



## The 5<sup>th</sup> EWC International Graduate Student Conference

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**Title:**

Culture and Technology: An inquiry into the intercultural intersubjective webs of Indian international students at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

**Abstract:**

This paper details an inquiry into the role of technology in the cultural resilience, resistance, assimilation and acculturation of graduate students from India who find themselves embedded within the academic culture of the University of Hawaii at Manoa, the unique multicultural environment of Hawaii and the prominent and sometimes dominant discursive practices of the US national culture.

Taking a first person indigenous ethnographic approach, based on participant-observation of the Indian graduate student community and from a privileged access to information as a community insider as well as an active community member, I will attempt to critically illuminate the role of technology both in its mediation and moderation of cultural practices. I will then proceed to describe how Indian festivals and other cultural and religious practices are performed, continued and discussed in Hawaii and how they are represented and legitimated in the Indian student community discourse. I will also demonstrate how secondary cultural connections to India are maintained through the consumption and circulation of popular cultural artifacts and resources like movies, music and small business establishments in addition to the primary cultural connections to family and friends. Having described the constituent cultural practices of this community, I then attempt to illuminate the role played by various technologies like wireless and voice over internet telephony, the Internet, the WWW and the email, home video technology. A critical investigation into the discursive flux of these cultural practices reveals the various reifications and contemplations that signify the various modes of cultural consumption.

Drawing eclectically from cultural studies, Poster's conception of the "modes of information", Castells' conception of "networked individualism" and Veblen's "theory of the leisure class", I will argue that the role of technology in these discursive practices is often taken for granted and is not the subject of reflection even though their economic costs are actively present in the community discourse. I will substantiate my argument with empirical evidence, in the form of interviews and surveys, collected during my ethnographic field study. I will also provide an interpretation of this analysis situating it within the intercultural intersubjective system (Vatrapu, in preparation) and argue that the intersubjective webs of significance are technologically mediated and the modes of information are economically determined.

I will conclude by emphasizing the interplay of culture, language and technology in the Indian student community and demonstrating the moral ambivalence involved in analytically judging the purposes, processes and products of technology. A systematic investigation of the cultural practices highlights the privileged position of the Indian graduate students at University of Hawaii at Manoa when compared to their counterparts in India but also underscores cultural and social costs of alienation and assimilation into the fabric of Hawaii and US. The cross-cultural context poses both new opportunities and new threats. Given this reality, navigating change itself becomes a negotiated practice that is reified and legitimated in discourse via language, culture, and religion.