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SHOULD I TEXT OR SHOULD I TALK?
TRANSFORMATIONS OF COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICES BY MOBILE PHONES

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Abstract
This article presents contemporary transformations of communicative practices among individuals. Communication is a primary vehicle for establishing and maintaining relationships, so it is of vital importance to understand why we communicate in certain ways. The article firstly presents the global climate of modern relationships, which are conducted by social media platforms. The technological convergence of various devices provides additional support for reinforcing communication and networking. Features offered by new media devices (collaboration, networking) are presented, along with current practices, which reflect certain problems at the level of usage. The relationship between society and technology is explored, and the fact that our usage of technologies is a reflection of society’s and individuals’ key understandings and orientations is stressed. In line with these remarks the article interprets modern conceptions of relationships that are becoming mere “connections”. Namely, our communication practices of text messaging and e-mailing are to a certain extent a reflection of contemporary orientations. Individuals may like a company, but nevertheless they like distance too. Our modern “connections” are therefore quite intentional. One of the article’s conclusions is that by using “poor” mobile devices (smartphones enable us to send messages of up to 160 characters) we mask/disguise our own unpreparedness to engage in complex and “exhaustive” communication (i.e. face-to-face or phone call conversations). This way our own intentions can be ascribed to “poor” technology. We are not confronted with our own intention to be connected, but still at a distance. Additionally, the article also stresses other contextual factors for communication practices, from technological constraints to communicative norms. Nevertheless the usage of

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technologies is at our command and it reflects the type of relationships we are looking for.

**Keywords:** new media, mobile phones, e-mail, text messaging, interpersonal relationships

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**Introduction**

A 16-year-old boy who relies on texting for almost everything says almost wistfully, “Someday, someday, but certainly not now, I’d like to learn how to have a conversation.” (From Shery Turkle, The Flight From Conversation, New York Times, 21 April 2012)

We live in a society that is full of information and full of communication; at least it seems so. In truth we live in a technological universe with endless opportunities for consuming media information, and in a society with almost endless opportunities to converge with other people, to link, to share, to connect with each other. People have lots of connections, but are they really connected? Are they connected in terms of relationships? It seems like everyday people have a little bit too many connections and too much information. Do we really want to be closely connected? It is an image like we want to have relationships but with limits. Do we use technologies in a manner that reflect our values? Do we use technologies in order to be more connected, but still at a distance, in solitude? Do people want to be alone, yet feel connected (Turkle, 2011: 18-19)? The latter question is oriented toward the problem of establishing relationships.

New media devices (social media, mobile phones) were presented and introduced to mass audience as the perfect communicative vehicle for maintaining or reinforcing communication among people, for improving our social lives, our connections to other, for improving society as a whole. New media have been presented as means for enabling the better organization of society, such that society would be much more oriented toward the individual. Indeed social media facilitate networking; they are platforms for gathering people together. But the question remains: what happened with our connections, our relationships, and our personal well-being in modern society? Are we really “upgrading” ourselves into better society, are we happier? The question is hard to answer, and even hard to grasp in its totality. What does it mean to be “happier”? Indeed, it is an ideological question, a reflection our own contemporary obsession.
The purpose of this article is not to give a coherent, one-dimensional answer to the problems outlined. On the contrary, the article contains several perspectives, even opposing ones, and it is thus meant to be a starting point for a further debate upon modern communication practices. The author is well-aware of contradictions presented herein, but nevertheless understands such contradictions as the “current state of the art” and as a precondition for fully reflective reconsideration and understanding of contemporary society.

What do we mean when talking about new media?
All technology is a black box, without ulterior motivations, intentions, etc. It is our use of technologies that is a part of a problem (and solution as well). As humans we might be interactive, supportive, engaged, etc., but the technologies themselves are not. For sure, technologies might have – for example – the quality of engaging individuals in interactivity, but this is only a potential quality that depends upon the individual. So our usage of technologies to a certain extent reflects ourselves, our society as a whole, and the prevalent values within said society. Our intention is not to criticize modern technologies, nor to criticize individuals for developing “wrong” practices.

Modern society is more and more mediated, especially over the last few decades, when we are confronted with so-called new media. Labels such as “new media” are ideological ones. The term is also relational to the term “old media”. So the question is: “What is new about new media?” New media has gained currency as a term because of its useful inclusiveness. It avoids, at the expense of its generality and its ideological overtones, reductions of some of its alternatives. It avoids the emphasis on a purely technical and formal definition, as in “digital” or “electronic media”; the stress on a single, ill-defined, and contentious quality as in “interactive media”, or the limitation to one set of machines and practices as in “computer-mediated communication”¹. (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, Kelly, 2009: 11-12). When considering what is new about new media, Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, and Kelly take the term to refer to the following:

• New textual experiences: new kinds of genres and textual forms, entertainment, pleasure and patterns of media consumption (computer games, simulations, special-effects cinema).
• New ways of representing the world: media that, in ways that are not always clearly defined, offer new representational possibilities and experiences (immersive virtual environments, screen-based interactive multimedia).

