EFFECTS OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION ON ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS : AN ANALYSIS OF ROUPENIAN'S *CAT PERSON*

1.Mujahid Khan,
BS Graduate, Department of English, Government College Daggar, Higher Education Department, KP, Pakistan.
Email: mujahid3780@gmail.com

2. **Ibrar Ali,**
Lecturer, Department of English, Government College Daggar, Higher Education Department, KP, Pakistan.
Corresponding Email: abrar7352@gmail.com

3.Sanaullah,
BS Graduate, Department of English, Government College Daggar, Higher Education Department, KP, Pakistan.
Email: Sanakhan675gamil.com@gmail.com

4.Ishaq Khan,
BS Graduate, Department of English, Government College Daggar, Higher Education Department, KP, Pakistan.
Email: ishaqkhan62655@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explores Kristen Roupenian's Cat Person (2017) as a literary lens through which we examine the complexities of modern dating, digital communication, and gender dynamics. The narrative sheds light on critical issues such as miscommunication, emotional vulnerability, and the disparity between digital personas and real-life identities, this research highlights how technology affects contemporary romantic relationships. The primary aim of this study is to analyze how digital communication impacts relational dynamics, particularly focusing on the tensions that arise between virtual and in-person interactions in the context of modern romance. The study employs thematic analysis as its methodological approach, a qualitative technique that involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within the narrative. The findings indicate that digital communication serves as both a source of alienation and a means of connection in romantic relationships, revealing the dual role of technology in fostering intimacy and creating emotional distance. Based on these findings, the study recommends further exploration of how digital communication can be better understood and navigated to foster healthier romantic relationships.

Keywords: *Cat Person*, Digital Communication, Miscommunication, Modern Romance

Introduction
1.1 Background of the Study
Cat Person is a short story written by Kristen Roupenian in 2017, was initially published online, on December 11, 2017, in The New Yorker when it went viral online. According to BBC, the "short story 'is being shared widely online as social media users discuss, how much it relates to modern-day dating'". This novel is a short story about Margot, a twenty-year-old college sophomore, and her encounter with Robert, a thirty-four-year-old man who attended many movies in the theater she worked in. He sought her number after they both talked to each other over the concession stand, then continued an extensive conversation using text messages. Margot finds Robert witty and funny through text, and their conversations grow frequent, featuring many jokes about Robert's two pet cats, but he is more awkward and inscrutable when she tries to see him in person or face to face.

Digital communication, a key factor in Margot and Robert's relationship is essential to understanding their dynamic. In *Cat Person* (2017), texting creates a foundation for intimacy

but also shapes perception and expectations in ways traditional interactions might not. Digital Communication is the communication of information and messages via electronic means, like emails, social media platforms, messaging apps, video calls, and other digital media. It differs from traditional, face-to-face communication because it relies on technology to bridge the distance between people so that they may connect anywhere instantly. This form of communication relies on digital signals, often in the form of binary code (0s and 1s), to transmit data over the internet or other digital networks, making it possible for people to share text, images, audio, and video content with ease (Proakis and Salehi, 2007).

Digital communication tools, such as texting and social media, have allowed individuals to foster relationships with greater immediacy, increasing both frequency of contact and potential emotional connection, (Jiang & Hancock, 2013). However, these digital environments also create opportunities for individuals to curate their online identities selectively, which can lead to misunderstandings and mismatched expectations when transitioning to face-to-face interactions, (Walther, 1996). Research by Hall et al. indicates; "Digital personas often differ from real-life behaviors," (2014), as seen in Roupenian *Cat Person*, where Margot and Robert's relationships form under the constraints of selective self-presentation and lack of physical cues.

In Kristen Roupenian's short story *Cat Person*, digital communication profoundly shapes the expectations and perceptions between Margot and Robert, whose relationship begins and unfolds mostly via text. The story delves into the nuances of digital interactions while highlighting how these mediated exchanges shape their perceptions, expectations, and ultimately, their relationship's course. Margot's changing impression of Robert, built partially through their text-based interactions—accurately illustrates how online communication can facilitate both intimacy and idealized assumptions. However, these assumptions often clash with reality, leading to disappointment when online personas are confronted in face-to-face interactions, (Joinson, A. N. 2001). As Margot reflects: "She still didn't know much about him, because they never talked about anything personal, but when they landed two or three good jokes in a row there was a kind of exhilaration to it as if they were dancing" (Roupenian, 2017). Digital communication, is a key factor in Margot and Robert's relationship and is essential to understanding their dynamic.

