

Computer-Mediated Communication in Postmodern Literature

¹Sarwan Kumar Johan, ²Dr. Shriven Kumar

^{1, 2} School of Liberal Arts (SOLA/English), K.R. Mandalay University, Guru Gram, Haryana, India

¹sarwankumar80886@gmail.com, ²dean.sola@krmangalam.edu.in

Corresponding Email: sarwankumar80886@gmail.com



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) has fundamentally transformed the landscape of postmodern literature by enabling new modes of textual production, identity construction, and narrative fragmentation. This paper examines the convergence of CMC and postmodern literary theory, tracing how digital platforms—hypertext, social media, virtual environments, and networked discourse—have become both the subject matter and the structural medium of contemporary fiction. Drawing on foundational theoretical frameworks by Walther, Leotard, Derrida, and Foucault, alongside close readings of cyberpunk and post-cyberpunk fiction, hypertext narratives, and digital storytelling, the paper argues that CMC does not merely reflect postmodern aesthetics but actively generates them. Key themes explored include the debentured digital subject, fragmented and nonlinear narrative forms, the collapse of authorial authority, gender dynamics in online communication, and the blurring of reality and simulation in cyberspace. The study situates these developments within the broader context of twenty-first-century literary culture, contending that an integrated framework of CMC theory and postmodern criticism offers indispensable tools for reading contemporary fiction in the digital age.

Keywords: Computer-Mediated Communication · Postmodern Literature · Hypertext Fiction · Digital Identity · Cyber culture · Fragmented Narrative · Online Communication · Postmodernism

I. Introduction

The intersection of technology and literature has always produced transformative cultural moments—from the printing press to the typewriter, each communicative technology has reshaped the forms and concerns of literary expression. In the contemporary moment, however, the emergence of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) represents a shift of

unprecedented scope, one that does not merely transmit literary content through new channels but reconfigures the very conditions under which literature is conceived, written, distributed, and read. When examined alongside the theoretical preoccupations of postmodern literary theory—fragmentation, the debentured subject, the collapse of grand narratives, the instability of meaning—CMC emerges not as an external technological force acting upon literature but as its most natural and thoroughgoing expression.

Postmodern literature, broadly understood as literary production that interrogates totalizing truth claims, destabilizes authorial authority, plays self-reflexively with narrative convention, and foregrounds the contractedness of identity and reality, found in digital communication an ideal medium and an inexhaustible archive of themes. The World Wide Web, email, chat rooms, virtual worlds, social media platforms, and hypertext fiction are not merely the settings of contemporary novels; they are, in a profound sense, postmodern literary forms in their own right. As Richards [1] argued in his influential critique of hypermedia literacy, the fragmented, information-based communication fostered by digital platforms is not incidental but structurally aligned with postmodern epistemology. Berth on, Pitt, and Watson [2] extended this argument by demonstrating that the Web itself is a postmodern artifact, organized not around central authorities and stable meanings but around hyperlinks, multiple identities, and the radical absence of any overarching controlling narrative.

This paper proceeds from the premise that CMC and postmodern literature are mutually constitutive phenomena. To study either in isolation is to miss the most significant cultural and aesthetic dynamics of our era. The research examines the theoretical foundations linking CMC to postmodern literary concerns, explores the formal and thematic innovations that digital communication has introduced into contemporary fiction, and proposes an integrated critical framework for reading postmodern literature in the age of networked communication. In doing so, it draws on a rich corpus of scholarship spanning communication theory, literary criticism, and cultural studies.

II. Theoretical Framework: Cams and Postmodern Theory

A. Foundational CMC Theory

Computer-Mediated Communication, as xxa scholarly field, emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s to address the distinctive features of human communication through digital networks. The foundational contribution of Walther [5]—his articulation of the impersonal, interpersonal, and hyper personal dimensions of online interaction—established CMC as a domain with its own relational dynamics, irreducible to face-to-face communication. Walther's hyper personal model is particularly resonant for literary analysis: in digital environments, communicators idealize their self-presentation, selectively deploying textual cues to construct identities that may be more coherent, desirable, or per formative than those available in embodied social life. This process of idealized self-construction is, as literary scholars have noted, structurally analogous to the construction of narrative voice and fictional identity in postmodern fiction.

