Social presence support between college students and their parents

A comparison of communication channels

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Study Rationale

- Homesickness in over half of college freshmen
- Can affect students physically, psychologically, and as a result academically
- Family Communication Patterns (FCP) associated with adjustment and conflictual independence
- Family members provide social support to cope with homesickness through communication
Study Rationale

• Perceived emotional support and availability of friends online reduced stress in college students
• Telephone and internet communication were direct strategies to seek social support from parents to cope with homesickness
Theory and Hypothesis

• Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984)
  ▫ Communication channels with more cues (real-time, natural language, nonverbal cues) are richer than channels with fewer cues.

• Social presence support (Scharp & High, 2015)
  ▫ The type of social support in which a person feels their conversation partner is in person

• **H1: College students will feel more social presence support when using telephone calls to communicate with parents than when using texting.**
Method

Participants

- ISU students ages 18-31 (M=20.62, SD=1.64)
- 104 respondents (90 female, 14 male)
- 75% upperclassmen (juniors or above)
- 90.4% Caucasian, 11.5% non-Caucasian
Method

Measures

• Online survey through Qualtrics
• Frequency of communication with parents overall, of telephone calls and texting with their parents (weekly)
• Social Presence Support Seeking Scale ($\alpha = 0.95$) by Scharp and High (2015)
Results

• Paired samples $t$-test
• Hypothesis supported
• Average perceived social presence support was greater by phone ($M=4.56$, $SD=0.64$) than by text ($M=4.14$, $SD=1.06$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>$t(94)$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone calls</td>
<td>4.56(.64)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texting</td>
<td>4.14(1.06)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived social presence support</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.525</td>
<td>$p&lt;.00$</td>
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Results

- Participants used texting much more than telephone calls weekly.

- Greater variance means texting was a better statistical predictor of social presence support.

<table>
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<th>Frequency of Weekly Use</th>
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<tr>
<td>Phone Calls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Texting</td>
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Distribution of Weekly Use

Weekly Use

0 50 100 150

Phone Calls  Texting
Discussion

• Students rely more on texting than telephone calls
  ▫ Compensation for fewer cues (Daft & Lengel, 1984)
  ▫ Displacement (Ramirez et al., 2008; Ramsey et al., 2013)
  ▫ May more clearly communicate messages (editable) (Keaten & Kelly, 2008)
  ▫ Higher availability of parents (asynchronous) (Feng & Hyun, 2012)
Applications and Future Research

- More representative sample
- Better frequency measures across more channels
- Measure stress, relationship satisfaction, adjustment
- Results should inform counselors and students in coping with homesickness and other college adjustment stresses