.

Anonymity is the quality or state of being unknown or unacknowledged. How does the anonymity of the Internet effect interpersonal interaction between people that SE social media sites? " Computer-mediated communication (CM) is a term used when communication is not conducted face-to-face but in the absence of nonverbal features of communication such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and potentially influential interpersonal features such as physical attractiveness, skin color, gender, and so on" (Barge & McKenna, 2004).

The effect of CM on interpersonal interaction is quite profound. According to Barge & McKenna, CM limits the " bandwidth" of social communication. CM is considered to be an impoverished communication experience meaning that with the reduction of social cues, there is an end result of an increased sense of anonymity. This can produce behavior that is less socially regulated than if the communication occurred face-to-face.

Anonymity results in a potentially weaker social interaction than face-to-face communication. An interaction that has begun to replace conventional interaction as a whole.

The user's name isn't attached to their words, so their words can cross over acceptable social boundaries because of the lack of accountability. An interaction that is backed by anonymity could be a catalyst for uncovers behavior that wouldn't normally be even attempted in the " real world.

" An example of this type of deceit can be seen with the story of Jessica Lee Rose. Jessica Lee Rose was better known as longingly 5 on Youth. Longingly 5 was a 16-year old girl who did video blobs on the Internet to express her frustration with family and teenage life. The video blob became the most subscribed channel on Youth. This channel took a part of" (Freebase, 2012).

The video blob had a cloud of suspicion as to the authenticity of it, and was revealed to be a work of fiction in 2006 by the Los Angles Times. This hoax included several morality issues. Rose deceived her viewers on her name and information about her life. At some point, creativity crosses the line between self-expression and morality. The act of expressing to deliberately deceive others in an effort to become famous is unethical and wrong.

Also, by falsely claiming that her family was in a cult, Rose made a mockery of anyone actually going through it.

If someone posted on Youth that they were being physically abused by their parents and those statements were found to be false, those claims devalue the seriousness of domestic violence as a social problem. The anonymity of the Internet can be looked at as a direct cause of this deception. The likelihood that Jessica Lee Rose would deceive others in a face-to-face conversation is significantly lower than when she is protected by the Internet. The Internet can act as a shield that can protect individuals from

being accountable for the things that are said, posted, and claimed as long as anonymity is maintained.

The Internet does have one other disadvantage as a medium for self-expression.

This disadvantage comes from the fact that once something is posted to the Internet, it is viewable forever. Now, the argument can be made that if someone knowingly posts something on the Internet that this level of accountability should be expected. But accidents do occur, and because of the maximized volume of exposure, a mistake on the Internet can be life ruining. An example of this can be seen with the story of Paul Withed.

Paul Withed was a South Paris (Maine) Oxford Hills Comprehensive football coach.

In a 2012 news article, Oklahoman wrote about how the coach accidentally posted a naked picture of himself on Backbone. Although the coach intended for this photo to only be viewable by his girlfriend, the picture nevertheless need up being biblically viewed on his general profile due to a mistake on the coach's part. The coach's mistake cost Paul his Job and put him into the limelight. A photo that had been posted for under 10 total minutes may have completely ruined his life. This story shows the power of the Internet as a self-expression tool.

That a relatively unknown man had enough exposure (no pun intended) within ten minutes to create this media frenzy is an incredible fact. The lowering of social interaction and the rationalization of criminal or unethical

acts being conducted on the Internet re definitely consequences to the anonymity of Internet expression. Another disadvantage to the Internet as a self-expression medium would have to be the monetary requirements to participate in Internet based expression. The Internet provides all kinds of methods of education, expression, and boredom control.

It also provides an item for the average citizen to spend money on. Between the cost of Internet service, a computer, and any other required equipment, the Internet highlights the gap between the privileged and the impoverished.

According to Narcosis in 2010, 79% of Americans now use the Internet shouldn't obscure the deeds and problems of those lacking Internet access or computer literacy. Computer literacy and money are required to be a part of this community and as self- expression shifts toward digital and Internet means, a person without these things will be at a severe disadvantage.

The fact that those with limited income and that Internet use is related to economic status and education. " 95% of upper-income households use the Internet, while 37% of lower-income households do not" (Narcosis, 2010). This shows that the economic status of a person is directly related to the ability to self-express on the Internet. This is a huge disadvantage because it also means that the perspective seen on the Internet on blobs, videos, and other forms of self-expression are of limited scope.

This scope is limited because almost a quarter of the population are unrepresented.

Despite a limited scope, marketing companies and retail companies still primarily advertise on the Internet. There is a counter argument to this rationale. Television was once a technology that was directly linked to economic status, which meant that advertising on Television was only geared for those who could afford a Television set. As technology becomes ore inexpensive, more people have that technology.

Therefore, the percentage of Internet users will continue to increase as the prices go down. The disadvantages of self-expression on the Internet seem to be overwhelming at first.

There are, however, ever growing solutions to these problems. The disadvantages to the Internet as an expression method seems to stem from both the interpersonal and economic status issues stated above. There are solutions to correct the status issue, however. " To bring about true digital equality in America, high-speed Internet should be installed in undeserved communities, while signing computers so that the disabled could affordable use them" (Narcosis, 2010).

The idea of getting Internet into undeserved communities is a good one.

Think of the Internet as electricity, if it is provided for in the lower income communities, the quality of life will improve and self-expression will increase. The creation of subsidies that could take the burden of Internet affordability off of the backs of impoverished communities would help this concept as well. The implementation of computer literacy classes would improve education regarding computers.

An education that would close the economic status gap that is seen as such a disadvantage to the Internet as a means of self-expression. This could empower all groups to participate and express.

