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Trait and Situational Variables Affecting Communication Channel Preferences in College Students

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TRAIT AND SITUATIONAL VARIABLES AFFECTING COMMUNICATION

CHANNEL PREFERENCES IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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by
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Approved by

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Abstract

As more and more interpersonal communication is being conducted via mediated communication channels, important theoretical questions about the impact of this shift in the use of communication media are raised. This study began the process of exploring the implications of the shift in channels used in interpersonal communication situations by examining several factors that previous research has linked to important aspects of relationship development and maintenance. Specifically, respondents were surveyed about their preferred channel of communication in four types of interpersonal communication situations that reflect varying levels of interpersonal comfort in association with communication locus of control scale (CLOC) scores. Respondents were college students living in the residence halls at Marshall University. Findings indicated there was a slight significant correlation between communication locus of control and channel preference with respondents who reported an internal CLOC preferring face-to-face interactions. Results indicated clear channel preferences for face-to-face communication in communication situations that involved communicating emotional support, conflict, and sharing positive news, but a preference for text messaging when coordinating schedules. Finally, a small interaction effect between type of situation and CLOC was found, but only for the situation in which communicators had good news to share.

Chapter One: Introduction

Electronic communication technologies are affecting the ways in which we communicate with others. It is possible that mobile communication has become the preferred channel of communication of American teenagers. A recent study by the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project found that both mobile phone ownership and usage among teenagers has increased dramatically in recent years. In fact, approximately 75% of twelve to seventeen year olds now own cell phones. With these increases in cell phone ownership, text messaging has also increased. In 2010, 72% of all teens or 88% of teens who use cell phones, used their mobile phone to send and receive text messages. In 2006, only 51% of US teenagers reported texting. What's more fascinating is that the frequency with which teenagers text has risen above the frequency of communication via other prominent channels such as voice calls, social networking sites, instant messaging, e-mail, and even face-to-face communication. Half of teenagers send fifty or more text messages a day, whereas one in three send more than 100 text messages in a day. In fact, two-thirds of teenagers say they are more likely to use their cell phones to text their friends than to talk to them via voice calls on their mobile phones.

The following literature review addresses research related to individual trait variables, such as communication locus of control and situational factors, that may affect college students' preferences for text messaging over other channels of communication in different communication situations. Taken as a whole, these studies suggest that there are

many factors that are of importance in communication channel preferences, and that the relationship among these factors is not clear.

The purpose of this study is to investigate some of the factors involved in communication channel preferences in college students residing in the residence halls at Marshall University. The proliferation of mediated communication channels, with text messaging being the most prominent, has given students new ways of communicating with each other. Research has shown that text messaging, as a form of computer mediated communication, has increased dramatically among young adults and teenagers. This new communication channel may be affecting the ways in which we communicate with one another.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Of particular interest for this study are two types variables, trait and situational, that may be related to young adults' preferences for text messaging or face-to-face communication. Text messaging, a form of computer-mediated communication, has established its presence in our interpersonal relationships. Sometimes individuals send a text message, although face-to-face communication may be preferred for communicating in other situations. What remains unclear, however, are the reasons individuals choose to communicate through text messaging. The literature suggests that several related traits may be involved in channel selection preferences, whereas other research suggests channel preferences may depend more on the situation and the concomitant type of information that it requires to be communicated. Moreover, the ways in which individual differences and contextual variables interact are not known.

Texting as Computer Mediated Communication

Research in computer-mediated communication (CMC) in interpersonal relationships has most often involved personal computers and the internet. Early definitions of CMC focused on electronic mail and instant messaging by which "senders encode in text messages that are relayed from senders' computers to receivers'" (Walther, 1992; p. 52). Mobile phone messaging was not developed at this time, but one can see how text messaging would fit Walther's definition. More recently, mobile phone text messaging has been included in definitions of CMC. In defining CMC, Spitzberg (2006) wrote "CMC is tentatively defined as any human symbolic text-based interaction conducted or facilitated through digitally-based technologies. This working definition includes the Internet; cellular phone text, instant messaging (IM), and multi-user

interactions (MUDs & MOOs); email and listserv interactions; and text supplemented videoconferencing." (p. 630). According to Spitzberg, CMC involves people in a process of message exchange through a medium that, at some point, is a computer and that, by using the particular medium, they have made an evaluation of the medium within the context of the interaction (Spitzberg, 2006). This definition implies that individuals choosing to convey a message through text messaging (CMC) have made a judgment about the potential effectiveness of the medium based on the medium itself, the context of the interaction, and, presumably, their confidence in their ability to use the medium successfully.

