

Ties to a virtual seminar - the role of experience, motives and fulfillment of expectations

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Whereas virtual seminars are becoming more and more popular, evaluations still show some problems: A relatively great amount of time is required for the solution of technical problems as well as for coordination. The rate of active participation is low, cooperation is restricted to subgroups, and there are many drop-outs. The question arises whether it is possible to establish stable ties to the virtual seminar, despite technical problems and the lack of face-to-face contacts. The objective of the presented study is to identify factors influencing identification with a virtual seminar. Students from Eichstaett and Goettingen cooperated in a virtual seminar. Asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) was used. There were newsboards for the specific topics. Two questionnaires were issued, one at the beginning and one at the end of the course. The first one measured the students' experience with CMC, their motives for study in general and participation in the virtual seminar and their identification with the home university. The second one assessed the degree of identification with the home' university and with the virtual seminar. Additional scales addressed technical problems, and fulfillment of expectations. Identification with the home university was significantly lower at the end of the course and ties to the virtual seminar were established. Technical problems did not influence identification with the virtual seminar. The decrease of identification with the home university can be predicted by the motives, whereas identification with the virtual course is connected with the fulfillment of expectations. The results are discussed with regard to implications for the creation of further virtual seminars.

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