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Managing availability – Exploring the role of social interdependence

The integration of mobile phones into our everyday lives has led to the phenomenon of „anytime, anywhere communication“. However, mobile availability – as seen from a social perspective – cuts both ways, leading to the so called „Erreichbarkeits-Dilemma“ (Lange, 1993), or dilemma of availability. On the one hand we expect other people to be contactable via their mobile phones, anywhere and at any time. On the other hand, we ourselves do not want to be available all the time, or sometimes are not able to use our mobile phones, for example in the theatre. Besides, people may feel disturbed by ubiquitous mobile communication in public.

The presented study aims at the following research objectives: Firstly, handling of the dilemma of availability was predicted by a social psychological model. Secondly, the model was tested with a laboratory experiment. The theoretical model is based on the theory of social interdependence and was completed by personality prototypes as an additional influencing factor. It considers interdependence structure of situations as independent variables, personality traits, relationship-based motives and self-representational motives as intervening variables and experience and behaviour in regard to the disturbing phone call as dependent variables.

During the experiment, subjects were confronted with a situation inducing a dilemma of availability. Test persons were either called on their own mobile phones in an inappropriate situation or witnessed a disturbing phone call being answered by the experimenter. As the presented study is work in progress, detailed results will be presented in the conference paper.

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