Cultural Differences in Construction and Utilisation of Electronic Mail from an African and Irish perspective

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Declaration

This Dissertation is entirely my own work, and has not been previously submitted to this or any other third level institution.

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Abstract

This study sets out to explore whether different cultural backgrounds and specifically learned rules of behaviour affect the usage of computer mediated communication. The study appears to support the general argument that individuals' different cultural influences do have some impact on communication strategies particularly those from a high context cultural background. What is however very significant is the finding that those individuals who are from a high context cultural background but are long term residents in a low context society gradually behave more similarly to the hosting culture and that the cultural conditioning in their styles of communication is lessened or altogether diminished over time.

Introduction

Cultural differences are reflected in communication styles which are based on the modal behaviours of societal learned values and these can then influence communication behaviour (Morse, 2003). This study therefore sets out to explore how different cultural backgrounds and specifically learned rules of behaviour are therefore very relevant to the usage of computer mediated communication. In developing this thesis, it has been evident that despite the fact that CMC has become a common tool of communication in the developed world, there seems to be little research on how people utilize CMC as a relational communication channel in different cultures especially in the developing world (Yum & Hara, 2005).

Whatever their cultural backgrounds, human beings' communication is mediated through interactions with other people and by means of any number of different verbal and nonverbal modes (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004). However, it is the added dimension of technology, specifically the computer that has expanded the horizons of how humans communicate with each other regardless of the challenges of proximity.

The relevance of this added dimension of CMC is aptly summed up by Suler (2004) who writes that e-mail may be the 'most important, unique method for communicating and developing relationships since the telephone' and that for anyone new to the internet it is probably the first and easiest communication medium to use. E-mail is familiar and safe to most people since it is similar in many respects to letter writing, without the annoyances of addressing envelopes, licking stamps, and trips to the mail box (Suler, 2004).

According to the media richness theory, e-mail is a lean medium, since it conveys little information (Daft & Lengel, 1986 as cited by Shachaf, 2005). The inability of the e-mail channel to handle simultaneous multiple cues, two-way communication, and instant feedback can reduce intercultural miscommunication caused by non-verbal communication (Shachaf, 2005). E-mail also limits social presence, which is a subjective perception of the realness of other users involved in the communication incident and emphasizes the lack of contextual cues in communication (Sproull & Keisler, 1986). Decreasing social cues has a deregulating effect on communication and results in status equalization and or these reasons Shachaf (2005) suggests, e-mail can help overcome diversity challenges. However, e-mail reduces, but does not eliminate, the negative impact of differences in verbal style and this reduction is due to its formal, technical, and structured format, with short and precise sentences (Shachaf, 2005).

Recall of Cultural Protocols

In his study of email usage of a Korean virtual team, Lee (2002) argues that in Confucian societies (very similar to collectivist African cultures) respect for the social order in all forms of social communication activity, including e-mail, provide different type of patterns of e-mail use in management of virtual teams compared to Western countries such as Ireland.

Lee (2002) proposes the principle of recall of cultural protocol whereby 'email can trigger critical reflection, which brings about the total recall of one's relevant memory from both the consciousness and the unconsciousness, which automatically includes the cultural protocol that usually, resides in the unconsciousness'. This principle of cultural protocol recall according to Lee (2002) applies to those whose cultural background has conditioned them to accord deference and respect to their elders/seniors as is the case with the Korean virtual team. In a high context culture, this means that an individual sets

out to be respectful in all interactions with them and this would include which modes of communication are used and how and when they can be used. As Lee (2002) points out, cultural protocol plays an irrational role in suppressing the use of email. In most instances, the preference is to make a phone call, instead of sending an email depending on the position of the person to be engaged with.

Cultural protocols also inform the usage of specific email greetings denoting what kind of relationship the author has with the recipient, whether it is the informal 'Hi', which according to Waldvogel (2007) and Suler (2004) creates solidarity and shows familiarity with recipient or 'Dear' which constructs greater formality and sometimes, a degree of aloofness. Basically, different greetings convey slightly different emotional tones and levels of intimacy (Suler, 2004). According to Heisler and Crabill (2006) another relevant facet of cultural protocols and inhibitions that exist in CMC utilised by someone from a high context culture is the careful construction and review of messages before they are sent out. They highlight this by acknowledging that in such cases email is susceptible to impression management (Heisler & Crabill, 2006).

Alternately, O'Brien, Alfano & Magnusson (2007) found that globally-distributed team work mediated by effective use of digital technologies such as email can motivate and influence people to approach cross-cultural communication and cultural exchanges with greater sensitivity, understanding, and ethical awareness in order to bring about positive international and social relations. Shachaf (2005) also notes that when global virtual team members communicate with each other, the differences that have been present in face-to-face (FTF) intercultural communication are mediated by the technology used for communication and therefore it is possible that when team members are using email, these differences in verbal styles will be amplified or mitigated compared to FTF communication.

Critical Social Theory and Communication Accommodation Theory

Lee (2002) posits that the critical social theory provides adequate theoretical support for the claim that e-mail use can be varied due to cultural difference when it is used to manage virtual teams. He adds that it can also identify cultural codes such as respect for seniors as a part of the complete information package that can be illuminated during the use of e-mail, by using a critical social theory concept called critical reflection (Lee, 2002).

The virtual team members in Lee's study were shown to have critical reflection moments that exhibited media richness and the actual usage of email exposed multiple cues which included cultural protocols from the unconscious (Lee, 2002). In supporting his argument, Lee (2002) posited that in Confucian (or African) societies people show respect for their elders and seniors in the workplace as well as at home in all types of communication. In the workplace, Lee argued that critical reflection occurs to individuals in these societies when they are trying to use email to communicate with their seniors, which forces them to illuminate the code of respect usually hidden in the unconsciousness of their mind (Lee, 2002).

For example, the virtual team in Lee's study used email frequently amongst peers, but when it came to communicating with senior managers, email was rarely used. This, according to Lee (2002), confirms the proposition that cultural difference is an important factor in causing varied usage of email in western countries and East Asian ones.

Lee (2002) suggests that the critical social theory provides adequate theoretical support for the claim that e-mail use can be varied due to cultural difference when it is used to manage virtual teams. It can also identify cultural codes such as respect for seniors as a part of the complete information package that can be illuminated during the use of e-mail, by using a critical social theory concept called 'critical reflection'. As such cultural protocols played a significant role in the team members' decision not to use

email 'out of fear of eliminating the cue of respect which was brought up by the initial stage of critical reflection through total recall (Lee, 2002).

Habermas (1984) as cited by Lee (2002) further postulated that emancipation from mental pollutants can happen through critical reflection during communication of information. This study therefore seeks to argue that email should facilitate critical reflection more than other means of communication if it used properly since according to Lee (2002) and Ngwenyama & Lee (1997) communication richness, including emancipation can occur during use of email.

This study will also argue that social context cues indicating politeness could easily be included in CMC messages, just as Bunz and Campbell (2002) did in utilising the principles of communication accommodation theory (CAT) into a computer-mediated environment to argue that it was conceivable that individuals may accommodate to these cues when interacting with others through email.

For instance, Bunz and Campbell (2002) suggested that there is an altering or reduction in the normal conventions of politeness in email discourse compared with more established written forms of communication and that generally there is also evidence to suggest that, due to the decontextualised nature and brevity of many email messages, politeness indicators are reduced or omitted.

Therefore, for the purposes of their study, Bunz and Campbell (2002) utilised CAT to address behavioural adjustments individuals make during communication in order to express values, attitudes, and intentions or as in the case of this study's hypotheses, the recalling of cultural protocols. As Bunz and Campbell (2002) stated in their study, it is essential that communication theories are considered in FTF settings, it is also imperative that these theories be considered in CMC.

Similarly, in their study on communication richness in email, Ngwenyama and Lee (1997) adopted Habermas' critical social theory in positing that all social action assumes a basic set of norms. Lee (2002) also argues that CMC such as email should facilitate critical reflection more than other means of communication if it is used properly since communication richness can occur during the use of email.

High context vs low context cultures

Quite relevant to this study is Wallace's (2004) argument that whilst the cues in FTF communication are quite prominent, with email, the cues that signal the context for communication are much less significant. To emphasise this argument, Wallace (2004) cites Hall (1983) who proposed 'sorting cultures and their various communication styles along the dimension of context'. This according to Wallace reflects 'the degree to which the information contained in a message is conveyed by the context of a message, as opposed to the message itself'. These cultural differences in communication styles can be described under the headings of high context or low context.

African or Far Eastern cultures are considered 'high context' in that they rely far more on the context of the communication and less on words contained in verbal communications (Wallace, 2004). Essentially, these cultures tend to rely more on personal relationships to establish context for communication, and they also tend to prefer more indirect approaches in communication.

Wallace (2004) describes low context cultures (such as Ireland and other western countries) as those that have a tendency to 'extract the information from a communication from the words it contains and rely to a lesser extent on a communication's context'. The words in a message do not have to explicitly relate to every aspect of the situation because the individuals have a long history of shared values and knowledge.

People in low context cultures tend to be more individualistic, whereas those in high context cultures are more collectivist (Wallace, 2004; Lee, 2002) and this has significant bearing on communication styles whether FTF or computer mediated. Interestingly, with so much north-south migration some western countries may lean toward one end of the spectrum partly because the individuals within the country have more shared context, for example individuals from high context cultures who become long residents in low context cultures or vice versa.

All this makes intercultural communication particularly challenging when low context meets high context cultures especially in western and low context countries (Wallace, 2004). To follow Hall's (2000) hypothesis, in a typical African context, FTF communication is characterized by an extensive use of non-verbal strategies for conveying meanings and these strategies usually take the shape of behavioural language, such as gestures, body language, silence, proximity and symbolic behaviour.

Jandt (2001) argues that in low context cultures, verbal messages are elaborate and highly specific and tend to also be highly detailed and redundant. And therefore verbal abilities are highly valued and logic and reasoning are expressed in verbal messages. On the other hand, most of the information is either in the physical context or internalised in the person in high context cultures. In this case, very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. High context cultures such as those in Africa, Asia or South America decrease the perception of self as separate from the group and are generally more sensitive to nonverbal messages (Jandt, 2001).

In undertaking this study it is worth noting Jandt's (2001) argument that language separates people, something which when understood from the perspective of high and low context cultures makes a lot of sense. Essentially, in high context cultures, people are

brought closer by the importance of their shared context whilst those meanings are often lost in low context cultures (Jandt, 2001).

In their study on the politeness perceptions of Australian and Korean academics in their intercultural email communications as part of their work practices, Murphy and Levy (2006) suggest that email is seen primarily as an information transaction medium (low context culture), rather than an interaction based communication system supporting interpersonal relations (high context culture). Therefore, their research attempted to ascertain how people from different cultural backgrounds saw email as contributing to interpersonal relations through the use of politeness indicators and how acceptable those levels of politeness were, to their culturally different email recipients (Murphy & Levy, 2006).

They also put forward the argument that in misunderstanding cultural assessments of, for example, social distance, impositions and deference could lead to differences in assessments of face which in turn, could result in the use of corresponding politeness strategies which may be at odds with personal and cultural expectations (Murphy & Levy, 2006). In such instances, intercultural email communication could not be assured, Murphy and Levy (2006) argued.

This study concurs with Würtz's (2005) hypothesis that individuals in high-context cultures (such as Africa) are more likely to adopt the visual effects offered by the internet to convey their messages efficiently than their low-context counterparts. The question however, remains as how much high-context cultures make the most of the potential offered by the Internet, in particular CMC (Würtz, 2005).

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede's (1997) five patterns of culture - individualism vs. collectivism, femininity vs. masculinity, long-term vs. short-term orientation in life, power distance, and uncertainty

avoidance are widely accepted as playing a role in communication in multicultural environments. Specific to African culture is Hofstede's (2003) analysis of West African culture utilising the five dimensions of culture:

> **Power Distance Index** refers to the degree of equality, or inequality, between people in the country's society. A High Power Distance ranking indicates that inequalities of power and wealth have been allowed to grow within the society. These societies are more likely to follow a caste system that does not allow significant upward mobility of its citizens. A Low Power Distance ranking indicates the society de-emphasizes the differences between citizen's power and wealth. In these societies equality and opportunity for everyone is stressed.
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> **Individualism** refers to the degree the society reinforces individual or collective achievement and interpersonal relationships. A High Individualism ranking indicates that individuality and individual rights are paramount within the society. Individuals in these societies may tend to form a larger number of looser relationships. A Low Individualism ranking typifies societies of a more collectivist nature with close ties between individuals. These cultures reinforce extended families and collectives where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their group.
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> **Masculinity** refers to the degree the society reinforces, or does not reinforce, the traditional masculine work role model of male achievement, control, and power. A High Masculinity ranking indicates the country experiences a high degree of

gender differentiation. In these cultures, males dominate a significant portion of the society and power structure, with females being controlled by male domination. A Low Masculinity ranking indicates the country has a low level of differentiation and discrimination between genders. In these cultures, females are treated equally to males in all aspects of the society.

Uncertainty Avoidance Index refers to the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity within the society (i.e. unstructured situations). A High Uncertainty Avoidance ranking indicates the country has a low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. This creates a rule-oriented society that institutes laws, rules, regulations, and controls in order to reduce the amount of uncertainty. A Low Uncertainty Avoidance ranking indicates the country has less concern about ambiguity and uncertainty and has more tolerance for a variety of opinions. This is reflected in a society that is less rule-oriented, more readily accepts change, and takes more and greater risks.

Long-Term Orientation refers to the degree the society embraces, or does not embrace, long-term devotion to traditional, forward thinking values. High Long-Term Orientation ranking indicates the country prescribes to the values of long-term commitments and respect for tradition. This is thought to support a strong work ethic where long-term rewards are expected as a result of today's hard work. However, business may take longer to develop in this society, particularly for an "outsider." A Low Long-Term Orientation

> ranking indicates the country does not reinforce the concept of long-term, traditional orientation. In this culture, change can occur more rapidly as long-term traditions and commitments do not become impediments to change. Hofstede's (2003)

Although Hofstede's research investigated the patterns of culture that are common across cultures, his findings can be applied to cross-cultural communication situations. From Hofstede's (2003) analysis, the following generalities may be concluded regarding African culture: that character qualities of sociality, patience, tolerance, sympathy, and acceptance are highly valued; community is paramount; holistic worldview; open to foreign influence; hierarchal power structures; comfortable with uncertainty; and gender role distinctions (Hale, 2004).

However, it is necessary to note some common critiques of Hofstede's dimensions of culture which include their apparent presumption that everyone within a given national culture fits within a simple polarity; for example, all individuals in high context cultures are collectivists. In fact, the polarities of Hofstede's cultural dimensions run the risk of essentialising national culture as something fixed, Ess and Sudweeks (2005) argue.

Further criticisms of Hofstede's analyses are centred on the assumption that culture is synonymous with national identities, thus ignoring internal ethnic and linguistic diversities. Such diversities, Ess and Sudweeks (2005) contend, are prone to shift and change, especially as the processes of immigration and globalization lead to new third identities that represent complex and shifting hybridisations of earlier cultural patterns.

