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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTORS COMPARING A LOW MEDIATED
IMMEDIACY SYLLABUS TO A HIGH MEDIATED IMMEDIACY SYLLABUS

ANN KAMPS

51 Pages

Instructional communication researchers have begun exploring the effects of levels of immediacy and mediated immediacy on students' perceptions and success in the classroom. To date, researchers have concluded high levels of immediacy are beneficial for instructors to use both in their classroom and online as well. To extend this line of research, this experiment explores the effects of mediated immediacy on student perceptions of instructor's clarity, credibility, and motivation. Results indicated that high levels of mediated immediacy in syllabi have positive effects on student perceptions and should be integrated within the online classroom. These findings contribute practical implications for instructors and department chairs who are interested in instructional communication.

KEYWORDS: Immediacy, mediated immediacy, qualitative, quantitative, clarity, credibility, motivation, syllabus, perceptions, instructors

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IMMEDIACY SYLLABUS TO A HIGH MEDIATED IMMEDIACY SYLLABUS

ANN KAMPS

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IMMEDIACY SYLLABUS TO A HIGH MEDIATED IMMEDIACY SYLLABUS

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A.K.

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CHAPTER I: LITURATURE REVIEW

Student Perceptions of Instructors Comparing a Low Mediated Immediacy Syllabus to a High Mediated Immediacy Syllabus

Mottet et al. (2006) once stated that effective teaching today is in large part determined by how students perceive instructors in positive ways. Beginning in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique challenge to higher education due to the recommended restrictions by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) like limiting contact, which shed light on the importance of how teachers use mediated immediacy. Now with social distancing mandates, limited in-person classrooms, students logging on from remote locations, research has shown that teacher clarity, credibility, and creativity are crucial for student engagement. Immediacy behaviors have been commonly associated with student learning outcomes. In fact, Zhang & Witt (2016) found “immediacy cues enhance the teacher-student relationship by communicating affiliation, liking, and interpersonal connection, which in turn are associated with student learning, motivation, and satisfaction with the teacher and course” (p. 157). However, the search for the answer to why these relationships exist and how immediacy affects learning outcomes continues.

Literature Review

Throughout my experience as both an instructor and master’s student, high mediated immediacy, or a high number of communicative cues that portray closeness and connection, is critical because it allows instructors to foster healthy learning environments, positive perceptions, and an overall more pleasurable classroom experience. Another way to interpret mediated immediacy is any form of communicative cues that do not happen face to face. The signature at the bottom of your email, your online classroom profile information, and your

syllabus content for example. Due to the exploratory nature of research surrounding mediated immediacy, this thesis includes syllabus as a form of media because of its nonverbal properties and online use. Additionally, it is important to explore how integrating high mediate immediacy within a syllabus can potentially reach students on a different level and create a better perception of credibility, clarity, and motivation.

Research examining the effects of mediated immediacy on student perceptions of instructors is needed because mediated immediacy in syllabi is a far under researched area of pedagogy. The majority of previous research stems from Aboagye (2020), specifically when looking at students' willingness to come to class and communicate with an instructor out of class. Due to this lack in research, relationships among mediated immediacy and student perceptions should be examined due to the relationship a syllabus has with student success in the classroom. The syllabus is often the first contact students have with an instructor, and thus the syllabus is an important catalyst in the impressions they form, and the relationship students cultivate with the instructor.

The importance of first impressions along with student expectations have long been studied along with effects on student perceptions of instructors. Hayward (2003) found that the first day of class has special importance for both student and instructor because the first day allows them to establish a relationship and communicate about expectations through a syllabus review, course requirements, and course assignments. Interestingly, he also found that "student impressions remain stable across the semester. Once students form an initial impression based on the first day of class, the events taking place in the classroom throughout the semester have a little impact on the impression of the instructor on the last day of class" (p. 7). Hayward (2003)

found that both students and instructors may be nervous that expectations of the course will not be fulfilled.

As the research demonstrates, students can and do form impressions about instructors on the first day. Thus, starting the first day effectively and appropriately is relatively easy, as long as instructors are prepared in advance. Finally, Hayward (2003) offers five tips to effectively manage the first day including being prepared, getting acquainted with students, saving time for administration, immersing students in course content, and soliciting student feedback.

At both the collegiate and high school level, the use of immediacy is not as common. Students often meet a number of new instructors every semester, and not all of them portray high levels of immediacy. The importance of first impressions does rely on student expectations but those same expectations are created not only from what the teacher does on the first day but how this instructor compares to others. Because of this, expectancy violations theory manifests itself well within first impressions through both verbal and nonverbal immediacy use in the classroom and before.

Expectancy Violations Theory

It is hypothesized that if students receive a syllabus with high mediated immediacy, it would be considered a violation of expectation and should have a positive outcome. Especially if the syllabus is the first impression students get of the class expectations and instructor style. However, if your classroom does not match that positive expectation for the level of immediacy, that's another expectation violation. Tatum's (2021) study provides additional evidence that expectancy violations theory is an appropriate framework for understanding student expectations and because of that, should be explored alongside student first impressions of instructors.

Student expectations range from how difficult the grading will be, if late work is accepted, to how the teacher will run the class and how to be successful. There are many definitions of student expectations for both them and their instructor. One definition suggests that student expectations refer to a student's perception of the amount of work that a particular course will require in order to be successful. Although student expectations do not rely only on course load, that is a large percentage.

According to Mottet et al. (2006), it is the "perception of workload that shapes student responses to a course, not the actual number of contact hours or the actual time students spend studying for a course" (pp. 147). Expectancy violations theory was created by Judee Burgoon (1978) and was originally titled "nonverbal expectancy violations theory" and focused on analyzing individuals' expectations of personal space and how responses to personal space violations were influenced by the relationship to the violators. If the individual creating the expectations favor them and or have previous past experiences with them then they may be perceived in a positive way. Hale (1988) then helped change "nonverbal expectancy violations theory" to its current name, expectancy violations theory, when they began to focus on violations of social behavior expectations beyond just nonverbal communication.

Expectancy violations theory would suggest that individuals (e.g., students) have different levels of expectations for different types of mediated communication interactions that shape and guide the interaction and evaluations of expectancy (Schrodt and Witt, 2006). Additionally, Burgoon and Hale (1988), found that there are three factors influence how people react when people do not behave as expected: expectations, increased arousal, and reward valance. Expectations themselves can be affected by any number of variables along with level of increased arousal. According to Burgoon and Hale (1988) reward valance is the level of

perceived awards and may be based on the person's attractiveness, expertise, gender, socioeconomic status, similarity, and style of communication. Mottet et al. state that (2006) "if the person violating the expectation is perceived positively, receivers tend to grant the source permission to violate expectations. Conversely, if the person violating the expectation is perceived negatively, then receivers have a tendency to socially sanction the source of the violated expectation" (p. 150).

Additional key concepts within expectancy violations theory include an expectancy or what a person anticipates will happen in a given situation based on prior knowledge and social ideas. A violation refers to an action that is different from the expected and elicits a reaction. Levels of unexpectedness in addition to the level of violation are also interworking concepts in expectancy violations theory. Level of unexpectedness refers to how prepared the individual is for unexpected actions while the level of violation refers to how the violation is perceived from the individuals' prior expectations. Other variables that also come into play when creating expectations and how violations are perceived include the social norms, the purpose of the interaction, cultural differences, and the formality of the situation. Finally, environmental variables can also influence expectancy and your reaction to its violations including the amount of space available and the nature of the setting the interaction took place in. For example, if you are in an empty field, you do not expect to see someone else out there as well.

