The Role of Personal Chat in LINE Application in the Helping Behavior of Students at the Faculty of Psychology Universitas Padjadjaran

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Abstract

Social media has become an important platform in human interaction. Through its main function to facilitate communication, LINE is being used by a lot of people to spread online forms in a group chat that consists a lot of people. This sort of usage is categorized as asking for help from others. In previous research about bystander effect in Yahoo! messenger, a significant difference was found in the amount of people who performed helping behavior when their names were mentioned specifically in the group chat as compared to when their names were not. The current research was conducted to investigate whether using personal chat will be more effective for getting help. The experiment used a within-participant posttest only design (N=38). The participants joined a chat in which they were asked for help to fill out a questionnaire through a group chat. After their behaviors were recorded, they were asked to fill out the same questionnaire through personal chat. McNemar Test indicated a significant difference between helping behaviors in the group chat and personal chat conditions. Implications for helping behavior practices in social media are discussed further in this article.

Keywords— Computer Mediated Communication, Helping Behavior, Instant Messenger Social Media, Line

1. Introduction

Humans are social beings. According to Maslow’s theory of the hierarchy of needs, the need for social relations is placed third in the hierarchy of needs (Feist & Feist, 2009). Mclelland’s theory of motivation similarly stated that affiliation is one of the basic human needs (Aamodt, 2010). Such a need for social interaction explains the need of humans to communicate with one another.

More recently, the means through which people communicate with each other has evolved as a result of the advancement of the internet. Trends in computer-mediated communication have encouraged social psychology researchers to draw ideas from theories to generate hypotheses about the phenomenon (Kiesler, Siegal & McGuire, 1984). Moreover, due to the ease of access to the internet, social media has become a popular method of human communication, whether it be done one-on-one, through sharing things to the entire internet community, or from one person to specific groups a people.

Clearly, social media plays a large role in everyday human life. Social media affects people's decisions to make purchases, both directly (through conformity to peers) and indirectly (through reinforcement of product involvement) (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). In addition to its effects on purchasing behavior, social media is also correlated with altruistic behavior. According to Ma and Chan (2014), perceived online attachment motivation and perceived online relationship commitment have significant positive and direct effects on online knowledge sharing. Moreover, due to the wide scope of social media, it also significantly affects how people perform altruistic behavior (Anderson & Clark, 2015).

Social media is manifested in various applications that can be used by everyone. Among such applications is LINE, which is one of the most widely consumed applications by people around the world. LINE users worldwide as of the first quarter of 2016 were documented at over 218 million monthly active users. In October 2014, LINE also reported 560 million registered users worldwide (LINE, 2016). At the Faculty of Psychology Universitas Padjadjaran alone, more than 95% of students consider themselves active LINE users.

One of LINE’s widely used features is group chat. Through group chat, people can send messages to many
people at once, as long as they all belong in a common group. After a person sends a message to the group chat, the person can then keep track of which group members have already read the message, allowing the person to ascertain whether the message has been delivered to and read by the target recipients.

Group chat is a useful and efficient way for conveying information to and asking for help from multiple people, though it may not always be effective. Every month, especially around the peak times during which many students are conducting research, hundreds of chats containing messages seeking help can be found in the group chats of students at the Faculty of Psychology Universitas Padjadjaran. Usually, the messages' senders ask for the help of other group members to fill out questionnaires for the purposes of data collection. Yet few people respond by offering their assistance. Based on the pilot study conducted by the authors, in a group of 296 people, only 20 people managed to help by filling the questionnaire. Moreover, from previous research, the ratio between internet group members who help and conduct something and members who do nothing was found to be 3:200 (DeCarlo, 1998; Man to plead guilty, 1998). Additionally, it was found that as the number of people present in a computer-mediated chat group increased, the longer it took for an individual to receive help (Markey, 2000).

Findings of the ineffectiveness of social media-mediated helping behavior as reported by DeCarlo (1998) and Markey (2000), as well as that which was personally observed by the authors in the pilot study, eventually led the authors to conduct the current research. It is presently proposed that having a lot of people in a group will lead to a decrease in group members' willingness to help. Furthermore, as previous research has demonstrated that help was received much more quickly when a bystander's name was specified (Markey, 2000), it is hypothesized in this study that personal chat is more effective than group chat for asking help from the students of the Faculty of Psychology Universitas Padjadjaran.

2. Method

Latane and Darley (1970) formulated a theory about helping behavior when more than one person is standing by at any given moment. Within this framework, five steps must occur before a bystander gives aid to a victim: failure to fulfill any of these steps will result in the bystander not giving help (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2013). This phenomenon, known as the bystander effect, explains why as group size increases, a bystander is less likely to aid a victim (Latane & Nida, 1981). In accordance with the mentioned bystander effect theory, the present study employs a theoretical framework that consists of the following five steps.

First is noticing an event, which maintains that if people do not notice the existence of an emergency, then they will not intervene and offer to help.