As technology enables real-time interaction, romantic relationships evolve under new norms. *Cat Person* offers insight into these changes, showing how online personas influence expectations and lead to conflicts. Generally, a romantic relationship refers to a close connection between people who show affection, as well as emotional closeness and commitment. Such relations include the deep emotional connection, trust, and harmony between their emotional and even physical intakes that set this apart from friendship or simply acquaintances. These connections are often viewed as essential for personal wellbeing and social stability, and they have long been a focus of psychological and sociological research, (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Historically, societal norms and cultural expectations have largely influenced romantic relationships, particularly about courtship, marriage, and gender roles, (Coontz, 2005).

Technology has changed everything about romantic relationships in the new digital age, from who people meet to how people communicate and stay in contact. Roupenian's short story *Cat Person* poignantly presents all the nuances that arise out of digitally mediated interactions. Online interactions are used as a basis for initial romantic and emotional connection; communication technologies simultaneously improve and complicate the relationship, generating gaps between perception and reality. This context provides a foundation for analyzing how digital conversations between the protagonists, Margot and Robert, play a crucial role in shaping their dynamic and how these interactions illuminate broader themes of modern relationships, (Baym, N. K. 2015).

Kristen Roupenian is an American writer best known for her 2017 short story *Cat Person* and her 2019 short story collection "You Know You Want This". Born and raised in the Boston area, Roupenian developed an early interest in literature as a student, editing her high school's literary magazine. Her father is an Armenian medical doctor and her mother is a retired nurse. Roupenian received her AB from Barnard College in 2003, double-majoring in English and Psychology, then went on after graduating with a PhD in English Literature at Harvard to complete her Master in Fine Arts (MFA) work from the University of Michigan as part of the Helen Zell Writers' Program. She was a graduate of the prestigious Helen Zell Writers Program at the University of Michigan, and Cat Person, the story by which she has so unexpectedly and sensationally made her big debut in a wide audience, was developed as a piece of writing during the program.

The story by Roupenian begins as Margot and Robert meet in real life, though soon they start texting regularly which is why it is worth noting that online communication plays an essential role in the modern romantic interactions. The texts between them offer a space where playfulness and banter create the illusion of intimacy. However, these interactions also expose how digital platforms allow individuals to curate idealized versions of themselves. Margot's reflection, as captured in the story, reinforces this: "While she was home over break, they texted nearly non-stop, not only jokes but little updates about their days. They started saying good morning and good night, and when she asked him a question and he didn't respond right away she felt a jab of anxious yearning" (Roupenian, 2017). These dynamic raises essential questions about authenticity in romantic relationships mediated by technology (Baym, 2015).

In *Cat Person* (2017), Roupenian explores these complexities focusing on Margot and Robert's digitally mediated relationship in which digital personas can lead to illusions and mismatched expectations. In Kristen Roupenian's short story, *Cat Person*, Margot, a college student, works the concession stand at a movie theater where she meets her Robert. Their first contact, through Margot's teasing remark about his snacking choice, evolves into a series of text messaging contacts that become the base for their developing relationship. Weeks become days, and they slowly build up an understanding with the help of texting as Margot finds herself being lured into the humor and the smarts of Robert. As the two keep on chatting, she envisions Robert as someone she may have a connection with, although they have been quite different, and she has very little information about him personally.

By the time Margot comes back to campus, she and Robert eventually schedule to have a face-to-face date. But face-to-face interaction shows that there is a disconnect between the kind of person that she communicates with via text and in person. Robert does not seem socially fluent and it seems that the kind of activities he chooses to do like the proposal they should go on a date and watch a movie about the Holocaust do not fit the requirements of Margot. As the night goes on, Margot feels more and more uneasy and still feels the need to stay with the date and yet the date turns into a clumsy sexual experience leaving her with a sense of regret and embarrassment. The actual state of being with Robert is in stark contrast to the ideal picture she had created in her imagination based on their online communication.

After the date, Margot gets disgusted by Robert and starts disregarding his messages, hoping he will lose interest. Robert is, however, obsessive and more and more desperate. The messages reveal his emotional instability and frustration at her abrupt coldness. As she then over with a plain message of rebuff, Robert gives Robert a counter-blow of avalanche. accusatory and angry messages followed by a humiliating insult. Roupenian's story thus addresses the nuances and traps of relationships that emerge through digital. communication, in which the online interactions lead to a state of forming illusions of intimacy. which might not survive in the field.