¹Further in text abbreviated as CMC.
• New relationships between subjects (users and consumers) and media technologies: changes in the use and reception of image- and communication-based media in everyday life and in the meanings that are invested in media technologies.

• New ways of experiencing the relationship between embodiment, identity, and community: shifts in the personal and social experience of time, space, and place (at both local and global scales), which have implications for the ways we experience ourselves and our place in the world.

• New conceptions of the biological body's relationship to technological media: challenges to received distinctions between the human and the artificial, nature and technology, body and (media as) technological prostheses, the real and the virtual.

• New patterns of organization and production: wider realignments and integrations in media culture, industry, economy, access, ownership, control and regulation (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, Kelly, 2009: 12-13).

Does new automatically mean “better”, or “worse”? The problem of technological determinism

The unifying term “new media” refers to a wider range of changes in media production, distribution, and use. These changes are technological, textual, conventional, and cultural. Since the mid-1980s a number of concepts have come to the fore that define the key characteristics of the field of new media as a whole. Some of the main terms in discourses about new media are digital, interactive, hypertextual, virtual, networked, and simulated. But we must bear in mind that “what we are calling ‘characteristics’ here (digital, interactive, hypertextual, etc.) can easily be taken to mean the ‘essential qualities’ of the medium or technology in question” (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, Kelly, 2009: 13). So, as they proceed, “it becomes a totalising or overreaching concept which wholly subsumes the medium in question. There is then a danger that we end up saying, ‘Because a technology is like this (electronic, etc.) it necessarily results in that (networked, etc.).’” This process is then dangerously close to essentialism in the sense that a thing is what it is because it possesses an unchanging and separable essence. That kind of reasoning is close to the problematic conceptions of technological determinism, which has been defined as an approach that identifies technology as the central causal element in processes of social change (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003, on Wikipedia, 2016). This stance ignores the social and cultural circumstances in which the technology was developed. Rather than acknowledging that a society or culture interacts with and even shapes the technologies that are used, a technological determinist view holds that “the uses made of technology
are largely determined by the structure of the technology itself, that its functions follow from its form” (Technological determinism, Wikipedia, 2016).

There is a problem in viewing technologies as “revolutionary, transformative”, or as a “threat” to society. This kind of terminology is well-documented in media discourse. We usually label this type of discourse as a “moral panics”. Younger generations are often the subject of such discourses and considerations. The use of the internet has long been the subject of several discussions. As Susan Herring acknowledges: “If media producers construct the Internet Generation as self-reliant and ‘in charge’, commentato  

rs in the mainstream media often represent young media users as vulnerable and in need of societal protection and direction. To a considerable extent, this discourse reflects what journalists perceive as the concerns of parents and educators about children who spend time on the Internet and the World Wide Web. For many, especially less technologically savvy, adults, the Internet is unfamiliar, intimidating, and potentially dangerous. Many adults are concerned about the risk of children being exposed to pornography or lured through interactions in online social spaces into offline encounters, and the occasional cases in which terrible things have happened to young Internet users do nothing to allay such fears. News reporting often sensationalizes these cases, occasionally giving rise to full-blown ‘moral panics’ in which new media environments are represented as a threat to societal values and interests” (Herring, 2008: 74).

In this type of discourse technology is represented in a quite deterministic way: “Kids ‘are different as a result of . . . exposure to and use of digital media’, ‘technology has changed the Net Generation’, and ‘digital mastery’ will make this generation ‘a force for social transformation’.” Thus at the same time that young people are represented as powerful — more even than “most kids dare imagine” — they are also shaped by technology, even dependent on it by definition for their identity as a generation. “Moreover, technological determinism is problematic in that it glosses over contextual factors and social motivations that shape human behavior. Peer groups and social relations are arguably more influential during our youth than at any other life stage, and young people use and think about technology differently according to their cultural, economic, and familial contexts” (Herring, 2008: 76).
Communication practices in “participative culture”

After reconsidering some basic assumptions about new media we would like to move forward to communication practices. For sure, new media technologies impact the organization of our everyday lives, our communicative practices, etc. New media technologies introduce new ways of connecting to each other and new ways of maintaining relationships. They serve as an additional communication channel; here we would like to stress *additional*. Do we really perceive new communication devices only as new technological channels for sending information to our partners, friends, or children? Do we really use new technologies, for example mobile phones, e-mail, or Facebook, to communicate the same message and meta-message of concern, interest, or involvement?

