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Speaking Their Language: Textisms in Today's Communication

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Speaking Their Language: Textisms in Today's Communication

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This study is an exploratory look into the use of text-based slang, or textisms, in modern communication. People use textisms in multiple media of communication, whether it is in text messages, emails, and various types of social media. This study asked a focus group about their uses and gratifications from textisms. The focus group delved into their appreciations as both users and receivers. Participants reflected on their personal experience and preferences with textisms for their personal communications as well as their opinion for various types of businesses using them in their larger message design efforts.

The participants were comprised of youthful twenty to twenty-two year olds in undergraduate studies at the University of South Florida. Each was currently enrolled in a media studies course at the time of the discussion group. Each member of the nine person group provided information. Each was asked as an individual to reflect on specific questions while also adding their own opinion to the larger group discussion.

General themes pulled from the discussion was the creation of an author's personality, textisms use as a way to create tone, and the varying levels of context needed within personal communication. Participants were in agreement that an individual could be characterized by his or her message design, especially through that individual's use of textisms. By establishing the author's personality, textisms created expectations from the audience. They help reinforce the relationship of those engaged. Tone is often removed from simple text-based communication. Through the use of textisms, or lack of, tone is able to be added to short messages with the use of a single textism. Playfulness, sarcasm, and seriousness are all able to be quickly established by

an author with the additive of a textism. Context is always something to be aware of when interacting with any audience. Gender, generational, formality, and overall relationship are all aspects that impact the interpretation of a message, especially a message that contains textisms. Being aware of how a gender, an age group, or an individual will receive a message further add to the relevance of that message. More information is always best, but if there are limitations, then there are general approaches that can be used to help develop the most salient message.

Businesses had a specific set of expectations from the discussion group that shaped their responses. The consensus for this group was that textisms should be refrained from use within any business context. The group did allow for leeway when it came to more casual style businesses ranging from fast-food restaurants to youth-targeted products, but ultimately said there could be a confusion if a company with an older demographic was using textisms, as it would be appear to be targeting a younger audience. As this group is comprised of young people with a vision for their futures within the business world, their approach to textisms in business was also attached to that vision. They see business as very formal, and that formality is expected to translate into all areas, including communications.

This study pulled valuable overall themes for an exploratory study. The specific details of a small sample group could and should be tested for greater validity, such as the strong and opposing reaction to varying types of smiley faces. The group had conflicting expectations for certain types of textisms and these expectations were from a narrow set of demographics. Further inquiry into this topic will lead to a better understanding of how language is evolving and how those changes are being used in today's and tomorrow's communication.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Text-based communication is growing and changing at such a rate that when one social networking site (SNS) begins to lose its mystery, as the field of communication understands the nuances, a new SNS is created and people flock to the newest way of online interaction. This study is not going to attempt to understand a specific site, but instead aimed at understanding language within all types of modern mediums of communication. Language within text-based communication is able to take on new life. Words are no longer contained to just letters, as all characters are accepted within text-based communication, and words are no longer forced to operate within the boundaries of spelling and grammar (Conti-Ramsden, Durkin, & Simkin, 2010). Language adapts to those that use it (Gottlieb, 2010; Smith, 2011). Smith (2011) also goes on to add that users must also be contributors. This is to say that those who are the intended audience must also have a voice in the message design. Language is meant to communicate, therefore if communication can be made easier through some adaptations, those adaptations must be analyzed and given the opportunity to succeed.

In the United States we are seeing social media take over many aspects of day to day life. Users come in such vast volumes that Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube are common terminology. As tweeting, status updates, and commenting become more relevant to how society views news, entertainment, and information, communicators will need to adapt their language to fit the expectations of their audiences (Plester, Wood, & Joshi, 2009; Haridakis & Hanson, 2009;

Rosen, Chang, Erwin, Carrier, & Cheever, 2010; Gottlieb, 2010; Smith, 2011; Lim & Ting, 2012). Communicators will also need to understand why people communicate in these settings and what their expectations from social media are. Language can create barriers and anxiety which can dissuade people from joining your audience (Yang, Lay, Tsao, Liou, & Lin, 2007; Pierce, 2009). Discovering the motives behind these new techniques in communication is essential, which allows for the theory of uses and gratification to be a direct path toward finding those answers (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974).

The study analyzed how language is used through what has been described as “language play” (Gottlieb, 2010), “textisms” (Ling & Baron, 2007; Plester et al., 2009; Rosen et al., 2010), “teen speak” (Arellano, 2007), or “folksonomies” (Smith, 2010). These terms all refer to the creative use of text-based communication that falls outside the standard rules of spelling and grammar. By understanding how these modern sets of slang impact communication, message design will be able to make use of them. Authors and audiences are engaging with these terms on a regular basis. This study sought to understand why these twists of words and phrases are being used. What does an author and the audience gain? Knowing the answer to that question adds another tool for communication and message design. This study found an awareness of how individuals communicate with one another to be able to create a more relevant message for potentially larger broadcasting efforts.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are limitations to the amount of information regarding this topic. There are papers in regards to text-based slang, but none seeking exact reasons why they are used or how one interprets their use. As such, this study sought an exploratory understanding reinforcing ideas from neighboring points of interest to understand language tactics within a modern setting with modern media.

To begin, there is a look into the theory that specifically seeks out that type of understanding, uses and gratifications (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). From that theory, the researcher looked into understanding linguistics and audience-based messaging. The developed into grew to finding common themes in the way that audiences engage communications. The understanding of the psychological needs added to how an audience finds relevance and expectations with others. These studies are all being sought for their current information about the rapidly evolving realm of internet studies. This exploratory approach will build a foundation from psychology, sociology, linguistics, as well as mass communications.

Uses & Gratifications

Whether it is Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) discussing the beginnings of uses and gratification theory or Markus and Kitayama (1991) analyzing motivation through “self-schemata,” researchers have been trying to understand the underlying reasons why people engage media. Uses and gratification is often reflected upon by its early analysis of media, but

motivation has been tested through many offshoots of similar concepts. Motivation theory (Lin & Lu, 2011), five factor model of personality (Ross, et al. 2009), self-construals (Kim, Kim, & Nam, 2010), and consumers online business-related activities (Mutinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011) have all expanded upon uses and gratifications in order to test a wide range of motivational factors. The list of factors has been summarized many times to a varying degree of acceptance as with the aforementioned list.

Factors are often explained through a dichotomy of gratifications: extrinsic versus intrinsic motivations (Kim, Kim, & Nam, 2010; Lin & Lu, 2011), social versus nonsocial (Jung, Youn, & McClung, 2007; Kim, Kim, & Nam, 2010), independent versus interdependent (Markus & Kitayama 1991), informational versus transformational (Rossiter & Bellman, 2005), gratifications obtained versus gratifications sought (Quan-Hasse & Young, 2010). A simple split of summarization is not always clear for some researchers. Factors are often broken down even further with some key ideas that hold constant, such as information, entertainment, and social integration motivations (Bellman, Schweda, & Varan, 2008; McQuail, 1983; Men & Tsai, 2013; Quan-Hasse & Young, 2010; Shao, 2009). Some other unique outliers discovered were parasocial interaction, remuneration, and empowerment (Men & Tsai, 2013), fashion (Quan-Hasse & Young, 2010), and satisfaction (Kim et al., 2010). Motivation is an abstract concept with multiple ways of defining and analyzing the process. Different media can also test motivations in more expansive ways such as with the use of social media with Cyworld (Jung et al., 2007), Facebook (Kim et al., 2010; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Ross et al., 2009), Renren (Men & Tsai, 2013), or interactive television (Bellman et al., 2008).

Uses and gratifications has been a tool in media analysis for decades as is it became obvious that the audience is an active participant in the media it consumes (Katz et al., 1974).

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) went on to note that the audience is self-aware and selects the media it wishes to engage with to pursue some form of satisfaction. The question is then asked, “What media does the audience choose and why?” That question emerged early on in the 20th century when television, newspapers, and radio were the primary sources of media. In today’s world, media has expanded with the vast array of access points presented by the Internet. Questions about social motivations have been directly applied to media through interactive platforms such as Facebook (Quan-Hasse & Young, 2010), instant messaging (Eijnden, Meerkerk, Vermulst, Spijkerman, & Engels, 2008), online video games (Wu, Wang, & Tsai, 2010), and a change within a media platform from television (Rubin, 1983) to interactive television (Bellman, et al., 2008).

Uses and gratifications has tested and expanded the range of motivations across all fields of study. Mutinga, Moorman and Smit (2011) tested six motivators for the audience that interacts with business related social media. These factors ranged from entertainment, social integration, personal identity, information, remuneration, and empowerment. Quan-Haase and Young (2010) looked into a comparison of motivations between Facebook and instant messaging. Their findings resulted in six key dimensions for Facebook use: pastime, affection, fashion, share problems, sociability, and social information while also determining three specific motivations for joining Facebook including peer pressure, social connectivity, and curiosity.

The evolution of motivation testing can be seen through earlier analyses of television such as Rubin’s (1983) five factors: entertainment, habit, information, escape, and companionship, which was further developed into Rossiter and Bellman (2005) informational and transformational motives. The informational motives were broken into problem solving, problem avoidance, incomplete satisfaction, mixed approach-avoidance, and normal depletion,

whereas transformational motives were separated into sensory gratification, intellectual stimulation and mastery, and ultimately, social approval. Bellman with Schweda and Varan (2008) then expanded upon this set of informational and transformational motives by shaping those motives into two types: negatively originated motives paired with informational motives and positive-ending motives paired with transformational motives and then defining all of it under consumer behavior for interactive television. These transitions of analysis for over two decades within television media alone demonstrates the expansive areas to be tested for motivation and a variety of possible interpretations.

Motivations for Social Media Use

Social media and its ongoing and growing interaction have found a set of themes that draw a large number of participants back to these networks. The three general themes for social media use usually breaks down into information, entertainment, and socialization (Bellman et al., 2008; Muting et al., 2011; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Shao, 2009). McQuail (1983) added the fourth theme of personal identity, though this element is often rolled into socialization with more recent research delving into social media (Bellman et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2010; Shao, 2009). This set is then often analyzed through juxtaposition as with extrinsic versus intrinsic motivation or social versus non-social motivation (Kim et al., 2010; Lin & Lu, 2011). Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations offered a comparison between usefulness and enjoyment (Lin & Lu, 2011). Usefulness is associated with extrinsic motivation through its perceived helpfulness to find value whereas enjoyment is connected with intrinsic motivation because the action itself determines value rather than an external reinforcement. Markus and Kitayama (1991) compared social motivations as a means for communication with family and friends and non-social motivations as anything related to entertainment, self-expression, professional advancement, or passing time.

Self-expression can be a challenging position as a non-social factor. Self-expression within social media is often paired with connections to one's online friends with real-time interaction (Kim et al., 2010).

One element in analyzing social media is that satisfaction is not determined by how people use medi, but rather it is linked to the motivation to socialize (Jung et al., 2007). While in America, Facebook is commonly referenced and is accessed from many countries, there still are a multitude of social networking sites designed for a specific country or region which are preferred by the native users (Men & Tsai, 2013). This need for socialization with today's textisms use is the primary factor which underlines this study. The aforementioned elements of information and entertainment are readily combined with socialization. Information is shared and approved by the audience of friends, families, and, for some, complete strangers to whom it is broadcasted. Entertainment is a combination of social approval as shared viewership and commenting draw people unfamiliar with each other into a shared environment of forums, blogs, and user comments (Rubin, 1983). The focus on information and entertainment was a viewpoint of the past as the social aspect has risen to the forefront with the expansion and depth of the value of social media in today's society (McQuail, 1983). The fact that shared interactive media is rooted in social motivations, which developed into significant relationships and a sense of belonging and appreciation within a virtual community, shows the influence and impact (Rubin, 1983). The pattern of presenting oneself through a broadcast setting in order to gain satisfaction through social interaction is the essence of why persistent social media exists (Jung et al., 2007; Rubin, 1983).

This heavy handed influence of socialization on today's society can have a strong and deep effect on a person's mental state as satisfaction with personal well-being within a virtual

setting may be the ultimate goal for any service provider and user (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). People are influenced by many things, and those who are influenced by their relationships with others and their surroundings are affected by social media outlets more than others and also receive more satisfaction than others (Jung et al., 2007). This is a common theme for anyone who is passionate about anything, but these new social settings are prone to bringing issues of peer pressure (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010), language anxiety (Yang et al., 2007), social anxiety (Pierce, 2009), and have been linked to depression (Eijnden et al., 2008). The variances in social motivation and shyness make the greatest contribution to what a person takes away from interacting in social media (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). People produce online content for self-expression and self-actualization (Shao, 2009). The extent to which that content is accepted by the online communities can influence the user. Language is the first factor. Unconventional language use, for example, is common throughout social media to help establish a stronger sense of group or “in-crowd” identity (Ling, 2010). This makes it a possibility that users could be subject to ridicule and exclusion because of a limited knowledge or misuse of the accepted jargon of the community establishing an inverse relationship with internet self-efficacy (Yang et al., 2007), which is then reinforced through behavior mimicry as someone will imitate what they see from other users within their networks (Lenhart et al., 2010). New social media networks are outlets, especially for people who are typically unable or fear having to interact in person, allowing for interaction without face to face conversations thus helping them bypass some of their innate social anxiety issues (Pierce, 2009). These new socialization outlets have offered to many the opportunity to become active participants within large communities, but as with any community there is the possibility to be shunned and spurned. There must be an understanding of not just how to interact, but also how to define the etiquette within these settings.

Social Media and Language Use

Social media is growing. The interactivity of two way communication between peers, businesses, and general broadcasting has drawn more and more people into the various social media networks year after year. In 2011, approximately two-thirds of adult internet users were on social networking sites as compared to about one-third in 2008 and less than a tenth of total adult users in 2005 (Madden & Zickuhr, 2011; Wang, Tchernev, & Solloway, 2012). Shifting the scope to adults between the ages of 18 and 29 years old found that 72% of users were on social media in 2010 (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010; Wang et al., 2012).

Social media has had strong effects on its users. Behavioral influences through social learning effects have been demonstrated by Facebook users (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2009). Burke et al. (2009) examined 140,000 newcomers to Facebook and watched as those newcomers interacted with their friends. When new users saw their friends post lots of photos they emulated that behavior whereas new users whose friends post fewer photos demonstrated similar behavior. Similar research has found that reading friends' posts would motivate users to generate and share content to represent their ideal self (Dunne, Lawlor, & Rowley, 2010; Shao, 2009). Such content creation behaviors showed a similar impact to the language used within social media throughout all platforms. Twitter, Facebook, instant messenger, and email each created unique frames for how language can be used and each demonstrated a style and vernacular that provided insight to overall communication within these settings.

Language has had a great impact on the way an individual views him or herself as well as the way he or she viewed the world. Language is a part of building and reflecting social identity (Mahootian, 2005). Mahootian (2005) took a look at Spanish speakers and their concern about maintaining their Hispanic linguistic and cultural identity to note that language created a

comfortable setting for users. While a bilingual audience may function perfectly well within either language, there is an identity associated with each framework as they engage within that mindset. The more a message was tailored to an individual, the more impactful it was (Bauer, Niet, Timman, & Kordy, 2010). Language can often be tricky, despite the fact that speakers used the same words whether they were wrapped in a local dialect or professional vernacular (Smith, 2011). Health messages can be complicated to the average person and tailored messages with a layperson's touch increased the impact of a targeted message (Bauer et al., 2010; Smith, 2011).

Text messaging initiated a large population of youth into text-based shorthand techniques that were never used prior to this medium (Ling, 2010). This set of language mutations can be summed up as "textisms" (Plester, Wood, & Joshi, 2009; Rosen, Chang, Erwin, Carrier, & Cheever, 2010). Plester et al. (2009) broke up textisms into 12 categories: shortenings, contractions, g-clippings, other clippings, omitted apostrophes, acronyms, initialisms, symbols, letter and number homophones, misspellings, non-conventional spellings, and accent stylization. Shortis (2007) didn't categorize the variants, but rather described the variations as accent simulation, semiotic features such as capitals to indicate paralinguistic details such as volume or emphasis, stage directions to indicate nuance, reduplication for stretched sounds, as well as noting the visual and graphical additions such as emoticons, alphabetical rebuses, and other special effects to add meaning. This kind of language play was able to create a function and barrier for practical purposes for the users (Gottlieb, 2010).

The manipulation of language is a constantly evolving format. Modern language has been changed and sculpted all across the world as studies have analyzed it in Japan (Gottlieb, 2010), Norway (Ling, 2010), Korea (Jung et al., 2007), China (Men & Tsai, 2013), England

(Plester et al., 2009), United States (Kim et al., 2010; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Ross et al., 2009), and wherever there are children there has always been analysis of why they do and say things. Textisms have been shaped by practical needs for timeliness, size of screen, limitations in texting functions, such as avoiding the inconvenience of input modes, as much as playfulness (Gottlieb, 2010; Shortis, 2007). The development of the language among teens gave them a sense of credibility with their peers and helped define them away from their parents or other groups (Ling, 2010). Spelling gained flexibility allowing for functional economy and identity performance as well as to show credible mastery of standard conventions (Shortis, 2007). Such functional economy would be the accents to inflect semantic nuance for irony or a reduction of characters for text entries. These allowances within the language opened other possibilities as the prevalence grew and adapted with more users taking more creative license without worries of grammatical constraints.

Textisms and Social Media

Textisms exist through a motivation for change and for being new and innovative. Innovation through the use of children and their texting methods were clear as textisms provided for speed, privacy, and control (“Teens who text”, 2008). The initial textisms were to create new usability attributes to allow things to be easier for the users (Shao, 2009). Innovativeness was often a way to remove irritation through limitations within the various formats of social media thus bridging the relationship between attitude and intention (Lim & Ting, 2012). Innovativeness begins with the adoption of new technologies and then seeks out new sensations, both intellectual and sensory (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009; James et al., 2008; Venkatraman & Price, 1990). Language has had a strong value for encouraging innovativeness, whether it is through a native language or a set of jargon accepted by a community such as textisms (James et

al., 2008). Innovativeness found a trend within social media as younger people tend to seek sensory innovation and older people have a stronger need for intellectual innovation (Venkatraman & Price, 1990). Innovativeness is the core of what textisms were born from. Its expanding usage was a trending motivation born from the youthful and, as they aged or taught a larger audience, it grew into a standard and acceptable component of communication.

Social motivation has been one of the main reasons for interacting (Rubin, 1983). Users have consumed, participated, and produced content on social media as a means of interacting with other users (McQuail, 1983; Shao, 2009). They have wanted to bolster their social lives through a virtual community. These users are highly concerned with their relationships with others and attempt to improve those relationships through constant participation with their friends on social media (Jung et al., 2007). This connection helped with “online-only friends” as well as their “real world” relationships. These communities allowed for an instant establishment of a like-minded peer group that enabled the peer-oriented mindset of users to find friends and encourage their socialization skills (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2010). These users shared with one another to feel inclusion and affection while giving them a sense of control for their engagements (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009). In today’s world of easy access communities that can relate to any niche topic, socialization become the main focus of users as information and entertainment no longer have the same value with the growth of social media (McQuail, 1983). The growth of online interaction has been associated with the simplicity of accessing these media. The natural drive for social interaction given the ease of online use for persistent updates has created a need for users to be flooded with day-to-day mundane information from their friends and family. There have been systems of communication that have existed without bias toward race, age, or any other demographic statistic for years. Textisms are commonplace as noted with the addition

of terms such as LOL, OMG, and <3 to the Oxford Dictionary (Brown, 2010). The language of the internet has become more informal and more expressive as these purposeful mistakes are tolerated (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2010).

Textisms have moved from text messages into other social media formats such as Facebook, Twitter, and instant messaging, but they have also found their way into verbal communication and academic writing (Arellano, 2007). Rosen et al. (2010) found that 64% of 12-17 years old children had used informal writing in their school work such as removing capitalization, using shortcuts such as “LOL”, and using emoticons such as smiley faces. Plester et al. (2009) found that children in all their survey groups used textisms about 58% of the time. Ling and Baron (2007) found that textisms were common with college students, but also noted a difference in usage based on format where instant messaging would use less textisms than standard phone-based text messaging. Education level had a direct impact on textism use and writing skills (Rosen et al., 2010). People who reported having no or only some college education had similar results of more shorthand and weaker formal writing skills. People who used more text messaging had a correlation with worse formal writing and people with lower education had showed an increased use of textisms as a whole.

Textisms became a subset of many written language as seen through the studies in China (Ment & Tsai, 2013), Korea (Jung et al., 2007), Japan (Gottlieb, 2010), England (Plester et al., 2009), and the United States (Kim et al., 2010; Quan-Hasse & Young, 2010; Ross et al., 2009). The youth of these populations have found a different and more expressive function in text messaging compared to young parents who found the function to be more practical (Ling, 2010). The playfulness of textisms has had lasting effects on language as a whole (Gottlieb, 2010). Language play in the public settings has long established a connection among participants as

well as demonstrating a rejection of outsiders. This subset of language is rooted in the participants, as much as any particular social media. That allows those participants a familiarity which draw them in to read and to use in their daily activities as it is part of their personal index of terms (Smith, 2011). The use of textisms that people, in general, are familiar with should increase the relevance of common and informal messages.