According to Ess and Sudweeks (2005), another key criticism of Hofstede's analyses is the focus on FTF interactions in organizational contexts, which then attempt to appeal to a notion of a presumably homogenous national culture to help explain problems in organizational communication. They however, note how national, as well as other cultural identities, interact with intercultural communication online, that is, already

removed from the FTF setting, and not only with regard to organizational behaviour (Ess & Sudweeks, 2005).

CMC vs FTF communication

According to an optimistic suggestion from Cakir & Cagiltay (2002) CMC allows people to communicate independent from the physical constraints of time and space and the social constraints of race, gender and class. However, Fouser (2001) as cited by Cakir and Cagiltay (2002) offers a more critical analysis which from supposing that CMC is the final stage in the dehumanization of society argues that the anonymity of CMC encourages insulting communication behavior to a greater degree than FTF communication. Cakir and Cagiltay (2002) cite Ma (1996) who posits that there is no nearness concept in CMC since the participants contribute to the conversation from their own cultural context and as such none of them are bounded by the same cultural context as other participants utilizing other modes of communication.

Sproull and Kiesler (1986) and Bunz and Campbell (2002), observed significant differences between CMC and FTF communication noting that CMC resulted in messages that were self-absorbed, undifferentiated by status, and uninhibited. They contended that these communicative effects of CMC were the result of a lack of regulation of the communication by social context cues, which are not as prevalent in CMC as in FTF communication (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). Cakir and Cagiltay (2002) found that cultural differences lead to some differences in style of communicating via email, though they went on to state that cultural norms in email are not as apparent as in FTF environments. Their qualitative study showed that culture does contribute to some differences in e-mail communication styles, particularly in multicultural environments, but that it appeared people do not bring their cultural norms to the e-mail environment as much as they do in FTF environments (Cakir & Cagiltay, 2002).

Cakir and Cagiltay's (2002) identified three cross-cultural purposes for the use of e-mail which are chatting with friends and family, communicating with colleagues for academic and business purposes, and communicating with authority figures such as their supervisors or professors. The existence of cultural tendencies that led to the use of certain communication styles in e-mails meant that language style and expressions of emotions could vary depending on context, content and the recipient of an e-mail (Cakir & Cagiltay, 2002).

It has been posited that CMC lacks paralinguistic communication cues, which makes it a poor medium for the use of sense making strategies in comparison with FTF communication (Cakir and Cagiltay, 2002). The emphasis is that in any communication environment, culture plays a major role in the creation of a message (Cakir & Cagiltay, 2002). Critically, in FTF communication, people can adjust their messages according to immediate feedback from their peers through paralinguistic communication cues. Therefore, in the absence of these cues in a CMC environment, the role of culture, emotions and the way emotions are shown through culture lens become even more important, and these elements are to be investigated in this research Cakir and Cagiltay (2002) suggested. The study acknowledged that cultural differences did not eliminate individual preferences, nor did they counteract an individual's ability to change and adapt to new situations (Cakir & Cagiltay, 2002).

Also relevant to this study, is Waldvogel's (2007) thesis which argues that the 'choice of greeting or closing and its presence or absence in an email message conveys not only an interpersonal message enabling the writer to negotiate his or her workplace relationships but also contributes to the creation of a friendly or less friendly workplace culture and, in turn, reflects this culture'. This corresponds well with the earlier stated need to consider cultural aspects when accounting for the linguistic choices individuals make when they communicate.

Whilst this study will not focus too much on the question whether CMC eliminates cultural cues that are synonymous with FTF communication, Vignovic (2008) examines whether the absence of contextual information, such as a communication partner's cultural background, fuels misunderstandings and causes certain types of e-mail recipients to form misattributions about the message sender. This issue is especially important in today's global economy, where computer-mediated cross-cultural interactions are not uncommon. As Vignovic (2008) suggests, when contextual information is operationalised as cultural cues, examining individual differences relating to the importance people place on their own culture may provide valuable information about these processes.

Individuals from collectivist cultures tend to use situational explanations for behaviour more than those from individualistic cultures (Krull, et al, 1999 as cited by Vignovic, 2008). The suggestion therefore, is that individuals' levels of individualism and collectivism may influence how likely they are to make dispositional or situational attributions, and how they are affected by the provision of contextual information (Vignovic, 2008).

By identifying those who are at risk for miscommunications, organizations can intervene in a timely and targeted fashion, perhaps through tailored training and education programs preparing employees for cross cultural collaboration (Vignovic, 2008).

Cross-cultural Communication

This study is necessary to develop an understanding of the behaviour of people from another culture in cross-cultural computer mediated communication, specifically e-mail. According to Pfeil, Zaphiris and Ang (2006), people from a given culture are likely to have attributes and behaviours concerning online communication according to their

cultural background. Pfeil et al (2006) argue that if society understands the way people behave in computer mediated communication, the effectiveness of this communication or work can be increased and misunderstandings and problems may be minimised.

Similarly, in a paper on values, cultural identity and communication, Nordby (2008) makes a case that difficulties in intercultural communication typically occur when the communicators understand concepts of meaning and identity in markedly different ways particularly when they have different values and do not acknowledge that culturally shaped values are different from beliefs and thoughts (Nordby, 2008). The solution to this, Nordby contends, is that if individuals' values are recognised and appreciated chances of securing effective intercultural communication are improved (Nordby, 2008).

Suler (2004) does provide some insight on the challenges of cross cultural communication via email in his online book on e-mail communication and relationships, in which he points out that people from around the world have different customs for conversing and developing relationships. He writes that a good rule of thumb in conversing with people from other cultures is to be appropriately polite, friendly, and as clear as possible in your emails, stretching 'your e-mail empathy muscles.' He adds that unless one was very sure of their relationship with the person, colloquialisms, slang, humour, innuendoes, and especially subtle attempts at cynicism and sarcasm were to be avoided as they would be difficult to convey in CMC even under the best of circumstances (Suler, 2004).

One the key findings of Murphy and Levy's (2006) research was that individuals from different cultural backgrounds are likely to have different expectations in their email communication, for instance, how they expected to be greeted or addressed. They noted that considerations of politeness were very important in email communication especially with people from other cultures and that if a correspondent did not conform to their expectations, they may feel uncomfortable (Murphy & Levy, 2006). The predominant

response to how Murphy and Levy's (2006) study participants expressed politeness differently was in the formality of their writing, that is, they expressed politeness in their overseas communications through the level of formality through using proper titles, showing more attention to clarity, using formal greetings and goodbyes, avoiding colloquialisms and giving attention to please and thank-you.

They also recommended the use of politeness strategies, whether positive or negative, which were found to be an important way to consider face aspects both for sender and receiver (Murphy & Levy, 2006). In summarising their findings, Murphy and Levy's (2006) advised that for their intercultural communication to be successful, email correspondents needed to be especially cautious when selecting the level of formality, directness and length of their emails.

Suler (2004), however, noted that despite the cultural differences, the delight of doing international e-mail was discovering that there is a universal e-mail language. This study will attempt to show that in some cases, individuals from high context cultures, namely Africa, who are long term residents in a low context culture such as Ireland to adapt to the communication norms of the host culture whether in FTF or CMC.

Research Question

This study sets out to identify cultural differences between emails from African and Irish sources. Cultural differences play an important role in the choice and usage of various communication tools which can sometimes reflect FTF communication.

This study will test the following three hypotheses:

> The primary hypothesis is that e-mails sourced from an individual from African cultural background follow cultural protocols/conditioning that exists in African FTF communication.
>
> The second hypothesis is that e-mails sourced from an individual from an Irish/Western cultural background are less constrained by cultural protocols/conditioning that exists in FTF communication.
>
> The third hypothesis is that cultural differences in email are not as apparent for individuals from an African cultural background but are long-term residents outside Africa.

Methodology

To test the three hypotheses, the study analysed a corpus of 300 emails from 50 participants who were randomly selected from the researcher's personal and work related email correspondence. This study showed that content analysis methods could be useful for investigating cultural differences in online communications. The methodology chosen demonstrated that valuable information could be extracted from the online communications, by categorising and then relating it to cultural dimensions (Pfeil et al, 2006).

Participants

Participants, all of whom were in the researcher's personal and business email address books were invited to participate by email or by phone. The 50 participants represented two groups, representing Irish/low context cultures and African/high context cultures. All participants, including those from an African cultural background were resident outside Africa and were all based in Ireland at the onset of the study. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to over 60 years, with the biggest cohort (68%) being in the 26-40 age group. The group was equally divided in terms of gender and cultural representation, i.e. African-born/high context or Irish-born/low context.

In terms of usage of email, 60% used email several times a day and another 30%, at least once a day. In terms of emails received per day, over four in five received at least 15 emails per day and over two thirds said they used email to gather information on current events or special interests, interact socially with acquaintances, friends or family and for work, school or other task-related purposes.

When asked on average how often they sent emails per day to someone from a different culture, half of the participants said at least every day, with 32%, several times a day. The numbers receiving e-mail from someone from same culture at least every day

were 44% with the highest percentage (30) receiving email from someone from a different culture. Just over half received email from someone form a different culture, with a third receiving such emails at least several times a day. Over 60% received email from same culture at least once a day, with 42%, several times a day. When asked if they used a different greeting or ending when writing e-mail to someone from a different culture, just under half (48%) said they did. There was lower usage of emoticons when writing an email to someone from a different culture compared to when writing to someone from the same culture. When asked if they put extra consideration in composing email to different culture, almost two thirds said they did not.

In response to the question whether other cultures used e-mail more deferentially, only 44% agreed with the statement. Finally, when asked if they thought e-mail usage removed cultural cues in communication, almost three quarters said yes. (See Appendix II for full list of frequencies and Appendix III for full list of graphs.)

Materials

To conduct the content analysis, each participant provided at least five emails, all evenly divided between those sent to a recipient from the same cultural background (low or high context) as them and the other corpus from the other cultural background (high or low context) to ensure that the email corpus was not skewed in favour of one culture over the other. The emails utilised for this study were all sent within a period of six months – from June 2008 to December 2008. The emails were business-related, personal or for social communication.

This study utilised SPSS to carry out content analysis on the data and relevant codes were developed and used as appropriate. Since the study used the critical social theory, *a priori* coding, whereby the categories are established prior to the analysis based upon on theory, was utilised instead of emergent coding. Categories were established and the coding was subsequently applied to the data and revisions made where necessary, and

the categories tightened up to the point that maximises mutual exclusivity and exhaustiveness (Weber, 1990 as cited by Stemler, 2001).

In this study, content analysis through the utilisation of SPSS amongst other things analysed the following:

- individual differences in communication style
- international differences in content
- group differences in content
- cultural conditioning

Procedure

This study utilised three instruments; a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and email text analysis to ensure the accuracy of data triangulation in order to support the overall analyses. The participants were invited to complete an online demographic and email usage questionnaire that outlined their general usage of e-mail and also their perception of culture specific tendencies when using email for communication. The survey specifically sought out participants' e-mail communication with individuals from their own cultural background and those from the other cultural background. Semi-structured interviews were carried out in the data collection process. The interview protocol consisted of 11 demographic questions and nine interview questions that were specific to email usage and a cultural context.

To test the lucidity of the instrument, a pilot study was held with two volunteer participants – one from each cultural background – with each providing a sample of two e-mails. At the conclusion of the pilot, minor and insignificant changes were made to the design of the study, mainly the demographic questionnaire and the structured interview questions at the end of the questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews were carried out in the data collection process. The interview protocol consisted of 11 demographic

questions and nine interview questions that were specific to email usage and a cultural context. The interview protocol is provided in Appendix I.

It was generally difficult to obtain an adequately large corpus of e-mails in the researcher's inbox that avoided a combination of very confidential content, empty bodied e-mails with attachments, spam or cross-postings. It was also important not to generate an e-mail corpus that was biased towards, for example, a particular cohort (e.g., gender, cultural classification) or e-mail topic as these could affect the results. Therefore, the selection of e-mails for this study, was done with careful consideration.

Ethical issues

There were no significant or major ethical issues arising from this study. As required by the Dun Laoghaire Institute for Art, Design and Technology's Department of Learning Sciences Ethics Committee (DLSEC) this study clearly described the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they were informed about what to expect.

They were also informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage should they wish to do so. With regards the questionnaires, the participants were informed of the option of omitting questions they did not want to answer. Most importantly, the participants were also informed that their data would be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it would not be identifiable as theirs. All participants were debriefed at the end of their participation in the study. Finally, the nature of the study did not present any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort.

Analysis

Analysis was then undertaken on the presence, meanings and relationships of key words and concepts, followed by inferences about the messages within the texts, the email

researcher, the audience, and even the culture and time of which these were a part (Stemler, 2001). Findings and data from the study are presented using tables and graphs (see Appendix II). Since the study utilised the critical social theory and a-priori coding was utilised allowing this researcher to extract actionable meaning from text in the emails. This meant that analysis was provided with some previous knowledge of the information being studied and prior knowledge of the corpus under investigation.

This study utilised critical social theory and qualitative content analysis of emails emanating from high context and low context cultural sources to draw plausible explanation for the phenomenon of cultural differences between the two sources. The principle of cultural protocol recall and the media richness theory were also utilised throughout the study.

This study also utilised Krippendorf's (2004) suggested key processes inherent to content analysis which involved utilising sampling of the unit of analysis of email content, utilising conventional summary statistical measures to reduce complexity in content data, analysing contextual phenomena to provide the context for findings and lastly utilising narrative traditions and discursive conventions to outline the study's conclusions.

Results

This study utilised critical social theory and qualitative content analysis of emails emanating from African and Irish sources to draw plausible explanation for the phenomenon of cultural differences between the two sources. The principle of cultural protocol recall and the media richness theory were utilised.

This study concurs with previous research (Bunz & Campbell, 2002 and Sproull & Kiesler, 1986), who observed the significant differences between computer mediated communication and FTF communication, noting that CMC resulted in messages that were self-absorbed, undifferentiated by status, and uninhibited. They argued that these communicative effects of CMC were the result of a lack of regulation of the communication by social context cues, which are not as prevalent in CMC as in FTF communication. This shows that cultural protocols that exist in FTF interactions also exist in computer mediated communication (Bunz & Campbell, 2002).

The survey results show that 60 percent used email several times a day and another 30 percent, at least once a day. In terms of emails received per day, over four in five received at least 15 emails per day and over two thirds said they used email to gather information on current events or special interests, interact socially with acquaintances, friends or family and for work, school or other task-related purposes.

When asked on average how often they sent emails to someone from a different culture, half of the participants said at least every day, with 32 percent, several times a day (Table 1).

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Several times a day	16	32.0	32.0
Every day	9	18.0	18.0
Several times a week	19	38.0	38.0
Once a week	3	6.0	6.0
Once a month or less	2	4.0	4.0
Not Applicable	1	2.0	2.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 1: Frequency of email sent to someone from different culture

When asked on average how often they sent emails to someone from the same culture as themselves, 30 percent said only several times a week, with 44 percent saying at least every day (of which more than half said several times a day (Table 2).