Traits and Text Message Preference

Several distinct but related dispositional or trait variables related to communication have been studied that are likely to impact individuals' use of CMC versus face-to-face communication. These variables include communication apprehension, social anxiety, willingness and unwillingness to communicate, locus of control, and communication locus of control. Although findings from studies of all these trait variables will be discussed, of particular interest in this study is communication locus of control because it is more comprehensive and inclusive of communication apprehension and willingness/unwillingness to communicate and it focuses more specifically on communication situations than the more general measures of social anxiety and locus of control.

McCroskey (1970) labeled what he described as broadly based anxiety related to oral communication as "communication apprehension." Later, communication apprehension was defined as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with

either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977). Early studies correlated communication apprehension with communication channel preference. Specifically, Reinsch and Lewis (1984) found that individuals with higher communication apprehension preferred to use the telephone versus speaking with another individual face-to-face.

Similar to communication apprehension, social anxiety has also been researched in relation to technologically based communication among teenagers. Pierce (2009) found a positive correlation between discomfort with talking to others face-to-face and the frequency of talking to others online and through text messaging via a mobile phone. In addition, females reported more anxiety concerning face-to-face communication and reported feeling more comfortable using text messaging and social networking sites than did males. Pierce argued that text messaging and social networking sites provide a channel of communication for individuals who are shy and have inhibitions about face-to-face communication. Therefore, the interpersonal immediacy of communication situations may be a factor that communicators use when selecting message channels.

Unwillingness and willingness to communicate are separate but related constructs, both of which are distinct from, but related to, communication apprehension and communication locus of control. Burgoon (1976) described unwillingness to communicate as a tendency to avoid face-to-face or oral communication and associated this concept with low self-esteem and high communication apprehension. The Willingness to Communicate Scale was developed to measure a respondent's predisposition toward approaching or avoiding the initiation of communication and assumes that the respondent is generally aware of his or her own approach or avoidance

tendencies, whereas the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension scale was developed to assess a respondent's fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons (McCroskey, 1992). The Willingness to Communicate scale looked at respondents' predispositions while the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension assessed respondents' fear or anxiety associated with communication with others.

In interpersonal communication, external locus of control has been related positively to communication apprehension (Rubin, 1993). Rubin referred to locus of control as a "mastery of one's environment" to help explain communication behavior. People with an internal locus of control were low in communication apprehension, while an external locus of control was correlated with high communication apprehension. Rotter (1996) found that individuals who possess an internal locus of control feel that they have the ability to change their environment, while those with an external locus of control feel a lack of influence in their environments. In addition, Flaherty, Pierce, and Rubin (1998) found that individuals with an external locus of control choose communication channels based on their particular relationship or interpersonal communication needs such inclusion, affection, and control. Therefore, locus of control and communication apprehension are two traits which may affect preference for a communication channel such as text messaging.

Elements of each of the scales described above were incorporated into Hamilton's (1991) Communication Locus of Control Scale. Hamilton developed the Communication Locus of Control Scale (CLCS) as an instrument to measure internality-externality of locus of control specific to communication situations. Concerning specific

communication situations, Hamilton suggested that the relationships between locus of control and other variables such as communication apprehension might be more accurately assessed by the Communication Locus of Control Scale than other available instruments (Hamilton, 1991). Therefore, the CLCS might be a variable affecting individuals' predispositions and preferences with regards to channel preference in certain communication situations.

Situational Variables and Text Message Preference

The previously mentioned research explored traits and individuals' predispositions that may affect channel preferences in certain communication situations. While individual traits play a role in channel preference, research analyzing individual differences often neglects the communication situation and the possible interactions between variables such as communication locus of control and elements of particular communication situations. Certainly, some situations are more interpersonally immediate and/or anxiety provoking than others and that require messages are more difficult to communicate than others. Situations involving conflict or expressing disagreement might create more anxiety for all persons than others and so would be more difficult than situations in which positive information would be communicated. The following research summarizes research that looked at communication channel preferences with regard to the communication situation.

