Jacintha Sumitro
Professor Bond
HG252: Language, Technology, and the Internet
Assignment 1: Analysis of a Medium of Communication
18 September 2014

Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) technology is a means of modern online communication in today's society. It allows people to make and receive telephone calls, as well as offers additional things that you can do and get done, compared to the traditional phone system. A VOIP service is the actual phone service, the type of VOIP technology, which provides its consumers with the ability to make and receive calls locally and internationally either for free or at such low-costs. Also, essentially all you need is a computer with a webcam, speakers or headset attached, and Internet broadband connection accessibility in order to use such a service; it's as simple as that.

Skype is an example of a VOIP service that has dramatically transformed how people interact—altering the ways people exchange information, how they meet new people, and how they communicate with friends, relatives, and coworkers alike. With Skype, you can share stories, celebrate various momentous occasions, hold important meetings, and discuss group work among colleagues or peers—just about anything you may need to do or get done as people who need to communicate with others on a daily basis. So, since its launch in 2003, Skype communications has focused on bringing people together according to their needs. It continues to make progress in its efforts through combining video, audio, and text (IM) features that make it simple to engage in interactive conversation with the people that matter to them, wherever they are, while being all for free or at little to no cost. Additionally, Skype communications offers people to upgrade to a premium account at a reasonable and affordable price; this is available and is optional for all Skype account members and non-members who wish to sign up. If you decide to pay for either 'Skype Premium' or a Skype subscription(s), you can make calls directly to mobiles and landlines, and even send texts (SMS) around the world with more ease; you may video-chat and call, etc. with more than two people.

The Skype service is popular, with over half a billion users to date, because it is user-friendly; it has attractive advanced features accessible already for free, as just touched upon earlier. Skype users find it best to contact one another from computer to

computer, considering Internet broadband has a good stable connection. However, the Skype service also has downloadable application software, which is also free and easy to install from the Internet. So, with this application software available on your mobile device, for example smartphones and tablets, Skype has gained prominence in its versatility regarding our ability to talk with our contacts, anywhere, in real time.

Skype calls go beyond the traditional telephone conversation with users actively depending on them for video messaging and communication on both a personal and professional level. Skype calls have introduced a new way of communication that makes long distances less overwhelming. "Suddenly, global conversations are as easy as calling your closest neighbor" (Lister, 2014). Skype is used to keep in touch with close friends and family members. In an article written by Kelsey Sheehy, he says, "Skype's video option is for those moments when you really want to talk face-to-face if you want to stay connected while your student (child or best friend) is abroad" (Sheehy, 2012). This way of staying in touch also applies to close friends and/or family members who are away on vacation. Thus, it would be as if he/she never left or almost like you are physically there with him/her alive on the screen to take in a little bit of your experience as it is happening, while chatting at the same time.

Furthermore, Skype has certain features that help you communicate and collaborate professionally in the field of business. Amy McIlwain discusses and analyses some of the prominent advantages of Skype in business communications. "Skype provides value and worth to your company's operations in the following ways: saving on business call costs, relationship-building, and increased productivity" (McIlwain, 2011). First, for corporations on a local or international scale, that requires making and/or receiving many calls daily, it would benefit them and will likely save more money with Skype. Secondly, Skype instant messaging establishes a more long-lasting connection with coworkers and clients and allows for more prompt responses from them. Screen sharing, another one of Skype's free features, is also very useful in giving virtual presentations to and/or with others (Kinsella, n.d. para. 3). Also, Kinsella writes that "the call forwarding on Skype allows you to send any messages or missed calls on to your mobile phone, making sure you do not miss any important opportunities" (Kinsella, n.d.

para. 3). And so, Skype proves to help businesses succeed in getting things done in an

organized and timely manner.

Figure 1: Skype Statistics in 2012
Source: Skype Journal, Skype Numerology
http://www.statisticbrain.com/skype-statistics/

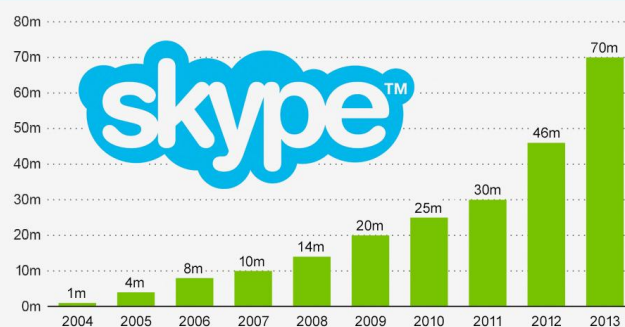| Skype Statistics	
Total number of Skype users as of Jan. 2012	31 million
Average time spent on a Skype conversation	27 minutes
Number of time that active Skype users spend on Skype per month	100 minutes
Total percentage of small businesses that use Skype as primary communication service	35%
Number Skype enabled television sets	50 million
Number of iPhone Skype downloads in 2010	7 million
Number of people who have ever used Skype	560 million
Total percentage of Skype calls that are video to video	40%
Average spent yearly by a paying Skype user	$96
Skype revenue in 2010	$406.2 million
Number of monthly log-ins to Skype	124 million
Number of monthly paying Skype users	8.1 million
Amount of money spent by Microsoft to acquire Skype	$8.5 billion

