New Technologies, New Worlds – Current Trends and Practices in Computer-Mediated Communication in Post-Communist Romania

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Résumé: L'arrivée et le développement en cours des nouvelles technologies ont conduit à des changements considérables dans tous les domaines et ont facilité l'apparition de nouvelles formes de communication globale. La diffusion de l'Internet facilite l'interaction globale et représente des nouveaux moyens de communication soutenus par un grand choix de dispositifs Hi-Tech. Pendant les vingt dernières années, CMC a subi une considérable augmentation, et la Roumanie ne fait pas exception. La Roumanie postcommuniste est maintenant non seulement membre de la Communauté Européenne et part du village global, mais aussi un participant dynamique dans le domaine électronique, dépassant ainsi les frontières et anciennes restrictions ou contraintes. Cet article vise à définir les tendances et pratiques existantes dans la communication assistée par l'ordinateur et le discours dans le domaine électronique Roumain, en considérant l'usage et le contenu des certaines CMC modes, à savoir l'email, les réseaux sociales et les blogs.
Mots clés: CMC, CMD, email, réseaux sociales, blog.

Introduction

Since the 1990's, after the fall of communism in Romania, western cultural, behavioral and social patterns have started to reshape Romanian national and cultural landscape. For many Ro-

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manians, the 1990's represented by far and away a quick passage from constant lack of freedom, in all its conceivable forms, freedom of expression, movement, thinking, etc., to a far forgotten liberty and lack of restrictions. From this definite point in time, Romania has become a fertile land and a new market for western influence and models. The years to come witnessed a far-reaching flood of western sway, as Romanians were more than ever eager for knowledge, information, and access to new social and cultural patterns. New political and economic systems brought about new trends and significant development in all fields. From a mere static society, repressed and subdued, even slow to react at times we now contemplate a fast-moving, dynamic and above all hi-tech lifestyle due to the fast technological developments at global level. The former secluded Romanian is now a global 'villager', member of the European Union and part of the global world, an active participant in the technological revolution. Unprecedented developments in the IT sector have enabled people to surpass borders and communicate at will, regardless of culture, religion, or social status.

Over a span of more than twenty years, Post-Decembrist Romania has swapped all former practices for new technologies. We no longer go to the post office to send a letter, to the cashier to pay our debts, to the supermarket to do our shopping, but we e-mail, scan, use online banking and electronic payments, order online the goods we need, and so forth. General concepts and practices such as mail, commerce, banking, shopping, learning, etc., have turned into electronic procedures: e-mail, e-commerce, e-banking, e-shopping, e-learning, and so on. At global level, the electronic environment is definitely making deep inroads into social, cultural, and behavioral patterns.

Our study aims at outlining current trends and practices in computer-mediated communication and discourse, while sketching out the profile of the Romanian netizen, in terms of practices, privacy, synchronicity, persistence, gender use, social vs. personal subject matter, and language use. Data were collected by means of online tools, and from several statistics sites, which

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monitor Internet traffic and usage: Internet World Stats, traffic.ro, facebrands.ro, and zelist.ro.

1. Computer-mediated communication and discourse – an overview

Communication is a complex process which underpins all areas of human interaction. The extent of its complexity can be seen in the variety of ways in which researchers have tried to define it. More than often, human communication has been described as the act of conveying meaningful information between a sender and a receiver. However, this representation of communication is becoming obsolete, considering the various new environments and ways in which communication takes place. Thus, the concept of communication is currently undergoing important changes and this model, known as the 'parcel-post model' – Shannon and Weaver's model of signal transmission in telecommunication systems – (Shannon and Weaver 1949), is being questioned because of the idiosyncratic features of the new environments and channels used for communication purposes.

With the advent of the Internet and information technologies, some other means of human interactions have emerged, giving rise to new forms of social interactions in an electronic environment. As computers have become part and parcel of modern society, shaping all fields of activity, and new state-of-the-art devices (such as iPad, Smartphone, etc.) are constantly overrunning us, the communication process has reached new levels and various forms. The way people communicate in various professional, social, or educational settings varies widely, according to the context and the channel used in the communication process, which in our case is via computers or other information technologies. The rapid spread of the Internet has paved the way for interpersonal interaction at international level, being a cornerstone for future global communications. On the importance of the Internet and its impact on society, John Naughton remarks: "The Internet is one of the most remarkable things human beings have ever made. In terms of its impact on society, it ranks with print,

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the railways, the telegraph, the automobile, electric power and television. Some would equate it with print and television […]. Yet it is potentially more powerful than both because it harnesses the intellectual leverage which print gave to mankind without being hobbled by the one-to-many nature of broadcast television."[1]

The Internet overcomes physical and social limitations of other forms of communication and therefore allows the interaction of people who are not physically sharing the same space. The process of interpersonal communication via computers (or other hi-tech gadgets), involving people situated in different environments is generally known as computer-mediated communication (CMC).

