

Analyzing Features of Messages to Old Friends & Peoples' Willingness to Hit Send

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BACKGROUND

- Having friendships is associated with greater health and well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Lu et al., 2021).
- However, many friendships drift apart (Bowker, White, & Weingarten, 2023).
- If people are given a chance to **reach out to an old friend** they've lost touch with, do they?

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

410 adults ($X_{age} = 40.7$, $SD = 13.2$, 45% female) took part in an online survey.

METHODS

Participants were asked to think of an old friend with whom they had lost touch and write a message to them. Participants were then given the opportunity to send their message. Only 1/3 of participants did so.

Here, six trained undergraduate students coded these messages along 13 content-related dimensions (our independent variable; see middle panel). We hypothesized that 9 dimensions would predict whether the message was sent or not (our dependent variable).

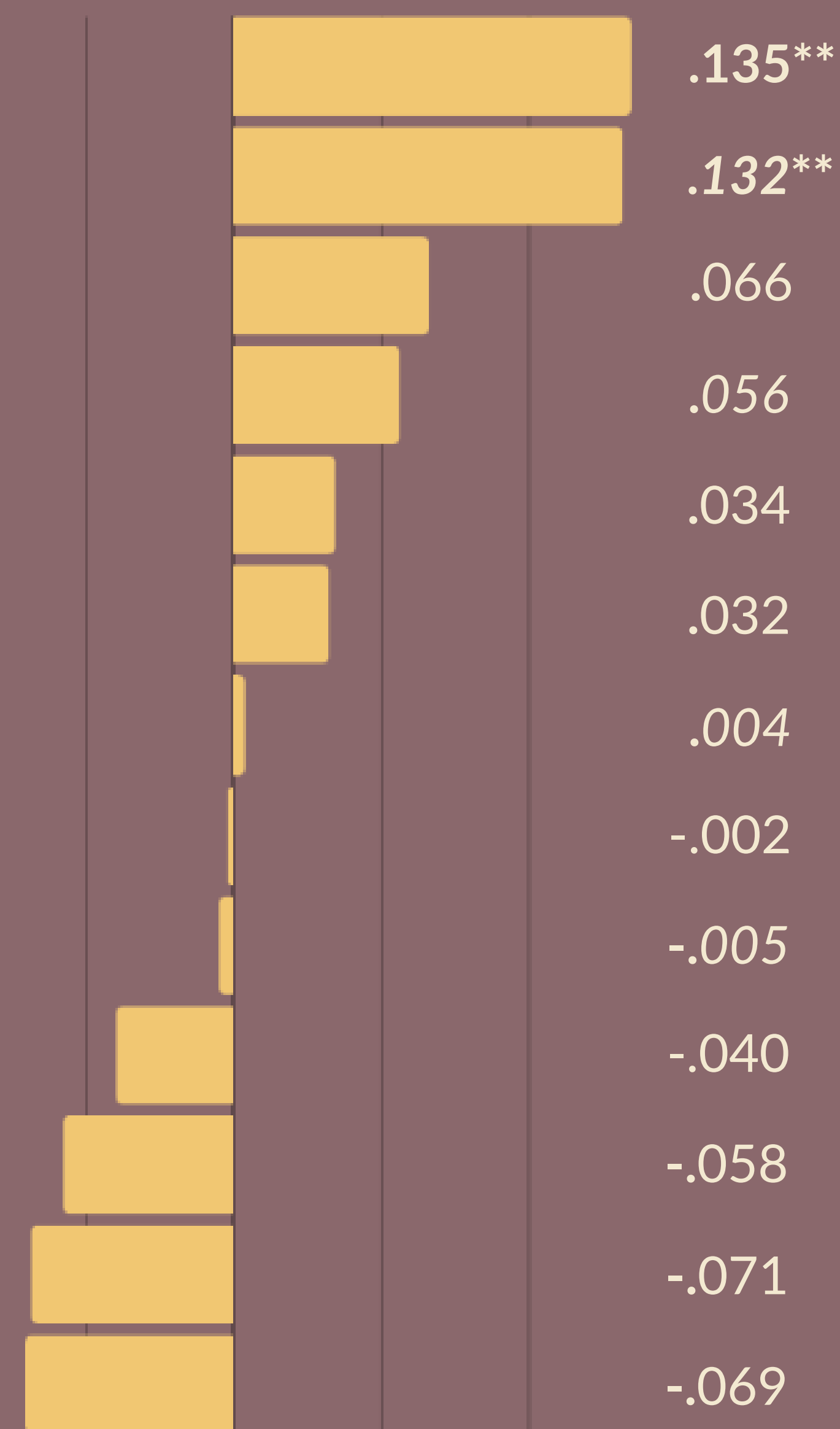
Very few factors predicted if participants were willing to send a message to an old friend.

Dimension: Did the message include...

Italics indicate that we did not pre-register a hypothesis for this dimension.

- ...A suggestion of vague future contact with their old friend.
- ...An acknowledgement that the writer has not spoken to their old friend in awhile.
- ...An enthusiastic tone
- ...An explicit mention of what is going on in the writer's own life or sharing of a personal recent event
- ...A promise that the writer will try to keep in touch, reach out, or visit their old friend more.
- ...A positive tone.
- ...An explanation of why the writer has not spoken with their old friend.
- ...An apology/expression of regret/acceptance of responsibility for not speaking to their old friend in awhile.
- ...An inquiry about how the old friend's life is going.
- ...An explicit mention of thinking about/missing their old friend lately.
- ...A suggestion of concrete future contact with their old friend.
- ...A recollection of a specific memory including their old friend.
- ...An apologetic tone.

Correlation with sending rates (r)



**Indicates significance ($\alpha = 0.01$)

DISCUSSION

Contrary to hypotheses, only two dimensions predicted whether a message was sent: a) an acknowledgment that the writer had not spoken to their friend in a while, and b) a suggestion of vague future contact with their old friend.

Given the common theme between these two dimensions it is possible that taking responsibility (both for losing touch and for initiating future contact) is a predictor of messages being sent.

Limitation: Participants self-reported whether they sent their message; it would be beneficial to directly observe sending behaviors in future studies.

Future research could investigate alternative predictors of reaching out to old friends, such as personality traits of the author, or the author's satisfaction with their present friendships.



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