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Several times a day	12	24.0	24.0
Every day	10	20.0	20.0
Several times a week	15	30.0	30.0
Once a week	5	10.0	10.0
Once a month or less	7	14.0	14.0
Not Applicable	1	2.0	2.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 2: Frequency of email sent to someone from same culture

Participants receiving e-mail from someone from same culture several times a day were 42 percent, with another 20 percent receiving email from someone from the same culture every day (Table 3).

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Several times a day	21	42.0	42.0
Every day	10	20.0	20.0
Several times a week	13	26.0	26.0
Once a week	5	10.0	10.0
Once a month or less	1	2.0	2.0
Not Applicable	0	0	0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 3: Frequency of email received from someone from same culture

Just over half received email from someone from a different culture, at least once a day, with 32 percent of them receiving such emails (Table 3).

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Several times a day	16	32.0	32.0
Every day	10	20.0	20.0
Several times a week	16	32.0	32.0
Once a week	5	10.0	10.0
Once a month or less	2	4.0	4.0
Not Applicable	1	2.0	2.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 3: Frequency of email received from someone from a different culture

When asked if they used a different greeting or ending when writing e-mail to someone from a different culture, just under half (48 percent) said they did (Table 4).

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	26	52.0	52.0
Yes	24	48.0	48.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 4: Different greeting/ending in e-mail sent to someone from different culture

In response to the question whether other cultures used e-mail more differently to their own culture, only 44 percent agreed with the statement (Table 5).

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	28	56.0	56.0
Yes	22	44.0	44.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 5: Other cultures use e-mail more differently

There was lower usage of emoticons when writing an email to someone from a different culture compared to when writing to someone from the same culture (Table 6).

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
All the time	19	38.0	38.0
Different culture	12	24.0	24.0
Never	3	6.0	6.0
Same culture	16	32.0	32.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 6: Use of emoticons in e-mail

Finally, when asked if they thought e-mail usage removed cultural cues in communication, almost three quarters said yes (see Table 7) and almost two thirds said they did not see the need to put extra consideration just because they were composing email to someone from a different culture (see Table 8).

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	15	30.0	30.0
Yes	35	70.0	70.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 7: E-mail usage removes cultural cues in communication

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	31	62.0	62.0
Yes	19	38.0	38.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 8: Extra consideration in composing email to different culture

There were no significant results in terms of whether age, gender, levels of internet or email usage or education level had any bearing on whether an individual's utilisation of email was affected by their culture, especially more so if they were from a low context cultural background. The results also suggest that the amount of experience using email, frequency of email use, and reasons for email usage do not have any significant influence nor relevance on cultural protocols that could affect usage of email.

Findings

This study set out to explore whether different cultural backgrounds and specifically learned rules of behaviour affect the usage of computer mediated communication. The following is a summary of results from the study.

Primary hypothesis

> *The primary hypothesis is that e-mails sourced from an individual from African cultural background follow cultural protocols/conditioning that exists in African FTF communication.*

The results suggested that the primary hypothesis that e-mails sourced from an individual from African/high context cultural background followed cultural conditioning that exists in African FTF communication followed Hall's (2000) hypothesis, that in a typical African context, FTF communication is characterized by an extensive use of non-verbal strategies for conveying meanings and these strategies usually take the shape of behavioural language, such as gestures, body language, silence, proximity and symbolic behaviour. Similarly, the t-test and chi-square (Appendix IV) results show the relevance of Hofstede's dimension of individualism vs. collectivism on culture and communication, particularly in the context of this study.

Whilst the participants from an African/high context cultural background admitted that whilst they tended to recall cultural protocols that prevailed in the FTF communication (deference for one's elders, superiors) when engaging in, there was also a realization that the longer they lived in low context societies, the less connected they were to such cultural conditioning. This did not mean, however, that they were no longer respectful in all interactions with them and this would include which modes of communication are used and how and when they can be used, but moreso that they were or had adapted to the communication style of the host low context society.

On the other hand, the Irish/low context participants stated that the degrees of difference were not so great as to negatively affect cross cultural communication. There was acknowledgement on both sides that the other was either individualistic (African on Irish) or collectivist (Irish on African) and that this was a significant factor in their communication styles. One African participant suggested that whilst his African culture taught him to show respect to the person(s) he was communicating with, he felt that 'westerners were too forward' with their questions and that when he first arrived in Ireland, he had thought some of the (low context) people he came across were too 'nosy' and asked too many questions whether it was in FTF communication or CMC.

It has been argued in previous research (Cakir & Cagiltay, 2002) that in cross cultural communication the language style used in e-mail is determined by the recipient of the e-mail. Results of this study suggest that both high context and low context participants are indeed particularly more considerate in composing their e-mail when the recipient is from a different culture. When asked if they put extra consideration in composing email to someone from a different culture, almost a third (with the majority being from an African background) said they were painstakingly ($N=50$; $M = 1.62$; $SD = .490$) careful in how they composed their emails and that the main reason behind this was the desire not to cause any offence and not to appear 'too familiar', 'disrespectful', 'dismissive' or in a business context, 'unprofessional'.

One participant from an African/high context cultural background, said she took slightly longer when she was drafting an email to someone from a different culture and that she tried as much as possible to ensure that she used the correct greeting and signing of language. However, having being resident in several low context societies for almost a decade, she realised that she had gradually lost some of those cultural protocols which had directed how she communicated with those around her who were from a culture different to hers.

> "For example, I do realise now, that after a few years living and working here (Ireland and the United Kingdom) that I no longer insist on addressing my supervisor or line managers with the deference that I used to have at first. I mean, I used to find it hard not to address someone in email by just their first name. I could not write 'Dear Niamh'; it was always Dear Ms or Mr So and so... I never could also use Hi, unless it was to someone close or from my own culture." - African participant

In the context of this study, the importance of greetings and closings as a linguistic resource lies in the affective role they play. The choice of greeting or closing and its presence or absence in an email message conveys not only an interpersonal message enabling the writer to negotiate his or her workplace relationships but also contributes to the creation of a friendly or less friendly workplace culture and, in turn, reflects this culture (Waldvogel, 2007).

This certainly concurs with Cakir and Cagiltay's (2002) finding that participants in their study admitted to paying more attention to their language in the e-mails when they are sending to colleagues or a superior. In that study the participants also stated that they never used abbreviations, acronyms and emoticons in such e-mails (Cakir & Cagiltay, 2002).

Secondary hypothesis

> *The second hypothesis that e-mails sourced from an individual from an Irish/low context cultural background are less constrained by cultural conditioning that exists in FTF communication.*

On the other hand, two thirds of the participants in this study (the majority from a low context/Irish background) did not take extra consideration in composing email to someone from a different culture stated that they did not necessarily consider whether or not the email recipient was from a different culture. Generally, this majority mainly considered whether the message they sought to relay in the email was clear enough and that if the email was work or business related they would be careful about quality of the text (spelling, grammar) and not the cultural background of the recipient.

According to some of the responses from the semi-structured questions, participants were more relaxed and less 'controlled' in their emails when writing to family members or close friends especially those in their culture. For those from a high context cultural background, emails to close friends and some family members (elderly relatives were still treated with deference and great respect whether in FTF communication or CMC) closely resembled those from low context participants in that the range of communication styles were less contrived and there was more freedom in expression.

The use of emoticons was more widespread and had cultural meanings. Interestingly enough, one of the key reasons for these differences was proficiency in the English language. When writing to family members or friends from the same cultural and national backgrounds, the vernacular or native languages were used and therefore they could express themselves without much hindrance. Whilst nearly all African/high context participants in this study had high proficiency levels in written and spoken English, they still considered the language as a second language. According to one African/high context participant:

> "Since English is not my language, I do take a lot of pride in ensuring that my emails particularly to someone who is a native

> English speaker, do not have any mistakes, there are no colloquialisms, no slang, there are very little or no grammatical and spelling mistakes. I prefer my emails to be formal to maintain those standards. However, with family and close friends from my country, I am more relaxed and have this tendency to mix Shona (Zimbabwean language) and English a lot in my emails. I certainly express myself better that way, especially when it comes to humour." – African participant

What was significantly clear was that the African/high context participants' expression of emotion in their emails followed similar cultural patterns in FTF communication whilst on the hand, Irish/low context participants expressed themselves according to communication medium they were using and also depending on the recipient.

Third hypothesis

> *The third hypothesis is that cultural differences in email are not as apparent for individuals from an African cultural background but are long-term residents outside Africa.*

Participants from an African/high context cultural background who had lived in a low context society for extended periods of time suggested that they were no longer as 'governed by the tenets of their culture' when it came to communicating with their low context colleagues or acquaintances. During the data collection process, over one in two participants (13) from an African/high context cultural background admitted that the longer they worked, studied or lived in a western/low context environment the less they felt culturally conditioned when they were using email. They were more concerned that their email and other general modes of communication were concise and to the point. Even though this was still under their consideration, cultural protocols no longer played a

significant role in their CMC to their peers in the workplace or in institutions of higher learning.

A study of the email corpus from the 13 participants revealed a substantial decrease in, for instance, the usage of considerate openings or endings in their email compared to other 12 participants from the same high context cultural background in this cohort. There were fewer opening questions asking after the recipient's well being such as 'I hope I find you well', and 'how are you?' and whilst closings still included expressions such as, the emails to low context recipients were concise and to the point. However, emails from the 13 participants to recipients from the same culture still maintained the familiarity and cultural considerations as suggested by the primary hypothesis.

Generally, this cultural aspect seemed to bring about the easy expression of emotions with or without emoticons. Alternatively, a study of the email corpus of the Irish/low context participants revealed that they rarely opened their business or work related e-mails caring or considerate statements and that the only time they did was they were writing to close friends and family members.

> "When I am sending someone email, I usually go straight to the point and I rarely go into niceties about the recipient's wellbeing. I do not think it is necessary especially if it is not an informal email. I mean, I do not even do that with close friends or family. I prefer to do that FTF or over the phone where I feel my sincerity comes across genuinely and not too contrived." – Irish participant

One component of CMC where it was clear that cultural differences in email were not as apparent for individuals from an African cultural background but are long-term residents outside Africa was in the use of emoticons (N= 50; M= 2.18; SD= .962). When

asked how often they used emoticons when writing email to someone from a different culture, 38 percent said they did all the time, with 32 percent saying they only used emoticons when writing to someone from the same culture. This suggests that the use of emoticons was very popular amongst the participants (only six percent said they did not use emoticons at all). However, the majority of participants (70 percent), particularly the Irish/low context participants believed that the actual types of emoticons used by other cultures had somewhat different meanings based on the norms and values prevailing in those cultures.

> "The only time I use emoticons particularly to someone that I am not too familiar with or is from a different cultural background, is when I use humour or sarcasm and I want the recipient to get that. It is usually to avoid any misinterpretation. A smiley face, which I think has quite a universally understood meaning, is usually handy in these cases. If it is used after what could otherwise be a culturally ambiguous statement, a smiley face puts across the correct and intended context. At least that is how it has worked out for me." – Irish participant

Similar to Irish/low context participants, African/high context participants who use emoticons only do so when they communicate with someone they are quite familiar with and the emails are informal.

Vignovic (2008) suggests that one of the benefits of text-based CMC is that it may help group members maintain a relatively equal status, which is important to communication, because the hierarchy and structure of a group influences the behaviour of the people within the group. This is particularly relevant for individuals from high context cultures, living in a low context society.

With the reduction of some of the social cues that are often present in FTF communication, especially in high context societies, CMC facilitates people to communicate with each other on a more equal level and this seemingly a key factor that ensures that cultural differences in email become less apparent or relevant for individuals from an African cultural background who are long-term residents in a low context society. This lack of explicit hierarchies appears to enable high context individuals to gradually adapt to the communication norms in the society they live in. This mirrors Vignovic's (2008) argument that text-based CMC filters out many of the visual cues that are not task related which may help people make decisions based on more relevant information than demographics.

On the question whether e-mail use removes cultural cues in communication 70 percent (see Table 7) of all participants said that e-mail definitely eliminates cultural cues mainly because it do not provide people with the opportunity to reproduce or distinguish cultural cues as they prevailed in FTF communication.

Since culture is often conveyed to other people through visual and auditory cues, such as distinct features or an accent when speaking (Vignovic, 2008) such cues are not typically available in email. This crucial aspect means that there was every possibility that the e-mail recipient would not necessarily be aware of the sender's culture making it easier for African/high context participants who were long term residents in low context societies to lose the cultural inhibitions in their communication styles. Similarly, as Vignovic (2008) again posits, an e-mail recipient may rely on dispositional attributions about a sender's behaviour even when situational variables related to the sender's culture would provide more appropriate explanations.

Another identifiable reason why African/high context participants who were long term residents in low context societies could adapt to the host culture has to do with the argument that e-mail reduces the negative impact of differences in verbal or general

communication style. As Shachaf (2005) posits, e-mail possesses straightforward text that helps overcome differences between succinct and elaborate verbal styles.

Discussion

This study appears to support the general argument that individuals' different cultural influences do have some impact on communication strategies particularly those from a high context cultural background. What is however significant is the finding that those individuals who are from a high context cultural background but are long term residents in a low context society gradually behave more similarly to the host (low context) culture and that the cultural conditioning in their styles of communication is lessened or altogether diminished over time.

Generally, as Murphy and Levy (2006) suggest, it is in misunderstanding cultural assessments of social distance, impositions and relative power rights that lead to differences in assessments of face. In turn, these differences may lead to the use of corresponding politeness strategies which may be at odds with personal and cultural expectations and unless the sender has an understanding of such factors, successful intercultural email communication cannot be assured. This research sought to highlight how cultural differences affect CMC cross culturally in the hope that increased understanding of these issues could result in more successful intercultural email communication.

This study shows that culture does contribute to some differences in how people communicated through e-mail styles, but there was suggestion that it appears that people do not bring their cultural norms to the e-mail environment as much as they do in FTF environments. The findings also reveal that all participants from the two cultures use e-mail for similar purposes with the main differences emerging only from the context and tone of the text.

Hofstede's research investigated the patterns of culture that are common across cultures, his findings can be applied to cross-cultural communication situations. Some of

Hofstede's (2003) generalities regarding African culture are valid to a certain degree, particularly in the case of those African/high context participants whose emails still reveal some common traits of sociality, patience, tolerance and sympathy. However, the African/high context participants who are long term residents in a low context society are less inhibited by the sense of community being paramount, though through experience they do retain a holistic worldview and are more open to foreign influence, hence the gradual adaptation to low context cultural norms of communication. Waldvogel's (2007) study demonstrated that there is a need to consider cultural factors in addition to sociolinguistic variables when accounting for the linguistic choices people make.

The findings of this study also concur with Hall's (1976) concepts of high-context and low-context cultures. In low context cultures, verbal messages are elaborate and highly specific and tend to also be highly detailed and redundant as is proven by email corpus from Irish/low context participants. As such the verbal abilities are highly valued and logic and reasoning are expressed in verbal messages. Alternatively, high context cultures are generally more sensitive to nonverbal messages (Jandt, 2001) and tend to rely on information that is either in the physical context or internalised in the person and as such very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message.

