

# **The Study of Love Happiness in Computer-Mediated Communication Research**

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## ***Computer-Mediated Communication Research***

The emergence of the Internet, as an electronic medium of new technology has brought tremendous changes in how people live in today's information society. Internet-based activities become immensely intense as the number of Internet users grow rapidly. Current estimates as of March 10, 2007 say that there are now 1.114 billion internet users worldwide (Internet World Stats 2007). According to Internet World Stats, much of future Internet users growth is coming from populous region such as Asia, which is now reaching nearly 400 million users. The growth of Internet users in Thailand is steadily increasing. According to a Thailand Internet User Profile survey in 2005 conducted by the National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre, there were approximately 7.08 million Internet users (NECTEC 2005). Current rates as of March

10, 2007 say that there are now 8.4 million Internet users (Internet World Stats 2007).

With this phenomenon of the Internet, the predominant technologies have created Computer-mediated communication (CMC). CMC can be defined broadly as any form of data exchange across two or more networked computers. More frequently, the term is narrowed to include only those communications that occur via computer-mediated formats (i.e., instant messages, e-mails, chat rooms, World Wide Web) between two or more individuals (Benbunan-Fich and Hiltz 1999). This type of communication has grown exponentially these last few years, to become almost an omnipresent form of communication for many people.

Much of the existing research on computer-mediated communication has been conducted by communication and linguistic scholars (Cooper and Sportolari 1997). These researchers have looked at CMC to observe how language is used in computer-mediated contexts. The studies have often focused on the distinct differences that exist between online and offline interactions, though contemporary research is moving towards the view that CMC should be studied as a unique interactive medium in its own right. The focus of these researches include the use of paralinguistic features such as emoticons; pragmatic rules such as turn-taking and the

sequential organization of talk; and the various sociolects, styles, registers or sets of terminology specific to these environments. The study of language in these contexts is typically based on text-based forms of CMC, and is often referred to as “computer-mediated discourse analysis” by many contemporary researchers.

Besides, communication occurring within a computer-mediated format has an effect on many different aspects of an interaction. Some of these that have received attention in the scholarly literature include impression formation, deception and lying behaviour, group dynamics, disinhibition and especially love relationship formation. Scholars from a variety of fields also study phenomena that can be described under the term of CMC. For example, many take a psychological approach to CMC by examining how humans use “computers” to form, support and maintain relationships with others. Biggs (2000) explores one woman’s experience of the Internet as a positive transformational medium through relationship. His results found that she has used the Internet as a means of finding and developing other relationships, both platonic and romantic. She can also be distinguished from the stereotyped “online junkie,” as she has maintained a strong face-to-face social life along side her Internet relationships. McKenna and colleagues (2002) have discovered that people who can better disclose their “true” or inner self to other on the

Internet than in face-to-face settings will be more likely to form close relationships online and will tend to bring those virtual relationships into their “real” lives.

### ***Finding love in Computer-Mediated Communication***

Millions of people are communicating within the computer-mediated community, looking for information, connecting for discussions about countless topics, sharing stories, attempting to form the relationships with another people, looking for sex, or searching for a romantic partner. This feature causes CMC distinguishes more than all other types of transmission, thus people who have a difficult time connecting with others in face-to-face interactions may have a better chance of meeting a compatible person online (Cooper and Sportolari 1997). Increasingly, several researchers in different disciplines are extending to realise the influence of CMC toward interpersonal relationships. Walther and colleagues (1994) have found that forming love relationships via CMC is possible, and that they can considered to be as “real” and personal as real life, offline relationships. Lea and Spears (1995) have proved that CMC “increases the field of available” people to meet others, allowing people to overcome the limits of physical proximity. These results indicated that in addition to getting to know others online, establishing

and maintaining love connections, online communication has become more prevalent and many of these relationships advance from online to off-line or real world interaction.

Besides the matchmaker services, dating agencies and personal ads, CMC is a supplementary format for meeting potential dates and mates. The internet seems to be an ideal mode which users expect for connecting with others in the aspirations of forming lasting relationships – love happiness, especially if the others also are in this state of mind (Donn and Sherman 2002).

In a series of internet relationship studies, Parks and Floyd (1996) found that approximately two-thirds of newsgroup users had developed personal relationships with others met online; of these personal relationships, 7.9% were love relationships. Donn and Sherman (2002) reported that a higher percentage of graduate students have thought about or taken steps to form relationships over the internet and a greater proportion of graduate students had met someone in person they first met online. Baker (2000) had examined the love relationship formation in a sequence common to online couples. His research showed that internet users progressed from communication in a public, group site or online forum, an asynchronous discussion group with divided conferences on certain degree topics to E-

mail and then to phone calls, which could progress to intimate exchanges to an exchange of photographs, and finally to a fact-to-face meeting or off-line interaction.

Apparently, a number of studies attempted to explore a variety of factors that attract people to develop online love relationships. For instance, Cooper (2000) proposed that Computer-Mediated Relating (CMR) reduces the role that physical characteristics perform in the development of attraction and enhances other factors such as propinquity, rapport, similarity and mutual self-disclosure. In examining the importance of disclosure, Joinson (2001) found that at the beginning of relationships, disclosing oneself to a new person causes a sensation of trust that enables the interlocutor to disclose in turn. In addition, the findings of Anolli (2005) demonstrated that the comprehensive condition of anonymity within online society enables individuals to reveal themselves without anxiety or fear, also has the opportunity to communicate to another person as if they speak to themselves. As the online communicators have thought that whatever they say, do not have significant consequences to real life. Consequently, they feel free to open disclosure and to reveal any possible their secrets.

Given online interactions afford participants relative anonymity, this may set the stage for “love at first sight” phenomenon of a quick developing of online romantic relationships. Indeed, previous qualitative research on online relationships has shown that many couples report a having experienced a quick, almost mystical sense of a “meeting of the minds,” which they describe as an important factor in their interaction for one another (Albright and Conran 1995).

### ***Suggestion***

Much of the existing research on computer- mediated communication has been conducted by Western scholars. The study of finding love happiness in computer-mediated communication has not received thorough attention by Thai academic researchers. Therefore, it will be much useful to have *Better understanding of this contemporary issue*. More significantly, it will lead to better planning of how to target security campaigns and protection for unfavourable effects of Internet love relationships. This will provide some guidelines to Thai government and sociologists on methods, strategies and policies which should be given more emphasis in order to overcome different social problems. The outcome policies will offer a high-level framework of Internet communication towards forging love happiness relationships. Internet users should be aware of the *value*

of communication technology in driving growth in a romantic relationship. Synchronisation with the Internet in particular, may result in improved relationships and increased awareness to communicate with strangers.

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