This critical writing about *Cat Person* attempts to demystify the multiple layers of digital. communication influences modern romance. Through the way Margot and Robert interact, this research conducted online and face-to-face to find out the role of technology in mediating emotional. altering the nature of relationships, experiences and complicate the concept that people have of. authenticity and intimacy in the digital age.

1.2 Problem Statement

As such, although the importance of digital communication in forming romantic relationships is overwhelming, the body of research is still inadequate in determining how such interactions impact identity construction, relational expectations as well as the shift between virtual and face-to-face interactions. Although the existing studies have considered different sides of online communication including its convenience and possibilities of maintaining constant contact, gaps in the understanding of the peculiarities of this phenomenon, such as identity theft, wrong communication, and expectations mismatch, still exist. The aim of this study is to examine how the digital communication affects the romantic relationships, paying especially close attention to the effect of the latter in the context of identity creation, the expectations of the relationships, and the disparity between the virtual and face-to-face communication.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How does digital communication influence the development and dynamics of the romantic relationships between Margot and Robert in *Cat Person?*
2. In what ways do the characters' interactions through digital platforms affect their perceptions of each other and their relationship?

1.4 Objectives

1. To examine how digital communication influences the development and dynamics of the romantic relationships between Margot and Robert in *Cat Person*.
2. To analyze how the characters' interactions through digital platforms affect their perceptions of each other and their relationship.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The story by Roupenian is an example of the effects of digital communication on romantic relationships and, therefore, it would be an interesting question to discuss in the context of contemporary relationships. The portrayal about the association between Robert and Margot in the story shows how the feelings, expectations, and actions of interactions between two persons with digital communication and texting are influenced, which can be regarded as effective information about modern relationships. With the rise of online dating sites and the abundant use of mobile communication restructuring the way people connect with each other, the work is designed to contribute to some larger discourses of intimacy, miscommunication, and the regulation of affect within relationships.

By tracing the gap between the real and the online, this study can aid to better define the challenges of authenticity and genuineness in relationships mediated by the online environment. She reveals how technology helps an illusory sense of connexon and how people are forced to negotiate interpersonal space and power in a way that may not line up with reality. This research study can thus be beneficial to understand how online communications make human relationships relaxed and easy as well as complex in a romantic relationship.

Literature Review

The discussion of the literature on *Cat Person* (2017), by Kristen Roupenian, addresses the subtle nature of dating in modern times, gender roles, and the concept of feminism, highlighting the ability and the relevance of the culture to cause nationwide debate on social media and beyond. The dependent nature of the utilization of text messaging, social media and dating applications heavily alters who individuals meet and the way they interact and understand

intimacy as digital communication redefines the dynamics of intimate relationships in the twenty first century. The short story by Roupenian published in 2017 in The New Yorker is a complicated discussion of the misconception, emotional deficiency, and the line between a virtual and real image. This literature review is an assessment of the current research on the importance that digital communication has in determining the current romantic interactions.

Digital communication has revolutionized the nature of how people relate, form and sustain romantic relations. Scholar maintains that social networking and dating applications, as well as texting, are digital platforms that have transformed the formation of romantic relationships, their maintenance and, in some cases, their dissolution. Baym (2015) states that digital media destroy the limits between personal and public, and relations are at the same time more available and more exposed. According to Strauss, Harr, and Pieper (2024), digital communication is unique in nature to be compared with the traditional face-to-face communication, and the author concentrates on such important features of it as the lack of non-verbal signals and time asynchrony. All these peculiarities indicate that special research in this field is required and the applicability of previous studies on traditional communication to digital cases is doubted. Likewise, Rosen, Carrier, and Cheever (2013) observe that digital communication creates intimacy and immediacy, on the one hand, and emotional distance and deferred action, on the other. Specifically, texting is now a common form of communication in romantic relationships that affects the speed and intensity of relationships. Drouin, Millen, and Toy (2012) argue that texting can promote intimacy by creating constant contact, but it can also lead to miscommunication, as textual interactions lack the nuances and emotional cues of face-toface conversations. The concept of "textual chemistry," which Gibbs et al. (2011) describe as "the emotional bond formed through the back-and-forth of written exchanges," exemplifies how individuals forge connections in a digital landscape. In *Cat Person* the protagonist, Margot talks to Robert mostly online, exposing the clash that occurs when texts create a space for ambiguity. Online dating sites such as Tinder, Bumble, and OkCupid have changed how people date. Dating is now fast and more accessible, and this has transformed the romantic expectations and behaviors of people.

