Review Article   **Open Access**

New Media in Interpersonal Communication

Ngugi Peter Kibe* and Charles Kinyua Kamunyu

JKUAT University, Kenya

Abstract

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is literally altering the norms of interpersonal interaction and creating a new system of messages by which people attempt to understand one another both verbally and nonverbally. It's rare to look around and not see people texting, processing their email, or checking their Facebook status using smart phones, laptops, or iPads and in some of the most unusual places. Technology has changed the way we understand and handle our interpersonal relationships. Little research has been done to evaluate the impact that computer-mediated technology has had on the theoretical view of relational closeness. In social networking like Facebook, the user is constantly using social penetration theory by displaying self-disclosure. Annie McCarthy posits that: a Face book user can set their privacy settings to determine their levels of self-disclosure. This paper attempts to explore these perspectives in relationship development.

Definition of Terms

Social media

These are websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Thesaurus© Cambridge University Press).

Introduction

Allyn and Bacon, quotes psychologist Carl Jung who once said, "The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances; if there is any reaction, both are transformed." An interaction can be face to face or technologically mediated.

Richard Nordquist comments that interpersonal communication is the process by which people exchange information, feelings, and meaning through verbal and non-verbal messages: it is face-to-face communication. Interpersonal communication is not just about what is actually said-the language used-but *how* it is said and the non-verbal messages sent through tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures and body language.

Lawrence Erlbaum, communication is an interactive process. "Interaction means that both parties--persons or entities--can affect the other. In this way, both parties are senders and receivers. They are also co-persuaders in that they may take turns trying to affect one another by sharing symbols."

- There are many different models of interpersonal communication process, but the key elements are:
- The sender or communicator (the person who initiates a message)
- The receiver or interpreter (the person to whom a message is directed)
- The message (the verbal and/or nonverbal content that must be encoded by the sender and decoded by the receiver)
- The channel (the medium by which the message is delivered and received)
- The context (the setting and situation in which communication takes place)
- Noise (anything that interferes with the accurate expression or reception of a message)
- Feedback (a response from the receiver indicating whether a message has been received in its intended form)

One of the hottest areas of interpersonal communication research is how technology is influencing our interpersonal communication and how our interpersonal communication is influencing the development of technologies. It's rare to look around and not see people texting, processing their email, or checking their Facebook status using smart phones, laptops, or iPads and in some of the most unusual places. Technology has changed the way we understand and handle our interpersonal relationships. Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is literally altering the norms of interpersonal interaction and creating a new system of messages by which people attempt to understand one another both verbally and nonverbally.

According to Mcluhan [1], technology refers to human inventions that enhance communication. The new technologies like alphabets, printing press, electronic media and now digital communication have effect on man's cognition and social organization which in turn affect the culture of any society. Today more electronic discoveries have been made like the computer, the TV, the Internet, the Cellular phone, radio etc. Human societies are no longer closed systems but interconnected. It is claimed that a new technology sometimes destroys more than it creates. Neil Postman (New York University) argues that TV is detrimental to society because it has led to the loss of serious public discourse. The world of TV turns everything into entertainment and everyone into juvenile adults. He further notes that triviality trumps

*Corresponding author: Ngugi Peter Kibe, JKUAT University, Post box: 20117-834, Naivasha, Kenya, Tel: 0754639-844; E-mail: ngugi.leoking@gmail.com

seriousness. His concern on the coming age of computer was that it concerned itself with more information than humane wisdom. The Internet as an extension of our consciousness is an electric technology that enables instantaneous movement of information from every quarter to every point at the same time. Electric speed heightens human awareness. Web connections have created new social realities in communication culture. The electronic media in form of World Wide Web create unified communities.

Boeder, observes that computer mediated communication has taken the place of coffee-house discourse. Castells, argue that the diffusion of Internet, mobile communication and digital communication and a range of social software tools have prompted the development of interactive communication. These new online media and social networks have created new communication spaces where debate can be conducted. Just like TV, Radio and other media, the internet terrain has produced new spaces for information, debate and participation as well as new possibilities for manipulation and social control according to Keller. The new media has invented terms such as global village, cyberspace, blogosphere and virtual community. The new media is different from the traditional media in that it attracts millions of people from al-over the world for instance the face book was reported to have 150 million users by March 2011, from al-over the world. Murru, say that in online contexts anyone can potentially take the role of speaker with practically no cost, thus multiplying the source of news and freeing the flux of communication and information from any sort of system control. The Internet is not confined to physical space constraints such as frequency bandwidth; it can expand to infinite length allowing everyone to be a publisher or producer. This free flow of information can promote diversity of views and expand democratic space. Internet can therefore create critical discourse that may influence political action. Networking of individuals enables the public to hold all institutions of government and politics more accountable. The emergence of the internet leads to a globalization of public sphere and public opinion. The transnational context or global public sphere offer forum for political discussion. Increased speed of communication has given people the ability to read about, spread and react to global news quickly. We become more involved with one another around the world. This has formed new sociological structures within the context of culture. Technology also fosters the idea of conglomerate yet unified global community.

