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An Abstract of  
GECYBERSCHAFT: A THEORETICAL MODEL FOR THE ANALYSIS  
OF EMERGING ELECTRONIC COMMUNITIES

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This is a study of whether a new form of community—virtual community—is emerging in the Western world at the turn of the twenty-first century. It includes the development of a model for analyzing the characteristics of human communities which may be used to examine any period of human history as well as to make projections concerning the features of community forms which may evolve in the future.

The study begins with an analysis of the observations of sociologists contrasting societal characteristics of *gemeinschaft* (community as traditionally conceived) and those of *gesellschaft* (community in the period following the Manufacturing Revolution). These observations form the foundation of the model for examining community forms. The study continues with an exploration of changes in the environment, triggered in part by the revolution in electronic communications and information, which have given rise to the concept as well as the emergence of virtual community and of the *gecyberschaft* social period.

The model framework is then extended through the application of relevant concepts and observations drawn from the study of complex systems and media ecology. Next, beginning with two data points in each area (characteristics observed in *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*) and applying vectors from complex systems and media ecology, the model is used to predict anticipated characteristics of virtual community and the *gecyberschaft* period. These predictions form a framework for examining societal characteristics emerging at

the turn of the twenty-first century. The observations lead to the conclusion that there is, indeed, a coherent model of virtual community that is supported by sufficient evidence to indicate the presence of an emergent geczyberschaft period and social form. An argument is presented for the significant role of communications media and information in the precipitating environment of societal change.