

## Digital Intimacy and the Death of Presence: Rethinking Human Relations in Hyperconnected Societies

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### Abstract

*The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has transformed the structure of human interaction within hyperconnected societies. This study examines the emergence of digital intimacy and its implications for the decline of authentic human presence in contemporary communication practices. Using a qualitative conceptual approach grounded in communication theory, media ecology, existential philosophy, and critical digital studies, this article explores how social media platforms, algorithmic systems, and virtual interaction reshape intimacy, identity, and relational experience. The findings reveal that hyperconnectivity produces a paradoxical condition in which individuals remain continuously connected yet increasingly experience emotional fragmentation, loneliness, performative communication, and communicative fatigue. The study introduces the concept of “presence erosion” to explain the weakening of embodied interaction and existential closeness caused by excessive technological mediation. Furthermore, the article argues that digital capitalism commodifies emotional expression and social interaction through engagement-driven communication systems that prioritize visibility over authenticity. Although digital technologies provide opportunities for global connectivity and social participation, they simultaneously threaten the depth of human relationships by replacing direct presence with symbolic and algorithmic interaction. This study contributes to global communication scholarship by offering an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for understanding the crisis of presence in digital civilization. Ultimately, the article emphasizes the importance of reconstructing communicative ethics grounded in empathy, attentiveness, and authentic human engagement within increasingly mediated social environments.*

**Keywords** *digital intimacy, hyperconnectivity, human presence, social media, communication theory, algorithmic culture, digital society.*

### INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed the architecture of human interaction across the globe. Over the last two decades, societies have entered an era characterized not merely by technological acceleration, but by the emergence of hyperconnectivity—an environment in which individuals remain continuously linked through smartphones, social media platforms, virtual networks, and algorithmically mediated communication systems. Human beings now inhabit a communicative ecosystem where interaction transcends geographical boundaries and temporal limitations. Messages travel instantly, emotions are represented through symbols and visual reactions, and social relationships increasingly unfold within digital spaces rather than physical environments. Although such transformations promise unprecedented levels of connectivity and accessibility, they simultaneously provoke profound philosophical, sociological, and communicative questions concerning the nature of intimacy, presence, identity, and human relations themselves.



Digital communication initially emerged as an instrument intended to strengthen interpersonal bonds by overcoming barriers of distance and time. Social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, and WhatsApp redefined communication as a perpetual process of exchange occurring within virtual environments. Individuals gained the ability to maintain relationships with hundreds or even thousands of people simultaneously, creating the illusion of social abundance and emotional proximity. However, beneath this apparent expansion of human connectedness lies a paradox increasingly discussed within contemporary communication studies: the more connected society becomes technologically, the more fragmented human presence appears emotionally and existentially. The rise of digital intimacy has coincided with increasing experiences of loneliness, social anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and relational superficiality in many parts of the world.

This paradox forms one of the central dilemmas of contemporary communication theory. Traditional understandings of intimacy were historically grounded in physical co-presence, embodied interaction, direct eye contact, and shared spatial experiences. Philosophers such as Martin Heidegger emphasized the importance of authentic being-in-the-world, where human existence acquires meaning through genuine encounters with others. Similarly, Emmanuel Levinas argued that ethical relations emerge through face-to-face encounters in which the presence of the Other becomes undeniable and morally transformative. In contrast, digital communication often removes bodily presence from interaction, replacing embodied relationships with mediated representations composed of text, images, emojis, avatars, and algorithmically curated identities. Consequently, intimacy itself undergoes a process of virtualization.

The concept of digital intimacy refers to emotional closeness and relational attachment developed through technologically mediated communication. Unlike traditional intimacy rooted in physical presence, digital intimacy is constructed through constant connectivity, symbolic interaction, and curated self-presentation. Social media platforms encourage users to share personal experiences, emotions, desires, and vulnerabilities publicly or semi-publicly, creating new forms of emotional exposure and social performance. Yet these interactions are frequently governed by algorithmic systems designed not to deepen human understanding, but to maximize engagement, visibility, and platform profitability. As a result, communication increasingly shifts from authentic dialogue toward performative visibility.