The Language of Textisms

Most studies have analyzed how language is used through what has been described as “language play” (Gottlieb, 2010), “textisms” (Ling & Baron, 2007; Plester et al., 2009; Rosen et al., 2010), “teen speak” (Arellano, 2007), or “folksonomies” (Smith, 2010). These terms all refer to the creative use of text-based communication that falls outside the standard rules of spelling and grammar. For this study, the term “textisms” is used to describe the use of such text messaging and internet vernacular. Textisms studies often focused on children (Arellano, 2007; Eijnden, Meerkerk, Vermulst, Spijkerman, & Engels, 2008; Plester et al., 2009; Pierce, 2009; Ling, 2010) or young adults in college (Ling & Baron, 2007; Rosen et al., 2010). Some studies note how textisms have found their way into formal writing settings in schools (Rosen et al., 2010). Studies focusing on text messaging saw the emergence of the textisms within adolescence (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2010), but it has also progressed into the college populations (Ling & Baron, 2007). Education had a strong effect as persons with lower education used textisms more heavily (Rosen et al., 2010). This study sought out an exploratory understanding of textisms through how users learned the language and how those users engaged them in the various formats that they saw them in. As users of textisms begin to join the general adult audience in larger numbers as well as to convert older participants to the language adaptations,

the current set of uses and gratifications have become a more important area to analyze as it helps provide for audience relevance in message design.

Textisms may be a polarizing topic. Users and even non-users may or may not have a preference toward textisms. The initial pursuit of this study was to discover how an audience member perceives textisms and how that created a positive, neutral, or negative effect on that person. As this study established the correlation between a user and his or her preference as an audience member, there became a new understanding of how to connect with members of that audience. Also, as the preference came back as a neutral position for one rather than the other, then these results have also led toward messaging tactics favoring one side, user or non-user, while only being a neutral reflection by the other or vice versa for negative preferences.

By breaking down the barriers of language, these techniques will become more open and accepted. As new audiences began to use textisms they will become more commonplace and allow for a higher absorption by the community. This will also allow for a greater implementation by communicators toward a greater number of targeted audiences. Conti-Ramsden et al. (2010) also found a toleration of textisms when it was taken as a peer-oriented usage, thus showing that the audience member's relationship with the speaker has an influence on the reception of the message.

There is a broad variety of textisms. The following describes the six classifications that were used for this study along with commonly used examples of textisms used in text-based communications.

Emoticons. Emoticons are described by the use of image emphasis through the use of characters to create a visual symbol. The word emoticons is a combination of emote and icon. Emotes are visual representations of actions or feelings.

Emoticon Examples:

heart:	<3	skeptical:	:-/
monkey:	:{}	stick it out:	:P
rock out:	\m/	equal eyes:	=/ =(=P
oh no!:	:-o	wince:	>.<
grin:	:D :-D	devil:	};-)
frown:	:{	broken heart:	</3
grimace:	x-(more cowbell:	+/\
cool:	B-)	kiss face:	:* :-x
crying:	:{	crab:	V.v.V
equal eyes:	=D =)	pig / cow:	:{)
wink:	;) ;-) ;^)	mustache:	:{
indifferent:	:-	robot:	[:]
smile:	:-)	poo:	~@~

These emoticons typically display a face going through some form of emotion. That face representing an emotion is able to express a statement through a few characters. Emoticons are often used to express an emotion that is difficult to show within a limited character availability of many social media formats. An emoticon can apply an emotion to an overall statement as done through sarcasm, hyperbole, excitement and sadness. A visual representation of words can often have a stronger effect as a smiley face as opposed to stating one's happiness.

Acronyms. Acronyms will shorten a group of words into a few letters. Acronyms are often employed to save character space within limited character formats. They are also used to speed up the communication process. Acronyms can reduce entire phrases and sentences into a few letters.

Acronym Examples:

LOL - laugh(ing) out loud	AFK - Away from keyboard
JK - Just kidding	BFF - Best friend forever
OMG - Oh my goodness	BF/GF - boyfriend/girlfriend
TMI - Too much information	ROFL - Roll on floor laughing
IDK - I don't know	gg - good game
BTW - By the way	nvm - Nevermind
BRB - Be right back	ily - I love you
WTF - What the flip?	ftw - for the win

Abbreviations. Abbreviations will shorten a single word into a few letters. Like acronyms, abbreviations are often employed to save for character space within limited character formats and to be used for speed with social interaction.

Abbreviation Examples:

l8r - later
rly - really
thx - thanks
h8 - hate
r - are
u - you
y - why

Purposefully misused capitalization. Purposefully misused capitalization is often used when words or whole messages are typed in all caps. This technique shares traits with emoticons. This is typically used to express an emotion. Often it is used for volatile emotions such as anger or excitement. The use of all-capitalized letters for whole sentences or paragraphs is often interpreted as shouting. Sarcasm can also be expressed through an over exaggeration of certain words followed by a limited amount of emotional expression. These are a few ways in which the technique can be used to get varying results.

Purposefully Misused Capitalization Examples:

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?
HE did WHAT to HIM?
BOOM goes the dynamite.
I can't believe you just said THAT!

Purposefully misused spelling. Purposefully misused spelling differs from abbreviations because the emphasis is not on shortening a word. These spelling errors are often done for emphasis rather than reduction. Like the previous technique it is often used to create an emotional perspective. These purposefully misused spellings are for the sake of exaggeration. Some of these exaggerations are to add an onomatopoeia effect or a cute simpleton-like

expression. These type of techniques are often seen when animals or objects are personified or when accent is being expressed within a general statement. Any accent trying to be expressed through text will break from the standard English rules of spelling and grammar as the general portrayal is that an accent does not always embody the propriety of language.

Purposefully Misused Spelling Examples:

Oreeeaallllyyy?

Took you loooooonnnnngggg enuf.

I seez ya!

You sooo purrty.

So you loooooove him!

Purposefully misused punctuation. Purposefully misused punctuation is also used to express an emphasis on the statement. Similar to the uses of emotional textisms, this tool allows for an expression of emotion that is not always available in limited text formats such as Twitter. While it contradicts shortening techniques, its ability to portray an emotional state through a few characters can still show its usefulness within a limited character medium such as a tweet. The following example can show how purposefully misused punctuation can add to the portrayal of confusion, excitement, and sarcasm through punctuation.

Purposefully Misused Punctuation Examples:

You did what???

I can't believe that just happened!!!!?!?!?

Well duh.....

Each of these is classified as a textism. They are each a violation of rules for spelling and grammar in Standard English. As such, each is able to be tested individually to see the varying seepage of each textism. These classifications will allow for preference between the textisms to be tested. A preference or aversion toward each of the textisms will help provide insight into the density that each of these tools should be used or not used within message designs. A direct test for each type of textism may also provide for a level of interpretation by the audience as

allowable. An audience member may not classify him or herself as a textism user, but may have a varying negative to neutral to positive opinion based on the type of textism used. If emoticons can be accepted by both users and non-users of textisms, then that difference is worth testing for.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This is an exploratory study into the uses and gratifications people gain from the use and interaction with textisms. The literature review demonstrated the variety of interests focused around the topic of textisms. Each of these studies looked at language, innovation, and evolution of behaviors. The studies analyzed sub-groups of society from language, age, and education variances. Those studies looked at social media and its effects on society. Some even took on the phenomenon of textisms from a cultural and international perspective. Each previous study helped develop a look toward analyzing the users need and benefits of textisms. None of the prior research took a qualitative look into how the users see their own usage. This study analyzed from the users' perspective their own understandings of textisms within today's communication efforts. The purpose of this study was to seek the beginning, exploratory answers for the following research questions:

RQ1: Does the communication platform decide which textisms are used?

RQ2: What does one gain from using textisms?

RQ3: How does one interpret textisms?

Each of these questions provided insight into how a person interacts with textisms. These questions asked about the engagement with textisms as both the author and the audience member. Directing these questions through a lens of uses and gratifications allowed for the exploratory needs to properly engage the participants to respond with their personal beliefs and expectations. The simple nature of the questions goes to the exploratory expectations of this

study. Not testing for a specific detail, but rather a general understanding and appreciation of the author and audience experience has helped gain a large volume of responses with numerous directions for further analysis.

RQ1 recognizes that communication happens on many platforms. Each platform can embrace a unique experience for those involved. This question sought to find whether there are communication differences that went along with the user's experience. Each change in social media is based on the expectation that the users will gain a new, and for the designers preferred, experience. In answering RQ1, the participants of this study were forced to think about how they use communication, and how their use of communication may or may not change based on the medium in which that communication is taking place. The participants were able to recognize and reflect on those differences as question gained a variety of responses.

RQ2 focuses on the author's interaction with textisms. This question challenges the participants to reflect on their own use of textisms. The participants were then able to explain why and for whom their textisms were used. There was a multitude of responses based on the author's relationship with the audience. The different type of audiences along with the different expectation of those audiences was key information for how the study was developed. The open exploratory design of this question helped the author to find multiple themes which can further be honed in future studies.

RQ3 asked the participants about their experience as part of the audience. This question was essential to understanding how the receiver receives a textisms and how that reception affects the relevance and engagement with the overall message. Again, the exploratory nature of the question allowed for many answers. As an individual within a single member audience, the expectations of language is solely based on the relationship with the author. As an individual

within a larger audience whether group-oriented or complete broadcast, the expectations of language will change. Audience perspective with textisms have a set of challenges and inquiries that were discovered within the exploratory look. The audience perspective also gives an important aspect of potential message design tactics for all types of communicators. Businesses, governments, and individuals need to understand what they can do for their audiences and how their audiences will engage with those messages. Each of these questions helped build the possibilities for different avenues to use textisms in order to gain audience attention.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

A focus group was conducted to answer the research questions. As a research method, focus groups allowed for continuous discussion of open-ended questions. According to Kitzinger (1995), the discussion efforts allow the participants to build organically on the topic, shaped by their personal interests and experiences which have a greater impact on subcultural studies. The natural dialogue within the group helps build a narrative directly sensitive to the cultural variables.

Focus groups are particularly useful for obtaining qualitative information about group dynamics. Each participant is able to build upon the ideas with his or her own anecdotes and experience. The discussion is able to grow with the interests of those participating that may have been overlooked with the initial question design. The moderated question-answer design enables each participant to be actively involved. There are a variety of questions that are built around different types of triggers whether it is a response to a visual, a personal experience, or the individual's opinions.

Participants

Participants for the focus group were selected from a convenient sample of students at the University of South Florida who were currently enrolled in a public relations course. Those students were offered a chance to assist in a graduate student's study as an opportunity for them to learn about the process of focus groups and thesis development. Students were given a time

and place for the focus group. That time and location were both designed to be convenient for those participating. The time was after the majority of courses would have taken place in the early evening to avoid potential time conflicts. The location was set on campus of the university that all participants were currently attending within a building all were familiar with. Initially there were eleven responses for focus group with nine in attendance at the date and time of the focus group.

Procedures

Through the focus group, the researcher asked about personal usage and motivations behind textisms. It was determined through a brief questionnaire that each of the participants was a social media user with varying degrees of activity on such sites (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Krueger and Casey (2009) also noted that the questions need to follow a line of inquiry that allows the participants to be guided from a general concept to the focused core questions that actually probe into the purpose of the study. Thus, with the proper facilitation, the researcher was able to discover the users' motivations and appreciations of textisms with the development and progression of the questions within the focus group.

To begin this process, a brief questionnaire was developed and distributed. The questionnaire targeted college students in order to access a convenient sample group that is engrossed in social media. I pulled basic demographic information such as contact information, sex, age, race and ethnicity, and then asked for social media usage to be most accurately selected from amongst a set of given responses: "constantly," "few times a day," "once a day," "less than daily," or "rarely." Next, I asked how the participant uses social media; does the participant read, comment, and/or contribute content to social media websites. These set of questions were

designed to ensure that the participants were able to contribute with knowledgeable and relevant information based on their active interaction with textisms.

The second part of the questionnaire targeted textism specific questions. First the definition of textism was presented. Secondly, the textism types are named, defined, and a few examples are provided. These statements allowed the participants a clear understanding and separation of each textism type. Next textism usage questions were specifically asked. There is an initial yes or no response to textism use. All responses were yes, which led to the question of frequency of use with the selection from the choices: “constantly,” “occasionally,” or “rarely.” A second follow up for the yes responses asked the participant to select all viable options from the textism types. That concluded the questionnaire (See Appendix 1 and results Appendix 2). The questionnaire is very user friendly as it is easy to complete quickly as there are only 10 multiple-choice questions (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

The focus group was assembled as a convenient sample based on willingness to participate and availability. The focus group pursued as much data saturation as possible within the confines of accessibility for time and available sampling (Krueger & Casey, 2009). This study built around a single-category design engulfing language in textism users as the lone variable to measure results. The initial design is to use focus groups to gather the needed information with the possibility of seeking more as needed within the restraints of an available sampling group. The focus group targeted twelve invitations to work around expected participant attrition with hopes of gaining eight to ten participants to allow for a full discussion and explanation of each answer. These goals were met with the initial responsive sample group being eleven and the actual attendance being nine. Each invitation was followed up with a reminder email. The questions were designed to have cued questions to start each change of

topic as well as un-cued follow up questions based on the direction in which each discussion could possibly go or topic areas that might be ignored. The focus group was set for 90 minutes to progress through the questions and then to allow for as many follow up questions based on the responses to the essential key questions.

Working from Krueger and Casey (2009) question categories of opening, introductory, transition, key, and ending, the researcher built a script (See Appendix 2) for the focus group moving from each question type. Beginning with a factual based opening question to bring out basic conversation and a response from each participant to stoke the initial discussion, the researcher asked for each participant to introduce themselves by their first name and state what brought them to the focus group. This question garnered a short response no longer than 15 seconds for each participant and the question was allotted 3 minutes. Allowing each person in the room to say something early on in the focus group was to encourage persistent engagement from those who would typically feel uncomfortable or have a preference for remaining silent. Also by using a close-ended question, it limited the response times and enabled the facilitation to move quickly toward the introductory questions.

The introductory questions allowed the first open-ended response (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 39). The question was a direct opinion aimed to have limited discussion. This question was allotted 5 minutes. At this point, I asked about the formality of language in text-based communication. Typically the viewpoint of text-based communication compared to phone-based text messaging, instant messaging, and social media is that it is informal, thus the use of textisms. Here, as the facilitator, I wanted participants to experience the variants of textisms, so offered a visual explanation of a quick PowerPoint presentation (Appendix 3) with a simple phrase then offered a manipulation of that phrase using different textisms. This visual

representation of the textism types was to help the participants engage with the idea of how textisms impact a message. Next the group was asked about their personal experience with textisms and how a message could be misinterpreted by an outside audience. Each participant was directed to write a phrase on a provided index card (Appendix 4), which they would share and explain the meaning and possible misinterpretations due to textisms.

The transition questions allowed for a smooth shift into the key questions for which the study seeks thoughtful and robust responses (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 39). My transition questions fleshed out the participants' personal history of textisms. One question asked about how they learned textisms and how the textisms have changed. These transition questions then embrace the aspect of textisms and begins to probe the participants' personal connections. The question will draw out where they've used textisms and what kind of environment promoted their use. An additional element that might need to be coaxed from this question set up is their use in more formal settings such as within work emails, with bosses, or with classroom submissions such as papers, tests, or general written work. This then questioned the idea of a formal environment which may not be a part the average users' social media interactions. The participants then had the challenge to consider something as formal which specifically asked if such a formal environment exists within social media, does it have its own set of rules. The open-ended nature of this question brought out a discussion based on the juxtaposition of a formal environment within social media versus the standard nature of informality and, often, anonymity. This question should drive the participants to consider whether rules do exist for the informal side of social media, and if so are those rules then applied equally to a possible formal side, or is there a differing set of guidelines. Now that the participants have begun to consider the possibility of different arenas within social media communication, especially toward a formal

side, that will open them to naming and framing of formal outlets with the transition questions. The first transition question will be planned for 5 minutes of discussion and the second for 10 minutes.

From the position that formality is not the norm, the transition questions asked whether any of the participants recalled seeing a textism from a business, organization or news outlet and if they could recall a reaction from that textism. These questions began to sculpt the domains in which textism users will begin to see a sense of comparative formality. A follow-up component may be added to address the users' feelings by asking whether textisms would be "odd or weird" coming from a source that was associated with such a formal entity. These transition questions bridged the position of personal experience and formality, established by the introductory question, to textisms.

The key questions evoked the majority of the input toward the research questions previously posited (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 40). Each key question is allotted 15 minutes for discussion. One key question asked about a possible link between communication format and textism use. The media that were brought up as points of discussion were from broadcast formats such as Twitter or Facebook posts as compared to personal direct communication types such as text messages and emails. The responses were shaped about the peer setting and if that context would allow for a different set of textisms to be used. Participants provided insight on whether the medium determines a textism preference and expectation. This established the boundaries for use of textisms.

The second research question asked about motivations for using textisms. The second key question initiated that same inquiry. "What do you gain from using textisms?" This question forced the participants to discuss why they chose to use textisms. It is the motivation

and expectation for their readers to react to their statements. It asked about the audience for their message as well as personal aspects of the message they're sending out. In today's setting, are textisms second nature or are they thoughtful maneuvers by the writer? The resulting answer was both. This simple aspect of textisms gave insight into how messages grow with their use as well as lead into the third key question.

The third key question is aimed at the answering the major research question. "How do you interpret textisms?" Motivations are set aside for direct user gratification. The follow up questions for this key question were about the participants' thoughts and feelings when they came across a textism. Does the sender change the interpretation of a textism? If your best friend, parent, and significant other all sent you the same message, would it have a drastic change in interpretation? The participants provided answers to this question as a prelude to reintroduce the topic of formality. Then they were directed toward remarking upon businesses, news, or any other kind of professional communication and whether or not it should have textisms or if there is such a thing as a no-textism environment. This key question is aimed at the line between formal and informal communication. In an online domain where most communication is driven at the social and informal level, this gave an audience opinion of the accessibility of business communication toward the general populous.

The discussion and the timeliness of each question determined the allowance for follow up questions, making the previously prepared follow ups a well thought out plan that encouraged more information on themes and motivations for textisms. These questions were designed to draw out specific instances of textisms and how the audience interprets those occurrences. The script had 73 minutes of the 90 mapped out. The variables of participants cannot be clearly predicted ahead of time. If the agenda runs its course exactly as planned then there will be 17

minutes for further delving into these follow up questions, the focus group was completed with about 15 minutes left in the allotted time communicated to the participants.

Themes that were asked about were innovation, socialization, entertainment, and language helpers such as tone in relation to sarcasm and playfulness. The variety and evolution of textisms showed the link to innovation as a driving factor, whether it is for the novelty of something new or a change to something needed, were the typical responses from this type of question. Asking about socialization as a theme was linked to the concrete examples previously mentioned in the earlier questions, but also layered on an abstract consideration about the overall possible increased connectivity with the networks available on the various communication media. Language assistance can be a strong impact for the use of textisms. Compact character allotments of some social media combined with general writing skills gives textisms the ability to express tone without a lengthier flourish of language. Tone was an often expressed need for the use of textisms. Textisms are direct for their intended use and sarcasm can be put on display with a simple smiley face after an insulting remark. Inquiring about textisms as a language helper helped build on this opinion.

To test the mindset for communicating within modern tools of social media, emails, and text messages, the participants were then questioned about motivations and consciously preparing messages. If the author of a post or comment takes into account the fact that his or her message will only be visible to friends versus a larger broadcast, does that change the way that author writes with textisms? Is there a difference between individual and group targeted messaging? Taking into account audience-based motivations shaped the perspective of the writer as well as the audience. These kinds of influence on the social media communication can lead to more skillfully crafted message design.

The focus group concluded with the ending question. This question asked the participants to clearly state or reinforce one point from the focus group. The responses were relatively brief with minimal discussion thus allotted 5 minutes for the agenda. This primarily drew a single poignant component from the already discussed topics helping to solidify a strong walkaway aspect, though it also received a response to a subject that was not discussed, yet the participant felt strongly about. In both instances, that aspect was something important to the participants about the topic at hand. Those remarks added weight to the review and analysis of the focus group as they were the impactful final reference for each particular participant.

Data Analysis

The data came in multiple techniques. The data was developed in three concrete components: the initial questionnaire, the audio recording of the focus group, and a hand written response to one of the questions. Each was handled only by the principal investigator / facilitator. The analysis of those data points was interpreted and presented solely by that individual.

Upon entering the discussion group, each participant was given a blank sheet to create a name plate for themselves and their previously examined questionnaire as a reminder for their responses as well as a guide for defining textisms and textism classifications. For the name plate, they were instructed to provide only their first name, and each was designated with a letter for future referencing to help provide another layer of anonymity for documentation.

The questionnaire was provided to gather basic demographic and usage data as well as provide as a primer for the discussion by defining the terms that would be often used by the facilitator to explain the topics. These questionnaires were printed documents that were disseminated prior to the discussion. The participants were in possession of the document for the

duration of the focus group and they were submitted back to the facilitator at the conclusion of the discussion. The questionnaires are being secured by the principal investigator.