Online dating allows people to connect beyond geographical and social borders, but it promotes shallow evaluation based on the profile and pictures, (Finkel et al., 2012). Toma (2015) expands on this, stating, "Online dating creates a paradox where users seek authenticity in others but often present an inauthentic version of themselves." This identity curation impacts users' self-perception and influences how potential partners interpret intentions in digital interactions, thereby shaping the dynamics of modern romantic relationships, (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017).

Standlee (2020) expands on this by analyzing how technological tools impact college dating cultures, particularly during the 2020 pandemic lockdowns. Using George Ritzer's McDonaldization framework (1993), her research identifies three key trends: the use of technologies for efficiency in forming relationships, their function as tools for relational control, and their role in symbolizing commitment within standardized social narratives. These findings illuminate the evolving intersection of technology and romantic practices, demonstrating how "technological mediation redefines intimacy in ways that are both empowering and restrictive", (Standlee, 2020). In *Cat Person* (2017), Margot's perception of Robert is heavily influenced by their initial online exchanges, where she constructs an image of him that is shaped by her assumptions and the limited information available through digital communication. This tension between reality and mediated image embodied by a person reflects bigger social concerns about online dating and the loss of connection between virtual and the real-life encounters. Online dating can create wrong expectations because they tend to project an attractive picture of their partners, which contributes to the disappointment when the true picture of their partners is not what they see online.

Digital communication has received much research on the impacts on relationships, particularly on the issue of miscommunication. As written in Drouin et al. (2012), in the absence of emotional contexts in the text-based communication, individuals are likely to analyze the message extensively and subject it to ambiguous interpretation. Without nonverbal context, it is difficult to make a good judgment of tone and intent, and therefore nonverbal context can cause misunderstandings and emotional conflicts in interpersonal relationships. As Hall and Baym (2012) argue, although texting brings about the illusion of intimacy via a sequence of exchanges that are of low-effort but high-frequency, it can also result in the degree of misunderstanding as communication is pleading to be out of context and devoid of emotion. *Cat Person* (2017) has been studied to suggest a nuanced expression of gender relations, power and agency especially in feminist discourse today. The manner in which Margot acts and views the world has been discussed in contradictory terms; this implies that there is an intersection between the systemic constraint and individual agency. Among all the concepts that can be applied to explain the behavior of Margot in the story, the concept of narcissism attributed to Simone de Beauvoir is the most applicable since it places the behavior of this character in the context of a larger feminist criticism of patriarchal institutions.

The decisions which Margot makes as the manifestation of alienated desire, not as the submission to the societal pressure, can be studied through the lens of Beauvoirian narcissism, which is defined as the clearly-defined process of alienation: the woman tries to locate herself in the shape of a man-made object and becomes the object which she represents (Beauvoir, 2011). Previous interpretations have put the discompositional sexual experience of Margot and Robert in context as symbolic of a larger contest: her effort to idealize herself as an object. That is a paradox of narcissism when the active seeking of self-validation serves to reveal the deficit of genuine agency or satisfaction (Bauer, 2015).

This was a piece of research that was not confined to the story itself but was more about the larger meaning behind the philosophy of Beauvoir. Scholars have highlighted that feminist resistance must address not only the external structures that perpetuate women's subjugation but also the internalized alienation that leads women to participate in their subordination, (Beauvoir, 2011). Margot's narrative thus underscores the transformative potential of self-awareness and self-liberation, aligning Cat Person with ongoing feminist efforts to interrogate and resist the systemic and psychological dimensions of oppression, (Bauer, 2015; Arp, 1995). Despite digital communication increasing its prevalence in modern romantic relations, existing research on the sophisticated representation of this phenomenon in contemporary literature is incredibly lacking, especially in Kristen Roupenian's *Cat Person*. Psychologically or sociologically significant impacts of digital communication are common in other studies, it does not, however, explore how these phenomena are formed in the perceptions of the self and others in literature. *Cat person* is an excellent platform to explore how texting is being used in romantic relationships, influence's identity and becomes a source of expectation mismatch reality that is indicative of larger trends in the manner dating culture is being articulated today. This paper will fill this gap by examining how digital communication contributes to the development of the romantic relationship presented in the story, and how the perceptions of the characters towards each other and themselves are mediated by interactions.

Research Methodology

In this section, the researcher explains the research design, methodology, and analytic tools used in the analysis of the research on the impact of digital communication on existing romantic relationships in the short story *Cat Person* by Kristen Roupenian (2017). Research methodology refers to a set of procedures and methodologies through which reasonable steps are followed in order to explore a problem efficiently, thereby addressing some problems in the interest of getting an insight that counts. This part will present the research process step by step

in such a way that the research can be replicated and also be transparent. It employs methodological approach which combines qualitative analysis of literature and the knowledge of communication theory, psychology of relationships and media studies.

