

Perceptions of Mediated Presence in an Asynchronous Online Course: Interplay of communication behaviors and medium

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This investigation of student perceptions of mediated presence in an online college class yielded two key findings. First, perceptions of the instructor's mediated presence were significantly higher than perceptions of the other students' presence. Second, students identified a set of communication behaviors that influenced their perceptions of whether other participants in the class were "real" or present: frequency of interaction, responsiveness, use of non-verbal communication channels, and participants' tone or communication style. Theoretical and pedagogical implications of these findings and directions for future research are discussed.

Introduction

Requests continue to increase from students, employers, and learning institutions for asynchronous online classes. It has been estimated that over the next few years there will be over 2.3 million US students taking distance learning courses (US Distance Learning Association, 2004). Many such asynchronous classes are delivered through the Internet. These entirely online classes are seen as meeting several objectives: addressing the needs of non-traditional students who require greater flexibility to accommodate work or families; incorporating learning about technical and information-gathering skills in the context of course content; supporting outreach beyond an institution's geographic area; and to help institutions remain competitive (Lieberman, 2002). Some groups of students appear to find asynchronous online courses especially appealing. In addition to the flexibility inherent in any time—anywhere mode, working asynchronously gives students time to reflect and respond, may reduce evaluation apprehension where individuals withhold their ideas

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