Self-Disclosure in Online Groups:  
Predisposition, Disclosing Style and Relational Development  

JIANG Li, Crystal  

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Principal Supervisor: Prof. Ringo C.L. MA  

Hong Kong Baptist University  

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ABSTRACT

This study examines self-disclosure in the context of online groups as a multidimensional construct (intent, amount, valence, honesty and control of depth). The styles, the predispositions, and the interpersonal effects of self-disclosure are addressed through a survey method ($N = 288$). The contextualized influences and self-disclosure strategies were investigated in the qualitative interviews.

The results suggest that self-disclosure unfolds great flexibility and variation in online groups. No universal factor that influences all the dimensions of self-disclosure was identified; different predispositions or situational variables account for different self-disclosure dimensions. While the intent and amount of self-disclosure are mainly shaped by individuals’ predispositions, the valence, honesty, and control of depth of self-disclosure are more subject to situational influences. Making decision about self-disclosure is a very strategic process in which manipulation are exerted over the dimensions of valence, honesty, and control of depth.

Furthermore, this study indicates that in online groups, self-disclosure does not follow the same dynamics as it does in face-to-face settings. On the one hand, the reciprocity of self-disclosure has been revealed in terms of honesty and control of depth, but not the amount dimension as previous studies predict. This suggests that participants choose to reciprocate in terms of disclosure quality rather than disclosure quantity in online groups. On the other hand, the persuasiveness of online self-disclosure does not necessarily result in committed and satisfied relationships. The media attributes of online groups have influenced the process of risk assessment, and disengaged the combination between self-focused and interpersonal focused self-disclosures.
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