3.1 Research Design

This research study is qualitative, and applying thematic analysis to investigate the nature of digital communication in associations in modern aeras through the lens of a story (short) *Cat Person* by Roupenian (2017). This is the most prudent approach to understand the subtleties of the relationships between the characters, especially in the context of the text at play, to uncover patterns of expectations, misunderstanding and failure to relate to emotions. The thematic analysis aids the learn to recognize and read patterns in the story in a systematic way, e.g., ambiguity and miscommunication, juxtaposition between on-line and real-life identity, the psychological effect of such interactions. Using the approach, the paper will show how digital forms of messaging influence relationship outcomes and will explain the previously overlooked but important ways in which digital communication impacts modern romance.

3.2 Research Methodology

In the present research study, the researcher employed thematic analysis as the core method in order to examine the novel *Cat Person* (2017). Thematic analysis is optimal to find and interpret patterns in the story, which can be said especially in the digital sphere of communication and in modern romantic relationships. This approach makes it possible to explore the main themes including ambiguity in online communication, emotional distance and disconnect, expectation and reality, and power relations more carefully because it reveals how online relationships define the experiences of the characters. Also, the study entails some aspects of hermeneutic analysis which dwells upon the thematic approach to find deeper meaning to the digital communication between Margot and Robert. The hermeneutic analysis is interested in revealing hidden layers of meaning in texts particularly where implicit assumptions and relational ambiguity happen to be major factors to be taken into consideration, (Schleiermacher, 1998).

3.3 Data Collection

In this paper, the qualitative approach of data collection in the form of documentary method is used, as the specific analysis of the main text, *Cat Person*. This kind of approach is particularly suitable because it allows to analyze in detail the written text to uncover the patterns and themes of digital communication within the framework of a fictional dating situation. The study uses a systematic analysis and reading of selected texts to investigate how mediated communication shapes modern romantic relationships through conversations and interactions between the characters Margot and Robert. This research design is able to address the research objectives to understand the effects of digital communication on expectations, emotions, and relationship processes.

3.3.1 Primary Data

The current study is based on the primary data obtained after close reading *Cat Person* (2017), as it involves digital interaction between Margot and Robert. Through the analysis of important exchanges and text messages, the way the digital communication influences the course of their relationship, emotions, expectations, and eventual disconnection, the analysis will be conducted. It is the dialogue of the story, and particularly the text messages that explain the bizarre nature of digital communication in love relationships. The conversation of the tale explains many traits of a contemporary love affair, particularly, building intimacy, building expectations, and making errors due to poor communication. Consequently, the discussion of certain passages of the story, which will provide the commentary on the shifts in moods and misunderstandings created with the help of digital communication, will be highly necessary to

understand how online communication contributes to the formation of connections and dissociations at the same time.

3.3.2 Secondary Data
Besides the primary data of *Cat Person*, there is a broad compilation of academic or literature secondary data, such as psychology, media studies, or communication studies. Theoretical basis of this analysis can be found in scholarly literature on digital communication, status of romantic relationships and dynamics of online interaction. The application of these theoretical frameworks helps to put the research within the context of emotional reactions and relational changes observed in interactions between Margot and Robert and to illuminate the general tendencies of online dating and digital communication.

3.4 Data Analysis Process
The study takes a thematic approach to the issue of the impact of digital communication on romantic relationships in *Cat Person* (2017). This will entail the systematic coding of the data, the determination of themes and the comparison of results with the available literature in order to place Margot and Robert digital interactions in a broader context. By use of such a methodology, the researcher hopes to establish the influence of mediated communication to the feelings and the relationship dynamics of the characters involved and provide a commentator to the larger meaning of the digital interactions in contemporary romance, (Fox et al., 2014; Jin and Peña, 2010). Thematic analysis classifies repetitive motifs which arise as a result of interactions between characters. This is done by subdividing codes into more general themes in regard to digital communication dynamics in their relationship. Such possible themes as false intimacy, in which digital conversation builds an illusion of communion that is superficial, (Baym, 2015), and the contrast between expectation and the reality, in which online identity fails to match real-life interaction, (Turkle, 2011), are just some of these. These themes contribute to demonstrating the connection and disconnection in digital communication as an emotional form of communication.

