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Mobile Phone Use in Meetings among Chinese Professionals: Perspectives on Multicommunication and Civility

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INTRODUCTION

Mobile phones have dramatically impacted communication in the workplace. Within just a decade, mobile phones have become mainstream devices that nearly all business professionals use for workplace communication. Increasingly, business professionals in all cultures use them in meetings. The presence of mobile phones in meetings is relatively new. Therefore, the etiquette of mobile phone use in meetings is emerging and uncertain within various cultures. Furthermore, little research exists about how the norms and etiquette associated with mobile phone use differ across cultures.

Recently, one of the first studies of mobile phone use in meetings showed that many American business professionals consider various mobile phone actions in meetings rude. This research showed that older professionals are far less accepting of mobile phone use in meetings. Also, women tend to be less accepting than men (Washington, Okoro, & Cardon, 2014). Emerging from the business communication discipline, this research was highlighted in hundreds of popular media outlets, including the *Wall Street Journal* (Gellman, 2013c), the *Washington Post* (McGregor, 2013), and *Forbes* (Essig, 2013; Kruse, 2013). This research was highlighted in dozens of countries and languages. For example, Gellman's original *Wall Street Journal* piece was translated and published in the *Wall Street Journal Asia* (Gellman, 2013a) and *Yahoo! News Hong Kong* (Gellman, 2013b).

This important research by Washington and colleagues (2014) captured attitudes among American professionals. We thought that this research should be conducted in other cultures to identify the critical role of culture in influencing norms and etiquette associated with mobile phone use. Our experience in China suggests that what is considered appropriate or respectful mobile phone behavior in meetings differs from the United States. So, we decided to replicate and extend Washington and colleagues' (2014) study among Chinese professionals. Our study had the following purposes in the context of Chinese professionals: (a) examine attitudes toward using mobile phones in meetings; (b) examine mobile phone behaviors in meetings; (c) examine attitudes about appropriate response time to digital messages; (d) identify targets of multicommunicating; and (e) identify functions of multicommunicating in meetings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, we wanted to examine the nature of mobile phone use in meetings among Chinese professionals. Using mobile phones in meetings is a form of *multicommunication* (described in the next section *Overview of*

Multicommunication), an emerging area of study about overlapping conversations. So, we developed this literature review with a focus on multicommunication research. In this literature review, we review the following: (a) an overview of multicommunication; (b) the impact of multicommunication on perceptions of civility; (c) the impact of multicommunication on performance; (d) multicommunication and its potentially positive impacts in teams and meetings; (e) Chinese cultural influences and multicommunication via mobile phones; and (f) technology and the future of international business communication. We note here that the first four sections are dominated by theoretical perspectives and research conducted in North America. The final sections reveal cultural considerations about multicommunication in the Chinese and international context.

Overview of Multicommunication

A small but emerging set of research has started addressing the role of mobile devices in the workplace with the concept of *multicommunication*. Turner and Reinsch (2007) coined the term *multicommunicatin*g and defined it as "a specific form of multitasking [that] involves engaging in multiple conversations at any one time" (p. 38). Later they defined multicommunicating as "engaging in two or more overlapping, synchronous conversations" (Reinsch, Turner, & Tinsley, 2008, p. 391). They grounded their work in the idea of *polychronicity* (and its opposite *monochronicity*), which has generally referred to cultural preferences about the degree to which multiple activities should overlap with one another (Bluedorn, 2002; Hall, 1959, 1966 1983; Turner & Reinsch, 2002).

Multicommunication has developed theoretically primarily through three camps of researchers. Turner, Reinsch, and their colleagues are the originators of the construct through a series of research articles over the past decade or so (Reinsch & Turner, 2006; Reinsch, Turner, & Tinsley, 2008; Turner, 2011; Turner et al., 2006; Turner & Reinsch, 2002, 2007, 2010). Stephens and her colleagues have refined research about multicommunication and developed an instrument to measure it (Stephens, 2012; Stephens, Cho, & Ballard, 2012; Stephens & Davis, 2009; Stephens, Murphy, & Kee, 2012). Cameron and colleagues have focused primarily on the relational outcomes of multicommunicating (Cameron, Barki, & Plante, 2012; Cameron & Webster, 2005; 2011).