Some research has looked at the preference for interpersonal communication channels from an impression management perspective. From the impression management perspective, O'Sullivan (2000) argued that individuals choose interpersonal channels that enable them to manage ambiguity and clarity, especially with difficult topics that could

threaten self-presentation. O'Sullivan suggested that individuals recognize and then form preferences for interpersonal communication channels based on the levels of clarity or ambiguity that the particular channel provides. O'Sullivan found that mediated channels were preferred when either a partner's or one's own self-presentation was threatened, suggesting that individuals recognize that mediated channels can help to minimize the costs for themselves or their partners associated with embarrassing or unattractive information. In contrast, the study also found that face-to-face communication was preferred for communicating information that supported one's own or a relational partner's self-presentation. Therefore, mobile communication could be a preferred method of communicating when the topic at hand is a difficult one. From this perspective, mobile communication reduces the threat to self-presentation that a difficult interpersonal interaction could pose. Although text messaging was not discussed in O'Sullivan's study, mobile text messaging fits his definition of a mediated communication channel.

Teenagers may use text messaging for communicating a variety of relational messages, but it is unclear what interpersonal channels are preferred for communicating these messages. In a recent study of Japanese teenagers, the frequency of mediated communication channel use positively correlated with the frequency of face-to-face interactions (Ishii, 2006). This finding suggests that mobile communication is used to maintain interpersonal relationships. However, the preference for text messaging over face-to-face interaction is not clear. Igarashi, Takai, and Yoshida (2005) found that social network development of first year college students was enhanced by mobile communication. In Yoshida's definition of a social network, computer-mediated

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interactions were a central component as opposed to a more traditional definition that may not have accounted for computer mediated interactions. Specifically, relationships which included mediated communication in addition to face-to-face communication were rated as being more intimate. This study further highlights the role of mobile technology in interpersonal relationships, specifically in the enhancement of interpersonal relationships. However, this research does not address the specific content of the messages. The functions of the messages, such as expressing support or self-disclosure, are not discussed. It is possible that text messaging may be used to express these relational-type messages.

Studies of friendship development may suggest some factors that include the choice to use or not use mediated rather than face-to-face communication. Many studies have researched messages that are exchanged between friends through non-mediated channels. Friendship formation and maintenance has also been studied as a function of self-disclosure. Altman and Taylor's (1973) social penetration theory suggests that, as a relationship develops, so do the frequency and depth of self-disclosure. According to the theory, disclosing intimate information about oneself is a mechanism of friendship development and an indication of the degree of closeness of the relationship. In a study of college roommates, Berg (1984) found that liking and relationship satisfaction of a roommate were correlated with self-disclosure. In a study tracking relationship development among first-year college roommates, Hays (1985) found that roommates who reported exchanging more information, and more intimate information, reported developing the closest friendships. Hayes (1985) classified friendship behaviors into four different categories. These categories included companionship, communication,

consideration, and affection. Communication was defined as the verbal or nonverbal disclosure of information about oneself or the exchanging of ideas, facts, and opinions about any topic. Consideration was defined as providing support or expressing concern for the other person's well-being. Affection was defined as the expression of either positive or negative sentiment about the other person. Companionship was defined as spending time together or sharing an experience. Concerning the maintenance of friendships, Hays (1985) also found that disclosure among friends was more casual than intimate. It is important to note that Hayes (1985) found both the frequency and the level of intimacy of interaction were positively correlated with ratings of friendship intensity. The breadth of communication alone positively correlated with friendship ratings. Therefore, college roommates who communicate frequently but do not participate in intimate self-disclosure may achieve the same level of relationship intensity as those who do participate in disclosure of intimate topics. However, considering the proliferation of mediated channels, especially text messaging, channel preferences for communicating these messages are not known.

These studies suggest that text message may facilitate relationship development and maintenance simply by keeping roommates and friends in touch with one another, and by making it easier for roommates to coordinate schedules and meetings as well as sharing information immediately – whether that information is casual or a more intimate expression of support or concern.

Other studies that have approached the use of text messaging from a contrasting point of view have reported similar conclusions about the role of text messaging in relationship development and maintenance. Specifically, text messaging may be a

preferred channel for relational messages. Research has pointed to topic avoidance as a maintenance strategy in friendships, which stands in contrast with social penetration theory and self-disclosure. It is possible that there are topics that are not discussed between roommates. Research studies have explored the benefits of topic avoidance in young adult friendships. Afifi and Guerrero (2009) found that same-sex friends avoid disclosure and discussion of certain topics when there is a desire to protect one's autonomy and self-image. In the roommate relationship, whether voluntary or nonvoluntary, it is not known if topic avoidance is used as a relationship maintenance strategy. Previous research showed that individuals choose certain interpersonal communication channels when concerned about the reactions of others (O'Sullivan, 2000) and that teenagers use text messaging to avoid uncomfortable face-to-face interactions (Pierce, 2009). Therefore, text messaging might be preferred when there are concerns about the message being communicated and the reaction that the sender might receive. Text messaging may also be used to discuss difficult topics that were previously avoided in face-to-face interactions. The role of text messaging in these types of situations needs to be more fully explored.