After the opening question of introductions, an audio recording was started for the remainder of the proceedings. This audio recording was handled only by the principal investigator. The audio recording was then transcribed (Appendix 5) by the principal investigator. The letters provided to each participant upon entering the focus group was also the letter representation that each was given within the transcription. None of the last names of the participants are provided within the transcription, and first names are only used when part of the dialogue. Each is defined by a single letter and any use of participant names are redacted from the transcription to ensure anonymity. Each word was accounted. For instances where the participants were unclear or spoke over one another, the principal investigator would repeatedly listen and found the most accurate words and/or phrasing for each participant. The audio recording is being secured by the principal investigator.

For one of the transition questions, the participants were asked to write down a response that would later be shared with the group. Those responses, along with any kind of visual representation, were submitted to the facilitator at the conclusion of the focus group. Each was expressed verbally to the group during the discussion and thus formed part of the audio recording, but the concrete component of the response is being secured by the principal investigator.

The data was then analyzed by the principal investigator. The analysis was from a qualitative perspective. This process was done first by breaking down each question with its corresponding responses. The development of the answers was taken chronologically for impact and theme development. The consistency of a theme was then extracted for overall importance.

Repetition and group agreement added integrity to each extrapolated idea. Each of those ideas were then condensed into themes and reinforced with the ongoing discussion to show validity even with the variances of the overall topic that would still yield a common reply.

The analysis of the data took place in four reviews. First, the principal investigator was the facilitator of the focus group. This allowed for the principal investigator to hear all the responses firsthand, shape the necessary follow up questions, as well as to make valuable notes on every remark. Second, the audio recording was transcribed by the principal investigator. This was a reengagement of the focus group. Their words were then heard and combed over for accuracy which led to hearing the responses multiple times. Third, the transcription was then broken down for themes, quotes, and paraphrasing. Lastly, the transference of the findings into the final development of the overall study allowed for the fourth review of the data.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

From the focus groups, the principal investigator pulled qualitative data to answer the research questions. The information provided by the focus group was analyzed for repetitive themes with textisms. When there was a consensus with any word choices or concepts by the group, then those aspects were considered more impactful findings. When there was a level of passion shared by the group whether in agreement or discourse, then that was also treated as an impactful finding. Anything that evoked a volatile response must be treated as something that would have an effect on a larger audience. Body language and tone of voice was also noted during the participants' responses, to offer further insight into their responses. Each of these aspects was noted as a viewer of the interactions between the focus group participants.

The focus group discussion was transcribed into a written format to analyze for common themes and language. Any consensus of opinions highlighted a strong position toward the question being asked. Common themes and relatable responses that bring consensus from the group in regard to a specific question or from the overall discussion were noted and related back to the initial stance of uses and gratifications. How do these themes relate to how the participants use textisms and how do those themes relate to their interaction with textisms? The analysis demonstrates an understanding of how people see and interact with textisms and if the delivery system or "speaker" had any effect on how it relates to the audience. As gender became a theme throughout the discussion and analysis, the gender of the participants will be noted with either an M for male or F for female along with their letter designation.

Personal Examples

The participants are directed to a PowerPoint presentation displaying a set of textism examples. Each example showed the same statement, “you suck”, altered by a variance of textisms. As each message was shown, the participants are asked to internalize how the message is different to them. This was to help reinforce the varying impact of different types of textisms on the audience as well as how it might be used by the author. Each participant was then asked to consider his or her own messages and then write down one on the provided index card. The participants are prompted to review their own text messages in their phone for a message that they have written or someone has written to them that could have a different meaning than what someone might have interpreted it as. The participants are asked to analyze their own text messages for how textisms could create multiple interpretations from an outsider’s perspective.

Participant F-F began the conversation with a language barrier creating misinterpretation. Her message was the word “weiii” which she uses as onomatopoeia to express excitement or happiness. Her first language is Spanish and when communicating with friends that typically expect Spanish the word “weiii” triggered an unexpected response:

...in Spanish “weiii,” the way that it’s spelled, my friend took it as “dude” but could take it offensively. So my friend was like “What? Um, excuse me? Like what do you mean?” And I was like “No, umm.” I was confused and I thought well that was like, “what is he talking about” and then realized that he took it out of context and thought it was another word and it was misinterpreted as something offensive. And I was just trying to say like “yay” you know, how exciting or whatever.

This exchange showed how a variance of language can be misinterpreted. “Weiii” would fall into a purposefully misspelled word. Through this example, Participant F-F showed how an author can establish a personality through textisms. She realized that “weiii” is a fairly unique aspect of her communication and that sometimes it doesn’t translate. In this instance it demonstrated

confusion between English and Spanish communication, but it also confirmed a loss of meaning if the audience does not know that the author uses “weiii” as an onomatopoeia for excitement.

Participant E-F used an example with purposefully misused capitalization. It was a message intended for close friends that requires the context of that relationship to prevent misinterpretation. Her friend was becoming frustrated by a lack of response:

So she sent me a picture of getting a Mardi Gras mask. So she sent it to me and I didn't respond. So she was like, “HELLO? IM BUYING IT...” like in all caps with dot, dot, dot. But like she was my best friend; she didn't mean it in a mean way. But it looks rude if you didn't know the context of it. I don't know, but I feel like if someone random texting me like that would be like “what's your problem.”

Participant A-F's example was of conversations with her sister and how she “loves to use emoticons. And they, uh, get pretty descriptive.” This statement was received by laughter from the group. The descriptive nature of emoticons in today's messaging was something that was relatable by all members of the group. Emoticons are able to embody full statements and can be strung together to create messages without words, which was a staple of Participant A-F's personal communications with her sister.

Participant B-F's example focused on abbreviations. Her message was “HML LOL” and through her own reflection of the message stated: “I put ‘HML’ like ‘hate my life’ and ‘LOL’ after it, because that is kind of confusing. I'm like ‘I hate my life and I'm like laughing about it.’” Participant G-F agreed that the abbreviation could lead to confusion. Understanding the context of a message is as important as the words. Often, negative words are actually meant to convey a positive or light-hearted idea.

Participant H-F also used an example of a purposefully misspelled word. Her conversations with her friend also require the context of understanding the author's personality, in this example it requires an understanding of her friend's personality:

Mine says “fuck you.” So instead of saying the actual word, that might come across as “what the heck does that mean,” um like my best friend says it to me whenever she gets jealous. I don’t remember why she says this, but she does it a lot, so.

This example shows the importance of establishing meaning consistency for an author’s personality. “Fuck you” would typically be interpreted as a vulgar statement, but in this scenario her friend was understanding and even accepting of such a statement as the norm.

Participant I-M continued with the theme of understanding the context and the author’s personality using a message from his friend as an example. The message he received used purposefully misspelled word, purposefully misused capitalization, and abbreviations. There was also a set of words that also connected to the author’s personality allowing for a more personal conversation with the intended audience. Participant I explained the scenario for the message:

...my friend Maria says she’s in the library sitting next to some girl who is like chomping on her gum really loud or something like that. So I told her to punch her in the head; like just for like a joke. So she said, “Hahahahaha omg I just saw your last text. fucking dead.” And like some people might see that and be like “she’s pretty much like going to kill her” or something like she’s really really going to punch her in the head. But like “fucking dead” means like “I’m laughing so hard. I’m dying because it’s so funny.”

Participant G-F used an example of her response to a friend wishing her happy birthday with a nickname that Participant G-F is not fond of. Participant G-F response used purposefully misused capitalization and an emoticon: “i hate you -_-”. Participant G-F also reflected on her own message, “...if somebody saw that they would probably think, ‘What do you hate her for?’” Participant G-F’s use of the emoticon with two horizontal lines for eyes also demonstrates a typical emoticon used for expressing sarcasm.

Participant D-M’s example also demonstrated a need to express tone. His message to his friend used purposefully misused punctuation: “I am coming over at 530!!!!!!!!” Participant D-M expressed his intent, “So it wasn’t like I was just telling him, I was reminding him that it was

urgent, like changing the meaning since I used so many exclamation marks.” Like the previous example with Participant G-F, textisms were used as a way to express tone, which is often a key element that is lost through text-based communication.

How Textisms Are Learned

The second question asked of the participants, “What started your use of textisms?” They were asked to consider what their first interactions with textisms and where they learned to use them. Was it a friend, an older sibling, or just an aspect of their environment? Participant B-F was the first to chime in, “. . .instant messaging to be honest. Like AIM (AOL instant messenger) and stuff. So I’ve been doing it before I’ve had a cell phone.” Participants F-F, G-F, H-F, and I-M voiced agreement to that statement. Participant E-F added an example, “It’s where we all learned to say ‘hahahahaha’, like when something is really funny or just say ‘haha’ like when it’s a little funny.” Participant G-F agreed with instant messaging, adding “You want to be quick about it, so you abbreviate and shorten things.” Adding another social media environment, Participant D-M noted the history of the language, “. . .I feel like all that stuff kind of originated on like AIM and like MySpace and those things are like really outdated, but like the language that was created like kind of carries on.” Each participant saw it as an aspect of the environment they were engaged in. They were communicating on instant messengers and other social media networks which established textisms as a standard means of communication.

What about those who didn’t grow up engaged in instant messengers and social media platforms? Participant F-F offered, “Like if you ask my dad, he learned it from me.” The group of early-twenty-year-olds agreed. Participant E-F added, “Yea, the same. My dad will text me “FML” (fuck my life), and I’m thinking ‘you can’t say that.’” Her opinion of an authority figure in this setting created an odd interaction with the textism for both the nature of the meaning and

the author using such terms. An older adult, a parent, or any type of authority figure created an expectation for the author's personality. The nature of the communication can also elicit a response to those unwilling to engage in the informal use of language. Participant B-F stated that her father works at a high school and his texting would be "too proper." She also added, "...they used to make fun of him for it. So he would give me his phone to reply. Just make it seem more modern." The intended audience shaped the use of textisms, but the intent will sometimes lose out to the unconscious nature of the author as Participant H-F reflected on her parents:

I try not to use too many abbreviations for when I'm texting my parents. Sometimes I accidentally slip and do it, and they're right there with me. And I'm really surprised that they've caught on a lot, like "ttyl" means or whatever. My Dad especially. It's like ridiculous, but he's got it. I don't know how.

Some outsiders will rebel against the environment as Participant C-M reflected that his dad made up his own textisms and wrote them all in caps only to get a response of "I don't know" from his son. This prompted an explanation from his father which ends up in an explanation removed from any standard or accepted textisms. This example shows how the creation and acceptance of textisms can be a mystery. The creation of a term or phrase into the common vernacular could be a challenge and currently it filters from the younger generations to the older ones.

Building from Participant E-F's response about her father using "FML", the facilitator asked her, "Why would his use of the term seem out of place?" She responded, "...it's just funny because I feel like that's not a joke my Dad would make, but he would in a text message or something. ... somehow it's much more appropriate to say 'FML' than it is to say, 'fuck my life.'" This adds to the nature of the informality of textisms. The connotation of the textism itself added to a playfulness that is not often found in standard text-based communication.

Relationships Influence Language

The next question was about how the group found certain messages “weird” based on the author: “So are there other instances where you think it would be weird, I mean you said your parents, but how many people? If your boss were to send you that?” Participant H-F responded first with the observation that the message had more of a reflection on the personal relationship with the message maker rather than a classification of individuals:

It depends on the relationship with your boss. If you have a really tight relationship with them, and like they’re cool with cussing and that kind of thing, then it would be one thing. But if you have a really formal boss, then you absolutely not use that kind of language.

Participant I-M added an example about textisms, “I have a floor manager at my work and she always sends me winky faces,” which was received with laughter from everyone in the group. The general opinion is that winky faces imply a sexual connotation for most conversations for the age of the discussion group. Participant I-M added,

But like not in that kind of way, she’s like older than me. Like we just hang out, like we’ve just gone to like The Lodge and get drinks or whatever before like in a big group. But she always sends winky faces, and I always think that’s the weirdest thing.

This comment brought into the discussion the issue of age gaps. Participant I-M stated that the person sending winky faces was older, which Participant E-F adds, “I actually get that with older people too.” The implication is that textisms hold different connotations for different generations of textism users. This could also lead to miscommunication when persons are using textisms to have different meanings to different readers. Participant E-F then shared an example:

I communicate with all the people that are like 50 and whatever... But they’ll text me. Like some of them will send me a smiley face and like I can understand that, like I think that’s nice. Like “see you tomorrow, smiley face” but there is something so different about “see you tomorrow, winky face.” I have a few women at my internship that do that, and... I wouldn’t send you a winky face, but I would to my boyfriend.

The group then reaffirmed the difference between smiley faces and winky faces. Participant E-F's offering her boyfriend as the only person she would send a winky face also confirmed the sexual connotation the textism holds. The sexual aspect of winky faces is again addressed when Participant B-F commented, "Especially if it's opposite gender, for sure." The other females in the discussion group agreed with this comment. Participant H-F adds, "I don't think I've ever had a way older man send me a winky face." These prior statements brought gender and age into the discussion, Participant E-F defended the authors' positions based on ignorance of the language, "But like women do that, and I think that's cute, but I don't think they understand that, like, it kind of has a weird innuendo." The hidden context within the world of textisms could lead to miscommunication through the multiple meanings that each textism can have and the multiple ways that any audience member might interpret which meanings is to be implied.

Participant F-F shifted the topic to emails as a weird places to see textisms. Participant F-F stated confusion about textisms in emails: "Even through emails, when you get smiley faces it's just like, 'what is...?'" Participant E-F added, "Yea, like is it really necessary in an email? I don't really think so." This position was not universal through as Participant G-F responded that she sends them in emails sometimes. This aside about emails did not last for long, but reflected on the possibilities for the medium to use textisms while having multiple positions on the subject.

Context and Tone

From the discussion about relationships, gender, and generation gaps, the discussion shifted to context and tone of the communication. Participant B-F created an aside about cultural context:

Participant B-F: "...I have a couple international friends. I noticed that the way that they use [textisms], is totally different. Like my friend, she's from England and she puts like 'Xs' like after every text and statement she ever writes."

Participant A-F: "What does that mean?"

Participant B-F: "It's like kisses. But it's like for them, I don't know, you know like they kiss when they greet. And she's like French and they do it too. It's like a different thing. And they do winky faces like all the time."

Participant F-F: "Yea, more often."

The cultural context was demonstrated by the difference of how the winky face is used. Here the discussion group noted that the European use of winky faces held a different connotation for their age group. This brief conversation added another contextual layer, culture, for textisms. It also added that culture will dictate the textisms used. Not everyone in the discussion group was familiar with "Xs" for kisses, and that such a textism was so commonly used in European English-based conversations.

Establishing tone can be difficult in text-based communication. The use of textisms can easily add a layer of tone to the conversation that might not be understood without the use of informal language. Participant H-F created a discussion through an example about a conversation with her roommate about not cleaning dishes:

Participant H-F: "...you're trying to be nice about it, you'll text them, like you're being mean, but you put a smiley face on the end. So it just kind of smooths it over. It's like, 'clean the fucking dishes, smiley face.' And so it's not as bad."

Participant G-F: "...I do that all the time. Yea, but for some reason it softens the message. Like 'oh smiley face, I'm not trying to be a bitch, but do it.'"

Participant E-F: "Or like the little devil emojis that are smiling. Like the ones that are the devils that are frowning then it seems mean, but the ones that are smiling, like I could send those all the time. Like 'do it' or like 'will you come pick me up, devil faces.' And like something about that is like I feel like seems cute instead of rude."

This conversation showed how textisms are helping to establish tone in text-based communication. The use of playful emoticons allowed for serious and potentially forceful language to take on a less aggressive demeanor.

The lack of textisms allowed the reader to apply a tone to the message. Tone can be misrepresented in language when brevity or grammatical accuracy is mistaken for aggressiveness. Incorrect tone can complicate communication where simplicity, often a desired method, is received as anger. Participant A-F provided an example:

...that if you reply with just the one “k” it sounds like you’re mad at them rather than the two “k’s” (kk). But for me it’s like not a big deal, so why are you looking more deep into a single letter when it’s just easier to type one letter than two.

Two other participants agreed with the statement. In this instance the author was choosing brevity by shortening it to use just one letter, but the audience applies a tone that does not line up with the intent of the author. The agreement of other members helped demonstrate that miscommunication can occur where the tone is not clearly provided. While Participant A-F did not understand the misinterpretation of a single letter, Participant D-M defended the audience interpretation with the example: “Because there is a difference if you get a text that’s like ‘hey’ with one ‘y’ or like ‘heyyyy’ with extra ‘y’s.’ Like ‘Oh, ok. I see what’s going on here.’”

Participant D-M’s position is reinforced with Participants H-F’s and B-F’s agreement.

Grammatical accuracy also implies a tone when set in an informal setting for the group:

Participant C-M: “I was just going to say if they start putting periods onto the end of things.”

Participant H-F: “Yea, I was going to say the same thing.”

Participant C-M: “Pissed off.” (Group agreement)

Participant B-F: “Yea, why is that?”

Participant H-F: “They take the extra time to put the period, you know they’re pissed, like ‘hmmmm.’”

Participant B-F: “And I don’t get that. But it does that. Like do I have to erase the period?”

The discussion group’s agreement, but also confusion, about whether the correct use of a period implied an aggressive tone showed how intent can be lost through text-based communication. Due to the misinterpretation of tone, it could be argued that there is an even stronger need to provide a clear tonal position to remove any possibility of confusion. Lack of grammatical accuracy within a formal setting can also trigger a response as Participant E-F noted, “...if somebody is texting me something for my internship, like professionally, I’m like ‘whoa, why didn’t they put punctuation.’ ...like what’s wrong with them.” This demonstrated how the formal versus informal context can evoke varying degree of interpretations from the same message. Participant E-F then went on to say:

But at the same time, like if I texted you all the time and you always texted me like that then I would know you weren’t being mean. But, like, I put, like, ten exclamations after everything I say. Like if I said “k” to you, you’d be like, “what’s her deal, like what’s wrong with her.”

This brought up an interesting discussion about establishing an author’s personality through the use of his or hers textisms:

Participant H-F: “I use exclamation points all the time; like, don’t even use periods ever. So after every sentence, it’s ridiculous, I don’t even know why I talk like I’m so excited. I don’t know what it is.”

Participant F-F: “Yea I put like smiley faces on everything, and at first, when people, like begin to text me, they’re like, ‘Why are you so happy?’ you know, or ‘Why are there so many smiley faces?’ Or sometimes they take it the wrong way, and it’s like “oh, no. smiley faces.” But yea, so I’ve cut down on smileys.”

The establishment of an author’s identity and tone emerged with the concept of a consistency.

Both of these responses recognized their use of certain textisms without really having a specific

need other than consistency. The consistency created a recognizable personality for that specific author. Participant F-F went on to infer that in these cases, the author is “trying to make the text more personable” with the intended audience.

Phones: Texting versus Calling

The use of texting as opposed to calling stirred a conversation within the discussion group about medium preference based on situation. Participant F-F began with the belief that increased use of textisms is based on the preference of texting over calling. Participant G-F, while ignoring the position of that statement, engaged the preference of texting as opposed to calling. Participant G-F declared a preference for a “phone call over a text any day, cause, it’s quick.” Participant F-F agreed with a preference for phone calls over text messages, but Participant G-F also made an interesting point. Text messages do not always require any immediate attention or response. A text message conversation can go on for hours with few words actually shared. Participant G-F noted this through the belief that phone calls are “quick” even though they require immediate attention and response due to the potential brevity of the conversation in contrast to an extended back-and-forth that can come with a text message based interaction. Participant E-F reiterated the preference for a phone call when immediate response is desired so there’s no need to “stand around waiting for a text message” and also offered the lack of immediate response as a reason to text, “I’m not going to call you to tell you something stupid I saw online.” Participant H-F agreed with the position that in communication requiring immediate response phone calls were more effective than text messaging, she said, “So I call for things you don’t want to wait. You don’t have time.”

Participant H-F went on to acknowledge that there is value in text messages as a way to “get proof.” Often businesses such as a doctors’ office or hair salons would send text messages

to set up appointments or as a means for confirmation with their clients. Participant H-F noted that the practical value of having a documented conversation can help with services.

Participant B-F brought into the discussion the value of text messages in a professional setting. Participant B-F challenged the idea that it's about social etiquette. Within a hospital setting, Participant B-F has had to prepare tests for doctors and age has influenced the way communication evolved:

So, there are certain ones, especially younger ones that are like right in and out, they prefer you to text. And I've gotten more casual with my texting, cause like they'll joke back and forth, so I'll start using abbreviations for the younger ones and people I know that do it. And then the older ones... they've been like, "it's ok to text me." Because I used to just call them, like I don't know how they feel about the whole texting, but, I still with my text with them, I'm very proper. No smileys, just straightforward.

This example showcased the author's hesitation to engage in informal communication with text messaging with those she felt are of a different age generation. And even when told of the preference for text messaging, a certain comfort level had to be established before there was a willingness to lower the formality and use textisms as a playful way of communicating.

Formality on Social Media

Next the group was asked if the formality of the author would shape what language should be expected, and if the medium of communication created allowances for textisms. An example was provided for discussion:

If you were on Twitter and you saw a news entity throw out a smiley face at the end of a message... would that change things, or if you were getting a message from a restaurant you like to follow and they sent you a message and they're abbreviating and they're using different things? Is there a point where you think there should be boundaries between what a business, or a non-profit organization, something that's trying to convey a message?