We are certain that we can use new media in an old-fashioned way; we could use mobile phones (smart phone) exactly the same as we did use stationary phones (fixed phones, landlines). The usage of certain technologies is at our command. But we think that society nowadays is characterized by a general transformation that is not the “effect” of new media itself but the effect of transformed society as such. We would like to stress that our usage of technologies is a reflection of a society’s key understandings and orientations. Society is empowered by new values that are introduced correspondingly with the arrival of new media: creativity, participation, collaboration, networking, sharing, linking, etc. All the mentioned activities are characterized by new media.

One of the crucial and defining activities of new media cultures established via the Web 2.0⁠¹ is collaboration. New media technology fosters new cultural connections and relations. We are faced with the transformed “intimacy” of new media cultures too, which serves as further evidence for a new and unstable, and to some respect a blurring, division between the public and private spheres of communication (Praprotnik, 2014: 138-139). According to this new climate we are faced with several kinds of activities performed by individuals online: sharing,

⁠¹ A Web 2.0 site may allow users to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue as creators of user-generated content in a virtual community, in contrast to the first generation of Web 1.0-era websites, where people were limited to the passive viewing of content. Examples of social media sites are Facebook, blogs, wikis, and video-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube) (from Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0).

Some of the most popular social media websites are Facebook (and its associated Facebook Messenger), WhatsApp, Tumblr, Instagram, Twitter, Baidu Tieba, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube, Viber, and Snapchat. These social media websites have more than 100,000,000 registered users (from Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media).
collaborating, linking, liking (as in the case of Facebook). There are many studies that attempt to explain the communicative motivations and characteristics of social media, even the construction of “popularity” on social networking sites, which is reflected through the number of a user’s Facebook friends (Praprotnik, 2015: 129-130).

Participative culture has a strong influence upon individual’s motivations and engagements. Social media enable the faster dissemination of information and the convergence of various social initiatives. So participation and collaboration are new principles for the organization of everyday life. But we would like to add something else: participation and collaboration in a sense of networking has also become the new “organizational principle” in the private sphere. What do we mean by this? Networking (connecting) as a process has also become a major organizational principle within everyday life, among friends, etc. Some people have a couple hundred of friends on Facebook. For sure, their Facebook “friends” have different statuses as “friends”. Nonetheless friends demand a certain type of interaction, for example the act of liking their pictures, commenting on the links they attach (as is common practice among Facebook friends). So a person might have a different number of friends, and correspondingly a person also has certain obligations toward said friends. This person must perform certain communicative acts in order to maintain these relationships. As we have already said, a person has the opportunity to regulate the status and normative expectations of particular relationships among Facebook friends, but nevertheless the person is forced to manage such a social network.

Social media enhanced by digitalization facilitates new forms of interactions. The sociality of social media enables constant growth in popularity. Web platforms facilitate the sharing of content among users; their main purpose is therefore to enhance social interaction, and to build relationships, self-representation, and collaboration among users. Traditional consumers became prosumers/producers. Web 2.0 platforms such as LinkedIn, Flickr, Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter have become dominant communication channels for distribution, consumption, and appropriation of a diverse range of information or media news (Praprotnik, 2016: 86).

So, everybody has the chance to be interconnected to others, be that by e-mail, social media, mobile phones, etc. Technological convergence has even sped up these processes. Namely, previously distinct media such as telephones and data communications are converging into common interfaces on single devices. Most smartphones can make
phone calls and search the web (Technological convergence, Wikipedia, 2016). We are thus always connected, always on, always available, and yet still separate. Is this our “dream come true”, our best possible solution for ourselves? Let’s take a look at our modern idea of “connection”.

**From conversation to connection; what’s wrong with the connection?**

The article has the ambition of shedding light on communication enhanced by mobile phones, which enables sending e-mail, social networking (Facebook), or texting and talking. There are plenty of communication practices, so it is hard to manage them all. The problem arises even when e-communication is accompanied with face-to-face communication. Let us quote Sherry Turkle: “My students tell me about an important new skill; it involves maintaining eye contact with someone while you text someone else; it’s hard, but it can be done” (Turkle, 2012: 1). As Turkle pointed out: “Technology-enabled, we are able to be with one another, and also elsewhere, connected to wherever we want to be” (Turkle, 2012: 1). As Turkle acknowledged: “in the silence of connection, people are comforted by being in touch with a lot of people-carefully kept at bay. We can’t get enough of one another if we can use technology to keep one another at distance we can control: not too close, not too far, just right” (Turkle, 2012: 1). Electronic devices provide us with a different communication setting, in which we can at any moment decide how to continue the communication or eventually end it. Contemporary communication (text messaging, email, posting, etc.) lets us present the self we want to be. We can edit, and we can delete. A similar situation is to be found within social networking sites (Bebo, Facebook, Flickr, etc.)¹.

