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Impact of Text Messaging on Communication

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Speech 485: Senior Seminar Research Project

Dr. Cronn-Mills

## **Abstract**

This study used two focus groups to learn about college students and their use of text messages. All of the students were from the Arts and Humanities College at Minnesota State University. One focus group contained five females and other focus group contained five males. The main focus of this study was to find if text messages displaced face-to-face communication. The results of this study suggest text messages do have a displacing effect on face-to-face communication. But text messaging is not the only technology that has the displacement effect. This study also suggests males and females view text messages differently. The implications of the five themes that emerged are discussed in this study.

## **Introduction**

Interpersonal communication is vital for humans. People use interpersonal communication all the time. Some forms of communication include: face to face communication, email, chats, facebook, myspace, instant messaging, and text messaging. Text messaging has become quite a communication phenomenon. People use text messaging to get dates, tell people they love them or goodnight, avoid oral communication, coordinate times to meet up, connect with friends, and even some places, such as Japan, look fashionable (Leung 2008). College students use text messaging on a regular basis. Text messaging is a fast, easy, convenient, and an easy way to multitask ( Grinter & Eldrige, 2001).

But is text messaging use out of control? According to Perry and Lee (2007) Text messaging is displacing face-to-face communication (p.74). Text messaging is used a lot, especially among college students, because of the convenience. Text messaging may even be addicting (Lee & Perry). College students text in class, on dates, in the movie theatre, at the office, in the mall, and even text while driving.

### **Literature Review**

College students spend a good majority of their time communicating. College students are either listening to a professor, talking to their friends, emailing, listening to their iPods or texting on their cell phones. College students use text messaging for four main reasons.

First ,college students text to coordinate plans. Hagen and Rice (2007) found text messaging was mostly used for coordinating. A lot of college students mass text their friends “What are you doing tonight?” A mass text is a text message sent to more than one person at a time. Text messaging could simply be used to plan and coordinate with their friends for that night or the future. In fact, according to Adams, Baker, Daufin et. al (2008) text messaging and other interactive communication make up thirty-one percent of the time they spend communicating, while listening is fifty-six percent and actually talking is only thirteen percent.

Second, college students use text messaging to multitask. Text messaging is convenient, fast, and easy. You can text someone as you are brushing your teeth, singing a song, eating food, in class, playing a game, or at work. Some people even text while driving, which could endanger the public or even themselves. A convenience of text messaging is you do not need to answer the text right away. You can answer the text message whenever you want, like email, and it will be there. Sometimes, there is only one message you want to say such as, “Where are we going for dinner?”, so texting may be easier than calling. Text messaging saves time. However, multi-

tasking has negative aspects such as decreased performance being and distractions changes how we remember information (Gaither, 2008). When you are texting in class you are not paying attention to the professor or writing notes.

Third, college students use text messages to stay in contact. Text messaging is an easy way to show someone you care. For example, texting your new boyfriend or girlfriend goodnight, texting your best friend you love them, thanking your mom for dinner, or texting your sister you miss her are all good examples of staying in touch by showing someone you are thinking of them. Text messages remind each other of their relationship and allow the text messaging participants to choose when and where to communicate (Hagen & Rice, p. 3). Lin and Tong (2007) agree text messaging is a good way to keep in contact with those we love, who are far away.

Fourth, college students send text messages to avoid face to face communication and therefore reduce social interaction (Lee & Perry, 2007, p. 74). Adams, Baker, Daufin et al.(2008) agree with this notion of the displacement theory. College students are finding limited amount of leisure time and need to use their time wisely, in which text messaging saves them on time (James, Wotring, & Forrest, 1995). Text messaging would not be the first technology to displace face-to-face communication. According to Lazarsfeld and colleagues (1948), they found displacement effects of the radio and on the print medium. Media scholars continue to recognize the effects of every new technology including TV, and text messaging. So if text messaging does displace face-to-face communication, it would not be the first technology to displace. However, according to Lin and Tong (2007) text messaging is a good way to communicate after a fight. You do not have to hear the other person's voice, but you are still trying to resolve the conflict. Therefore, Lin and Tong do not think it is displacing, because the fighting couple would not have

called each other anyways. But if you use it for every interaction, does that mean you displace face-to-face communication? “Does text messaging reduce or displace face-to-face communication? Does it have no effect? Or does it cause an increase in other communication?” (Lee & Perry, 2007, p. 16)?