Offering that formal entities could communicate in textisms drew a strong negative response from the group. A dialogue was built even to the point that the participants recognized their own

language was not up to par for formal communication, yet they do that with the intent that it is designed for different kinds of audiences. Participant E-F believed in separating language based on the author and the audience, “I want to text my sister like a child and I want to text my boss like he’s my boss. ...it’s just not professional and I would like you to act like a professional if you want to be a professional.” Participant B-F used an example of CNN using a smiley face would cause that entity to, “lose some respect... regardless of the topic. Cause I would just be like, ‘This is all light and fun, but to use emoticons and stuff, I think it’s a little too much for them.’” Participant B-F did allow for an exclamation point, but Participant E-F made sure to clarify that two exclamations would create a negative reaction with the statement, “Do you not realize you can’t do that? I think it would just kind of make them look dumb.” As the discussion of punctuation rolled on, Participant B-F then brought back the topic of a period creating tone, “Like how we were saying you can seem pissed off using periods. You also seem very serious. But for a professional business you want to seem serious.”

The topic shifted to social media and whether or not that created a special situation for communication efforts. Participant H-F viewed Twitter as being acceptable for abbreviations due to its 140-character limitation, but Twitter still did not allow for emoticons or specifically, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen them use like a ‘u’ instead of typing it out, but they definitely condense everything that they say, and I don’t know, that’s different now.” While Participant H-F did allow for some language variety due to character constraints, she thought there was still a need for formal communication. Participant E-F also respected some of the shortenings on Twitter, “because that’s what they have to do.” Though there was a clear difference between Twitter and other social media outlets without character restrictions per message. Participant E-F specifically noted that a business’s presence on Facebook would not allow for textisms, “Why

don't you just write it out?" Participant G-F reiterated this position, "...like understandably on Twitter, but like on Facebook or Instagram or any other place that doesn't have a word limit, if you're not following AP style, I'll be like, 'What the hell are you doing, do you not know how to write news style stuff?'"

Participant I-M then offered a new consideration, "depends on what company though."

Up to this point the group was mired in thinking about formal businesses and news entities.

Participant I-M brought up that following Anderson Cooper on Twitter is not the same as liking Taco Bell on Twitter or Instagram:

I'm not paying attention to AP punctuation marks. Taco Bell's Twitter is really good with customer interaction. And they seem to maintain professionalism really well while still communicating with customers and still doing the whole internet presence thing without compromising. I was signed up for some fast food chain, like they would send you text alerts... but they used abbreviations and anytime I saw it, I was like "ugh." It was so obnoxious, like "come on, you're a business."

Participant I-M's observation of two similar businesses, both fast food companies, was that language can shape the response. In this example, Taco Bell had strong customer services when directly interacting with its followers, but the other fast food entity with direct text messaging with textisms was a negative experience for this audience member. Participant H-F offered another informal company, Zoom Tan, that will send messages like "Happy V-Day" or "SEVERE BLIZZARD," but the type of company also elicited the response, "You're going to a tanning salon, so it's, like, way different." Participant D-M chimed in to the tanning salon's messaging tactics, "Yea, that's weird to me. I don't like that." This was followed up with Participant C-M remarking, "Whenever I see promotional stuff, it seems so forced to me. Like whenever they put really, like 'rly', like 'you rly will love this' or something. It just seems... like stop trying to relate to me like that." This statement received agreement by three others from the group. It was interesting to note that the three offering a negative response to these

businesses using textisms were the three males within the discussion group. While some of the females voiced agreement to a negative response when dealing with a message that comes across as patronizing, the three people who specifically brought this to the discussion were the three males at the table. From these interactions, it was interesting to note that gender created a specific interaction as both author and audience as interpretation of messages reflected differently based on gender.

There was an interesting interaction that occurred in relation to the issue of putting textisms into spoken word. It came across as jarring and it grabbed those textism-users as silly, and yet endearing. Participant A-F brought up an example of a movie trailer for the *Muppets* by speaking abbreviations and emoticons as saying someone from Twitter said these messages. This tactic engaged the people who use textisms directly. It puts on display a disconnected relationship between the internet and real life. Participant D-M saw it as “trying to force the internet culture and real life together. It just comes across as awkward.” Participant C-M also used a commercial example of the fast food chain Wendy’s. In that commercial they created songs from Twitter messages directed toward Wendy’s, which Participant C-M approved as “using it just to show how stupid you sound sometimes when you post that. Like instead of saying like LOL they would say like ‘lawl’ and stuff like that and just mispronounce everything.” Participant E-F remarked how the literal interaction of textisms came across funny, but since it was a joke, “it didn’t seem as forced as like...” where Participant D-M filled in, “actually trying to utilize those things.” This direct confrontation, one that did not attempt to patronize the intended youthful audience, was approved by Participants C-M and D-M, who previously voiced disapproval at these tactics, as they often came across as “forced.”

The facilitator reiterated the idea that there is a difference between a formal and informal company to reinforce the concept of informal business entities to the discussion group. The group was then told to consider the previously mentioned companies Taco Bell, Budweiser and Coca-Cola and to indicate whether the participants could see these organizations using textisms in any kind of media campaign. Participant C-M was the first to offer that a viable Budweiser campaign could focus on drunk text messages. Participant H-F agreed with that sentiment, but also reflected that a “medical company or something more serious, you wouldn’t want them to be using all these emoticons or something.” This gained a sarcastic response from Participant B-F, “Yay, colonoscopy,” followed by group laughter.

Participant A-F brought the conversation back to the informal brands by adding Coca-Cola could use textisms as a way to gain a younger audience. Participant A-F also added that Budweiser attempting to use such tactics would also appear to be targeting a younger audience which would remove the concept of drink responsibly, thus a more mature language should be used to avoid any misinterpretation of who the target audience was. As such, Participant A-F presented the position, that textisms are only used to target the young, which the facilitator redirected to the group asking if there are any emoticons or abbreviations that could target larger demographics ranging from the 20s to 50s. Participant I-M was the first to say that communicating with 20-year-olds and 50-year-olds is not the same. Participant I-M recalled from earlier in the discussion that both he and Participant E-F noticed that wink faces from their older female coworkers caused a negative response from the younger intended audience. Participant E-F offered a range of examples to the newly shaped question which caused this discussion:

Participant E-F: “I would say that the only universal emoticon or whatever is a happy face. I think that everyone is comfortable with happy face and I don’t think that no matter

what boss sent me that, or what client sent me that, or whoever, or what friend, I would never be like, ‘Ooh, they sent me a happy face. That was strange.’ I think that’s the only one. But when people send me the ones with the little ‘p’, I’m like, ‘What? Is that necessary?’ You know? I mean I do know people that use them. Not a lot of my friends do. So it seems awkward or seems weird. But I think most companies can’t get away with the Taco Bell thing. Like somebody posted a picture of their Taco Bell and Taco Bell tweeted back with just like a heart (<3). And like I think that’s cute. But I wouldn’t feel comfortable with my... I don’t know what company. I would say like most food companies it would be okay for them to do that, but not like...”

Participant I-M: “Like Mercedes. Like something that’s not geared toward our age demographic. It’s just not appropriate. It’s just not the same.”

Participant E-F: “But it would be like okay for Mercedes, if I’m like, ‘Ooo, just went out and bought my new Mercedes. Like so excited,’ and they tweeted back like ‘Congratulations.’ Then I would be like, ‘That’s nice.’ Or like Lilly Pulitzer is from where I’m from, so I was like, I tweeted something like ‘It’s great to be home and in a Lilly store.’ And Lilly Pulitzer tweeted me back like, ‘Welcome Home [Participant E].’ And it’s like ‘XOXO’ or something, but they said something like that and I thought that was cute. Like the interaction was great and appropriate for Lilly, but if it was J. Crew that said ‘XOXO’ I probably would have been like ‘What is that for?’”

Participant G-F: “I like posted a picture like when I went to Datz. They retweeted me, like 3 minutes later. And so I think that’s good interaction. But they’re not sending me winky faces or anything like that.”

Participant E-F: “But there’s just like a lot of weird exceptions I think.”

This conversation presented multiple interactions by businesses directly to their customers. It started with Participant E-F offering the opinion that the happy face is the only universally accepted textism. Participant E-F then explained that no matter the author, she would not have any kind of negative reaction to interacting with that textism, which was clearly juxtaposed to the emoticon smiley with the lowercase “p” which caused awkwardness. This awkwardness was given some parameters, that while Participant E-F was well aware of the smiley and its use, it was not used by her friends. Comfort level, expectations, and relevance are factors in acceptance of any given textism. These factors played a part when dealing with any specific age group. While the topic of smileys was presented in a one-on-one interaction, the business to individual

message of a simple textism, as demonstrated by Taco Bell with the heart emoticon, was also met with approval by Participant E-F who offered that most food-oriented businesses could use such informal messaging. Mercedes was then offered up as a business beyond the use of textisms by Participant I-M. Mercedes is most likely interpreted to be a luxury item, and it is typically an older audience that has the ability to purchase such an item, the participants did not believe textisms were appropriate. Participant E-F then offered two companies that could target the same demographic, but are kept from the same use of language. The example of Lilly Pulitzer being able to use “XOXO”, yet J. Crew not being able to offered an interesting piece of brand interaction. Lilly Pulitzer is specifically a female-oriented company, which allowed for a feminine set of communication tactics that may not typically be allowed by a male or in this case gender-neutral company such as J. Crew. Business identity could also be connected with gender orientation for communication. Participant G-F then offered an example of a restaurant and its quick response to interacting with its customers. Both speed of interaction and direct interaction were considered to be positive, but the recipient also noted the lack of winky faces was a positive. Again the specifics of smileys have shown to hold a correlating value to those receiving it.

The example of Taco Bell using the emoticon for a heart led Participant E-F to reinforce a belief that a generational context must be a factor for the audience, she said,

Our grandparents would like Taco Bell to just say, “There’s a new item on the menu, period.” ...like where we would be okay with Taco Bell sending us heart emojis. Where like if my grandparents were like 70 or 80 they would see a less than sign and a 3 and be like, “What does that mean?”

The statement takes on a stance with a large age gap from the 20-year-olds in the discussion group. Participant B-F lessens that gap saying, “You know to 18 to 20 versus 30 to 40, probably have different reactions to interactions like that” which noted that the generational context could

be reflected between siblings as much as it would be felt between parents and children.

Participant B-F then warned about textism usage in marketing, “You’re going to limit your audience too cause they’re going to be excluded if they don’t know what the abbreviation is or can’t interpret it.”

Textisms to the User

The facilitator then asked the group to consider why each of them used textisms. Previously, it was mentioned that some use textisms as a signature. A type of smiley face or the way that punctuation is used becomes a way for the audience to recognize the author. The facilitator asked the group to consider “when you send [a textism] out are you expecting it to be interpreted in a certain way? You’re saying it with a little bit more of something that [your audiences] are going to get out of it. Why do you put them in at all?”

The response was about establishing an author’s personality. Participant I started it off by answering the last question offered by the facilitator:

Participant I-M: “To set the tone. You have to set the tone. I could tell you ‘shut up period (shut up.)’ means leave me alone, but like ‘shut up exclamation point (shut up!)’ could mean like, ‘are you kidding me?’ Completely different.

Participant E-F: “Like ‘no way.’”

As Participant I-M pointed out, tone is difficult to express at times and textisms provide a way to add the nuance of voice to the simplistic letters of text-based communication. Participant I’s example also demonstrated how context and connotation provide a large factor in interpretation. The language shifts meaning on how it is laid out. Participant E-F piggybacked on the idea with another simple statement that can easily alter its meaning based on the author’s manipulation.

The conversation about creating an author’s personality shifted as Participant B-F discussed about knowingly creating a consistent tone:

I think it's a fine line between knowing your audience and trying to brand yourself like with what you're saying with like when she puts "XO." It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter your demographics. But when interacting with your boss or your friends, you have to decide like how you are going to text so you got to tailor that. As a business you have to decide like, "this is my brand" and stick to it across the board or if also you're going to tailor it to your specific audience.

Participant B-F added in the considerations of consistency and branding. An author's personality, whether from an individual or an inorganic business, needs to have a voice. That voice then becomes relatable. It interacts with the audience.

The consistency also created a habitual voice, but the habit of language can also create an unintended tone. Participant C-M opened a sentiment that other participants were able to mirror:

Participant C-M: "I find myself putting 'lol' sometimes when I don't even mean to. Like I just text and I just start putting 'lol'. And I just find it's been in the wrong situation at times. I didn't even mean to, it just happened out of habit."

Participant H-F: "Yea, I use 'haha' a lot. Like at the beginning of every sentence. I don't know why. Everything is funny apparently."

Participant D-M: "That's like one of my biggest pet peeves though, like someone is like, 'What are you doing?' I'm like 'heading to work.' And then they're like, 'oh, lol'. I'm like, 'Why is that funny? I'm just going to work. Why is everybody laughing at me?'"

As Participant D-M responded, the habitual use of certain textisms can also disconnect the audience from the intended tone that the author may be trying to present. An absent-minded reply may not always relay the intended message.

New audiences may not be privy to the nuance of an author's personality, which could lead to miscommunication. The audience must be able to absorb the messages with the proper tone, or the communication is lost. Participant E-F also noted that gender is a large factor for a new audience's misinterpretation:

I send things like that with a ton of exclamations to boys. And boys would think nothing of it. Where girls would be like, "Why did she send me exclamations?" It just depends on who you're talking to if they really care. But if I'm texting my boyfriend and I'm not texting with a bunch of exclamations, he's like "Hey, is something wrong?"

Participant B-F described this level of consistency as a “commitment” which received group agreement. Participant C-M queried the group with an example prompting this dialogue:

Participant C-M: “Has someone ever taken your phone and texted a friend, and that friend knows it’s not you based on how it’s written? It’s like really weird. It’s just like you can’t tell my handwriting, but you can tell how I text. I just thought that was really weird.”

Participant B-F: “Or you can tell it’s not your friend. Like a signature.”

Participant C-M: “Yea, exactly. Cause he spells this like that.”

Participant D-M: “Yea, that’s happened a bunch like, if I’m like... like sometimes my friend will be texting or whatever and they’ll be busy and I’ll be like, ‘oh I’ll just text them back.’ And they’ll say ‘No, no, no. It’s not me.’ How are they going to know it’s not you? It’s just a couple words. But it’s true. Like if someone starts texting me from a number, and they’re saying weird things that person wouldn’t usually say. I’ll say, ‘Okay, who is this?’ Like I can tell that’s not my friend.”

Participant E-F: “But I’m saying that’s always the case. Like I was saying, my friend texted me like, ‘HELLOOOO? I’m buying it.’ Like she usually types in all caps when she’s excited or like I put a million exclamation points. And so, like if I’m driving and like, ‘Hey, would you text them back?’ I’m like say, ‘blah, blah, blah, exclamation, exclamation, exclamation.’ Or she’ll be like, ‘and put it in all caps.’ Because that’s what we have to do. What people are accustomed to us doing.”

Participant B-F: “My husband was texting for me like when I’m driving, and it was to my boss. And I’m like ‘What are you doing? Why are you texting her abbreviations and stuff?’ And he’s like, ‘Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t even know.’ Like at least look at the previous messages of how I talk, you know?”

Participant I-M: “Like she said before, with each friend, cause I have another bartender at work. He’s a guy. And I’ll text him, we text to each other like this all the time, ‘Hey sister. Are we working together this Friday?’ And he’ll be like ‘yes girlll’ with a bunch of L’s. And put kiss emojis on it. And just to be obnoxious. But if he’s like short with me, I’m like, ‘Oh my god. I must have pissed him off last night.’ Like why are we not...?”

This exchange over the idea of consistency to create an author’s personality demonstrated the expectations of the audience. Elements that seem out of place can lead to audience confusion and potential misinterpretation of the message. If the language or tone is out of place, the

audience will recognize this disconnection from the previously established style and question the meaning of the message. This reiterated the concept of branding and if a business wishes to embrace some kind of author's personality, then consistency will be a key factor for relatability with any kind of audience.

Emoticons are as much a part of an author's personality as the word choices. Participant C-M stated that using "the smiley face just to set the tone," and also went on to respond to the prior PowerPoint example that "there's a completely different tone between those last three when it's just a colon and something else." The example offered showed a basic message with slight changes to capitalization, punctuation, and emoticons. The example offered different smiley faces then asked the group if those different smiley faces would evoke different responses. Participant F-F explained, "There's also different kinds of smileys. Like you could put the straight eyes, or like the dots, and there's like ones with a nose. There's critiques of the smiley." This opened up some strong opinions when it comes to the actual formation of a smiley. Participant C-M then asked the group, "You ever use the brackets?" Participant F-F responded in favor, which Participant I-M replied "I hate that. I hate the nose. That's the worst."

Understanding that the emoticons' designs can cause such a strong reaction makes them a cautionary tool to be used. Design is not the only drawback to some emoticons. Technology can also create a gap between what the author and audience can expect from one another. Participant H-F and E-F reflected on how iPhones, with the use of iMessage, can allow for a set of emojis that not everyone can access. These emoticons can be displayed to an audience without the software as squares instead of images or not displaying anything. The audience in these situations could feel excluded or angry at being separated from the message. Understanding the

basic combinations for standard emoticons will be valuable for times when you have to “revert back to old days” as Participant H-F viewed their usage.

Textisms to the Receivers

The facilitator then shifted the group to the other side of the discussion, “When you receive the [textisms], how do you interpret them?” Textisms are all about establishing tone, but tone is often lost, as Participant G-F noted:

If some random person was sending me a message and it had a smiley face on it, it just softens it a little bit. It makes it a little bit like, for some reason it’s just different than without the smiley and the same with like punctuation. But it could definitely change if it’s there and shouldn’t be...

Participant G-F pointed out two aspects of communication with a new person: 1) it can soften the message and 2) it can create an unintended tone. Understanding that a smiley face can be taken as a negative or inappropriate addition to a message can become a factor when attempting to use such textisms with an audience that has not yet been initiated in the author’s personality.

Participant B-F added that when meeting new people, especially with group projects for school, it is something that she has to consider,

You either put an exclamation or a smiley or something. Because you’re talking about, “we need to do this,” “we need to meet up.” You don’t want to be seen as the bitchy boss one. You soften it up with something then you feel like it’s going to help work as a group.

This sentiment received general agreement, but also brought up another issue with tone: sarcasm.

Participant I-M explained the negative side of a smiley face, “Someone who has clearly been a bitch, sends me a text and be like, ‘make sure you guys do your part by midnight tonight or you might not get good on your evaluations, smiley face (☺).’ It’s like, why are you being an ass?”

Participant C-M agreed that a “smiley face can also mean you’re being just a bitch.” Participant B-F agreed that a smiley face can also amplify a negative statement.

Participant E-F brought up an interesting gender context related to author personalities by stating that “only girls do that. Guys do not send mean smiley faces.” Participant B-F further analyzed the gender context, “If I was in a group full of guys, I wouldn’t expect exclamations or smileys. Girls are more complicated.” Participant H-F added that her boyfriend will send “k” and “not be mad. He’s just like okay, perfectly fine.” Short messages appear to be more acceptable and more often used by males than females. Participant I-M also reflected that he likes “sending short texts.” He went on to explain how that is not always received positively by his audience,

I’ll just send people back just “k” or “see you there” or something like two or three words. And they’ll be like, “why are you being short with me?” and I’m like, “okay, I’m not being short with you. I’m just saying everything I have to say.” I’m like “k, see you there” like I’m just saying what I need to say.

Gender context for both author and audience are necessary to understand in order to create a clear message. Neutral message design can have its rewards, but if the message can be focused, there is a higher degree of relevance when a relatable a gender can be presented.

Tone is a repeated theme throughout the discussion. Participant I-M clarified why that tone is needed in the text-based communication formats,

Person to person, there’s body language there. And you’re able to read the person based on how they’re moving. And whenever you’re texting someone, body language is completely removed. So it’s almost like a fabricated body language that works. When you say “lol” like in today, no one, I don’t think anyone is really like laughing out loud when they say “lol.” Just kind of sets the mood as being light-hearted.

Participant E-F added how “shrug” has a meaning of a non-committal “that’s nice.” Participant G-F noted that devaluing of some textisms through over use as with “lol,” “If I like actually mean that I laughed out loud at something, I’ll say, ‘I literally lol’d.’ That really was an ‘lol’ moment. You have to clarify.” This statement received general group agreement and Participant C-M added, “Something different that just ‘lol’” and Participant G-F remarked, “‘lol is just like

‘ha.’” Participant H-F added to the lack of body language, “it’s been misconstrued before where someone thinks you’re mad and you’re not really.” Participant F-F provided a simple example, “You’re just busy. And then you can’t reply really long, so you’re just like ‘ok.’” Participant G-F explained, “That’s one of the biggest downsides to texting in general, there is no body language and there is no face to face interaction, and it is so easy to miscommunicate with people and for that kind of thing to happen.” Participant B-F demonstrated the value of textisms as some people are “so serious and all of a sudden I get a smiley, and I’m like ‘oh my god, he loves me.’” A simple exclamation or smiley for Participant H-F added a layer of humanity, which Participant B-F agreed it makes things “a little bit friendlier.” The established author’s personality also added to the tone, as Participant E-F used her work environment as an example:

With women at my internship, different women that don’t send winky faces, I’ll be trying to set up appointments with them, and they’ll say “great, see you tomorrow, happy face.” I’ll be like, “oh my gosh, she really likes me” and she might not necessarily like me, but it makes it feel that way. Like you feel special because you got a happy face from someone you wouldn’t expect to get a happy face from.

