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From Face to Face Communication to Computer Mediated Communication: An Analysis of changing Personality & Language Traits

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Abstract:

With the expanding use of e-mail, instant messaging and sms, mediated human communication is emerging rapidly in interpersonal communication. The impact of the features of the technology, and the factors that influence the adoption of new communication technologies have been the focus of much research in the last decade. A lot of variables can be considered while explaining the use of communication technology in a social setting. Among them are considerations of time and space, group culture and norms, socio-economic variables, technophobia, intelligence and personality. The present research explores personality as an important measure of individual difference in the analysis of computer mediated communication (CMC).

Keywords: *Face to Face , Communication, short message, service, sms, instant messaging, chat,*

Introduction:

The use of the internet and technology has become commonplace among most Indians, increasing in use over the past few decades. Much of the early research on CMC focuses on the nature of the channel, and implications these characteristics have for communication. CMC is text-based, and therefore non-verbal communication is in large part eliminated. CMC, when used in an asynchronous format (e-mail) does not allow for immediate feedback, which in turn hinders a sender's ability to correct a message if a receiver's interpretation is inaccurate. When feedback is delayed and users cannot rely on nonverbal cues, ambiguity is increased, thereby creating opportunity for miscommunication. (Perry, 2010)

CMC varies by degree of synchronization with synchronous CMC including channels such as online chatting and asynchronous channels including e-mail. While some may argue that synchronous channels would be more advantageous in that they allow for quicker feedback, others argue that asynchronous channels are more beneficial to users in that they allow for more reflection and reconsideration of one's message before sending (Kruger, Epley, Parker, & Ng, 2005). The vast majority of CMC models, theories and empirical research support the first theory of the lack of synchronization being a hindrance to communication. It may also be the case that users would prefer different levels of synchronization based upon the content of the message and the context in which it is being sent.

The argument is clear that CMC is a channel that lacks non-verbal cues that exist in FtF (Face to Face) communication such as facial expression and tone of voice. The assumption is that these cues are beneficial in that they assist in meaning making of a message beyond the actual words being uttered. Furthermore, when these cues are absent, miscommunication will be the result. This assumption, however, may not always be valid. In Pragmatics of Human Communication, axioms of communication are discussed, one of which states that all messages have report and command functions (Watzlawick, et al., 1967). The report (or content) of a message is declarative, conveying information, while the command is an implied message based on expectations, defined by the relationship between those communicating.

In the context of CMC, the report would refer to the text-based communication being transmitted. However, the implied meaning of the command that exists in social cues would be absent. This may actually be advantageous for communication in that it would help users focus on content without the distraction of command messages. The case can be made that the presence of non-verbal cues does not always guarantee perception that is more accurate or satisfying communication. Their absence in CMC, while potentially explaining some degree of difference across communication environments, does not necessarily dictate that FtF interaction will be more satisfying or that CMC, lacking these cues, will be less satisfying. The next section will discuss how users can actually learn to adapt to this channel, and how cues may be filtered back, influencing one's experience of the channel. (Perry, 2010)

In a study of small groups, it was found that during initial meetings FtF users reported higher satisfaction and task performance than did those users in the CMC environment. However, over time the margin of difference in task performance decreased and in turn, users were reporting similar levels of communication satisfaction, regardless of communication environment (Hollingshead, Mcgrath, & O'Connor, 1993). This indicates that CMC is likely to be useful to those who have adapted to the channel. These findings have implications for media naturalness theory in that with increased use and familiarity with the technology, it is possible that the channel can be perceived as being more natural. According to Spitzberg's model (2006), as CMC competence increases, coorientation (understanding, accuracy, and clarity), efficiency, task success/accomplishment, satisfaction and relationship development (intimacy) are more likely to occur.

Researchers have begun to examine why some communicators prefer creating and maintaining relationships through mediated rather than face-to-face communication.

They have found that a heavy preference for online social interaction (POSI) develops when people believe they are safer, more confident, and more successful in online interpersonal relationships than in person. Two complementary factors help explain how and why a preference develops for online communication to the exclusion of face-to-face interaction. The first involves social skills—or more accurately, a lack of those skills. People who typically struggle

to communicate successfully in person because of nervousness or anxiety can communicate online without facing many challenges. They can edit thoughts and transmit them when and how they want, and even construct identities that are more attractive than their in person presence. In online interaction, factors such as physical attractiveness, stammering, blushing, and a host of other concerns become non-issues.