Herring defines computer-mediated communication as 'communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers'[2], and characterizes it as 'an important new communication modality that is increasingly permeating everyday life in industrialized societies'[3]. Even if computer-mediated communication has initially referred to interpersonal interactions that occur via computer-mediated formats, such as instant messages, emails, chat rooms, etc., lately the term has also been applied to other forms of text-based interaction, or Internet-based social networking. In our approach of CMC, the term 'computer' has broadened its original meaning and refers to any other electronic device which can be connected to the Internet and supports software applications that allow digital interactive communication. The term 'computer' stands just for a generic term in our collocation, as information can presently be shared through a whole gamut of devices.

[1] John Naughton, *A brief history of the future: the origins of the Internet*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1999, p. 21.

[2] Susan Herring, *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross-Cultural Perspectives. Pragmatics and Beyond series*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, 1996, p.1.

[3] *Idem*, p. 2.

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Originally initiated in the USA in the late 1960's for national defense reasons, computer networks began to stand for a means of interpersonal communication, first among computer specialists in the early 1970's. Afterward, in the 1980's, its use extended to academic and business personnel in elite organizations, while ten years later to popular use due to the growth of Internet service providers. Thus, what was once the appanage of a restricted group of computer specialists who shared data in restricted networks has now become a commonplace practice among millions of people around the world, regardless of age, social status, location, etc.

This new form of communication is part and parcel of everyday life and has significantly changed interpersonal interactions over the last two decades. CMC offers a vast field of research, as it explores both social, communicative and linguistic impact of communication technologies, and encompasses a large array of discursive genres (synchronous/asynchronous, local/global, academic/leisure). Thus, new forms of communication have led to new forms of social practices, and especially to new forms of discourse which involves appropriate linguistic tools. As CMC is about text-based communication, where participants interact by means of written words, a new linguistic field has emerged, that of *Internet language*, also coined under various names, such as *electronic language*, *electronic discourse*, *cyberlanguage*, *netspeak*, *cyberspeak*, *virtual language*, etc. New words have been coined to name new concepts; new meanings have been attached to existing words, adapting them from general usage to specialized terminologies. All in all, computer-mediated communication has given rise to a ground-breaking, alternative concept of communication in an electronic environment.

The communication produced by people interacting by sending and receiving messages via networked computers is known as computer-mediated discourse (CMD). The study of CMD focuses on language and language use in the electronic environment, by making use of discourse analysis methods, and considering CMC social and behavioral aspects. Besides, the type of computer-mediated discourse depends on the idiosyncratic fea-

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tures of various CMC modes. "While the case for the deterministic influence of the computer medium on language use is often overstated, properties of computer messaging systems nonetheless play a significant role in shaping CMD."[4] Thus, language use is shaped by the different properties that each CMC mode incorporates: synchronicity, one-way or two-way transmission, persistence of the text, anonymity, visual or audio content.

Current CMD studies reflect researchers' concern over language change in the new medium. Changes and variations in language use were considered inherent due to the peculiar features of this innovative form of communication, namely the electronic environment. The first linguist who addressed this issue was Naomi Baron, in 1984, who acknowledged "computer-mediated communication as a force in language change". Later on, as CMC continued to expand at a rapid pace and provided such an ever-increasing corpus, researchers and linguists (Murray, D., 1985; Severinson Eklundh, K., 1986) began to show interest in computer-mediated language and varieties of computer-mediated discourse. In 1991, Kathleen Ferrara's study on "Interactive Written Discourse as an Emergent Register" drew attention to the emergent field of research and its astonishing potential. The paper analyzes the syntactic and stylistic features of written language occurring in synchronized terminal-to-terminal typed dialogues, drawing the conclusion that interactive written discourse is a naturally occurring register and a hybrid language variety, displaying characteristics of both oral and written language.