Marshall McLuhan's famous proposition that "the medium is the message" becomes profoundly relevant within this context. Digital media do not merely transmit communication; they reshape human perception, cognition, and social behavior. The structure of social media platforms encourages rapid interaction, fragmented attention, emotional immediacy, and continuous self-disclosure. Human relations become increasingly quantified through metrics such as likes, followers, comments, shares, and engagement rates. Emotional validation is transformed into measurable digital feedback, generating new forms of psychological dependency and social comparison. In hyperconnected societies, identity itself becomes partially dependent upon digital recognition.



Contemporary scholars have increasingly examined the consequences of this transformation. Sherry Turkle argues that modern individuals are “alone together,” surrounded by continuous communication yet deprived of genuine emotional connection. According to Turkle, digital technologies provide the illusion of companionship without the demands of authentic relationships. Similarly, Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of “liquid modernity” describes contemporary relationships as increasingly fragile, temporary, and unstable. In digital environments, relationships can be initiated, maintained, and terminated with unprecedented ease, fostering a culture of disposability in human interaction. Social ties become fluid, reversible, and often emotionally shallow.

The emergence of hyperconnectivity has also altered the temporal structure of communication. Digital interactions occur continuously and instantaneously, eliminating traditional boundaries between public and private life, work and leisure, presence and absence. Individuals remain perpetually accessible through notifications, messages, and online interactions. This constant availability generates what many scholars describe as communicative fatigue—a condition in which individuals experience exhaustion due to the relentless demands of digital interaction. The pressure to remain visible and responsive contributes to anxiety, emotional burnout, and diminished reflective capacity.

Furthermore, algorithmic communication systems increasingly mediate how individuals perceive reality itself. Social media algorithms prioritize emotionally stimulating, controversial, or sensational content because such material generates higher engagement. Consequently, communication environments become shaped by emotional polarization, attention competition, and informational fragmentation. Human relations are no longer formed solely through interpersonal interaction but are increasingly influenced by invisible technological infrastructures that organize visibility, relevance, and emotional exposure. This phenomenon raises urgent ethical concerns regarding autonomy, authenticity, and manipulation within digital societies.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified global dependence on digital communication technologies. During periods of lockdown and social distancing, digital platforms became primary spaces for work, education, socialization, and emotional support. While technology enabled social continuity during crisis, it also accelerated the normalization of virtual interaction as a substitute for physical presence. The pandemic revealed both the necessity and limitations of digital intimacy. Many individuals experienced emotional disconnection despite constant online interaction, highlighting the irreplaceable value of embodied human presence.

Existing literature on digital communication has explored themes such as social media behavior, online identity formation, digital loneliness, virtual communities, and mediated interaction. However, much of the scholarship remains fragmented across disciplines including sociology, psychology, media studies, philosophy, and communication theory. There remains a significant need for integrative theoretical analysis examining how hyperconnectivity reshapes the philosophical foundations of human relations themselves. Many studies focus primarily on technological effects without sufficiently interrogating



deeper existential questions concerning presence, authenticity, embodiment, and emotional meaning in digital civilization.

This article seeks to address that intellectual gap by critically examining the transformation of intimacy and human presence within hyperconnected societies. Rather than focusing on empirical measurement alone, this study develops a conceptual and philosophical analysis grounded in contemporary communication theory, media ecology, existential philosophy, and critical digital studies. The article argues that hyperconnectivity has produced a paradoxical condition in which communication abundance coincides with existential absence. Human beings increasingly communicate everywhere while remaining emotionally distant from one another. Presence becomes simulated through digital interaction, yet authentic relational depth gradually erodes beneath the logic of algorithmic mediation and performative visibility.

