



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Intercultural Relations

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijintrel

Revisiting the contact hypothesis: Effects of different modes of computer-mediated communication on intergroup relationships[☆]

Bolin Cao^{a,*}, Wan-Ying Lin^b^a School of Media and Communication, Shenzhen University, China^b Department of Media and Communication, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Contact hypothesis

CMC

Intergroup communication

ABSTRACT

This study applies the contact hypothesis to computer-mediated communication (CMC) and examines whether intergroup computer-mediated contact can facilitate relationships between conflicting groups. The effectiveness of different CMC modes, text-based and video-based, in improving interpersonal and intergroup attitudes was compared. The results from an experiment indicated that video-based CMC exerted greater influence in improving participants' attitudes towards a targeted outgroup member when compared to text-based CMC. However, text-based CMC produced a stronger effect than video-based CMC in improving one's attitudes towards the outgroup as a whole.

Intergroup conflicts often occur as a result of competition for resources or the pursuit of group esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When at odds, different groups often develop negative stereotypes and hostile attitudes towards each other (Maaoz, 2000). For decades, scholars in social psychology have sought ways to reduce stereotyping and prejudice towards outgroups (Amichai-Hamburger, 2012). One of the most acknowledged and enduring approaches is embodied by the contact hypothesis: positive contact between groups helps to reduce intergroup prejudice (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969; Hewstone & Swart, 2011). Since Allport proposed the contact hypothesis in 1954, it has been bolstered by ample empirical evidence from various social contexts, including case studies on different races (e.g., Ellison & Powers, 1994), religions (e.g., Henry & Hardin, 2006), and nationalities (e.g., Maaoz, 2000).

Moreover, the available channels for intergroup contact have evolved over time. Intergroup contact refers primarily to face-to-face (FtF) encounters and has been expanded to include computer-mediated communication (CMC) in recent decades. CMC is characterized by its capacity to overcome temporal and spatial barriers, as well as its convenience and potential anonymity (Amichai-Hamburger, 2012; Cohen, 1996). These characteristics enable CMC to play a significant role in social interactions and interpersonal relationships (Baym, Zhang, & Lin, 2004). Meanwhile, CMC is also hypothesized to have great potential in ameliorating conflicts between groups (Amichai-Hamburger, 2012), thus extending the contact hypothesis (Harwood & Joyce, 2012; Hewstone & Swart, 2011).

This study aims to investigate the role of computer-mediated intergroup contact in influencing ingroup members' attitudes towards a targeted outgroup member and towards the outgroup as a whole. In particular, different modes of CMC, such as text-based and video-based, which vary in their capacity to convey social cues (e.g., Sproull & Kiesler, 1986), will be compared to examine their effectiveness. Overall, this study attempts not only to employ CMC theories to examine the effect of intergroup contact in the digital age, but also to compare the effectiveness of communication at an individual and a group level through different CMC modes. This study offers practical suggestions as well as policy implications for ameliorating intergroup relationships.

[☆] This study is supported by City University of Hong Kong.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: caobolin2006@163.com (B. Cao), wanying@cityu.edu.hk (W.-Y. Lin).

Literature review

The contact hypothesis

The contact hypothesis asserts that acquaintance and positive associations through intergroup contact can reduce prejudice and negative affect. Intergroup contact enables members from different groups to explore their similarities, develop liking for one another, and generally improve intergroup relationships (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969; Pettigrew, 1998). The underlying assumption of the contact hypothesis is that limited contact with and knowledge about an outgroup will lead to unfavorable, stereotypical views (Ellis & Maoz, 2012); however, sufficient intergroup contact can alter those. The contact hypothesis promotes intergroup contact to yield positive effects under specific conditions, groups in the situation should have equal status, common goals, a willingness to pursue intergroup cooperation, authority support for interaction (Allport, 1954), and the potential to make acquaintances (Cook, 1978). In particular, certain intimate contacts, such as cross-group friendships, are likely to exert highly positive effects in reducing intergroup prejudice (e.g., Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008; Pettigrew, 1998). The contact hypothesis has been substantiated by evidence collected by global researchers, and a meta-analysis of 515 studies found a significant negative correlation between contact and intergroup prejudice ($r = -0.21$) (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Three models regarding social-categorization have been identified as potential pathways to reduce intergroup conflict and to extend the classic contact analysis (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Turner, 1985). The first one is the de-categorization approach (Miller & Brewer, 1984), in which individuals build interpersonal relationships to promote positive attitudes towards the entire outgroup. Personalization of group members is expected to weaken both group identifications and resolve conflicts. Another two alternative approaches are re-categorization, in which individuals are believed to belong to a common group towards a superordinate goal to generate positive affects (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; González & Brown, 2003) and sub-categorization, in which individuals hold salient group identities to enhance the positive intergroup contact effect (Hewstone & Brown, 1986). The sub-categorization model suggests that the existence of two distinctive groups helps achieve and generalize the effect of intergroup contact, rather than damage the relationship (Hewstone & Brown, 1986).