Subsequent theoretical developments refined and expanded this foundation. Tree, Leonardo, and van den Hoof [6] proposed a multidimensional theory of communication visibility, arguing that a defining feature of CMC is its capacity to render communication observable in new ways, with profound implications for the production of meaning in organizational and cultural

contexts. Sun and Walther [9] offered a meta-theoretical survey of CMC scholarship that situates the field within philosophy, geopolitics, and cultural theory, making explicit the connections between digital communication research and broader humanistic inquiry. Metz [23] contributed an early but enduring framework for understanding CMC as a coherent communicative context—one that encompasses not only email and chat but the full range of digital discourse spaces that have since become the primary arenas of literary culture.

B. Postmodern Philosophy and Digital Communication

The affinities between CMC and postmodern theory run deep. Sandbothe's [7] philosophically rich examination of media temporalities in the internet draws explicitly on Derrida and Rorty to argue that digital media restructure postmodern conceptions of time, trace, and meaning. In Derridean terms, the internet is a machine for the endless deferral of presence: meaning is always already mediated, archived, and subject to retransmission in contexts unanticipated by any originating author. This structural feature of digital communication—what we might call its constitutive secondariness—maps directly onto the postmodern literary preoccupation with intersexuality, pastiche, and the impossibility of original utterance.

Adcock's [8] application of Foucauldian theory to online environments opens another important avenue. Foucault's technologies of the self—the practices through which individuals constitute themselves as subjects—are, in the digital age, substantially conducted through CMC. The construction of online identity through profile duration, self-narration, and strategic communication is both a social practice and a literary one; the digital subject is, in the fullest sense, a textual construction. Marvin's [15] examination of the aesthetic dimensions of text-based virtual realities similarly foregrounds the literary character of digital self-presentation, exploring how CMC creates postmodern spaces for identity play, deception, and the performance of selfhood that anticipate the concerns of the most searching contemporary fiction.

III. Cams and Postmodern Narrative Form

A. Hypertext and the Fragmentation of Narrative

Perhaps the most direct formal intersection of CMC and postmodern literature is the development of hypertext fiction—narrative works that exploit the linking structures of digital environments to produce nonlinear, reader-navigated texts. Modern, Guan, and Abdul Aziz [10] trace the theoretical genealogy of hypertext through the transition from structuralism to poststructuralism, showing how the digital link materializes the poststructuralist insight that meaning is always relational, always generated through difference and deferral rather than inherent in any single term or text. The movement from modernism to postmodernism is, on their account, homologous with the movement from analogue to digital, from text to hypertext.

Hypertext fiction, as analyzed by multiple scholars [12, 13, 14], realizes in technical form the postmodern narrative principles of fragmentation, multiplicity, and reader co-creation. Michael Joyce's *Twelve Blue* and Deena Larsen's *Disappearing Rain*—examined by NALANS contributors [12]—require active reader participation to construct meaning, transforming the reader from a consumer of pre-given narrative into a producer of one among multiple possible textual trajectories. This shift corresponds precisely to Roland Barthes' theorization of the

transition from the 'readily' to the 'whitely' text. More recently, scholars working on the concept of Textual Possible Worlds [13] have drawn on Bakhtin's theory of polyphony to argue that hypertext represents the fullest expression of postmodern multi-voiced narrative, disrupting linear chronological order and distributing authorial authority across an open network of textual possibilities.

The formal analysis offered by Comparative Literature scholars [14] is particularly suggestive in this regard. Their proposal that hypertext foregrounds interruption over linking—positioning the break, the gap, and the unresolved fragment at the centre of digital narrative experience—resonates with the postmodern aesthetic of deliberate incompleteness and open sexuality. The spatial-to-temporal shift they identify in postmodern writing, and the distinction between segment and fragment in digital narrative, offer precise conceptual tools for the close reading of hypertext fiction.

B. Digital Technologies and Twenty-First-Century Fiction

Beyond hypertext fiction proper, the influence of CMC on contemporary literary form is pervasive and multidimensional. Ashamed [11] demonstrates how digital technologies drive postmodern fragmented storytelling, nonlinear narrative techniques, and what he terms the ratification of personal identity in canonical contemporary works by Jennifer Egan, Dave Eggers, and Mark Z. Danielewski. These writers do not merely schematize digital communication; they formally absorb its logics, producing texts that function like databases, social media feeds, or interlinked networks of information rather than traditional linear narratives.

