Computer-Mediated Vs. Face To Face Communication Essay, Research Paper

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Computer-Mediated Versus Face To Face Communication

The invention of the computer changed the face of interpersonal communication forever. The Internet has contributed even further to this change. Through the Internet we can communicate with others online, through text, in almost any part of the world at any time. This is called computer-mediated communication and has become a major part of our lives. In many cases, people communicate by computer more than face to face or by phone. Is this a good thing and is communication in our society heading in the right direction via computer? Researchers have different views on this matter because there has been research done to indicate that computer-mediated communication can be both good and bad. The question then arises, who is right? A closer look at the two sides of the matter should help shed light on a more concrete conclusion.

There are many people who attribute anxiety to face-to-face communication. These same people often find it much easier to communicate by computer. According to research published in “Communication Research Reports,” through computer-mediated communication, apprehensive communicators have an advantage in that it may nullify certain features of communication contexts that tend to heighten anxiety (Patterson). Research shows that computer-mediated communication acts as a mitigating variable with regard to status differentials and it reduces evaluation fears that lead to communication avoidance and withdrawal (Gojdycz). This means that CMC, computer-mediated communication, allows us to communicate with one another without placing specific labels on the people we are communicating with such as race, age, physique, or

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even the sound of their voice. Why is this important? These labels often act as barriers to our communication. Many people find it difficult to communicate with others unlike themselves and this barrier is removed during CMC. In CMC, people have the choice of what to reveal about their appearance and they are not bound to it as they often are in face-to-face communication.

Others tend to feel very differently about computer-mediated communication. In an article in “Communication Education,” researchers came to very different conclusions about computer-mediated communication and it’s effects. These researchers point out that when using CMC we lose a lot of social interaction. For example, when chatting or e-mailing someone you do not get the benefit of seeing their body language or hearing their tone of voice. This is a concept known as “cues filtered out” and it plays a major role in the opposition of CMC. By missing these “cues” you are less likely to fully understand what the others person is trying to communicate. Researchers concerned with the social psychological aspects of CMC have proposed that the medium causes “depersonalization” (Kelly). CMC lacks social context cues and shared norms governing its use, which produces greater apprehension and inhibition.

Though researchers have opposing opinions about the quality of computer-mediated communication they tend to agree that it has its purpose. Those who feel CMC is an ineffective means of communication will concede that it can be useful and in some cases necessary. CMC tends to be cheap and focused. It allows people to communicate thoughts directly in print, which are often topic based and to the point. Also, researchers concur that it is more cost effective to use CMC as opposed to meeting someone in

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person or talking to them on the phone long distance. In addition, it offers a means of communication to the disabled, such as those who are deaf or mute.

There seems to be two clear-cut sides regarding the issue of effectiveness and quality of computer-mediated communication with some neutral meeting ground in between. Some feel that CMC is a superior medium because it removes physical barriers such as appearance and significantly eliminates anxiety that can be caused by face-to-face interaction. Others feel that CMC lacks social context cues and causes depersonalization. Both sides of the issue agree that both face to face and CMC have their advantages. I feel that people are better off communicating in person despite cost or convenience. I think that people need to communicate face to face in order to see the person’s eyes and other body language as well as to hear their tone of voice. I tend to agree with researchers that conclude CMC causes depersonalization and it is inferior to talking with someone in person. I feel that CMC, while convenient, causes isolation and inhibition. I have a strong bias that the world has become too reliant on computers. I do realize however, that CMC has its place and can be effective when used efficiently but still suggest that it be used sparingly.