

Potential impact of communication technology on relationships



The Many Faces of Communication Technology: The Worrying Potential Impact On Our Relationships

Introduction

One of the most fundamental and important aspects of our lives as humans are our relationships to other people. As our lives have become more intertwined with technology, it is worth examining the impact that the use of communications technology (CT) can have on those relationships with other people. As pointed out by Barbakoff (2014) popular press article, the ways we communicate over text can leave a very different impression of who we are in comparison to a face-to-face conversation. We already know that the over-use of CT can have a negative impact on our overall life satisfaction, as demonstrated by various studies (Goodman-Deane, Mieczakowski, Johnson, Goldhaber & Clarkson, 2016). This led to the specific research question of does the daily use of messaging with smart technologies (ex. Texting via cellphone) correlate with overall poorer social and emotional competence? Within that research question, the primary hypothesis is that there will be a negative relationship between communications technologies and social and emotional competency within relationships. A secondary hypothesis is that the negative association might be influenced by amount of communication cues present in the method used to communicate.

Methods

When seeking to determine the impact that CT, it is important to define what we mean by emotional and social competency. We settled on defining *social competency* as the ability to navigate social interactions with appropriate

<https://assignbuster.com/potential-impact-of-communication-technology-on-relationships/>

behaviours pertaining to the situation (aka ability to communicate effectively). We defined *emotional competency* as the ability to express appropriate emotions, have emotional regulation, and be able to react to other people's displays of emotions appropriately. The lack of which is demonstrated through displays of inappropriate aggressive behaviour. In terms of determining which studies to include in our literature review, we chose to focus on articles that examined the impact of high levels of technology use that were empirical, peer reviewed, and relevant. Studies were excluded if they examined the relationship between technology and social/emotional competencies but only in participants with an already existing condition such as Autism or Schizophrenia, were not contemporary (2004 or later), examined the effects CT abuse within the context of the development of children, or were not empirical or peer reviewed. Ultimately, we ended up using roughly four studies that related directly to our research question, and seven which were related indirectly.

Results

The five main studies we focused on consisted of a study on CT impact on life satisfaction (Goodman-Deane et al., 2016), a study on the relationship of CT abuse with: social competencies, emotional competencies, and bullying (Nasaescu, Marín-López, Llorent, Ortega-Ruiz & Zych, 2018), a study on the relationship of CT with the development of interpersonal competencies within romantic relationships (Nesi, Widman, Choukas-Bradley & Prinstein, 2017), a study on the ability to initiate offline friendships (Koutamanis, Vossen, Peter & Valkenburg, 2013), and a study on the effects on instant messaging on already existing relationships (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009).
<https://assignbuster.com/potential-impact-of-communication-technology-on-relationships/>

Primary Articles:

	Rejects
Supports	Primary
Primary	Hypothesi
Hypothesis (3)	s (2)
(Goodman- Deane et al., 2016;	(Koutama nis et al., 2013;
Nasaescu et al., 2018; Nesi g & Peter, et al., 2017)	Valkenbur 2009)

The studies that supported our hypothesis consisted of the first three in the list. The 2017 study was longitudinal and took place over the course of 1 year. Participants were asked to self-report the amount of time spent communicating with and without CT, along with competency in conflict management and negative assertion. Results suggested that those who used CT to communicate more than without CT, reported lower levels of the competencies (Nesi et al., 2017).

The 2018 study aimed determine if there was a link between technology abuse and emotional competency. The study was cross-sectional and correlational. Regression analysis revealed that less technology abuse was associated with high levels of social and emotional competency (Nasaescu et al., 2018).

The 2016 study aimed to determine if the use of CT had a negative or positive association with many forms of life satisfaction. Through results from an online self-report survey, the researchers found that certain forms of CT such as voice and video calls had a positive association, whereas other methods such as texting and instant messaging had a negative association (Goodman-Deane et al., 2016).

In terms of the studies that rejected our hypothesis, the 2009 study examined the impact that the use of CT had on the quality of pre-existing friendships. Over the course of 6 months, they found that there was a positive longitudinal effect (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009).

The 2013 longitudinal study took place in 3 waves over the course of a year. Participants took a survey to see how often they used CT in the form of IM. Results showed that in the first 6 months, participants abilities to initiate offline friendships had a positive correlation (Koutamanis et al., 2013).

Conclusion + Discussion:

What the results of these various experiments tell us is that it is likely that there is a link between the overuse of CT with elements that relate to low levels of social and emotional competency such as depressive states (Van, Meerkerk, Vermulst, Spijkerman & Engels, 2008)

and bullying (Savage & Tokunaga, 2017). We are further informed that low levels of social and emotional competency have a tendency to affect our relationships with others. This can be seen in the 2018 study which found that CT abuse positively associated with the perpetration of online bullying

along with inter and intra personal conflict (Nasaescu et al., 2018). This is further supported by the 2017 study which found that those who used CT more reported less competency in conflict management and negative assertion than those who used CT less. Although these results are seemingly contradicted by the 2009 and 2013 study (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009; Koutamanis et al., 2013) which found positive associations with the use of CT, the results of the 2016 study might help to address why these differences may occur. The authors found that certain CTs such as verbal or video call had a positive association with satisfaction in various relationships, while CTs such as texting or instant messaging had a negative association (Goodman-Deane et al., 2016). The difference between these forms of CTs are that methods such as video and voice call are much richer in communication cues than texting and instant messaging. The use of communication cues such as: body posture, tone, gestures, physical movements, and the use of natural language in successfully getting across a message has been demonstrated to be of critical importance (Sheer & Chen, 2004).