Lastly, the research results are compared to the existing literature to place the insights offered in Cat Person (2017) in larger contexts on digital communication in romantic relationships. The analysis examines the way the story is consistent or inconsistent with the existing academic views. This thematic analysis will offer a more detailed explanation of how trends of digital intimacy and conflict are portrayed or criticized in Cat Person (2017). The findings will become part of the academic discussion on the role of digital communication in emotional and relationship well-being in contemporary romance.

Analysis and Discussion
This part is a reflection on the findings of the discussion of the contemporary short story *Cat Person*, by Kristen Roupenian and focusing on the impact of digital communication on romance in this digital age. It critically evaluates how text-based interactions affect emotional relationships, expectations of relationship, misunderstandings in relationships between people. This discussion takes into account the bigger picture of digital intimacy, ambiguity of communication, and differences between online and real-life communication discussed in previous chapters.

4.1 Digital Communication in *Cat Person*: A Case Study of Modern Romantic Dynamics
Digital communication has completely changed the process of creating, sustaining, and terminating relationships, (Baym, 2015). In the text Cat Person (2017), text messaging is the most common tool that the characters of Margot and Robert use to start their relationship. Such dependency on online communication is consistent with the contemporary tendencies in society, in which first impressions, emotional connections, and misconceptions are commonly facilitated by the use of screens. The interactions of Margot and Robert demonstrate such a

hyperpersonal character of the digital relationships that both partners are selectively self-presented, which enhances the feelings of intimacy. The Hyperpersonal Communication Model (1996) of Walther claims that idealized impressions are created through the reduced cues environment of digital communication since users concentrate on the messages they select to send instead of nonverbal communication. This environment forms an illusion of intimacy that tends to fade away during face-to-face communication when the romanticized representations are faced with reality.

Using the example of exchanges in *Cat Person* (2017), we find the role of the digital environment in the quick creation and destruction of intimacy. The messages crafted by Robert build and influence Margot in such a way that she creates a perfect vision of him. The messages that Robert is careful enough to create shape Margot and her expectations and perceptions of the man, creating an idealized image of him. This is in line with the Hyperpersonal Communication Model by Walther, which observes that lack of non-verbal communication may lead to exaggerated intimacy and relatedness perceptions during online communication.

4.2 Key Themes in Roupenian's Story Cat Person

4.2.1 Idealization vs. Reality

A key theme in Cat Person is the disparity between idealized online personas and reality, often called the "reality gap." Digital communication enables individuals to craft curated and idealized identities, as seen in Margot's perception of Robert, which is shaped by his carefully constructed digital persona. However, when they encounter each other in real life, 18 the differences between what they had been projecting about themselves online and the actual people are disappointing and disillusioning. This fits into the findings of Turkle (2011), who noted how selective self-presentation in the online world exaggerates the disparity between expectation and reality. The story shows the limitation of digital communication to produce deep connections and underlines the difficulties of transitioning from virtual interactions to face-to-face relationships, where idealized expectations often do not translate to reality.

4.2.2 Emotional Intimacy and Detachment

Digital communication, and emotional intimacy specifically (as depicted in *Cat Person*) is a complex phenomenon which is often misleading as far as selective self-disclosure is concerned. Margot feels like she is connected to Robert after frequently texting, as Walther describes in his Hyperpersonal Communication Model of how online communication can seem more personal than it actually is. However, this illusion of intimacy is precarious, and shatters as Margot finally meets with Robert in real life, and sees the contrast in their virtual and real-life communication. It is the digital intimacy, which is contradictory and paradoxical in itself, that stresses the fact that it cannot be meaningful, substantial, and constant like the relationships built with a face-to-face contact. Margot and Robert culture in Roupenian coincides with the rest of the literature that the focus of study aims to know as it is emotions of emotionally away and emotionally home that breath out of modern-day relationships.

4.3 The Role of Gender Dynamics

The issue of gender has an essential role in the development of power dynamics and interactions of romantic relationships, especially in online communication, where women are obliged to consider and adjust the interests to the socio-cultural standards of decency and prudence (Baym, 2015). This can be very confusing and nervous because women have the urge to hold their real feelings or to live according to the roles they have been used to and according to which they must act. In Cat Person (2017), the struggles that Margot faces are shown in the internal fight as she struggles with discomforts and feels the need to interact with Robert in a positive way. *"It wasn't that she was scared he would try to force her to do something against her will but that insisting that they stop now, after everything she'd done to push this forward,*

would make her seem spoiled and capricious, as if she'd ordered something at a restaurant and then, once the food arrived, had changed her mind and sent it back", (Roupenian, 2017). These changes emphasize that the social constructs limit the freedom of women and determine their choices when dating online. Digital communication enhances these imbalances and provides the scenario in which women might be forced to act, which does not correspond with their true emotions, which reduces their capacity to set boundaries and navigate consent, effectively. Online spaces remove the face-to-face interaction and thus intentions are lost in amid the individual limits and demands of the society. Margot is so ambivalent that this makes agency between sexes more complicated, and people should create a setting in which people respect and do not overstep one another in contemporary love.

