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The Relationship among Gender, Attachment Style and the Perception of Text Message Valence

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ATTACHMENT STYLE AND PERCEPTION

Abstract

Text messaging has become a quick and easy way to get in touch with peers whether professionally or informally, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This form of communication, however, can be detrimental if a message is perceived incorrectly. In order to understand what can cause these miscommunication issues, prior research studied the influence of punctuation, capitalization, and emoticons on the perception of text messages. However, specific traits of the message-recipient might be relevant for the interpretation as well. Butterworth and colleagues (2019) discovered that women are more likely to rate text messages as more affectionate than men. In addition to gender, research on attachment style was explored in the context of text-based communication and the results have shown that a high anxious attachment style is related to a negative perception of texts, whereas a high secure attachment style seems to lead to a positive interpretation (Fleuriet, 2010; McSpadden, 2020; Morey et al., 2013). The present study aimed to further examine the relationships among attachment styles, gender, and the perception of text message valence. Based on prior research it was hypothesized that attachment security is positively correlated with the valence of text messages and that attachment anxiety is negatively correlated with the valence of text message ratings. Finally, it was hypothesized that women will rate messages more extremely than men. In order to test those hypotheses a survey containing an attachment-style measure as well as a text messages rating task was conducted. Data is currently being collected, and we anticipate that the findings demonstrate that individuals who score higher on secure attachment rate text messages more positively and those who score higher on anxious attachment rate messages more negatively. Furthermore, the results indicate that women will rate messages as more affectionate. Even though these implications are giving further insight on the topic of text message perception, future research with a more representative sample size is necessary to gain more knowledge about other influential variables such as age.

Keywords: Attachment style, perception, text messages, gender, punctuation, capitalization, emoticons