Hisami's [4] examination of cyber cultural portrayals in post-postmodern fiction extends this analysis into the domain of artificial intelligence, social media, and multimedia storytelling, showing how these technologies transform ideas of authorship, identity, and communication in the most sophisticated contemporary fiction. The themes he identifies—virtual identity, anonymity, and human-machine interaction—are not merely topical concerns but structural features of a literature shaped at every level by the communicative environments CMC has produced. Similarly, the analysis of post-cyberpunk fiction by Global Language Review contributors [18], drawing on Leotard's account of the postmodern condition, traces how fictional representations of AI, cyberspace, and post humanism enact the literary deconstruction of grand narratives that Leotard identified as the defining gesture of postmodern thought.

IV. Identity, Gender, and Power in Cams and Postmodern Literature

A. The Debutured Digital Subject

One of the central preoccupations of postmodern literature is the critique of the unified humanist subject—the stable, self-identical individual presumed by Enlightenment philosophy and realist fiction alike. CMC has given this critique new material grounding and new urgency. The capacity of digital communication to enable pseudonymity, multiple account identities, and the deliberate performance of alternative selves makes the postmodern decentring of the subject not merely a theoretical proposition but a lived communicative practice.

Dante, Wachenhauser, and colleagues [16] explored this dimension in their pioneering study of virtual theater on Internet Relay Chat, connecting CMC performance to postmodern notions of

the self as constituted through iterative social performance rather than pre-given essence. Their work anticipated by decades the mainstream critical recognition that social media profiles, avatar-based online identities, and the carefully curate digital self-presentations of contemporary culture are all, in the most rigorous theoretical sense, literary productions—authored, revised, and performed for imagined audiences.

The analysis of cyberspace as a postmodern metaphor and literary space by the University at Buffalo researchers [17]—focusing on writers including William Gibson and Kathy Acker—shows how postmodern fiction absorbed the logic of digital networks into its formal and thematic DNA. The nonlinear, chaotic narrative structures these writers employ mirror the fragmented nature of cyberspace itself, and the themes of identity dissolution and reality blurring in their work are continuous with the broader cultural experience of living and communicating through digital networks.

B. Gender and Power in Online Communication

The postmodern critique of power relations—particularly the critique of gendered power structures—finds rich material in the literature of CMC. Herring's [19] seminal study of gender and democracy in computer-mediated communication demonstrated that digital discourse, far from dissolving the power asymmetries of offline social life, reproduces and in some cases intensifies them. Her findings—that women's contributions in online spaces are systematically undervalued, interrupted, or ignored—are continuous with postmodern feminist critiques of discourse as a site of power struggle rather than neutral information exchange.

The 2018 study by Median and Bache [3] on gender and social support in CMC adds a more nuanced dimension to this analysis. Examining patterns of online social support among Algerian Face book users, they identify four types of support—self-esteem, tangible, informational, and appraisal—and document significant gender differences in their deployment. Women primarily sought appraisal and self-esteem support, while men focused predominantly on self-esteem support in domains including music, education, and sports. This fine-grained analysis of gendered communication patterns in digital spaces provides the empirical grounding for literary-critical accounts of how postmodern fiction represents and interrogates gender in digital environments.

V. Literature, Internet, and the Transformation of Literary Culture

The relationship between literature and the internet is not merely one of content influence—writers setting their novels in online spaces or schematizing digital communication—but extends to the fundamental transformation of what literature is and how it circulates. Academic scholars [20] have examined the interface of Internet and literature from four distinct viewpoints: the Internet as literature, literature as Internet, literature in the Internet, and the Internet in literature. This fourfold framework captures the full complexity of a relationship in which digital communication is simultaneously the subject matter, the formal model, the distribution mechanism, and the interpretive context of contemporary literary production.

The analysis of Fiction and Cyberspace by Open Edition scholars [21] traces the trajectory of narrative from old to new media, arguing that the digital turn marks a decisive epistemological break while also finding postmodern analogies between Victorian fiction and digital

storytelling—both characterized by anxiety about the boundaries between public and private, the authentic and the performed, the original and the reproduced. Springer Nature's research on computer-mediated texts and sexuality [22] contributes an important theoretical framework through its examination of hypertext theory, the Ordered Hierarchy of Content Objects (OHCO) model, and McCann's concept of non-informational sexuality, proposing Reception Theory and Versioning as bases for digital literary interpretation that can account for the unstable multiply instantiated character of digital texts.