Since the 1990's, research on CMD has continuously developed and former popular claims swapped for new perspectives and findings. If early studies categorized CMD as impersonal, fragmented, spoken-like, or even unsuited to social uses (Baron, 1984), subsequent research has proved that language use in the new medium is in fact a more complex phenomenon, highly

[4] Susan Herring, "Computer-mediated discourse", in D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, H. Hamilton (eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001, p. 614.

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related to technical and situational factors. This view is also supported by Herring, who contends that "language use is highly variable in computer-mediated environments, even within a single mode. This variation reflects the influence on the linguistic choices of CMD users of social factors such as participant demographics and situational context."[5]

Implications of language use in the electronic environment were also discussed by David Crystal in "Language and the Internet", in 2001. He rejects the popular view that Internet language is illiterate, while acknowledging that the new medium will fundamentally change the way we think about language. His study analyzes the language of email, chat groups, virtual worlds and the web, and concludes with his view on the linguistic future of the Internet. He claims that each form of CMC offers "clear signs of the emergence of a distinctive variety of language, with characteristics closely related to the properties of its technological context as well as to the intentions, activities, and (to some extent) personalities of the users."[6]

Previous concerns over language use in the electronic environment are rebutted by Crystal who utterly asserts that the Internet is not the death of languages, but on the contrary, an instrument of huge potential enrichment for individual languages.[7]

2. CMC in Romania

Among all industries, communication technologies witnessed a swift development compared to post communist telecommunications systems. Communication becomes easier and faster with the advent of the mobile phone, followed closely by the spread of the Internet. In Romania, broadband Internet has been available since 2000 and numbered around 800.000 users. Ten years later, in 2010, there are 7.8 million connections, while 2012 places Ro-

[5] *Idem*, p. 620.

[6] David Crystal, *Language and the Internet*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 225.

[7] *Idem*, p. 241.

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mania on the eleventh place in Europe, with 8.57 million users. Romania's Internet and broadband market is experiencing strong growth, and broadband services are widely available. Statistics data are relevant to the significant and continuous growth of electronically-mediated communication in our country. Although Romania has become part of the cyberspace later than other European countries, which accounts for only 39.2 % Internet penetration rate, one of the smallest in Europe, noteworthy developments have taken place over the last decade. According to Eurostat, 34 % of Romanians access the Internet at least once a week.

CMC is analyzed through a number of aspects thought to be universal to all forms of communication, including synchronicity, persistence, and anonymity. According to Herring, research on discourse structure in CMC usually distinguishes between two main genres, namely synchronous and asynchronous CMC (Herring 2001). In synchronous CMC, such as chat or Instant Messaging, people exchange messages straight away and in real-time, and all participants are simultaneously online and react immediately and only with a slight delay to messages from other participants. In addition, "[…] synchronous modes of CMD impose temporal constraints on users that result in a reduction of linguistic complexity relative to asynchronous modes."[8] Synchronous interaction offers immediacy but usually lacks persistence unless the user takes care to keep a history of his/her conversations.

Asynchronous communication, such as emails, mailing lists or discussion groups, occurs with time constraints and users do not have to be online at the same time to communicate. Besides, "[…] asynchronous CMD permits users to take their time in constructing and editing messages. Variation in structural complexity in e-mail messages, therefore, must be understood as reflecting

[8] Susan Herring, "Computer-mediated discourse", in D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, H. Hamilton (eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001, p. 617.

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social situational factors which determine what level of formality […] is appropriate to the context"[9].

3. The email

According to current research (Weber, 2004; Kim et al., 2007), email has quickly become an extensively used means of communication within organizations, as it allows users to send and receive messages that reach a wide array of individuals regardless of time or location constraints. The prevalence of text and Internet-based communication technologies within the workplace, especially the email, is a result of the growing need for faster global communication.

Currently, the email has become one of the most popular forms of asynchronous communication. The email is low in synchronicity since response time varies, but high in persistence since messages are always saved and stored in the long term. There are different reasons for the choice of asynchronous interaction. This form of communication offers the user a controlled, distant and delayed reaction, while synchronous communication involves immediacy and on the spot reaction. According to current statistics, 77% of Romanians check their email on a daily basis, and 61% of them are men. Consumer email accounts outnumber by far corporate accounts not only in Romania, but also at global level. However, the number of corporate email accounts is forecast to increase at a faster pace than consumer email accounts over the next four years. The growth rate in the number of emails sent and received on a daily basis is slowing down due to the fast increase in other forms of communications (IM, chat, social networks). Despite spam filters, a high proportion of emails delivered to the user's inbox are spam.