4.4 The Impact of Digital Communication on Perception and Connection in Cat Person

Their digital interactions in Cat Person (2017) are the key factors that predetermine how Margot and Robert see each other as they enable people to build ideal versions of their characters and personalities. Margot's interpretation of Robert's text messages portrays him as witty, thoughtful, and intriguing version that aligns with her expectations of a potential romantic partner. This carefully constructed image, however, is easily shattered during their face-to-face encounters, where his awkwardness and lack of confidence become evident. For instance, *"He kissed her then, on the lips, for real; he came for her in a kind of lunging motion and practically poured his tongue down her throat. It was a terrible kiss, shockingly bad; Margot had trouble believing that a grown man could possibly be so bad at kissing. It seemed awful, yet somehow it also gave her that tender feeling toward him again, the sense that even though he was older than her, she knew something he didn't"* (Roupenian, 2017), highlighting the complexity of her feelings, oscillating between revulsion and compassion and dissonance between his online and offline personas. This gap illustrates how the controlled nature of digital communication fosters unrealistic expectations, complicating the transition to real-world interactions.

The inherent ambiguity in digital communication, on the other hand, pushes both characters to attach their wishes and insecurities to the messages they are exchanging. In this respect, assuming that Margot perceives the texts that Robert sends her as emotional communications implies a connection between them and it does not always have to be the case. In this sense, when Robert can sense that Margot messages are flirtatious and receptive, he becomes swept away trying to imagine that she likes him, thus mistaken expectations. Margot is very brilliant in describing this tension by comparing the texting of Robert to be so safe and exciting and non-texting to cause her some discomfort and fear. The lack of nonverbal communication and tones in this form of communication acts as part of these misunderstandings that ultimately make the foundation of this relationship shaky.

Finally, there is the avoidance mechanism of online communication, which will allow Margot to feel her uncertainty and anxiety without risk-taking and without being talked to directly. The reading material she utilizes to paint a clear image of the relationship on top of the manner in which she ghosts Robert, reflects the distance technology is capable of generating at least emotionally. The fact that Margot is not bothered at all with discussing how she feels, is an is-so-of-our-time tendentiousness of not wanting to have a challenging conversation with the digital technology support. This eventually results in the final delivery of hurt and angry messages that Robert sends when she remains silent which is a representation of the emotional impact of unresolved communication. It is through this process that Roupenian demonstrates that the shallow intimacy that digital technologies have produced, in most cases, backfires when applied in the real world.

4.5 Text-Based Relationships: Miscommunication and Disillusionment

The change of digital to face-to-face communication between Margot and Robert shows the significance of non-verbal communication in the establishment of perception. According to Media Richness Theory, various communication mediums possess varying degrees of social richness and text messaging is a lean method of communication that lacks the richness of face-to-face communication. The failure of her meeting with Robert face-to-face is representative of the failures of communication by use of text only as Margot cannot draw on the immeasurable aspects of tone, body language, and eye contact which would allow her to create a proper impression. This expectation-reality disparity shows that digital communication is more prone to form perfectized mental images that will not work in the real world. No more than five minutes later she was already too uncomfortable, and, when they entered the highway, the idea of him taking her somewhere and raping and killing her arose in her; she hardly knew anything about him, after all (Roupenian, 2017).

The disillusionment of Margot reflects a more general pattern in internet relationships, often called the reality gap. Miscommunications and lack of emotion that are typically inherent in text communications contribute to this. Without contextual or non-verbal information, text communication has more chances to be misunderstood and result in emotional friction and gradually accumulate relationships.

In the case of Margot and Robert, the discrepancies between their online and offline relationships disclose the weaknesses of digitally mediated relationships. An example is that Margot describes their texting as animated as compared to Roberts quiet and reservedness in the date: On the drive, he was quieter than she had expected and he did not look at her much. Five minutes later, she was already very uncomfortable (Roupenian, 2017). This unease underscores the fact that her idealized perception of Robert, as built up through her conversations with him via texts, is not reflected in his actions in real life.