Participants from a high context cultural background acknowledged that their cultural background still dominated to some extent the way they related to those they considered to be 'senior to them in rank'. Generally there was a tone of deference in their email style and expressions of emotions. These varied according to context, content and of course the recipient of an e-mail.

Whilst participants from the low context cultural background were less constrained by cultural inhibitions, there was still acknowledgement that their email communications were particularly sensitive to cultural cues when the recipient was from another culture. A significant number suggested that they sometimes adapted their statements and

expressions according to the circumstances of the context and requirements of the situation.

Studying the email corpus, it was apparent that participants filtered their cultural and individual preferences therefore seemingly adapted to the environment that they were in, particularly those from a high context cultural background. The intention behind this was mainly to stay in the safe region of their e-mail communications (Murphy & Levy, 2006 and Cakir & Cagiltay, 2002).

The use of emoticon to express emotions in e-mails appeared to be a widespread and popular practice in both cultures particularly as they were seen to be effective in translating any hidden meaning or clarifying any possible culturally relevant innuendos. There was reluctance from both cultures to use emoticons for formal or business related email implying that culturally or otherwise there was a proper place and context for using emoticons. Evidently, the high context participants who used emoticons the most, were long term residents in a low context society, who were gradually losing the cultural conditioning in their CMC.

The findings of this study revealed that the principle of recall of cultural protocol for high context individuals, as posited by Lee (2002), whereby email can trigger critical reflection, which brings about the total recall of one's relevant cultural memory, was not as dominant as had been expected. This principle of cultural protocol recall according to Lee (2002) would have normally been expected to apply to those whose cultural background has conditioned them to accord deference and respect to their elders/seniors as is the case with participants from a African/high context cultural background. Certainly, whilst the African/high context culture participants were evidently respectful and considerate in their interactions with their perceived seniors/elders and even their peers, the cultural protocol did not play an irrational role in suppressing the use of email as Lee (2002) had suggested.

This study also concurs with the one of the most common critiques of Hofstede's dimensions of culture which appear to presume that everyone within a given national culture fits within a simple polarity; for example, all individuals in high context cultures are collectivists. Whilst the majority of high context participants in this study came from the Southern African region, there was diversity in terms of the cultural condition that different individuals faced. As Ess and Sudweeks (2005) argue these polarities ran the risk of essentialising national culture as something fixed, which is not the case.

Since culture is not synonymous with national identities, internal ethnic and linguistic diversities do tend to shift and change, especially as the processes of immigration and globalization leads to new third identities that represent complex and shifting hybridisations of earlier cultural patterns Ess and Sudweeks (2005). This is clearly shown by those African/high context culture participants who having lived for some time in low context societies gradually lose the cultural inhibitions that would have been prevalent in the communication style.

As other researchers previously discovered (Cakir & Cagiltay, 2002; Bunz & Campbell, 2002; Murphy & Levy, 2006; Sproull & Kiesler ,1986) cultural differences did not necessarily eliminate individual preferences in how people communicated with other cultures, nor did they cancel out an individual's ability to transform and familiarize themselves with new situations.

Limitations to the study

Further studies are also necessary to examine the distinction between beliefs and values. As Nordby (2008) posits intercultural communication typically fails when communicators have different values and do not acknowledge that culturally shaped

values are different from beliefs and thoughts. So research in this area would evaluate whether understanding the recipient's culture enabled successful intercultural communication to take place. Furthermore, as Cakir & Cagiltay (2002) argue, not much systematic research has been carried out on the dialectic of culture as it relates to CMC.

To ensure that the sample was not heavily skewed in one cultural context and had some significant internet and email experience, the researcher sourced the participants from within his own address book and therefore there was potential for the researcher to already have some prior knowledge of the participants' cultural norms and tendencies.

As Cakir & Cagiltay (2002) argued that anonymity was important feature of CMC and a freedom for the people to express them however they want. In this study, its was necessary for the researcher to reach specific people as participants and not having the anonymity of e-mails in the research could have reduced the amount of information that could have been caused because of culture (Cakir & Cagiltay, 2002).

Although there have been studies on issues of gender (Boneva et al., 2001; Thomson & Murachver, 2001), politeness (Bunz & Campbell, 2002) and emoticons (Walther & D'Addario, 2001) in email interactions, there seems to be a dearth of research on CMC from an African/high context cultural perspective. Most of the research in this area has concentrated on the utilisation of CMC from a high context cultural perspective has almost consistently concentrated on the Far East (mainly Japan and South Korea). Therefore further research from a African/high context cultural perspective than is currently available, is definitely required.

Prospects for future research

Future research could study whether an individual from a high context culture who resides and interacts in a low context culture, is more likely to shed some of the cultural protocols or inhibitions in their communication methods. This is an area that requires

further research particularly on how long it takes such individuals to behave more and more like the host low context society.

Also interesting would be a study of the reverse of this, that is, whether a low context individual who is a long term resident of a high context society also takes up the cultural traits of that host society with regards to FTF communication or CMC. There is still a lot more research required to fully comprehend the influence culture has on communication.

Even though this study did not focus much on the question whether CMC eliminates cultural cues that are synonymous with FTF communication, the question whether the absence of contextual information, such as a communication partner's cultural background, fuels misunderstandings and causes certain types of e-mail recipients to form misattributions about the message sender. This issue, Vignovic (2008) suggests, is especially important in today's global economy, where computer-mediated cross-cultural interactions are not uncommon. Future research may need to examine individual differences relating to the importance people place on their own cultural cues to see how that may provide valuable information on whether their culture affects their style of communication.

To understand the necessity of a study such as this one, it is worth noting Jandt's (2001) argument that language separates people, something which when understood from the perspective of high and low context cultures makes a lot of sense. Essentially, in high context cultures, people are brought closer by the importance of their shared context whilst those meanings are often lost in low context cultures (Jandt, 2001).

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Appendices

Appendix I

Demographic Survey on E-mail usage

PART 1

1) What is your gender?
Female
Male

2) What is your age?
18-25
26-40
41-59
60 or older

3) How would you classify yourself?
African-born
Irish-born
Other _____
Would rather not say

4) Where do you currently reside?
Africa
Ireland
Other _____

5) What is your occupation?
Professional
Student
Unemployed
Retired

6) What is the highest level of education you have completed?
Primary/Junior school
High school or equivalent
Vocational/technical school
Bachelor's degree
Professional Qualification (ACCA, CIMA etc)
Master's degree
Doctoral degree
Other

7) How long have you been using the Internet?
Never used it
Less than 12 months
1 to 4 years
5 to 9 years
10 years or more

8) How often do you use the internet?
Once a month or less
Once a week
Several times a week
Every day
Several times a day
Not Applicable

9) How often do you use e-mail?
Once a month or less
Once a week
Several times a week
Every day
Several times a day
Not Applicable

10) How many emails do you normally get per day?
0 -15
16 - 49
50 - 100
101 - 249
250 - 500
More than 501

11) You use email primarily for ...
Interacting socially with acquaintances, friends or family
Work, school or other task-related purposes
Gathering information on current events/special interests
All of the above
None of the above

12) How often do you send email(s) to someone from a different culture as you?
Once a month or less
Once a week
Several times a week
Every day
Several times a day
Not Applicable

13) How often do you send email(s) to someone from the same culture as you?
Once a month or less
Once a week
Several times a week
Every day
Several times a day
Not Applicable

14) How often do you receive email(s) from someone from a different culture as you?
Once a month or less
Once a week
Several times a week
Every day
Several times a day
Not Applicable

15) How often do you receive email(s) from someone from the same culture as you?
Once a month or less
Once a week
Several times a week
Every day
Several times a day
Not Applicable

PART 2

Interview questions

1) Do you use a different greeting/opening and ending when you are writing e-mail to someone from a different culture?
If yes, please explain.

2) Do you use emoticons to express your emotions in your e-mail when writing to someone from a different culture?
If yes, please explain.

3) Do you pay extra attention to the language you write e-mail to some from a different culture?
If yes, please explain.

4) Do you think people from other cultures use e-mail differently?
If yes, please explain.

5) Do you think that the use of e-mail eliminates cultural cues in communication?
If yes, please explain.

6) What kind of important differences did you observe in e-mail communication between your culture and other cultures?

7) Do you pay extra attention to the kind of openings or closings in your email when writing to someone from a different culture?

8) How often do you use emoticons if sending to someone from same culture or culture?

Thank you for completing this survey

Appendix II: Frequency Tables

Table 1: Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Female	25	50.0	50.0
Male	25	50.0	50.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 2: Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
18-25	6	12.0	12.0
26-40	34	68.0	68.0
41-59	8	16.0	16.0
Over 60	2	4.0	4.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 3: Classification

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
African-born	25	50.0	50.0
Irish-born	25	50.0	50.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 4: Current residence

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Ireland	50	100.0	100.0

Table 5: Occupation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Professional	38	76.0	76.0
Retired	2	4.0	4.0
Student	10	20.0	20.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 6: Education

	Frequency	Percent
Doctoral degree	4	8.0
Master's degree	28	56.0
Bachelor's degree	12	24.0
Professional Qualification (ACCA, etc)	2	4.0
Vocational school	2	4.0
High school or equivalent	2	4.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 7: Internet experience

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
6 to 12 months	1	2.0	2.0
1 to 4 years	4	8.0	8.0
5 to 9 years	20	40.0	40.0
10 years or more	25	50.0	50.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 8: Frequency of internet use

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Several times a day	32	64.0	64.0
Every day	12	24.0	24.0
Several times a week	5	10.0	10.0
Once a week	1	2.0	2.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 9: Frequency of email use

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Several times a day	30	60.0	60.0
Every day	15	30.0	30.0
Several times a week	4	8.0	8.0
Once a week	1	2.0	2.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 10: Emails per day

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
0 -15	30	60.0	60.0
16 - 49	12	24.0	24.0
50 - 100	7	14.0	14.0
101 - 249	1	2.0	2.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 11: Primary email use

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Gathering information on current events/special interests	0	0	0
Interacting socially with acquaintances, friends or family	0	0	0
Work, school or other task-related purposes	16	32.0	32.0
All of the above	34	68.0	68.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 12: Frequency of email sent to someone from different culture

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Several times a day	16	32.0	32.0
Every day	9	18.0	18.0
Several times a week	19	38.0	38.0
Once a week	3	6.0	6.0
Once a month or less	2	4.0	4.0
Not Applicable	1	2.0	2.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 13: Frequency of email sent to someone from same culture

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Several times a day	12	24.0	24.0
Every day	10	20.0	20.0
Several times a week	15	30.0	30.0
Once a week	5	10.0	10.0
Once a month or less	7	14.0	14.0
Not Applicable	1	2.0	2.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 14: Frequency of email received from someone from different culture

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Several times a day	16	32.0	32.0
Every day	10	20.0	20.0
Several times a week	16	32.0	32.0
Once a week	5	10.0	10.0
Once a month or less	2	4.0	4.0
Not Applicable	1	2.0	2.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 15: Frequency of email received from someone from same culture

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Several times a day	21	42.0	42.0
Every day	10	20.0	20.0
Several times a week	13	26.0	26.0
Once a week	5	10.0	10.0
Once a month or less	1	2.0	2.0
Not Applicable	0	0	0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 16: Different greeting/ending in e-mail sent to someone from different culture

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	26	52.0	52.0
Yes	24	48.0	48.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 17: Use of emoticons in e-mail

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
All the time	19	38.0	38.0
Different culture	12	24.0	24.0
Never	3	6.0	6.0
Same culture	16	32.0	32.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 18: Extra consideration in composing email to different culture

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	31	62.0	62.0
Yes	19	38.0	38.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

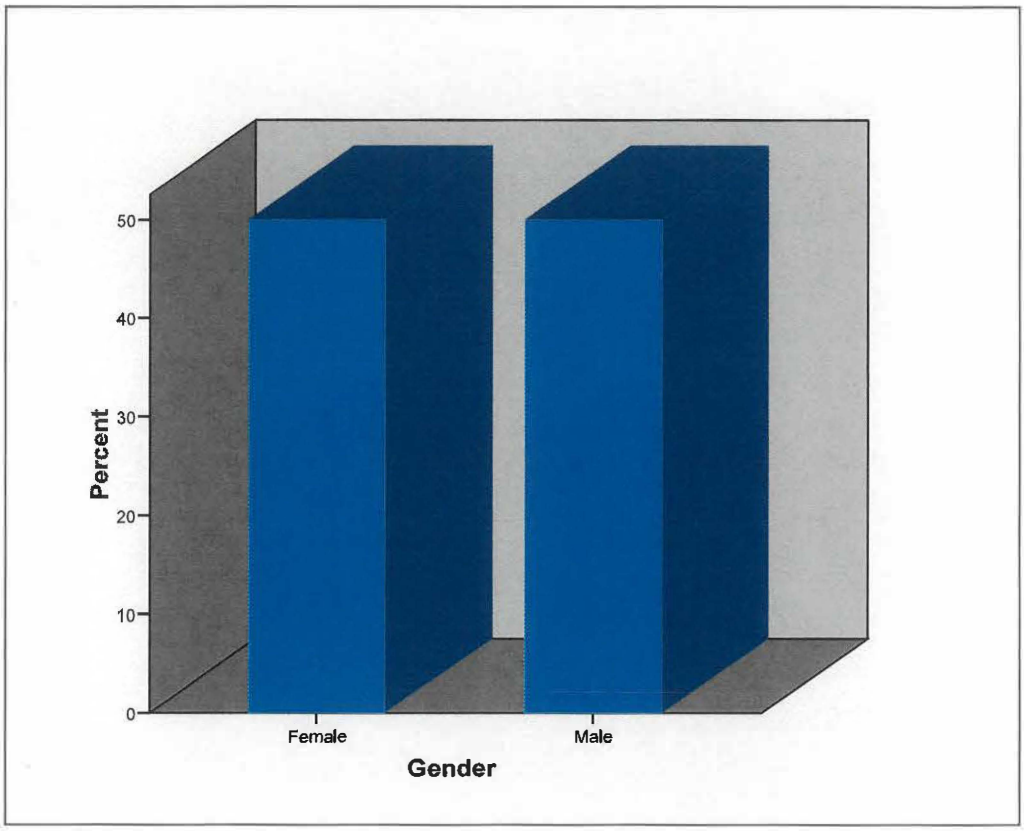
Table 19: Other cultures use e-mail more differently

