Social Communication: Recommendations for a Hybrid Approach

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ABSTRACT

Scholars continue to analyze the past, present and future of computer mediated communications (CMC) in an attempt to make sense of the pervasive social media environment in which people operate today. George Santayana said, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Social media grew, in part, out of a need to overcome communication limitations of geographical distance and time. In the process, human connection has suffered and some may even long for a way to close the geographic distance or approximate face-to-face interactions. This examination looks at hybrid approaches to social communication.

KEYWORDS

Computer Mediated Communications (CMC), Face-To-Face Interactions, Social Media Environment, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Today’s scholars are beginning to understand the importance of taking a hybrid approach to social communication that combines the best of face-to-face and online interactions. This approach considers internal and external forces on people and their communication environment. My research suggests a hybrid approach that combines the best of face-to-face and online communication. Researchers have found that even when digital communication is the better method, it was more effective when combined with face-to-face interactions (Brown, 2017, p. 209). All parties in a communication must strive to get the best possible message-medium fit tailored to the choice of media and type of use. This should result in enhanced collaborations focused on message, media-mix, task, digital communication competence, interaction partners, optimal outcomes, and considerations of context (Bubaš, 2001).

This article examines the continued growth of computer-mediated communication as a starting point in working toward a hybrid approach to combining face-to-face and
online activities. We then move to a discussion of the importance of trust in effective collaborations. Trust is built, in part, by overcoming and adjusting to barriers to communication. Finally, the article discusses aspects of human interactions leading to the proposed hybrid approach.

For instance, James Arthur Baldwin, American novelist, essayist, playwright, poet, and social critic, said, “Know from whence you came. If you know whence you came, there are absolutely no limitations to where you can go (2018).” Success in social networking relies on creating relationships and building strong ties.

The prevalence of digital communications might suggest that there are no issues with communication, or even that there is no need to focus on face-to-face interactions. I disagree. For instance, researchers in the United Kingdom analyzed the quality of face-to-face interactions and the way in which they are influenced by mobile communication technology (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013). The results point to the difficulty that the mere presence of mobile phones causes difficulties in developing interpersonal trust and closeness, or even in starting a face-to-face communication at all (Brown, 2017, p. 3). The UK research also suggests that the more personal the interaction, the higher the level of difficulty (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013).

COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

CMC is a popular way people use information technology to interact. CMC is portable, and it removes the boundaries or limitations of geographical distance and time. Computer-mediated relating (CMR) is another term relevant for our learning journey because it addresses interpersonal dimensions of interactions, encompassing a broader spectrum of exchanges than CMC might, such as online friendships and romantic communications (Cooper and Sportolari 1997, Whitty and Gavin 2001).

The current discussion suggests tools that are available to communicators and it suggests limitations that exist in strictly online communications. This discussion addresses how the use of face-to-face skills can enhance CMC activities. For instance, the feedback cycle is crucial in communication importance because we know that messages are rarely fully “one-way” activities. The sender needs clarification that the receiver or receivers decoded the message in the way it was intended or that they received the value that the sender intended to provide in the communication. A mutual agreement between the communicating parties is vital to ensure effective interactions that are true to the original message and its meaning. This agreement sets the stage for the continuing, cyclic conversation that should follow the original engagement. A truly effective communication features all parties accepting responsibility to exhibit authenticity and accuracy. Human contact or interaction can be important to improving the engagement, but they are not normally available in digital communications.

CMC is a powerful way to connect with people and studies on Gen Y and Millennials demonstrate their constantly growing numbers in terms of participation. These groups are known to prefer the use of instant messaging or other social media over stopping by an office for a talk (Tardanico, 2012). That preference makes it a
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