Contextual Domain of Interpersonal Communication

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the contextual domain of interpersonal communication concerns the study of social interaction between people. It yells us the traditionally conceived connotation of interpersonal of communication as a process that occurs between people encountering each other face to face, increasingly social interaction is being accomplished through the use of such communication technologies as computers and mobile phones, thus adding a new dimension to this area of communication inquiry. This paper deals with the consequential behavior occurs in diverse contexts. It also discusses the hypotheses, "More is the communication with others, more is the information exchange", "High is the effective communication, and high is the impact" and similarly, "high is the empathy of source, high is the ability to see himself in the frame of receiver".

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication is a form of communication which involves close physical proximity to each other. The *psychological* contextual is, who you are and what you bring to the interaction. Contextually your needs, desires, values, personality, etc., are related to psychology. Your reactions to the other person are the "Relational *context* ."   Where you are communicating would reflect the *Situational context.*   Communication takes place in a classroom will be very different from one that takes place in a hotel. Locations, noise level, temperature, season, time of day, all are examples of factors in the environmental context. Interpersonal communication is the application of interactions between people of different cultures with an emphasis on the problems associated by uncertainty and anxiety stemming from cultural differences. *Cultural context* deals with the operational definition of all the learned behaviors and rules that affect the interaction. If you come from a culture (foreign or within your own country) where it is considered rude to make long, direct eye contact, you will out of politeness avoid eye contact. If the other person comes from a culture where long, direct eye contact signals trustworthiness, then we have in the cultural context a basis for misunderstanding.

Interpersonal communication skills are the tools we use to let others know what we think, feel, need and want. And they are how we let others know that we understand what they think, feel, need and want. Interpersonal communication concerns the study of social interaction between people. Interpersonal communication theory and research seeks to understand how individuals use verbal discourse and nonverbal actions, as well as written discourse, to achieve a variety of instrumental and communication goals such as informing, persuading, and providing emotional support to others. Although interpersonal communication has been traditionally conceived of as a process that occurs between people encountering each other face to face, increasingly social interaction is being accomplished through the use of such communication technologies as computers and mobile phones, thus adding a new dimension to this area of communication inquiry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Approximately two decades ago, however, Cappella (1987) noted the importance, and difficulty, of defining interpersonal interaction. Given the range of scholarly approaches to interpersonal communication, Roloff and Anastasiou (2001) acknowledged that "…we are doubtful that there will ever be consensus about a definition of the field or a central theory…" Indeed, in his more recent review of theorizing on interpersonal communication, Berger (2005) noted that "[i]t is possible to organize theoretical activity within the interpersonal communication domain into at least six distinct areas". Because a complete exploration of the many orientations to interpersonal communication extends beyond the scope of this review, we focus here on two key characteristics of interpersonal communication that are most central to this study.   In particular, we suggest that interpersonal communication is consequential behavior and that it occurs in diverse contexts.

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), unsurprisingly, offer an appropriate starting point in terms of scholarship, if not purely in terms of chronology. Drawing upon earlier speculation by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944), Katz and Lazarfeld asserted that interpersonal conversation mediates between the general broadcast of information and individual engagement of and action upon that information. Specifically, Katz and Lazarsfeld observed the pivotal role played by opinion leaders as individuals who both engage news and elite media sources and, in turn, dispense information from those sources to their networks of followers. Scholars subsequently extended the original notion of a two-step flow by pointing to the possibility of a multi-step flow; however, the basic idea remains as a prominent account of media effects (Brosius and Weimann, 1996, or Katz, 1987, for further discussion). Early observations by Tarde (1903) at the end of the 19 th century on imitation and the spread of ideas shed light on the notion that the social nature of humans, and their tendency to converse, offers a key route for information diffusion. In the early 20th century, numerous examples emerged of information quickly spreading via interpersonal channels, including telephone conversations.

Rogers ' (1962) famous volume, called simply *Diffusion of Innovations* , focused squarely on the question of whether individuals vary in their openness to new information **.** In that initial volume, Rogers answered that question affirmatively. He demonstrated individual-level variance in the time required for agricultural innovation adoption among individuals. In turn, he characterized people as being more or less likely to adopt particular innovations. Recently, Fan and Yu (2005) even questioned whether we need – and attempted to empirically refute – an assumption of individual difference in openness to new ideas in order to explain patterns of information spread. Milgram's (1967) study on the small-world phenomenon indicated that impressive information flows often involve only a limited number of communication agents. Valente (1995) emphasized the utility of understanding social networks for studying diffusion, a point emphasized in his recent collaborations (e.g., Schuster et al., 2006). We can expect information to spread most quickly when established social connections exist among members of a population.

