

Do Strangers Trust in Video-mediated Communication?

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ABSTRACT

Trust in computer-mediated communication is increasingly attracting researchers' attention yet unexplored extensively in social / organizational psychology. The objective of this study is to empirically examine the effect of media and task on people's trust perception. A total of 42 pairs of Chinese undergraduate participated in the study by performing either negotiation or brainstorming task through either video channel or Instant Messenger. Particularly this paper reported our discourse analyses. It revealed that when no prior personal relationship existed (strangers) in a virtual environment, video does not always increase people's trust perception. It helps only when the task involves conflicts.

Keywords

Discourse, video, IM, negotiation, brainstorming, trust

ACM Classification

H.5.3 Information Systems; Group & Organization
Interfaces; Microsoft .NET; WEB

INTRODUCTION

Trust is a willingness to accept vulnerability [8]. There are couple related previous studies. Some literature showed conflicting results on video-mediated communication. On the one hand, many studies showed no advantage of video compared to audio on performance measure [1] [4] [5] [7]. On the other hand, Venot's study [11] revealed that video does help people who don't share common ground like non-native speakers. In addition, video was shown to benefit process and user satisfaction [10]. Other literatures showed conflicting results in terms of video and trust. While some studies showed that visual access may lead to competition, a sign of being less truthful [2] [3], Russo's study showed that video might help fix the trust break-down in a remote setting [9]. She found that when participants did investment game via video instead of chat, their trust perception went up.

Trust becomes salient and challenging in remote communication. In this study, we are interested in what factors will influence the trust perception in remote interpersonal communication. Particularly we are interested in two factors based on previous studies: communication medium and task. First, if seeing is believing, then will video

increase trust in a remote setting? Second, for tasks like brainstorming which doesn't require much visual cues, will IM, a lean communication media and much less expensive than video, be as good as video in facilitating communication and trust perception? In sum, our research question in this study is how communication medium and task will interplay in trust perception in remote communication.

Hypotheses

We predicted that medium and task would interplay in the remote trust perception.

We chose two tasks for our study. The negotiation task is price-fixing three common drugs. Visual cues like eye-blinking, flush cheek, facial expression, could be useful for participants to determine the other side's sincerity and trustworthiness. However, such visual cues won't matter much to the brainstorming task, which is to ask the pair of participants to brainstorm items an Eskimo person would find at a modern middle-class house.

Given video providing participants rich visual cues, helping them to form affective impression of the other side, participants won't need to have much explicit discussions on affective relationship in video communication. Therefore we predicted less affective relationship discussion in video than in IM for both negotiation and brainstorming tasks.

However for task related communication, we predicted different media effects for two tasks. Compared to IM, video will increase more task-related discussions for negotiation task, but no such differences for brainstorming task. The reason is that negotiation task is sensitive to visual cues. While video makes negotiation communication easier by providing extra visual cues compared to IM, participants would be willing to spend more time on discussing different options and improve their negotiation results. But for brainstorming task, participants can equally perform well in task-related discussions in the lean medium IM as in the rich medium like video.

Therefore, our hypotheses are:

H1: For negotiation task, participants will have less relationship discussions, but more task-related discussions in video than in IM.

H2: For brainstorming task, participants will have less relationship discussions in video than in IM, but same amount of task-related discussions in video as in IM.

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