Sherry Turkle in her book Alone Together (2011) cited her interviewee Audrey: “The phone, it's awkward. I don't see the point. Too much just a recap and sharing feelings. With a text ... I can answer on my own time. I can respond. I can ignore it. So it really works with my mood. I'm not bound to anything, no commitments ... I have control over the conversation and also more control over what I say” (Turkle, 2011:190).

We would like to stress that the meanings of particular communication devices has changed too. As Turkle says: “The telephone was once a way to touch base or ask a simple question. But once you have access to e-mail, instant messaging, and texting, things change. Although we still use the phone to keep up with those closest to us, we use it less outside this circle. Not only do people say that a phone call asks too much, they worry it will be received as demanding too much” (Turkle, 2012:191).

¹ The list of social networking sites can be found at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites)
So in texting messages we have a feeling that we are in control of the interaction, as well as of our own self-image. But relationships are (or ought to be) more than just intentionally fabricated words or pictures designed by Facebook or some sentences sent by Blackberry. To communicate means to provide information as well as to build relationships. Let us quote Duncan: “people do not relate then talk, people relate in talk” (Duncan, 1967: 249). Communication has an informational as well as relational aspect. By communicating with you, I establish relations with you too. In transmitting information we also transmit relational aspect of the communication, for example: “I see you as a trustworthy person so I decide to provide you with my deepest thoughts and feelings”. The level of disclosure reflects the level of the relationship: deep relationship, deep self-disclosure (Praprotnik, 2015: 131).

So let’s ask once again: what is “wrong” with text messaging, emailing letters, etc.? Nothing at all. They are additional communicational devices. On the other hand human relationships are rich, sometimes messy and demanding; we are often “exhausted” from relationships. Sherry Turkle states that we as a society have transformed the basic frames of our relationships. Turkle describes that shift by saying it is “the move from conversation to connection”. Let us quote her: “We are tempted to think that our little ‘sips’ of online connection add up to a big gulp of real conversation. But they don’t. E-mail, Twitter, Facebook, all of these have their places — in politics, commerce, romance and friendship. But no matter how valuable, they do not substitute for conversation. Connecting in sips may work for gathering discrete bits of information or for saying, ‘I am thinking about you.’ Or even for saying, ‘I love you.’ But connecting in sips doesn’t work as well when it comes to understanding and knowing one another” (Turkle, 2012: 2). We would like to add just one more sentence from Sherry Turkle: “We create technology to provide the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship” (Quotes by Sherry Turkle, 2016).

We think her considerations are of utmost relevance, indeed. “Online, we easily find ‘company’ but are exhausted by the pressures of performance. We enjoy continual connection but rarely have each other’s full attention” (Turkle, 2011: 280). We want to add something else: Our usage of technologies in terms of “companionship without friendship” we can understand as a true, honest attitude. It is maybe
unwelcomed, but it is nonetheless there. Maybe this attitude is not just our “incorrect” usage of technologies. That kind of usage reflects to a certain extent our “inner” (honest, sincere) motivations, too. Without making an impression on our interlocutor. By sending a text message or email our negative face does not reveal so much, or, conversely, by texting we can easily construct an impression of a perpetually nice, available, and patient colleague. That kind of image is possible because new media technologies do not reveal so much information about the current circumstances in which the relationship takes place. By texting we do not have to fake something in order to keep up our positive face. Our performance is not so revealing, especially the performance of our negative face. But if we take into account that our persona is a construction of positive and negative face (i.e. I have the motivation to be perceived as a nice, available person, but I also have the need to organize my life on my own and not to be intruded upon by others), we can say that new media connections can be viewed as incomplete, i.e. as revealing only “half” of our persona. Nevertheless it is quite a problem when young people use texting as their primary means for maintaining relationships, since real life confronts us with much more complex and uncontrolled interactions. Experiences that concern the balance of positive and negative face are therefore of crucial importance.

We thus agree with Turkle's observation that texting is not a substitute for conversation, but anyway we would like to stress the significance of established norms developed within communication. Particularly within smaller groups we can develop certain norms that can ensure better relationships and where a mere connection has a better chance of “counting” as a conversation. So what we are pointing at here are contextual factors, which are of great importance when considering how “rich” or “poor” a particular medium is. The medium is not “poor” (only) because of its technological constraints, the medium becomes “poor” because we use it in a “poor” manner. We must however bear in mind that our “poor” manner is perhaps quite intentional.

Our well-being is not a simple reflection of a more or less “perfect” technology; our well-being is a reflection of our estimation and impression of the extent to which our needs are accomplished/satisfied. Whether or not the communicative goals of communicators are fulfilled is a result of the overlap in the communicative intention of both interlocutors. It is important to ask yourself: Do I have the same intention as you when we talk to each other or when we text each other?