Axiom   *Implication for Interpersonal*

Communication

The impossibility of not communicating	Interactional partners' interpretations of your behavior will affect your relationship, regardless of whether you intended that interpretation.
Content and relationship levels	How you say what you say will affect your partners' interpretations and will also give others clues about the relationships between the interactants.
The problem of punctuation	What you view as the cause and effect is not necessarily how an interactional partner will view it. To resolve the problem, forget about assigning blame.
Digital and analogic communication	Digital communication can express detailed meaning if the interactants share the same set of symbols; anagogic communication can express powerful feelings directly.
Complementary and symmetrical communication	Within systems, patterns of interaction develop such that people behave differently or behave similarly. These patterns particularly illustrate power in the relationship.

MEDIATION AS ACCEPTABLE AGREEMENT

Mediation is a dispute-settlement process that involves an acceptable, neutral and impartial third party (the mediator) facilitating communication and understanding between two or more parties in dispute. Mediation culminates in the parties determining their own solutions to the dispute in the form of a defined and acceptable agreement. The mediator has no power to make decisions or to enforce suggestions or recommendations affecting the settlement of the dispute. At the outset of the transition process, the parties in dispute are probably not communicating with each other effectively. They bring perceptions and emotional sets to the issues of concern and these inhibit effective communication. The initial step of the transition process is to establish a constructive pattern of interpersonal communication between the parties in dispute and thus set the tone for cooperative decision-making and reaching consensus.

If campaigns can generate talk, for better or worse, then it also makes sense for us to consider the possibility that such conversations, in turn, can spur desired behaviors among audiences. If that is the case, we can consider conversations to also sometimes serve as a mediating link between campaign exposure and particular campaign goals. In light of that possibility, even if campaign planners do not explicitly attempt to generate talk, campaign evaluators should consider the potential role of interpersonal communication in explaining campaign effects, an argument largely consistent with recent prominent calls to reassess evaluation design (e.g., Hornik & Yanovitzky, 2003; Valente & Saba, 2001).

In simplest terms, interpersonal conversation can potentially extend necessary message reach and frequency, particularly important when advertising budgets are not spectacularly high. On a different plane, campaign-induced conversation might also lead to social norm discovery that indirectly leads to behavior change. We discuss support for both possibilities below, especially in the specific realm of health and science communication.

Parrott (2004) has gone so far as to suggest that the recent lack of focus on interpersonal communication as a potential explanation for outcomes represents an important oversight by health campaign scholars. Talk with others, after all, appears to be an important part of the array of channels claimed by individuals as influential with regard to science and health decision-making (Morton & Duck, 2001; O'Keefe, Ward, & Shepard, 2002; Trumbo, 1998; Wilkin & Ball-Rokeach, 2006). O'Keefe and colleagues, for example, found that landowners in Wisconsin tended to rely on a diverse set of information sources, including sometimes only conversation with other people who kept track of the news, in monitoring developments related to the local watershed. Wilkin and Ball-Rokeach found that Latinos in Los Angeles reported interpersonal networks of friends and family to be important sources of health information, along with health professionals and media content specifically designed for them. The question, however, is whether such dependence on interpersonal channels might be tapped to facilitate indirect campaign effects.

Typical campaign evaluations, however, find a measure of exposure to the campaign and simply correlate it with outcome variables, such as knowledge, beliefs and attitudes. Do and Kincaid (2006), for example, looked at the relationship between viewing of an entertainment-education program, relevant knowledge, and health clinic visits in Bangladesh without explicit consideration of conversation.

MASS-MEDIATED AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Purcell (1997) has argued that continuing to dichotomize mass-mediated and interpersonal communication is archaic and downplays the dialectic relationship between them. Actually, one could argue that this was an insight made, in part, a number of years ago by proponents of the two-step flow of communication perspective (e.g., Katz 1957), who argued that mass-mediated messages were further disseminated and given credence by local opinion leaders. While I would agree that these types of communication are not polar opposites, I do not think we have reached a point where we can substitute one for the other. Still, distinguishing between them can be problematic. With the proliferation of electronic forms of interpersonal communication, such as telephones and computer networks, it is no longer useful to rely on distinctions based on

medium. Audience size is also problematic, as conference calls and mass electronic mailings can be made at the interpersonal level, but audience size cannot be abandoned. Following Neuman (1991), I will argue that mass-mediated communication takes place when there are at least 500 receivers of the information. In addition, concerns of audience size must be accompanied by the nature of the relationship between the communicator and receiver involved in the communication process. Thompson (1988) has argued that one difference between mass-mediated and interpersonal communication rests on the fact that mass-mediated "messages are incorporated into products which are sold or which are used to facilitate the sale of other goods. Message , something to be communicated from the sender to the receiver , as opposed to noise , which is something that inhibits the flow of communication or creates misunderstanding. If information is viewed merely as a message, it does not have to be accurate.

