Social Information Processing
Joseph Walther

Objective Theory – Socio Psychological Tradition

Joseph Walther's SIP

- SIP build on the 1990s because of emails
  - Stood the test of time
    - Was build on SPT, URT, and other relationship development theories to explain how people form relationships across communication technologies
- Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc...
  - Why does social networking have such appeal?
    - Much of the motivation is social – commenting on another person's post

HISTORY OF SOCIAL INFORMATION THEORY

□ 1980s – 1990s – Skepticism

▫ Communication scholars skeptic about building close relationships online through computer-mediated-communication (CMC), which filters out nonverbal cues

- Cyber space – relational wasteland; stark and barren
  - Social Presence Theory

□ 1992 – Walther introduces SIP

▫ CMC users can adapt to cue-limited-media and use them effectively to develop close relationships

- Dependent of the opportunity for a sufficient exchange of social messages and subsequent relational growth
- Useful for today's use of cell phones, instant messaging and networking sites to build close relationships

CMC Versus Face-To-Face: A SIP Instead of a Gulp

- Walther believes that
  - Relationships grow only to the extend that parties first gain information about each other and use that information to form interpersonal impressions of who they are (p.122)
  - SIP focuses on the first link of the chain of communication
    - The personal information available through the CMC and its effect on the composite mental image of the other that each one creates
      Social Information → Impression Formation → Relationship Development
    - Two features of CMC provide a rationale for SIP theory:
      1. Verbal Cues
      2. Extended time

Verbal Cues of Affinity Replace Nonverbal Cues

- Human need for affiliation – As active online as it is face-to-face

  - History supports SIP's claim that that people creatively adapt their communication to connect across cue-limited media

  - Experiment results support SIP's claim that people meeting online can begin a relationship just as effectively as if they had meet face-to-face, using the words they write rather than nonverbal cues

Extended Time:
The Crucial Variable in CMC

- Closest relationships – Multimodal
  - We use a variety of media to sustain them
    - There are relationships that are sustained by just one medium
      - The length of time CMC users have to send their messages is the key factor that determines whether their online messages can achieve the level of intimacy that others develop face-to-face (p.125)
        - Its not the amount but the rate at which information mounts up
          - CMC takes mote time than face-to-face – experiments show CMC is task-oriented and impersonal
  - Two other time factors contribute:
    - Anticipated future interaction
    - Chronemic cues

Hyperpersonal Perspective: Closer through CMC than in Person

- Hyperpersonal
  - CMC relationships that are more intimate tan if partners were physically together
- Four media effects due to the fact of not being face-to-face
  - Sender: Selective Self-Presentation
  - Receiver: Overattribution of Similarity
  - Channel: Communicating on Your Own Time
  - Feedback: Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

The Warranting Value of Information: What to Trust?

- Networking ≠ than other CMC Forms
  - Ability to add information to other people's pages (p.129)
- Warranting value
  - Reason to believe that information is accurate, typically because the target of the information cannot manipulate it
    - Low warrant information – Your Facebook
    - High warrant information – Public government information about you

CRITIQUE : WALTHER'S ASSESMENT

- Technology changes too fast
  - Valid CMC Theory is difficult to craft and defend
    - SIP remains popular because it stacks up well against all the criteria for a good social science theory (p.130)
- Tom Postmes & Nancy Baym – Two weaknesses:
  - Theory falls into the common socio-psychological ideology of determinism
  - Theory does not really account for how group identification structures CMC relationship development
- Assignment: Explain why CMC stacks up well against all the criteria for a good theory and why Walther is the harshest critic of his own theory

THANKS

Does anyone have any questions?