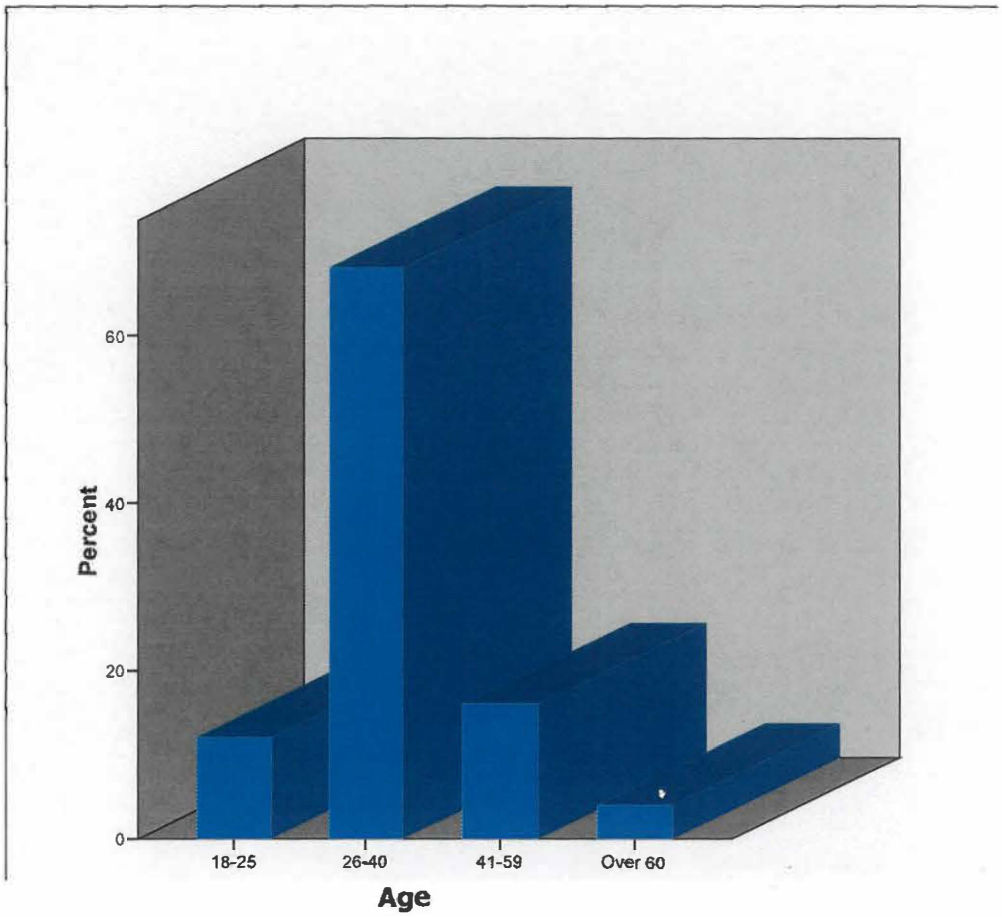
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	28	56.0	56.0
Yes	22	44.0	44.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

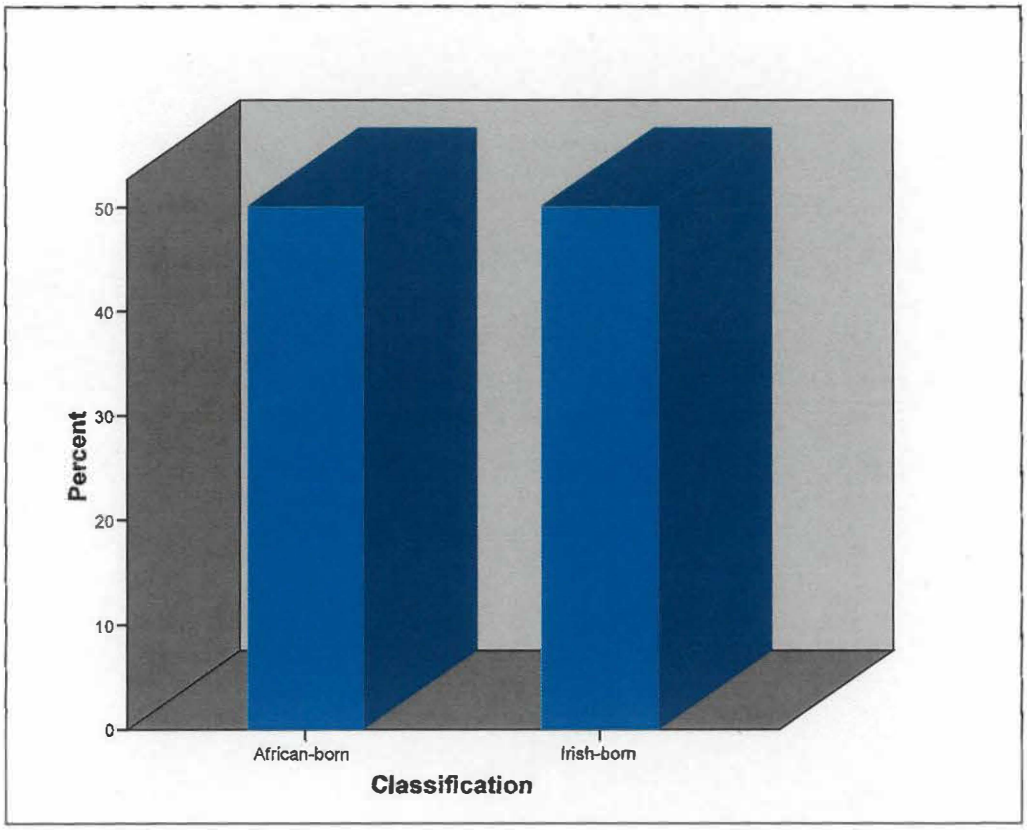
Table 20: E-mail usage removes cultural cues in communication

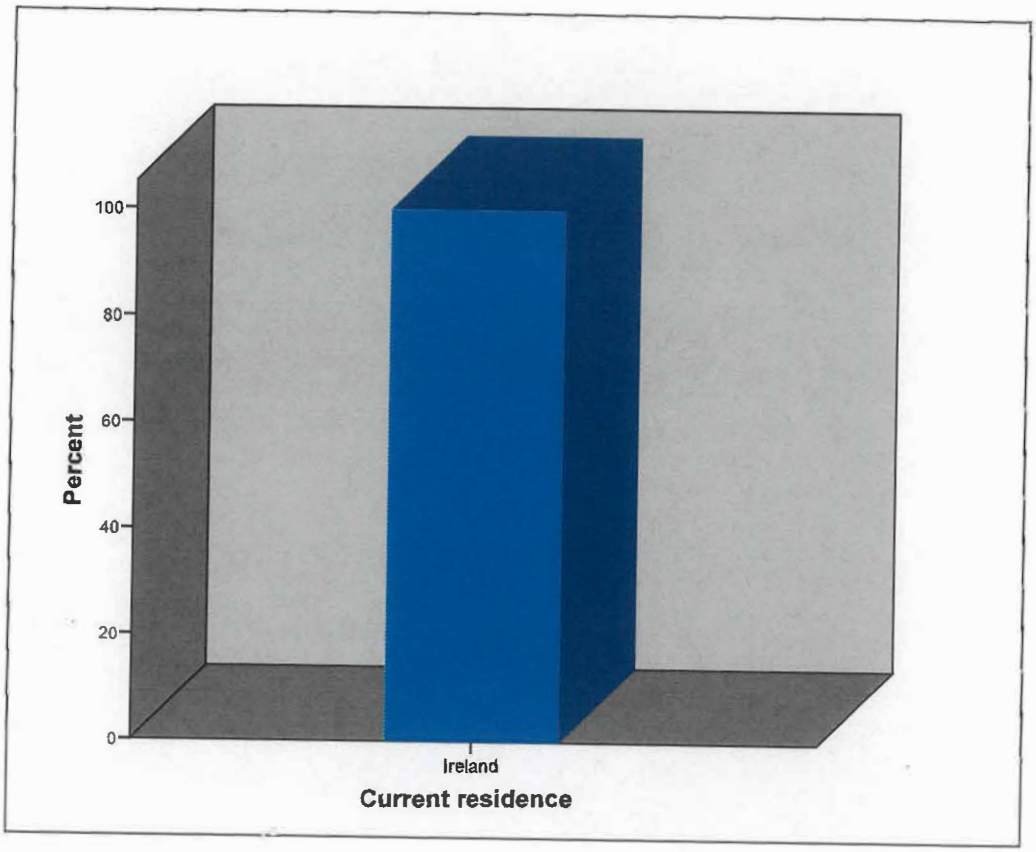
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	15	30.0	30.0
Yes	35	70.0	70.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0