The novelty of this study lies in its interdisciplinary conceptualization of “the death of presence” as a communicative and existential condition emerging from hyperconnected digital culture. Unlike previous studies focusing separately on social media addiction, online identity, or digital loneliness, this article integrates philosophical perspectives on presence with communication theories concerning mediated interaction and algorithmic culture. The study introduces the concept of “presence erosion” to explain how continuous digital connectivity weakens embodied relational experiences while simultaneously intensifying symbolic interaction. Additionally, this article contributes to global communication scholarship by reframing digital intimacy not merely as technological adaptation but as a civilizational transformation affecting the ontology of human relations.

Another dimension of novelty concerns the article’s critical analysis of emotional capitalism within digital communication systems. Contemporary digital platforms commodify attention, visibility, and emotional expression, transforming intimacy into a form of exchange governed by platform logic and data extraction. Emotional experiences become monetized through engagement-driven architectures that reward visibility over authenticity. Consequently, communication increasingly operates within systems where emotional performance replaces existential encounter. This article argues that the crisis of presence within hyperconnected societies cannot be understood solely through psychological analysis; it must also be examined as a structural consequence of digital capitalism and algorithmic governance.

Ultimately, this study aims to encourage a deeper reconsideration of what it means to be present, connected, and human in an era dominated by digital communication. The central question is no longer whether technology connects people, but rather what kind of humanity emerges when relationships become increasingly mediated by screens, algorithms, and virtual representations. In hyperconnected societies, communication may be abundant, but presence itself risks disappearance.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative conceptual approach grounded in critical communication theory, philosophical inquiry, and interdisciplinary literature analysis. The



research does not rely on quantitative data collection or statistical measurement but instead develops an analytical framework for understanding the transformation of human relations within hyperconnected societies. The methodological orientation of this article is interpretive and critical, emphasizing theoretical synthesis and conceptual exploration rather than empirical generalization.

The primary method used in this study is qualitative literature review combined with critical discourse analysis. Relevant scholarly works from communication studies, media ecology, sociology, philosophy, psychology, and digital culture studies were systematically examined to identify major theoretical patterns concerning digital intimacy, mediated interaction, presence, hyperconnectivity, and algorithmic communication. The literature analyzed includes journal articles, academic books, theoretical essays, and contemporary studies discussing the social consequences of digital technologies in global society.

This research adopts an interdisciplinary perspective because the phenomenon of digital intimacy cannot be adequately understood through a single disciplinary lens. Communication technologies influence not only interpersonal interaction but also social structures, cultural behavior, emotional experiences, and philosophical understandings of existence. Therefore, this study integrates theoretical contributions from multiple scholars and intellectual traditions. Media ecology theory provides insight into how communication technologies reshape human perception and social environments. Existential philosophy contributes conceptual understanding regarding authenticity, embodiment, and presence. Critical digital studies offer analytical tools for examining algorithmic power, platform capitalism, and emotional commodification.

The analytical process was conducted through several stages. First, the study identified key concepts frequently discussed in contemporary communication scholarship, including digital intimacy, online identity, social presence, emotional connectivity, virtual interaction, and communicative fatigue. Second, the study examined philosophical theories related to human presence and relational authenticity. Third, the analysis explored how digital platforms restructure communication practices through algorithmic mediation and engagement-based interaction systems. Finally, these theoretical insights were synthesized to construct the conceptual framework of “presence erosion” proposed in this article.

Critical discourse analysis was also utilized to interpret broader narratives surrounding hyperconnectivity and digital communication. This approach enabled the study to examine how contemporary societies normalize perpetual connectivity while simultaneously overlooking its existential and relational consequences. Public discourse often celebrates technological connectedness as social progress, yet critical examination reveals tensions between connectivity and authentic human experience. By analyzing dominant narratives concerning digital communication, this study seeks to uncover underlying assumptions shaping contemporary understandings of intimacy and social interaction.

