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Emoticons' influence on advice taking

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ABSTRACT

Although there is a lot of research on advice and its utilization, little research on advice has examined the effect of computer mediated communication (CMC) on advice outcomes. Emoticons, which are graphic representations of facial expressions, are unique to CMC and commonly used as a substitute for nonverbal cues that are missing from CMC. We explored the relationship between emoticons in advice messages and advice utilization. Because emoticons convey emotional information, the effects of emoticons on advice utilization may be higher when the receiver is less willing or able to analyze the message more systematically. Therefore, we examined two moderators that affect message processing: involvement and need for cognition. Two experiments tested our hypothesis. In Study 1, emoticons increased intention to utilize advice, but only under conditions of low involvement. Study 2 replicated the effects of Study 1 but also found that emoticons had a stronger effect when participants had a low need for cognition.

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Advice is ubiquitous in our daily life. Informed by good or bad advice, decision makers may improve or worsen their decisions (Bonaccio & Van Swol, 2013; Harvey & Fischer, 1997; MacGeorge, Feng, & Guntzviller, 2016), but assuming the advisor has good intentions, use of advice generally improves decisions (Yaniv, 2004). Therefore, understanding factors that can increase utilization of advice is important. In addition, people are communicating more through text, email, and social media, and hence, receiving more advice through these leaner channels. People are especially likely to be multi-tasking and distracted when communicating online (Wang & Tchernev, 2012). Therefore, understanding factors affecting advice received through computer mediated communication (CMC), especially when the receiver is likely to be peripherally processing the message, is important. The two studies in the paper use the Judge Advisor System (Sniezek & Buckley, 1995; Sniezek & Van Swol, 2001; Van Swol & Sniezek, 2005) to examine the use of emoticons in CMC advice. In a Judge Advisor System, the judge receives advice from an advisor, but then has authority to make the final decision by themselves, with or without incorporating the advice. Two variables linked to peripheral processing of messages are examined as moderators. These include

level of involvement in the message issue and need for cognition.

1. Emoticons

Because of its convenience and low cost, instant messaging (IM) has become a commonly used way to communicate (Huang, Yen, & Zhang, 2008), and by extension give and receive advice. Emoticons, used heavily in IM, refer to the graphical representation of facial expression or body posture embedded in communication content to convey emotions (Walther & Addario, 2001). Since the first emoticon “:)” in CMC scenarios, the role of emoticons has been thought to coincide with nonverbal cues in face-to-face communication, which help strengthen the function of speech information (Lee & Wagner, 2002). Emoticons can make up for the lack of nonverbal information in CMC and can help express the sender's emotions (Derks, Bos, & Von Grumbkow, 2007; Lo, 2008; Walther & Addario, 2001). They can affect the interpretation of the information and enhance the strength of the verbal information (Derks, Bos, & Von Grumbkow, 2008). Because of this, they have become very popular in CMC.

In nonverbal information, facial expressions are one of the most important pieces of information towards understanding the speaker (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996). In text based CMC, emoticons take on an important social function in communication (Provine, Spencer, & Mandell, 2007). They help increase understanding of the nuances of the meaning (Gajadhar & Green, 2005),

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the attitude (Lo, 2008), and emotion of the speaker (Tossell et al., 2012). Similar to facial expressions, they speed up the communication because they allow users to convey more information about emotions in less time (Huang et al., 2008). The study of the emoticon recognition mechanism in comparison to facial recognition found that because of the similar roles of emoticons and facial expressions, the brain interprets them similarly and processes them in similar areas of the brain (Churches, Nicholls, Thiessen, Kohler, & Keage, 2014). Thus, emoticons can be thought of as the abstract representation of facial expressions.

In addition to substituting for facial expressions, previous studies have found that the emoticons one uses can reflect one's personality, such as Big Five Personality factors (Iacobelli, Gill, Nowson, & Oberlander, 2011; Schwartz et al., 2013). Therefore, emoticons may be a new index for social behavior that can accurately reflect what the sender is feeling and help the receiver understand the sender (Hu, Zhao, & Wu, 2016; Park et al., 2015). Given its importance for accurate online communication of emotions, its role in advice giving is examined.