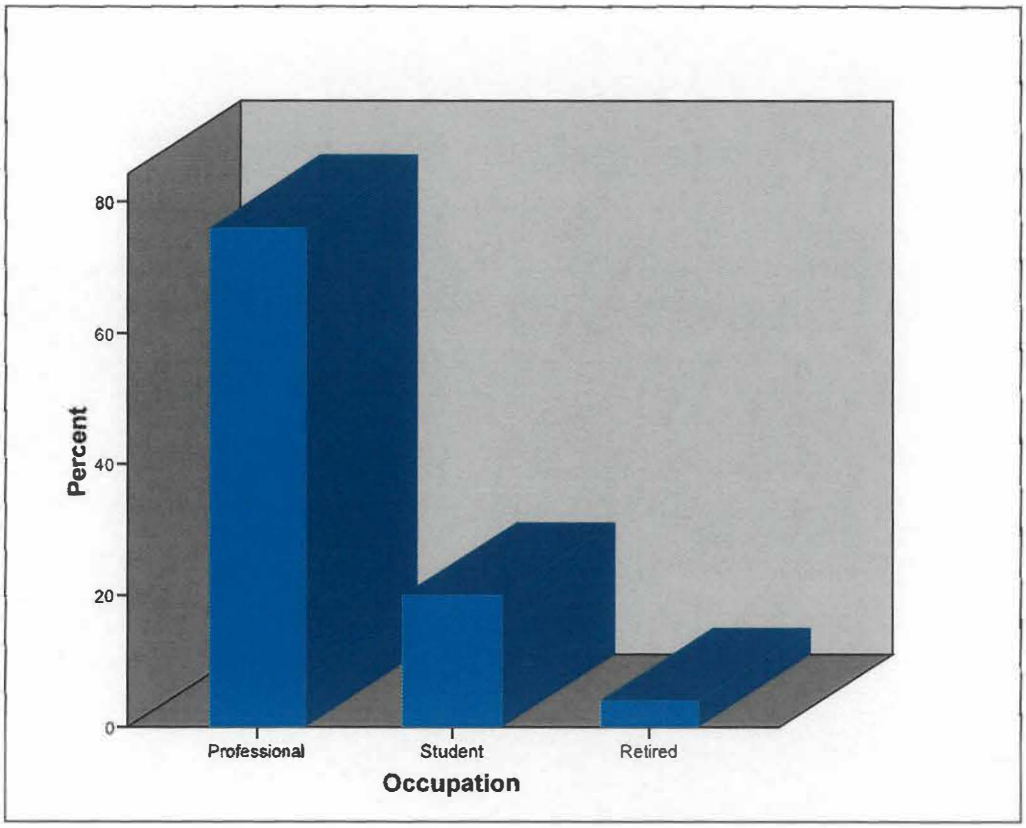
Appendix III: Frequency graphs

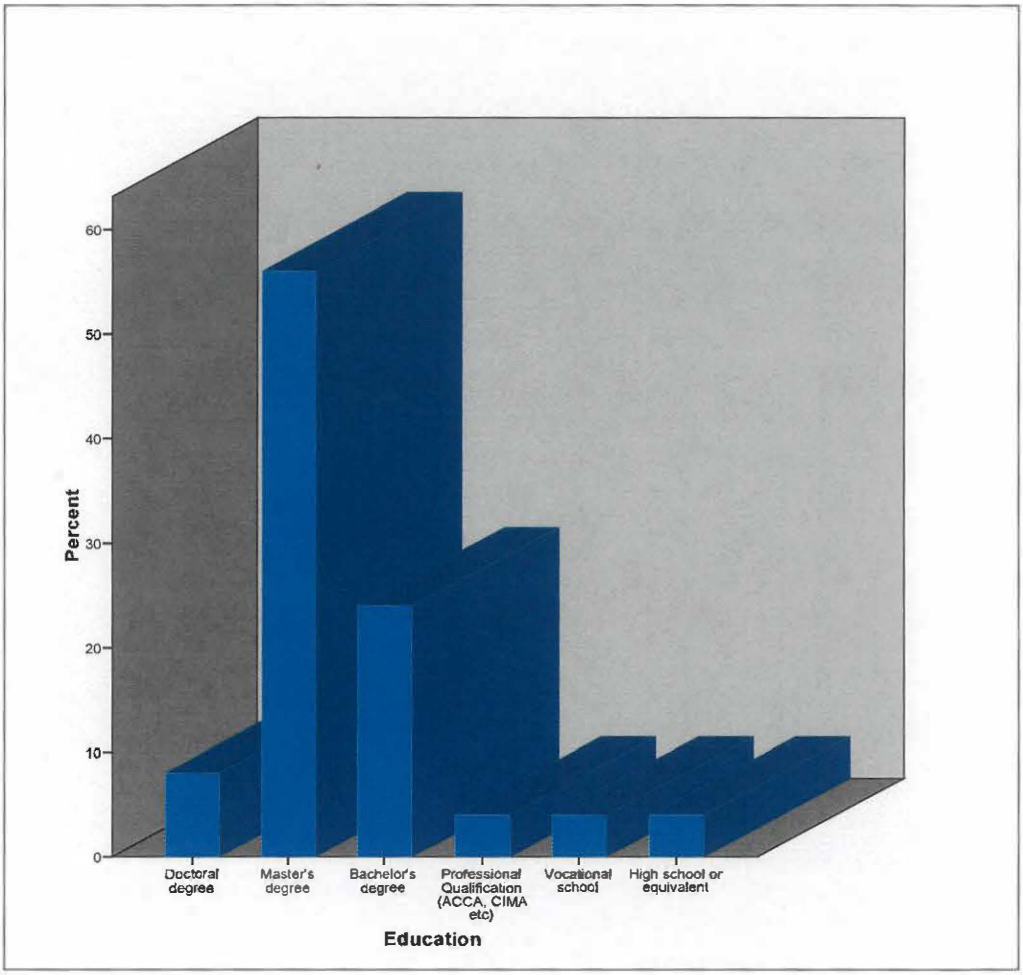


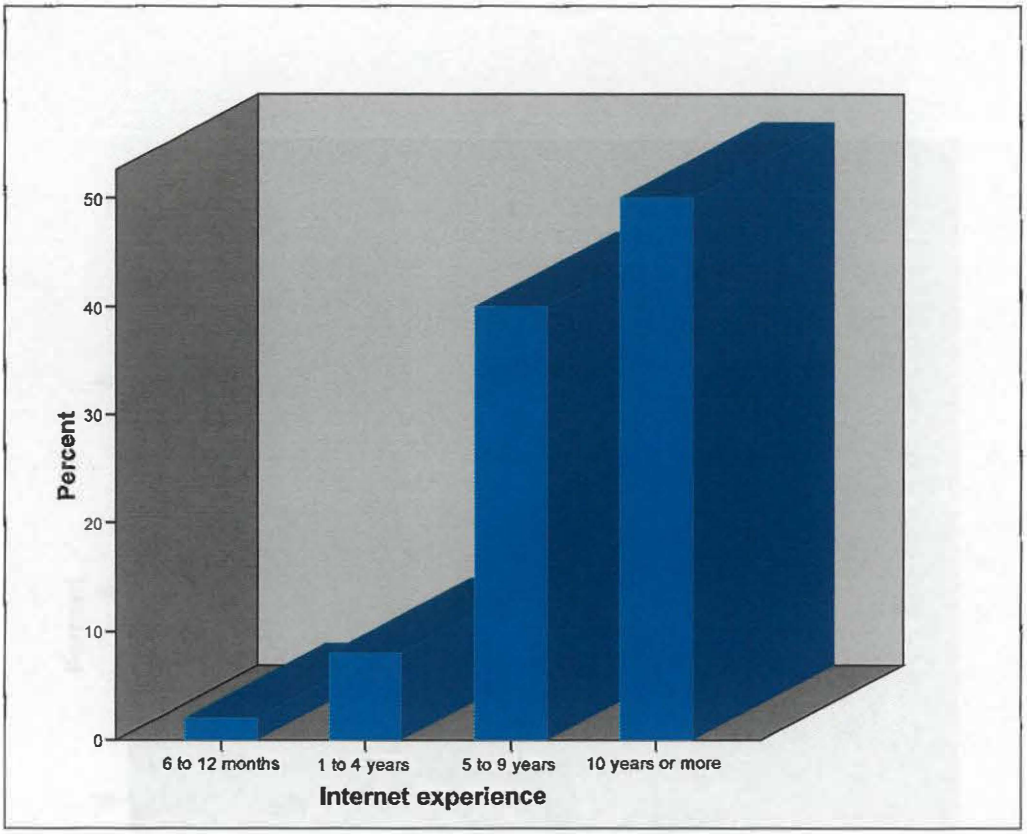

Percent
60
40
20
0
18-25
26-40
41-59
Over 60
Age

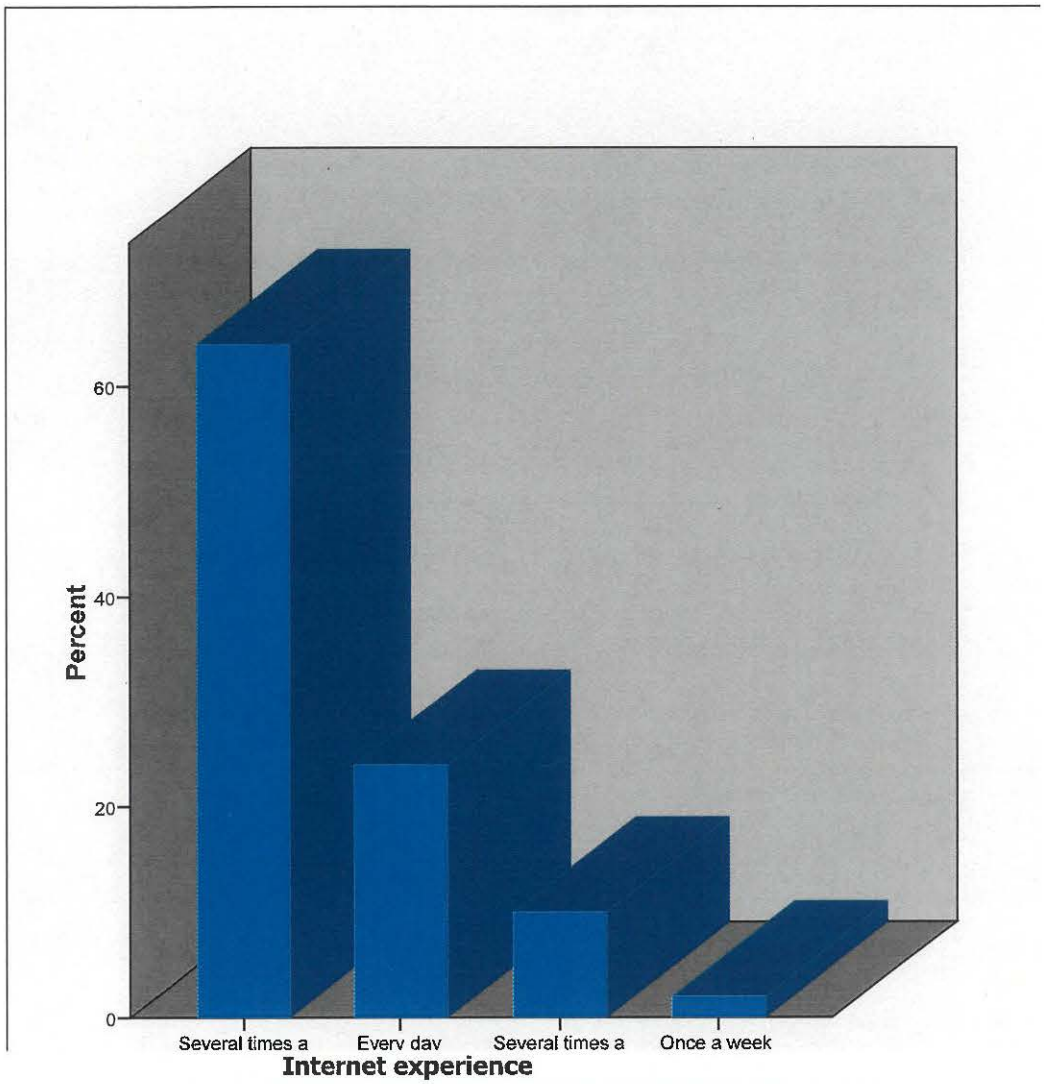

50
40
30
20
10
0
Percent
African-born
Irish-born
Classification

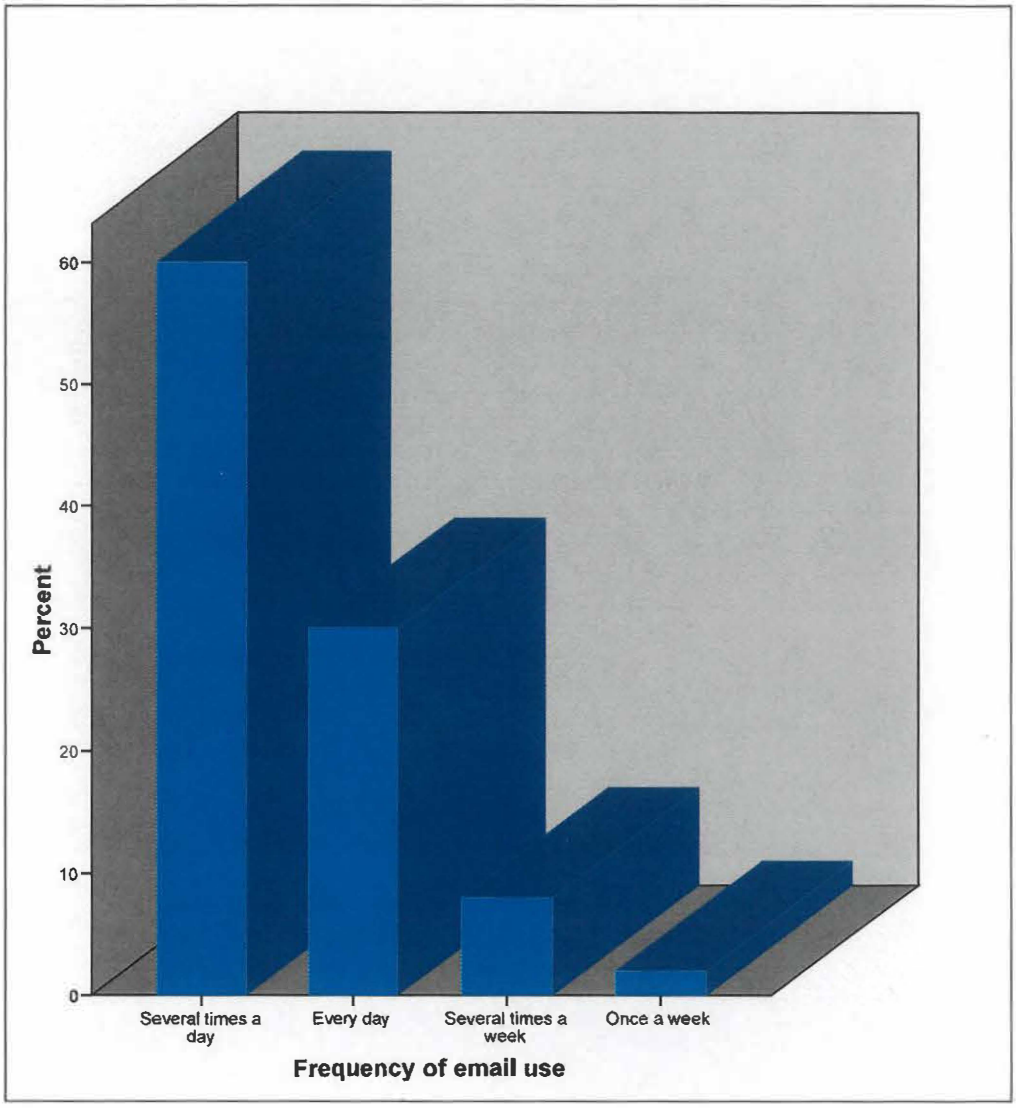

100
80
60
40
20
0
Percent
Ireland
Current residence

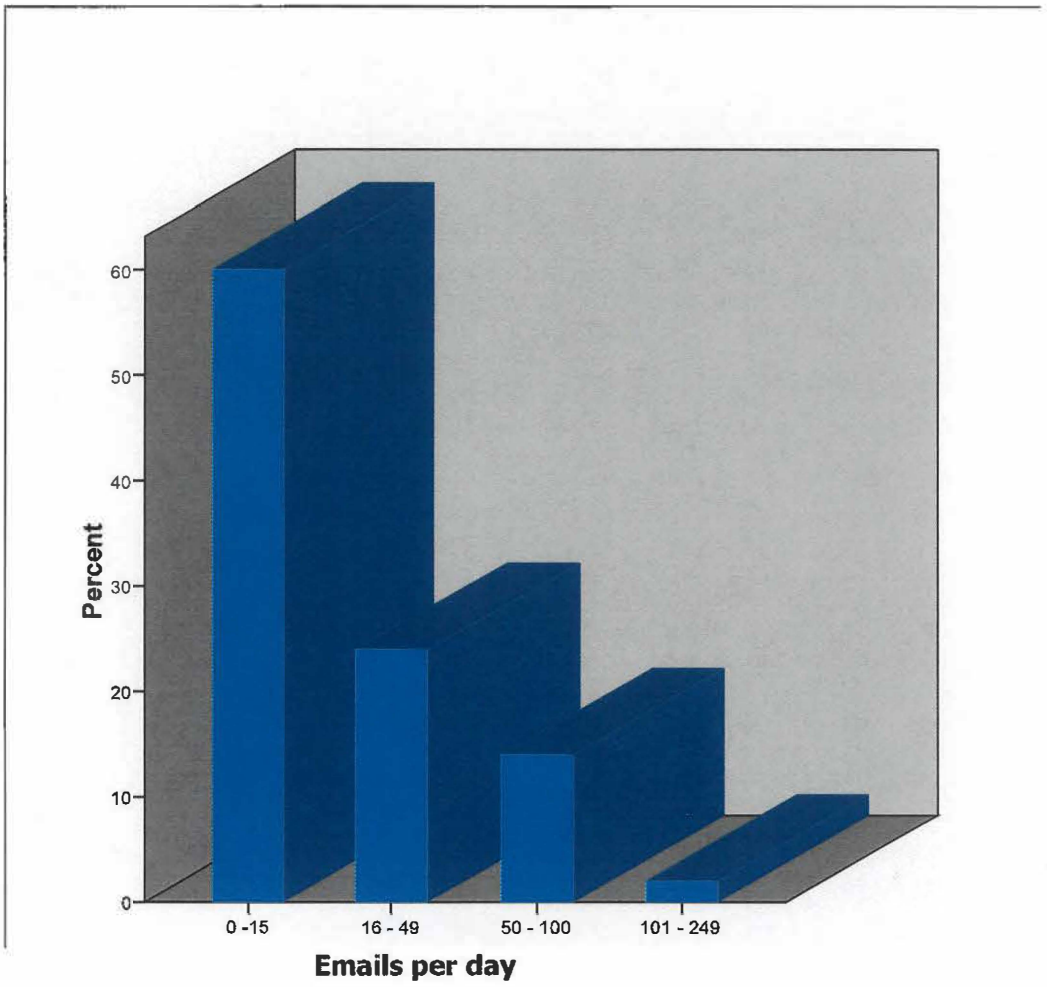

80
60
40
20
0
Percent
Professional
Student
Retired
Occupation

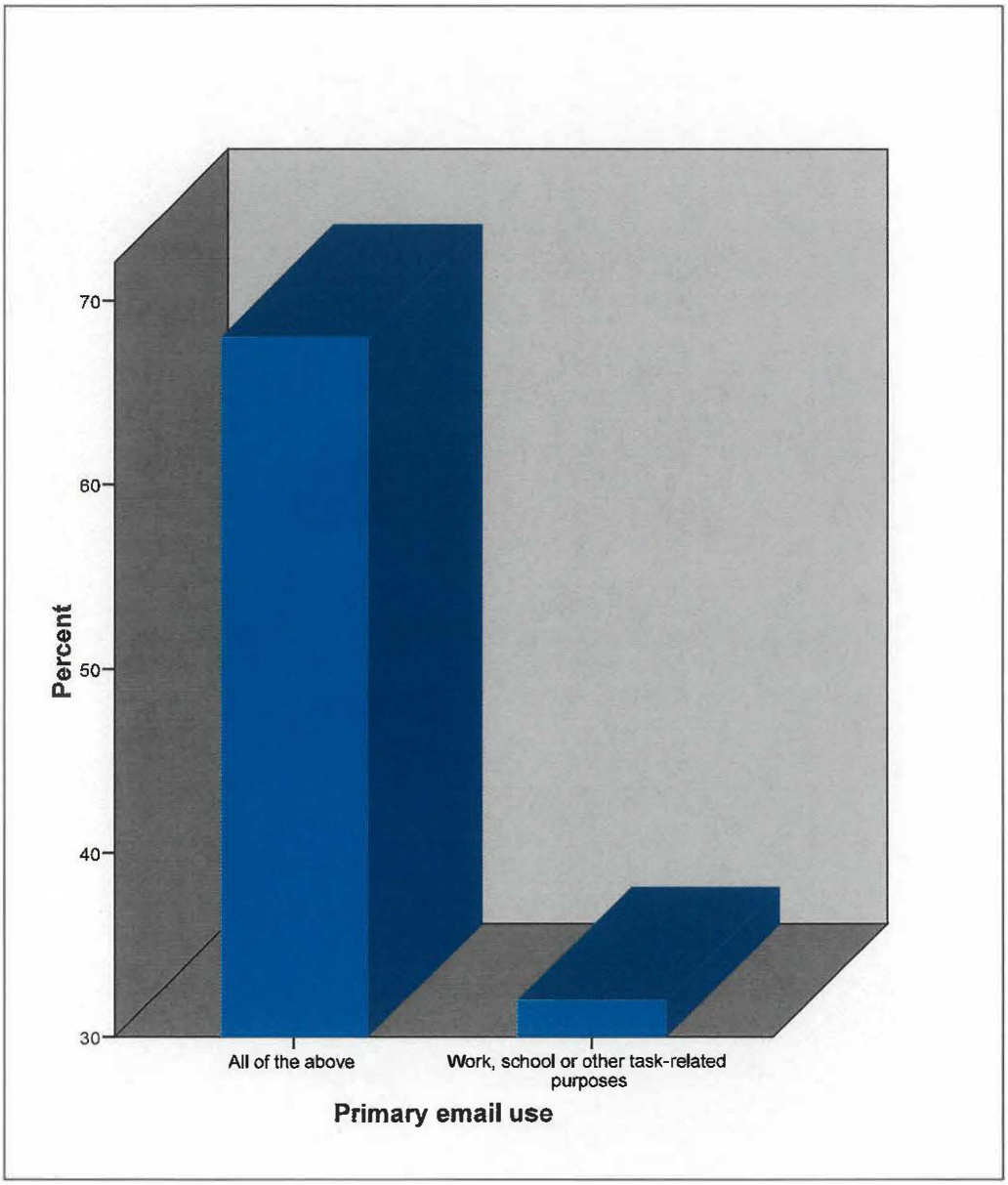

60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Percent
Doctoral degree
Master's degree
Bachelor's degree
Professional Qualification (ACCA, CIMA etc)
Vocational school
High school or equivalent
Education