Each violation is perceived as either positive or negative based on the characteristics listed above and the context and purpose of the interaction. As well, interactions between people with differing expectations of the interaction will influence the individual's willingness to risk violation. The willingness to risk a violation can come when there is an anticipated positive reaction whose benefit would outweigh any potential negative reaction. For example, you may

violate social norms by screaming inside a busy building if you are alerting everyone of danger the expectancy violation will be received well be individuals thankful of your warning.

Due to expectancy violations theory's heavy incorporation into instructor immediacy research, results indicate that instructor immediacy cues are positively evaluated and associated with positive learning. Mottet et al. (2006) found that "even when instructors violated student course workload expectations, nonverbally immediate instructors were perceived as more rewarding, fair, and positive than nonverbally nonimmediate instructors" (p. 148). However, when exploring expectancy violations theory in connection to level of instructor's immediacy, use it is important to remain consistent over all platforms.

Mediated Immediacy

Mediated immediacy is a new avenue of pedagogical research that focuses on how instructors can portray common immediacy cues through communication in non-face to face situations like zoom or via the online classroom and how that may affect student learning and outcomes. Immediacy itself consists of both verbal and nonverbal expressions that elicit perceptions of interpersonal closeness between communicators (Zhang and Witt, 2016). Zhang & Witt (2016) list some immediacy cues to include "smiles, eye contact, forward body leans, gestures, relaxed body position, appropriate touch, and moving around the classroom while teaching... use of personal examples, self-disclosure, humor, and praise" (p. 157). They also include expressive tones, praise, and vocal variety as cues.

Original research on immediacy in its mediated form was first done by O'Sullivan et al., (2004) by looking at the instructor's classroom website and then focusing on characteristics of immediacy through different mediums. Zhang and Witt (2016) also found that instructors in online courses can utilize verbal immediacy behaviors, such as humor, addressing students by

name, encouraging discussions, or providing feedback, even if they are restricted to a text-only context. Mediated immediacy can also be seen as communicative cues that can be portrayed within interactions that can help shape perceptions of closeness and connection. O'Sullivan et al. (2004) define mediated immediacy as "communicative cues in mediated channels that can shape one's perceptions of psychological closeness between interactants" (p. 471).

Andersen (1982) identified four definitional attributes of immediacy behavior: (1) Immediacy behaviors are characterized by approach within an interaction as opposed to avoidance; (2) Immediacy behaviors signal availability in interactions as opposed to unavailability; (3) Immediacy behaviors induce stimulation and psychological arousal within the receiver of the behavior; (4) and in (almost) all relationships, immediacy behaviors are seen as messages that portray closeness and comfort between the communicators (Andersen, 1982).

Aboagye (2020) drew attention to two macro categories of mediated immediacy: approachability and regard for other. O'Sullivan et al. (2004) describe approachability to include "immediacy cues that signal to others that 'You can approach me'" (p. 472). Nine classifications of immediacy cues that also mirror approachability including self-disclosure, expressiveness, accessibility, informality, similarity, familiarity, humor, attractiveness, and expertise. O'Sullivan et al. (2004) also describe regard as behaviors that tell others that "I am approaching you" including personalness, engagement, helpfulness, and politeness.

Research by Baringer and McCroskey (2000) has shown "that teacher nonverbal immediacy in the classroom context produces positive learning outcomes for students" (p. 178). Specific nonverbal immediacy behaviors stated by Andersen (1982) include but are not limited to eye contact, vocal inflection, gestures, proximity, as well as smiling and touch when appropriate. Baringer and McCroskey (2000) agree that "communication channels such as eye

contact, facial expressions, tone of voice, postures, and movements... allow people to share thoughts and feelings with each other” (p. 178). However, there is a lack of research that has tested the relationship between teachers’ nonverbal immediacy, verbal immediacy, and students’ success in the classroom.

Verbal immediacy and how it is presented via supplemental course material and online learning is important to explore as well. Gorham (1988) states there are many behaviors that indicate verbal immediacy including: praising students; using students’ names; using humor in class; engaging in conversations with students in different settings; self-disclosing; asking for students’ opinions or insight; providing feedback; and inviting students to telephone or meet outside of class if they have questions. Examples of verbal immediacy that can be used within syllabi include inviting students to meet outside of class, using your first name and asking them to refer to you as such, and self-disclosing information they might connect with. This is important because learning model research has shown that teacher immediacy (primarily nonverbal) directly influences affective learning, which has been conceptualized as a process whereby students acquire or modify attitudes, positive or negative, about their teacher (Rodriguez et al., 1996).

According to Allen and LeFebvre (2014), immediacy affects not only student learning but also student ratings of instructors. Moore et al. (1996) examined college students’ perceptions of teacher immediacy and students’ rating of instructors. They found that “students who observed frequent verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors in their professors were more inclined to give high ratings to such things as the overall quality of instruction and value of the course” (p. 29).

Although mediated immediacy is often verbal, it is important to note that perceived instructor immediacy is often significantly higher in live settings and in person classrooms (O’Sullivan et al., 2004) than online. This is relevant because mediated immediacy can happen in both online and face to face classes. Behaviors that can only be done in person matter because they could also be apparent via video or Zoom communication. Kohnke and Moorhouse (2022) describe Zoom as a “immersive and easy-to-use SMT (that) includes several features, such as annotation tools, polls, breakout rooms and video and screen sharing. These functions facilitate communicative language learning through the use of authentic language instruction in interactive synchronous classes” (p. 2). Gorham (1988) further indicates that movement around the classroom as well as a relaxed body position are “low-inference variables of a process which results in a product of increased cognitive and affective learning” (p. 40).

Kelley and Gorham (1988) found that a “combination of eye contact and physical immediacy accounted for 19.5% of the overall variance in recall, with equivalence and interaction of the two immediacy agents suggesting that other immediacy behaviors should produce potentially similar beneficial results” (p. 198). Another possibility proposed by Zhang and Witt (2016) explains that instructors who exhibit immediacy behaviors are more likely to exhibit other behaviors such as credibility or clarity, which may cause students to rate them more highly. Unfortunately, research linking immediacy and students' perception is lacking which warrants further research.

Guerrero and Miller (1998) state that skilled instructors who are animated, fluent, composed, and warm seem likely to convey immediacy despite the physical distance separating them from their students. This is important because online learning often includes physical distance. For example, Guerrero and Miller (1998) found that instructor behaviors projecting

instructor involvement and conversational skill (e.g., general involvement, expressiveness or warmth, composure or fluency, eye contact, and articulation or clarity) correlated with students' positive responses to the instructor and the course content. It is important to explore teacher immediacy because as expressed previously, high teacher immediacy can lead to more effective teaching and student learning (Simonds et al., 2006). Because of its potential positive effects, research focusing on immediacy needs to be done to prove immediacy training and integration should be integrated into every discipline.

