

Chapter 49

Reply Timing as Emotional Strategy in Mobile Text Communications of Japanese Young People: Focusing on Perceptual Gaps between Senders and Recipients

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the timing of replies to mobile phone text messages focusing especially on the timing of replies from the perspective of the “recipient” of the message. In a previous study, the authors evaluated the timing of replies and the emotional strategies associated with such timing from the perspective of the “sender” and found they employed an emotional strategy whereby they “waited” before responding to mobile text messages in order to continue positive communication. In the present study, they examine if the same strategy is as effective from the perspective of recipients of the messages. Specifically, study participants were asked by questionnaire to rate what emotions they would feel and to what degree when the other party waited before replying to the mobile text messages the participants had sent, where the message sent had conveyed one of four emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, or guilt. These four emotional scenarios are the same as used in the previous study to allow for comparative analysis of the two studies. Additionally, participants in the present study were asked to provide freemform responses for scenarios where they felt it was desirable to wait before replying themselves. The results show differences between the emotional strategic intent of senders for waiting before replying,

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as determined in the previous study, and how this is perceived by the recipients. The results suggest that there are gaps in perception between senders and recipients regarding the intentional manipulation of reply timing (especially waiting before replying). One suggested gap is that senders that intentionally manipulate the timing of replies for negative or hostile emotions, such as sadness, anger, or guilt, run the risk of making the recipient feel the opposite of the sender's intended outcome.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of supporting the emotional perspective of learners has been highlighted in the area of e-learning in recent years. For example, sense of community theory (Brook & Oliver, 2003) and social presence theory (Garrison & Anderson, 2003) frequently appear in research related to e-learning. A specialized way of thinking about emotional presence from the perspective of emotion has also been reported in e-learning research (Kang, Kim, & Park, 2007). With frequent reports from various organizations on increasing student dropouts with the shift from the e-learning implementation stage to the operation stage, there is an ever-increasing focus being placed on providing emotional support to students. However, nearly all studies conducted thus far have involved distance learning, such as e-learning, and have focused mainly on cognitive issues such as acquisition and understanding of knowledge, making it difficult to avoid the impression that any consideration of the emotional aspect is of secondary importance at best.

It is thought that communication both within and outside the e-learning environment is important for supporting the emotions of learners and guiding them toward continual learning activities. Learners' emotions are influenced in e-learning environments by their communications with instructors, mentors or other students attending the same course, and are influenced outside of the e-learning environment by their communications with family members, company colleagues, or friends who support them as they pursue education through e-learning. Through these various types of communication, learners will likely have increased desire toward learning if they experience happiness or interest, and will have decreased desire toward learning if they experience antipathy, anger, or sadness. In other words, we believe that the emotions of learners are more strongly influenced by the various communications that surrounds them than by the instructional materials or contents of the courses themselves.

In modern life, much of our communication is text-based communication. Of course, text-based communication in the form of, for example, letters or facsimiles have existed for a long time. However, it cannot really be said that these were the primary forms of communication means of the time. However, with many households now accessing the Internet, text-based communications such as electronic mail and electronic bulletin boards have spread into our daily lives. In recent years, blogs, tweets, and social networking have also become extremely popular. It goes without saying that communication in e-learning has also come to be commonly conducted by text communication. The different types of text communication have become second nature to us because we can use them not only from personal computers but also from mobile phones and smart phones.

We believe, therefore, that by examining the emotional aspect of text communication especially, clues will be discovered that will effectively support the emotional aspect of e-learning students, and will form a basis for continued research. Our recent research, including this study, therefore focuses on investigating the emotional aspects of text communication.

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