As research has already confirmed (Weber 2004; Burgess et al. 2005), email style and language are substantially different from other modes of communication in terms of salutations, grammar, words use, and formality. Previous research suggests

[9] *Ibidem*.

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that email language tends to become formal and 'error-free' even in informal communication, as email use becomes more popular and replaces other forms of writing[10]. In our email sample, we distinguished between formal and informal styles. Organizational emails are definitely formal in style, with typical salutation formulas (Openings: Dear Sir/Madam, Dear Colleague; Closings: Sincerely yours, Best regards), and observance of grammar and spelling rules. The subject box usually indicates the subject matter of the message, offering the reader anticipatory clues about the nature of the content. David Crystal also underlines the importance of the language of the subject line, considering it a critical element: "Because it is the first thing that the recipient receives, along with the sender's name, it is a critical element in the decision-making over what priority to assign to it or whether to open it at all (in the case of someone who receives many e-mails every day)."[11]

Within institutions, emails more than often include signature and the sender's information at the end. As for words choice, we noticed a high rate of cognitive and social words, a moderate number of emotion words, and a limited use of self-reference items. In contrast, personal emails show a high rate of emotion words, more self-reference items, and a moderate use of cognitive and social words. They also tend to lack openings and closings, politeness markers, while making great use of abbreviations and informal language. Another parameter we measured was politeness, and the frequency of such words as 'please', 'thank you', etc. Formal emails showed by far a high rate of politeness cues than compared to informal, personal emails. Thus, linguistic variation is conditioned by discourse topic, level of formality and communication purpose. Our findings are consistent with existent research on emails characteristics, and Romanian email style and layout didn't show any discrepancies with established email norms in the literature.

[10] *Idem*, p. 626.
[11] David Crystal, *op. cit*., p. 97.

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Other general aspects entangled in the peculiar features of electronic environments involve privacy and security. The anonymous message in cyberspace stands for another special feature of CMC. The use of nicknames is a first step towards anonymity, while the use of anonym re-mails makes identification almost impossible. However, the email ranks higher than social networking or blogging in terms of security and privacy. The possibility of hiding one's identity has both advantages and drawbacks. Whereas offering the utmost freedom of expression, it can also become a portmanteau for anti-social activities involving harassing, racial discrimination, offense, etc.

However, even in the case of anonymous messages, information about the author can be retrieved from the message content: language use and its level of complexity, observance of standard norms, topics, life experiences and concerns, gender stereotypes, they all account for the author's educational level, age, or gender.

4. Social networks

Social networking technologies connect millions of people and have actually changed the way people get their information. The fast development of social networking with both individual and corporate users has taken place against a background of growth in Internet access. In 2011, the total number of worldwide social networking subscribers, including both consumer and corporate accounts, was nearly 2.4 billion. The most successful social web in Internet, having reached more than 700 million subscribers worldwide, is undoubtedly Facebook. In Romania, there are more than 4, 6 million Facebook users, with a total amount of 16353 pages, and 60 % penetration rate among Internet users. In terms of gender use, both sexes use Facebook to the same extent, as statistics show a proportion of 50, 64% of men subscribers, and 49, 36 % of women subscribers, according to facebrands.ro.

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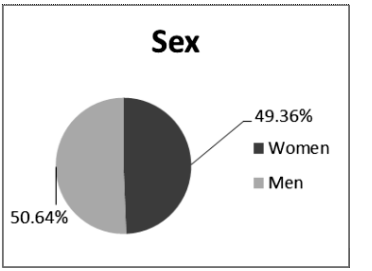
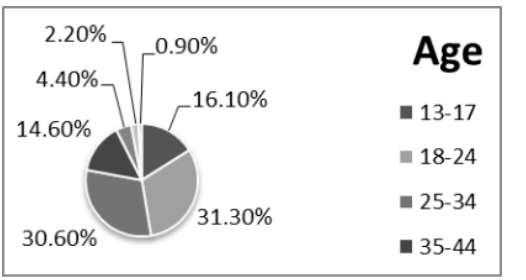


Regarding age, the young account for the vast majority of users, followed closely by middle-aged adults. The high proportion of young users is reflected in the main preference for subject matter such as entertainment and social media.