Nevertheless, the technological characteristics of mobile communication (text messaging, email) have certain technological constraints, be that
the length of a message or some other technological property, for example (a)synchronicity. There is a clear distinction between talking by phone and texting a message in terms of the construction of the “message” itself. We correspondingly also have a clear distinction between “real time” chat (Internet Relay Chat) and discussion forums or emails, which do not take place in real time. So let us quote David Crystal's remarks on various types of computer-mediated communication; here the stress is on different communication “activities”, which are predominant in various CMC settings: “In contrast to the Web, the situations of e-mail, chatgroups, and virtual worlds, though expressed through the medium of writing, display several of the core properties of speech. They are time-governed, expecting or demanding an immediate response; they are transient, in the sense that messages may be immediately deleted (as in e-mails) or be lost to attention as they scroll off the screen (as in chatgroups); and their utterances display much of the urgency and energetic force which is characteristic of face-to-face conversation. The situations are not all equally ‘spoken’ in character. We ‘write’ e-mails, not ‘speak’ them. But chatgroups are for ‘chat’, and people certainly ‘speak’ to each other here—as do people involved in virtual worlds” (Crystal, 2001: 29).

Given the fact that lots of people are “always on”, even when in a hurry, they have developed certain characteristics of speech – they are time-governed, “demanding” a relatively immediate response, etc. Therefore there is no time for reflection and complexity. As Turkle acknowledges: “On our mobile devices, we often talk to each other on the move and with little disposable time – so little, in fact, that we communicate in a new language of abbreviation in which letters stand for words and emoticons for feelings. We don't ask the open-ended ‘How are you?’ Instead, we ask the more limited ‘Where are you?’ and ‘What's up?’ These are good questions for getting someone's location and making a simple plan. They are not so good for opening a dialogue about complexity of feeling” (Turkle, 2011:19).

For sure, texting is not by default “poorer” in transmitting socio-emotional aspects of interlocutors; these kinds of considerations were popular when CMC first emerged. In that period several theories emerged that attempted to explain the “social effectiveness” of CMC: One of these is the technologically deterministic view, which holds that, unlike FTF interaction, the limitations that characterize CMC as a technology restrict its utility as a channel of rich and varied social information. The other perspective emerged from the notion that verbal and textual content can convey rich social information just as FTF interaction does.
Several theories have stressed the social disadvantages of CMC, with the probability of highly-developed personal relationships found to be relatively low online. These findings were generally explained by the “cues filtered-out” perspective, an umbrella term for several related theories that posit that the lack of non-verbal cues in CMC causes it to be more impersonal than FTF interaction. In social presence theory CMC is thought to convey little social immediacy or relevance compared to FTF communication due to the former’s inability to transmit non-verbal cues. CMC is thus more impersonal. Media richness theory also focuses on CMC’s predominantly lexical mode of interaction, deeming it a lean medium compared to FTF interaction, which has multiple cues and a high degree of personalization (Hian, Chuan, Trevor, Detenber, 2004: 2). There are other theories that address the level of CMC’s “sociability” too, for example the Social Identification/Deindividuation (SIDE) model and the Social Information Processing (SIP) theory by Joseph Walther. Walther articulated another theory in 1996 that is an extension of both the SIDE and SIP perspectives; Walther’s hyper-personal communication model introduces factors that explain how the CMC environment can allow the individual to experience a level of closeness above the norm experienced in FTF conditions. Walther describes three conditions necessary for hyper-personal communication to occur: 1) the receiver’s idealization of the other due to over-attributions, whereby the receiver assigns magnified positive values to their partners; 2) the sender’s selective self-presentation, in which the sender has the advantage of being able to optimally edit their message before transmitting; 3) feedback loop or reciprocity of interactions, whereby the interplay of idealization and self-presentation becomes a dynamic process and creates a self-reinforcing cycle. If these conditions are met, people can develop a sense of closeness and rapport in their CMC interactions (Hian, Chuan, Trevor, Detenber, 2004: 2).

So CMC and mobile texting are capable of transmitting the same amount of social information as FTF conversation. Both are certainly capable of establishing relationships. But we nevertheless think that this possibility is just a theoretical one. What kind of “meaning” do we ascribe to e-mail, to a telephone call, to a text message? What are we referring to when we talk about the “meaning”? Does a telephone call count as “hard” — “a person has something personally important to say to me”? Does sending a message count as “light” — “a person just wants to say hello to me”? These kinds of considerations are of vital importance. The meanings we ascribe to particular channel of communication are of course the result of our already accomplished communication acts with others. Let us pose another question: Do we often send a message by mobile phone with the sentence: “Hi darling, I am all yours. Please send
me a message telling me what’s bothering you lately”. Do we text each other in that manner? We think it is not a common practice. For sure, it is not so convenient to text a message for such complex issues. So the constraints are both technological as well as contextual. Over the years of using technological devices we have adopted communicative norms in order to communicate effectively and to be relevant for our on-line partners. We usually obey these norms in order to be polite, cooperative, etc. Devices are not the only thing that is less than apt for various types of relational communication, but also the norms that govern the specific communication setting (text message, email, etc.).