Theoritical Framework

Social penetration theory

Social Penetration Theory states that as relationships develop, people move from relatively shallow levels of self-disclosure to more intimate disclosures [2]. The theory states that this process occurs primarily through self-disclosure and closeness develops if the participants proceed in a gradual and orderly fashion from superficial to intimate levels of exchange as a function of both immediate and forecast outcomes. Closeness varies according to the following factors: rewards versus benefits; costs versus vulnerability; satisfaction; stability and security.

In social networking like Facebook, the user is constantly using social penetration theory by displaying self-disclosure. Annie McCarthy [3] a Face book user can set their privacy settings to determine their levels of self-disclosure. Little research has been done to evaluate the impact that computer-mediated technology has had on the theoretical view of relational closeness. With hundreds of social networking websites linking people together around the world, research should look at effects of social network that suggest that the theory has

evolved, eliminating layers in this global online world. Inspite of the many limitations highlighted by scholars, the theory explains how intimacy in relationships develops. This paper attempts to explore these perspectives in relationship development. Black, explored how social-networking sites will continue to search for the most efficient way to make people more visible and more connected to people they know without exposing them to unwanted solicitations and information. The balance between sharing and protecting personal data is the key to their success.

A study done about the connection on how couples or other romantic relationships have trust, commitment, and affection towards each other and the amount of self-disclosure each person gives to the one another revealed that If they met before talking over the Internet they are more likely to reveal personal information due to trusting someone easier.

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) can be thought of as another way in which people can develop relationships. Internet has thought to broaden the way people communicate and build relationships. By opening up a new window in which people could be open-minded and unconventional and partners from traditional limitations like time and place. Take Facebook as an example, users are able to determine their level and degree of self-disclosure by setting their privacy settings [3]. People achieve the breadth via demonstrating everyday life and share surface information while develop intimate relationship with great depth by sending private Facebook messages and creating closed group [4] there could be deceitful or dishonest intents involved from people on the Internet.

Business professionals have adopted the use of Facebook at a rapid pace. For the business professional, Facebook is a fun, less formal alternative to LinkedIn. Conversation can be found through discussion threads within Facebook groups, with users engaging in self-disclosure. Finding groups that both match a user's interests, which are consistently active, can be hit or miss depending on what topics the user is looking for.

Uses and Gratification Theory

Blumler and Elihu Katz, suggest that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media. Users take an active part in the communication process and are goal oriented in their media use. The approach suggests that people use the media to fulfill specific gratifications. The theorists say that a media user seeks out a media source that best fulfills the needs of the user. Uses and gratifications assume that the user has alternate choices to satisfy their need.

The theory places more focus on the consumer, or audience, instead of the actual message itself by asking "what people do with media" rather than "what media does to people" [5]. This theory would then imply that the media compete against other information sources for viewers [6]. This theory can be said to have a user/audience-centered approach.

There are three objectives in developing uses and gratifications theory:

1. To explain how individuals use mass communication to gratify their needs. "What do people do with the media?"

2. To discover underlying motives for individuals' media use.

3. To identify the positive and the negative consequences of individual media use. At the core of uses and gratifications

theory lies the assumption that audience members actively seek out the mass media to satisfy individual needs.

Katz, Gurevitch and Haas, developed 35 needs taken from the social and psychological functions of the mass media and put them into five categories:

1. **Cognitive needs**, including acquiring information, knowledge and understanding;

2. **Affective needs,** including emotion, pleasure, feelings;

3. **Personal integrative needs**, including credibility, stability, status;

4. **Social integrative needs**, including interacting with family and friends; and

5. **Tension release needs**, including escape and diversion.

Mobile phones, due to their nature of mobility, constant access, and options to both add and access content, have the following uses and gratifications:

- Affection/sociability
- Entertainment
- Instrumentality
- Psychological reassurance
- Fashion/status
- Mobility
- Immediate access

The Internet provides a new and deep field for exploring UGT. It was found to have three main categories of gratifications: content gratification, process gratification, and social gratification [7].

- **Content**: Uses for the Internet include the need for researching or finding specific information or material, which are gratified with content.

- **Process**: Users gain gratification from the experience of purposeful navigating or random browsing of the Internet in its functional process.

- **Social**: Uses encompass a wide range of forming and deepening social ties.

Scholars like LaRose et al. utilize UGT to understand Internet usage via a socio-cognitive framework to reduce uncertainties that arise from homogenizing an Internet audience and explaining media usage in terms of only positive outcomes (gratifications). LaRose et al. created measures for self-efficacy and self-disparagement and related UGT to negative outcomes of online behavior (like Internet addiction) as well.

