

Chapter 4

Desired Speed of Reply During Text-Based Communication via Smartphones: A Survey of Young Japanese Adults

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ABSTRACT

Text-based forms of communication have long been communicated via PCs and more recently via mobile phones and smartphones. This chapter has tried to explore how the speed of text message exchanges has become a nonverbal cue in the asynchronous communications that occurs via mobile phones and smartphones. This chapter presents the investigation of the speed of exchange relevant to the LINE text-messenger application. Specifically, the authors surveyed Japanese university students who provided free-response descriptions of situations when (a) a quick reply is preferred and (b) a late reply is acceptable. The main finding was that judging when a quick reply is preferred and when a late reply is acceptable is overwhelmingly influenced by the convenience of the sender (who is waiting for a reply) over the convenience of the recipient who will reply.

INTRODUCTION

Reports in recent years have indicated that slow replies during text message exchanges via smartphones have caused problems among young people in Japan, in some cases progressing to bullying and even homicide (Schreiber, 2015). The speed of exchange of text messages thus strongly influences the emotions of young smart phone users (Kato & Kato, 2015). In this chapter, we focus on significance of the speed of exchange (interaction) during text-based communication via smartphones.

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Text-Based Communication on Smartphones in Japan

When communication tools such as e-mail first became widely popular, they were mainly used with PCs. In the latter half of the 1990s, the short message service (SMS) and mobile access to the Internet became available on mobile phones. Since Apple's release of the iPhone in 2007 (2008 in Japan), the penetration rate of smartphones has continued to increase rapidly. According to the *White Paper 2015: Information and Communication in Japan* (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2015), the share of smartphones in Japan in 2014 was 94.5% among those in their 20s and 92.4% among those in their 30s, and smartphones have become the dominant mobile terminal, replacing conventional mobile phones, especially among the younger generation. About ten years ago, voice calls and SMS were the main method of communication for mobile phones, with Internet use still limited on these devices. However, with the rapid spread of smart phones in recent years, various communication tools such as social media can be easily accessed through Internet applications. The modern smartphone allows for selective utilization of various communication tools according to the user's intent and circumstances.

In addition to conventional communication tools like SMS, social media such as Twitter and Facebook are also used for everyday communication via smartphones. Previously, social media was primarily PC-based but has become more common on smartphones with the emergence of easy-to-use applications. In fact, the high affinity between the smartphone and social media has rapidly increased utilization rates for both. Against this background, text over IP messaging applications have become more common as well.

Globally, the most popular of these messaging applications is WhatsApp, which was created in the United States in 2009 (Ahad & Lim, 2014; Church & Oliveira, 2013; O'Hara, Massimi, Harper, Rubens, & Morris, 2014). There are currently around 900 million active users of WhatsApp, with the number of downloads in first or second place in many countries, mostly in Europe, the United States, Southeast Asia, and South America (Statista, 2016). In Japan, Thailand, and Taiwan, however, the most-downloaded social media/messenger application is LINE (Statista, 2016). This was released in June 2011, following the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011, with the aim of creating an application where users can easily communicate even in the event of a disaster. One year after its launch, LINE reached 50 million users, and currently has about 212 million active users, as well as the seventh-highest adoption rate among messaging applications worldwide. In Japan, LINE has come to replace traditional mobile text messages (including SMS), especially among young people (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2016).

Socio-Emotional Aspects of Text-Based Communication

Early studies of Internet-related psychology have cited a lack of nonverbal cues and visual anonymity as characteristics of PC text-based communication, such as e-mail and electronic bulletin boards (e.g., Daft & Lengel, 1984; Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984; Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). A number of studies on computer-mediated communication (CMC) have discussed two characteristics of text-based CMC exchanges: the absence of facial expressions and gestures, which are included during face-to-face conversation, and the absence of nonverbal cues such as tone of voice. These characteristics form the basis of various models and theories in CMC research conducted prior to the 1990s. For example, the *social presence model* posits that when media conveys little nonverbal information, the sense of the other party as an actual person becomes less distinct, resulting in cold, impersonal communication (Short,

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