Computer-mediated communication

The contact hypothesis, which was first established based on FtF interaction, has evolved to include computer-mediated contact, reflecting the fact that, in the modern age, people spend a significant amount of time communicating online (Vilhelmson, Thulin, & Ellmér, 2016). Previous studies have found that CMC is likely to provide similar, if not stronger, effects in generating intimate relationships, as compared to FtF interaction (e.g., Hian, Chuan, Trevor, & Detenber, 2004; Jiang, Bazarova, & Hancock, 2011). Additionally, CMC is anticipated to play a promising role in improving intergroup attitudes for three reasons (Amichai-Hamburger, 2012). First, CMC can overcome practical obstacles that exist with FtF contact, especially for distantly related groups (White, Harvey, & Abu-Rayya, 2015). Second, CMC provides multiple forms of communication (e.g., email, instant messaging, and social networking sites), allowing people to choose channels that lessen their intergroup anxiety during encounters (Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna, 2006). Finally, CMC may downplay individual information and emphasize group identity, so as to generalize the effects of contact from a personal level to a larger group level (Amichai-Hamburger, 2012). Evidence of how intergroup computer-mediated contact improves intergroup relationships has emerged. For instance, Walther et al. found that yearlong online contact between Israeli Jews and Arabs decreased prejudice, supporting the contact hypothesis in CMC settings (Walther, Hoter, Ganayem & Shonfeld, 2015).

Networked computers provide multiple modes for intergroup contact. A mode refers to “a genre of CMC that combines messaging protocols and the social and cultural practices that have evolved around [its] usage” (Herring, 2002, p.112). Text-based CMC and video-based CMC are among the most popular and publicly-accessible CMC modes (Antheunis, Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Sprecher, 2014). Text-based CMC refers to communication via text messages, whereas video-based CMC means interaction through video talk. These two platforms are distinct in terms of their capacity to convey cues. Text-based CMC provides fixed and static records for interaction (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997). Video-based CMC contains ample non-verbal cues, such as eye contact, head nods, and facial expressions, as well as additional audio and video information. While video-based CMC is largely comparable to FtF in many respects, FtF remains better able to provide communication cues due to the subtleties inherent in such interactions, including tactile sensing and smell (Antheunis, Schouten, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2012; Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2007).

Video-based CMC, with abundant social cues, is likely to personalize the interaction. Although some scholars argue that visual cues can make people continually aware of category membership and reinforce intergroup biases, the pleasant contact itself and available personal characteristics through visual information provide the opportunity to break down monolithic perception of the outgroup as a homogenous unit and disconfirm category stereotypes (Brewer & Miller, 1996). Available cues vary across different CMC sessions and may result in different communication effects. In line with the cues-filtered-out approach (Culnan and Markus, 1987), the capacity of CMC modalities to deliver social information determines people’s perceived quality of and satisfaction with communication. Similarly, social presence theory (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976) and media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984) suggest that the degree to which a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication influences one’s evaluation (Gunawardena, 1995). The closer a mediated communication is to FtF interaction, the higher quality the interaction is. Following this line, video-based CMC, which has a stronger capacity to provide individual cues that disrupt outgroup homogeneity, is more likely to facilitate the building of intimate relationships than text-based CMC. Video-based CMC provides higher fidelity than text-based CMC—that is, there is more richness and granularity of detail to be processed by interlocutors. Sufficient social cues during video-

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5045545>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5045545>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)