But, more crucial, do we actually want to communicate in a “hard” way? Do we want to be engaged in complex issues? Sometimes yes, indeed. Here is the possible, rather cynical – but nevertheless serious – interpretation: sometimes we enjoy using mobile phones because the technological constraints of our phones mask/hide our own unpreparedness to engage in deep, complex communication. We can ascribe our own inability and unpreparedness to engage in complex relationships to “poor” technology, which lets us send messages of up to 160 characters. So, we can say to ourselves: “Thank God I have a (lazy) smartphone, which can’t send longer and more complex messages”. This way we can rid of the guilt that we are responsible for the poor relationship.

I text, therefore I am? The dark side of texting
“You and I can talk any way we want on the Internet; the question is what kind of conversation are we looking for” (Crystal, 2001: 17).

Conversation is different from texting; there are different kinds of norms governing conversation as well as texting. There are also different sets of expectations between interlocutors, different sets of rules on how to manage conversation. When is it proper to introduce a new topic in conversation, how to signal to your interlocutor that there’s nothing else to talk about it, how to transform conversation into closing section with closing adjacency pair of goodbyes. This has been much discussed within ethnomethodology and discursive studies (Schegloff, E.A., Sacks, H., 1999: 263-274).

Conversation is not a predictable practice; we are confronted with people and with different sets of expectations, with different sets of norms about what kinds of conversation we are looking for, etc. We are often confronted with intercultural communication, since our cultural background influences our attitudes toward conversation: how to
express involvement, how to show that we are listening to our interlocutor, etc.

These kinds of conversation skills are formed within conversation and they are a must for successfully conducting and managing our relationships, which are formed within communication.

What about texting: “When we communicate on our digital devices, we learn different habits. As we ramp up the volume and velocity of online connections, we start to expect faster answers. To get these, we ask one another simpler questions; we dumb down our communications, even on the most important matters. [ ] And we use conversation with others to learn to converse with ourselves. So our flight from conversation can mean diminished chances to learn skills of self-reflection. These days, social media continually asks us what’s ‘on our mind’, but we have little motivation to say something truly self-reflective. Self-reflection in conversation requires trust. It’s hard to do anything with 3,000 Facebook friends except connect”. (Turkle, 2012).

As Turkle says in her article: “We expect more from technology and less from one another and seem increasingly drawn to technologies that provide the illusion of companionship without the demands of relationship. Always-on/always-on-you devices provide three powerful fantasies: that we will always be heard; that we can put our attention wherever we want it to be; and that we never have to be alone. Indeed our new devices have turned being alone into a problem that can be solved. When people are alone, even for a few moments, they fidget and reach for a device. Here connection works like a symptom, not a cure, and our constant, reflexive impulse to connect shapes a new way of being. Think of it as ‘I share, therefore I am.’ We use technology to define ourselves by sharing our thoughts and feelings as we’re having them. We used to think, ‘I have a feeling; I want to make a call.’ Now our impulse is, ‘I want to have a feeling; I need to send a text.’ So, in order to feel more, and to feel more like ourselves, we connect. But in our rush to connect, we flee from solitude, our ability to be separate and gather ourselves. Lacking the capacity for solitude, we turn to other people but don’t experience them as they are. It is as though we use them, need them as spare parts to support our increasingly fragile selves. We think constant connection will make us feel less lonely. The opposite is true. If we are unable to be alone, we are far more likely to be lonely. If we don’t teach our children to be alone, they will know only how to be lonely” (Turkle, 2012).
Turkle cites the texted apology — or what she calls “saying ‘I’m sorry’ and hitting send” — as a vivid example of what is lost when we type instead of speak. “A full-scale apology means I know I’ve hurt you, I get to see that in your eyes. You get to see that I’m uncomfortable, and with that, the compassion response kicks in. There are many steps and they’re all bypassed when we text.” When the apology takes place over the phone rather than in person, the visual cues are lost, of course, but the voice — and the sense of hurt and contrition it can convey — is preserved.