The problem with these statements is about the relationships of authors and audiences as Participant H-F noted, “I guess it just depends. Like all so circumstantial.”

Initiation Language

The facilitator then asked the group to reflect on a topic briefly presented earlier, “When you establish first contact with someone through text messaging, your first communication, do you normally have textisms in it? Or for females you do? For men you don’t?” Participants I-M and H-F agreed with the gender context. Participant I-M also added that when contacting new group members:

I get frustrated sometimes based on the first thing they’ll say or like the first thing they’ll respond. Because I’ll be like, “oh, no. I’m with like dumb people” that like I don’t know based on what they said or I’ll be like, “oh they’re really well put together.” Just based on

a first interaction how they talk either online or on texting. I can kind of like, evaluate this person even going to be valuable to the group.

Participant G-F agreed, “As bad as it is, it’s almost like a first impression.” These text-based communications will establish the identity of the author. Participant E-F spoke about a first interaction with a friend-of-a-friend in which she was requesting a favor due to that person’s skillset. She wanted to be clear that it was a request and not a demand, so she added a happy face “so he got the impression I wasn’t being bossy or mean.” The response given to Participant E-F was positive but included a winky face, which received group laughter prompting Participant E-F to clarify that she did not think “he meant that in a sexual way.” This disconnect with the use of the winky face is due to generational context. Those within the discussion group see the winky face as having an inherent sexual connotation, but the belief is that the author does not. Participant H-F then asked if he was older to explain the casual use of the winky face. Participant B-F simply stated the belief that “some people do it” as if the generational context for older groups allowed for the winky face to exist without a sexual implication.

First impressions with text-based communication can be a period of learning about each other and so Participant A-F’s first texts to a new companion are “grammatically correct, because I don’t know how they’re going to respond.” This allowed for the other side of the communication to set the acceptance level of textisms. The response to that initial message will determine the level of textism use as Participant A-F reflected, “if they’re going to do abbreviations and smiley faces, then I’ll slip that in occasionally. But if they’re going to reply all correct, then I’m like, ‘ok, this person probably doesn’t want to mess around like that.’” Multiple other females around the table agreed with this comment. Gender-based consideration opened up another aspect of the gender context for communication. If males do not inherently use as many textisms, then there is less worry about how they are initiated into the conversation

since neither party is expecting their general use. Female-to-female or female-to-male conversations will more likely be testing the willingness for each party to use textisms when the other participant is an unknown.

Etiquette is also an important piece of communication, even in the realm of social media. Establishing respect is an integral part of communicating, especially when building relationships. Participant F-F provided an example to explain this position which blossomed into the following dialogue:

Participant F-F: “I think greetings in particular are very important, especially for first impressions. Even if it’s just a message through Facebook that somebody needs my help, instead of saying ‘Hi, my name is so and so.’ I know your name because I can see it, but the fact that you’re just like, ‘What is the assignment for this?’ I’m sorry, but if I haven’t known you for a long time I need like a ‘hi’ at least.”

Participant E-F: “Hey, I’m sorry to bother you.”

Participant B-F: “It’s really a social etiquette thing.”

Participant F-F: “Aside from it being formal or informal, sometimes it’s taken too lightly and shouldn’t, because you lose respect for people that way.”

Participant I-M: “Yea, I think that’s one thing that does overlap between real life and text language. If I see you in person, say that I don’t know the assignment for class. If I walk up and I’m like, ‘Hi, you’re such and such from that class. Do you know what the homework was?’ I wouldn’t just walk up and say ‘Hey, what’s the homework?’ That would be strange.”

Participant E-F: “Yea, like ‘Why’s this guy so rude?’ I think that etiquette is really important whether you’re talking about a business, or a boss, or your friend, or whatever.”

The value of a greeting was highlighted in this discussion. The participants expected to be engaged in a social setting. This called for recognition of the audience as a participant in the conversation. By exchanging pleasantries upon initial contact, it opened up the possibility for a more fruitful relationship. Even within a casual format, the greeting held great value for creating an active and responsive audience.

Familiarity also added to the variance of communication when initiating conversation.

Participant E-F returned to the example of her friend-of-a-friend that she asked a favor from:

If I would have found him online and was getting in contact with him, I probably would have called and been like, “Hi, my name is [Participant E-F first and last name]. Blah, blah, blah,” instead of being like, “Hey, I’m Stephanie’s friend” and send him a smiley at the end. But I wanted him think I was nice and I would want him to be like, “oh, I never met [Participant E-F], like she seems nice.”

In this instance, Participant E-F used a common textism to create a friendly tone which she expected to increase her likability of the intended audience. Her level of familiarity as a friend-of-a-friend rather than as a complete stranger also dictated her using a text message as compared to a phone call. This example also showed that the user believes that a phone call is more formal and is preferred to a business transaction with an unknown source. Participant B-F used this example as a reason to have a contact’s email and phone number since “text in general, I think is seen as more casual; so people expect a little bit more casual language.” This idea that the medium dictated language is further developed with Participant B-F’s example, “Like my supervisor, we’re super casual in text, but if I send her an email it’s: ‘Hello,’ ‘Sincerely,’ da, da, da... all my contact info. It never varies from that. No smileys in the email.” This example showed that even with a casual relationship with intended audience, the format of communication changed the textisms allowed into the conversation. Someone whom an author is comfortable sharing textisms will refrain from their use based on the medium of the exchange.

The facilitator continued on with a slight shift to focus on media of communication. The group was asked to consider emails, which were previously brought up and generally agreed upon that textisms should not be used in that format, as well as how they’re accepted on Facebook and even more so on Twitter. Participant H-F confirmed that emailing “is where I type the most grammatically correct.” And this was due to the belief that emails are “for

professional companies where I'm applying for a job, or internship, or something," which was just cause to stay away from textisms and smiley faces. This was the standard approach toward emails, but it was not the only approach. Participant H-F continued with an example of a workplace environments about a company that was "very loose" as "they want us to feel like they're not our bosses. They want us to feel like we're equals. They'll send smiley faces and abbreviations and stuff." This organization was juxtaposed with another work environment that Participant H-F had experienced where everything was "very professional" thus reminding that there is a need to adjust to the audience as required. Participant I took a stronger stance on the subject with the belief that outside of a "chat" interaction on "Facebook, Twitter, and text messages; [textisms] shouldn't be used." This was explained further by questioning how emails are used: "When else do you use your email? When you're applying for a job. Contacting somebody you work with. You never email your friend, 'Hey, what are you doing this Friday?' You just text or call." Participants G-F and B-F added to the stance using sarcastic textisms of "Yo, Prof." Participant I-M reiterated his position by defining an email as a "formal letter." Participant B-F went on to say, "I don't think that's going to evolve either. I feel like that is kind of the standard. ...as far as emails go, I think that's one of them that's going to stick around as far as the format." The separation of emails from other forms of text-based communication led to the belief that there is a variance of formality. Participant I-M related the textism allowable formats to a "chat" which holds a simplified and relaxed connotation.

Key Takeaways

As the discussion group came to a close, the facilitator asked each participant to state what would be the most valuable thing to remember about textisms. Participant E-F began by speaking out against pandering,

...sometimes businesses seem like they're trying too hard or like someone is not a part of our generation or it just seems very unnatural. Why are you going to make things awkward? You don't need to send me a winky face or say anything crazy. So I think keeping it simple is very important.

The goal is to reach your audience, not make them uncomfortable. Simple language is great for presenting a neutral statement, but if having a message that is more relevant to the audience is the ultimate goal then other tactics can be useful. Though when that audience can sense pandering, it removes them completely from the message. Participant G-F recognized that exceptions will exist, but “for the most part, the business world needs to stay professional, and your personal life is your prerogative.” Participant G-F also added that businesses should “try to stay away from textisms when they are not appropriate.” Participant H-F also noted the importance of keeping things “professional,” because when you get away from that you can't be taken “seriously.” This opinion seemed to be against the general use of textisms, but ultimately left it up to the business to create its own identity with the additive consideration for exceptions.

Participant F-F appreciated that textisms are meant to make “more conversations more personable and more relatable and more interactive. But...there's not a set standard. It's going to vary from person to person.” Textisms are constantly changing as seen with each shift in generational context and not every person within a specific generation is learning the same set of textisms. Participant D-M added to this subject by clearly positing that “language changes over time” by using examples of outdated slang from United States' 1960s and '70s. Extending this idea to the present topic, Participant D-M doesn't “think that textisms are the future. They might not disappear completely but their usage and how they're accepted and how often they're used is probably going to change.”

Participants A-F and B-F agreed about the need to “know your audience.” Participant A-F believed that language goes through phases for the individual. Textisms are common as a kid, but will taper off with age as the individual becomes more professional with maturation. Participant B-F added that any author needs to “just be consistent and be appropriate for your audience and be sincere. Don’t try to be something you’re not.” This idea lends agreement to the previous remarks against pandering. Creating relevance for your audience requires understanding the expectations of that audience. Though it is not just about what the audience wants for themselves, but also what is expected from the author as well.

Participant I-M reflected on one of the categories of textisms, rather than a topic previously mentioned in the discussion. The use of abbreviations was brought into question as Participant I-M claimed:

Everyone probably uses all of [categories of textisms] on here except for the abbreviations. No one says “l-8-r” for later. Or even like “2much”, no one uses the number “2”. The only time I’ve ever had to be limited by the number of characters is on Twitter. Like that’s the only reason. No one else does that except old people. Like my parents will send the letter “r”, letter “u”, “ok” question mark (r u ok?). Something like that, I would never send someone or even anyone in this room “r u ok?” or like why with just the letter (y). Abbreviations are... like really, “rly”... No one uses that.

While making generalizations with the use of “everyone” and “no one,” Participant I-M also made the issue a generational context issue. This statement, opined the use of abbreviations is limited to the “old people” which is then characterized as Participant I-M’s parents. The group added to this sentiment that abbreviations are often used with sarcasm when they are used by this generation within the discussion group. Participant E-F described the use of abbreviations when “kidding.” Participant I applied the word “obnoxious” to using abbreviations. And Participant C-M agreed that he uses them to be “annoying.” Though Participant H-F previously stated her friend’s use of abbreviations and reiterated that point with “except for ‘jones’ with ‘obv’ and all

that stuff. ‘obv totes starbs.’” Participant E-F made a gender context claim by explaining, “It’s just what girls do. Like I say ‘obv’ when I’m being annoying.” As Participants H-F, B-F, G-F, and E-F defended the female use of abbreviations, it became clear that it is a gender context that dictates their usage and audience acceptance. Participant B-F added that she uses “prob” frequently to the point of never being able to recall spelling out the entire word in a text. Participant G-F also used “probs” with the additional point that her brother has a negative reaction to her use, which added to the disconnection due to gender. While Participant I-M wanted to make a strong stance against the use of abbreviations by his generation, the discussion that emerged from that position revealed that the category of textism is still prevalent and that it can also lend to the application of sarcasm in text-based communication.

Participant C-M posited that the most valuable concept from the discussion group is that textisms can set the tone. The use of smiley faces can be very valuable since they can establish tone. Participant C-M reflected:

You can’t hear what the person is saying. So I’ve gotten in arguments because of that. Because I’m like, “Why are you so angry?” And they’re like, “Oh, I wasn’t angry at all.” And I think a smiley face or just an “lol” or something, and just be like, “Oh, he’s not being an asshole. He’s just talking.” Cause you can’t hear tone over text.

The facilitator then asked whether “people assume you’re speaking negatively unless you put a smiley face?” The response from multiple participants was it “depends on the person.”

Participant F-F added that “some people will say misleading things.” Participant C-M then offered the example “clean the apartment” versus “clean the apartment, smiley face.” Clarifying tone is an important role for textisms in general text-based conversations. Participant B-F then summed it up, “Do it with a smile.”

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

The topic of textisms in today's communication is fairly new and not often delved into by scholars. The questions of the discussion were framed in a way to find answers related to the user's sense of uses and gratifications. Research question one asked whether the communication platform would decide which textisms are used. It is safe to say that the medium will highly influence the language and will determine whether the audience will be more or less responsive to the use of textisms. Research question two asked why a person would use textisms. People use textisms to create a more relevant and familiar message with their intended audience. And in return, that audience has developed a set of expectations from those authors. Research question three asked how an audience member interprets textisms in communication. In general, textisms are interpreted as youthful, immature, playful, often feminine, and informal. It elevates a relationship through a feeling of familiarity.

Textisms have many uses in message tactics. They create a new presentation of the same message in a way to produce a more relevant message to different types of audiences. Text-based communication lacks many aspects that face-to-face communication possesses. Textisms allow for a text-based communication to easily feature aspects of those face-to-face conversations. Textisms allow for tone. They enable an author to build a personality within the text. Textisms cannot exist on their own. As with any language, they are created by a group of people for that group of people. General acceptance will allow for textisms to grow beyond their original purpose as more and more are willing to learn, engage, and understand those specialized

terms. As textisms can only exist in text, they are also tempered by the media of text. Society has a degree of expectations when it comes to language, but those expectations are constantly shifting, expanding, and altering.

Tone is not always easily translated into text. Consider a conversation in any normal environment. Sitting across the table from your audience, you smile. As your words pour from your lips, her eyebrows raise, her lips sag, and her head tilts. You see and internalize those cues and adjust your message. She sits up and moves forward in her seat. Her eyes focus intently on yours. Your message continues and her previous frown takes on a slight smile in the corner of her mouth. This is body language, and body language is nonexistent in the text-based communication world. So now you want to demonstrate that smile to your audience. Simply insert a smiley face emoticon. If you want to add some playfulness through sarcasm, then toss out the negative statement followed by “lol.” Your audience will interpret that message differently because the textisms are adding a tone that would not previously be there. Emphasis of words is enabled through the allowance of improper capitalization and punctuation. The basics of language is changing through the acceptance of textisms.

Textisms allow for the nuance of varying degrees of tone to be available. Textisms themselves can embody a tone with each varying character, symbol, or out of place punctuation. And the most valuable aspect is that the audience gets it. The audience understands the difference between a smiley face, a winky face, and a face sticking out its tongue. Textisms are created, accepted, and shared by the community. This is where people are able to separate “ha” from “hahahahaha” and where “lol” has lost the impact that those letters once had. “Laughing out loud” now has to be explained to the extent of how funny something actually is since it has become so common place in today’s text-based language. Textisms are so prevalent that their

absence allows for audience to provide a tone, which may be misinterpreted. The proper use of grammar is often received as anger, aggression, and seriousness. By using periods properly, audience can interpret that as the author being “pissed off.” Brevity of message is internalized as someone “being short” and not wanting to converse, rather than the actual possibility of the message holding everything that needed to be said or the author being pressed for time and unable to embellish.

Thus, in today’s text-based communication there is often the need to clarify tone. A single textism easily puts tone into play. While it may not be readily used in most professional settings, in the realms that allow for any kinds of informality their usefulness should not be ignored. Textisms can soften the tone of a message in a couple characters. It can reduce the potential to perceive a statement as aggressive. And a message that would typically be negative can be softened to allow the intended audience to internalize the meaning before taking outright offense to it. Tone is a tool to be used in all areas of communication, yet it is often lost when language is removed from voice.

Textisms also allow for style to become a signature. In the world of branding, being able to solidify a recognizable signature holds great value. Textisms allow an author to hold a personality that is unique to him or her. That personality is formed through the choice of textism. As the participants mentioned, there was an expectation of language depending on the author. They all spoke about the recognition they would have for their messages both as author and audience. The choice of certain words, the way that punctuation and capitalization was manipulated, or even the acronyms that were commonly used to lighten messages became a distinction. These aspects became a piece of the author’s identity with familiar audiences.

The author's personality takes time to cultivate. It is built upon consistency. It is a norm established through a commitment to a single style. Examples were provided scenarios where an author would ask someone else to write their message. These examples demonstrated how another author would write incorrectly due to lack of attachment to the style. The actual author would dictate the message exactly as it should be typed with desired textisms. This was to show the expectations of the authors. When those expectations were not met it would be received with discomfort and confusion. The audience is able to recognize the style of that author and is also able to recognize when that style is not being met.

The author's personality can have drawbacks. It is such a consistent style, that it can become a habit. Such a habit may become an unconscious inclusion. This unintended inclusion can also lead to a disconnection from the audience. That style may hold a tone that can be interpreted as inappropriate for that message. This is also the risk of not reviewing or editing any form of writing upon any type of medium. An author's personality may embody such a flavor for language that an uninitiated audience may miss the references or misinterpret the playfulness. Those who are dealing with a new audience that is not familiar with an author's personality should proceed with caution to ensure that the message is delivered properly. Taming the personality for a neutral statement can assist by taking time to slowly develop that personality with the intended audience.

These potential pitfalls are easily avoided with a little preparation and awareness. The real value of having an author's personality for text-based communication is that it increases relevance. The participants had an expectation and appreciation for that style. Having a personality is important for any consistent author. It can be attached to an individual or a business. And that commitment grows with the audience. The messages from that author's

personality are more relatable as they become a characteristic of the speaker rather than a simple message. The personality can give an abstract essence such as giving a company a style that the audience will be able to recognize. The message becomes unique and personalized to that author, which then develops familiarity with the audience. That familiarity will create a more relatable message, thus allowing for more relevance and interaction with the audience.

Knowing your audience is a key component for messages. If a message is to be internalized and appreciated, it must be relevant to that audience. Context is a major factor for promoting relevance with any statement. Context can come in many forms for a wide variety of audiences. Generational context is a separation of how language is received by different age groups. Gender context showcases how a message can take on different meanings for both the author and the audience depending on the gender of all parties involved. The relationship between author and audience can alter the way a message is received. A message that may break norms in most generic situations, can take on a new life if there is a previous relationship. The medium of communication will also determine what is acceptable. Different tools have different expectations and are used to craft the same set of words into different messages.

Generational context is very important when communicating with textisms. Different age groups have learned textisms at different stages of their life while the language has been evolving. A common and often repeated example was the winky face. While the smiley face is almost always used for a playful, sweet, and non-intimidating purpose, the winky face has shifted its meaning over the years. Those within the discussion group, early-twenties-year-olds, often felt that the winky face held a sexual connotation. They stated that those using the winky face from older age groups were ignorant of that meaning, and when those used the winky face it most likely held a different meaning than the sexually related meaning understood by the

younger age group. Different age groups may have used the common textism to have a different meaning, such as playfulness rather than sexuality. The winky face might have been a relic as it reached those of this discussion group therefore it took on a different implication rather than become extinct. This was also noted for the face with a tongue sticking out, “:P”. The group had a strong negative response to this emoticon, though those of an older generational context used it freely. While tone is a key aspect of textisms, the group also believed that luxury-type items would embrace a tone for those of an older generation. Such items of value would require someone to be able to purchase or access that item, which would not typically be someone of a younger generational context. One participant took a strong stance that abbreviations, the reduction of a single word into a smaller textism, were something done only by “old people.” This reduction was further debated and shaped to a group position that abbreviations used for phonetics alone was something for an older generational context. Specifically the reduction of words into the letter name representations such as with “you,” “are,” and “why.” These changes in the shaping of messages can be noticed with a shift of generational context and acceptability by those of the age groups.

Winky faces are not simply a subject for generational context as it also has a gender context. Gender context refers to the specific way that the language is adapted by the author for the audience based on the genders of both the author and the audience. As with the winky face, the group noted that older females used it more likely than older males. This may be because only females use the emoticon, or it could be that older males recognize the generational context and only send them to females or males of their own age groupings. Either conclusion results in a gender context. There are ways that the language bends depending on the gender of those in

the conversation. These adjustments are noted in all direction of communication: female to female, female to male, male to female, and male to male.

This is demonstrated through initiation tactics. Female initiations are a feeling out period to see what is acceptable for textisms. Females will lead with no textisms or basic textisms to see how the audience engages with those. This allows the audience to set the terms of acceptable usage of textisms with a response to the statement or general feedback of approval or disapproval. Females will use this subtle opening with females to see how the other female will respond. Female to male initiations have a lower expectation of textisms in the response. The belief is that males will not actively engage or establish textisms as common ground but are more likely to wait and reciprocate the language with females. This is similar to male to female initiations where the male will not open with textisms, but will respond with the use of textisms to a female who introduces textisms to the conversation. Male to male initiations will be void of textisms. Neither male has an expectation to introduce textisms to the conversation, nor will either feel like the dialogue is lacking without textisms being included. This also helps with the belief that males do not have a need to explicitly declare tone. Their messages are generally accepted at face value with no further interpretation for anger or aggression. Often stated throughout the discussion was that males did not intend to convey for an aggressive tone with their plain-language statements. This lack of tone continued in their same gender initiations and ongoing conversations.

Gender can be a hurdle with some message designs. An unintended gender audience may not interpret the message correctly and may not respond to the same textism use. The discussion introduced the idea that only females will send a “mean smiley face.” This smiley face is attached to a negative message, but it is interpreted not as a softening tone, but rather as a

sarcastic or passive aggressive tone. The audience is interpreting that the author is purposely using the smiley face to create the perception of a softer message when in fact it is doing the opposite. Males have a strong negative reaction to the abbreviation class of textisms. The reduction of a single word is met with disdain from males. They see abbreviations as obnoxious and annoying, whereas females may also attach those descriptions to abbreviations, they see them as being playful and cute.