Later, her growing awareness of these mismatches is evident when she considers the difference between their text dynamic and the in-person awkwardness: "*She was starting to think that she understood him—how sensitive he was, how easily he could be wounded—and that made her feel closer to him, and also powerful because once she knew how to hurt him, she also knew how he could be soothed*". (Roupenian, 2017). This shift in her perception, however, is rooted more in her own projections than in reality, further emphasizing the fragility of such digital relationships.

Conclusion

This study explores how digital communication affects romantic relationships by using the example of Margot and Robert in Cat Person (2017) by Kristen Roupenian. It discusses how the text-based communication creates an idealized image of the relationships, how it shapes the relationship dynamics, and how it produces the effect of emotional dissonance when shifting to a face-to-face communication.

The study evaluates the impact of reduced cues of digital platforms to project their desires and insecurities through the prism of the communication theories of Media Richness Theory and the Hyperpersonal Communication Model suggested by Walther, which generally result in an imbalanced expectation. The communication between Margot and Robert via the internet is described to be exciting and intimate, yet this virtual communication does not take into consideration the finer details of face-to-face communication and leads to discomfort, misunderstanding, and disappointment in the end.

The paper, further relates *Cat Person* (2017) to feminist criticism in general, and specifically to the notion of narcissism as developed by Simone de Beauvoir. It acts as Margot is behaving in an alienated version of desire which is conditioned by social pressures and male restrictions. The fact that she uses digital communication makes it clear that technology is both an

instrument of connection and avoidance because individuals can use it to work around their own insecurities without having to deal with each other emotionally. It was discovered that digital platforms enable people to present idealized forms of themselves, which brings about false intimacy and unmet expectations. The relationship between Margot and Robert helps to understand that texting causes closeness as well as increases ambiguity and lack of communication that results in disappointment of the online personas meeting the reality.

References

Baym, N. K. (2015). Personal connections in the digital age. Polity Press.

Beauvoir, S. de. (2011). The second sex. Vintage Classics.

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., & Tight, M. (2006). How to research. Open University Press. 21.

Arp, K. (1995). Beauvoir and the concept of alienation. Feminist Theory Journal, 7(3), 213-228.

Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13(1), 210–230.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative

Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1986). Organizational information requirements, media richness, and structural design. Management Science, 32(5), 554–571.

Drouin, M., Millen, D., & Toy, R. (2012). Texting and intimacy: Exploring the relationship between texting and relational satisfaction in married and dating couples. Computers in Human Behavior, 28(2), 461–469.

Finkel, E. J., Eastwick, P. W., Karney, B. R., Reis, H. T., & Sprecher, S. (2012).

Gibbs, J. L., Ellison, N. B., & Heino, R. D. (2011). Self-presentation in online personals: The role of anticipated future interaction, self-disclosure, and perceived success in Internet dating. Communication Research, 33(2), 152–177.

Hall, J. A., & Baym, N. K. (2012). Calling and texting (too much): Mobile maintenance expectations, (over) dependence, entrapment, and friendship satisfaction. New Media & Society, 14(2), 316–331.

Jiang, C., & Hancock, J. (2013). The role of digital environments in fostering relationships: A communication perspective. Journal of Media Psychology, 25(2), 79- 89.

Joinson, A. N. (2001). Self-disclosure in computer-mediated communication: The role of self-awareness and visual anonymity. European Journal of Social Psychology, 31(2), 177–192.

Lessons from the pandemic. Journal of Digital Behavior.

Online dating: A critical analysis from the perspective of psychological science.

Proakis, J., & Salehi, M. (2007). Digital communications. McGraw-Hill Education. Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 13(1), 3–66.

Ranzini, G., & Lutz, C. (2017). Love at first swipe? Explaining Tinder's selfpresentation and motives. Mobile Media & Communication, 5(1), 80–101. Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101.

Roupenian, K. (2017). "*Cat Person*". The New Yorker.

Standlee, A. (2020). McDonaldization of intimacy: Online dating and the rise of efficiency in romance. Digital Sociology.

Strauss, H., Harr, R., & Pieper, H. (2024). Digital communication and relationships:

Toma, C. L. (2015). Perceptions of authenticity in online dating: Effects of visual and textual self-presentation. Journal of Communication, 65(3), 666–688.

Turkle, S. (2011). Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other. Basic Books.

Walther, J. B. (1996). Computer-mediated communication: Impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal interaction. Communication Research, 23(1), 3–43.