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Research Paper Summary

Carrying too Heavy a Load? The Communication and Miscommunication of Emotion by Email,

The Academy of Management Review, 2008

1. Problem definition and the main ideas of the research

Despite advice against it, people who send emails will intentionally and unintentionally communicate emotion. The nature of email makes miscommunications likely, and work emails are often misinterpreted as more emotionally negative or neutral than intended. This paper seeks to introduce a theoretical framework to describe the factors that make miscommunication most likely, how miscommunication affects organizations, and how employees can improve emotional communication accuracy in emails.

2. Significance of research study (Importance and Challenges of research problem)

This research is important to workplace relationships, as emotional miscommunications through emails lead to problems in the workplace and problems in productivity. It's important that in the workplace, people communicate effectively to each other and understand each other's emotions accurately so that they can make informed decisions. Emotional intensity is difficult to convey accurately in email, particularly with positive emotions, due to the lack of emotional cues that one would have in face-to-face conversation. In performing the research of this paper, there is particular difficulty with measuring accuracy between sender and recipient, as it relies on comparing the intensity perceived by the receiver with the sender's self-reported intended intensity.

3. Main research questions and assumptions

There is little research or theory in explaining what factors might affect the accuracy or inaccurate perception of emotion in emails. This paper seeks to fill in this gap by proposing a theoretical framework, drawing on a wide range of research and theory on topics such as computer-mediated communication (CMC), nonverbal communication, emotions, and perception. The authors are proposing a model explaining why emotions are likely to be inaccurately perceived in email, which the most likely types of inaccurate judgments, what factors influence their occurrence, and what implications this has for organizations.

4. Research Methodology

Rather than gathering data, conducting studies, or proposing a computational model as previous papers in this class have, this paper draws on the works of computer-mediated and nonverbal communication, emotion, and perception literature to reach conclusions. From past literature, the author introduces a new theoretical framework. Although not a computational model, a model drawn on throughout the paper is the Berlo's Source-Message-Channel-Receiver Model (SMCR), which is an overarching framework for the proposed model. SCMR main praise is that it acknowledges that the sender and receiver's relationship and social context affect the communication process.

5. Experiments

Instead of doing experiments, this paper focuses on drawing on previous works and defining the framework they propose. Throughout the paper, a number of effects are explained, with the key ones being: effect of channel on emotion perception in emails, effect of senders and receivers on emotion perception in email, effect of message on emotion communication, and the consequences of emotional inaccuracy in emails. After drawing on a large body of past literature, the model proposed here helps explain why emotions are likely to be inaccurately

communicated, the likely inaccurate perceptions of that, what factors affect the occurrence, and the consequences that result from this.

6. Discussion

6.1 Important aspects

- The paper provides an explanation through a model as to the issues surrounding email communication

The article talks about email communication being on the rise, but the article was written in 2008, and emails are so well integrated at this point that many people prefer newer mediums of communication. However, it is still important that we understand email communication in this way, as most professional settings communicate via email.

6.2 Limitations of the paper

- Focuses on perception, not expression of emotion

Relevant to many computational linguists is that a model is able to recognize the underlying emotion. While recognizing inaccurate perceptions is beneficial, the ability to detect the real emotion would be more useful.

6.3 Questions for presenter

- Which do you see as having more benefit to computational linguistics research, the ability to recognize phrases that may be inaccurately perceived, or the ability to recognize the underlying emotions of a text?