

Recent studies show value of technology and in-person communications

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In recent years, text messaging and social media (e.g., Facebook), have become an integral part of how people interact with their social networks. In fact, many adolescents and young adults now use text messaging and social media more than in-person interactions.

Across four different research groups in the United States and Canada, findings from personality and social psychologists suggest that text messaging and social media can have emotional and psychological benefits. However, these benefits often fail to match those of in-person social interactions. As our society increasingly relies on digital forms of [social interaction](#), there may be costs as well as benefits to the quality of our relationships and our emotional health.

In one study, 64 young adult women took part in a stress task and were then randomly assigned to receive emotional support via text, face-to-face communication, or no support. Face-to-face support proved to be significantly better than [text message](#) support in creating positive mood. The participants rated the different support systems similarly though.

"While text messaging may contribute to positive relationship outcomes, it may be less effective at reducing the emotional impact of an acute stressor," writes Dr. Susan Holtzman, University of British Columbia, Okanagan.

Another study, from a group including Dr. Patricia Greenfield, University of California, Los Angeles, showed that increasing in-person

interactions in preteens greatly improves their recognition of nonverbal emotion . In that experiment, 51 preteens spent five days at an overnight nature camp where television, computers, and mobile phones were not allowed. They compared this group with school-based students who continued with their usual media practices. Those who spent five days away from technology showed significant improvement in recognizing nonverbal emotion cues.

Since this research focuses on young adults, adolescents, and children, more research is needed to determine how well these findings generalize to other age groups.

"Digitally-mediated social interactions can have a positive impact on sense of belonging, bonding, self-esteem, and mood among adolescents and [young adults](#). However, the benefits of text messaging and social media often fail to match those of in-person social interactions." states Dr. Holtzman.

Dr. Amori Mikami at the University of British Columbia added that some individuals seem to be more at risk of the negative effects of [social media](#), such as those who are disliked by their peers.

Summarizes Dr. Holtzman, "Digitally-mediated communication cannot be considered 'good' or 'bad' for our health—it has both costs and benefits."

More information: The results were presented as part of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology 17th Annual Convention. The symposium, The Age of Digital Social Interactions: Can Technology Compete with In-Person Communication occurred Friday, Jan. 29, 2016 at the San Diego Convention Center.

Provided by Society for Personality and Social Psychology

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