According to Leung (2008), college students use text messaging for escape, affection, convenience, entertainment, coordination, and sociability. Escape is thought to be a motive for addiction. So if you use text messaging frequently to escape do you have an addiction to text messages?

Peele (1985) found in order to find something to be addictive, it must fall under three motives which are escape, ritual, and compensation. Lee and Perry (2007) conclude people who use text messages tend to focus on the mobile phone interface when communicating, not paying attention to their surroundings which is a form of escape. They control the time, place, and content of text messages which is compensation and engage in frequent daily messages which is ritual. Text messaging, therefore, could be addicting. The main reason students do not get addicted to text messaging is due to the money (Lee & Perry, 2007).

Women and men use face-to-face communication differently. Women in China are encouraged to use text messages to express how they feel, as they are more indirect and pervasive (Lin & Tong 2007). According to Igarashi, Takai and Yoshida (2005) women use three main concepts to communicate. First, women tend to tell more about themselves than men and have more social networks (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982). Second, women tend to have more friends and stay active communicating, and are therefore less likely to be lonely than men (Wheeler, Reis & Nezelek, 1983). Third, women are more interested in emotional and personal communication and in building more stable relationships than males (Hirschi, 1969). For

example, I call my parents about once a week. I can talk to my mom for an hour about everything from school to boyfriends to work. However, my dad only ask a few simple questions such as, “How is the car?” “The computer?” “School?” Sometimes, he does not want to talk, because he assumes there is nothing to say. Men prefer task-oriented networks. (Walker, 1994). Men usually spend face-to-face communication together in common activities such as fishing, watching football, Nintendo, basketball, etc. Men and women use face-to-face communication differently, so it would be plausible to say that they would use text messaging differently, as well. Gender may affect what and how much to text.

**Research Question:** Does text messaging displace face to face communication?

## **Method**

I conducted two focus groups for my research method. One focus group consisted of five girls and the other consisted of five boys. All of the participants went to MSU and were part of the Arts & Humanities College. Some of my questions included “Was there a time you used text messaging to show someone you cared about them?” “Do you think text messaging displaces face-to-face communication?” “Do you find text messaging addicting?” The interview was conducted at my home. I used my tape recorder to record the focus groups, and I typed up notes on my computer. The focus group took about an hour each and was very helpful with my study. I focused my questions on what I found from the literature review, but other themes still emerged and are mentioned in the results.

According to Knodel (1993), since focus groups are a qualitative method, there needs to be analysis. This study will use the analysis to find certain themes of the focus groups. The focus

group was a good method, because focus groups are usually used for new technologies (Williams, Rice, & Rogers, 1988).

Bernard and Ryan (2003) state four main techniques used in focus group such as analysis of words, careful reading of blocks of texts, an intentional analysis of linguistic features, and manipulation of texts.

The first technique is analysis of words, which includes word repetition, indigenous categories, and physical manipulation of texts. Indigenous categories include searching for familiar or unfamiliar terms to find themes (Bernard & Ryan, 2003). Key words in context are looking for the term and see how the term is used in different contexts and then compare meanings (Bernard & Ryan). After the researcher compares meanings, it is possible to form themes.

The second technique is careful reading of blocks of texts which includes compare and contrast, social science queries, and searching for missing information. Spradley (1979) “suggests searching interviews for social conflict, cultural contradictions informal methods of social control, things people do to manage relationships, methods by which people achieve status, and how people solve problems” (p. 199-201). This technique is useful, because a researcher can focus their efforts for specific kinds of topics thus themes emerge (Bernard & Ryan, 2003). Searching for missing information is exactly as it sounds. A researcher looks for missing information. However, this technique is more difficult than it seems. Some people may leave certain information out that may be interesting such as religious women mentioning birth control methods and not mentioning abortion (Bernard & Ryan). Or participants may assume something and do not mention the assumption (Bernard & Ryan).