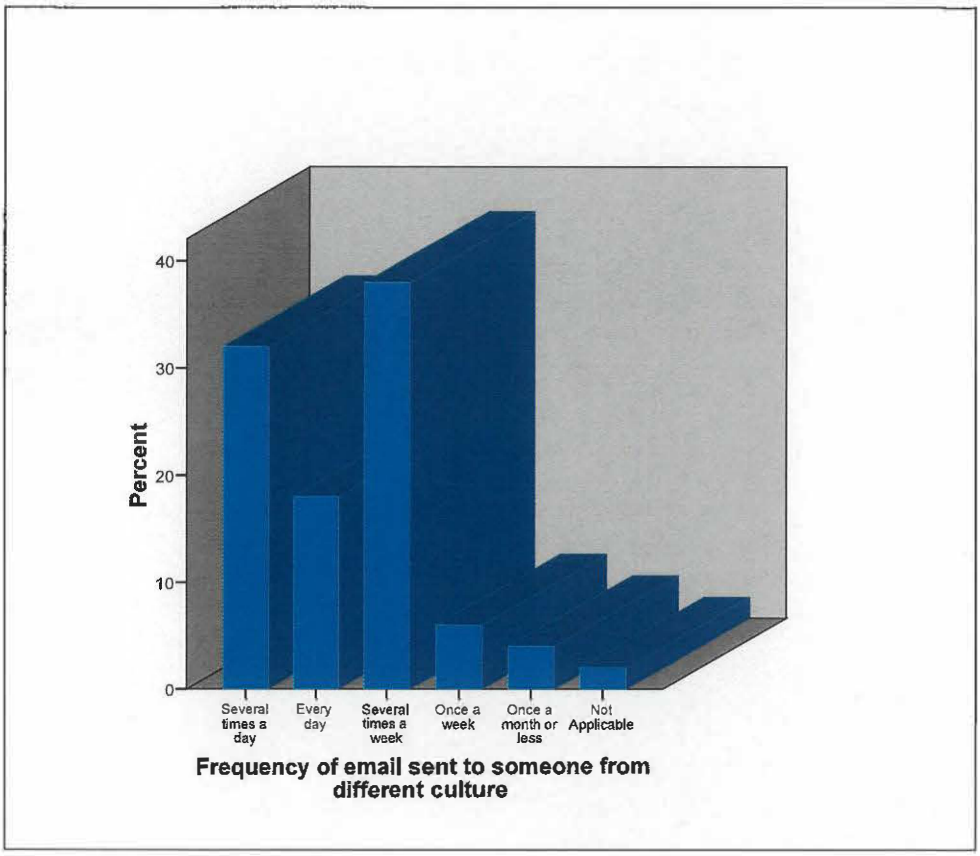

Percent
50
40
30
20
10
0
6 to 12 months
1 to 4 years
5 to 9 years
10 years or more
Internet experience

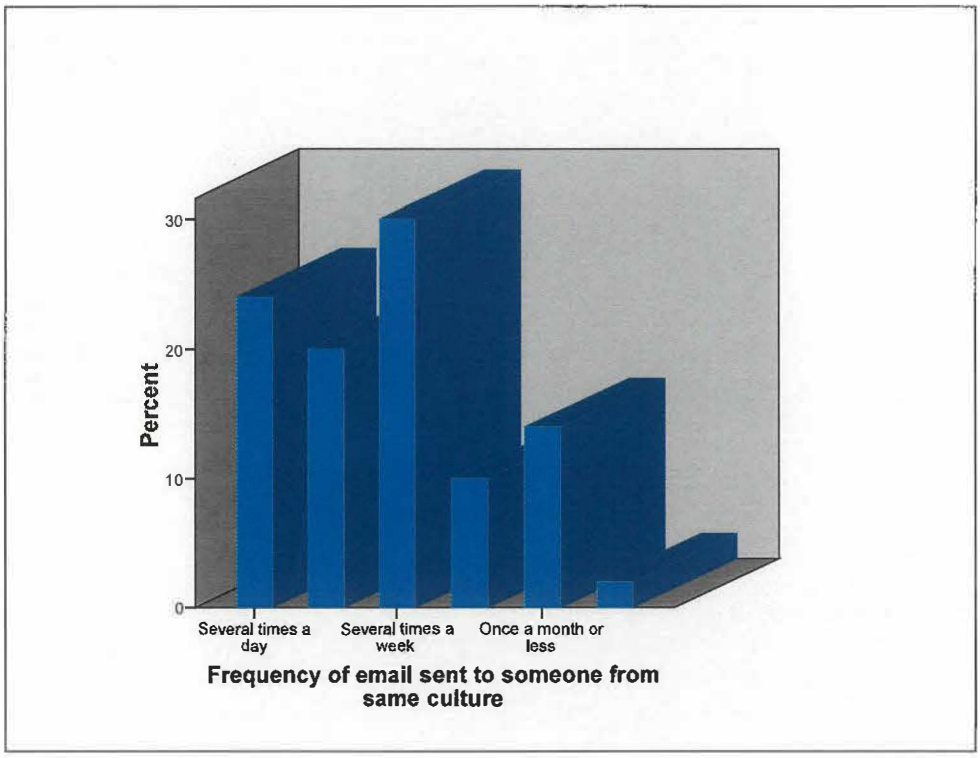

60
40
20
0
Percent
Several times a
Every day
Several times a
Once a week
Internet experience

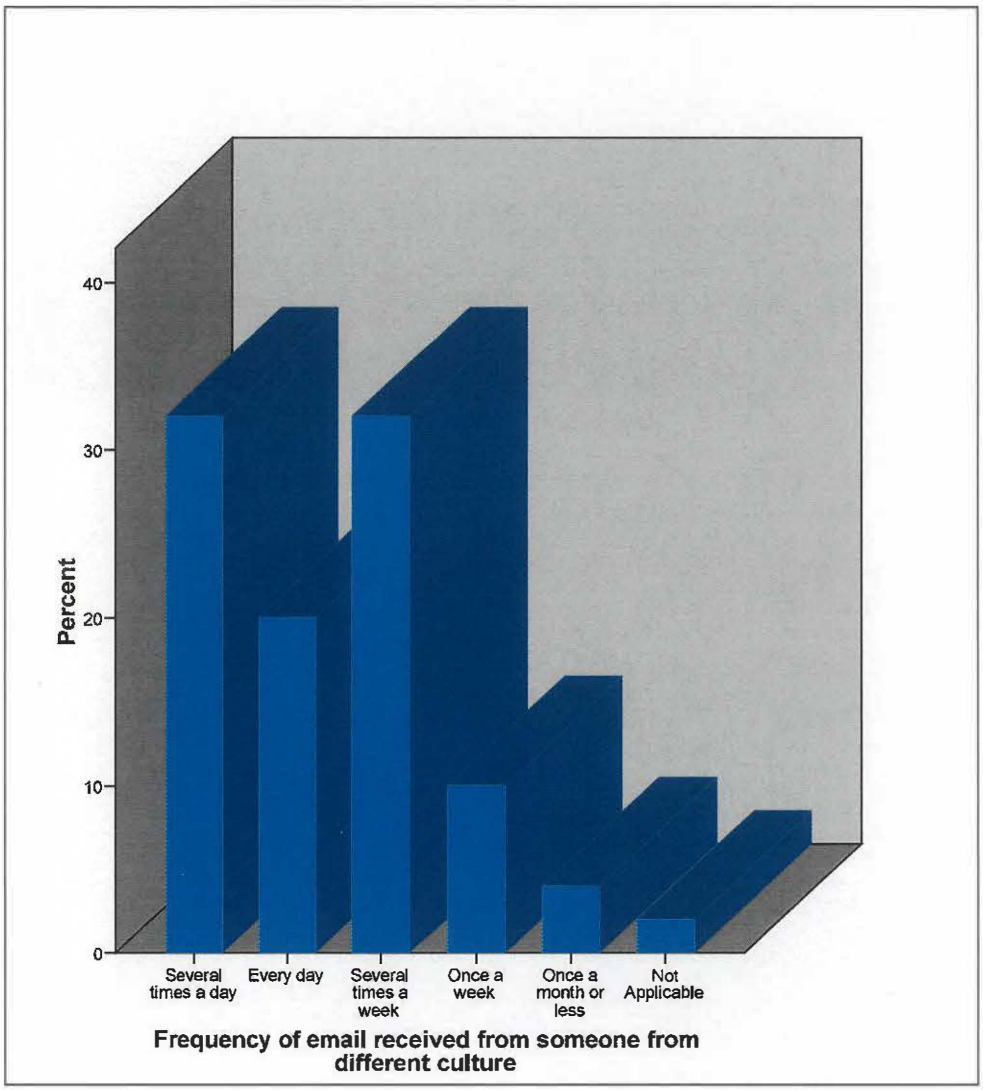

Percent
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Several times a day
Every day
Several times a week
Once a week
Frequency of email use

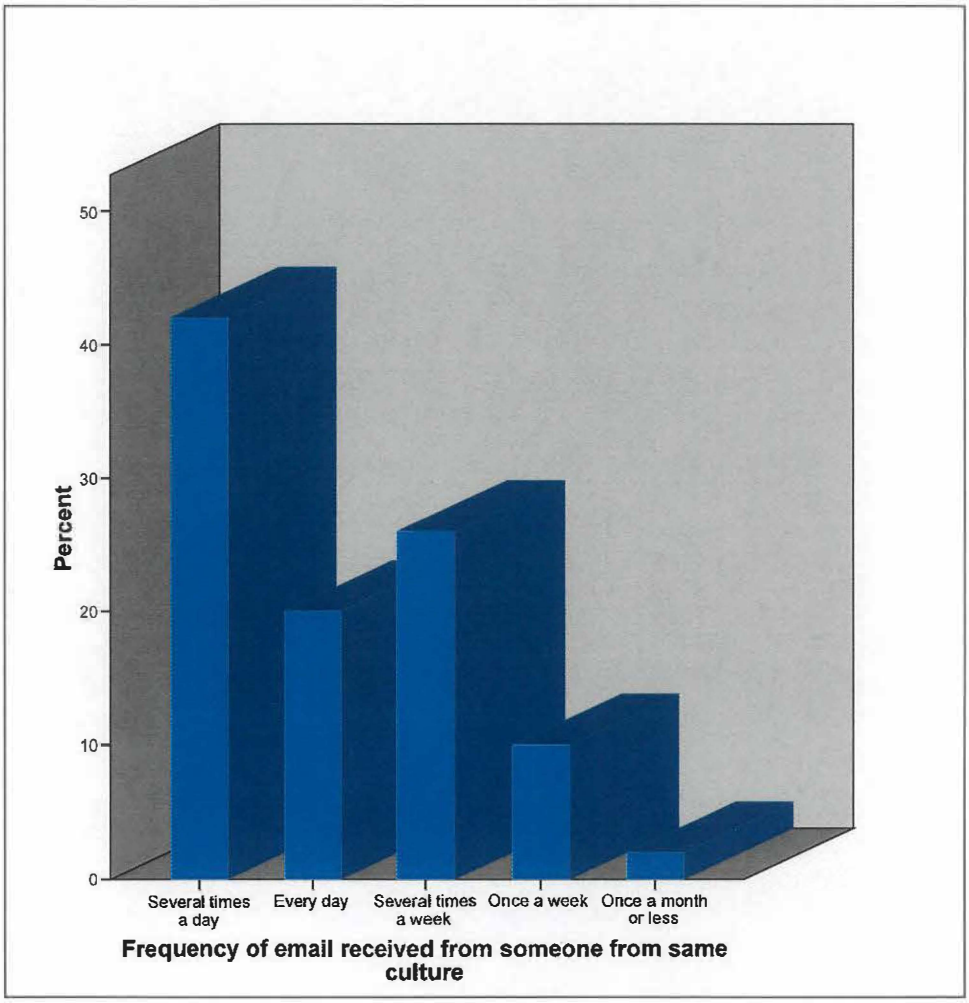

Percent
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
0 -15
16 - 49
50 - 100
101 - 249
Emails per day

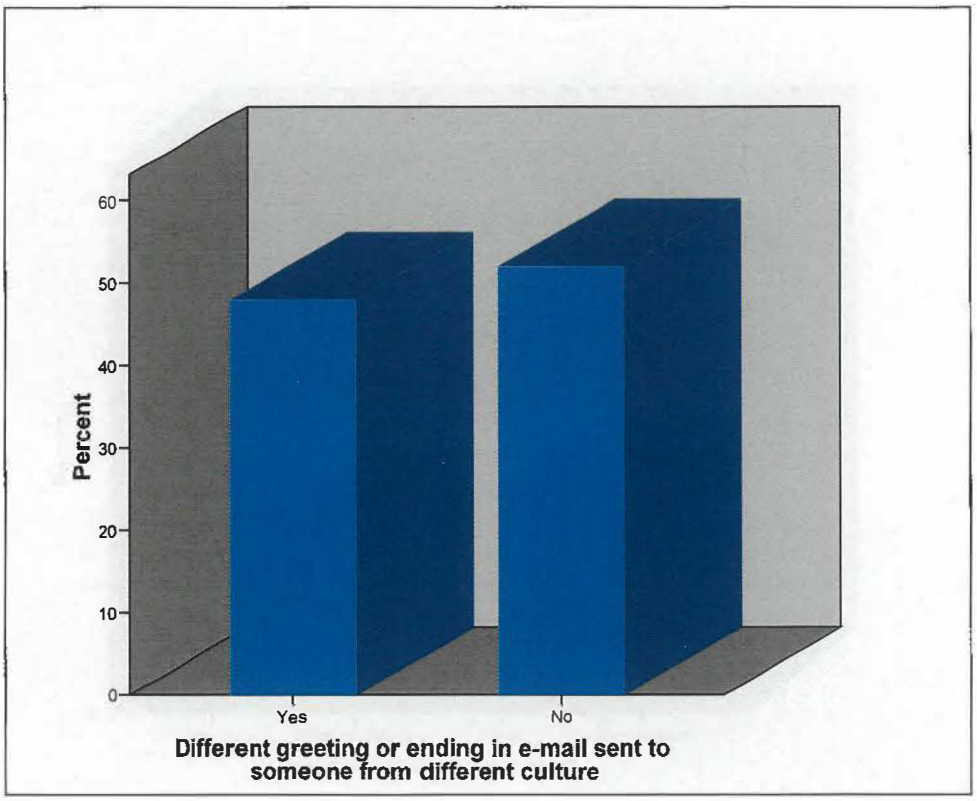

70
60
50
40
30
Percent
All of the above
Work, school or other task-related purposes
Primary email use