As online interaction proves successful, users' sense of self-efficacy (what they believe they are capable of doing) grows. When lonely and socially anxious people who struggle with social interaction offline receive positive feedback from others online, it enhances their self-esteem. These people begin to feel respected and important online but disconfirmed offline. This leads to an increasing dependence on and desire for online interpersonal interaction. Walther, DeAndrea & Tong (2009)

Changing Attitude:

The following are CMC characteristics: Cherny (1995, 1999)

1. The size of an utterance is determined entirely by the speaker. In general, however, in synchronous CMC, utterances are rather short: an average range of 5–13 words per utterances in conversations on MUDs. This increases the feeling of interactivity for participants and lets listeners know that the speaker is not idle and not finished speaking. •
2. It is impossible to overlap utterances. In synchronous CMC, two users may be typing at the same time, but it is only upon pressing "return" that their utterance is processed by the MUD/IRC and displayed to other users. •
3. In synchronous CMC, the order of utterances need not be sequentially relevant for meaningful conversation to take place. Due to the persistent nature of text-based CMC, a communicator need not be present at the time of the utterances, but rather has the option of returning to one's computer later to catch up on what has been transmitted.

Moreover, in most CMC environments, and in asynchronous CMC environments especially, two typical features of face-to-face conversation are missing:

1. The collaborative commitment of participants and the co-formulation of the message.
2. Feedback, which allows the social meaning of the message to be processed immediately

CMC in no way guarantees that a user's declared identity is the real one. The use of false identities, often of a different sex, is widespread in electronic communities and in IRC especially. Different areas of CMC are characterized by intense language, swearing, negative or hostile communication. As experienced by many users of Usenet Newsgroup or Inter- net Relay Chat, the intensity of many communicative exchanges is usually heat. To reduce the number of offending messages, net groups have established a netiquette—norms of network usage—that specifically ad- dresses how the user can write and post messages. These norms stress obligations for group and self-monitoring to insure that members maintain a correct language, respect for the interlocutor, and communicative relevance.

The typical breach of netiquette involves the use of flames. For instance, Rice describes flaming as "the tendency to react more critically or with greater hostility, leading to an escalation of conflict." Following this line Walther defines it as "insults, swearing, and hostile instances of behaviour." A more effective definition is the one provided by Thompsen and Ahn: flaming is composed by CMC behaviours that are interpreted to be inappropriately hostile. This definition focuses on an important point: for a flame to take place two separate actions must occur. First the behaviour has to be created. Then someone else has to interpret the behaviour as being offensive. However, the use of inappropriate language is only one of the possible miscommunication processes typical of CMC.

The word "lurking" is used to define the behaviour of subscribers to electronic forums who rarely or never send contributions to the discussions, content to read what others are writing. In CMC, a "lurker" is equivalent to a spy: someone who listens to discussions within a chatroom but doesn't make his or her presence known. The motivations for this behaviour are varied: having nothing to say, feeling "outclassed" by scholars who post frequently, or simply enjoying the exchange as a passive reader. More- over, the use of lurking is a good strategy for getting a sense of what is acceptable in a new environment. However, the drawback to lurking is that, in an entirely text-based environment, if a user writes nothing he/she effectively ceases to exist. As one witty user noted, "I post, therefore I am."

Sproull and Kiesler said that CMC occurs in a social vacuum where the personal identities of subjects tend to fade and vanish. The most important consequences of this are as follows:

a. CMC subjects tend to express themselves more openly and freely: "People who interact via computer are isolated from social rules and feel less subject to criticism and control. This sense of privacy makes them feel less inhibited in their relations with others."

b. At the same time, however, loss of personal identity may encourage subjects to break social rules.

In general, if sufficient time is available, CMC allows the development of interpersonal relationships, and even intimacy, between the communicators. How is this possible? And in particular, what are the elements required for creating an interpersonal relationship between CMC users? The SIP perspective identified the following factors:

a. A priori relational motivators: Possible drives are the affiliation motive, impression management or the need for dominance. •

b. Time: It takes longer to learn how to use the medium, to get to know each other and to build up trust and friendships via CMC. •

c. Encoding of relational messages: CMC users have to learn how to transmit relational content even with the limitations of the available channels. In particular they have to understand how to verbalize relational messages. •

d. Impression formation. In CMC, this happens by decoding the verbal messages of the

communication partner. Despite the limits imposed by CMC users are able to create them. They use knowledge-generation strategies such as interrogation, self-disclosure, deception detection, environ- mental structuring, and deviation testing to gather psychological knowledge-level information about other persons.