Foertsch's [24] early and influential study of how electronic networks transform scholarly communication remains relevant here, offering insight into how CMC reshapes the production, distribution, and reception of literary and intellectual culture more broadly. The implications are significant: when literary texts circulate through digital networks, they are subject to the same logics of fragmentation, decontextualization, and remediation that characterize all CMC; they become, in a sense, participants in the postmodern condition they describe.

VI. Discussion

The evidence surveyed in this paper supports a strong version of the claim with which it began: CMC and postmodern literature are not merely parallel phenomena but mutually constitutive ones. The formal innovations of hypertext fiction—nonlinearity, reader co-creation, fragmentation, multiplicity—are not independent literary inventions but technical realizations of postmodern narrative theory, made possible by the communicative infrastructure of the internet. Conversely, the theoretical frameworks developed by literary scholars to describe postmodern fiction—the debentured subject, the instability of meaning, the collapse of authorial authority, the critique of grand narratives—find their most thoroughgoing empirical realization in the practices and experiences of everyday CMC.

Several implications follow from this analysis. For literary scholarship, it means that the study of postmodern literature cannot be adequately pursued without sustained engagement with CMC theory. The literary-formal analysis of fragmentation and nonlinearity is enriched and deepened by understanding the communicative practices—hypertext navigation, social media interaction, virtual identity performance—that have shaped both the form and the thematic concerns of contemporary fiction. For CMC research, conversely, it means that the communicative experiences of digital users cannot be adequately understood without attention to the literary-theoretical frameworks that illuminate their significance.

For literary education and pedagogy, the implications are similarly significant. Richards' [1] proposal for a 'rhetoric of design'—a holistic approach to electronic literacy that integrates oral, print, and digital forms—points toward a model of literary education adequate to the contemporary communicative environment. Students of literature in the digital age need not only the close reading skills cultivated by traditional literary pedagogy but also the critical digital literacy to analyze the communicative forms through which postmodern literary culture is produced and consumed.

VII. Conclusion

This paper has argued that Computer-Mediated Communication and postmodern literature are best understood as mutually constitutive phenomena that illuminate each other in fundamental

ways. The formal fragmentation, narrative nonlinearity, identity multiplicity, and authorial decent ring that characterize postmodern fiction find their material realization in the communicative structures and practices of CMC; conversely, the theoretical frameworks developed to describe postmodern literature—from Leotard's critique of grand narratives to Derrida's analysis of the trace to Foucault's technologies of the self—provide indispensable tools for analyzing the cultural significance of digital communication.

The scholars whose work has been surveyed here—from Walther's foundational CMC theory to Hisami's analysis of post-postmodern fiction, from Herring's study of gender in online discourse to the hypertext scholars who have theorized the formal innovations of digital narrative—have collectively produced a rich intellectual tradition that this paper has attempted to synthesize and extend. What emerges from this synthesis is a clear and pressing research agenda: the systematic development of an integrated framework for the analysis of postmodern literature and CMC that brings the insights of communication theory, literary criticism, and cultural studies into genuine dialogue.

As digital communication continues to evolve—with artificial intelligence, immersive virtual environments, and new social media forms generating further transformations in communicative practice and literary form—the questions explored in this paper will only grow in significance. The future of postmodern literary studies lies, in no small part, in its capacity to engage critically and rigorously with the communicative technologies through which literature is made, circulated, and read.

Acknowledgment

The author gratefully acknowledges the guidance of Prof. Dr. Shriven Kumar, Supervisor, School of Liberal Arts (SOLA/English), K.R. Mandalay University, Guru Gram, Haryana, India, whose scholarly insights and generous support were invaluable in the preparation of this work.