Recent research has looked at social networking services, personal and subject-based blogs, and internet forums put together to study the U&G in posting social content, the relationship between gratifications and narcissism, and the effects of age on this relationship and these gratifications. Users have motivations of the following overall [8]:

- Social and affection
- Need to vent negative feelings
- Recognition

- Entertainment
- Cognitive needs

Basic research finds that socialization motivates use of friend-networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook. Particulars under socialization might be finding old friends, making new friends, learning about events, creating social functions, and feeling connected. Some further exploration has demonstrated that although emotional, cognitive, social, and habitual uses are motivational to use social media, not all uses are consistently gratified. In research examining Facebook groups' users' gratifications in relation to their civic participation offline, 1,715 college students were asked "to rate their level of agreement with specific reasons for using Facebook groups, including information acquisition about campus/community, entertainment/recreation, social interaction with friends and family, and peer pressure/self-satisfaction." The study ultimately yielded results through principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. The results showed that there were four needs for using Facebook groups, "socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information [9]."

- **Socializing**: Students were interested in talking and meeting with others to achieve a sense of community and peer support on the particular topic of the group.

- **Entertainment**: Students engaged with the groups to amuse themselves.

- **Self-Seeking**: Students sought out or maintained their personal status, as well as those of their friends, through the online group participation.

- **Information**: Students used the group to receive information about related events going on and off campus

Conclusions

Mcluhan correct prediction on the World Wide Web and the prominent role technology will play in determining the future history of man should inform planners and strategies in the field of communication in Kenya today especially the architects of Vision 2030 and the ambitious planners of the Jubilee government in implementing their pledge of laptops for class one pupils project [10]. Researchers also need to get down and find out more on the effect of each communication gadgets that have literally controlled our lives e.g. the mobile phone, internet etc. The new online culture has deep ramifications on our society. In some cases, it has empowered sections of the society but also marginalized others due to access. The mobile banking and money transactions may intensify cybercrimes like electronic fraud through hacking Terrorism may also rise camouflaged in social media.

Social penetration theory will change in the future because of the Internet. A person can meet someone on a social net-work such as Facebook and know everything about them before a conversation ever takes place. Anticipation of future interaction both in the on and off-line world represents external influences which alters the way in which individuals present themselves to another, or in the case of Facebook, a community. Facebook is used to maintain existing offline relationships or solidify offline connections, as opposed to meeting new people, as found by Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe.

As for sexual relationships, some scholar posits that when initiating a romantic relationship, there are important differences between internet dating site and other spaces, such as the depth and breadth of the self-disclosed information taken place before they go further to

one-on-one conversation [11-13]. Research shows that people disclose more on the social sites.

Other study has shown that in real life adolescent tend to engage in sexual disclosure according to the level of relationship intimacy, which supports the social penetration model; but in cyberspace, men present a stronger willingness and interests to communicate without regarding the current intimacy status or degree.

According to Jih-Hsin Tang, Cheng-Chung Wang, bloggers tend to have significantly different patterns of self-disclosure for different target audiences. The online survey which involved 1027 Taiwanese bloggers examined the depth and breadth of what bloggers disclosed to the online audience, best friend and parents as well as nine topics they revealed.

Regarding online chat, research conducted by Dietz Uhle, Bishop Clark and Howard shows that "once a norm of self-disclosure forms, it is reinforced by statements supportive of self-disclosures but not of non-self-disclosures."

Recommendations

1. There is need to do more research on how social net-working is affecting relationship development and modify the social penetration theory accordingly to account for these changes.

2. Research more on why men disclose less compared to women but on the social sites they open up much easily.

Research on the degree of gratification when one is using social media in contrast to face to face interaction.

References

1. Eric McLuhan (2008) Marshall McLuhan's Theory of Communication: The Yegg. Global Media Journal 1: 25-43.

2. Altman I, Taylor DA (1973) Social Penetration. The development of Interpersonal Relationships, Oxford, England: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Newyork, USA.

3. Annie McCarthy (2009) Social penetration and Facebook. Fairfield University, Connecticut, USA.

4. Taylor DA, Altman I (1987) Communication in interpersonal relationships: Social Penetration Theory. Sage annual reviews of communication research 14: 257-277.

5. Social Penetration theory. Changing Minds.

6. Lynnh T, Richard W (2004) Introducing communication Theory. 2nd Edtn, Mcgrawhill, Willowbrook, USA.

7. Social Penetration Theory. Wikipedia.

8. Littlejohn SW, Foss AK (2008) Theories of human communication. Cengage Learning, Stamford, CT, USA.

9. Thibaut JW, Kelley HH (1959) The social psychology of groups. John Wiley and Sons, New York, USA.

10. West RL, Turner LH (2004) Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and application.

11. Wood JT (1997) Communication theories in action: An introduction.

12. http://www.enculturation.net/

13. Edan Tina (2003) St. Marshall, Mass and the media: Catholism media Theory and Marshall McLuhan.