Gender context can also be applied to a business. A business can create an author's personality along with an assumed gender. The business can then use language acceptable and expected of that gender. The gender must then be maintained just like any other aspect of an author's personality. Gender is a reality of any author. It is a way to create a more personable message, and as such, the audience can feel cheated for having gender expectation when that author breaks from the assumed role.

Relationship context can shift how language is perceived. Certain general expectations can be broken once a relationship expands those expectations. Textisms and messages can hold a personal meaning for those involved. The outsider's perspective no longer has value once a relationship is established. Often the expectations of formality can fall away within an acceptable relationship. One example used was the relationship between boss and employee. This relationship would have expectations of serious language, no textisms, and a requirement for proper grammar. When a relationship is created, it can change those expectations. The relationship may introduce textisms and allow for a playful tone. The language can change as agreed upon by those within the relationship. Individual classification, such as boss, coworker, or professor, will lose weight once a personal connection is created between author and audience. Traits that lead to accepting a change due to relationship are comfort, expectations, and

relevance. Each trait creates a feeling for both the author and audience. Those feelings become the reason why each will use and seek out the use of textisms. It helps create a bond through familiarity. These factors are also why the initiation is important. And there are some requirements for initiating an unknown audience. The digital age has often been found to be neglectful of the social niceties that have existed throughout history. The participants expanded on this idea through social etiquette. The basic need for greeting and introduction is understated in today's world. There is value for etiquette when seeking to establish ongoing relationships. The audience must be treated with respect. The relationship cannot be examined as if speaking into a void with no care for how that abyss responds.

Relationship context has many aspects for consideration. Culture is important in determining how the audience will interact with the author. Language can lead to misunderstandings. Like any word, and especially slang, textisms are rooted in a language. If author and audience differ on the language from where the textisms are being derived, then this can lead to misinterpretation. Even when a common language is shared, the context of a textism may change based on region or country. The group demonstrated this fact with an example of a British person, communicating in English with an American having a communication breakdown. The textisms change with the culture from where they are being presented. Textisms are different, but even the same textism can have a different meaning with a change in culture. Language is not always a barrier either. When multiple cultures often overlap, then there are regional textisms. Europe has many languages but also common textisms among those many languages due to their overlapping environment. Culture can also be created within a microcosm. Sub-cultures, like a specific business, can create their own set of textisms. A phrase

common to members will be met with confusion from outsiders. Culture is important to any relationship context, where the author and audience must find a common tongue.

Another building block of the relationship context is formed from community. Community is similar to culture, with a difference that the bond is one of a lesser formation. Community has the overall design of textisms in mind. The community shapes the inclusion and exclusion of textisms. The community is the origin for textisms and the birth of their dissemination. The teaching of textisms is first from the community, and if that textism is accepted it will expand to everyone within that community.

Formality is the last aspect of the relationship context. The relationship creates expectation due to the position of the author and the audience. The formality will vary the acceptable language. Establishing a sense of authority or casualness will manipulate how the audience will receive and respond to messages. Initiation will vary with the type of formality presented in the relationship. The participants noted the difference between communicating with their boss, their coworker, their friends, and even friends-of-friends. Each relationship is different, and each variance of formality changed the way the initiation and ongoing communication occurred for both author and audience. Formality changes the allowance of textisms. While, in an informal setting, lack of grammatical principles might be acceptable, in a formal setting, that absence would be completely jarring and taboo. A simple textism, such as an extra exclamation point or a basic smiley face, would be misplaced in a formal setting regardless of topic.

A business can even dictate its formal presence as with any aspect of the author's personality. The language will alter the business' perception as an authority, an advisor, a friend, or a clown. That selection in formality will create an expectation from the audience. That voice

should also align with the expectations of that business's identity. If the author's personality is interpreted as forced with a sense of pandering, the audience will reject and hold a negative response to that business. Textisms are generally seen as a way to reach a youthful audience. If a business's identity correlates with an older audience, then having a youthful voice would create a disconnection as the business would be seen to be targeting a younger generation. An example of this was presented as the fact that alcoholic beverages using textisms might be interpreted as promoting underage drinking.

A communication medium can also dictate the allowances for textisms. Each medium has an associated level of formality attached to it. The group often reflected the serious nature of emails, followed by the phone calls, and the most informal being text messages. One participant noted the "chat" formats would be acceptable for textisms as they are inherently less formal. Social media would fall within the chat-like formats. Medium dictating formality can overwrite the acceptance level determined by the relationship context. Often it was stated how no matter how comfortable the relationship, emails should remain free of textisms and embody all seriousness. While participants did experience textisms in emails within some casual organizations, they also felt that they were unnecessary and did not feel completely comfortable with their use.

Businesses can determine their internal and external communication culture. They can shape their formal presence. This can open the acceptance of text and instant messaging, but similar to emails, the discussion group believed that any internal business communications should be free of textisms. Businesses that use social media as a way to communicate with their external audience, should follow the rules of spelling and grammar. While professional acronyms were acceptable, no playful language should be utilized for business communications.

The participants did recognize the possibility of varying formal presences, but also did not see the value of textisms.

The group discussed a variety of aspects to communication. They noted their introduction to the text-based slang on instant messengers when they were young. They were inducted through their community. Phone calls were described as “quick” in comparison to text messages, since text messages did not necessarily require an immediate response and that the conversation could be drawn out due to that aspect. Text messages offer a way of having proof by creating an electronic paper trail that would not occur with phone calls. Customer interaction on social media receives high approval. There is a technology gap with textisms. Not all electronic devices can interpret emoticons in the same way. Different devices will translate symbols differently and some are not able to receive those symbols at all. When using textisms, it is often necessary to know the basic designs. In general, it is best for a business to not use textisms. There are exceptions, and ultimately that knowing your audience is the only way to really know those exceptions. And if there is a universal emoticon, then it would be the smiley face.

Further Research

The principal investigator does not believe this study can be applied universally to all audiences. This study was conducted with a young group in their early-twenties. They were all ethnically white, college students. Each was enrolled in a communication course. Their expectations for language and its professional use have been shaped by their studies and their peers. While the research does hold value in looking at the personal interpretation and usage of textisms, it does not embody all the possibilities for the language. I believe conducting this discussion with groups of different ethnicity, age, and education would result in a different set of

responses. I also think a group of complete diversity would also change the findings and alter how each question was discussed. This study is exploratory by design and an introduction into the possibilities of what textisms may hold for modern communication.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Participant Questionnaire

Name: _____
Course Name/Number: _____
Professor/TA: _____

Demographics:

Sex	Age	Race/Ethnicity (check all that apply)
<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> 16 or younger	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> White
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="checkbox"/> 17 to 19	<input type="checkbox"/> Black
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20 to 22	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian
	<input type="checkbox"/> 23 to 25	<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic
	<input type="checkbox"/> 25 or older	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

Focus Group Availability: _____ Seat: A
CIS 3115
Thursday, February 13, 2014
4:00pm to 5:30pm

Phone Communication Usage (choose the most accurate response):

Preferred method of phone communication:

- Phone Call
 Text Message
 Email

How often do you text message?

- Few times a day (< 20)
 Throughout the day (20 to 50)
 Constantly (50+)

Social Media Usage (choose most accurate response):

How often do you use social media?

- Constantly
 Few times a day
 Once a day
 Less than daily
 Rarely

How do you use social media?

- I only read on social media websites.
 I read and comment on social media websites.
 I read, comment, and contribute content to social media websites.

Please Read and Answer Page 2

Textism Usage:

Textism: the creative use of text based communication that falls outside the standard rules of spelling and grammar

Textism Types:

- Emoticons: use of a visual symbol either created on its own through a program or through characters to form a symbol. Ex. <3 :(☺ @~'~
- Acronyms: shorten a group of words into a few characters. Ex. LOL, JK, OMG, BTW
- Abbreviations: shorten a single word into a few characters. Ex. l8r, rly, thx, r, y
- Purposefully Misused Capitalization: words or whole messages are typed in all caps. Ex. "WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?" "HE did WHAT to HIM?" "I can't believe you just said THAT!"
- Purposefully Misused Spelling: differs from abbreviations because the spelling errors are often done for emphasis rather than reduction of characters. Ex. "Oreeeaallllyyy?" "I seez you!" "So you loooooovvvee him!"
- Purposefully Misused Punctuation: used to express an emphasis for the statement. Ex. "You did what???" "I can't believe that just happened!?!?!!" "Well duh....."

Do you use textisms?

- Yes No

If yes, then how often:

- Constantly Occasionally Rarely

If yes, which textism(s) do you use:

- Emoticons Purposefully Misused Capitalization
 Acronyms Purposefully Misused Spelling
 Abbreviations Purposefully Misused Punctuation

Thank you for your time and your responses.

Appendix 2: Participant Demographics & Textism Use

Basic Demographics					
Participants: 9					
Sex		Age		Race/Ethnicity	
Male	3	20 to 22	8	White	8
Female	6	23 to 25	1	Hispanic	2

Preferred Method of Phone Communication:

Phone Call	2
Text Message	6
Email	1

How often do you text message daily?

<20	0
20 to 50	6
50+	3

How often do you use social media daily?

Constantly	5
Few times a day	4
Once a day	0
Less than daily	0
Rarely	0

How do you use social media?

I only read on social media websites	2
I read and comment on social media websites	1
I read, comment, and contribute content to social media websites	6

Do you use textisms?

Yes	9
No	0

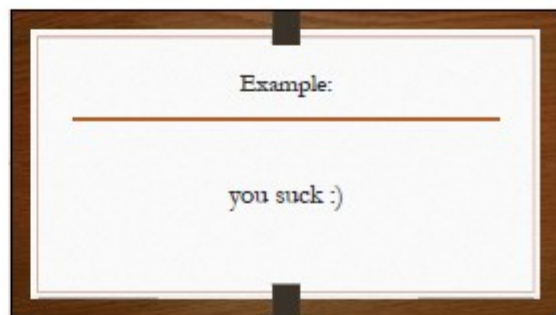
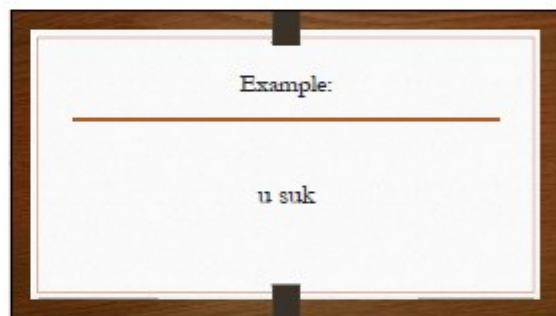
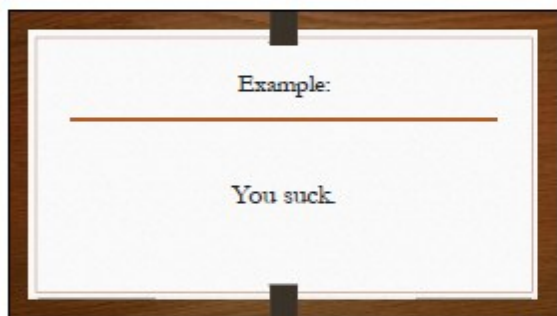
If yes, then how often?

Constantly	5
Occasionally	4
Rarely	0

If yes, which textism(s) do you use:

Emoticons	8
Acronyms	8
Abbreviations	5
Purposefully Misused Capitalization	7
Purposefully Misused Spelling	7
Purposefully Misused Punctuation	8

Appendix 3: Focus Group PowerPoint



Example:

you suck :P

Example:

you suck ;)

Review:

• You suck.	• you suck ;)
• You SUCK!	• you suck :P
• u suk	• you suck ;)

Appendix 4: Index Card Personal Response

Haha ☺

A

HML. Lol

B

Do you want a brew?

C

I am coming over
at 530!!!!!!!



HELLO?
IM BUYING IT....



weiii !!

^ < ^ ?



21-52

Ferris
Wendy's



i hate you -_-

Ⓒ

fack you

Ⓓ

Maria: Hahahaha omg I
just saw your last
text. fucking dead.

Ⓔ

Appendix 5: Focus Group Transcription

Upon entering the room, participants are instructed to grab materials and offered food and drink.

Introductions and initial question is asked about the commonality between all the participants. They were all recruited from an advertising course at the University of South Florida. Each participant told their name and the reason why they took the course. This was to initiate conversation, have each participant speak and move everyone toward a more comfortable setting for the discussion.

Each Participant is coded with a letter (A-I) to note the order of discussion. Focus group conductor is coded with the letter Z.

Z: Pretty much to get everything interactive and understand where the nuances of language itself, I'm just going to roll through this real quick. If you were going to take an example...

(Participants are directed to a PowerPoint Presentation displaying a set of examples.)

Z: See this one, standard language, capitalization, punctuation. But that's the message that you could send to your friend. You've probably seen it. Someone has probably sent it to you at some point or another. But then as you roll through the concept of how it could be manipulated. What can textisms really bring out when you start to manipulate the way things are spelled. The way that they come across visually. Do people start to interact with them differently whether it depends on how you spell it? Does it change the context to say something, but yet alter its interpretation? Does something as little the variation of faces, as found in these examples? When you come across and you see these kinds of things, I mean as just looking at this, have you ever worked with it? Have you ever sent a message you meant it to be something different just because you put a little face on it or you spelled something a little differently? (Participants nod and two voice agreement) So pretty much from there, I want you to, everyone has a little index card, and if you have your phone on you or you can just think about it. Think of a message that you've written or that someone has written you that would have a different meaning than what someone might have interpreted it as. Whether it involved spelling, or manipulation of punctuation or exaggeration, however it was and just write down a quick example. If you have your phone, you can just scroll through and find just like your first, best friend's last message to you that had something that really interacted in a way that most people probably wouldn't understand.

(Participants begin to scroll through phones and write down a message on their index cards [Exhibit __].)

Z: Give you guys a couple minutes to figure out and find one you're willing to share.

B: Does it need to be something big or small, cause there's going to be a lot?

Z: Enough to fit on the card.

I: And something that we understand, but if someone else saw it they probably wouldn't?

Z: Not necessarily anybody wouldn't understand it, but the general population might not. I mean, if you showed it to some guy on the street, would he know what's going on? In a world with emojis, I won't ask you to draw too accurately.

G: You said to draw two emojis?

Z: Oh no, I was just saying if it has emojis, you don't have to worry about being too artistic.

G: Ok.

Z: I know I can't draw anything. So, I don't expect that everyone else should be able to.

D: You want us to draw two emojis too?

Z: Oh, no.

(Few participants laughing. Everyone finishes writing on their index cards)

Z: That is unless your message has emojis. Would anyone like to start us off and share a little?

F: I can start off. Well I often say like "weiii," like out of excitement, like fun, instead of "yay" you know. And it's actually funny because my first language is Spanish, and in Spanish "weiii" the way that it's spelled my friend took it as "dude" but could take it offensively. So my friend was like "What. Um, excuse me? Like what do you mean?" and I was like "No, umm." I was confused and I thought well that like, "what is he talking about" and then realized that he took it out of context and thought it was another word and it was misinterpreted as something offensive. And I was just trying to say like "yay" you know, how exciting or whatever.

Z: You know that's a common thing, like I said, what becomes a common interaction between two people can misinterpreted by an outside viewer. Even if you're intending them to understand your message, sometimes it can be misdirected.

F: And then it was afterwards, and I was like "no. that's not what I meant." So.

Z: Anybody else? We're all going to go so...

E: I was texting my best friend she was at a store getting something for me, so she was like "make sure answer your phone so I can get it." So she sent me a picture of getting a Mardi Gras mask, so she sent it to me and I didn't respond so she was like "HELLO? IM BUYING IT...." like in all caps with dot dot dot. But like she was my best friend; she didn't mean it in a mean way. But it looks rude, if you didn't know the context of it. I don't know, but I feel like if someone random texting me like that would be like "what's your problem."

A: Mines not like really a story, but my sister text me a lot and loves to use emoticons. And they, uh, get pretty descriptive so (group laughter) and it's just like that little thing and she just said "haha" to something I told her.

C: My friend always asks me if I want a "brew." But not like a beer, but a coffee. But he calls coffee a brew. And I thought that was like something that somebody wouldn't understand if they saw it out of context.

B: I put “HML” like “hate my life” and “Lol” after it, because that is kind of confusing.

G: Yea with the abbreviations. Yea, that is could be like that.

B: Yea, I’m like “I hate my life” and I’m like laughing about it.

H: Mine says “fuck you”, so instead of saying the actual word that might come across as “what the heck does that mean,” um like my best friend says it to me whenever she gets jealous. I don’t remember why she says this, but she does it a lot so.

I: Mine is my friend Maria says she’s in the library sitting next to some girl who is like chomping on her gum really loud or something like that. So I told her to punch her in the head; like just for like a joke. So she said, “Hahahahaha omg I just saw your last text. fucking dead.” And like some people might see that and be like “she’s pretty much like going to kill her” or something like she’s really really going to punch her in the head. But like “fucking dead” means like “I’m laughing so hard. I’m dying because it’s so funny.”

(Group laughter)

G: Mines really simple. My roommate called me; she has a nickname for me that I really don’t like. And she said like, my birthday was yesterday so she texted me, “Happy Birthday Danish.” Because my name is Dana. So she calls me Danish, which is like annoying. So I texted her back saying, “i hate you” with the emoticon that’s like the two horizontal lines for eyes “-_-“, and if somebody saw that they would probably think, “what do you hate her for?”

B: And she was just telling you, “happy birthday.”

G: Yea. (laughter)

D: I’ve been trying to like to meet up with this friend of mine for a while now and every time it seems like something comes up and he’s like “oh, I’m sorry, like I was planning to do this” or I show up somewhere and he’ll be like, “I can’t make it, like I got caught up doing this.” So then last week we made plans, and I was like, “I’m going to come to your house at 5:30 whether you’re there or not. I’m going to be at your house.” And so I texted him “I am coming over at 530!!!!!!” with like a billion exclamation marks. So it wasn’t like I was just telling him, I was reminding him that it was urgent, like changing the meaning since I used so many exclamation marks.

Z: Ok, so we all know we do it ourselves. Everyone’s got their, you know. So the question is, “What started your use of textisms?” Like, once upon a time no one used them. So what was your first interaction? Was it something that a friend taught you? Was it something that an older sibling taught you? Did you just learn it from?

(Laughter)

B: I think mine came from, um, like instant messaging to be honest. (F, G, H, and I voice agreement) Like from AIM and stuff. So I’ve been doing it, like um, before I’ve had a cell phone, so.

E: It's where we all learned to say "hahahahaha", like when something is really funny or just say "haha" like when it's a little funny. Like, (laughter) I mean I never really thought about it that way but I think that is kind of what it is.

G: Yea. It's always been for instant messaging with me too. You want to be quick about it, so you abbreviate and shorten things, and whatever.

D: It's kind of funny because I feel like all that stuff kind of originated on like AIM and like Myspace and those things are like really outdated, but like the language that was created like kind of carries on.

F: Like if you ask my dad, he learned it from me. (Laughter, group agreement)

E: Yea, the same. My dad will text me "FML", and I'm thinking "you can't say that." (Laughter)

B: He works at a high school, so like he would text too properly and like they used to make fun of him for it. So he would, like, give me his phone to reply. Just make it seem more modern.

H: I try not use, like, too many abbreviations, for like, when I'm texting my parents. Sometimes I accidentally slip and do it, and they're like right there with me. And I'm really surprised that they've caught on a lot, [what] like "ttyl" means or whatever. My Dad especially, it's like ridiculous, but he's got it, I don't know how.

C: My Dad just makes up his own (group laughter). He'll be like "I'm going to the grocery store" and write it all in like caps. And I'm like, "I have no idea what that means." Good times.

Z: That's interesting going back to what you said about your dad saying "FML" (directed toward E) seemed out of place.

E: I mean, cause you know what I mean, I don't know what's wrong with that. Like I would say that out loud, I'd be like, "Wow, my life sucks" like this would happen to me. But like joking and then it's just funny because I feel like that's not a joke my Dad would make, but he would, like, in a text message or something.

B: Like he doesn't curse or something?

E: No, he does. But I just don't think he would say that.

B: Ah, like verbalize it really?

E: But somehow it's much more appropriate to say "FML" than it is to like say, "fuck my life." (Nervous laughter) Excuse me.

H: It's not polite. It's vulgar.

E: Yea, it's just not at all. It's bad.

Z: So are there other instances where you think it would be weird, I mean you said your parents, but how many people, if your boss were to send you that?

H: It depends on the relationship with your boss. If you have a really tight relationship with them and, like, they're cool with cussing and that kind of thing, then it would be one thing. But if you have a really formal boss, then you would absolutely not use that kind of language.

I: I have a floor manager at my work and she always sends me winky faces. (Group laughter) But like not in that kind of way, she's like older than me. Like we just hang out, like we've just gone to like The Lodge and get drinks or whatever before like in a big group. But she always sends winky faces, and I always think that's just the weirdest thing.