Communicating emotional support is also an important component of maintaining friendships in same-sex friends. As previously mentioned, Johnson et al. (2008) concluded that communicating assurances, positivity, and openness as important relationship maintenance behaviors. In studies of college students, relationship quality has been predicted by a friend's ability to provide support messages that are sensitive and effective (Burleson and Samter, 1990). Burleson and Samter (1990) developed a measure to evaluate the level of importance that people place on certain communication skills,

particularly in same-sex friendships. Communication skills such as ego support and comforting were rated as more important to a friendship than nonaffectively oriented communication skills such as narrative and persuasive abilities. In addition, Finn and Powers (2002) found that the communication skills of comforting, ego support, and conflict management were emphasized more in developed same-sex friendships than in less developed relationships. Again, text messaging may be used to communicate these types of messages.

So, what matters most when individuals choose to send a text? The research reviewed above suggests that text message may be beneficial to developing and ongoing relationships simply as a means to exchange basic information and/or coordinate schedules, to share news and keep in touch, to show concern and support, and to avoid holding uncomfortable discussions through more immediate channels such as face-to-face or telephone. In addition to the degree to which various types of communication situations may make less immediate channels more or less comfortable, it is also possible that individuals prefer text messaging due to traits such as communication locus of control. What is not known is whether or how the interplay between individual traits and situational variables affects the preference for one type of communication channel over another. Therefore, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ$_1$: Is there a relationship between communication locus of control and communication channel preference?

RQ$_2$: Is there a relationship between more and less comfortable communication situations and individual preference for text messaging versus face-to-face communication?

RQ$_3$: Is there an interaction between CLOC and more and less comfortable situations and preference for text messaging as a mediated channel?

Chapter Three: Method

Participants

This study was based on a convenience sample. Participants for this study (n=207) were students residing in the residence halls on Marshall University's campus in April 2012. The group consisted of 146 females and 61 males. The average age for participants was 20.1 years. All of the participants resided in one of Marshall's residence halls at the time of the survey.

Materials and Procedure

After I received approval from Marshall University's Institutional Review Board, data collection began. A link to the online survey was e-mailed to students residing in the residence halls on Marshall's campus. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that data would be collected anonymously. A copy of the anonymous survey consent form designated by Marshall University's Institutional Review Board to be used when research procedures were found to be exempt from review appeared as the first page of the online survey. An advertisement with the link to the survey was also created and placed in the residence hall computer labs inviting students to take the survey. The survey consisted of twenty scenarios representing four types of situations that varied by the degree to which people were likely to feel more or less comfortable sharing the type of information required. Participants were asked to rate their level of comfort and then to select their communication channel preference in each situation. Finally, participants were asked to answer the eighteen questions that make up the Communication Locus of Control Scale.

The four types of communication situations each included five items for a total of twenty items. The four types of communication situations included communicating positive news, coordinating schedules, communicating emotional support, and expressing conflict. These scenarios reflect the types of situations used in studies of friendship development and the domains of interpersonal competence described earlier in the literature review (Hayes, 1985; Buhrmester et al., 1988) as well as situations that were likely to provoke anxiety and/or concern for impression management (O'Sullivan, 2000; Pierce, 2009).   Possible communication channel preferences included in the survey were "text message," "phone call," and "face-to-face" communication. To ensure that the types of situations reflected the intended degree of interpersonal immediacy, respondents were asked to rate their level of comfort in each situation on a seven-point Likert scale with values ranging from 1 = uncomfortable to 7 = comfortable.

The next eighteen survey questions were the Communication Locus of Control Scale (Hamilton, 1991). These items were intended to assess respondents' internality or externality of locus of control specific to communication situations. This measure was used to compute individual communication specific locus of control scores. The possible range of scores was 18 at the external extreme and 72 at the internal extreme of the scale. Therefore, a high score on the scale would indicate that an individual has an internal locus of control. A low score on the scale would indicate that an individual tends to have an external locus of control. Individuals who possess an internal locus of control believe they are in control of communication situations. In other words, they believe they are capable of communicating effectively and can influence the outcomes of their interactions in various communication situations. Individuals with an external locus of

control tend to believe that forces outside of their control influence the outcomes of their communication. They may also feel that they often lack the ability to successfully express themselves through communication and lack the ability to influence the outcomes of conversations.