The study emphasizes conceptual originality rather than empirical replication. Instead of measuring digital behavior statistically, the article critically interrogates the philosophical implications of technologically mediated intimacy. This approach aligns with theoretical



communication research traditions that prioritize critical reflection and conceptual innovation as important contributions to scholarly discourse.

To ensure academic rigor, the study relies primarily on peer-reviewed international sources and foundational theoretical works widely recognized within communication and social theory scholarship. The literature selection prioritizes relevance, theoretical significance, and interdisciplinary contribution. Sources discussing social media culture, virtual communication, digital capitalism, emotional sociology, and mediated presence were particularly emphasized because they directly support the central arguments developed in this article.

Through this methodological framework, the study aims to produce a comprehensive theoretical understanding of how hyperconnectivity reshapes the meaning of human presence and intimacy within contemporary digital civilization.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Transformation of Intimacy in Hyperconnected Societies

The emergence of hyperconnected societies has significantly altered the meaning and structure of intimacy within human relations. Traditionally, intimacy was associated with physical proximity, emotional vulnerability, sustained interaction, and embodied communication. Human relationships were built through direct encounters involving facial expressions, physical gestures, touch, silence, and shared spatial experiences. However, digital communication technologies have transformed intimacy into a mediated experience increasingly dependent on virtual interaction and symbolic representation.

In contemporary digital culture, intimacy is no longer confined to physical presence. Individuals now establish emotional relationships through text messages, video calls, social media interactions, and digital platforms operating continuously across global networks. Communication technologies create the perception of closeness even when individuals remain geographically distant. This phenomenon has contributed to the emergence of what scholars describe as “digital intimacy,” where emotional attachment is formed and maintained through technologically mediated communication systems.

Despite these advantages, the transformation of intimacy within digital environments also creates relational tensions. Communication becomes increasingly rapid, fragmented, and performative. Individuals may interact constantly without developing meaningful emotional depth. Social media platforms encourage users to present curated versions of themselves designed for public visibility and social approval. Consequently, intimacy gradually shifts from authentic relational engagement toward symbolic self-presentation shaped by audience expectations and algorithmic logic.

The transformation of intimacy also reflects broader cultural changes associated with modern digital civilization. Hyperconnectivity promotes immediacy, accessibility, and continuous communication, but it simultaneously reduces opportunities for reflective interaction and emotional attentiveness. Relationships increasingly operate within accelerated communication systems where responses are expected instantly and visibility



becomes socially valuable. As a result, human intimacy becomes vulnerable to superficiality, distraction, and emotional instability.

### **Presence Erosion and the Crisis of Embodied Communication**

One of the central findings of this study is the emergence of “presence erosion” as a defining condition of hyperconnected societies. Presence erosion refers to the weakening of embodied relational experiences caused by excessive dependence on mediated communication. Although individuals remain continuously connected through digital technologies, authentic emotional presence often diminishes.

Embodied communication historically played a fundamental role in human relationships. Physical encounters allow individuals to experience emotional nuance through tone of voice, eye contact, gestures, silence, and shared atmosphere. These dimensions contribute to empathy, attentiveness, and existential recognition. However, digital communication frequently removes or reduces these elements, replacing them with simplified symbolic interaction such as emojis, reactions, text messages, and visual content.

The absence of embodied presence creates emotional limitations within communication processes. Virtual interaction may successfully transmit information, but it often struggles to reproduce the emotional richness of direct human encounters. Individuals can communicate frequently while remaining psychologically distant from one another. This condition explains why many people experience loneliness despite constant digital interaction.

Furthermore, hyperconnectivity fragments human attention. Digital environments continuously compete for cognitive and emotional engagement through notifications, updates, and algorithmically curated content. As individuals divide their attention across multiple communication channels, the capacity for sustained relational presence decreases. Conversations become interrupted, fragmented, and partially attentive. Physical co-presence no longer guarantees emotional engagement because individuals remain psychologically connected to distant digital environments.