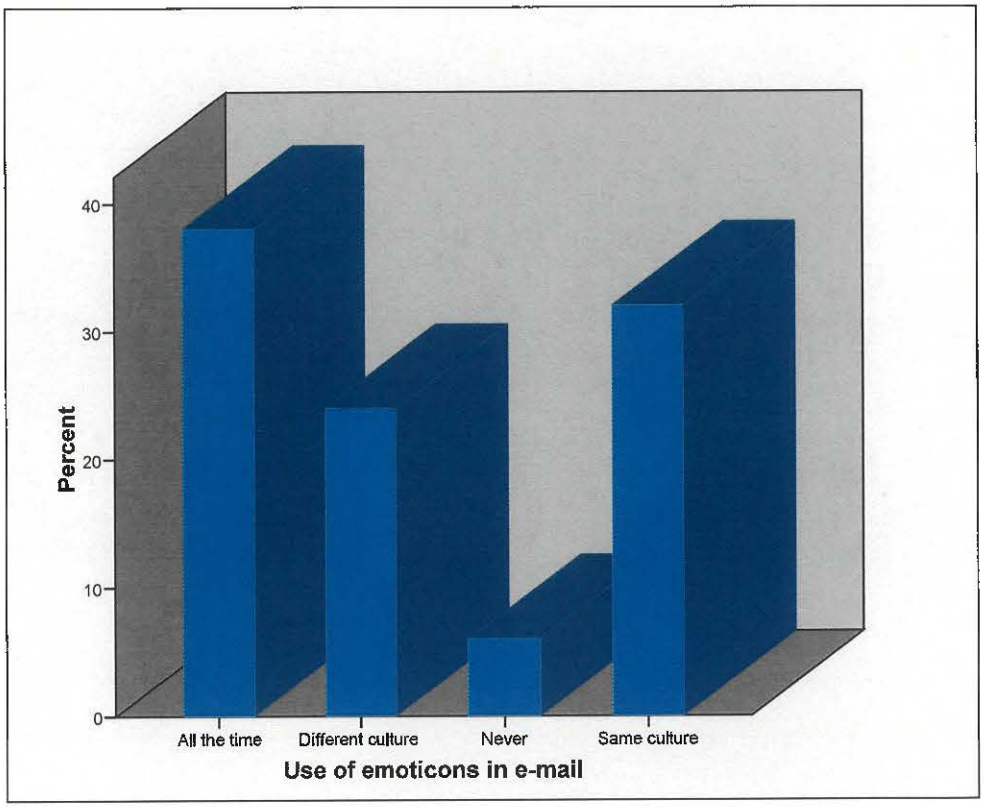

Percent
40
30
20
10
0
Several times a day
Every day
Several times a week
Once a week
Once a month or less
Not Applicable
Frequency of email sent to someone from different culture

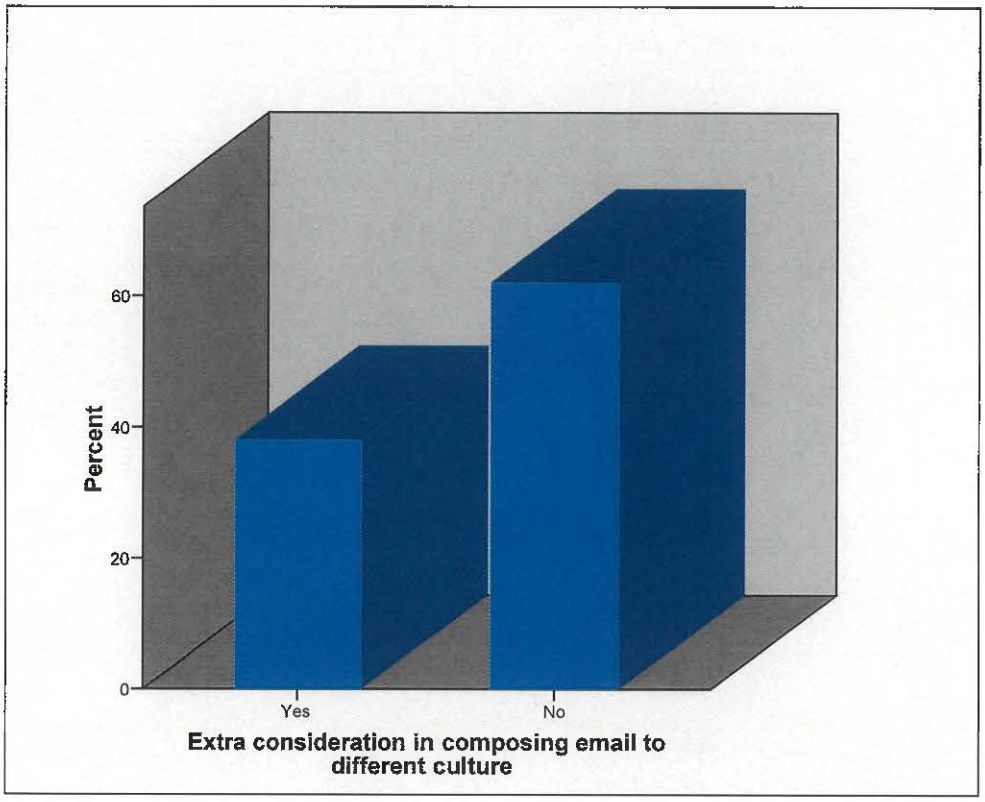

30
20
10
0
Percent
Several times a day
Several times a week
Once a month or less
Frequency of email sent to someone from same culture

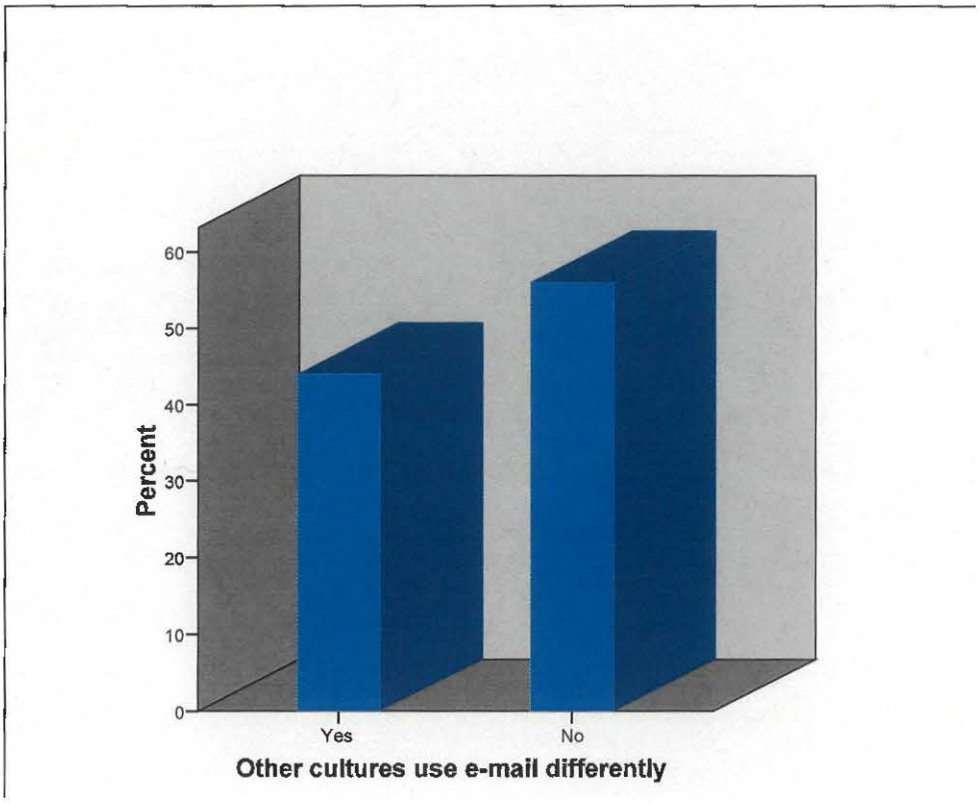

Percent
40
30
20
10
0
Several times a day
Every day
Several times a week
Once a week
Once a month or less
Not Applicable
Frequency of email received from someone from different culture

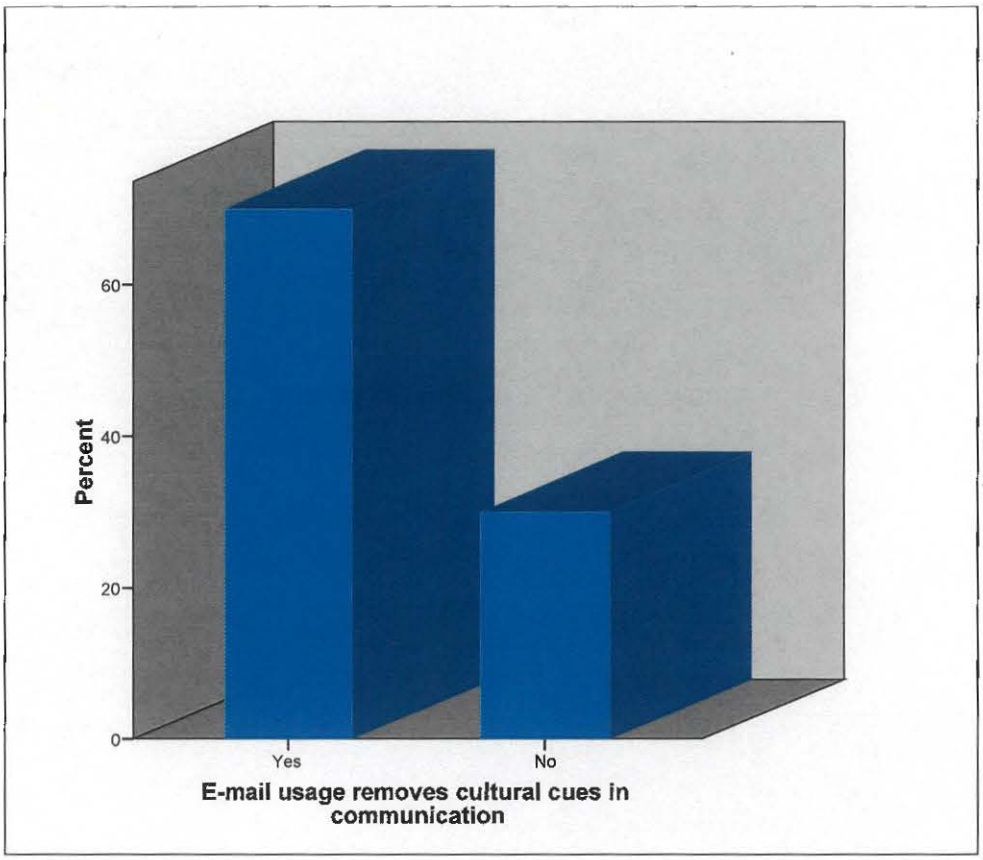

Percent
50
40
30
20
10
0
Several times a day
Every day
Several times a week
Once a week
Once a month or less
Frequency of email received from someone from same culture


60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Percent
Yes
No
Different greeting or ending in e-mail sent to someone from different culture


40
30
20
10
0
Percent
All the time
Different culture
Never
Same culture
Use of emoticons in e-mail


Percent
60
40
20
0
Yes
No
Extra consideration in composing email to different culture


60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Percent
Yes
No
Other cultures use e-mail differently


Percent
60
40
20
0
Yes
No
E-mail usage removes cultural cues in communication

Appendix IV: T-test and Chi-Square Results

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Gender	50	1.50	.505	.071
Age	50	2.14	.639	.090
Classification	50	1.50	.505	.071
Current residence	50	1.00	.000*	.000
Occupation	50	1.84	.468	.066
Education	50	2.50	1.074	.152
Internet experience	50	3.40	.670	.095
Frequency of internet use	50	1.50	.763	.108
Frequency of email use	50	1.52	.735	.104
Emails per day	50	1.58	.810	.115
Primary email use	50	3.36	.942	.133
Email to same culture	50	2.38	1.227	.174
Email from different culture	50	2.76	1.408	.199
Frequency of email to same culture	50	2.40	1.262	.178
Frequency of email from same culture	50	2.28	1.230	.174

* t cannot be computed because the standard deviation is 0.

Table 1: One-Sample Statistics

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Gender	21.000	49	.000	1.500	1.36	1.64
Age	23.674	49	.000	2.140	1.96	2.32
Classification	21.000	49	.000	1.500	1.36	1.64
Occupation	27.817	49	.000	1.840	1.71	1.97
Education	16.463	49	.000	2.500	2.19	2.81
Internet experience	35.880	49	.000	3.400	3.21	3.59
Frequency of internet use	13.908	49	.000	1.500	1.28	1.72
Frequency of email use	14.621	49	.000	1.520	1.31	1.73
Emails per day	13.786	49	.000	1.580	1.35	1.81
Primary email use	25.210	49	.000	3.360	3.09	3.63
Email to same culture	13.715	49	.000	2.380	2.03	2.73
Email from different culture	13.862	49	.000	2.760	2.36	3.16
Frequency of email to same culture	13.451	49	.000	2.400	2.04	2.76
Frequency of email from same culture	13.112	49	.000	2.280	1.93	2.63

Table 2: One-Sample Test

Appendix V: Sample Consent Form

SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Cultural Differences in construction and utilization of Electronic mail from an African and Irish perspective.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **ITAYI VIRIRI** from the **School of Creative Technologies** at the **Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology.** This research will contribute to a dissertation submitted as a partial fulfilment requirement for the degree of MSc in Cyberpsychology.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study sets out to explore whether different cultural backgrounds and specifically learned rules of behaviour affect the usage of computer mediated communication.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Complete a demographic and email use survey
- Participate in semi-structured interview process

Please note you will be debriefed at the end of your participation.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There is no payment for participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is entirely voluntary so you can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Department of Learning Sciences Ethics Committee (DLSEC).
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

[name]
Course Coordinator
Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design & Technology
Kill Avenue
Dun Laoghaire
Co. Dublin
Ireland
Telephone: + 353 1 239 4000
Facsimile: + 353 1 239 4700
Email: info@iadt.ie

SIGNATURES

I have read the information provided for the study as described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
Name of Participant (please print)

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

_____
Name of Researcher (please print)

_____ _____
Signature of Researcher Date