The positive effects of teacher immediacy on students is becoming a more prominent topic of study due to its application benefits in the classroom. Jensen (1999) analyzed how to train teachers to be more immediate and found that the training teachers participated in had positive outcomes on immediacy use which then led to positive outcomes for student participation. The key to increasing the use of immediacy is to look at developing strategies like the one used by Jensen to show teachers how immediacy behaviors positively affect not only classroom climate but also student participation.

Andersen (1979), Gorham (1998), and Richmond et al. (1987) emphasized the importance of immediacy behaviors regarding teaching effectiveness, and O'Sullivan et al. (2004) took it one step further by examining mediated immediacy and its importance. Therefore, by using a syllabus that is high in immediacy, students can take more of an active role in their own learning and make connections with important content (Stein & Barton, 2016). Aboagye (2020) agreed that "instructors should consider revising their syllabi and include immediacy cues in their syllabus. When a syllabus does not show immediacy behaviors, students who may be facing genuine problems are more likely to keep to themselves—a situation that hampers their academic progress" (p. 13-14). Finally, Zhang and Witt (2016) found that immediacy cues used

in instruction can enhance the teacher-student relationship by communicating affiliation, liking, and interpersonal connection. This in turn is associated with student learning, motivation, and satisfaction with the teacher and course, a positive outcome of successful instruction.

Mediated Immediacy in Syllabi

A syllabus refers to an outline detailing the subjects of a course of lectures, the contents of a curriculum, and course expectations. However, syllabi can also affect student perceptions of teaching effectiveness (Saville et al., 2010). Aboagye (2020) states that the syllabus serves several important functions for the students such as increasing willingness to communicate with instructors and out of class communication. Aboagye (2020) expands on Slattery and Carlson's (2005) research surrounding the goals of a syllabus is summarized by saying "as serving motivational, structural, and evidential goals. Since students usually receive the syllabus on the first day of class, it sets the tone and can offer a warm and friendly, formal, condescending, or confrontational environment" (p. 2). Because the syllabus is an important communication tool between an instructor and a student, it is crucial to understand the role of the syllabus in setting classroom expectations and environment.

Saville et al. (2005) found that students who viewed a more detailed six-page syllabus were more likely to rate that teacher as possessing better qualities. In addition, students who viewed the detailed syllabus were more likely to report that they would recommend the course to a friend and take another course from the teacher. Students who viewed the detailed version of a syllabus were more likely to rate their teacher as being "approachable, caring, and flexible" (p. 186), which are characteristics of immediacy.

Kelley and Gorham (1988) state that "immediacy is related to arousal, which is related to attention, which is related to memory, which is related to cognitive learning" (p. 201). Further,

McKeachie (2002) argues that a less organized syllabus might signal to students that their teacher does not care about them or their success in their class. Additionally, Zeytoon (2017) believed that “using a well-designed Interactive Graphic syllabus can bring about many advantages such as clarifying complex relationships; causing a better retention; needing less cognitive energy for interpretation; helping instructors identify any snags in their course organization; capability of being integrated easily into a course management system; appealing to many of learning styles and engaging students with different learning styles” (p. 10). Research like this has opened the door to the importance of nontraditional syllabi and the immediacy cues within them.

Fitzpatrick (2008) found that her syllabi allowed her to get to know her colleagues at a deeper level; “the apathetic and the lazy, the diligent and the compulsive. But most significantly... an inattention to proofreading and a failure to check spelling, failures of behavior we find intolerable in our students” (p. 5). This is interesting since syllabi are the first piece of material students receive from instructors, they can be very a highly effective tool. Evert et al. (2013) firmly believe that instructors play a vital role in “introducing students to the fundamentals of innovation and, depending on how they do, can potentially encourage or discourage the innovation process” (p. 91). Their beliefs are backed by data that shows “positive relationships between students' perceptions of faculty communications and students' motivation in capstone courses” (p. 92).

McCroskey and Richmond (1992) found that if the teacher engages in behaviors that communicate positive intent to students, along with the knowledge within the subject to back it, students will engage in more effort to learn what the teacher is trying to teach. Thweatt and McCroskey (1998) found “a statistically significant positive relationship between instructor

immediacy and presence” (p. 348). Due to this finding, evaluating mediated immediacy is incredibly valuable and based on the lack of research linking immediacy with syllabi, that area deserves additional research as well. Additionally, there are few research studies that have tested the relationship between teachers’ immediacy within syllabi and students’ first perception of them.

O’Sullivan et al. (2004) argue that it is in fact an instructor’s pedagogical choice whether or not to include immediate statements in the syllabus. Their choice communicates if they are approachable and respect the concerns of students. Aboagye (2020) finishes by stating, “While we anticipate that some instructors may think students do not read the syllabus, our study shows the value of a carefully constructed syllabus. College students, especially first-year students, pay particular attention to the content of a syllabus. As such, the syllabus can encourage communication between student and instructor when immediate messages are communicated” (p. 14).

Credibility

Scholarly analysis of credibility and the idea of ethos dates to the work of Aristotle and has evolved throughout time. O’Keefe (2002) refers to credibility as judgments made by perceivers based on the message they received as well as how believable the communicator is. It is also important to note that perception of credibility resides uniquely in everyone. McCroskey and Teven (1999) state that Aristotle's definition of ethos included three components that are perceived by the receiver in communication situations: expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill.

A slightly different conceptualization of ethos and the idea of credibility was offered by Hovland et al. (1953) when the researchers suggested that credibility included perceived expertness, trustworthiness, and intention toward the receiver. Hunt and Meyer (2022) argue that,

“there is now widespread agreement among scholars that a credible communicator is one who is perceived to be an expert, is regarded as trustworthy, and who displays goodwill toward receivers” (p. 2).

Teacher credibility specifically refers to a student's belief that they can and will learn new and pertinent information from a particular instructor (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). Teven and McCroskey (1997) found that positive perceptions of instructor credibility parallel positive outcomes in the classroom, including increased participation and student learning. They also suggest goodwill and clarity as helpers to perceived credibility in instructors and found that the students' perceptions of teacher caring were correlated with “students' evaluation of their teachers, their affective learning, and their perceptions of their cognitive learning” (p. 2).

Thweatt and McCroskey (1998) investigated the relationship between teachers' immediacy and their credibility before creating the hypothesis that teachers who are more immediate would be perceived as more credible than less immediate teachers. McCroskey and Teven (1999) went on to further develop the concept of credibility and “goodwill” by concluding that, “goodwill is indeed a meaningful predictor of believability and likeableness and should take its place in the... future of communication research dealing with ethos and credibility” (p. 101). Teven and Herring (2006) explored students' perceptions of their teachers' power in relation to competence, caring, and trustworthiness. They found a positive correlation between teacher power, credibility, and satisfaction. The construct of instructor credibility has changed immensely over the years due to technology, online learning, and an ever-changing society but its link to teacher clarity has never been stronger. Thweatt and McCroskey (1998) went on to state “the higher the credibility, the higher the learning” (p. 349).

However, instructors should be purposeful when using immediacy because Schrodt and Witt (2006) found that highly immediate teachers who uses too much immediacy eventually reach a “point of diminishing returns” in terms of perceived credibility. Nevertheless, Schrodt and Witt (2006) also found that “across all four technology conditions and all three dimensions of instructor credibility, students perceived instructors who were described as being highly immediate as more competent, trustworthy, and caring” (p. 1). Because of that, they found that student expectations of immediacy are responsible for additional attributes of instructor credibility, as long as instructors remain consistent within their other methods of communication.

