

## **PARA-SOCIAL PRESENCE AND COMMUNICATION CAPABILITIES OF A WEB SITE: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>**

Nanda Kumar and Izak Benbasat  
Faculty of Commerce and Business Administration  
University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

E-mail: [nanda.kumar@commerce.ubc.ca](mailto:nanda.kumar@commerce.ubc.ca), [izak.benbasat@ubc.ca](mailto:izak.benbasat@ubc.ca)

### **ABSTRACT**

The goal of this paper is to describe the theoretical underpinnings of the construct Para-social Presence and to develop an instrument to measure this construct. Para-social presence refers to the extent to which a medium facilitates a sense of understanding, connection, involvement and interaction among participating social entities. We make a case for treating a web site as a valid social actor and argue that the relationship between a web site and her visitors should be characterized in much the same way one would characterize an inter-personal relationship. We also argue that a web site could possess different levels of para-social presence depending on how it is configured and used. We then develop a research framework that illustrates the impact of new technologies (such as personalization systems) and associated web interface design decisions on perceived communication characteristics of a web site, para-social presence, and subsequent user evaluations of the web site.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the conference paper forthcoming at Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences 2002; Kumar and Benbasat, "Para-Social Presence: A Re-conceptualization of 'Social Presence' to Capture the Emerging Relationship Between a Web Site and Her Visitors", Collaborations Systems and Technology Track, Proceedings of the HICSS, 2002