The third technique is an intentional analysis of linguistic features which include: metaphors, transitions, and connectors. Metaphors are a powerful technique, because they sum up the meanings in simpler terms so most people will understand. The purpose is to find the underlying principles and deduce the schema to find a pattern in order to locate themes (Bernard & Ryan, 2003). Transitions are used to find a shift in thematic content (Bernard & Ryan). Connectors are used to locate themes by searching for certain words or phrases (Bernard & Ryan). Certain words can determine certain relationships and therefore form themes. For example, the phrases *since*, *because* and *as a result* usually indicate casual relationship (Bernard & Ryan).

The fourth technique is the physical manipulation of texts which include: unmarked texts, pawing, and cut and sort procedures. Unmarked texts refer to looking at the texts that do not already have a theme and try to come up with a new theme (Ryan 1999). Pawing refers to organizing your texts either in different folders, different highlighters, or putting different texts on a bulletin board (Bernard & Ryan, 2003). Cut and sort procedure refers to cutting out certain quotes and pasting the all the quotes in piles of themes (Bernard & Ryan).

## **Results**

My dominant approach in this study was analysis of words. I used word repetition and key words in context to find my themes. The purpose of this study was to find the reasoning for using text messaging. But more importantly the study was used to find out if text messaging displaces face-to-face communication. We will go over the results of whether the participants use text messages to multi-task, if they find texting messaging addicting, if they use text

messages to stay in contact, whether or not text messages displaces, and if they find text messages trendy. Also, this study focused on the differences between genders not sex. Gender is socially constructed word that represents behavior, thoughts, or ideas. Sex, on the other hand, is just the physical difference between males and females.

### *Multitasking*

All of the females agreed text messaging is used for multi-tasking. Most of females even admitted to using text messaging at work when the boss was not around. The females text message in class, because they are bored. I asked them if they thought text messaging was a distraction. The female focus group concurred text messaging is a distraction, but that is why they use text messages in class or at work. The female focus group wanted to be distracted, because they were bored. One of the participants said she used text messaging, while she is engaging in a face-to-face conversation. She knows texting while communicating face-to-face is rude. But if she is uninterested in the face-to-face conversation, she will let the other person know the conversation is pointless by bringing out her phone and texting.

The males agreed with the females that text messaging is used for multi-tasking. They also use text messaging at work and school. In addition, the male focus group uses text messages during a TV program. The male group finds text messaging entertaining. One male said he felt text messaging is good for multitasking, but you are limited in that you only get 160 characters for one message.

### *Addiction*

All but one female thought text messaging could be an addiction. One of the participants admitted she was addicted. She feels she needs to text everyday to communicate. Another

participant stated she would never get addicted, due to the cost. The one who claims she could be addicted has unlimited text messaging. The other one who claims she will never get addicted does not have unlimited texting. The female focus group also concurred they find themselves saying “Throw me a text” instead of saying “Give me a call”.

However, all but one of the males does not believe text messaging could be an addiction. The other four males disagreed. The males said “addiction” is too strong of a word. When the males think of addiction, they think of heroin. One of the males mentioned text messages could be habit forming, but not an addiction.

### *Connection*

The females found text messaging is used for a connection. One of the participants said her best friend moved away. And now her inbox is full of text messages such as “I saw a guy with a beard. You would like him” or “It is rainy here in Washington”. The text messages are humorous, but the main purpose the text messages are used for is intimacy and connection. Even though friends, family, or lovers are far away in distance, text messaging is perfect for reminding them they still care.

The males also text people to have a connection. The males will text things like “I am thinking of you” or just text friendly like “How are you?” One of the males knows Spanish and he texts his mom in Spanish. He considers himself a bilingual texter. Sometimes the males text messages they would be too embarrassed to say. Text messages are just easier. However, one of the participants received a text message from a girl asking how he felt about her. He ignored the text, because it was annoying. He concluded there are certain messages you can text, and there are messages you do not text.

### *Displacement*

None of the females feel like text messaging was displacing face-to-face communication. One of the females said the phone has already displaced face-to-face communication. The females said text messaging is written communication and therefore cannot displace a verbal communication. The female focus group did admit to avoiding communication sometimes with text messages, but the text messages did not displace their face-to-face communication.

