

Women use emoticons more than men in text messaging :-)

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Credit: Rice University/Photos.com

(Phys.org)—Women are twice as likely as men to use emoticons in text messages, according to a new study from Rice University.

Emoticons are graphic symbols that use punctuation marks and letters to represent [facial expressions](#) to convey a person's mood, help provide context to a person's textual communication and clarify a message that could otherwise possibly be misconstrued.

The study, "A Longitudinal Study of Emoticon Use in Text Messaging from Smartphones," used [smartphone](#) data from men and women over six months and aggregated 124,000 text messages. The participants were given free iPhones to use for the test period but didn't know what researchers were investigating.

"We believe that our study represents the first naturalistic and [longitudinal study](#) that collects real emoticon use from text messages 'in the wild,'" said Philip Kortum, assistant professor of psychology at Rice and one of the study's authors.

Texting has become one of the most popular forms of communication in society worldwide. This year alone, it is estimated that 8 trillion text messages will be tapped out.

In the Rice study, 100 percent of the participants used emoticons, but they did not use them very often, with only 4 percent of all their sent text messages containing one or more emoticons. Other researchers have found differing rates, but those studies relied on users to self-report their emoticon usage. One benefit of the current field study is the realistic look at the ground truth of what actually occurred and what users really do.

"Texting does not appear to require as much socio-emotional context as other means of nonverbal communications," Kortum said. "It could be due to [texting](#)'s simplicity and briefer communication, which removes some of the pressures that are inherent in other types of non-face-to-face communication, like email or blogs."

The study also confirms previous research that women are more emotionally expressive in [nonverbal communication](#); however, in this research, the authors found that while women may use emoticons more than men, the men used a larger variety of emoticons to express themselves.

Participants in the Rice study texted a wide variety of emoticons. Seventy-four different emoticons were used, but the top three emoticons – happy, sad and very happy – made up 70 percent of the total [emoticons](#) sent by the study participants.

Kortum and his co-authors pointed out that their study is a glimpse into the complex nature of real mediated communications. They said that additional inquiry in real-world settings are needed to understand the complexities of human communications through technology.

The study's co-authors were Chad Tossell, Clayton Shepard, Ahmad Rahmati and Lin Zhong, all of Rice University, and Laura Barg-Walkow at the Georgia Institute of Technology. The study was funded in part by the National Science Foundation and appeared in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior*.

The data collected from the smartphones included all text messages sent and received with the timestamp, number of words and amount and type of emoticon(s) used. Privacy was maintained by making the users anonymous and by permanently masking the textual content.

Provided by Rice University

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