Rogers State University

RESEARCH PAPERS

Communication Major, Graphic Design Minor

Project Title: Communication Research Paper

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The objective of this assignment was to be able to conduct research myself, contract research from others or evaluate the methods and results of others' research. As a communication professional these will be skills I must be able to put into practice daily. When preparing public relation strategies you must have research to back up your proposals. This project aided me in experience of conducting my own research as well as evaluating others' research in order to prepare a plan that will be effective. I learned skills to conduct my own surveys, focus groups, and content analysis' so that I can triangulate for the best results.

Communication: A Changing Medium

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Abstract

This paper examines the usage of digital communication versus the usage of face-to-face communication (FTF). I am defining digital communication as any communication involving a computer or computer based system, such as a cell phone or computer, using typed words primarily to communicate. I am defining FTF as being any interaction without a digital device in the presence of another person, or face-to-face with another person. The articles examined suggest that the use of digital communication is both benefitting and harming communication skills in subjects pertaining to education, workplace, and relationship formation. In order to investigate whether the use of digital communication is taking over that of FTF communication in younger generations, a triangulation of two quantitative methods was conducted. While a survey was conducted to measure the use of digital communication from college age students age 18-30, a content analysis was conducted to measure the amount of digital communication shown in popular television shows for different target audiences. The results indicated that the number of hours spent using the digital communication was less than the hours spent using FTF communication and that a show that targeted the younger audiences showed more instances of digital communication.

Communication: A Changing Medium

The usage of digital communication has overwhelmingly surpassed that of face-to-face (FTF) communication in the past decade. Digital communication is defined as any communication involving a computer or computer based system, such as a cell phone or computer, using typed words primarily to communicate. Digital communication includes text messages, emails, and any communication produced through social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and other social media or blogging websites. FTF is defined as being any interaction without a digital device in the presence of another person, or face-to-face with another person. FTF communication has seen positive and negative effects through the elevated usage of digital communication in areas such as learning, job opportunities, and relationships. In an attempt to investigate whether positive effects outweighing negative effects and if indeed any increase in digital communication is phasing out FTF communication, a triangulation of quantitative methods were conducted. The results reveal that the number of hours spent using the digital communication was less than the hours spent using FTF communication and that a show that targeted the younger audiences showed more instances of digital communication.

Literature Review

In Blau et. al.'s study, it was found that there is a decrease in actual face to face (FTF) communication and an increase in communication through other mediums, or text communication (2012). The study discussed that the level of personal contribution varied between the two different styles of communication. While expressing the readiness to discuss a sensitive topic, the participants preferred a text chat over a voice chat (Blau et. al., 2012). The study also found that voice chat has a different effect on interpersonal interactions than text chat because of the different degrees of anonymity (visual anonymity versus both visual and auditory anonymity), therefore resulting in higher levels of participation (Blau et. al., 2012). Yet, audio chat seems to be a more appropriate medium than text chat for encouraging involvement in synchronous communication if the subject of discussion cannot be manipulated.

Lee et al.'s (2011) study specifically examines the question of whether Internet communication serves, like face-to-face interactions, to enhance quality of life. They hypothesized that Internet communication improves quality of life, and actually found that there is no connection at all (Blau et. al., 2012). Quality of life is not directly connected to Internet usage. There's a sense of "in-depth quality" when writing on the Internet, or disclosing personal information, which was thought to have an effect on the improving the quality of life (Blau et. al., 2012). The study found this is not essential. In retrospect it highlights the importance of social interactions on personal basis in human societies, social interaction with more development in visual communication online, such as MSN and Skype, non-mediated face-to-face communication and interpersonal touch will remain important in developing long-term relationships and mutual support among people (Lee et al., 2011).

Nolen's (2010) paper includes a literature review about the forgiveness process, Face

Theory and communication via technology. It focuses on how forgiveness is granted and how it differs between technology and FTF. Forgiveness communication, according to the findings, is predicted to be more easily granted through FTF rather than technology based on the fact that face-savings behaviors are more possibly during face-to-face conversation (Nolen, 2010). This findings reveal that forgiveness is not easily observed, it is instead a private communication process between individuals that most are unwilling to let others observe. Even if observation were allowed, Nolen adds, the process would most likely be altered by the third party, and a natural progression of the event would be impossible (2010).