Chapter Four: Results

The first research question asked if there is a relationship between communication locus of control and channel preference. To examine this question, a Pearson Correlation was computed with respondents' Communication Locus of Control Scale score (CLOC) and the respondents' communication channel preference score. There was a slight significant correlation between communication locus of control and preference for text messaging   ($r = 0.153$, $N = 189$, $p < 0.036$).

To address the second research question that asked whether a relationship between more and less comfortable communication situations and individual preferences for various message channels existed, frequencies of respondents' channel preferences were computed and grouped by type of situation. First, the twenty situations were grouped into clusters of five situations that required similar types of information and comfort levels of information. Frequencies of channel preference for the four types of communication situations are given in Table 1 on the next page. As can be seen in Table 1, results indicated clear preferences for either face-to-face communication or text messaging, depending on the comfort level reflected by the type of situation. Situations consisting of items that concerned coordinating schedules showed respondents' preference for text messaging, whereas situations consisting of items that concerned communicating positive news, emotional support, and expressing conflict were associated with respondents' preference for face-to-face communication.

Table 1

Frequencies of Channel Preferences for Four Types of Communication Situations

Situation	Frequency		
Communicating Positive News	Face-to-Face	Phone Call	Text Message
Question #1	161	6	37
Question #2	154	2	43
Question #3	158	5	39
Question #4	153	1	45
Question #5	127	3	64
Coordinating Schedules	Face-to-Face	Phone Call	Text Message
Question #6	47	19	133
Question #7	75	9	114
Question #8	14	28	155
Question #9	99	14	84
Question #10	65	6	127
Emotional Support	Face-to-Face	Phone Call	Text Message
Question #11	168	2	26
Question #12	161	4	29
Question #13	176	4	14
Question #14	158	3	28
Question #15	153	4	31
Expressing Conflict	Face-to-Face	Phone Call	Text Message
Question #16	149	2	39
Question #17	165	0	24
Question #18	160	2	28
Question #19	154	1	35
Question #20	156	2	30

The final research question asked whether an interaction effect would be found when trait (CLOC) and the comfort level of the situation were examined together. To address this question, sets of regression analyses were performed for each category of situation. The three sets of regression analyses were conducted following the procedures suggested by Barron and Kenny (1986) that allow the unique and combined contributions to the amount of variance accounted for by specific variables to be discovered.

Beginning with the five situations that concerned sharing positive news, a first linear regression was computed with channel preference as the dependent variable and communication locus of control as the independent variable. Results indicated about two percent of the variance in channel preference was accounted for by communication locus of control [$F(1, 187) = 3.65$, $p<0.058$ (ns); $R^2 = 0.019$]. Next, a second linear regression was computed with channel preference as the dependent variable and comfort level as the independent variable. Results indicated about twelve percent of the variance in channel preference was accounted for by comfort level [$F(1, 202) = 27.94$, $p<0.00$ (s); $R^2 = 0.121$]. Finally, a third linear regression was computed with both CLOC and comfort level entered as a block. If the amount of variance accounted for when both independent variables are entered into the analysis together is the same as the amount of variance accounted for when the variables are entered into the equation separately, then we know the independent variables are orthogonal and there is no interaction effect. However, if the amount of variance changes, we know the two variables work together to influence their effect on the dependent variable and an interaction effect has occurred. Results indicated that together the trait and situational variables (CLOC and comfort level) interacted such that the variance accounted for by one overlaps with the variance accounted for by the other [$F(2, 186) = 7.53$, $p<0.001$ (s); $R^2 = 0.075$].

The same procedure was followed to examine the possibility that an interaction effect would occur between CLOC and comfort level in situations that addressed coordinating schedules. As before, a first linear regression was computed with channel preference as the dependent variable and CLOC as the independent variable. Results indicated a zero percent of the variance in channel was accounted for by communication

locus of control [F(1, 187) = 0.036, p<0.849 (ns); R^2 = 0.00]. Because virtually no variance was accounted for by CLOC, only the second regression was computed with channel preference as the dependent variable and comfort level as the independent variable. Results indicated two percent of the variance in channel preference was accounted for by comfort level [F(1, 197) = 4.089, p <0.045 (s); R^2 = 0.020].