Figure 2: Skype Key Statistics—2013
http://it-nigeria.com/skype-key-figures-2014/

Figure 3: Skype Connects up to 70million People at the Same Time
http://www.statista.com/chart/1417/skype-usage/

Figure 4: Computer-to-computer Skype calls are now at the level of nearly 40 percent of traditional international telephone calls
Figure 5: Increase in International Phone and Skype Traffic
http://it-nigeria.com/skype-key-figures-2014/

Computer-to-computer Skype calls are now at the level of nearly 40 percent of traditional international telephone calls
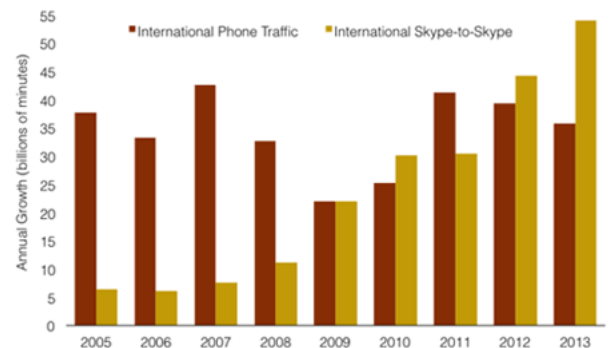International call traffic, 2004–13
Billion minutes
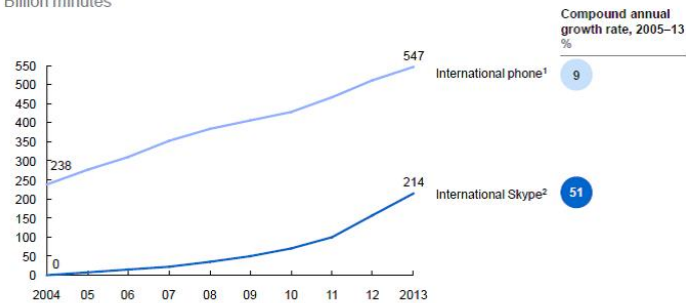
1 Includes time-division multiplexing (TDM) and voice-over Internet protocol (VoIP).
2 Includes only cross-border, computer-to-computer Skype calls.
SOURCE: Telegeography; McKinsey Global Institute analysis

Increase in International Phone and Skype Traffic
Source: TeleGeography
© 2014 PriMetrica, Inc.

Based on these five illustrated tables and graphs, Skype has made significant progress over the years. Figures 1 and 2 tell us that Skype is distinguished in its number of members, and the amount of time spent on calls. Figure 3 shows us just how many people are connected and communicating worldwide at the same time. The chart indicates slow, steady increases from its first year after it was launched, to more substantial increases leading up to its 'tenth birthday' just a year ago. Figures 4 and 5 tell us that in the span of Skype's ten years since its launch in 2003, people have gradually turned away from traditional international phone calls to Skype's VOIP service that is more affordable for people everywhere.

A VOIP service such as Skype exhibits many similar features in comparison to both speech and text. Skype is both time bound and space bound in providing both video/voice chat and text (IM) simultaneously to contact a person(s). Skype also is socially interactive and factually communicative, immediately revisable and repeatedly revisable, and prosaically and graphically rich. Through Skype video chat we can get immediate responses, comments, and reactions from the other person. Skype's text (IM) feature is factually communicative such that information is shared with the other person by sending him/her files, photos, etc. What is spoken over Skype is immediately revisable simply by saying, 'I did not mean to say that'. What is sent over IM within Skype can

also be immediately corrected or deleted entirely, allowing you to more accurately convey what you mean or not what him/her to know what you said. Lastly, video calling and messaging over Skype enables you to see the person's display of emotion and expression as well as is graphically rich depending on the kinds of media files that you share with the other person.

On the other hand, to some extent, Skype's service can be seen as generally just speech like. With video and voice chat, what is being said is instinctive as opposed to messaging you something that is manufactured, for example an expression that is written out is arranged before the IM gets sent. It is also a close substitute to face-to-face conversation; in video chat you are physically able to see the person to whom you are talking just like he/she is sitting right in front or beside you. And, Skype is loosely structured such that you or the other person changes what he/she says in an instant.

