

Perceptions of Text Messages When Using Periods and Emojis

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Abstract

People across the globe now rely on computer-mediated communication. Whether it is texting, email, or even direct messaging through social media platforms, it is hard to know the exact intentions and meanings behind the sender's message. To examine how text messages in real-life circumstances can be perceived by different genders based on the addition of a period as well as an emoji, we hypothesized that participants identifying as females in the age range of 18-25 to rate responses with periods as less sincere than responses without periods, regardless of the presence of emojis. We predicted this due to the stereotype that women at these ages are insincere and shallow when communicating. College-aged and young adults entering the workforce are often seen as being more facetious when communicating so as to maintain the social status quo, as sending responses with a period is often considered passive aggressive, and women in particular are assumed to be culprits of this. Thus, if young women truly were more insincere when sending texts, we would expect them to rate the exchanges with periods as more insincere. To test this hypothesis, we administered a survey containing different forms of test-message exchanges. A total of 77 participants responded to the survey. Contrary to the hypothesis, we found that males in the age range of 18-24 rated responses with periods in them as the least sincere compared to all other participant categories.

Background

As found by Gunraj et al., 2015, adding a period to a text can make the person behind the screen seem rude or insincere when really, they are just using proper grammar. During the global pandemic we are experiencing, text messaging, facetime, phone calls, emails, and social media are the best and only way to communicate with the world. By having to communicate through a screen, it is difficult to know and understand the original meaning behind a message, so it is all left to perception. If the person on the other end of the conversation feels that the sender is being apprehensive towards them or is irritated, the conversation can be steered in the wrong direction, possibly ending in an argument or misunderstanding.

Hypothesis

People identifying as females ages 18-24 are more likely to rate the addition of periods at the end of the sentence, with or without emojis, as insincere more so than any other age group of females, males, and other gender identities.

Methods

- 77 Participants were asked to rate the message from Sally on a 1 to 7 Likert scale where 1 represented "very insincere", 4 represented "neither sincere nor insincere", and 7 represented "very sincere".
- Participants submitted their answers using the slider tool on Qualtrics instead of typing in their answers.
- We showed the two exchanges four times with Sally answering four different ways with the inclusion and exclusion of both periods and emojis.
- We decided to do two types of exchanges with four different responses to show how a slight change in a response via the use of punctuation and/or emojis can alter the sincerity level.

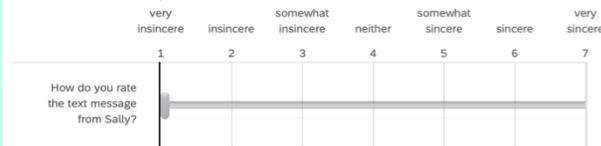
Sample Exchanges

"Hi Sally, heard about what happened. How are you?"

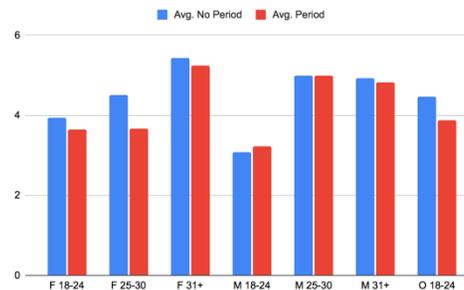
- "I'm fine."
- "I'm fine."
- "I'm fine 😊"
- "I'm fine 😊."

"Hi Sally, I'm going out with Dan. I'll be back around 11:00."

- "K"
- "K."
- "K 😊"
- "K 😊."



Results



Average score given to all responses to text messages with and without periods

Discussion

The visual use of the emojis implements the human need for non-verbal cues when communicating, and expresses the emotion behind the messages as opposed to the messages that did not have any. This could be why a greater number of participants interpreted the messages with emojis as sincere. Without the emoji, participants were left to interpret the message without any clues. Participants may have felt more comfortable with messages ending with emoji because the use of a single word or two-sentence message comes off as an aggressive and sudden stop to the conversation.

The results of our study did not support the hypothesis. The original hypothesis stated that participants identifying as females in the age range of 18-25 would rate responses with periods as less sincere than any other age range and gender category. However, this was not true; males in the age range of 18-24 rated responses with periods in them as the least sincere compared to all other participant categories. However, males in this age range also had the least amount of fluctuation between sincerity levels when the answer didn't have a period. While other categories of participants had variation between sincerity levels when the same response had a period or did not, males aged 18-24 did not, and rated both responses as having equal sincerity. When forming the hypothesis, it did not occur to think of the fact that males of this age range would just consistently rank all responses with the same amount of sincerity, regardless of punctuation.

There were some confounding variables present in our study. The way the messages were laid out did not exactly replicate the way true text-messages appear on everyone's cell phones. If the experiment had been conducted in person, only one specific operating platform or emoji-style would have been used, irrespective of the participant's normal device. Also, the instrument itself had flaws of its own that we were unaware of until responses were coming in from our participants. One of the immediate ways to fix this issue in a future experiment would be to indicate in the directions to only pick full numbers, otherwise, the answer will not be recorded. Another way to correct this is to fix the settings on the Qualtrics survey to ensure that only whole numbers can be selected, and the scale cannot be set to random intervals. We also received an uneven amount of males and females in each age category. The low sample size of each gender makes us unable to generalize our results across a population.

References

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