

# Phone calls create stronger bonds than text-based communications

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New research from The University of Texas at Austin suggests people too often opt to send email or text messages when a phone call is more likely to produce the feelings of connectedness they crave. Credit: McCombs School of Business

After months of social distancing mandates, people are leaning heavily

on technology for a sense of social connection. But new research from The University of Texas at Austin suggests people too often opt to send email or text messages when a phone call is more likely to produce the feelings of connectedness they crave.

In the study, people chose to type because they believed a [phone call](#) would be more awkward—but they were wrong, said Amit Kumar, a McCombs School of Business assistant professor of marketing, co-author with Nicholas Epley of the University of Chicago.

"People feel significantly more connected through voice-based media, but they have these fears about awkwardness that are pushing them towards text-based media," Kumar said.

The research is online in advance in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*.

In one experiment, researchers asked 200 people to make predictions about what it would be like to reconnect with an old friend either via [email](#) or [phone](#), and then they randomly assigned them to actually do it. Even though participants intuited that a phone call would make them feel more connected, they still said they would prefer to email because they expected calling would be too awkward.

But the phone call went much better than an email, researchers found.

"When it came to actual experience, people reported they did form a significantly stronger bond with their old friend on the phone versus email, and they did not feel more awkward," Kumar said.

In another experiment, researchers randomly assigned strangers to connect either by texting during a live chat, talking over video chat, or talking using only audio. Participants had to ask and answer a series of

personal questions such as, "Is there something you've dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven't you done it?" or "Can you describe a time you cried in front of another person?"

Participants didn't expect that the media through which they communicated would matter, and in this case they also predicted that they would feel just as connected to the stranger via text as by phone.

But the researchers found when they really interacted, people felt significantly more connected when they communicated by talking than by typing. And, again, they found it wasn't more awkward to hear each other's voices.

In fact, the voice itself—even without [visual cues](#)—seemed to be integral to bonding, the researchers found.

Confronting another myth about voice-based media, researchers timed participants reconnecting with their old friend. They found the call took about the same amount of time as reading and responding to email.

The researchers said the results both reveal and challenge people's assumptions about communication [media](#) at a time when managing relationships via technology is especially important, Kumar said. "We're being asked to maintain physical distance, but we still need these social ties for our well-being—even for our health."

**More information:** Amit Kumar et al. It's surprisingly nice to hear you: Misunderstanding the impact of communication media can lead to suboptimal choices of how to connect with others., *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* (2020). [DOI: 10.1037/xge0000962](https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000962)

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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