IT Capstone Project Sample

Different Meanings of Online Communication and Their Impact on Relationships

Abstract

This paper looks into four articles reporting on data from research done online (via the Internet), offline relationships, and their connection with computer-mediated communication (CMC). However, the articles differ in their definition and utilization of CMC. Baron and Kurt (2004) emphasize that face-to-face interactions are generally more interactive compared to CMC and are often designed and utilized in emails, creating a feeling of intimacy or closeness. On the other hand, there are other articles that define CMC in a different way, and thus, providing different results. This capstone project also looks into Claren, Baron, and Kurt's (2004) research in connection with the other three articles to suggest that all types of CMC need to be studied so as to understand how it influences both online and offline relationships completely.

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Several studies have been done regarding different aspects of Internet relationships, looking deeper into overall levels of closeness, intimacy, different modalities in communication as well as the frequency of use of CMC. However, there are contradictory results that are being suggested in the research since only particular facets of CMC are studied, for instance, through email only. Claren, Baron, and Kurt (2004) suggest that face-to-face interactions are generally considered more effective compared to CMC in the creation of a feeling of intimacy or closeness, while there are also other studies that suggest otherwise. In order to understand how online and offline relationships are being impacted by CMC, all types need to be studied. This project further looks into Claren et al.'s research in contrast to other research, proposing that additional research should be conducted in order to understand better how these online relationships can have an impact on relationships.

Literature Review

In Claren et al.'s (2004) summary article that reviews empirical studies on the social relationships online, it was discovered that CMC, particularly email, becomes less effective as compared to face-to-face contact when it comes

to the creation and maintenance of closer social relationships. Two of the three studies on Internet and non-Internet relationships discovered that the frequency of using each of the modalities was linked significantly to the strength of the specific relationship (Claren et al., 2004). The overall strength of the relationship was also best predicted by face-to-face contact and communication on the phone since participants commonly labeled email as an inferior type of maintaining both personal and social relationships compared to face-to-face as well as phone contacts.

Claren et al. (2004) reviewed a further study conducted in 2001 by the AANet Project. In the project, Kurt, Maliny, Sedler, Kim, and Scher (2001) have compared the overall value of utilizing both CMC as well as non-CMC in maintaining relationships with their partners. They have discovered that the participants less frequently corresponded with their online partner compared to the offline partner. The difference may not really turn out to be significant since it only happens at least two times less every month. However, as found in other self-report surveys, the participants also report a feeling of being less intimate and more distant towards their online partner compared to their offline partner. This discovery may be connected to the belief of the participants that email is considered as an inferior mode in personal communication and relationships.

Intimacy is much important in creating and maintaining relationships since it has been defined as sharing the innermost being of a person with another person (Haley, Ween, Smorn & Eastbrook, 2006). Relationships are facilitated by reciprocal self-disclosing between the partners, regardless of CMC or non-CMC. Claren et al.'s (2004) results contradict other studies that work on the connection between relationships and intimacy through CMC.

Haley et al. (2006) focused on the relationship between the frequent use of Instant Messenger (IM) as well as the degree of assumed intimacy among friends. Using IM instead of using email as a CMC mode was studied since IM provides support to a non-professional environment that factors intimate social exchanges. The results suggest that there is an existing positive relationship between the overall frequency of using IM, showing that participants ultimately feel closer towards their online partners as time passes through the CMC mode.

In the same way, Unberg and Finley (2006) focused on the impact of Internet relationships in terms of primary offline relationships as well as the perceived intimacy.

Intimacy or self-disclosure was measured with the mention of shared secrets and discussion of personal problems. The participants have reported a relatively higher self-disclosure level in their online relationship in contrast to their main relationship. On the other hand, the primary relationships of the participants were also reported as self-disclosed in the past, but the current disclosure level was assumed to be lower (Unberg & Finley, 2006). The result suggests that participants have turned online to fulfill their longing for intimacy. Conclusions and Recommendations

So as to reach a complete understanding of the real effect of CMC on both online as well as offline relationships, it is much important to study different facets of CMC. That includes the use of IM, email, video chat, voice chat, online diaries, journals, and social groups online with chatrooms and message boards. The impact on relationships of each of the modalities may turn out to be different, as shown in the discrepancies in the intimacy between IM and email correspondence.

References

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