

# Consequences of Social Listening via Mediated Communication Technologies (MCTs): Application Across Levels of the Communication Hierarchy

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## ABSTRACT

As mediated communication technologies, or MCTs, are increasingly used to interact, consequences across levels of communication arise. The social listening process using MCTs has positive and negative implications. The process of social listening exists within four levels of communication. The pervasiveness and determinism of MCTs and their impact on communication and social listening are supported by existing and developing research, practical examples, and theoretical frameworks. This critical review of literature discusses potential consequences of social listening via MCTs. These findings (1) demonstrate alignment among levels of communication, relevant theories, and resulting social consequences, such as big data and mediated deception, and (2) support exploratory research investigating mediated deception, which may contribute towards future studies of social listening and MCTs. In closing, a matrix to visualize the communication contexts, theories, and social consequences related to social listening via MCTs is presented.

## KEYWORDS

Communication Hierarchy, Digital Communication, Mediated Communication Technologies (MCTs), Mediated Deception, Social Consequences, Social Listening, Social Media

## INTRODUCTION

This paper [article] seeks to explore the process of social listening via mediated communication technologies, or MCTs, such as social media and digital messaging apps. These intersecting phenomena are examined across four communication levels, or contexts, of the widely recognized

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hierarchy. Technology's pervasiveness in everyday life continues to influence communication, and grasping the implications of these changes present a problem as individual experiences become more nuanced through online interactions. Social listening continues to develop as an emergent dimension of listening via MCTs, presenting a rich opportunity for an exploratory critical review of existing research and information to better the process when using MCTs and among communication contexts. Upon establishing this research baseline for contemporary social listening using MCTs across communication contexts, potential social consequences are identified and discussed. This report concludes by presenting a matrix of information designed to inspire and support forthcoming and future research exploring MCTs.

## PURPOSE STATEMENT

The landscape of MCTs, including social media and mobile technologies, is continuously innovating, while the user base is steadily growing over time. As a result, the process of social listening emerges as a norm for communication interactions facilitated MCTs. Technological determinism represents an opportunity through this current research comprising a critical review of literature to capture a snapshot of contemporary social listening and MCT history to better inform considerations of emerging implications and outcomes. By exploring two (2) broadly designed research questions, the purpose of this report is to capture literature findings which reveal intersecting information about social listening and MCTs across theories, communication contexts, and developing social consequences.

## Research Questions

This review of existing academic and trade literature attempts to uncover potentially meaningful information regarding the intersection of MCTs, social listening, and the levels of communication. As well, the purpose of this work is to identify possible social consequences inductively as they present among these variables. The potential findings from this exploration and critical review address the following research questions:

**RQ1:** In what ways has the persistent user growth and technological innovation of mediated communication technologies (or MCTs) potentially influenced (a) the traditional communication hierarchy, and (b) the social listening process?

**RQ2:** What social consequences are emerging from the persistent user growth and technological innovation of MCTs?

## SOCIAL LISTENING AND COMMUNICATION USING MCTS

Considering the stated purpose and RQs of this project, this section presents the synthesis of ideas emerging from the critical review of literature among three (3) main phenomena: (1) the social listening process, (2) the evolution and determinism of MCTs, and (3) social listening among the levels of the communication hierarchy.

### Defining the Social Listening

Social listening develops from the persistent popularity of MCTs as communication channels.

Social listening is defined by Stewart and Arnold (2018) as "an active process of attending to, observing, interpreting, and responding to a variety of stimuli through mediated, electronic, and social channels" (p. 86). Traditionally, listening is described as "the process of receiving, attending to, and assigning meaning to aural and visual stimuli" (Wolvin & Coakley, 1996, p. 69). Technological innovation and determinism warranted recognizing social listening due to its distinctiveness within mediated contexts. Social listening encompasses the means in which individuals attend to, observe,

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