In particular the following elements are possible indexes of the development of the elation.

a. Low level of formality: When CMC users feel more comfortable communicating with each other, they will not be focused on the formal aspects of communication. The amount of formality can be evaluated by the attention to general rules, the form of address a communicator chooses, as well as the figures of speech he or she employs.

b. Rate of information exchange: When CMC users create a sufficient level of trust and intimacy the rate of information ex- changed increases. This also strengthens the personal relation: when more messages are sent, users grow more comfort- able with each other and interesting topics of conversation are brought up. On the other side, a sufficient rate of information exchange is required for supporting any personal relation. •

c. Trust and receptivity: When CMC users feel more trust in another person, they are more likely to reveal personal details about themselves. The amount of trust is usually expressed through the vulnerability of people's revelations and their self-disclosing opinions on different issues.

CMC interlocutors are forced to find alternative way for reproducing the meta-communicative features (emotions, illocutionary force) of face-to-face conversation. According to Utz, it is possible identify three different forms of emotional expressions in CMC: emoticons, social verbs and emotes. Emoticons (also smileys) are the most used textual devices: ASCII glyphs designed to show an emotional state in plain text messages. These symbols are widely known and commonly recognized among computer-mediated communication users, and they are described by most observers as substituting for the nonverbal cues that are missing from CMC in comparison to face-to face communication. Both male and female users have altered the definition of emoticon to suit their conception of emotion. On one hand, males have expanded on the conventional definition of emotion to include sarcasm and teasing. On the other hand, female users have expanded on the male definition of emoticons and their use adding other dimensions including solidarity, support, assertion of positive feelings, and thanks.

And as for non verbal emotional expression, there is some confusion in emoticon interpretations: "In some instances the emoticon :-Q means user smokes; others define it as meaning tongue hanging out in nausea or sticking out tongue. A more widely used emoticon for user sticking out tongue is :-P." In general there is a broad acceptance in the interpretation of the basic smiley, frowney, and winkey emoticons: their respective meaning is humour, sadness, and sarcasm. However, the more elaborate the emoticons become, the greater variation one finds in the

interpretations available for them. Emoticons are seen as helpful in expressing socio-emotional contents. More interesting, the use of emoticons is correlated with development of online friendships. However, emoticons' contribution to the interpretation was limited and outweighed by verbal content and a negativity effect was found: any negative message, expressed either verbally or using an emoticon, shifts message interpretation in the direction of the negative element.

The following are the outcomes of computer mediated communication: (Riva, 2002)

a. The Miscommunication as a Chance Theory (MaCHT): A strategic use of miscommunication may enhance the degrees of freedom available to the communicators during an interaction. If a user handles well the miscommunication processes typical of CMC, he/she may even achieve results difficult to obtain in face-to-face meetings. •

b. The Positioning Theory (PT): PT replaces the traditional concept of role with the concept of positioning. The main difference between the two is that a role is a stable and clearly defined category, while positioning is a dynamic process generated by communication.

c. The Situated Action Theory (SAT): Action is not the execution of a ready-conceived plan, but the subject's adaptation to context.

d. The Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effect (SIDE): A social or a group identity replaces individual identity in CMC.

e. The Social Information Processing (SIP) Perspective: Users adapt existing communicative cues, within constraints of language and textual display, to support processes of relational management.

Conclusion:

Mediated communication operates on similar principles and goals as face-to-face communication. However, there are also significant differences including reduced nonverbal cues, variable synchronicity, and the existence of a permanent, public record that can be viewed as personally by others. The asynchrony and reduced nonverbal cues of mediated communication expand the opportunities for strategic self-presentation. These same features of technology that facilitate hyperpersonal relationships can also be used by people to misrepresent who they are and deceive others. Since nonverbal information is often not available, people rely on different cues, such as the warranting value of information, to guide the impressions they form. Excessive usage of the Internet can lead to negative consequences. However, there is also strong evidence that various forms of mediated communication help initiate, maintain, and intensify interpersonal relationships. By understanding the pros, cons, and unique features of mediated communication, greater communicative competence can be achieved, enhancing your interpersonal interactions.

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