Part of the appeal of texting in these situations is that it is less painful — but the pain is the point. The complexity and messiness of human communication gets short-changed (Kluger, 2012). Let us enumerate one more example: “Texting an obligatory birthday greeting means you don’t have to fake an enthusiasm you’re not really feeling. Texting a friend to see what time a party starts means you don’t also have to ask ‘How are you?’ and, worse, get an answer” (Kluger, 2012). The sentence “you don’t have to fake an enthusiasm” is worth repeating. This seems like one of the “magical” benefits of online communication when compared to face-to-face communication. Let us quote Rodney H. Jones, who compared both communications in terms of “primary involvement”:

“If I am having a face to face conversation with you about your uncle's cancer, for instance, although I may be able to think about a lot of other things and even engage in a number of side involvements like smoking or eating, I would not be able to listen to music on my walkman, read a magazine, write a letter or engage in a totally unrelated conversation with someone unknown to you and at the same time sustain the appropriate display of involvement warranted by the situation. New communication technologies, on the other hand, allow users to display ‘primary involvement’ along a number of attentional tracks at once and not risk offending anybody” (Jones, 2002: 15-16). One of the main ways new communication technologies alter context is by creating a new kind of interactional accessibility involving new ways of being present and monitoring others’ presence (Jones, 2002: 17).
Cultural-based motivations and the usage of mobile phones
“The technology cannot save us from ourselves; it can only reflect all too candidly who we are” (Barber, 2002)

The very idea of what comprises the basic characteristics of relationships is changing slightly, as researchers acknowledge that modern relationships are more optional, ephemeral, and short-lived. We tend to understand relationships as not eternal; people understand relationships more as a shopping-mall where you can pick up the “right” person for a certain period of time and for certain type of relationship. And our usage of technologies is also somehow a reflection of our perception of what relationships mean to us. So when considering the effects we must bear in mind the following idea: “Effects are produced by people themselves, individually and in institutions, in interaction with media but not by the media directly” (Mc Quail, 1996: 522).

Our relationships are a reflection of our attitudes and ideas about what relationships are all about. We can add a rhetorical question: “tell me how you use technology and I will tell you what kind of relationships you are looking for?” For sure, our types of usage are not completely individual, since we have to obey communication norms for certain communication technologies. What is ours is the very choice of how to develop a relationship, which communication channel is appropriate for conducting our relationship, etc. Ours are our visions of relationships. In line with our visions and attitudes about relationships we can pick up the “right” technologies, which will to a certain degree frame our relationships.

Additionally, the culture within which the individual lives to a certain degree influences their usage of technologies. The study “Gender and Mobile Phones in Cross-National Context” (Baron, Campbell, 2011: 1) investigated gender patterns identified in a cross-national study of mobile phone use by university students in Sweden, the USA, Italy, Japan, and Korea. Data were collected using a convenience sample of 18-24 year old students between October 2007 and December 2008. There were a total of 2001 subjects who completed the survey, of which 524 were male and 1477 were female (Baron, Campbell, 2011: 16-17). The data were analysed with respect to the purpose of communication, politeness issues, contact management and volume of use. Results indicated a number of gendered usage and attitudinal patterns. As researchers suggested, in some cases cultural variables may prove more explanatory than gender. We will present just one section – contact management – in order to question which factors predominate regarding the use of mobile phones. Namely, the search also
investigated the “pretending to talk” strategy. It is a strategy for avoiding acquaintances and strangers and was particularly prevalent in the US, where males in the sample were numerically more likely than females to use the strategy at least once a month (15% of American males and 11.7% of females reported pretending at least once per month to be talking on their phone to avoid people they knew – compared with 3.0% of Swedish males and 1.4% of Italian males). To avoid conversation with a stranger 14.3% of American males and 15.4% of American females pretended to be talking compared with only 1.7% of Swedish males and 3.5% of Swedish females (Baron, Campbell, 2012: 20-21). When summarizing male and female behavior we get an interesting picture that somehow points to culture-dependent behavior. Namely, the distinction between American and Italian behavior for avoiding acquaintances at least once a month by pretending to talk on their phones is stark: 12.6% of Americans in the sample versus 2.1% of Italians. The Italian pattern is consistent with the very small proportion of Italians who found it appropriate to talk on their phones at a family dinner (3.1%). Baron and Campbell concluded that these data support the notion of Italy as a culture that strongly values communication with friends or family members in one’s physical presence. Gender-based differences were more meaningful with respect to using the mobile phones to avoid strangers. This strategy (pretending to talk as well as playing with other function of phone) was generally employed more often by females than by males. Given females' greater vulnerability in potential encounters with strangers these findings are not surprising (Baron, Campbell, 2012: 24).