This crisis of presence represents not merely a technological issue but an existential transformation. Human beings increasingly experience reality through screens and mediated representations rather than direct encounters. Presence becomes dispersed across virtual spaces, reducing opportunities for contemplative interaction and authentic relational depth.

### **Social Media and Performative Communication**

Social media platforms have fundamentally reshaped communication practices by encouraging performative interaction. In digital environments, individuals are not merely communicating with others; they are simultaneously constructing publicly visible identities. Every photograph, caption, story, and online activity contributes to the formation of a curated digital self designed to attract recognition, validation, and engagement.

This performative culture transforms communication into a process of symbolic management. Individuals often feel pressure to appear attractive, successful, emotionally stable, or socially relevant within online environments. As a result, communication



increasingly prioritizes visibility over authenticity. Emotional experiences become selectively displayed according to social expectations and platform norms.

The logic of performative communication is closely connected to platform architecture. Social media systems reward content that generates attention, emotional reaction, and audience engagement. Likes, comments, shares, and follower counts function as symbolic indicators of social value. Consequently, users may adapt their communication behavior to maximize visibility rather than foster meaningful interpersonal understanding.

Performative communication also contributes to emotional comparison and psychological insecurity. Individuals continuously encounter idealized representations of other people's lives, relationships, achievements, and experiences. This exposure encourages social comparison processes that may intensify feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, or dissatisfaction. Digital intimacy therefore becomes intertwined with emotional performance and symbolic competition.

Moreover, performative communication weakens the boundary between public and private life. Personal emotions, relationships, and experiences increasingly become publicly shareable content. Intimacy is transformed into visibility, while privacy becomes progressively reduced within digital culture. Human relationships are therefore shaped not only by interpersonal interaction but also by audience observation and platform dynamics.

### **Algorithmic Mediation and Emotional Capitalism**

Another significant issue identified in this study is the growing influence of algorithmic systems within contemporary communication processes. Digital platforms utilize algorithms to organize visibility, prioritize content, and regulate user engagement. These systems are not neutral technological mechanisms; they actively shape emotional behavior, social interaction, and communication patterns.

Algorithms prioritize emotionally stimulating content because emotional intensity generates higher levels of engagement and profitability. Content associated with outrage, controversy, fear, desire, and emotional excitement tends to spread more rapidly within digital environments. Consequently, communication ecosystems become dominated by emotional acceleration and informational fragmentation.

This condition contributes to what may be described as emotional capitalism. Human emotions increasingly function as economic resources within platform-based communication systems. Every interaction, reaction, and emotional response generates data that can be monetized through advertising, predictive analytics, and digital surveillance. Intimacy becomes economically valuable information processed within systems of data extraction and commercial optimization.

The commodification of emotional life has serious implications for human relations. Communication platforms encourage continuous participation because user engagement directly supports economic profitability. As a result, individuals are exposed to perpetual stimulation designed to maintain attention and emotional responsiveness. Hyperconnectivity therefore becomes economically structured rather than purely socially motivated.



Algorithmic mediation also influences how individuals perceive reality and interact with others. Personalized content systems create informational environments tailored to user preferences and behavioral patterns. While personalization increases convenience, it may also reinforce ideological isolation and emotional polarization. Individuals increasingly inhabit fragmented communication spaces where exposure to alternative perspectives becomes limited.

Ultimately, algorithmic communication transforms human interaction into a technologically regulated process shaped by commercial interests, emotional manipulation, and engagement optimization. Human relations are increasingly mediated not only by communication technologies themselves but also by invisible systems determining what individuals see, feel, and prioritize within digital environments.

### **Hyperconnectivity, Loneliness, and Communicative Fatigue**

One of the paradoxes of contemporary digital society is that increased connectivity often coincides with rising experiences of loneliness and emotional exhaustion. Hyperconnectivity creates conditions in which individuals remain constantly reachable and socially visible, yet many continue to experience isolation, anxiety, and relational dissatisfaction.