Women users are more likely to post personal subject matter, whereas male users are less focused on the personal side. Thus, personal content seems to be the dominant theme of women users, while men tend to be more interested in information, favoring politics, business, and sport. Much time is spent communicating with close friends about events in personal lives, or sharing breaking news, discussing political issues and learning about new trends. For both men and women, social networking is a leisure activity and not a source of income. Another peculiar feature of the Facebook 'phenomenon' is the proportion between written and visual content, as the visual content exceeds by far the written one. Computer-mediated discourse among Facebook users is characterized by the prevalence of social and emotion words, a high rate of abbreviations, emoticons and quotes, colloquial language,

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as well as non-standard spellings. Linguistic behavior in social networks is undoubtedly shaped by participants' age, gender, and level of education. The high rate of colloquial language, unconventional orthography and abbreviations accounts for the large majority of young users. Although an initial perception may reveal language as lacking appropriate correctness, or expressive functions, language choice is deliberately determined by users' needs: "[…] only a relatively small percentage of such features appears to be errors caused by inattention or lack of knowledge of the standard language forms. The majority are deliberate choices made by users to economize on typing effort, mimic spoken language features, or express themselves creatively."[12]

Language expressiveness is rendered differently than in standard written language, due to constraints imposed by the communication medium. Thus, all other features common to face-to-face interactions, such as auditory and visual information, are replaced by textual representations. Therefore, emoticons are used to represent facial expressions or physical actions. Textual representation of auditory and visual information accounts for users' creativity and ability to adapt language to their expressive needs and it also forecasts new linguistic possibilities.

As for privacy and security in social networking, considering Facebook in particular, there is a general trend to reveal excessive personal information, which may become unsafe especially in the case of public pages (subscribers who allow public access to their information). This practice may affect teenagers above all, leading in some cases to harassment, or other serious offences. Although Romania has not so far experienced such negative effects as compared to the USA, caution regarding privacy and security matters should be increased and dealt with more seriously in the electronic environment.

[12] Susan Herring, "Computer-mediated discourse", in D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, H. Hamilton (eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001, p. 616.

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Since the fast spread of social networking in our country, companies in all industries have seized this new and less expensive opportunity of promoting their business in the electronic environment. Consequently, two more categories of users have designed Facebook pages, namely corporate and entrepreneurs, who post especially about their business, in order to attract new clients, or to gain greater visibility in their industry. Social networking is already acknowledged to be a powerful tool in molding public opinion, shaping decisions and choices, and connecting companies with their consumers. More and more companies are now using social networking in their campaigns, focusing on their target audience. It is obvious that this new form of communication offers plenty of opportunities for advertising and marketing products among consumers. As it already happens in other mass media environments, advertising campaigns led by corporate and entrepreneur subscribers tend to become excessive and annoying. Anyway, it is interesting to remark that advertising campaigns are most of all promoted by individual users who post links on their walls and spread the rumor about certain brands or products.

5. The blog

Interpersonal interaction in CMC has considerably soared with the emergence and spread of the latest genre of computer-mediated communication, namely the blog. Weblogs, generally known as blogs, have become extremely popular in recent years. Blogs are generally described as regularly updated web pages, containing recent and archived text-based posts, and stand for an alternative communication channel, especially a two-way communication tool[13]

Romanian blogosphere consists of around 63000 blogs, of which only 12000 are currently active (according to zelist.ro –

[13] Susan Herring et al., "*Bridging the gap: A genre analysis of weblogs*", in *Proceedings of the 37th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS'04)*, IEEE Press, Los Alamitos, 2004, p.1.

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statistics for 25.03.2012). Top lists and statistics are made up considering several parameters such as the number of posts, comments, or hits per day. Our overall evaluation of the Romanian blogosphere, in terms of gender use, age, education, technical skills, interests, content, was based on a selection of 50 blogs picked out from the most popular blogs.

