Summary of Research

Abstract

Text messaging has become a major part of college students’ communication and is increasing as a way to keep in touch with family, friends, and significant others. With this idea in mind, not only does text messaging impact everyday communication, but interpersonal relationships as well. Within those relationships, recent studies have reported both positive and negative effects of text messaging. However, little if any research has addressed motives for texting within a romantic relationship.

Thus, this study will examine text messaging within romantic relationships among college students to better understand the positive or negative beliefs and motives. How often do people in a romantic relationship report using texting? Does the increase of texting negatively correlate with face-to-face communication? Is there a relationship between frequency of texting in a romantic relationship and the belief that texting leads to more connectedness in the relationship? To answer these questions, an online survey of 221 college students was conducted. Students were asked to report frequency of texting their romantic partner, frequency of in-person communication, and other measures of beliefs about text messaging. Results provided evidence that texting was used to connect with romantic partners and to facilitate intimacy, love and happiness. Additionally, results indicated that positive motives and beliefs of text messaging within their romantic relationship did not always predict positive outcomes.

Introduction

Little if any known work has focused on personal beliefs of how texting may affect romantic relationships. Broadly looking at the literature surrounding text-based communication, Seltzer and colleagues’ (2012) results showed that instant messaging was not as effective as other forms of communication at producing hormones indicative of “stress mediation” and bonding. Davila and colleagues’ (2012) results showed that depressive symptoms were not highly correlated with social media use and texting. Focusing more specifically on the topic at hand, romantic couples found that text messaging improved their relationships (Pettigrew, 2012). In summary, it appears that, though text-based communication does not necessarily afford the same benefits as in-person
communication, it is still useful and valued, particularly in romantic relationships. Thus, for the current study, an online survey was conducted examining correlations between the amount of text messaging and the strength of beliefs held about the effectiveness in texting within boyfriend-girlfriend and husband-wife romantic relationships. Through this, the aim was to uncover the motivations for text messaging in a romantic relationship. It was hypothesized that as the use of text messaging on cell phones increases in romantic relationships, the belief that it makes the relationship stronger, gives happiness, love, and solutions also increases. Additionally, it was hypothesized that as texting increases, the belief that texting will lead to less confusion in a relationship decreases. Hypotheses were as follows:

H1: As average use of cell phone for texting in a romantic relationship increases, the belief that text messaging makes the relationship stronger also increases.

H2: As average use of cell phone for texting in a romantic relationship increases, the belief that text messaging a significant other often results in solutions increases.

H3: As average use of cell phones for texting in a romantic relationship increases, the belief that text messaging a significant other often results in confusion decreases.

H4: As average use of cell phone for texting in a romantic relationship increases, the belief that text messaging a significant other results in happiness increases.

H5: As average use of cell phone for texting in a romantic relationship increases, belief that text messaging a significant other results in love increases.

Additionally, research questions asked how much time romantic partners spent texting each other, the relationship between the frequency of texting and face-to-face communication, and if participants agree that arguments in the relationship start via texting. Research questions were as follows:

RQ1: How often do people in a romantic relationship report using texting?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the frequency of texting in a romantic relationship and the frequency of seeing the romantic partner in person? As average use of cell phone for texting increases in a romantic relationship, will in-person communication increase or decrease?

RQ3: Do those in romantic relationships agree that arguments in the relationship often start via text message?

Methodology

In order to address these five hypotheses and three research questions, an online survey (using SurveyGizmo) was conducted of 221 college students currently involved in a romantic relationship at a mid-sized Kansas university. Students were given a two-week time period, between April 15 and April 29, 2013, to participate and complete the online survey. In addition to basic demographic questions, such as sex, race, and class standing, the survey contained 32 questions related to text messaging and romantic relationships.

Results

The findings suggested that most of the hypotheses were supported. However, the results from H4 show that there was no relationship between use of cell phones for texting and happiness ($r(219) = .091, p = .09$). Some of the research questions’ findings were unexpected. RQ1 showed that most partners in romantic relationships text significant others more than 20 times per day, resulting in 80 of the 221 participants texting their partners in this category. RQ2 showed that as the frequency of text messaging in a romantic relationship increased, the frequency of seeing the romantic partner in person also increased. RQ3 showed that the majority of participants agreed that arguments frequently start through text.

Discussion

This study researched the motives and beliefs that college students within romantic relationships have about using text-based communication. It hypothesized that: as text messaging increases, the beliefs that it makes the romantic relationship stronger, gives solutions, creates happiness and increases love. It also hypothesized that the use of text messaging within romantic relationships...
decreases confusion within the relationship. Questions pertaining to the amount of time spent texting within a romantic relationship, the correlation of frequently seeing significant others face-to-face versus text messaging them, and the correlation of text messaging creating arguments within the romantic relationship were also investigated. Overall, the data at least somewhat suggests that using text messaging to communicate in romantic relationships is correlated with beliefs that technology will bring about connectedness. With text messaging as a main means of communication, and with technology always moving forward to different types of remote communications, further research is needed to see its effects on romantic relationships and society as a whole.

Conclusion

The current study reveals more positive beliefs and motives than negative beliefs and motives for texting in a romantic relationship. It was hypothesized that text messaging is used because it helps facilitate romantic relationships. This study sought to answer the question of why people text, finding the motives and beliefs romantic partners have about using text-based communication within their relationships.

From the data gathered in this study, it was observed that romantic partners had more positive beliefs and motives than negative beliefs and motives. However, it is important to point out that despite most data pointing to the idea that people text to facilitate a relationship, there was evidence to suggest that sometimes texting is used as a means of arguing in a romantic relationship.

References