One-to-one vs. one-to-many communication

Mediated	One-to-one Email Messaging Talk Net meeting	Mailing list Chat	Usenet group, CB radio
	Telephone 2 people	Conference call	
	Conversation 2 people	Group Meeting	Meeting, Conference, Bulk mailing
Face-to-face			One-to-one

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AS MODERATOR OF CAMPAIGN EFFECTS

Not all mass communication researchers conceptualize interpersonal conversation solely as a simple outcome or as a conduit of information from media to individuals. Following some researchers (e.g., Eveland, 2004, or Tsfati, 2003) have explored whether interpersonal communication might offer a competing channel of information, as we noted above, or even might act in an amplifying (rather than directly mediating) fashion in political or civic contexts. In a political communication example, M. Mendelsohn (1996) found that Canadian voters were primed by election campaign materials to evaluate candidates in terms of overall leadership perceptions whereas interpersonal conversation tended to activate thinking about salient issues. Voter engagement with mass media not only led to simple information exposure differences, but it also apparently posed different consequences for subsequent information processing than did interpersonal conversations. In other words, interpersonal channels performed differently than mass media channels and demonstrated the potential to interact with other types of information seeking and exposure to jointly affect issue evaluation.

In some of these studies, in contrast to most diffusion approaches, scholars argue that conversation can facilitate, amplify, or dampen campaign effects. For example, Druckman (2004) questioned whether political campaigns and interpersonal discussions might sometimes prime alternative or orthogonal criteria for candidate judgment. In this way, the absence of competing talk might be viewed as a facilitating condition for media effects while the presence of consonant talk might also boost effects.

Brucks (1985) categorizes consumer product knowledge into three kinds: *objective knowledge* , *subjective knowledge* , and *prior experience* related to a product class. Objective knowledge refers to what a consumer actually knows, while subjective knowledge refers to what a consumer thinks he/she knows. Based on the distinction, consumer researchers have found that subjective knowledge level is closely related to one's behavioral motivation, such as information search intention. What should be noted, however, is that the level of product knowledge does not directly determine one's behavioral motivation? Instead, it creates a psychological condition by which an individual's motivation is influenced and shaped. In short, a person's knowledge level exerts an indirect influence that conditions his/her responses to various situational causes (Alba and Hutchinson 1987).

ROLE OF THE MODERATOR

As a Moderator, your …

- Acceptance of participants and welcome their diversity

- Neutral positions toward problems

- Motivate people through questions and get them ready into the situation

- Encouragement of participants' questions

- Sense of nosing problems

- Address disturbances if it becoming barrier in working together

- Respect others' feelings as your own

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

More is the communication with others, more is the information exchange. Young people usually communicate with young people. Farmers with farmers poor with the poor and the rich communicate with the rich. They know their problems and their aspirations very well. Communication is most effective when both the source and the receiver are likely to share basic meanings. Similar people, of course, already have a basic vocabulary in common. If a mechanic is talking to another mechanic, there's a lot that he doesn't have to stop to explain. Both use the language of their trade daily. The same holds true of two people of the same age and sex. They readily understand each other. They share a common vocabulary.

High is the effective communication, high is the impact. It is really impossible to ask which comes first. Each depends upon the other. The more you talk to another person your own age, for example, the more likely you will be to share knowledge and opinions. If the communication is truly effective, the more alike you will eventually act. When both source and receiver possess almost the same degree of subject matter competence, little change can be expected in either person. But moderate differences in competence are ideal. Such differences are substantial

enough for a receiver to accept the competence of a source. Yet they are sufficiently minor to prevent suspicious reactions or difficulty in understanding. If you talk to a person similar to yourself, who, you both realize, knows a bit less than you do about movies, you are more likely to alter his attitude about movies in general or a specific film. The differences are great enough so that the other person yields to your superior knowledge.

Similarly, high is the empathy of source, high is the ability to see himself in the frame of receiver. If the source has empathy for the receiver, he is better able to select the kinds of messages that will have the desired effect on the receiver. He can do this simply because he will have a deeper understanding of the receiver. If you are a junior who is trying to get a freshman to join a club, you are likely to be much more effective if you are able to visualize yourself in the freshman's position. The better able you are to relate to his or her natural reluctance and surprise at being asked, the better your chances of gaining a member will be. When a source believes that dissimilar receivers are similar, communication is ineffective. We all see the world through the eyes of our own beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. Without information to the contrary, we automatically believe that our own attitudes are shared by others. But such assumptions lead to non-communication when our receivers are actually not at all like us.

Feedback builds empathy. If feedback is ignored or unavailable, communication between dissimilar people become ineffective. One of the most common causes of communication failure in business organizations, for example, occurs when feedback from lower level employees is either ignored or discouraged by higher level employees both groups are, of course, dissimilar. But those in charge could better communicate their wishes and desires if they took the time to properly evaluate the feedback which reaches them from below.

In summation, mass communication is a complex process which often depends upon both the mass media and interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is much more important to mass communication then most people popularly believe. Anyone who wishes to understand mass communication must begin by studying the inter-relationships which exist between it and interpersonal communication. Stated as simply as possible, the mass media provide information both directly to the ultimate mass audience and to accepted opinion leaders. The eventual interaction between opinion leaders and their followers produces a recognizable change in attitude and behavior.

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