Quan-Haase's (2008) study delves into the student life and communication and how text messaging plays a big role in communication among students. IM is a synchronous form of communication, and its speed, availability information, and support for multiple conversations have made it appealing for young people (Quan-Haase, 2008). There seems to be a heavy reliance of instant messaging in college and the effect it has on social life and the academic life verses face to face communication. As the sophistication of communication technologies increases, also the opportunities for social representation are altered, giving individuals more control over their availability to others. This has implications for our understanding of social accessibility and necessitates the development of new norms of social interaction (Quan-Haase, 2008). Mediated communication, disclosure and concealment become key concepts because communication technologies increase people's reach into private time and allow users to represent their availability flexibly (Quan-Haase, 2008). It is important to understand how user concealment and the display of social accessibility statuses in their communication practice to negotiate private and public time. It is in particular relevant to better understand the social norms around disclosure and concealment as they develop in different mediated environments (Quan-

Haase, 2008).

Shafrir et al.'s (2012) study examined how social norms and values influence email usage in a nonprofit organization in a low-income urban community. Although adequate technical infrastructure was in place, a shared norm on getting a feel in social interactions reinforced face-to-face communication as the primary mode of communication among members (Shafrir et al., 2012). This study helps highlight which part of the socioeconomic class is affected by FTF verses digital communication. Since the world is growing to become more digitized, the new communication mediums are affecting the low-income communities. Extensive studies have been done to document how, in an information age, the digital divide in access to technology between high- and low-income communities, as well as between nonprofit organizations serving these different communities, can result in differential access to opportunities for employment, social mobility, civic engagement, and so forth (Shafrir et al., 2012). The lack of face-to-face communication in business's and communities and the increase of digital are causing more than a gap in communication, but also financial burdens that are now placed on low-income communities. The authors contend that "We believe that with adequate technical support and improvement in computer literacy, members of the organization will be able to maintain their norm of ''getting a feel in social interactions'' also through email communication" (Shafrir et al., 2012). This article sheds a new light on how this type of communication varies throughout demographics.

Sias et al.'s (2007) study examined information communication technologies and workplace friendship dynamics. Employees reported factors that influenced their initiation of friendship with a coworker and reported patterns and perceptions of communication with their workplace friend via different communication methods (Sias et al., 2007). The relevance of this

study is that of which communication methods play roles in relationships in which would have otherwise been face-to-face or more professional. Results indicated that personality, shared tasks, and perceived similarity are the most important factors to coworker friendship initiation, and the importance of physical proximity to workplace friendship is diminishing in the electronically connected workplace (Sias et al., 2007). Peers in the workplace have two different relationships, one more commonly now being friendships. With the addition of technology, it is shown there are more friendships in the workplace. Studies show that workplace relationships use more computer-mediated communication even if they are in the same physical location. Thus, they simultaneously communicate virtually and locally (Sias et al., 2007). Because relationships are socially constructed, communication quality is closely tied to relationship quality (Sias et al., 2007). Intimate self-disclosure may be more difficult to accomplish via text messages, social networks, or written documents," (Sias et al., 2007.) Despite innovations in communication technology, employees continue to prefer talking with their workplace friends in person. At the same time, employees also rely heavily on ICTs such as phone, e-mail, and texting, indicating that these methods are also central to coworker communication.

Strøms et al. (2007) compared activities in digital and F2F problem-based learning (PBL) regarding the content of the communication, turn-taking processes and the emergence of learning issues. This strives to show that computer-mediated communication may help with the learning process rather than face-to-face in some cases. Students might feel a need to think more about how they express themselves, because the discussion is saved and available for later inspection by any other member of the group. This may also encourage a more coherent process of knowledge building, as text based communication normally is less transient than oral communication (Strøms et al., 2007). Although the results read that, "that the use of synchronous

communication in PBL may cause restrictions on students' communication, especially in elaborating and specifying learning issues through proposing and responding to problems and hypothesis," (Strøms et al., 2007). It notes that it causes problems but also can be helpful in places like idea building or things that take more time to think out and have more research.

Martin et al.'s (2012) study highlighted education via digital communication verses face-to-face. Distance learning and internet-based delivery of educational content are becoming very popular as an alternative to real face-to-face delivery. Clinical-based discussions still remain greatly face-to-face despite the advancement of remote communication and Internet sharing technology (Martin et al., 2012). This study was done when observing a dental program. Physical face-to-face learning is a more effective communication modality for clinical case-based discussions between a learner and an expert. Remote, internet-based discussions enable a more relaxed discussion environment. The effectiveness of 3D supported internet-based communication is dependent upon a robust and simple to use interface, along with some prior training (Martin et al., 2012.)

Method

I suspect that most individuals do not perceive digital communication differently than face-to-face communication. I believe that digital communication is more widely accepted than FTF communication in younger generations, and I hope to support that with my research. I believe that using digital communication is overwhelmingly taking over the use of FTF communication that is in turn having positive and negative effects on every day communication including education, workplace, and relationships. I believe that more people are converting communication to digitized devices rather than using FTF.

For these reasons, I have developed the following questions to guide my research:

RQ1: Does communication with technology, or digital communication, cause a decrease in face-to-face communication?