Next, looking at emotional support, a first linear regression was computed with channel preference in communicating emotional support as the dependent variable and communication locus of control as the independent variable. Results indicated almost zero percent of the variance in channel preference was accounted for by communication locus of control [F(1, 187) = 0.56, p<0.455 (ns); R^2 = 0.003]. A second linear regression was computed with channel preference in communicating emotional support as the dependent variable and comfort level as the independent variable. Results indicated 31% of the variance in channel preference was accounted for by comfort level [F(1, 195) = 88.55, p<0.00 (s); R^2 = 0.312].

Looking at the fourth situation type, communicating conflict, a first linear regression was computed with channel preference as the dependent variable and communication locus of control as the independent variable. Results indicated that zero percent of the variance in channel preference was accounted for by communication locus of control [F(1, 187) = 0.197, p<0.658 (ns); R^2 = 0.001]. A second linear regression was calculated with channel preference as the dependent variable and comfort level as the independent variable. Results indicated thirteen percent of the variance in channel preference was accounted for by comfort level [F(1, 189) = 27.58, p<0.00 (s); R^2 = 0.127].

Chapter Five: Discussion

The results of this study indicated that there is a slightly significant relationship between communication channel preference and communication locus of control. The regression analyses suggested that situation may override CLOC in predicting communicating channel preferences. Regarding communication situation, results did show that individuals prefer text messaging when coordinating schedules, but prefer face-to-face communication when showing support, negotiating conflicts, and communicating positive news. These results support previous research that used related measures and constructs.

This study found a significant relationship between channel preferences and communication locus of control. A high score for communication channel preference (prefer face-to-face communication) is slightly correlated with a high communication locus of control score (internal locus of control). Similarly, other studies using conceptually related measures found certain trait measures to be related to communication channel preferences in college students. Kelly, Keaten, and Finch (2004) found that reticence was associated with comfort level and that reticent students were more likely to use e-mail to communicate with their professors. The reticent students were also less likely to communicate with their professors face-to-face. And finally, students' usage of e-mail, phone call, or face-to-face communication was associated with reticence and varied according to the particular communication situation. This study supports Kelly, Keaten, and Finch's (2004) study in that preference for communication channel was associated with interpersonal comfort in varying communication situations. In this study, text messaging was the preferred communication channel for

communicating the coordination of schedules. Because text messaging is fast and convenient, it may be easier to use text messaging to make plans with others and coordinate schedules.

Similar to previous studies that indicated that individuals make choices about communication channels based on managing their self-presentation (O'Sullivan, 2000), this study suggested a relationship between CLOC and channel preferences. An individual with concerns about his or her ability to manage self-presentation in communication situations may have an external CLOC and be more likely to choose mediated channels such as text messaging. The interplay between individual traits such as communication apprehension, locus of control, reticence, or willingness to communicate, communication contexts, and channel preferences needs to be further explored. Because computer mediated communication technologies such as text messaging have advanced so rapidly, it is possible that the ways in which individuals interact through these mediated channels is rapidly changing as well.

As previously mentioned, the CLOC scale is conceptually related to communication apprehension. Rubin (1993) found that a positive relationship between external locus of control and communication apprehension. Similarly, this study found a slightly significant correlation between communication channel preference and CLOC. A high CLOC indicated an internal locus of control, which corresponded with preference for face-to-face communication. Therefore, individuals who believe they have more control over their communication are more likely to prefer to communicate face-to-face while those with a low score (external LOC) are more likely to prefer text messaging.

Expressing conflict might be lead to greater communication apprehension than other situations. In expressing conflict, an individual found to have an external CLOC score might feel apprehensive in conflict situations in which he or she might feel that they cannot control the outcome. Teenagers have been found to prefer text messaging when discussing difficult topics, such as expressing conflict, and to avoid uncomfortable face-to-face interaction. The findings of this study are similar in that an individual who is uncomfortable communicating in a given situation may have an external communication locus of control which has been correlated with preference for text messaging.

There are several limitations to this study. Because a convenience sample was used, the results cannot be generalized to a larger population. The findings can be used, however, to justify a larger study with a sample that does allow generalization. All of the survey respondents were college students residing in college residence halls. Survey questionnaire items were written based on interactions that college roommates might have with one another. Second, it is possible that communication channel preferences in college students in their second semester may be different than channel preferences in the first semester as roommates may have become more comfortable communicating with one another in their relationship. Therefore, roommates in their second semester may be more experienced in communicating difficult messages to one another. And third, it is possible that the communication locus of control scale is not a reliable measure.