The research has thoroughly answered the question of if CT have a negative impact on social and emotional competency. In terms of the primary hypothesis, the answer is that CT can have both a positive and negative impact based on the type of CT used. This is explained by the answer to the secondary hypothesis which suggests that it is likely that certain forms of CT which lack many fundamental communication cues can result in an increased difficulty in both sending, and interpreting, an intended message (aka demonstrate a lack of social and emotional competency). Taken

together, the results may implicate that those with lower social and emotional competencies are more likely to rely on communicative technology for interactions, which in turn may further hinder their ability to learn social and emotional competencies and appropriate coping behaviours.

Some limits we found in the studies used is that they were all examining correlational relationships, which means that although strong negative associations were found with CT abuse, we cannot say that the daily use of technology causes social and emotional deficiencies or vice versa, and furthermore, the potential for a third variable to influence causation and directionality cannot be denied. Another limitation was that the majority of the studies used did not measure social and emotional competency directly so to speak, but more so focused on factors that demonstrated a lack of both such as relationship satisfaction and bullying. A final limitation was that the longest study took place over a year, and all the other were less. This means that none of them properly studied the effects of long-term daily use of CT, which is important for determining if any positive or negative effects would have a lasting impact.

Although ideally these limitations could be accounted for by a double-blind randomized control trial that measured causation, due to the ethical limitations of randomly placing half of participants in a potentially harmful condition of forced extended cell phone use, along with the sheer scale of an experiment measuring long term use of CT in a social context in a completely controlled environment would realistically never be done.

However, putting ethical restrictions and resource limitations aside, a

potential experimental way to determine causation might be to randomly
<https://assignbuster.com/potential-impact-of-communication-technology-on-relationships/>

assign participants to either an experimental group where only communication cue poor CTs were used daily, a comparison group where only communication cue rich CTs were used daily, and a control group where the use of CT was restricted to a minimal amount. In terms of solving the operationalization issue of social and emotional competency, we could create a list of behaviours and emotions that would be representative of either a demonstration of, or lack of both competencies so that they could be measured quantitatively. In terms of studying the long term effects of CT use, this could be solved relatively easily by ensuring that the longitudinal nature of the study was measured for several decades to see if any effects of use had a truly long term impact.

References

- Barbakoff, H. (2014, June 25). Texting: The Relationship Killer. *Huffington Post* . Retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/hannah-barbakoff/texting-the-relationship-killer_b_5185115.html
- Goodman-Deane, J., Mieczkowski, A., Johnson, D., Goldhaber, T., & Clarkson, P. J. (2016). The impact of communication technologies on life and relationship satisfaction. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 57 , 219-229. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.11.053>
- Koutamanis, M., Vossen, H. G. M., Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2013). Practice makes perfect: The longitudinal effect of adolescents' instant messaging on their ability to initiate offline friendships. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29 (6), 2265-2272. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.04.033>

- Nasaescu, E., Marín-López, I., Llorent, V. J., Ortega-Ruiz, R., & Zych, I. (2018). Abuse of technology in adolescence and its relation to social and emotional competencies, emotions in online communication, and bullying. *Computers in Human Behavior, 88*, 114-120. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.06.036>
- Nesi, J., Widman, L., Choukas-Bradley, S., & Prinstein, M. J. (2017). Technology-based communication and the development of interpersonal competencies within adolescent romantic relationships: A preliminary investigation. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 27* (2), 471-477. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jora.12274>
- Savage, M. W., & Tokunaga, R. S. (2017). Moving toward a theory: Testing an integrated model of cyberbullying perpetration, aggression, social skills, and internet self-efficacy. *Computers in Human Behavior, 71*, 353-361. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.02.016>
- Sheer, V. C., & Chen, L. (2004). Improving Media Richness Theory: A Study of Interaction Goals, Message Valence, and Task Complexity in Manager-Subordinate Communication. *Management Communication Quarterly, 18* (1), 76-93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318904265803>
- Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2009). The effects of instant messaging on the quality of adolescents' existing friendships a longitudinal study. *Journal of Communication, 59* (1), 79-97. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.01405.x>
- Van, d. E., Meerkerk, G., Vermulst, A. A., Spijkerman, R., & Engels, R. C. M. E. (2008). Online communication, compulsive internet use, and psychosocial well-being among adolescents: A longitudinal study.

Developmental Psychology, 44 (3), 655-665. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.44.3.655>