H1: Digital communication will be used more frequently than FTF communication in college age students.

Survey

The first study investigates the amount of time spent using face-to-face communication versus time spent using digital communication to discover which had a higher amount of time spent in college age students using a survey.

Participants

Participants included 43 (33 females and 10 males) undergraduate-college student volunteers age 18-30 with the majority being of the ages 21-24. These participants were selected through convenient sampling due to the amount of time and resources for this class assignment. The way of distribution might have added a few participants who are younger or older than the targeted range. I chose this range of participants because I wanted my study to lean towards how this will effect future communication. The age of these participants are in college or recently graduated, which makes for a "new generation" of how people communicate.

Materials

Use of digital and FTF communication was measured through a survey that consisted of 10 questions (Figure 3) Of the participants, 26 were surveyed through the online database Survey Monkey and the link was distributed through my personal Facebook page. The remaining 17 participants were surveyed through a paper survey distributed during a Friday communications argumentation class.

Procedure

The online version of the survey was posted as a link on my personal Facebook page with a message of request to partake in the survey with unlimited time to complete. The survey remained live on the Internet for two weeks. The paper version of the survey was handed out to a communications class in the first five minutes of a communications class on a Friday morning.. At the beginning of each survey the participants were informed that the survey was to track communication patterns, that all information would be confidential, and that the purpose of this research was for a communication class at Rogers State University.

To avoid skewing the results, the participants taking the paper survey were informed not to take this version if they had already taken the online version.

Results

The results were both inconsistent and consistent with the hypothesis that digital communication is used more frequently than FTF communication in college age students. Averages were done for the following categories by taking out the highest and lowest number of each category to eliminate skewed results. The average number of text messages sent in a day was 146. The average number of phone calls made in a day was 10. The average number of hours spent on the Internet using social media websites, email, or other digital communication was 4.5 hours. The average number hours spent communicating FTF was 5.8 hours.

Each survey has a chance to be skewed. The online version is targeted toward people with my viewpoints and beliefs, and being on a posted on a social media website leaves out people who do not use social media, which is the reason a paper survey was used. The paper survey was limited with the time of five minutes to complete. The uneven number of gender also could have skewed the results.

Content Analysis

The second study investigates the use of digital communication and FTF communication in popular primetime television shows targeted at two different age groups using content analysis.

Method

Sample

The content analyzed was two television comedies. One titled “The Office” which airs on the network television station NBC and the other titled “Awkward” which airs on the cable television station MTV. “Awkward” is a comedic drama that is aired on the popular cable station MTV which is geared for the age group 16 to about 25. “The Office” is another comedic drama that is aired on NBC a national network station that is geared towards all age groups but this show is for more mature ages 18-45. The stations overlap a bit in the age groups.

Materials

I chose these two specific shows because they were both listed under the popular tab on the Hulu website. I chose the most recent episodes of the two shows which both aired this year. I viewed the episodes from the same online data based named Hulu. I chose season 9, episode 6, for “The Office,” and season 2, episode 12, for “Awkward. Each show lasted approximately 21-22 minutes.

Procedures

Each show was watched with a coder in order to code every instance that digital communication was referenced or used (Figure 1 and 2). We each looked for use of cell phone texting, emailing, or social media use. Each instance was coded according to who used the digital

communication and to whom they used it with. We looked at words spoken about texting or digital communication as well as visual, or seeing the texting or digital communication happening.

Results

My analysis resulted a validation of my hypothesis. The television show "The Office" not only had a fewer amount of cell phone texting or digital communication; it had, to my surprise, none at all. There was a sufficient amount of computers around the office yet I did not see or hear anything about sending or receiving an email. I did not see any cell phones being used on the show, there were a lot of office phones in use, which helps support my hypothesis that the older generation is not as reliant.

When the show "Awkward" began, a girl was texting her boyfriend, and also spoke about texting using the word "texted." In the same scene but a different girl the situation was similar, a girl spoke about texting and also used the phone to send a text message to her boyfriend. When the first commercial came on it gave the option, similar to the other ad, to link the ad to the social media websites Facebook or Twitter. The next instance I found was that a guy talked about receiving a text from a girl, and shortly after that, you see several people in the background both male and female on cell phones. One particular instance a girl is holding her phone, reading it, and talking to a friend face to face at the same time, reverting back and forth.

Overall my hypothesis was proven valid with 4 instances of digital communication used in the show targeted more towards college age students and 0 instances in the show targeted towards an older audience. I did not expect such a difference of 0 to only 4 instances, but analysis of more episodes from each show would cause for more validation.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find out if digital communication is causing a decrease in face-to-face communication. I predicted that digital communication would be used more frequently than FTF communication is college age students. My hypothesis was supported by one study and not supported by the other. The first study, a survey of college age students, resulted in the number of hours spent using the digital communication was less than the hours spent using FTF communication. The second study, a content analysis of popular television shows, resulted in a finding that the show that targeted the younger audiences showed more instances of digital communication.