**Conclusion: Do we always get what we want? Probably yes**

Every technology has certain advantages as well as certain limitations. By limitations we mean that, while enabling certain communication technology, also introduces additional level of activity and availability. Facebook is such a case. Our signals of positive face are accompanied with signals of negative face. We can actively construct and signals our positive face (to be nice, available, good-looking, etc.), but as a counterpart we have to control our negative face in the same amount. If our Facebook friend posts a new picture, it is nice that we react, comment, and acknowledge that action. A similar thing happens when communicating by mobile phone. Our availability is a huge problem. We might be always on, always available, but we are available also in situations when we do not want to be. Even in romantic relationships potential availability might be a source of dissatisfaction. As Miller-Ott, Kelly and Duran (2012) reported in their study The Effects of Cell Phone Usage Rules on Satisfaction in Romantic Relationships: “cell phones play an important role in romantic relationships, although they can be a
source of uncertainty and conflict in relationships. Although cell phones help relational partners stay connected, expectations that partners will always be available and accessible to one another may decrease the quality of their relationship” (Miller-Ott, Kelly and Duran 2012).

So texting has some limitations and it is a source for frustration too. But texting is our choice and maybe it is a time to admit that texting gives us a “space” and maybe this is what we really want. In choosing to text we are choosing to have some amount of distance. “These days, looking at sociable robots and digitized friends, one might assume that what we want is to be always in touch and never alone, no matter who or what we are in touch with ... But if we pay attention to the real consequences of what we think we want, we may discover what we really want. We may want some stillness and solitude” (Turkle, 2011: 285).

We are not going to judge texting as “improper” communication, which diminishes our “inner” psychological needs. It is just “texting”. Instead, we would like to go back to the early days of the internet, when anonymity was one of the great fascinations. Anonymity has at least a dual effect; it reduces the level of social pressure on the individual, and at the same time the level of unpleasant communication sometimes increases with the “liberation” of the individual (Boudourides, 1995: 3-4). But on the other hand the very lack of social and visual connection is the condition for the growth of user’s own “imagination”. Anonymity is supposed to be a part of the magic attraction in CMC. As one of the participants said, she does not hide her identity because she is afraid of contact with other people, but because anonymity is part of the magic itself (Baym, 1998: 55). Some other people claim that a huge turn has been made in the field of internet because the very possibility of satisfaction (sexual games are an example) functions as real satisfaction. Some active participants in sexual games have stated that the essence and fascination of the game is not in meeting someone and actually doing something with them, but that there is a great fascination for them in disclosing their own fantasies when typing alone. In this sense the potential possibility itself already fulfils a satisfaction. The very idea that you are able to do something but you do not do it gives you more satisfaction than the act itself. You never go “all the way”; you just repeat a certain type of the game. You announce all the time but you never go through with it (Poster, 1998: 191-192). We may think that our usage of technologies perfectly reflects our intimate needs. Maybe, as Turkle concludes, we want some solitude and a distance: “We defend connectivity as a way to be close, even as we effectively hide from each other” (Turkle, 2011: 281). And we can mask our true motivations behind “limited” (i.e. poor, weak) technology. We can ascribe the media the
inability to support relationships in order to disguise our own unpreparedness to establish integral relationships.

Concerning distance, it is true that modern technologies let us repeat certain types of relationships, even if we could go “off-line” or, let us say, face-to-face. Potential anonymity or a distance is obviously “a good reason” that is worth defending. Some people enjoy distance and anonymity. How better to idealize than through CMC (and to some extent via texting too), where one is left to paint their own mental picture of someone? Brittney G. Chenault cited the article "E-mail romance? Can the Internet help your love life?" (Glamour, February 1996), in which the author gives examples from office romances, such as one that "Vicky" describes. She exchanged increasingly sexy and intimate e-mail with a colleague in another department of the corporation: "Every day our dialogue got more explicit. When that message sign blipped, I'd be practically orgasmic." However, according to Vicky, in face-to-face encounters, nothing changed: "I'd see him in the hall and blush like crazy, but he'd be totally normal. Rocklike. It was bizarre!"

When Vicky finally got "fed up" with the situation, she pulled the man into her office and asked him if they indeed were going to "get together." His response was: "I don't know what to say. Maybe, maybe not. Can't we just do this e-mail thing for now?" Vicky pulled the plug on the relationship, feeling like she was "electronically had" by a man through his "romantic cowardice behind a computer screen" (Chenault, 1998). So in reconsidering our contemporary life and relationships it is not productive to evaluate our communication practices as good or bad; they are reflections of who we are and who we want to be. If we constantly ask ourselves whether technology has ruined our relationships, we put a mask on ourselves and ascribe the problems to technology. We hide our true intentions and motivations behind ourselves. Maybe we really want some solitude; maybe we want to be less attached to each other, at least some of the time. But the consequences of such solitude go nevertheless in different directions; we are alone, but we might sometimes even be lonely. To be alone is fine, it is refreshing, but we ought to be able to live alone and not feel lonely at the same time. How we will cope with that problem is another question. Maybe we have to cut off constant connectivity with other people and find a connection with ourselves.
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