

INTERNET WEB-BASED LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the learners' attitudes and perceptions of students as they conducted electronic-augmented projects. This paper also discusses computer-oriented affective attitudes and cognitive perceptions toward this tool. It further reviews the core concepts and theoretical frameworks that should be applied to a mass communication perspective on Internet communication. The study also contributes to an understanding of research learning (RL) using the web, and provides a basis for empirical studies of Pakistani university students performing real educational tasks with the web.

INTRODUCTION

The past decade has seen the rapid development and tremendous growth in the use of electronic, computer-based communication and information sharing via the "Internet". Defined as a "decentralised, self-maintaining series of links between computer networks", the Internet operates throughout much of the world, and particularly the Western world (Barr,2001). Never designed as a mass communication medium, the Internet was originally developed by the US Defence Department in the 1950s as a means of connecting the Department's internal computers. The speed at which society has adopted this technology, its spread internationally and its significant penetration into work, school and family life, has been described by some as a "revolution" (Slattery,2001).

Mass communications researchers have overlooked the potential of the Internet for several reasons. The Internet was developed in bits and pieces by hobbyists, students, and academics (Rheingold, 1994). It didn't fit researchers' ideas about mass media, locked, as they have been, into models of print and broadcast media. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) at first resembled interpersonal communication and was relegated to the domain of other fields, such as education, management information science, and library science. These fields, in fact, have been doing research into CMC for nearly 20 years (Dennis and Gallupe,1993; O'Shea and self, 1983) and many of their ideas about CMC have proven useful in looking at the phenomenon as a mass

medium. Both education and business researchers have seen the computer as a technology through which communication was mediated, and both lines of research have been concerned with the effects of this new medium.

However, a new communication technology can throw the facades of the old into sharp relief. McLuhan (1960) recognized this when, speaking of the computer, he wrote, "The advent of a new medium often reveals the lineaments and assumptions, as it were, of an old medium". In effect, a new communication technology may perform an almost postmodern function of making the unpresentable perceptible, as (Lyotard,1983) might put it. In creating new configurations of sources, messages, and receivers, new communication technologies force researchers to examine their old definitions. What is a mass audience? What is a communication medium? How are messages mediated?

The Internet is a multifaceted mass medium, that is, it contains many different configurations of communication. Its varied forms show the connection between interpersonal and mass communication that has been an object of study since the two-step flow associated the two (Lazarsfeld *et al.*,1944). Chaffee and Mutz (1988) have called for an exploration of this relationship that begins "with a theory that spells out what effects are of interest, and what aspects of communication might produce them". The Internet offers a chance to develop and to refine that theory.