References

- [1] Richards, C.: Hypermedia, Internet Communication, and the Challenge of Redefining Literacy in the Electronic Age. *Language Learning & Technology* 4(2), 54–71 (2000). <https://www.lltjournal.org/>
- [2] Berth on, P., Pitt, L., Watson, and R.T.: Postmodernism and the Web: Meta Themes and Discourse. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 65(3), 265–279 (2000).
- [3] Median, M.K., Bache, A.: Computer Mediated Communication: A Study of Gender and Social Support. *European Journal of Research in Social Sciences* 6(2), 1–12 (2018). ISSN 2056-5429.
- [4] Hisami, M.: Navigating the Virtual Realm: Cyber cultural Portrayals in Post-postmodern Fiction. *AVANT XVI* (1) (2025). <https://doi.org/10.26913/avant202505>
- [5] Walther, J.B.: Computer-Mediated Communication: Impersonal, Interpersonal, and Hyper personal Interaction. *Communication Research* 23(1), 3–43 (1996). <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365096023001001>

- [6] Tree, J.W., Leonardo, P.M., van den Hoof, B.: Computer-Mediated Communication in the Age of Communication Visibility. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 25(1), 44–59 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmz024>
- [7] Sunbathe, M.: Media Temporalities in the Internet: Philosophy of Time and Media with Derrida and Rorty. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 4(2) (1998). <https://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol4/issue2/sandbothe.html>
- [8] Adcock, A.: Technologies of the Self: Michel Foucault Online. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 1(2) (1995). <https://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol1/issue2/aycock.html>
- [9] Sun, L., Walther, and J.B.: What Is Computer-Mediated Communication? An Introduction to the Special Issue. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 25(1), 4–12 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmz022>
- [10] Modern, L., Guan, L.C., Abdul Aziz, S.B.: Text, Hypertext, and Hyper fiction. *SAGE Open* 4(1) (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014528915>
- [11] Ashamed, K.: The Impact of Technological Media on Narrative Structures in 21st-Century Fiction. *International Journal of Literature and Arts* 13(6), 139–146 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijla.20251306.13>
- [12] Multiple Authors: Reading Paradigms of Digital Narratives: Reception of Hypertext Fictions and Its Implications. *Journal of Narrative and Language Studies (NALANS)* 9(18) (2021). <https://nalans.com/index.php/nalans/article/view/450>
- [13] Multiple Authors: Hypertexts: Changing Narrative Forms in the Era of Digitalis. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Creative Technology* (2025). https://www.ijirct.org/download.php?a_pid=2508001
- [14] Multiple Authors: Hypertext Fiction: The Future of Narrative? *Comparative Literature Studies / Academia.edu* (2014). <https://www.academia.edu/5558341/>
- [15] Marvin, L.E.: Spoof, Spam, Lurk and Lag: The Aesthetics of Text-Based Virtual Realities. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 1(2) (1995). <https://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol1/issue2/marvin.html>
- [16] Dante, B., Wachenhauser, T., Civically, A., Be char-Israeli, H., Rosenbaum-Tamari, Y.: Curtain Time 20:00 GMT: Experiments in Virtual Theater on Internet Relay Chat. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 1(2) (1995).
- [17] University at Buffalo, English Department: The Superabundance of Cyberspace: Postmodern Fiction in the Information Age. *Academia.edu* (2002). <https://www.academia.edu/33398158>
- [18] Multiple Authors: Postmodern Deconstruction of Grand Narratives in Post-Cyberpunk Fiction through Thematic Analysis. *Global Language Review* V (3) (2020). <https://www.humapub.com/admin/alljournals/glr/>
- [19] Herring, S.C.: Gender and Democracy in Computer-Mediated Communication. *Electronic Journal of Communication* 3(1) (1993). <https://www.cios.org/EJCPUBLIC/003/1/00312.HTML>
- [20] Multiple Authors: Literature in Internet / Linkterature: From Word to Web. *Academia.edu* (2014). <https://www.academia.edu/628160/>

- [21]] Multiple Authors: Fiction and Cyberspace: Reading Dickens in the Information Age. Cahiers Victorians ET Edouardiens. Open Edition Journals (2022). <https://journals.openedition.org/cve/12215>
- [22] Multiple Authors: Computer-Mediated Texts and Sexuality: Theory and Practice. Language Resources and Evaluation. Springer Nature. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1016178200469>
- [23] Metz, J.M.: Computer-Mediated Communication: Literature Review of a New Context. IPCT-J (Interpersonal Computing and Technology Journal). Georgetown University (1994). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261862440>
- [24] Foertsch, J.: The Impact of Electronic Networks on Scholarly Communication: Avenues to Research. Discourse Processes 19, 301–328 (1995).
- [25] Tag, C.: Exploring Digital Communication. Rutledge, New York (2017).