Three discussions on Skype: changes in how we communicate

An article written by Philippa Nicole Barr, asks its readers, does Skype help or hinder communication? She emphasizes the point that "the Internet has opened doors for us to communicate with people across the globe—but the technology often leads to misunderstanding" (Barr, 2013, para. 2). What Barr means by this is that Skype lacks certain attributes that still distinguishes speech greatly as "one of the most valued form of communication between humans" (Barr, 2013, para. 1). From her perspective, Skype is effectively 'lost in translation'. In other words, Skype call technology is tricky and we will need to start developing upon digital communications that aim to improve speech quality, the transmissions of the prosody of our emotions, and to acknowledge the significance of non-verbal cues more when communicating so that what gets expressed is not misconstrued. One thing she does know for certain is "improvements will depend increasingly on the synthesis of multimedia capabilities and recognition of our cultural differences in communicating, interpreting, and understanding one another" (Barr, 2013, last para.).

According to an article by author Kane Fulton, Skype is a video star that changed communication forever. "Skype's impact was huge, not only on how we communicate but also our expectations around how, where and how often we do it" (Fulton, 2013, para. 2). Fulton's article mainly talks about how Skype's success can effectively be attributed

to its focus on the concept of 'sharing is caring'. Skype's capabilities to allow for personal one-to-one conversations, for holding business meetings in conference chat, and for transferring media messages and files is influential globally without a doubt. In other words, in its 10 years since its launch, these features have not gone unnoticed and continue to be whole-heartedly embraced by Skype users. The article leaves its readers to ponder upon what's in store for Skype within the next ten years? There is no definite one answer to this, "…but you can be certain that our thirst for increasingly complex communication tools will take the service in ever more interesting and practical directions" (Fulton, 2013, para. 15).

Author Mark Gwilliam writes a third article that is relevant regarding Skype communication and its affects on how we interact in society today. Gwilliam addresses how Skype's communication media channels (text, video, graphics, and sounds) "bring about three major changes to the way we communicate: we retain much more information, employees and team members feel much more empowered, and businesses go global—easily and inexpensively" (Gwilliam, n.d. para. 7). He puts emphasis on the Skype communication medium in contrast to the 'traditional communication medium'. He assures his readers that "Skype is effective and empowering; makes people more responsive and interactive, has a wide reach, and is free" (Gwilliam, n.d. last para.).

Conclusion and Outlook

In summary, the Skype communication medium is not quite the perfect choice when it comes to VOIP technologies and services; it has its disadvantages. Yet, Skype is continuing to make its strides worldwide in bringing people together whenever and wherever they may be. Under Microsoft Corporation, Skype's future has yet to be determined, but for certain this communication tool is in store for some new innovative features that will seek to expand its appeal to more consumers and businesses respectively.

References

Barr, P. Nicole. (2013, December 17). *Does Skype help or hinder communication?* Retrieved 15 September 2014 http://theconversation.com/does-skype-help-or-hinder-communication-21121

Fulton. K. (2013, August 29). *Skype turns 10: How the video star changed communication forever*. Retrieved 15 September 2014. http://www.techradar.com/news/internet/voip/skype-turns-10-how-the-video-star-changed-how-we-communicate-1176314#null

Gwilliam, M. (n.d.). *Communication. How Skype Has Changed The Way We Communicate*. Retrieved 15 September 2014 http://www.evancarmichael.com/Small-Business-Consulting/943/How-SKYPE-has-changed-the-way-we-communicate.html

Kinsella, K. (n.d.). *Benefits of Skype for Business.* Retrieved September 13, 2014. http://www.cpaireland.ie/your-business/business-resource/technology/benefits-of-skype-for-business

Lister, K. (2014, April 28). *How I Use Skype to Keep in Touch With Friends and Family.* Retrieved 13 September 2014. http://www.wisebread.com/how-i-use-skype-to-keep-in-touch-with-friends-and-family

Mcllwain, A. (2011, June 16). The Advantages of Skype in Business Communications. Retrieved 13 September 2014. http://financialsocialmedia.com/the-advantages-of-skype-in-business-communications/

Sheehy, K. (2012, June 8). *Stay Connected While Your Student is Abroad*. Retrieved 13 September 2014. http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2012/06/08/stay-connected-while-your-student-is-abroad

Sources of tables, charts, and graphs:
http://www.statisticbrain.com/skype-statistics/
http://www.statista.com/chart/1417/skype-usage/
http://it-nigeria.com/skype-key-figures-2014/