

ABSTRACT

There has been a rapid growth in the use of mobile telephone technology, from which emerged with unexpected popularity of the short message service (SMS) or text messaging. Text messaging is a fundamentally new form of communication that has become a significant part of many of our lives. The aim of this study is to consider the effects of text messaging on the quality and style of our communication and its impact in our relationships.

The study employs a qualitative research methodology. An in-depth investigation was carried out using an interpretative phenomenological analysis of a small sample of 'text' users. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four participants who used the text messaging service frequently. Verbatim transcripts of these interviews were analyzed and formed the raw data for the study. Emergent themes from the data were organised under three superordinate themes: emotional distance; contact; and technology.

The participants all noted the emotional distance and detachment inherent in text messaging, feeling less connected to the other, with little interaction and spontaneity, and found the communication less revealing in a personal way. They used this emotional distance in the avoidance of risk in their relationships, but also to 'break the ice' and forge new or deeper connections. Text messaging facilitates a greater ability to contact and be contacted which the participants all used in the maintenance and nurturing of their relationships. The extra contact gave them a greater sense of security and self-assurance. The technology was found to have limitations and advantages, messages were short and could be misunderstood and ambiguous, while text messaging was also found to be a fun, cheap and effective way to communicate.