This paradox emerges because communication quantity does not necessarily produce communication quality. Digital interaction often emphasizes immediacy and frequency rather than emotional depth and sustained attentiveness. Individuals may exchange hundreds of messages daily while lacking meaningful relational engagement. Communication becomes continuous but emotionally fragmented.

Communicative fatigue represents another important consequence of hyperconnectivity. The expectation of permanent availability generates psychological pressure and emotional exhaustion. Notifications, online interactions, social obligations, and information overload create environments where individuals rarely experience communicative silence or mental rest. Digital culture normalizes perpetual responsiveness, reducing opportunities for reflection and emotional recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these dynamics significantly. During periods of social distancing, digital communication technologies became essential tools for maintaining work, education, friendship, and family interaction. Although technology enabled social continuity, many individuals simultaneously experienced emotional emptiness and relational dissatisfaction. Virtual interaction often failed to replace the emotional richness of embodied presence.

Loneliness within hyperconnected societies therefore reflects more than physical isolation. It reflects the weakening of meaningful existential connection despite constant communication. Human beings require more than informational exchange; they require recognition, empathy, attentiveness, and embodied relational experience. Without these dimensions, connectivity risks becoming emotionally insufficient.

### **Rethinking Human Relations in Digital Civilization**



The findings of this study suggest the urgent need to rethink the future of human relations within digital civilization. Hyperconnectivity is no longer a temporary technological phenomenon; it has become a defining structure of contemporary social life. Therefore, societies must critically evaluate how communication technologies shape human values, emotional experiences, and relational practices.

The challenge is not simply reducing technology use but developing healthier communicative ethics capable of preserving authentic human presence. Digital technologies should support meaningful interaction rather than replace embodied relational experience entirely. Human communication requires attentiveness, empathy, vulnerability, silence, and emotional depth—qualities difficult to sustain within accelerated digital environments dominated by distraction and visibility competition.

Educational institutions, policymakers, communication scholars, and technology developers all possess important responsibilities in addressing the relational consequences of hyperconnectivity. Media literacy education should include critical reflection concerning digital behavior, emotional well-being, algorithmic influence, and communication ethics. Individuals must learn not only how to use communication technologies but also how to preserve humanity within technologically mediated environments.

Furthermore, communication theory must increasingly engage philosophical and existential questions concerning presence, authenticity, and embodiment. The future of communication studies depends upon understanding not only how technologies connect individuals but also how they reshape the meaning of being human itself.

Ultimately, hyperconnected societies confront humanity with a profound existential dilemma. Technology enables continuous communication across global networks, yet authentic human presence remains fragile and irreplaceable. The future of human relations will depend upon society's ability to balance digital connectivity with embodied relational depth, ensuring that communication remains genuinely human rather than merely technologically efficient.

## CONCLUSION

The rise of hyperconnected societies has transformed human communication into a digitally mediated experience where connectivity is abundant but authentic presence is increasingly fragile. This study demonstrates that digital intimacy reshapes the meaning of human relationships by shifting interaction from embodied encounters toward symbolic and performative communication within algorithmic environments. Although digital technologies provide unprecedented opportunities for connection, they also contribute to emotional fragmentation, communicative fatigue, and the erosion of relational depth.

The concept of “presence erosion” introduced in this study explains how continuous digital interaction weakens attentiveness, embodiment, and existential closeness in human relations. Social media culture, performative identity construction, and algorithmic mediation encourage visibility and engagement rather than genuine understanding. As a result, communication often becomes continuous yet emotionally shallow.



However, this study does not reject digital communication entirely. Hyperconnectivity also enables global interaction, emotional support, and broader social participation. The central challenge lies in developing communication practices that preserve empathy, authenticity, and meaningful presence within increasingly technological environments.

Ultimately, the future of human relations depends not only on technological advancement but also on humanity's ability to maintain authentic connection in a world dominated by screens, algorithms, and perpetual communication.

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