E: I actually get that with older people too. I'm a financial representative at my internship, and like, I communicate with all the people that are like 50 and whatever, and their veterans and they've been there forever. But they'll text me. Like some of them will send me a smiley face and like I can understand that, like I think that's nice. Like "see you tomorrow, smiley face" but there is something so different about "see you tomorrow, winky face". (Group agreement) I have, like, a few women at my internship that do that, and I'm like, it's just, you know what I mean, I wouldn't send you a winky face, but I would to my boyfriend. Like, yea.

B: Especially if it's opposite gender, for sure. (Female agreement)

H: I don't think I've ever had a way older man send me a winky face.

E: But like women do that, and I think that it's cute, but I don't think they understand that like it kind of has a weird innuendo.

F: Even through emails, when you get smiley faces it's just like, "what is...?"

E: Yea, like is it really necessary in an email? I like don't really think so.

G: I actually send them in an email sometimes.

E: Do you?

G: Yea.

B: I don't know if this is, like, going off topic, but I have a couple international friends. I noticed that the way that they use it, is totally different. Like my friend, she's from England, and she puts like "X"s like after every text and statement she ever writes.

A: What does that mean?

B: It's like kisses. But it's like for them, I don't know, you know like they kiss when they greet. And she's like French and they do it too. It's like a different thing. And they do winky faces like all the time.

F: Yea, more often.

H: I think another thing is too, is like if you have a roommate who like, I don't know, for example, like will not clean your dishes. And so you're trying to be nice about it, you'll text them, like you're being mean, but you put a smiley face on the end. So it just kind of like

smooths it over. (Group agreement) It's like, "clean these fucking dishes, smiley face." And so it's not as bad. You don't feel as much, you don't feel mean, I don't know.

G: No, that's totally true, I do that all the time. Yea, but for some reason it softens the message. Like "oh smiley face, I'm not trying to be a bitch, but do it."

E: Or like the little devil emojis that are smiling. Like the ones that are the devils that are frowning then it seems mean, but that ones that are smiling like I could send those all the time, like "do it" or like, "will you come pick me up, devil faces." (Group laughter) And like something about that is like I feel like seems cute instead of rude

A: I just learned the other day that my sister, that if you reply with just the one "k" it sounds like you're mad (two voice agreements) at them rather than the two "k"s (kk). But for me it's like not a big deal, so why are you looking more deep into a single letter when it's just easier to type one letter than two.

D: I definitely, I disagree with that though. Because there is a difference if you get a text that's like "hey" with one "y" or like "heyyyy" with extra "y"s. (H and B voice agreement) Like, "Oh, ok. I see what's going on here."

C: I was just going to say if they start putting periods onto the end of things.

H: Yea, I was going to say the same thing.

C: Pissed off. (Group agreement)

B: Yea, why is that?

H: They take the extra time to put the period, you know they're pissed, like "hmmmm".

B: And I don't get that. But it does that. Like do I have to erase the period?

E: But at the same time, like if somebody is texting me something for my internship, like professionally, I'm like, "whoa, why didn't they put punctuation." Like it seems like what's wrong with them. But it's all like super judgmental. But at the same time like if I texted you all the time and you always texted me like that then I would know you weren't being mean, but like I put like ten exclamation after everything I say. Like if I said "k" to you, you'd be like, "what's her deal, like what's wrong with her." (Agreement from group)

H: I use, um, exclamation points all the time. Like, don't even use periods ever. So after every sentence, it's ridiculous, I don't even know why I talk like...

B: Like when'd you start it?

H: ...I'm so excited. I don't know what it is.

F: Yea I put like smiley faces on everything, and at first, when people, like begin to text me, they're like, "Why are you so happy?" you know, or "Why are there so many smiley faces?" Or sometimes they take it the wrong way, and it's like "oh, no. smiley faces". But um, yea so I've cut down on smileys.

E: It's like, um, they're funny.

F: I think the reason why, I find it ironic because at the same time I find people that don't like to talk on the phone as much, or you know they prefer to text, get that you're trying to make the text more personable with you.

G: I disagree with that. I prefer a phone call over a text any day, cause it's like quick.

F: I do too, but I find people that don't.

H: I, like, text sometimes for like, to get proof of like, not like in a crazy, psycho way, but like a lot of my doctors' offices now will send me text messages for my, like, appointments and they're like "you have an appointment," or like my hair salon, "you have an appointment this day, this time." And so I can say, "No you told me it was this time" and I can show them, you know, if there is, uh, discrepancy...is that the right word? I don't know...between like who is showing up at the right or wrong time, I can say "no, you guys told me to come at this time," so I think in certain instances texting is definitely helpful. So as a reminder.

E: I prefer calling when it's something like, "Hey, like are you there yet? Like I need to meet you" so I don't have to like stand around waiting for a text message. But like if I'm sitting in class doing nothing, then I'm going to text my friends and be like, "Oh my gosh, guess what I saw on Facebook." I'm not going to call you to like tell you something stupid I saw online or just something.

H: I would say like if you're at the grocery store and you're like, "What kind of pasta sauce should I get?" I don't know. So I call them for things you don't want to wait, you don't have time.

B: I, um, it's kind of weird cause, I guess it's a social etiquette thing too, cause I work at a hospital and, like, we get test and procedures ready for doctors. And they're busy and they're talking to, you know, like giving consults and stuff all day. So, there are certain ones, especially younger ones, that are like, right in and out, they prefer you to text. And like I've gotten more casual with my texting, cause like they'll like joke back and forth, so like I'll start using abbreviations for the younger ones and people I know that do it. And then the older ones, I've like gradually, they've been like, "it's ok to text me." Because I used to just call them, like I don't know how they feel about the whole texting, but I still with my text with them like, I'm very proper. Like, "We're ready for you. Thank you." No smileys, just, like, straightforward.

Z: So I guess, do you think it would ever be odd to see these textisms start to translate more onto formal sites? Like if you were on Twitter and you saw a news entity throw out, some kind of, a smiley face at the end of a message; they want to share, like, happy news, for once. Like if they saw a smiley face, would that change things, or if you were getting a message from a restaurant you like to follow and they sent you a message and they're abbreviating and they're using different things? Is there a point where you think there should be boundaries between what a business, or a non-profit organization, something that's trying to convey a message? Is it better or worse? And we know, we talked a little about how the older generations are becoming more affluent with the language and they're starting to interact with it. And they start to understand it.

So is it becoming more commonplace? And do you see it, if it's available now, or should it be something that might be available in five, maybe ten, years, or should proper grammar always be part of the business world?

E: To keep them separate. I want to text my sister like a child and I want to text my boss like he's my boss. I just, I don't know it that's like, I thought that it was just going to me that said that, but I think we all kind of feel like it's just not professional and I would like you to act like a professional, if you want to be a professional, I guess.

B: Like if CNN put a smiley face on the end of something I would lose some respect I think, I mean regardless of the topic. And I think it, like, the furthest I would even through social media expect a news agency or something to go to would be like an exclamation mark. Cause I would just be like, this is all light and fun, but to use emoticons and stuff, I think it's a little too much for them.

E: But how like I put, like, ten exclamations after a sentence, like that's not appropriate. Like there's nothing that's, like, intelligence or professional or anything about that.

B: It seems too casual and it can, for them, be immature or even...

E: Well yea, and you would wonder if they put two exclamations after their news story, I'm like, "do you not realize you can't do that. Like you put one there and that's how it works." I don't know. I think it would just kind of make them look dumb.

B: Yea, like how we were saying you can seem pissed off using periods. You also seem very serious. But for a professional business you want to seem serious even when you're being like...

H: I think on things like Twitter, that's when they add in abbreviations and things like that obviously cause they only have 140 characters. But definitely, I don't think I've seen one where they do like smiley faces or anything like that, they definitely do have to write in a way quicker way. I don't think I've ever seen them use like a "u" instead of typing it out, but they definitely condense everything that they say, and I don't know, that's different now.

E: I think that's okay, because that's what they have to do. But if they were doing it on Facebook, I would be like, "why don't you just write it out?" like a business should.

G: Even in the strictest sense, especially in the news or media type stuff, like if I saw two exclamation points or..., like understandably on twitter, but like on Facebook or Instagram or any other place that doesn't have a word limit, if you're not following AP style, I'll be like, "what the hell are you doing, do you not know how to write news style stuff?"

I: That depends on what company though, because on like one hand I follow, like, Anderson Cooper on Twitter and I would expect him to, you know, keep it like together, like PR news or something like that. But if I follow like Taco Bell on Twitter or Instagram...

D: Yea, I was about to bring up Taco Bell.

D: ...I'm not paying attention to AP punctuation marks, I mean. Taco Bell's Twitter is like really good with like customer interaction. And they don't like, I mean, I don't even have a Twitter, but

I've seen their feed and like everything. And they seem to like maintain like professionalism really well while still communicating with customers and, you know, still doing the whole internet presence thing without like compromising. Because, I don't know if it was like Sonic or something, I was signed up for some fast food chain, like they would send you text alerts like, "oh come in for a free thing," I can't remember what place it was exactly, but they used like abbreviate it and anytime I saw it, I was like "ugh." It was so like obnoxious, like come on, you're like a business.

H: Well like, I got a text today from Zoom Tan.

E: I get texts from there all the time.

H: It said, "Happy V-Day" and things like that, so that would be an instance where they're abbreviating it and it's less professional. But you're going to a tanning salon, so it's like way different. Or they'll say things like, "SEVERE BLIZZARD" like in a capitalize everything.

D: Yea, that's weird to me. I don't like that.

C: Whenever I see promotional stuff, it seems so forced to me. Like whenever they put really, like "rly", like "you rly will love this" or something. It just seems like stop trying to relate to me like that. (3 others voice agreement.)

A: Has anyone seen the *Muppets* commercial trailer for the new movie? Because, it's really good. They really interact, like they really putting abbreviations and emoticons and, like, saying someone from Twitter said that and so, I don't know, I would recommend checking it out. Cause it's like two minutes and it doesn't feel like a real movie.

D: Yes, I feel like there's, this really like, recently like this really unnatural, like trying to force the internet culture and real life together. It just comes across as awkward.

C: The only one I thought did well was, I don't know I had to watch it in my writing professor's class, was the Wendy's commercial where they took all the Twitter feeds and just made a song out of it. Like, if you could like write a Twitter and then just hashtag like Wendy's and then they took each separate one and made a stupid song out of it. I thought that was okay, like to be using it just to show how stupid you sound sometimes when you post that. Like instead of saying like LOL they would say like "lawl" and stuff like that and just mispronounce everything.

E: And like people would type things funny and they would be like, "this is sooooo good" and then they would like say it really funny.

C: Yea, like they took it very literally.

E: But it was a joke, but it didn't seem as forced as like...

D: Actually trying to utilize those things.

E: Yea.

B: And it's something that like older people, like people that aren't comfortable with doing it, they would understand since they would receive something like that and misinterpret it.

Z: So playing off the Taco Bell thing, would it be weird, if say, Budweiser ran a campaign that use emoticons. I mean something that is as far from formal as possible. Whether its alcohol or, you know, Coca-Cola was running a campaign and they wanted to, like, bring back “a coke and a smile” campaign so they had the little colon parentheses. Would that seem out of place or something? I mean we talked about formality and you want businesses to be business-like, but what if a business is in the culture of informality? Beer commercial, none of them, they speak to the lowest common denominator. They want to embrace whatever they can and whoever wants to interact with it, by all means. So would it be weird if Budweiser ran a stupid campaign of “wazup” all over again except now using emoticons and fresh... I mean they took the playful language and made it into a visual. They did it with the croaking frogs. They did it with the “wazup” campaign. They’ve always tried to utilize these playful interactive, more informal settings. So, you mentioned Taco Bell, but you even said that Taco Bell still maintained proper business when they spoke. But would it be weird if Taco Bell interacted with their fan base? It seems to be more of a casual thing. I mean it’s a fast food, they’re not trying to hold high marks on anything. Would it be out of place in those kinds of settings?

C: I can see Budweiser doing a drunk text campaign and it being really funny. I think it’s just because the product determines a lot of what it is.

H: Yea, if it was like a medical company or something like more serious you wouldn’t want them to be using all these emoticons or something.

B: Yay, colonoscopy. (Group laughter)

H: Yea, right.

B: Woo, winky face. (More laughter)

A: I could see Coca-Cola, like, doing that because they want to get a younger audience. But trying to think like Budweiser doing that to get a younger audience at the same time you want to drink responsibly so you wouldn’t want...you would want to be more mature in that case.

Z: So basically the question is textisms are now directly related to younger audiences. I mean, I’m 29, and my people, we use them too. And like the younger generations they come up with it, it’s probably more prevalent. I know there’s tons of times I’ll come across something and I don’t know it. I mean does that abbreviation... So what point now is it common... You know, if you were trying to market to a demographic, you know the big ones, 25 to 52. In a 25 to 52 thing, could you use an emoticon? And if you used that emoticon would the majority of them understand it?

I: It’s not the same. Like how [Participant E] said earlier, like, (an aside to E) how old are you, like 20? Yea, we’re like in our early 20s now and we both noticed earlier like our 50 year old female coworkers are sending us winkies and we notice the differences. So I don’t think you can hit 25 and 50 in the same bracket with the same kind of text, because we notice. And we’ll think it’s kind of weird if they’re appealing to the 52 year old and the 52 year olds won’t notice. You can’t. You hit one or the other. You can’t hit all 25 to 50 all in one hit.

E: I would say that the only universal emoticon or whatever is a happy face. I think that everyone is comfortable with happy face and I don't think that no matter what boss sent me that, or what client sent me that, or whoever, or what friend, I would never be like "Ooh, they sent me a happy face. That was strange." I think that's the only one but when people send me the ones with the little "p", I'm like "What? Is that necessary?" You know? I mean I do know people that use them. Not a lot of my friends do. So it seems awkward or seems weird. But I think most companies can't get away with the Taco Bell thing. Like I just went and looked, because I don't follow Taco Bell, and like somebody posted a picture of their Taco Bell and Taco Bell tweeted back with just like a heart (<3). And like I think that's cute. Like I'd be "Oh my gosh Taco Bell just tweeted me. Cool." And then like maybe when I'd go back in my Twitter feed, I'd be like, "Oh, maybe I'll get Taco Bell again." But I wouldn't feel comfortable with my... I don't know what company. I would say like most food companies it would be okay for them to do that, but not like...

I: Like Mercedes. Like something that's not geared towards our age demographic. It's just not appropriate. It's just not the same.

E: But it would be like okay for Mercedes, if I'm like, "Ooo, Just went out and bought my new Mercedes. Like so excited," and they tweeted back like "Congratulations." Then I would be like, "that's nice." Or like Lilly Pulitzer is from where I'm from, so I was like, I tweeted something like "It's great to be home and in a Lilly store." And Lilly Pulitzer tweeted me back like, "Welcome Home [Participant E]." And it's like "XOXO" or something, but they said something like that and I thought that was cute. Like the interaction was great and appropriate for Lilly, but if it was J. Crew that said "XOXO" I probably would have been like "what is that for?"

G: I like posted a picture like when I went to Datz. I don't know if you guys have ever been there? And they are very... I don't know how they found me... I tweeted um prickly paired mimosas and took a picture of it and I just said "at Datz" but I didn't do the @ sign. So I don't know how they found me. But they retweeted me, like 3 minutes later. And so I think that's a good interaction, recognizing that I'm talking about that. I don't know how they found me, it was crazy. But um, I'm talking about them and they're kind of like acknowledging me as a customer, but they're not sending me winky faces or anything like that. I don't know. I don't know how to explain.

E: And I think a lot of us would like see that, like if I followed her on Twitter, I'd be like, "Oh my gosh, like Datz tweeted my friend. Like that's cool." And then I would be like, I don't know, like that is good advertising. But there's just like a lot of weird exceptions I think.

B: Well it would be interesting, well I don't know I'm kind of going off topic, we were having our class today and we had the Seaworld representatives come from public relations, and they were talking about how they actually segment through Facebook. I don't know how they do that. But they send out different messages for like the international customers versus their like local versus California. So if they were able to do something like that, I think that would be wise. Like for, I don't know if they're able to do it by demographics and by also by age. But maybe it would

be something to look into if you're going to be sending out messages through social media. You know to 18 to 20 versus 30 to 40, probably have different reactions to interactions like that.

E: I think we could all agree that like our grandparents would like Taco Bell to just say, "There's a new item on the menu, period." You know what I mean, and like where we would okay with Taco Bell sending us heart emojis. Where like if my grandparents were like 70 or 80 they would see a less than sign and a 3 and be like, "What does that mean?"

B: You're going to limited your audience too cause they're going to be like excluded if they don't know what the abbreviation is or can't interpret it.

Z: So the question is how do you, like how gratifying is it when you send them out. Taking it from an interpretation of uses and gratification, I don't know if you guys know the theories. If someone sends you a message, or actually from your perspective, when you send out a message and you put some kind of textism attached to it: you put a smiley face at the end, you put an exclamation point. I mean is that, like you say it's almost a signature for you, but when you send it out are you expecting it to be interpreted in a certain way. You're saying it with a little bit more of something that they're going to get out of it. Why do you put them in at all?

I: To set the tone. You have to set the tone. I could tell you "shut up period (shut up.)" means leave me alone, but like "shut up exclamation point (shut up!)" could mean like, "are you kidding me?" Completely different.

E: Like "no way."

B: I think it's a fine line between knowing your audience and trying to brand yourself like with what you're saying with like when she puts "XO." It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter your demographics. But when interacting with your boss or your friends, you have to decide like how you are going to text so you got to tailor that. As a business you have to decide like, "this is my brand" and stick to it across the board or if also you're going to tailor it to your specific audience.

C: I don't know. I find myself putting "lol" sometimes when I don't even mean to. Like I just text and I just start putting in "lol". And I just find it's like been in the wrong situation at times. Like my mom will say something upsetting and I'll be like, "lol, that sucks". And she'll be like, "why would you put 'lol'?" And I would like, I didn't even mean to, it just happened out of habit.

H: Yea, I use "haha" a lot. Like at the beginning of every sentence. I don't know why. Everything is funny apparently. I don't know if LOL and haha....are very...we text a lot so.

D: That's like one of my biggest pet peeves though, like someone is like, "What are you doing?" I'm like, "heading to work." And then they're like, "oh, lol". I'm like, "Why is that funny? I'm just going to work. Why is everybody laughing at me?"

H: The best is when people are like, "literally dying." We know what they mean by it, but... It's just amazing.

E: Yea, I think a lot of times we, like I send things like that with a ton of exclamations to boys. And like, boys would think like nothing of it. Where girls would be like, “why did she send me exclamations?” It’s like, and that like seems weird, but it just depends on who you’re talking to like if they really care. But if I’m like texting my boyfriend and I’m not texting with it, with a bunch of exclamations, he’s like, “hey is something wrong?” And then like, you know what I mean? Where if I texted you that, you wouldn’t think something is wrong. You would just think I’m a normal person. You know.

G: Because you set up precedent with people when you like start to do something. If you’ve always done a lot of emojis or you’ve always capitalized your letters or punctuation or whatever it is. Like if it’s missing then something’s off.

B: It’s a commitment. (Group Agreement)

C: Has someone ever taken your phone and texted a friend, and that friend knows it’s not you based on how it’s written? (Group Agreement) It’s like really weird. It’s just like you can’t tell my handwriting, but you can tell how I text. I just thought that was really weird.

B: Or you can tell it’s not your friend. Like a signature.

C: Yea, exactly. Cause he spells this like that.

D: Yea, that’s happened a bunch like, if I’m like... like sometimes my friend will be texting or whatever and they’ll be busy and I’ll be like, “oh I’ll just text them back.” And they’ll say “No, no, no. It’s not me.” How are they going to know it’s not you? It’s just a couple words. But it’s true. Like if someone starts texting me from a number and they’re saying like weird things that person wouldn’t usually say. I’ll say, “okay, who is this?” Like I can tell, that’s not my friend.

E: But I’m saying that’s always the case. Like I was saying, my friend texted me like, “helloooo? I’m buying it.” Like she usually types it all caps when she’s excited or like I put a million exclamation points. And so, like if I’m driving and like, “hey, would you text them back?” I’m like say, “blah, blah, blah, exclamation, exclamation, exclamation.” Like, or she’ll be like, “and put it in all caps.” Because that’s what we have to do. What we people are accustomed to us doing.

B: My husband was texting for me like while I’m driving, and it was to my boss. And I’m like “What are you doing? Why are you texting her abbreviations and stuff?” And he’s like, “Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t even know.” Like at least look at the previous messages of how I talk, you know?

I: Like she said before, with each friend, cause I have another bartender at work. He’s a guy. And I’ll text him, we text to each other like this all the time, “Hey sister. Are we working together this Friday?” And he’ll be like “Yes girllll” with a bunch of L’s. And put kiss emojis on it. And just do it to be obnoxious. But if he’s like short with me, I’m like, “oh my god, I must have pissed him off night.” Like why are we not...?

B: And you walk in and he’s like, “Hey!”

I: Yea, everything’s fine.

C: You said it at the end, I think the smiley face just to set the tone. It's like "hmm" there's a completely different tone between those last three when it's just a colon and something else for example.

F: There's also different kinds of smileys. Like you could put the straight eyes, or like the dots, and there's like ones with a nose. There's critiques of the smiley.

C: You ever use the brackets?

F: Yes.