Four of the males thought text messages did not displace face-to-face communication. However, one male did, which is different from the females in which all of them disagreed. The male thought text messages displaced face-to-face communication, because you can now text messages instead of delivering the messages verbally. He gave an example of himself and his roommates. He has the gas bill in his name. Whenever he gets the bill, he texts his four roommates the amount they owe him, instead of going up to their room and knocking on their door. Therefore, he claims text messaging displaces face-to-face communication. The other four believe text messaging does not prevent them from having face-to-face communication conversations. However, the males did admit to avoiding face-to-face communication sometimes when they text. But the text messages do not displace their face-to-face communication.

### *Trendiness*

The females did not find text messaging trendy. One of the participants said she thought it was just technology. Everybody has text messaging, even some of the participant's parents.

In contrast, all of the males agreed text messaging is trendy. The males agree text messages determine a class or a generation. You can just whip out your phone and look trendy by using text messages, because older people do not. Plus, now there are even picture texts instead of all words.

## **Discussion/Implications**

Text messaging is used for multitasking. However, multi-tasking has negative aspects such as decreased performance and distractions change how we remember information (Gaither, 2008). The focus groups use text messages at work or school anyways, because they are bored. Entertainment is a big reason the males use text messaging. And according to Leung (2008), text messaging is used for entertainment. Plus, college students want the distractions, even though they are aware of the decreased performances. College students want distractions and find distractions in text messaging.

Lee and Perry (2007) and Leung (2008), argue text messaging is addicting. A female participant agreed text messaging could be addicting, but one female said text messaging is too expensive to get addicted. Lee and Perry (2007) found one of the reasons students do not allow themselves to get addicted is due to the cost. The males feel text messaging is not addicting. Addiction is too strong of a word for the males, as they think of heroin as an addiction. However, the male focus group admitted text messages could be habit forming. A reason the males and females disagree that text messaging is an addiction could be curved on money. If text messaging was free, perhaps they would agree text messaging is addicting and not just habit forming.

People who are far away are now able to stay connected through text messages (Lin & Tong, 2007) Text messaging is an easy way to keep in contact, because it reminds each other the relationship is still going (Hagan & Rice, 2007). As mentioned earlier, a female participant said her best friend moved away. They call each other a lot, because women are more interested in emotional and personal communication and in building more stable relationships than males

(Hirschi, 1969). Not only do they call each other, but they text every day. The texting allows them to feel together or just simply to say I am thinking of you. The males agree they use text messaging to show someone you care. The males text to be friendly or simply say “I am thinking of you”. However, a couple of the males said they would rather call. They like to hear the other person’s voice rather than just a text message. Males are more direct than females in conversation (Hagan & Rice, 2007), so maybe that is why the males would rather call to hear the other person’s voice.

The female and male focus group admitted they used text messaging to avoid communication as Lee and Perry (2007), and Adams, Baker, Daufin et. al. (2008) mentioned. Lee and Perry (2007) and Adams, Baker, Daufin et al. (2008) agreed with the displacement theory, that text messaging is displacing face-to-face communication. I asked the focus groups, since they admitted to using text messaging to avoid communication, “Do you think text messaging is displacing face-to-face communication?” All of the females, disagreed with the notion of text messaging displacing face-to-face communication. One participant said the phone displaces face-to-face communication, not text messaging. However, text messaging is part of the phone, but she clarified the phone calls did the displacing, not the text messaging. This notion of a different technology already displaced face-to-face communication concurs with Lazarsfeld’s (1948) research that new technology displaces face-to-face communication like the radio and the TV. Only one male in the focus group thought text messaging displaced face-to-face communication. He explained he uses text messages to directly displace face-to-face communication and even avoid it. Text messaging is new technology and in the past all new technology has displaced face-to-face communication. Perhaps a couple of reasons why the college students are unaware of the displacement are because they use text messages every day.

It has become a ritual, like brushing your teeth. And text messaging is only a small part in displacing face-to-face communication as phone calls, TV, radio, the internet, and even iPods displace, as well.