1.1. Emoticons and advice taking

Because people often discount and fail to use high quality advice (Yaniv & Milyavsky, 2007), researchers are interested in factors that increase advice utilization. Message factors that convey emotion but are unrelated to message content such as politeness of the message (MacGeorge et al., 2016) or use of empathetic message expression (Carlson, 2016) increase intentions to use advice. Because they provide information about emotions of the advisor, emoticons is a message factor that may also increase advice utilization.

Emoticons can increase the pleasure of reading text information (Thompson, Mackenzie, Leuthold, & Filik, 2016). Two lines of research have found that positive emotions have effects on the receivers of messages. First, decision-makers are more likely to utilize advice when they experience positive emotions, rather than negative or neutral emotions, especially if the positive emotions are related to the message sender (de Hooge, Verlegh & Tzioti, 2014; Gino & Schweitzer, 2008). Second, research with the elaboration likelihood model has found that when messages are processed in the low effort peripheral route, receivers may associate positive emotions with the message and have increased acceptance of the message. In other words, in lieu of central processing, positive emotions increase mood, and this may be mistaken for acceptance of the message (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984; Kahneman, 2011).

Furthermore, emoticons can express affection and convey social information (Kleef, Berg, & Heerdink, 2015). Use of emoticons can help the receiver understand the perspective and emotions of the advisor (Lo, 2008; Tossell et al., 2012). One reason decision-makers fail to use high quality advice is that do not understand the perspective of the advisor (Yaniv & Kleinberger, 2000; Yaniv, 2004). Interventions that can help decision-makers feel like they understand the perspective of the advice can reduce disregard for advice (Yaniv & Milyavsky, 2007). While emoticons cannot convey arguments or complex information, if they help the receiver understand the advisor's emotions, this can increase advice utilization.

Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1. Advice containing emoticons is more likely to be adopted than advice without emoticons.

1.2. Involvement of decision maker

However, emoticons do not convey strong rational arguments and may have stronger effects when processed in the peripheral route. Involvement is the motivation and ability a receiver has to

process and comprehend a message. Generally, receivers have higher involvement when the message is personally relevant and when they have the time, attention, and ability to process a message. When receivers have low involvement in a message issue, they are more likely to rely on peripheral cues to judge the message (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984). For example, previous research has found that framing effect, a peripheral cue, was more influential in a low involvement situation (Cheng & Wu, 2010). Under low involvement, participants are more affected by emotional cues, which require less effort to process, than rational arguments, which require more systematic processing to comprehend (Maughan, Gutnikov, & Stevens, 2007; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983; Shavitt, Swan, Lowrey, & Wänke, 1982). Emoticons contain nonverbal cues and express more emotional information than written text. Like facial expressions, emoticons are processed easily (Churches et al., 2014) and are likely to have stronger effects when receivers are not carefully reading the message. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2. Involvement moderates the influence of emoticons on advice taking. In low involvement conditions, decision makers accept more advice containing emoticons than advice without emoticons, but in high involvement conditions, inclusion of emoticons will not affect advice taking.

2. Need for cognition of decision maker

Need for cognition (NFC) refers to an individual's tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive endeavors (Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996), and there are significant individual differences in need for cognition (Cacioppo, Petty, Kao, & Rodriguez, 1986). Individuals with high NFC prefer complex cognitive tasks and are willing to use existing experience and information to analyze relevant materials systematically and in detail. They are less influenced by peripheral cues, like a framing effect (Chatterjee, Heath, Milberg, & France, 2000; Smith & Levin, 1996). Individuals with low NFC avoid effortful thinking and are more likely to distort or ignore relevant information. Individuals with high NFC spend more time and process a message more thoroughly than individuals with low NFC (Mussel, Göritz, & Hewig, 2014). For example, individuals with high NFC analyze information independently, but individuals with low NFC are more likely to rely on the peripheral cue of social norms (Waller, 1994).

Given that high NFC individuals have a strong motivation towards thinking and solving complex problems, they should read advice more carefully and be less influenced by emoticons. However, individuals with low NFC are more likely to be affected by peripheral information, such as emoticons included in advice. Formally stated:

Hypothesis 3. Need for cognition moderates the influence of emoticons on advice taking. Decision makers with low NFC will be more likely to accept advice containing emoticons than advice without emoticons, but emoticons will not affect advice acceptance for participants with a high NFC.

Below we report two studies that provide converging evidence for the impact of emoticons on advice taking, as well as the moderating effect of involvement and need for cognition.

3. Study 1

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

Forty two college students were recruited from a university in

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