The findings in study 1 brought about something that I was not expecting. Does digital communication have an effect on bringing on FTF communication? In study one the main purpose that students used their cell phones for was texting with social media as a close second with only 1 behind and 2 behind that being email. Although making a phone call is not listed under the definition of digital communication, it most definitely is digital communication, yet was used significantly less than texting. The number of phone calls made was significantly lower at an average of 10 calls per day whereas the number of texting was an average of 146 a day.

The findings in study 2 were more consistent than study 1 with the data from in Blau et. al.'s (2012) study. Blau et. al.'s study found that there is a decrease in actual face to face (FTF) communication and an increase in communication through other mediums, or text communication. My study found there was more instances of digital communication in the television show targeted towards the younger audience. I found the study to be consistent with Sias et al.'s (2007) study, which examined information communication technologies and workplace friendship dynamics. Sias et al.'s study found that despite innovations in communication technology, employees continue to prefer talking with their workplace friends in

person. In study 2, the show "The Office," had 0 instances of digital communication. Sias et al.'s study also said that at the same time, employees also rely heavily on ICTs such as phone, e-mail, and texting, indicating that these methods are also central to coworker communication (Sias et al., 2007).

There were several constraints that could be eliminated with more time and resources. Research on the growing effects of digital communication could continue in several directions. While researching more, many other questions came to mind. More research on the positive effects of digital communication could result in findings such as a gateway to FTF communication. Research on the use of digital communication to help students with learning disabilities that would rather not speak could be done in future observations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research question I posed, "Does communication with technology, or digital communication, cause a decrease in FTF," was answered by study 1 as no. The numbers were very close, yet FTF was higher, which may have resulted due to the fact that college students interact with other students in class for many hours out of the day. I hypothesized that digital communication will be used more frequently than FTF communication in college age students. That was also proved to be invalid. In order to have a more valid answer more research should be done.

References

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Appendix

Figure 1. –Coding sheet for The Office

Type of Interaction	Frequencies of Appearance "The Office"						
	User		Interaction with				
	Male	Female	Friend/Acquaintance	Peer/Co-worker	Teacher/Boss	Family	Other
Texting							
Visual	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Words	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Email							
Visual	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Words	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social Media							
Visual	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Words	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other							
Visual	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Words	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 2.-Coding sheet for Awkward

Type of Interaction	Frequencies of Appearance "Awkward"						
	User		Interaction with				
	Male	Female	Friend/Acquaintance	Peer/Co-worker	Teacher/Boss	Family	Other
Texting							
Visual	0	3	3	0	0	0	0
Words	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Email							
Visual	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Words	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social Media							
Visual	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Words	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other							
Visual	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Words	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 3. –Survey Questions

1. What is your gender?

What is your gender?
Female

Male

*

2. Which category below includes your age?

Which category below includes your age?
17 or younger

18-20

21-24

25-29

30 or older

*

3. What is your approximate average household income?

What is your approximate average household income?
$0-$24,999

$25,000-$49,999

$50,000-$74,999

$75,000-$99,999

$100,000-$124,999

*

4. Do you currently have a working cell phone?

Do you currently have a working cell phone?
Yes, I do

No, I do not

*

5. In a typical weekday, about how many texts do you exchange on your mobile or cell phone?

In a typical weekday, about how many texts do you exchange on your mobile or cell phone?

*

6. In a typical weekday, how many calls do you make or receive on your mobile or cell phone?

In a typical weekday, how many calls do you make or receive on your mobile or cell phone?

*

7. In a typical weekday, which of the following activities do you do on your mobile or cell phone most often?

In a typical weekday, which of the following activities do you do on your mobile or cell phone most often?
Send or receive photos

General internet use (other than using social networking websites)

Make or receive phone calls

Purchase products or services

Play videos (other than video games)

Play music

Send or receive emails

Play games

Record videos

Send or receive texts

Take photos

Send or receive videos

Use social networking websites

Other (please specify)

*

8. Do you currently have access to a computer regularly?

Do you currently have access to a computer regularly?
Yes

No

*

9. How many hours a day do you spend online communicating with others? (email, social networking, chat, etc.)

How many hours a day do you spend online communicating with others? (email, social networking, chat, etc.)
0-1

2-3

4-6

7 or more

*

10. How many hours do you spend communicating with people face to face? (not webcam)

How many hours do you spend communicating with people face to face? (not webcam)
0-1

2-3

4-6

7 or more