Clarity

Simonds (1997) defines clarity as the teacher's ability to present knowledge in ways that are clear and students can understand. Titsworth and Mazer (2016) define the term teacher clarity “as students’ perceptions of teachers’ behaviors that assist in selecting, understanding, and remembering information, there are better, and more descriptive terms that should be used to guide researchers as they isolate and operationalize behaviors” (p. 106). Titsworth and Mazer (2016) also go on to explain that clarity can be understood at various levels, ranging from an overall impression to a highly specific behavior. Being clear, previewing main points of discussion, explaining details of assignments, and remaining organized for example.

Comadena et al. (2007) describe how teachers convey clarity “as one who is (is not) very clear in presenting course content, class sessions are (are not) well organized, topics are (are not) previewed and summarized, and effective transitions are (are not) provided between topics and class periods” (p. 241). Simonds (1997) includes an additional aspect of teacher clarity that emphasizes focus on organized and intentional instructing. This allows instructors to bring clear expectations and a level of fairness to the classroom through clarity. In turn, when teachers are

clear on expectations and information, students are better able to understand what is needed for them to succeed.

Cruickshank (1985) broke down teacher clarity into nine variables: clarity, variability, enthusiasm, task orientation, criticism, teacher indirectness, criterion material, structuring comments, and levels of questions. Cruickshank (1985) then summarized the findings on teacher clarity into five statements: (1) Teacher clarity is a multidimensional phenomenon; teacher clarity appears to be stable; (2) Certain teacher clarity behaviors are more central and important than others; (3) Teacher clarity is related to both student achievement and satisfaction; (4) Learners judge a teacher's effectiveness in large part based on clarity; (5) Teacher clarity can be enhanced through training.

Chesebro and McCroskey (2001) argue that because there are “relationships among receiver apprehension, teacher clarity, and teacher immediacy in the instructional context” (p. 59), then instructors must understand the importance of being both clear and immediate. As well, Chesebro (2003) later indicates that “clarity is an important factor in student learning, receiver apprehension, and affect” (p. 135). Simply put, students who were taught by a clear teacher learned more than those who were taught by an unclear teacher. Those students also noted less receiver apprehension and had an overall positive perception of the instructor and the course material.

According to Simonds (1997), expanding the view of clarity in the classroom and diving deeper into research “will allow scholars to identify student concerns pertaining to classroom processes as well as the presentation of course content” (p. 287). Simonds (1997) also proposes a further exploration of the relationship between teacher clarity and credibility within the classroom. Therefore, a lack of clarity in lectures and rules can confuse students about how to

behave in class, what is expected of them, how to meet requirements for the class, and how to succeed.

Additionally, Simonds (1997) argued that “clarity must be incorporated as a goal of general classroom understanding” so that instructors can become aware of and identify, more inclusively, the behaviors that constitute teacher clarity (p. 280). It is also important to note that Titsworth and Mazer (2016) found that “teacher clarity has a larger effect for student affective learning than for cognitive learning” (p. 106). On the reverse side, Bolkan et al. (2015) did find that if students lacked their own motivation, no amount of clarity would help them process material better and because of that motivation should also be included. Titsworth and Mazer (2016) also argue that “clarity is both a behavior and an impression” (p. 112).

Motivation

Increasing students’ motivation is central to improving students’ learning in the classroom and that motivation is the energy that drives student performance as well (Frymier, 2016). Frymier (2016) found that “over the past four decades research on teacher communication behaviors has been very consistent... Behaviors, including verbal and nonverbal immediacy along with clarity, have led to a general profile of effective teacher communication and increased student motivation” (p. 389).

Christophel (1990) defines motivation as a situation with specific directions that are affected by stimulating properties such as money, recognition, or force. In simple terms, something is making you want to do something else. Baumeister (2016) provides a different definition to motivation as “a particular desire to perform a particular behavior on a particular occasion... and it is presumably characterized by subjective feeling of wanting something specific to happen—indeed, usually wanting to do something specific to make it happen” (p.1).

Brophy (1987) refers to student state motivation as when a student attempts to obtain academic knowledge or skills from classroom activities by finding these activities meaningful. This is not to be confused with student trait motivation which refers to a more general predisposition to learning (Brophy, 1987). Student state motivation is also related positively to perceived instructor clarity, humor, immediacy, confirmation, and caring (Simonds et al., 2006). Additionally, Bolkan, et al. (2016) indicated “when students’ motivation to process was high, motivation interacted with instructor clarity to increase test scores” (p. 1). In other words, Frymier (2016) explain that “trait motivation to learn is an enduring disposition to strive for learning and mastery that crosses situation and time. State motivation to learn is specific to a situation and relates to mastering the knowledge and skill being taught in that situation” (p. 378).

Both state and trait motivation include some aspects of intrinsic motivation because it has been found to be routinely associated with high educational achievement and enjoyment (Tohidi & Jabbari, 2012). Tohidi and Jabbari (2012) explain that intrinsic motivation occurs when students attribute their educational results to factors under their own control and or their own effort. Students also actively believe that they can be in control of reaching desired goals and are interested in mastering a topic, rather than just learning to achieve good grades. This concept couples well with state motivation and the idea of finding meaningful activities and topics. Christophel (1990) measured state and trait motivation and found that trait motivation had a small relationship with student learning while state motivation in correlation with immediacy positively impacted affective and cognitive learning.

One way to accurately measure student motivation is to use the State Motivation Scale, originally created by Christophel (1990) and later adapted by Frymier (1994). Frymier (2016)

used this scale to argue that student motivation is central to many effective teaching behaviors and their ultimate effect (positively or negatively) on student learning outcomes. They found a positive effect.

When analyzing motivation, Bolkan and Goodboy (2015) call attention to self-determination theory which refers to a person's own ability to manage themselves and their thoughts and go on to state, "communication researchers [must] begin to embrace self-determination theory in order to understand how instructors meet students' basic needs and how the fulfillment of these needs facilitates students' behaviors and, ultimately, learning" (p. 60).

Goodboy et al. (2018) believe that teacher communication behaviors that have positive relationships with learning outcomes function similarly to teacher immediacy and should be researched as such. Motivation is seamlessly integrated within mediated immediacy behavior because it helps satisfy student needs, enhancing intrinsic and integrated motivation, which in turn enhances learning outcomes (Goodboy et al. 2018). In terms of motivation, Slattery and Carlson (2005) indicate students who read "less friendly syllabi may believe that their professor does not expect them to be successful, which can create a self-fulfilling prophecy" (p. 160). Because of that, exploring the potential positive effects of mediated immediacy and students' perceptions of their instructor is important for instructional communication researchers.

CHAPTER II: METHODS

This prompts the research questions this study is seeking to answer:

RQ 1: Is there a difference between low mediated immediacy syllabi and high mediated immediacy syllabi on student perceptions of teacher credibility?

RQ 2: Is there a difference between low mediated immediacy syllabi and high mediated immediacy syllabi on student perceptions of teacher clarity?

RQ 3: Is there a difference between low mediated immediacy syllabi and high mediated immediacy syllabi on student motivation?