In one study, Avtgis and Richmond (1997) found that the communication-specific locus of control scale was unstable and cautioned against is use in communication research until a more stable version could be generated. The researchers also found the relationship between the CLCS and McCroskey's personal report of communication

apprehension scale to be comparably low in one study but slightly higher in a second study (Avtgis and Richmond, 1997). These mixed results suggest that while the communication locus control scale is more comprehensive than other similar scales, its breadth reduce its reliability in some settings. Avtgis and Richmond (1997) also raise the possibility that the CLCS does not actually measure locus of control at all, but possibly one's affect toward communication or an individual's self-efficacy with regard to communication. Even if these criticisms are warranted, the CLOC was slightly correlated with channel preferences, even if different dimensions of communication-related affect were being examined.

Effectively communicating many different types of messages is important in the development and maintenance of close relationships. Finn and Powers (2002) found that communicating emotional support and conflict management were important in same sex friendships, similar to the college roommate relationship. Other studies have shown that people value certain communication skills, particularly in same-sex friendships. Burleson and Samter (1990) found that relationship quality was predicted by a friend's abilty to provide support messages (e.g., ego support and comforting) that are sensitive and effective. The types of communication situations used in this study (communicating positive news, emotional support, coordinating schedules, and expressing conflict) are important types of messages that are communicated in relationships.

As this study provides valuable information regarding how individuals select communication channels in different situations, it also provides direction for future research. This study suggests that communication locus of control is only slightly correlated with communication channel preferences. These findings support previous

research showing that constructs related to communication locus of control, such as reticence and communication apprehension, are related to communication channel preferences. This research suggests the benefit of future research into what individual traits are related to communication channel preferences. Further research geared toward understanding how and why individuals select communication channels in different communication contexts is warranted.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Questionnaire

What is your Gender?   Male   Female

How old are you (in years) :   _____

Below are a set of situations in which you might communicate. First, please rate your level of comfort or discomfort in the situation, then choose how you would prefer to use to communicate in this situation.

1. **You are excited about winning tickets to a concert and you want to tell your roommate.**

   What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

        1   2   3   4   5   6   7

   Uncomfortable   Comfortable

   Which communication channel would you prefer?

   Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

2. **You are happy because you just got hired for a new job and you want to tell your roommate.**

   What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

        1   2   3   4   5   6   7

   Uncomfortable   Comfortable

   Which communication channel would you prefer?

   Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

3. **You just got asked out on a date by someone you have been interested in and you want to tell your roommate.**

What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Uncomfortable   Comfortable

Which communication channel would you prefer?

Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

4. **You heard that your roommate got an A on a very important exam and you want to congratulate him or her.**

   What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

   Uncomfortable   Comfortable

   Which communication channel would you prefer?

   Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

5. **You found a $50 bill in one of your coats you haven't worn in a while and you want to tell your roommate?**

   What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7
   Uncomfortable   Comfortable

   Which communication channel would you prefer?

   Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

6. **You are excited that your science lab class was cancelled and you want to tell you roommate you can eat lunch with him or her.**

   What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7
   Uncomfortable   Comfortable

Which communication channel would you prefer?

Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

7. **You want to invite your roommate to study with you in the library.**

   What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7
   Uncomfortable   Comfortable

   Which communication channel would you prefer?

   Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

8. **You are supposed to meet your roommate after class but you are going to be late.**

   What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7
   Uncomfortable   Comfortable

   Which communication channel would you prefer?

   Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

9. **Your roommate has invited you to a play but you have decided you do not want to go. You want to tell your roommate that you will not be able to attend.**

   What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7
   Uncomfortable   Comfortable

   Which communication channel would you prefer?

   Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

10. **You want to ask your roommate what time he or she is finished with class because you want to go to the mall.**

What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Uncomfortable   Comfortable

Which communication channel would you prefer?

Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

11. **Your roommate just broke up with his or her significant other. You want to tell him or her that you are there to talk.**

    What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

      1   2   3   4   5   6   7

    Uncomfortable   Comfortable

    Which communication channel would you prefer?

    Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

12. **Your roommate is upset because he or she did poorly on an exam and you want to tell him or her that you are sorry that they are upset.**

    What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

      1   2   3   4   5   6   7

    Uncomfortable   Comfortable

    Which communication channel would you prefer?

    Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

13. **Your roommate has learned that a family member has passed away. You want to express sympathy.**

    What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

      1   2   3   4   5   6   7

    Uncomfortable   Comfortable

    Which communication channel would you prefer?

    Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

14. **Your roommate has been very kind to you and you want to tell him or her that you appreciate your friendship.**

   What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

   Uncomfortable   Comfortable

   Which communication channel would you prefer?

   Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

15. **Your roommate is saddened by family conflict back at home and you want to tell him or her that you are there to talk.**

   What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

   Uncomfortable   Comfortable

   Which communication channel would you prefer?

   Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

16. **You are annoyed that your roommate has being using your belongings. You want to tell him or her that they need to ask first before using your things.**

   What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

       1   2   3   4   5   6   7

   Uncomfortable   Comfortable

   Which communication channel would you prefer?

   Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

17. **You want to confront your roommate because he or she has been waking you up while you're sleeping.**

What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Uncomfortable   Comfortable

Which communication channel would you prefer?

Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

18. **Your roommate has been messy and you want to tell him or her to move their belongings back to his or her side of the room.**

    What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

        1   2   3   4   5   6   7
    Uncomfortable   Comfortable

    Which communication channel would you prefer?

    Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

19. **You want to tell your roommate that you cannot study because he or she has guests over too often.**

    What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

        1   2   3   4   5   6   7
    Uncomfortable   Comfortable

    Which communication channel would you prefer?

    Face-to-Face   Text Message   Phone Call

20. **You want to tell your roommate that you are upset because he or she has not taken out the trash or picked up his or her laundry.**

What is the level of comfort or discomfort you would feel in this situation?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Uncomfortable   Comfortable

Which communication channel would you prefer?

Face-to-face   Text Message   Phone Call

This questionnaire is designed to assess some of your general feelings about public speaking in particular and communication in general. There are no right or wrong answers. You are asked to register the amount of agreement or disagreement that you have with each statement. Below is an explanation of the categories of agreement and disagreement.

SA = strongly agree with the statement

A = agree with the statement

D = disagree with the statement

SD = strongly disagree with the statement

1. Having the good fortune to have the right audience at the right time explains most good speeches.	1 SA	2 A	3 D	4 SD
2. I can influence nearly any audience if I try.	4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD
3. Even when I know what I want to say, I can't seem to control how I say it.	1 SA	2 A	3 D	4 SD
4. People who speak well are just plain lucky.	1 SA	2 A	3 D	4 SD
5. There are so many variables in a communication situation that communicating well consistently is nearly impossible.	1 SA	2 A	3 D	4 SD

6. When I get up in front of a group, my self-control flies out the window.

	1	2	3	4
	SA	A	D	SD

7. How much I contribute to a conversation depends on how much others will allow me to contribute.

	1	2	4	4
	SA	A	D	SD

8. The ability to speak well is something you just happen to be born with.

	1	2	3	4
	SA	A	D	SD

9. I am usually in control of my behavior, when I speak.

	4	3	2	1
	SA	A	D	SD

10. Good fortune or luck is created by the speaker, it doesn't just happen.

	4	3	2	1
	SA	A	D	SD

11. Given the chance, I can control almost any conversation.

	4	3	2	1
	SA	A	D	SD

12. If I am aware of a personal communication behavior that is bad, I can control it.

	4	3	2	1
	SA	A	D	SD

13. Since there is really no such thing as luck, being a good speaker is the result of personal effort.

	4	3	2	1
	SA	A	D	SD

14. No matter how hard I try, when I get up in front of a group, I just can't seem to make things come out right.

	1	2	3	4
	SA	A	D	SD

15. When I am in front of a group, it is almost as if the audience control me more that I control it.

	1	2	3	4
	SA	A	D	SD

16. Persistence and hard work, not chance, will make you a better speaker.

	4	3	2	1
	SA	A	D	SD

17. Very few situations are so complicated that communication cannot help.

	4	3	2	1
	SA	A	D	SD

18. I can keep my wits about me in most communication situations.

	4	3	2	1
	SA	A	D	SD

Appendix B

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board
401 11th St., Suite 1300
Huntington, WV 25701

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205
IRB2 #00003206

March 19, 2012

Cynthia Torppa, BA,MA,PhD
Communication Studies

RE: IRBNet ID# 320633-1
At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Torppa:

Protocol Title:	[320633-1] Trait and Situational Variables Affecting Communication Channel Preferences in College Student

Expiration Date:	March 19, 2013	
Site Location:	MU	
Submission Type:	New Project	APPROVED
Review Type:	Exempt Review	

In accordance with 45CFR46.101(b)(2), the above study and informed consent were granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire March 19, 2013. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

This study is for student Britt Frye.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral/Educational) Coordinator Michelle Woomer, B.A., M.S at (304) 696-4308 or woomer3@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

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