By empowering the underprivileged, the Internet would have a better-rounded expressive base. That base would consist of all economic statuses, races, creeds, and genders.

It is difficult to argue that there is an alternative medium that consists of such a diverse base of people. Despite this advantage, the Internet does cause harm to the way people interact. The Internet does provide a medium that allows for anonymity, which has been shown to be detrimental to the interactions of people in a social setting. There are some ways around this however, such as video conferencing on the Internet.

Video conferencing forces a virtual face-to-face interaction, and allows for the same nonverbal communication to be sent and received by the members of the conversation.

This helps blossom the interaction on the Internet. The argument could be made that this type of interaction would be a healthier method of communication than the telephone because the telephone doesn't provide those nonverbal indicators and behavior. Anonymity can be attacked in several different ways. The technology of biometric devices will allow for people to remain anonymous on the

Internet.

While still being simultaneously accountable for their actions because their forces people to " sign-in" to their computer using physical features. This would make people accountable in the background. Meaning that although the information could be tracked and monitored, that information wouldn't be viewable to the average forum user. So someone could post to the forum anonymously to their fellow support group members while still being tracked behind the scenes.

The option to use biometric devices would change the effect of anonymity on the Internet.

Basically making people accountable while not being known to the masses. This would be provided by a biometric user authentication system, meaning that instead of a password based system, people on social networking sites would provide an accurate set of biometric features that could determine that the correct person has logged in according to Change & Schroeder in 2009. This system would stop anonymity from being used as a shield by sexual predators, cyber bullies, and anyone else who would use expression as a means to inflict damage on another person.

These disadvantages are being worked on and the potential solutions seem to show that the future of self- expression on the Internet is bright. A future that is completely eradicated of these issues. However, there is one issue regarding self-expression in the future that society must keep an eye on. According to Chris Poole, who was a speaker at the Web 2. 0 Conference in 2011, we all have multiple identities, and it's not something that is abnormal, because identity is prismatic, and there are many lenses in which

people view you. Simply put the Internet allows a person to express themselves regarding any topic.

An expression without being held accountable for one's actions shows the importance of an interest driven system. A person can research an unpopular political party without fear of being ousted as a supporter of that group. This limited accountability allows for expression without fear. But what if the Internet was to be turned into an identity based system? Where all forums, websites, search engines, and platforms forced society to register with their real name, this freedom to explore without fear would be lost. Imagine the effects this would have on self-expression as a whole.

As it is self-expression on the Internet that is a lasting and binding commitment. This negative aspect is overcome because of anonymity. Armed with anonymity, expression can be done with a handle rather than an actual name. Without this, society might not be willing to take the same self-expression risks if every move was recorded and traced back to the identity of the person who created it. A good example of this can be seen by the ability to have a business and personal Twitter account. As people do not act the same way in both their business and personal life.

The reality that Twitter recognizes that people have many identities and caters to those identities shows a positive beacon about the future of expression on the Internet. Imagine a world where everything you posted on the Internet could be accessed by a third-party. Not Just what you registered for with your name, but every piece of information such as forum postings, blob comments, and visited websites were collected and could be viewed by

a potential employer with the help of a database company. This has become something that does occur already.

It occurs within limits as the interviewee still has the right to anonymity on most websites and therefore cannot be accountable for making those anonymous comments. Google Poole feels that the limiting of one's identity also limits the ability to be creative and expressive on the Internet. The fact that people are being forced into one identity could limit the ability of the youth to explore. The reduction in the ability for youth to explore is due to the fact that the youth could no longer actively explore their interests and find themselves without being tracked.

This tracking brings an unseen consequence to identity.

A consequence that is a huge risk for someone who has Just started the identity searching process. This is an issue in which Google and Backbone have decided to be a one identity model many. " We set the bar as users of the web regarding identity" (Chris Poole, 2011).

Society ultimately decides on how identity is determined on the Internet, and what will be allowed as far as anonymity and accountability of self-expression and curiosity. This issue of anonymity and identity is one that society has to actively watch, as it is clear that the right to be anonymous is one that must be actively protected.

In the future, this issue will come to a fork in the road. A decision where society can lean towards an identity based system, or one based around the anonymity of Internet users.

Unfortunately, this issue will be debated for years to come and has the potential to be the most liberating or controlling aspect of the entire Internet expression revolution. With all things considered, has self-expression benefited from the social computing boom that is based around the Internet? It is clear that interpersonal and class restrictions hinder self-expression on the Internet.

It is also clear, however, that individuals such as Harry Knowles have benefited from the Internet being a method for self-expression. This is because there are so many avenues for successful expression such as Youth. Although there are consequences to the technology, there are also increasing methods to limit those consequences. The class restrictions and social interaction consequences will have limited overall effect on social computing in the future due to these methods.

The ability to self-express has always been available.

Throughout history, there were methods to express freely. Whether it was through art, literature, or photography, the option to self-express was always there. The act of turning that self-expression into communication, however, was limited. This limitation was because communication as based on word of mouth and the communication technology of the time such as the telegraph or telephone. The Internet and social computing has maximized the ability to turn this self-expression into communication.

This communication brings the self-expression of one person to the entire world.

This minimization of exposure is truly a positive aspect of social computing as it relates to self-expression. So what about all of those negative aspects that come along with social computing? The reality is those aspects can only hinder self-expression as much as society allows it to. Society sets the bar on what is allowed and what isn't.

So instead of asking about those negative aspects, it should be asked, where will social computing in regards to self-expression take us next? Barge, J. A. , & McKenna, K. A.

(2004). The internet and social life.