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study included 191 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in sections of both the basic communication course and the communication theories course at a large Midwestern university. Demographics of participants were not collected due to the emphasis placed on anonymity. The basic communication course, the communication theories and group communication courses were chosen for recruiting participants because it allows for a cross-section of academic disciplines and because there are 250-300 students enrolled within those classes which allows for a large pool of students to be sampled resulting in better data. Additionally, any students with access to the large Midwestern Universities Research Board were also able to participate. All participants were chosen on a convenience basis and chose to participate in this study via Qualtrics.

Of the experiments distributed, 58 had to be set aside due to incompleteness, giving a final sample size of 133. Of that, 95 participants evaluated the high immediacy syllabus, and 96 participants evaluated the low immediacy syllabus.

Procedures

Before participating in the experiment, the participants had to acknowledge that they read a statement outlining their rights in the situation. Participants were also given directions for completing a survey including measurements of clarity, credibility, and motivation and are asked to read each question carefully and to make sure they answered the questions the way they intended to. This research included one independent variable with two groups (a high mediated immediacy syllabus and a low mediated immediacy syllabus) and two dependent variables (credibility and clarity). The participants were first randomly administered one of two syllabi, then were told to evaluate their first perception of an instructor based on the syllabus they received. Neither group of participants were aware there was another version of the syllabi other than the one they received. After looking over their assigned syllabus, they were asked a series of questions to measure their perceptions of each instructor.

The high and low immediacy syllabi used for this study was adapted from Aboagye's (2020) syllabi before adding visual elements and additional mental health statements. Aboagye (2020) created their original syllabi after reviewing sample syllabi and from their university archives and analyzing the basic course list serve for statements and characteristics that show high immediacy. They then analyzed the collected syllabus statements for evidence of O'Sullivan et al.'s (2004) categories of mediated immediacy: approachability (self-disclosure, expressiveness, accessibility, informality, similarity, familiarity, humor, attractiveness, expertise) and regard for other (personalness, engagement, helpfulness, and politeness). That framework including the statements of high immediacy found in the basic course list serve, was used to create the high mediated immediacy syllabi with the inclusion of "we" language and examples of care for student success.

After creating the high immediacy syllabus based on the sample syllabi collected, Aboagye (2020) used the same framework to create a low immediacy syllabus for each of the corresponding statements. For example, the low immediacy statement on instructor availability read “My office hours are listed above. Those are the only times I am available for individual discussions, and I don’t take appointments. Be prepared to show up early and wait in line for the chance to see me.” The corresponding high immediacy statement read “It is my personal ethos, to practice compassion with every person I come into contact, which includes my students. Know that my office door is always open, and you may come chat with me about anything you are struggling with regarding my course. I will do my best to help you succeed”. In addition to the low and high mediated immediacy syllabi created by Aboagye (2020), mental health resources and a personal teaching philosophy were included.

Measures

Instructor Credibility

Teven & McCroskey's (1997) 18-item scale was used to measure the participants’ perception of their instructor’s credibility. This scale assessed how participants perceive their instructors based on competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness. Participants were asked to align their perception of their instructor between adjectives on a seven-point scale. The adjectives used on the scale include but are not limited to; honest-dishonest, intelligent-unintelligent, untrained-trained, inexpert-expert, informed-uninformed, incompetent-competent, and bright-stupid. As with above, the closer the number you choose is to an adjective, the more certain you are of your perception. This scale was chosen as a base because it will accurately measure students’ perceptions of their instructor’s credibility and works well with measures of mediated

immediacy. The survey consisted of 18 items and the value for Cronbach's Alpha for competence was $\alpha = .89$, goodwill was $\alpha = .95$, and trustworthiness was $\alpha = .92$.

Qualitatively, six additional short answer questions were asked: (1) How certain were you of your perceptions of this instructor and why? (2) Do you perceive this instructor as credible? Why or why not? (3) In what ways, if any, did the instructor portray credibility? (4) Would you take a class with this instructor if offered? (5) In what ways, if any, could this instructor improve their syllabi to appear more credible? (6) What examples within the syllabi show credibility?

Instructor Clarity

In order to measure teacher clarity, one of two measures are used: the Teacher Clarity Short Inventory presented by Chesebro and McCroskey (1998) and the clarity indicators scale proposed by Bolkan (2014). Bolkan (2014) states that the clarity indicators scale is a "reliable and valid low- to medium-inference, multidimensional measure of instructor clarity from seminal work across several academic fields" (p. 45).

The Chesebro and McCroskey (1998) ten item Likert-type scale was used to quantitatively measure clarity in syllabi. This scale asked participants to respond from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) to a series of ten questions. Those questions include: (1) My teacher clearly defines major concepts. (2) My teachers answer to student questions are unclear. (3) In general, I understand my teacher. (4) Projects assigned for the class have unclear guidelines. (5) My teachers' objectives for the course are clear. (6) My teacher is straight forward in his or her lecture. (7) My teacher is not clear when defining guidelines for out of class assignments. (8) My teacher uses clear and relevant examples. (9) In general, I would say that my teacher's classroom communication is unclear. (10) My teacher is explicit in his or her

instruction. The survey consisted of 10 items and the value for Cronbach's Alpha for clarity was $\alpha = .87$.

Qualitatively, six short answer questions were asked for the participant to further explain their perceptions. Those questions include: (1) What does the phrase "My instructors' syllabus is very clear" mean to you? (2) In what ways was the instructor clear or unclear in their expectations of the class? (3) How certain are you of your perceptions of this instructor? (4) What examples within the syllabi show clarity? (5) In what ways could this instructor improve their syllabus to include more clarity? (6) Do you perceive this instructor to have clarity based on this syllabus and why?

Motivation

The State Motivation Scale is a 12-item, 7-point bipolar scale that asks respondents to indicate their state motivation or feelings toward a specific course and instructor (Christophel, 1990; Myers & Bryant, 2002). The adjectives used to assess perceived state motivation are as follows: motivated-unmotivated, interested-uninterested, involved-uninvolved, not stimulated-stimulated, do not want to study – want to study, inspired-uninspired, unchallenged-challenged, uninvigorated-invigorated, unenthusiastic-enthused, excited-not excited, aroused-not aroused, not fascinated-fascinated. The survey consisted of 12 items and the value for Cronbach's Alpha for competence was $\alpha = .95$.

CHAPTER III: MANIPULATION CHECKS

Manipulation Checks

Students' perceptions of their instructor's mediated immediacy were assessed via a 10-item semantic differential scale completed by O'Sullivan et al. (2004). The adjectives used to assess perceived immediacy are as follows: inviting-uninviting, disclosing-non-disclosing, open-closed, kind-unkind, distant-close, engaging-detached, inaccessible-accessible, expressive-non-expressive, friendly-unfriendly, warm-cold.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS

Data Analysis

To address the study's hypotheses and the research question, this study's independent variable was mediated immediacy (high levels and low levels). The dependent variables analyzed were motivation, clarity, and credibility. Due to the high correlation between dependent variables, an omnibus MANOVA was conducted to address RQ's one, two, and three. Box's M was used to test for homoscedasticity at $p = .05$. The Box's test (Box's $M = 29.0$) indicated that equal variances cannot be assumed: $F(2, 58951.71) = 15, p = .023$. Therefore, Wilks' lambda was used as the test statistic. The Wilks' lambda indicated significant group differences between independent variable groups in the omnibus analysis: $V = 12.50, F(5, 121) = 121.0, p < .001$, multivariate partial $\eta^2 = .341$.