I: Yea, I hate that. I hate the nose. That's the worst.

H: It seems like iMessage and all the emojis on my iPhone, I use those most of the time. So whenever I have a friend that texts me from, like I don't even know what bunch it is, I have to send her regular ones and I don't even know what they are anymore. Like I just do like the regular first three. Yea, because they'll show up and she'll get a question mark where it's not supposed to be.

E: Oh yea, like I know somebody who does that too. Like they don't have emojis. She doesn't have an iPhone so she can't get it.

H: So then I had to revert back to like old days (laughter) and use those.

B: Like, "just for you."

H: Yea.

Z: So, now from the other side, when you receive the texts, how do you interpret them? I know you've said, a lot of it gives you an expectation of who the author is. You know it's your friend, so it better have *that* otherwise it's not really them. So, like if someone is sending you something and it has a smiley face, does it automatically make you connect more with their message? Or if someone sent you something and it has a bunch of exclamation points does that automatically mean, or if it's missing it does it change everything? Like if you put a punctuation now you're angry all of a sudden. So when you're coming across that does that really play a large factor in how you interact with any kind of communication?

G: I think it could. It depends on the person, obviously. But like yea, if some random person was sending me a message and it had a smiley face on it. Like, it just softens it a little bit. It makes it a little bit like, for some reason it's just different than without the smiley and the same with like punctuation. It just depends on the person and what the message is. But it could definitely change it if it's there and shouldn't be or if it's not there.

B: We're in a lot of group projects this semester, and I think you're having to get to know a lot of new people. And I think that's something I think of now, you either put an exclamation or a smiley or something. Because you're talking about, "we need to do this," "we need to meet up," like very, kind of like... You don't want to be seen as the bitchy boss one. Like so you're just like, "ok, guys I think this is a good idea." You soften it up with something then you're, you know, you feel like it's going to help work as a group. I know it seems silly, but in a way...

G: Yea, that's so true.

I: I've been in group projects before when like when it'll be like five group partners and I know two people in it and not know the other two, or know everyone in it. Someone who has clearly been a bitch, sends me a text and be like "make sure you guys do your part by midnight tonight or you might not get good on your evaluations, smiley face (☺)." It's like "fuck you," why are you being an ass?

C: Smiley face can also mean you're being just a bitch.

B: Yea, it can amplify it.

E: Oh yea it can. Only girls do that. Guys do not send mean smiley faces.

B: And by the same token, it goes the same. If I was in a group full of guys, I wouldn't expect exclamations or smileys. I don't know if that's just me, but I would expect them to just be like, "alright, let's meet here, blah, blah, blah." Girls are more complicated.

H: Like my boyfriend will send out, he'll send out "k" and like he's not be mad. He's just like okay, perfectly fine.

I: Oh yea. Like sending short texts, I don't know, I'll just send people back just "k" or "see you there" or something like two or three words. And they'll be like, "why are you being short with me?" And I'm like, "okay, I'm not being short with you. I'm just saying everything I have to say." I'm like "k, see you there" like I'm just saying what I need to say.

B: "Why do you hate me?"

I: I think all of what it comes down to is like person to person, there's body language there. And you're able to read the person based on how they're moving. And whenever you're texting someone body language is completely removed. So it's almost like a fabricated body language that works. When you say "lol" like in today, no one, I don't think anyone is really like laughing out loud when they say "lol" just kind of like sets the mood as being light-hearted.

E: It can be like "shrug" meaning "that's nice."

G: If I like actually mean that I laughed out loud at something, I'll say, "I literally lol'd". (Group agreement) That really was an "lol" moment. You have to clarify.

C: Something different that just "lol" or something.

G: "Lol" is just like "ha".

H: I have a friend that abbreviates; she abbreviates like everything. So she'll be like "lets totes go to...", "obv lets totes go to starbs later". And that's how she talks. And you guys obviously know what that means, now. But if my Mom were to say something like that, I'd be like "whoa, wait a minute." "Totes go to starbs with me." She just talks like that all the time. And then, I have been in situations texting, like he said, removes, what did you say...

B: The body language.

H: Thank you. So you kind of like...it's been misconstrued before where someone thinks you're mad and you're not really. I can't think of an example right now, but I'll think about it and see if I can tell you later. Where they've been mad because they're like, "I thought that you were mad at me about this other stuff." So I don't know. The body language is a problem.

F: You're just busy. And then you can't like reply really long, so you're just like "ok".

G: That's one of the biggest downsides to texting in general, there is no body language and there is no face to face interaction, and it is so easy to miscommunicate with people and for that kind of thing to happen. Especially with even like we've said, texting language and emoticons, textisms whatever, it's different based on each and every individual person. So it just, it brings in a whole different side of miscommunication, and then therefore misunderstanding.

B: I think it can like help you by adding a different element to communication as well, because some people are just really awkward in person and, or you think they're pissed all the time. Like my husband, seriously, his face looks like, I don't know, like mad all the time. And he's really fine. Like he could just win the lottery and he would just have this face. But even like I was saying with my doctors, some of them are like so serious and all of a sudden I get like a smiley, and I'm like "oh my god, he loves me" you know? But for real, it's like, I don't know, sometimes people just have a serious look and then you get an exclamation or a smiley and you won't see them, it's like ok...

H: ...there's a person in there.

B: Yea, like a little bit friendlier.

E: Like again, with women at my internship, different women that don't send winky faces. They'll say something like... I'll be like trying to set up appointment with them, and they'll say "great, see you tomorrow, happy face". I'll be like, "oh my gosh, she really likes me" and she might not necessarily like me, but it makes it feel that way. Like you feel special because you got a happy face from someone you wouldn't expect to get a happy face from.

H: Yea, I guess it just depends. Like all so circumstantial.

B: There's this thingy, like the at&t commercial, now that you're asking like is it appropriate and I know we talked about Wendy's, but I think it was hilarious. What's the guy's name? Like the actors? The old guy? I think it's at&t when they're going back and forth and like, "you should totes go to blah, blah, blah". Like so the one with like the voice for Mufasa, that's how I know him, but they um... Yea, I thought that was really effective. I think it is hilarious up until a point, it got a little bit... I mean at first, I was laughing about it and older people, once again, could relate to that too like, "this is stupid, why would you talk like that".

Z: A couple times you've mentioned, like whenever you guys were starting new groups and going on group projects, when you establish first contact with someone through text messaging, your first communication, do you normally have textisms in it, or for females you do? For men you don't? Is that usually how the relationship goes?

I: Yea.

H: I would say yea.

I: Yea, I get like, I don't know, when I get with a new group and I like maybe get their numbers or talk on campus or whatever, I get frustrated sometimes based on like the first thing they'll say or like the first thing they'll respond. Because I'll be like, "oh, no. I'm with like dumb people" that like I don't know based on what they said or I'll be like, "oh they're really well put together". Just based on a first interaction how they talk either online or on texting. I can kind of like, evaluate this person even going to be valuable to the group or whatever.

G: As bad as it is, it's almost like a first impression.

E: Yea, but at the same time, like I had to text this guy this morning to ask for a favor. And I've never met him but he's like a friend of a friend, so I sent him this big long text like asking, "you did such a great job last time, how could I ever repay you? Like you just did a great job, so I was wondering if you could help" and I said happy face at the end. And then he was like very nice back, but I didn't want to be like, "Hey my name is [Participant E], and I need a favor because you're Steph's friend." So I had to make it clear that I was being nice and I complimented what he did last time, and would you mind doing it again, and I would be happy to compensate you for it, happy face. And then he got, I feel like, I mean he said he would do it. So he got the impression I wasn't being bossy or mean; I was really just like asking for a favor. But then later on, he told me to email him and I told him "I'll do that, thank you so much." And he said, "you got it" with a winky face, but I don't think he meant that... (group laughter)... in a sexual way, or like whatever...

B: You got it... (giggling)

E: He just meant it like, "no problem."

H: Is he like older?

E: Like 20ish? 25ish? I really don't know.

B: Some people do it though.

E: I honestly don't really know. I need him to like put together music for a routine. I don't know how to do that, but he's a DJ or something.

A: So like when I text people, I try to like type, and do it like, grammatically correct and stuff, because I don't how they're going to respond. And then based on what they respond, if they're going to do like abbreviations and smiley faces then I'll slip that in occasionally. But if they're going to reply all correct, then I'm like, "ok, this person probably doesn't want to mess around like that." (Agreement from multiple other females)

E: But like this DJ guy, like if I would have found him online and was getting in contact with him, I probably would have called and been like, "Hi, my name is [Participant E first and last name]. Blah, blah, blah", instead of being like, "Hey, I'm Stephanie's friend" and send him a smiley at the end. But I wanted him to, like, think I was nice and I would want him to be like,

“oh, I never met [Participant E], but like she seems nice.” I wouldn’t want him to ever be like, think something else, because I don’t even know if I’ll ever meet him.

B: That’s why it’s great to have somebody’s email as well as their phone number. Cause text in general, I think is seen as more casual; so people expect a little bit more casual language. But I think it crosses the line, especially... even if you’re casual in a text for some. Like my supervisor, we’re super casual in text, but if I send her an email it’s: “Hello,” “Sincerely,” da, da, da... all my contact info. It never varies from that. No smileys in the email.

F: I think greetings in particular are very important, especially for first impressions, because I’ve gotten... Just like from groups or classes that I’ve been in and like... even if it’s just a message through Facebook that somebody needs my help, instead of saying, “Hi, my name is so and so.” I know you’re name because I can see it, but the fact that you’re just like, “What is the assignment for this?” I’m sorry, but... (group female laughter) if I haven’t known you for a long time I need like a “hi” at least. I don’t know, but for me that’s just...

E: “Hey, I’m sorry to bother you.”

B: It’s really a social etiquette thing.

F: ...you still need, yea. Aside from it being formal or informal, I think, like, sometimes it’s taken too lightly and shouldn’t because you lose respect for people that way.

I: Yea, I think that’s one thing that does overlap between like real life and like text language or whatever. If I see you in person, say like that like I don’t know the assignment for class... if I walk up and I’m like, “Hi, you’re such and such from that class. Do you know what the homework was?” I wouldn’t just walk up and say “Hey, what’s the homework?” (group laughter) That would be like strange, like...

E: Yea, like, “Why’s this guy so rude?”

I: Yea, yea. I think that’s one of the things that overlaps.

E: I think that etiquette is really important whether you’re talking about like a business, or a boss, or your friend, or whatever. It’s still... I think people forget that it’s important, that even though texting is suppose to be convenient that like at least, and I don’t really know anyone that says “ty” for thank you, but like, at least give me that. Like give me something, because I mean I saw a guy post on Facebook today something about like... like I don’t know where etiquette went, like online. You can’t about like... I was taught you can’t talk about politics or money or religion, and like I don’t see how that’s any different like on Facebook. Which is true because you like think about it during election time people are like bashing people, and you wouldn’t do that in front of me. You wouldn’t talk about your political views if you didn’t know me well, so why would you do it and make me see it on your Facebook.

G: They hide behind their screens.

I: Because they know you’re not going to be able to say anything back right away or get hit or whatever. Of course you’re behind a computer so you’re going to be more brave.

B: There's different groups of friends. You know. It crosses a line once you have employees and stuff. And I have like nieces and nephews on there now. Like they have their own category that sees nothing.

Z: So I mean going between the emails and different social things, so is there certain formats where... I mean you talked about emails specifically where textisms would be allowed versus not being... Like on Facebook they're allowed. Twitter, even more so. Like because it's even more character structured.

H: You know... Like emailing, I would say, is where I type the most grammatically correct and like... Cause usually that's like for professional companies where I'm applying for a job, or internship, or something, whatever. I would probably spell everything out and probably wouldn't use a smiley face. But I have, I just got an internship starting this January and it's an event planning company. And so they're very like loose and they don't care about anything; well they do because they obviously care about their company but they want us to feel like they're not our bosses. They want us to feel like we're equals. Which in some cases I think works, sometimes it does not. But they'll send me smiley faces and like abbreviations and stuff. So, it's different, cause over the summer I worked for another company that was very professional. And so you kind of have to adjust to who you're working with and where you are.

B: True.

I: The textism aren't appropriate in like all sorts of formats. I really don't think other than like chat on Facebook, Twitter and text messages, they shouldn't be used. Like an email, when else do you use your email? When you're applying for job, contacting somebody you work with. You never, like, email your friend, "Hey what are you doing this Friday?" You just text or call or whatever.

G: Or like email your professor, you're never like...you know..."Yo Prof what's going..."

I: Yea, it's a formal letter. Right.

B: "Yo Prof..." (group laughter)

I: "Yo Prof." Right.

B: I don't think that's something that's necessarily going to evolve either. Like I feel like that is kind of the standard. Even if it, you know, there will be different acronyms in the future. There'll be different ways to interact socially, but I think as far as emails go, I think that's one of them that's going to stick around as far as the format and it's going to not change as far as the appropriate verbiage and everything.

Z: Alright. Well, coming to kind of a close, the question is: if there was one thing you want to make sure that I pull from this meeting... we'll go around and everyone can express... the one thing that you think is the most valuable thing I should know walking out of this room about textisms?

E: Do you mean like with our friends or professionally or like...

Z: ...In general. I mean how you interact with them, how you feel about them, how you see them in the world, how you see them from a business... I mean what is the one thing should resonate. And if someone takes you answer, you can come up with a new one as we go around.

E: I think that a lot of us, or all of us, agree that sometimes businesses seem like they're trying too hard or like someone is not a part of our generation or it just seems very unnatural, as if, you know what I mean, wouldn't interact like that, in a weird way, in person. So why are you going to make things awkward via texts, when you could just say "Hey [Participant E], you have an appointment tomorrow at 2pm." Like you don't need to send me a winky face or like say anything crazy. So I think that keeping it simple is very important.

G: Kind of along those lines, I mean obviously there're going to be exceptions like we've already talked about, but I would say for the most part the business world needs to stay professional and your personal life is your prerogative. But for the most part, like businesses need to remain professional and, in general, try to stay away from the textisms when they are not appropriate.

F: I think they're just meant to make, like, more conversation more personable and more relatable and more interactive. But at the same time I think that it should also... like people should be aware that it's not, there's not like a set standard. Like this is what it's always going to mean. Like it's going to vary from person to person.

D: I have kind of a long answer in mind, but I'll try to like condense it down. We talked about when we started using them, and I was thinking back, and it's like when I was on AIM and MySpace and everything, I used them all the time. You know, I was twelve or thirteen, however old. And then as time went on I got to be like maybe between sixteen and eighteen, I like thought it was so annoying and was like, ugh. I talked, you know... I typed capitalization, periods. I didn't use any... I was like, "why would anyone... that's such a little kid thing to do, like to use these abbreviations." And then as I got older, I was kind of like, "It's easier. It's not a big deal, I'm not trying to impress anyone when I'm just talking to my friends. Like I'll just use these textisms." So I think it's just kind of important to keep in mind that personally or business, language changes over time. There's words that are used in different generations that we don't use now to describe things. No one says "groovy" or "tubular" or whatever. Things that may have been said in the 70s. Like there's just different language that's used over time and like, you know, language goes through cycles and changes. And like I just think it's important that like to understand that textisms are no exception to that. You know, I think they're going to go through waning and waxing where people use them more frequently. And I don't think that textisms are the future type thing. Where, "Oh we should definitely integrate it into all our products because that's all people are going to be using for the next five years." It's like, "Well they might not disappear completely but their usage and how they're accepted and how often they're used is probably going to change just the same as any other type of language.

A: So that a lot of what I was going to say is basically that you just go through phases of you know you're using it a lot as a kid then you kind of get more professional then you see the older generation use it. But I would just like to say, a point brought up earlier, is just knowing your

audience. Because, like, some people like your friends, siblings, you might be more relaxed versus like other people, like teachers or mentors or adults, um, bosses you're going to be more professional with them unless they show you that they're okay with that, like abbreviations and emoticons.

B: Yea, like I was going to say, know your audience. I think that is the key point in all of this is that, whether you're tweeting for your company or just yourself, I mean there's a brand and a company and there's a brand and just yourself nowadays. You know you have your own social media so obviously your social media and your interactions are suppose to be in line with the brand, especially for us in marketing and PR and stuff. But just be consistent and be appropriate for your audience and be sincere and I think that'll shine through and people will understand it. Don't try to be something you're not.

H: Yea, I think pretty much everyone's covered it. If a business wants to be successful, I think that they need to keep their professionalism because if you can't take your boss seriously and if you feel you're on the same level as him, then I feel like you feel like you can get away with more things. And like there's these levels for a reason, so we can get things done, you know. And so, I don't really know. Just like what everyone's said. Just business need to keep their professionalism so that we can continue to do our jobs like the way we're suppose to, I guess.

I: If I could say one thing about textism types in general, I would think that everyone, on this sheet at least, everyone probably uses all of them on here except for the abbreviations. No one says "l-8-r" for like later. Or even like "2much" no one uses the number "2". Yea, there's only like... The only time I've ever had to be limited by the number of characters is on Twitter. Like that's the only reason. No one else does that except old people. Like my parents will send the letter "r", letter "u", "ok" question mark. Something like that, I would never send someone or even anyone in this room "r u ok?" Or like why with just the letter. Abbreviations are... like really, "rly"... No one uses that.

E: Unless they're kidding.

I: Yea. Unless you're just being obnoxious. Like just being like, "later hater" "l8r h8r".

C: I checked that box for that reason. Just being annoying.

G: I use abbreviations like "btw". Like I will say "btw" instead of like...

I: ...That's acronyms. Right above. "btw", "omg", "jk", "lol". Everyone uses the acronyms. But the abbreviations, no one uses those.

H: Except for "jones" with "obv" and all that stuff. "obv totes starbs".

B: But I think that with like obvious is just...

E: ...It's just like obnoxious. It's just like what girls do, like I say "obv" when I'm being annoying.

H: Yea, you never talk like that. But if you're just joking around.

B: I say “prob” that’s like my most frequent one...

H: ...probably...

B: Yea, like for probably. I can never spell out “probably” in a text. I don’t know why.

G: Yea, I say “probs” and my brother’s like “What the hell are you talking about, you sound like a...it’s really odd.” I don’t know. It’s stupid. Kid’s stuff I guess.

C: Yea, I would just say that the most important thing is like smiley faces sometimes they just set the tone. You can’t like hear what the person is saying. So I’ve gotten in arguments because of that. Because I’m like, “Why are you so angry?” And they’re like, “Oh, I wasn’t angry at all.” And I think, like, a smiley face or just an “lol” or something, and just be like, “Oh, he’s not being an asshole. He’s just talking.” Cause you can’t hear tone over text.

Z: People assume you’re speaking negatively unless you put a smiley face?

Multiple: Depends on the person.

F: Some people will say, like, misleading things, you know? Like it’s contradictory. I mean it’s like you said just being genuine with your texts, in a good way, so...

C: Like “clean the apartment” or like “clean the apartment smiley face”. It’s just like...

B: Do it with a smile.

Z: Thank you all. I appreciate your time and answers.

Appendix 6: Informed Consent Form



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

November 19, 2014

Adam Drum
Mass Communication
Tampa, FL 33612

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**
IRB#: Pro00016349
Title: Speaking their language: Textisms in today's communication

Study Approval Period: 11/19/2014 to 11/19/2015

Dear Mr. Drum:

On 11/19/2014, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents outlined below.

Approved Item(s):

Protocol Document(s):

[Textisms in communication](#)

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:

[Consent Form Version1 11-18-14.docx.pdf](#)

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristen Salomon', followed by a horizontal line.

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Vice Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board



Informed Consent to Participate in Research Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

IRB Study # Pro00016349

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:
Textisms in Communication

The person who is in charge of this research study is Adam Drum. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Scott Liu.

The research will be conducted at the University of South Florida.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to:

- Find insight into the writer and audience of text based shorthand in text based communication when studied through the lens of uses and gratifications.
- Why does a person use the shorthand?
- What does a person expect to gain when using shorthand?
- How does a person respond when reading the shorthand?
- This study is being conducted by a student to complete his thesis.

Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- Attend one focus group lasting no longer than one (1) hour and thirty (30) minutes on the campus of the University of South Florida.
- Participate in the discussion throughout the duration of the focus group.
- Answer a brief questionnaire asking about your current behavior in regards to text based shorthand.

- Provide short written responses.
- The focus group will be recorded for audio and transcribed for research needs. The audio will then be destroyed and the transcription will retain all aspects of the discussion. Short written responses will be attached anonymously as an appendix. Questionnaire responses will be anonymously converted into a table and attached as an appendix.

Total Number of Participants

About twelve (12) individuals will take part in this study at USF.

Alternatives

You do not have to participate in this research study.

Benefits

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, research nurses, and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP).
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, staff in the USF Office of Research and Innovation, USF Division of Research Integrity and Compliance, and other USF offices who oversee this research.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We

will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. As students, your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your student status (course grade).

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an adverse event or unanticipated problem, call Adam Drum at 813-786-2536.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he/ she understands:

- What the study is about;
- What procedures will be used;
- What the potential benefits might be; and
- What the known risks might be.

I can confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in the appropriate language. Additionally, this subject reads well enough to understand this document or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her. This subject does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give legally effective informed consent. This subject is not under any type of anesthesia or analgesic that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and, therefore, can be considered competent to give informed consent.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent