

## Texting as a Tool of Communication

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### Abstract

This review briefly examines the literature on the effect of texting on relationships. Previous research supports that texting can aid maintenance of relationships or build interactive support with social contacts. Given the ever-increasing usage of mobile phones to communicate, the present review underlines texting as a resource in case of conflict or unsatisfactory relationships.

**Keywords:** Psychology; Relationship; Texting; Interpersonal Focus

### Introduction

Human contact is vital for mental health. With the advance of internet technology and online networks, a new human experience is emerging. Virtual interpersonal connections between two people who use an online medium to interact grow in volume and importance. The cyberspace is becoming an extension of one's mind and also an interpersonal space between self and other.

With the development of communication technologies, non-face-to-face communication has become increasingly prevalent. For instance, text messaging, or texting, is nowadays a mainstream mode of communication. According to the results of a study, 97% of Americans use texting at least once a day on their cell phones and over six billion texts are sent in the United States each day as reported in Pew Internet and American Life Project [1].

Young adults of various cultures prefer to text with friends and family for many reasons: to give or obtain information, plan activities, greet one another, convey intimacy, deepen relationships, send jokes, fill unoccupied time, provide emotional support, and share exciting events [2-4].

There are an increasing number of studies on the social and psychological aspects of virtual communication. Obviously, as with every technology, there are advantages and disadvantages in using it. This theoretical paper aims to overview the impact of texting on interpersonal relationships and communication.

### Can texting improve existing relationships?

Communication is crucial to keeping an intimate relationship. As texting has become a mainstream channel of communication, it is legitimate to ask to what extent texting can improve or decrease the efficacy of communication in existing relationships? Would increasing positive texting improve the quality of the relationships? [5].

There has been evidence implying that texting may profit the existing relationships. Most people have a positive attitude about texting, as enabling to stay connected and maintaining independence at the same time, or making contact more pleasant and intimate [6].

### Improving interactive self-disclosure

Texting may improve interactive self-disclosure. Greater cell phone use among college students with a romantic partner was associated with more involvement and less uncertainty in the relation [7]. Other researchers reported that the number of text messages was correlated with a diminished feeling of isolation and greater levels of relationship satisfaction [8]. Crosswhite., *et al.* reported that women are more likely to use texting to nurture relationships compared to men [9]. Kavanaugh., *et al.* indicated that the use of texting could increase intimacy by making partners more available and by extending their repertory of connection, leading to improvements in the quality of face-to-face interaction [10]. Igarashi., *et al.* noticed that texting enhances intimacy and connectivity among Japanese adults [11]. It has also been suggested that Australian young adults view texting as a way to maintain and improve intimate relationships among friends [12].

Evidence from various cultures suggests that texting improves connectivity and has an impact on a range of interpersonal processes [13].

### Generating security priming

Security priming can be defined as regulation of emotion, via the activation of mental representations of attachment figures [14]. When the brain is primed to activate “secure base” mental representations of individuals, these representations are more readily available while experiencing distress [15]. Typical priming techniques used in research are the words (e.g. love, hug) and images (e.g. parents, couples) [16].

However, texting may also help to recall actual secure base experiences. A recent study showed that text messages are a suitable medium for security priming. Findings indicate that the secure text primes kept the initial sense of felt security induced in the participants active for several days. In this sense, the text messages can be viewed as “security booster” primes [14]. The security priming via text messages is an innovative methodology that efficiently induces perceived security in research.

### Composing shared semantics

For the people connected, the ongoing virtual relationship may be based on shared semantics, phrasing choices and symbols denoting shared intimate meaning. Texting style and preferred words change as a consequence of the changes in the relationship. The “shared language” can become more powerful and meaningful as the relationship develops; it regresses when they feel unsafe or angry.

### Giving sense of control

Texting gives opportunity of reading the message before it is submitted and added control over the social interaction, in that users might have additional time to think about how best to explain them. The lack of nonverbal cues might ease regulating the sender’s own emotions. Additionally, the sender might control which emotions he or she deliberately chooses to display in text. This renders texting a relatively “safer” environment, especially in case of conflict [17].

### Exploring different cognitive styles

In cyber-relationships, people explore their style of interpersonal communication and rehearse new behaviors, new ways of “being-with”. What is acquired online can be conveyed into real-life relationships. Merging face-to-face contact with cyber-contact of various types, grants people the chance of deploying different cognitive styles, adding new flavors to the relationship. Different ways of communication may be more suitable for different people. Integrating these additional aspects into the relationship may enrich the interaction; not being able to do so may be frustrating and alienating for some.

### Managing conflict

Managing conflict online may take lots of effort. It is not so easy to handle differences, tensions, or conflicts while communicating via texting. However, non-face-to-face communication is an excellent area to practice conflict resolution skills with the options of invisibility

and possibility of delayed reactions. When couples use texting to express affection, there seem to be less conflictual face-to-face communication responses for both partners [18].

### Controlling level of closeness and autonomy

Several studies have investigated the contexts of relationship or personality traits that predict the usage of texting as a way of communication. Texting may mean different things to different people. Attachment styles may clarify this effect. In a study of Morey, et al. avoidant attachment style was found to be related to limited texting and greater use of e-mails. However, texting was associated with more satisfying relationships for subjects with highly avoidant attachment style. E-mail use was found to be related to more conflict for highly avoidant subjects [19].

Individuals with different attachment styles prefer varying levels of intimacy and availability in their relationships. Therefore, texting may become an excellent communication tool for some, that can be used to control closeness or autonomy [20].

### Beating social anxiety

Recent evidence suggests that texting may play a vital role in sustaining social relationships among adolescents with social anxiety. Reid and Reid found that people with social anxiety preferred texting to calling, in communicating with intimate contacts [21]. Cacioppo, et al. confirmed that shy people used text messaging more than non-shy people to meet their need for social interaction [22].

### Texting as a social breach

Virtual friendships/virtual companions are important as long as they do not replace the real world version. Texting in some circumstances may be considered as a social violation, Pphubbing, i.e. “partner phone snubbing”, is a term coined to describe the extensive use of cell phone in the presence of a romantic relationship partner [23]. Constant texting may lead partners to attend to their cell phones instead of communicating with their significant other [24].

Study results imply that disadvantages of non-face-to-face communication include neglect of one’s immediate social environment [25]. Some have suggested that texting and other social technologies damage relationships by allowing users to replace, avoid, or reduce face to face communication [26]. One study found that even the insignificant presence of a mobile communication device was negatively correlated with closeness and conversation quality in face-to-face communication [13].

Studies also show that the physical health benefits of face-to-face contact outweigh those that accrue to virtual contact [27]. Results of a recent research imply that the probability of having depressive symptoms in older adults steadily increased as frequency of in-person-but not telephone or written or e-mail contact-decreased [28].

## Conclusion

Every social medium has its own dynamics. Emotional movements, hesitations, enthusiasms are felt on each of them, as the human brain can with its intricate social wiring. In case of conflict or unsatisfactory relationships, switching to texting can be an option while trying to mend the relationship. Several clients have come closer to their family members or alienated friends through thoughtful texting or emails. Text communication restructures the thoughts of individuals about their relationships. Messages can provide a sense of connectedness, continuity, and a valuable opportunity to reevaluate the relationship.

Texting is a major way of communication in modern life. Evidence supports that texting with positive and mindful content can be used as a tool to promote more satisfying relationship outcomes. People get closer, hug, love and work through different communication media. Human contact is good, and as food, it is better when it is diversified depending on needs.

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