Following the significant omnibus test, univariate ANOVA results were analyzed using $p = .05$. Significant differences were found between high ($M = 32.02, SD = 7.48$) and low ($M = 28.58, SD = 7.75$) immediacy syllabi for competence, $F(1, 125) = 6.39, p < .001$, multivariate partial $\eta^2 = .049$. Significant differences were also found between high ($M = 35.98, SD = 7.00$) and low ($M = 23.90, SD = 11.13$) immediacy syllabi for goodwill $F(1, 125) = 51.63, p < .001$, multivariate partial $\eta^2 = .292$. Additional significant differences were found between high ($M = 34.90, SD = 6.73$) and low ($M = 28.71, SD = 8.78$) immediacy syllabi for trustworthiness $F(1, 125) = 19.25, p < .001$, multivariate partial $\eta^2 = .133$. Finally significant differences were also found between high ($M = 63.69, SD = 13.67$) and low ($M = 48.01, SD = 17.98$) immediacy syllabi for motivation $F(1, 125) = 29.66, p < .001$, multivariate partial $\eta^2 = .192$. All significant differences show the positive effects of high mediated immediacy on student perceptions of instructor credibility and motivation.

However, clarity was not positively affected by mediated immediacy. Data found that no significant differences were found between high ($M = 35.36$, $SD = 7.89$) and low ($M = 34.81$, $SD = 8.50$) immediacy syllabi for clarity, $F(1, 125) = 0.14$, $p = .707$, multivariate partial $\eta^2 = .001$.

Thematic Analysis

When analyzing the data, I followed Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggested interpretive, three step comparison approach to working with the data (discovery, coding, and discounting). During initial analysis, I carefully read through participants answers twice and identified emergent themes, concepts, and patterns connected to the data. As I read through the answers, I focused on coding and sorting the data into appropriate coding categories through a constant comparison. After highlighting each short answer that fit into a thematic group, those groups were reanalyzed and three were dissolved into the remaining five. An attempt was made to differentiate between high and low answers; however, this was unsuccessful due to lack of identifiers. The final phase of data analysis dealt with inferring meaning from the coded categories and understanding the data in context of the classroom environment and participants' meaning.

One emergent theme that was extraordinarily helpful when it came to understanding what students expect came with examples and ideas on how instructors could improve clarity and credibility in their syllabus via a wide range of suggestions. Additionally, although this is not a "theme" itself, it is important to note that within the short answers the gender defining term "he" was used 107 times mostly when referring to low immediacy syllabus. The gender defining term "she" was used 131 times and "they" was used most often at 327 times.

Emergent themes

The quotes within the exemplars that follow are presented verbatim. Some may include grammatical errors.

Theme 1: Assumption of credibility

One of the first themes that emerged from the data was the student's assumption of instructor's credibility due to their position within the school and educational background. In order to be categorized in this theme the qualitative short answers needed to either directly state assumed credibility or reference it.

Recurring attitudes within this theme include the physical use of the title Dr. and professor creating assumed credibility as well as the instructor's ability to hold the job in the first place. Individuals expressed clear arguments as to their assumed credibility and were confident in their choice to do so. Specific exemplars have been pulled and included below alongside the coordinating qualitative short answer question to serve as examples to emergent themes. In response to the qualitative question, "Do you perceive this instructor as credible? Why or why not?"

Exemplar 1: "Depends on what they are credible towards. I'm sure they are an accredited teacher but are they credible as representing the school and its faculty."

Exemplar 2: "Yes because they work at a university"

In response to the qualitative question, "In what ways, if any, did the instructor portray credibility?"

Exemplar 3: "A big one is by being hired."

Exemplar 4: "Their Dr name and being an instructor here."

Exemplar 5: "They had education and they were able to get the position"

It is clear that credibility is still a tough topic for students to perceive since they are often automatically already looking at their instructor as credible based on their position.

Theme 2: General uncertainty

Another emergent theme revolved around uncertainty and the student's inability to create perceptions they were confident in due to their lack of personal knowledge and face to face contact with the instructor. In order to be categorized in this theme qualitative short answers needed to include direct expressions of uncertainty. Recurring attitudes within this theme revolved around face-to-face communication and meeting the individual first. For example, a few of the exemplars below include refer directly to meeting the professor.

In response to the qualitative question, "How certain are you of your perceptions of this instructor?"

Exemplar 6: "I haven't met this professor yet, so I can't be one hundred percent certain."

Exemplar 7: "Since I have never met them, I am unsure how to perceive them!"

Exemplar 8: "I am not certain at all as I have not actually met the person who created the syllabus."

Exemplar 9: "Not to sure because its just the syllabus and the first class meeting is more important I think."

Most short answers coded in this theme included an answer to the prompt but further retraction stating that they still could not be all the way positive. One example comes from an additional exemplar 10: "I am pretty certain of my perceptions; however I always like to meet people before I give them a final judgement."

Theme 3: Increase in emoji use decreases credibility.

One of the three large themes that emerged from the data was the use of emojis and how their inclusion can negatively effects perceptions of credibility. In order to be categorized in this theme responses needed to include the vocabulary word “emoji” and a negative attitude towards it. A negative attitude was reoccurring within this theme but so was an expectation of decreased credibility. For example, some individuals expressed that although they personally don’t mind the use of emojis, others may find their use and inclusion as less credible. Other individuals were clear in their objection by stating firmly in exemplar 18: “Remove the emojis!”

In response to the qualitative question, “Do you perceive this instructor as credible? Why or why not?”

Exemplar 11: “No, this professor his not credible. The use of emoji’s is unprofessional and strange to have in a outline for a class.”

Exemplar 12: “Unfortunately, the use of emojis and normal language makes the professor not as credible.”

In response to the qualitative question, “In what ways, if any, could this instructor improve their syllabi to appear more credible?”

Exemplar 13: “I don't want to say use less emojis because that can be showing personality but it definitely appears less professional.”

Exemplar 14: “Get rid of the emojis, or not have so many of them.”

Exemplar 15: “I personally did not like the emojis used in the syllabus, in my opinion it took away from the professional look of the syllabus but it also gave the syllabus a more casual, comfortable look to it.”

Exemplar 16: “I think the emojis could be a little overused at times.”

Exemplar 17: “If anything using fewer emojis might make it seem more credible. I do not have anything against them but in a more professional setting, these might seem unprofessional.”

Exemplar 18: “Remove the emojis! You can sound welcoming without the extra nonsense and having the whole syllabus talk about accommodating to students.”

It is clear after coding this theme that the use of emojis does negatively affect ones perception of credibility. Although it is still unclear as to why they are perceived that way, individuals like exemplar 13 and 17 expressed concerns over other individuals’ negative opinions on the use on emojis. Some participants also felt that instead of getting rid of emoji use all together within a syllabus, fewer emojis in appropriate spots may do the job.