In terms of gender differences, male dominance in the Romanian blogosphere seems unquestionable for the time being. The most prevalent category of blogs is definitely represented by male bloggers, and focus on social, political, and media topics. Women bloggers are less visible, and their blogs are generally hosting content similar to a personal diary, their life experience being the most popular topic. Thus, Romanian women bloggers have a low profile as long as quality is measured in terms of popularity of the blog, and at its turn, popularity is measured in terms of hits or posts. However, this result is hardly surprising and is consistent with North-American and European studies based on US or British bloggers, which have long stated that women bloggers are less visible in the blogosphere. (see Herring, Kouper et al. 2004; Pollard 2003) As Pollard contends, although there are many noteworthy exceptions, "blogs authored by men are much more likely to be about politics or about technology, and to be narrowly focused. […] men *tend* to blog more about external events (rather than personal ones). External events, being in the public domain, are more likely to be Googled […]"[14]

More than 70% of the blogs in our snowball sample account for topics related to social or political subject matter, whereas the personal content is quite limited. The authors offer just a brief presentation of their personal life (occupation, hobbies, special skills), and generally posts are related to their field of expertise. Blogs are used as professional ends, to increase authors' public visibility and reach a larger audience. In addition, more than 80% of the authors are public figures, who frequently appear in the

[14] Dave Pollard, *Is the blogosphere sexist? How to Save the World* [blog], 2003.

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media and are already known by the general public. This accounts for the large number of hits and comments they receive on their blogs. Blogs about technology, politics and social issues, which are the most popular in the Romanian blogosphere, are more likely to be produced by men. Consequently, male bloggers are more visible than female bloggers due to their area of interests, popularity, and technical skills as well.

Regarding privacy levels, all the blogs analyzed were publicly listed sites with open access to their content. 90 % of them offer information on their authors, and are interactive, allowing visitors to post comments. Additionally, a high rate of top listed blogs serves interpersonal ends.

Text analysis reveals the prevalence of formal style, with a high rate of both cognitive and social words, and self-reference markers. Authors tend to express their point of view on various public and social issues, and posts reflect their approval or discontent with certain topics, which unsurprisingly leads to a substantial use of emotion words. Men use more active and resolute language compared to women's tendency for passive and accommodating language, which is consistent with previous theories on gender and language use.[15] Moreover, the visual content balances the written one, most of the posts being backed by images or videos.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that computer-mediated communication and the Internet have radically changed and revalued all traditional forms of communication. New communication technologies allow the on-going connection to the global network by means of a plethora of hi-tech devices such as computers, Smartphones, or Ipads. Romania has also joined the global network, and has become an active participant in the electronic

[15] See Susan Herring, "Computer-mediated discourse", in D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, H. Hamilton (eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001.

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environment, making use of computer-mediated communication technologies, while developing new discursive patterns.

Our overall findings, in terms of discourse features, are however limited and not highly relevant due to lack of appropriate linguistic analysis instruments for our language. We tried to adapt and apply certain LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) features for text analysis which could also work for the Romanian language, such as frequency of cognitive words, social words, emotion words, and self-reference. Due to lack of established text analysis software applications for Romanian, our approach was difficult and limited in size regarding the amount of analyzed corpora and words frequency analysis. An analysis of a larger corpus would provide a more precise indication of words occurrence and usage, according to gender, subject matter, and means of communication. However, specific linguistic patterns have been noticed: the tendency for abbreviated, colloquial forms, non-standard spelling, self-reference markers, emotion and social words, especially in synchronous and personal communication, and a high rate of cognitive and social words, formal style, and observance of grammar and spelling rules in institutional communication. One medium variable, namely synchronicity, has an important influence over structural patterns, as time constraints account for the reduction of linguistic complexity and typically result in shorter information units, abbreviated language, lack of pronouns, determiners, auxiliaries, and unconventional orthography. Thus, linguistic features of text-based CMC vary according to the type of messaging system used and the cultural and social contexts involved in the interaction.

In terms of gender difference, women tend to use a more interactive, interpersonal style as compared to males, who mostly communicate about things than about people. These findings are consistent with traditional gender patters in communication style, despite all spectacular developments in technology and feminist changes in society over the last decades.[16]

[16] *Ibidem*.

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Although it has been often argued that CMC promotes isolation and remoteness, computer-mediated communication tools such as emails, blogs, social networking, IM, etc., have proved to enhance and sustain interpersonal communication, by increasing information exchange, developing relationships and intercultural communication, and promoting knowledge spread. People not only socialize online, but they also incorporate CMC tools in their practices, as an instrument of information search in both their professional and private life. The profile of the Romanian netizen is continuously changing, as he has become more and more receptive to social stimuli and more interested in sharing and accessing knowledge.

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