Second is interpreting the event as emergency, which explains that if people assume that nothing is wrong when an emergency is taking place, then they will not help. When other bystanders are present, people are more likely to assume that an emergency is something innocuous. When an emergency occurs, for example, bystanders often assume that nothing is wrong because no one else looks concerned—even though everyone is worried and concerned.

The third step is assuming responsibility. Each bystander’s sense of responsibility to help decreases as the number of witnesses increases. In other words, because other people are present, no single bystander feels a strong personal responsibility to act.

Fourth is knowing how to help. Bystanders must decide what kind of help is appropriate. If people are unsure of the form of assistance to provide, they obviously will be unable to help.

Fifth is deciding to implement the help. Sometimes, people might not be qualified to deliver the right kind of help. Other times, people might be afraid of making a fool of themselves, of doing the wrong thing and making matters worse, or even of placing themselves in danger by trying to help. Even when people know what kind of intervention is needed, they have to weigh the costs of trying to help.

As the present study is an experimental research, the authors used two different treatment conditions and attempted to control potential confounding variables. Four steps of helping behavior, i.e. notice the event, interpreting the event as emergency, knowing how to help, and deciding to implement the help, were all controlled. Only the “assuming responsibility” step in helping behavior was investigated.

A. Control

Noticing the event was controlled by looking and making sure every member in the group had already read the chat. It was further confirmed by asking the participant personally whether he/she already read the group chat. The ‘interpreting the event as an emergency’ step was controlled by holding constant the natural condition at the time of study, more particularly by using participants who were at the time also tasked with conducting their own research. Through the use of such participants, the authors attempted to ensure that every participant was exposed to similar conditions, in which they were all aware of how important it was to fill the questionnaire distributed for the purposes of the current study. ‘Knowing how to help’ was therefore already controlled, considering that all members of the group chat were capable of filling out the questionnaire. There was little cost to filling the questionnaire because the questionnaire was filled out anonymously and privately, with no one else outside the authors having knowledge of which participants decided to help and which did not.
B. Research design

This study employed a within-participant posttest-only design. In this design, the same participants are measured several times across multiple experimental treatment conditions. The within-subject design was chosen for the current research due to its ability to control many factors pertaining to individual differences, especially those commonly found in experiments such as the present one that are conducted in a natural setting outside the laboratory context.

C. Variables

The independent variable was the type of chat that the participants joined (personal chat vs. group chat). The dependent variable was helping behavior that was recorded from the participants. The theoretical model used in the research is shown in Figure 1.

D. Participants

A total of 38 3rd year undergraduate students enrolled in the Faculty of Psychology Universitas Padjadjaran were chosen by simple random sampling technique. Initially, a list of all the names of 3rd year students was acquired, from which the names of participants were chosen randomly. The chat group feature in LINE application was used for data collection. According to Markey (2000), chat groups are new forms of text-based communication that allows individuals to interact with each other on the internet in real time. All participants were then exposed to two treatment conditions. In one condition, the participants received a message asking for help in a group chat. In the other condition, the message was delivered through personal chat.

E. Procedure

The authors did not disclose any information to the participants that would otherwise alert them of their participation in the research. All the group chat members, including the participants, received a chat message that asked for help from group chat members to fill in a questionnaire about a random phenomenon unrelated to the present study. Following the delivery of the message, the authors confirmed whether the participants already read the chat by asking them if they were online and had read the group chat at the time the message was delivered.

The participants were then exposed to the second treatment, in which they were asked through personal chat to fill out a follow-up questionnaire. In both the group chat and personal chat, the sender of the message was the same person in order to control the potential confounding influence of interpersonal relationship between chat sender and participants. After confirming that participants had read the chat, the authors assessed the participants' helping behavior across conditions by comparing whether participants filled the questionnaire as the result of a request delivered to group chat, to personal chat, to both, or to neither.

Upon completion of the procedure, the authors debriefed the participants and provided them with post-debrief consent forms. If the participants did not want their data to be used by the authors, their data would be excluded from the analysis.

3. Result

To determine the difference in participants' helping behavior between personal chat and group chat, the authors used a McNemar test. With N = 38, a significant difference in the proportions of helping behavior between the personal chat and group chat conditions was found (McNemar's $\chi^2 = 28.033, p = 0.00$). This result, as summarized in Table 1, supported the hypothesis that personal chat is more effective for asking help from 3rd year students of the Faculty of Psychology Universitas Padjadjaran.

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<th>Personal</th>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 : Did not fill the questionnaire</td>
<td>1 : Filled the questionnaire</td>
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0.4. Discussion.

The present study demonstrated that not only does the bystander effect occur in interactions of non-computer based environments, but it can also occur in computer or internet-based environments. That is, with more than one person in a group chat, there is a diffusion of the sense of responsibility required to help someone. This diffuse sense of responsibility is illustrated in Table 1, which shows a significant difference in helping behavior when a person is approached on a personal level compared to when the person is contacted in the presence of other people. In other words, in support of Latane and Darley's (1970) theory that individuals are more inclined to aid a bystander when they feel personally responsible for helping, the bystander effect was virtually eliminated and help was more likely to be received when individuals were asked individually through personal chat compared to when they were asked en masse through group chat.