Theme 4: Suggestions for improvement

Another main theme that emerged from the data was an increase in suggestions for improvement in regard to both credibility and clarity. In order to be categorized in this theme responses needed to include suggestions, comments, or direct ideas to include in order to improve the syllabus. Recurring attitudes within this theme included desiring more focus on instructor’s own background and education as well as why they are teaching this class. Another emergent attitude when focusing specifically on the low mediated immediacy syllabi was negativity towards its cold nature rigid vocabulary.

When focusing specifically on credibility, coming across as more kind, understanding, and caring is necessary. For example, exemplar 21: “Be more nice and understanding. Not as rude.” expressed their opinions plainly while exemplar 19: “As I said, I think they are credible. If the question is how they could be more understanding and warm towards students, I’d start with using a less self-centered language and more of a “case by case” approach.” was very detailed in

their reasoning. Then when focusing on clarity most answers looked surface level inclusions such as deeper descriptions on class content and large activities or a timeline of class events.

In response to the qualitative question, “In what ways, if any, could this instructor improve their syllabi to appear more credible?”

Exemplar 19: “As I said, I think they are credible. If the question is how they could be more understanding and warm towards students, I’d start with using a less self-centered language and more of a “case by case” approach.”

Exemplar 20: “Be more empathetic towards their students, make themselves more available.”

Exemplar 21: “Be more nice and understanding. Not as rude.”

Exemplar 22: “Make it sound like they actually care about the students success rather than the fact that they're going to deduct grades based on absences and such.”

Exemplar 23: “Seem more kind, seem more caring about problems people may encounter in their lives, and seem more interested in meeting with your students outside of class”

Exemplar 24: “This instructor needs to show their students that they care about them. The instructor could add more about what the class entails, assignments, and grading scale to appear more credible.”

In response to the qualitative question, “In what ways could this instructor improve their syllabus to include more clarity?”

Exemplar 25: “Adding in a clear cut schedule or chart format to clarify for students the flow of the course.”

Exemplar 26: “breakdown the grading scale, use less emojis”

Exemplar 27: “For more clarity I would add a course timeline and list out the topics going to be covered”

Exemplar 28: “Give specific guidelines about certain assignments or projects.”

Exemplar 29: “He should include a more detailed outline of the assignments, along with the exams, of when everything is due. He should also include a tentative schedule of the learning objectives that are being taught in each class or unit.”

Exemplar 30: “In order to provide additional clarity, additional details in regards to the necessary assignments, tests and etc. would be beneficial.”

Exemplar 31: “He could provide a dated list of when all of the assignments are due, as well as an outline of the lesson plan.”

Exemplar 32: “Include information about their education.”

Exemplar 33: “Maybe add some grade breakdowns, where students will be earning points.

Also, perhaps a course schedule.”

Exemplar 34: “Maybe adding more credentials.”

Generally, participants felt that in order to improve both credibility and clarity instructors should work to include deeper descriptions, a course schedule and point breakdown for assignments, more personal credentials, and educational background, and finally less emojis.

Theme 5: Expectancy violations

The final main theme that emerged from the data was the manifestation of expectancy violations theory and how expectations on both students and instructors can affect perception and motivation greatly. In order to be categorized in this theme, qualitative short answers had to either use the vocabulary surrounding “expectations” or allude to their expectations being a part

of their perception. A recurring attitude within this theme includes a lack of confidence due to not meeting the professor and it being impossible to tell if they will be the same in class as students expect from their syllabus. This overlaps expectancy violations theory perfectly and shows how crucial reminding consistent in your level of immediacy cues is beneficial.

In response to the qualitative question, “Do you perceive this instructor as credible? Why or why not?” and “In what ways, if any, did the instructor portray credibility?”

Exemplar 35: The syllabus was not like one I had seen in college so I would say not so much.”

Exemplar 36: “Yes, however I think actually meeting a person can always strengthen credibility. However yes, for the most part I believe that they are credible.”

Exemplar 37: “Credibility is almost impossible to judge off of one sheet of paper, because you aren't sure if they will follow through with what is stated on the syllabus.”

Exemplar 38: Yes, as the syllabus was concise and to the point. Although it is impossible to tell whether or not the instructor will follow how the syllabus was written in their teaching.”

In response to the qualitative question, “What does the phrase “My instructors’ syllabus is very clear” mean to you?”

Exemplar 39: “A clear syllabus would include contact info, office hours, rules, assignments, important dates, extra credit opportunities and services that the university offers.”

Exemplar 40: “I think it means that you can expect what is asked of you and you know what it is that you are asked to finish. Most of the time a clear syllabus is important for

people to go back to and refer to when they need guidance. I myself use it and it helps when it is clear and can clear up questions I may have.”

Exemplar 41: “It outlines a clear expectation of what the student needs to be responsible for learning. This includes the main learning objectives as well as the assignments and readings that the instructor will use to help develop the student's understanding of the main objectives. It is also necessary to provide clear expectations for his grading scale, and how many points total the class will be.”

Exemplar 42: “That the policies and the plan for the term are clear and everyone has a good understanding of what to expect.”

Exemplar 43: “The phrase indicates the outline for class along with the expectations necessary to uphold if a student desires a good grade.”

Exemplar 44: “The students can understand what they need to do and what is expected of them.”

Exemplar 45: “They have expectations clearly presented and elaborated so students know exactly what is expected of them and when.”

Exemplar 46: “That would mean that I know exactly what to expect in the class, such as the amount of assignments, projects, quizzes, tests, and a weekly schedule of everything.”

Exemplar 47: “That our course expectations are to be followed and that I understand how the class will work.”

Exemplar 48: “Able to understand the expectations of the class, as well as understanding how the professor conducts themselves”

Individuals in exemplars 39–45 above expressed characteristics they expect from a syllabus as students and the individuals in exemplars 46- 48 expressed the benefits of knowing

what the instructor in turn expects from them and vice versa. More specifically in exemplar 48 when they say "... as well as understanding how the professor conducts themselves", they are alluding to their expectations of the professor and their potential teaching style made from the syllabus. Thematically, expectations were mentioned in answers to every qualitative question which proves their importance when navigating credibility, clarity, and motivation.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Based on the results from both the quantitative data results and the emergent themes from the qualitative short answer questions, instructors should work to include high mediated immediacy cues within their syllabus due to its positive effects on perceptions of instructor credibility and student motivation.

Summary of findings

When exploring RQ 1: “Is there a difference between low mediated immediacy syllabi and high mediated immediacy syllabi on student perceptions of teacher credibility?”, I found that students perceived the instructor with the high mediated immediacy syllabus to have more credibility. Quantitatively, significant differences were found between high and low immediacy syllabi for competence. Significant differences were also found between high and low immediacy syllabi for goodwill. Additional significant differences were found between high and low immediacy syllabi for trustworthiness. Qualitatively, participants were asked short answer questions focusing on if the syllabus was credible, in what ways, if any, the syllabus was credible, and examples of improvement.

After analyzing if the data answered RQ 3: “Is there a difference between low mediated immediacy syllabi and high mediated immediacy syllabi on student motivation?”, it was found that students with the high mediated immediacy syllabus to have more motivation. Quantitatively significant differences were also found between high and low immediacy syllabi for motivation.