All of the males thought text messaging was trendy. The males said text messaging demonstrates your class. Plus, text messages represents the generation they grew up in. Leung (2008) states text messaging is very stylish in Japan. However, none of the females thought text messaging was trendy. They all agreed it is technology, and even their parents do it from time to time. The females said text messaging is not trendy and the males said text messaging is trendy. This is a difference between the genders. However, I was surprise the females did not think text messages are trendy and the males thought text messages are trendy. Perhaps, the males like and use technology more often than females. The males may understand technology more and therefore think it is pretty cool. While the females view text messages as just another way to communicate and everyone uses text messages.

James, Wotring, and Forrest (1995) explained college kids are low on leisure time and are finding new ways to save time, such as text messaging. One of the boy participants exclaimed he works forty hours a week and is taking seventeen credits. He just does not have time to talk on the phone as much as he would like. Therefore, he will send mass text messages and text 30 times per hour. Text messages are used for their convenience as text message save college students on time and you can text anywhere.

### **Further Research/Limitations**

This study focused on students in the Arts & Humanities College. This is a limitation and therefore more research could be done with students in different colleges. Perhaps students in

Arts & Humanities use text messaging differently than other colleges. More research could focus on a different age group such as high school students or adults. In this study, two of the males were homosexual. However, this study did not focus on sexual orientation just gender. Research could be done with a focus on sexual orientation. Also, one of the males was Mexican and another male was half Japanese. All of the females and the other three males were Caucasian. Research could be done with a focus on race. The Mexican male text messaged his mom in Spanish. Perhaps, a study could have a focus on text messages with a language other than English such as Spanish or Japanese.

A limitation of this study is that the focus groups consisted of either five females or five males with a strong emphasis on what the differences were between the genders. The result was a bias of the genders. This includes stereotypical ideas of how men and women communicate, such as women like to talk more in conversation. A better research method would be the double-blind method. A third party would hand out a survey and only she would know the genders. I, however, would not know the gender and could put similar people in categories without knowing the gender. The results would end up without the biases of gender, because I would not know the gender until I put similar ideas into categories.

### **Conclusion**

This study showed text messaging does displace face-to-face communication. However, text messaging is just a small part of displacing face-to-face communication. Technology displaces face-to-face communication and the displacing began with the radio, newspaper and television. Most college students are unaware they are displacing face-to-face communication when they are using text messaging. Perhaps, this is because the displacing is caused not only by text messages but all new technology.



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## Appendices

### *Questions for Participants*

1. How often do you text?
2. What do you like about text messaging?
3. If you are mad at a friend, do you call them, text them, or talk to them one on one?  
Who is sending the messages.
4. Do you find text messaging addicting? If so, how?
5. Do you find it text messaging displacing your face to face communication?
6. Do you use text messaging to coordinate?
7. How does text messages save you on time, if it does?
8. Do you use text messaging cuz you are lazy or too busy?
9. Was there a time you text someone to show that you care?
10. Do you think text messaging is stylish or trendy?
11. If someone is texting in class, at the movie theater, in the library, etc. do you finding it annoying? If so, why?
12. How would you describe your feelings when someone is texting another person while talking to you face to face?

*IRB Form*

Dear Participant:

I am doing a study in the Speech Communication Department. I am focusing the study on text messaging and how we use it through our daily lives. I selected you, because I am choosing candidates who are in the Arts and Humanities College. I am doing two focus groups. One will consist of five boys, and the other who will consist of five girls. This will be completely voluntary, and I thank you if you choose to accept.

In order to participate in this study, all you need to do is show up for the meeting. I will announce the meeting times later. You will be asked to answer several questions within your focus group. This is completely anonymous, so your privacy will be protected.

The benefit to you is that you get to participate in an academic study. You will greatly help me with my research, and learning more about the text messaging communication phenomenon. There is not cost from you, nor any risks.

If there are any questions or concerns, please contact me. My email is [heidi.hemmer@mnsu.edu](mailto:heidi.hemmer@mnsu.edu) or my phone number 507-828-0443.

Again, thank you for considering being a participant in my research study.

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Researcher

Date

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Participant

Date