The main objective of this study was to investigate whether the bystander effect plays as an important role in social media as it does in the real world. In social media, the bystander effect occurs among group members who are equipped only with the assumption that other group members already read a message asking for help, especially since they cannot see how many persons already read the sender's message. This phenomenon will be explained further in accordance with the research model employed in the current study.

First is noticing the event, which in the context of the current research takes place upon delivery of the message.
asking for help. By reading the chat, it is assumed that participants notice the event because reading involves a complex mental process that includes attention, recognition, and perception (source?). However, control over this first step of helping behavior may have been flawed. More particularly, control was attempted by asking participants the question, “Did you open the group chat (at the time the sender sent the message)?” Following completion of the experimental session, only a few of the participants reported having opened and read every message sent during that time, suggesting that control over this particular step of helping behavior was less than optimal.

The second is interpreting the urgency of the event, which was accomplished by asking for help explicitly. Recall that at the time of study, all participants were fully aware of the importance of filling in the questionnaire distributed by the author, as every participant was also involved in conducting their own research at the time.

The third step, assuming responsibility, is the most important step in this research. Each bystander’s sense of responsibility to offer help generally decreases as the number of witnesses increases. Due to the presence of other people, no single bystander feels a strong personal responsibility to act. This also occurs in social media, despite the fact that people who communicate through social media do not really come face to face with each other and instead only act based on assumptions. The authors of the current study aimed to strengthen participants’ assumption of responsibility by eliminating the presence of other people during delivery of the message. This was accomplished by sending a separate message asking for help through personal chat. As receiving a message through personal chat makes a person feel that they are the only person addressed, this should in turn enhance their assumed responsibility. In fact, the data analysis revealed a significant difference between participants’ actions when they were asked for help through group chat compared to when they were asked through personal chat. In particular, participants were more likely to help when they were asked through personal chat.

The fourth step in helping behavior is knowing how to help. This step was controlled by informing participants explicitly that the way to help was by filling in the questionnaire through the link included in the message. The fifth step is deciding whether or not to help by considering the consequences of helping for the participants. Control of this step was done by explicitly telling the participants that filling in the questionnaire would only take a short amount of time, and that the data provided by the participants would be kept confidential. Following the fifth step, helping behavior was finally measured. Out of the five steps of helping behavior, the third step was the one that was varied and specifically investigated. Considering that every other step of helping behavior was controlled, any difference in participant's helping behavior was interpreted to reflect a difference in one’s sense of responsibility as a bystander in internet-based communication. The result of the experiment suggests that helping behavior in social media resembles helping behavior in the natural world, especially with regard to its susceptibility to the bystander effect. Moreover, the result of the present study is consistent with prior findings that people’s involvement in helping others is significantly influenced by the presence of others.

5. Conclusions

The recent increase in human interaction, which often includes helping behavior, served as the background of the present study. More particularly, the present study attempted to explain the tendency of a person to perform helping behavior within the context of the group chat feature of internet-based communication application. The explanations and results of the present study offer some insight regarding the likelihood of a group chat member to receive help via internet-based communication. Much like communication in the natural world, internet-based communication was found to show manifestations of the bystander phenomenon. LINE application was chosen as the means of communication used in the study because it was deemed both appropriate and highly popular in Indonesia, especially among students of the Faculty of Psychology at Universitas Padjadjaran.

Furthermore, the authors designed the current research based on the steps of helping behavior proposed by Latane and Darley (1970). A within-participant post-test only
design was employed, such that participants were exposed to two treatment conditions. In the initial phase of the experiment, the author sent the participants a message asking for help through group chat. Next, a similar message asking for help, this time containing a different link to a questionnaire, was sent to participants through personal chat. Following the delivery of the message, the authors compared the helping behavior shown by participants in response to the message sent in a group chat and in response to the message sent in a personal chat. A McNemar test was then used to analyze the data.

The present research is not without its limitations. First and foremost is the method employed to assess whether participants noticed the stimulus message. This attempt to control the "notice the event" step of helping behavior is quite hard to implement in the context of daily life. Another limitation concerns the authors' effort to ensure that participants were not influenced by their interpersonal relationship with the sender of the message. Still another major limitation is with the sample size, which was relatively small and thus potentially affect the external validity of the result. Finally, the experiment used a within-participant design, which has its own disadvantages compared to a between-subjects design.

The authors offer several suggestions that may be considered in future research. For instance, to ascertain if participants notice the event, participants could be asked explicitly about whether they have checked the specific message sent by the sender in the group chat. In addition, the participants should be asked to explicitly express if the reason they provide help is because they genuinely want to help, and not because of other personal interests or extraneous variables. Taking into account these suggestions may help increase the validity of future research.

References