Finally, when comparing the collected data to RQ 2: “Is there a difference between low mediated immediacy syllabi and high mediated immediacy syllabi on student perceptions of teacher clarity?” it was found that there was no increase in student perception of clarity when using the high mediated immediacy syllabi. Quantitatively, although no significant differences

were found between high and low immediacy syllabi for clarity, these results are an equally important finding. Qualitatively, participants were asked short answer questions focusing on how the instructor was clear or unclear on expectations, specific examples, and suggestions for improvement.

After a thematic analysis, five themes emerged that included assumption of credibility, general uncertainty, increase in emoji use decreases credibility, suggestions for improvement, and finally manifestation of expectancy violations theory. The result from the thematic analysis suggests that having high immediacy in syllabi will in turn cause students to view you as more credible and have high levels of motivation. That means in terms of implications, instructors should use these results as evidence to add high mediated immediacy characteristics into their syllabus or increase the use if already present. Keep in mind however that additional results from the thematic analysis suggest that although high mediated immediacy itself causes an increase in student perceptions of credibility and motivation, it did not establish a relationship with clarity. As well, the use of emojis in any syllabus can be seen as unprofessional and less credible.

Additionally, instructors may benefit from suggestions for syllabus improvement including deeper descriptions of course objectives, a course schedule, and point breakdown for assignments. Including additional personal credentials and an educational background summary was also suggested.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that mediated immediacy is necessary for instructors to integrate in their syllabus due to its strong influence upon increased student perceptions of motivation and credibility.

Implications

This thesis found that instructors should work to include high mediated immediacy cues within their syllabus due to its positive effects on perceptions of instructor credibility and student motivation. Departments should seek to include this research in instructor training in order to improve their departments blanket syllabus. Instructors will see benefit in integrating high mediated immediacy aspects into their syllabus based on the results of this experiment.

When including high immediacy characteristics in the syllabus, instructors should include the use of “we” language, mental health considerations, and open communication with students. Instructors should not include emojis within their syllabus based on students’ negative perception of their use, either personal or societal.

The result of this experiment makes a difference in the instructional communication and educational discipline because it further solidifies the importance of your syllabus on student perceptions. As well it encouraged the inclusion of high immediacy through different mediated channels, based on its positive effect when used in a syllabus. This study proves the importance of mediated immediacy and if correctly used its positive effects on student perceptions. That in turn can help students’ motivation in class.

This research specifically exploring the relationship between a syllabus and students’ perceptions is exploratory as the first of its kind. Now the question poses itself, as the instructor what do I need to do with this information? Instructors can take this data as evidence that your syllabus should be reworked to include high immediacy cues. More specifically, the syllabus you receive from your departments or school needs to be paid attention too due to their high effects on student perceptions.

Although this thesis does not test expectancy violations theory, how it effects students' perceptions need to be taken into consideration when using high immediacy syllabi. Exemplar 49: "Yes, as the syllabus was concise and to the point. Although it is impossible to tell whether or not the instructor will follow how the syllabus was written in their teaching."

The results of this research is also helpful in both synchronous and asynchronous classes due to the syllabus use before classes start and the inclusion of mediated forms of immediacy. Moreover, since college instruction ranges from online to in person, a well-constructed syllabus that embodies mediated immediacy encourages students' interaction with instructors. While it's anticipated that some students do not read the syllabus, this study shows the value of a carefully constructed syllabus with the inclusion of high mediated immediacy.

As instructors, we must be mindful of the level of immediacy we set forth at the beginning of the semester, and as competent communicators, we must consider the way in which the opportunity use of immediacy cues help us achieve those objectives. Instruction itself and the sudden shift to online learning was difficult. However, focusing on the syllabus is another way to connect with students on a level instructors seem to forget. This strengthening to the importance of immediacy and its addition to our "teacher toolbox" used to impact students.

Limitations

Despite the contributions of this study, there are limitations that deserve attention. When thematically analyzing the qualitative short answer questions, it was difficult to differentiate which of the high or low syllabus was correlated with each qualitative short answer making it hard to code based on syllabi. This was caused by the lack of separation between the high mediated immediacy syllabus and the low mediated immediacy syllabus qualitative question answers. Additionally, this experiment was scenario based and not preformed within a real

classroom setting which limits authenticity and credibility. Finally, although participants were given ample time to analyze the syllabus, they could not see the syllabus after the first page making it almost impossible to remember specific details and examples. Examples of participant frustration are included in exemplars 50 – 54 below.

Exemplar 50: “I would reference it if I could, but I can't.”

Exemplar 51: “Not very certain, again, due to not being able to look over it again.”

Exemplar 52: “I can't recall specific examples at this point”

Exemplar 53: “I need to see it again”

Exemplar 54: “Again, I would reference it if I can, but it appears this survey doesn't allow that.”

Directions for future research

One incredible aspect of this thesis is the number of future studies that can use this data and experiment layout as a jumping off point. Future studies in instructional communication can perform longitudinal studies to determine how the positive effects of high mediated immediacy in syllabi evolve over time. Specifically, when looking at the use of mediated immediacy within online classroom platforms such as Canvas. Future researchers can also explore immediacy use in real classroom scenarios as well as within their online classroom platforms allowing researchers to collect authentic data and in person interviews for later thematic analysis. In this way, we would be able to determine whether students' initial perception of an instructor remains consistent or is impacted by outside factors. Scholars would then be able to identify specifically how instructors can include immediacy practices that ensure students perceive them in a clear and credible way.

In addition, results from the thematic analysis suggest future research should also explore if and in what ways emoji use can cause students to perceive instructors as less credible. Further, if there is an appropriate amount of emojis to use in order to still be seen as credible. Many exemplars included express the lack of credibility in correlation to emoji use but none has specific reasoning as to why. Further research in providing clear examples of credibility and clarity within mediated immediacy may also pose benefits.

Finally, when looking to use this thesis as a shell, expectancy violations and expectancy violations theory should be explored within this research. Because student expectations effect student perceptions, including that as an independent variable would be beneficial. Another interesting avenue for future research includes exploring the effects of instructor gender on student perceptions or credibility, clarity, and motivation. Additionally, different disciplines within higher education may have different syllabus expectations and requirements. Exploring how to integrate mediated immediacy into other disciplines as well as how student from varying educational backgrounds may perceive instructors is another interesting path. The possibilities for future research are endless when looking at mediated immediacy and its relationship to the syllabus.

Conclusion

Frymier (2016) argued that effective teachers engage in immediate behaviors and the results of this experiment further solidify that statement. In terms of expectancy violation theory, it is important to remember that if students perceive high immediacy to be an unexpected course enhancement, the expectancy violation may carry a positive reward valence and add positivity to students' attitudes about their teacher (Witt, 2004). Frymier (2016) also found one final thing,

“behaviors such as immediacy, clarity, affinity-seeking, and confirmation... facilitate student engagement in learning” (p. 388).

The positive link between high mediated immediacy in syllabi and positive student perceptions of instructors proves the importance of mediated immediacy and encourages instructional communication scholars to rethink the importance of the syllabus construction. Instructors from various disciplines should reflect on the level of immediacy portrayed in their syllabus. Administrators alike should encourage instructors to include immediacy cues and personal information into their syllabi. Finally, additional research surrounding effects of immediacy in all forms in addition to the best way to formulate a syllabus should be explored due to its potential link to student success.

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