

How to do Big Business in Pandemic? An Exploratory Study on Effect of Computer-Mediated Communication on Doing High-Level Business Development

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Abstract.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) took on a whole new dimension during Covid-19. During the pandemic, many people were forced to work via online platforms, and some of these people were performing their jobs almost exclusively in face-to-face communication environments prior. One specific group is Senior Business Development Managers who are responsible for handling large strategic businesses, particularly relationship-based businesses. This study focuses on key aspects of CMC in the context of developing these relationship-based businesses in light of the situation during the pandemic. This study aims to discover how Senior Business Development Managers reconciled the pros and cons of CMC in their work, and how the sudden change in communication channels affected their ability to perform their work successfully. The research was conducted with regards to social interpretative epistemology. We utilized a purposeful sampling method and recruited eight senior business development managers. They were interviewed and presented with open-ended, semi-structured questions. Interviews were conducted in accordance with the problem-centred interview method, which made it possible to combine both inductive and deductive approaches. During the analysis, we identified five major themes. These were: (1) communication cues: strong preference for audio-visual communication (2) attention: difficulty in retaining attention across digital mediums; (3) “manipulation”: establishing rapport with client to navigate discussion to navigate the discussion; (4) insecurity: hesitancy to divulge sensitive information over digital mediums; and (5) experiential information: useful information gleaned from the client workplace. We found overlap between themes on effect of CMC on doing business and themes on trust in doing B2B. We concluded that CMC has negative impact on building trust in the business on multiple levels and it negatively impacts clarity in information sharing.

Keywords: computer-mediated communication, CMC, business development, B2B business, COVID-19