SOCIAL INFORMATION PROCESSING THEORY AND COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

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Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT) looks at how interpersonal relationships are developed through computer mediated communication (CMC). When building or starting relationships online, there is an obvious lack of nonverbal cues, and impressions are made purely from verbal cues. People will make assumptions through the written messages. SIPT looks at this and attempts to explain why this happens. Previous researchers have explained that no matter what the channel of communication is, people naturally form impressions and develop relationships. Another key factor SIPT talks about is the time exchange involved. Face-to-face (FTF) interaction occurs in real time, whereas CMC communication can happen over a longer period of time. SIPT explains that given enough time, the same level of intimacy can be reached in CMC as it is in FTF interactions. A strength of SIPT is that is an essential building block for future research in online interaction. A weakness is that it does not look enough into the heightened level of anonymity online and how this can be attributed to a lack of accountability. Has the regular online user become complacent with this lack of accountability online? This lack of accountability may also have started to bleed over into FTF interaction as well.