No known scholarly work about multicommunication has reported differences based on cultural differences. However, previous work about polychronic time orientation—which served as the guiding theoretical development of multicommunication—has typically identified Chinese culture as polychronic and American culture as monochronic (Hall, 1976). Logically, this would imply

more acceptance of overlapping conversations among Chinese professionals and less acceptance by American professionals.

Multicommunication and Its Impacts on Perceived Civility

A common orientation of multicommunication communication research is civility. This vein of research emerges from the premise that members of society are increasingly disrespectful of one another, with a large part of this incivility due to mobile devices (Forni, 2008; Hoflich, 2006; Pearson & Porath, 2005, 2009; Smith, 2012). Cameron and colleagues (Cameron, Barki, & Plante, 2012; Cameron & Webster, 2005; 2011) have conducted extensive research about the impact of multicommunication on perceptions of incivility.

Cameron and Webster's (2011) study showed that multicommunicating sometimes led to spiraling incivility and lowered trust. The researchers found that while multicommunicating can be done successfully, it is more difficult to do well than other forms of multitasking since multitasking involves juggling tasks whereas multicommunicating involves "juggling . . . multiple people and often multiple media at the same time" (p. 754). Cameron, Barki, and Plante (2012) extended this research on the outcomes of perceived incivility due to multicommunicating. They examined an analyst-user relationship in an information systems environment. They found that when analysts multicommunicated while working with users, even when it did not interfere with the conversation with the user, study participants expressed less willingness to work with or help the analysts in the future.

A variety of other studies have examined the impact of multicommunicating with mobile devices during meetings on perceived rudeness (Bajko, 2012; Bajko & Fels, 2013; Forgays, Hyman, & Schreiber, 2014; Pinchot, Paullet, & Rota, 2011; Smith, 2012; Washington, Okoro, & Cardon, 2014). Generally, these studies show that a high percentage of North Americans consider mobile phone use as rude, inappropriate, or distracting during most meetings. Several studies show that perceptions of civility are largely determined by age and gender, with older North Americans and women far more likely to consider mobile use in meetings as rude (Forgays, Hyman, & Schreiber, 2014; Smith, 2012; Washington, Okoro, & Cardon, 2014). Washington and colleagues' (2014) study is the most detailed of these studies. It showed that professionals over 40 years old are three to five times more likely to consider checking texts and emails during meetings as rude or inappropriate. Similarly, women were about twice as likely as men to consider behaviors such as checking text messages or answering calls during informal meetings as rude behaviors.

One consideration is how norms of civility change over time. It's possible that professionals will become more tolerant of mobile phone use in meetings over time. Bajko and Fels (2013) are the only known researchers to have conducted comparison studies over time about how mobile devices are perceived in meetings. They replicated their 2010 study of mobile phones in 2012. They found that Canadian professionals had become *slightly* more accepting of mobile phone use in meetings during this period. They attributed this growing acceptance of using phones in meetings to increased functionality on smartphones. However, they showed that mobile phone use in meetings was still relatively low, with just 26 percent of professionals saying they made important calls during meetings and 29 percent of professionals saying they sent important texts during meetings.

Multicommunication and Its Impacts on Workplace Productivity

The potential negative impacts of multicommunicating are not limited to incivility. Many studies have shown how disruptions—due to multitasking in a work environment—are counterproductive (Acquisti & Spiekermann, 2011; Rennecker & Godwin, 2005). For example, a typical office worker is interrupted on average every 3 minutes. Yet, it takes the average office worker 23 minutes to get back and completely focused on a task. Generally, workers compensate for the expectation of interruptions by working faster. Overall, this creates more stress, frustration, time pressure, and effort (Gonzalez & Mark; 2004; Mark, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2005; Mark, Gudith, & Klocke, 2008; Su & Mark, 2008).

Since multicommunicating may hinder focused and sustained communication lines, it can hinder innovation (Turner, 2011). Turner and Reinsch (2010) suggested that it is the focus on efficiency may even inhibit innovation. After researching successful and unsuccessful multicommunication episodes of 201 professionals, they concluded the following regarding unsuccessful multicommunicating:

> What seems most troubling about multicommunicating is the lack of strategic thought associated with its practice. Most respondents seemed to view the practice as an opportunity for efficiency—to do more in less time. The frenetic pace associated with communication and managing responses may be leading to a situation where a response is valued more highly than the content of the response. In this way, conversation becomes a game of high stakes juggling where the goal is to keep as many balls in the air as possible without dropping them. Additionally, the practice of multicommunicating becomes very sender focused with little attention on the receivers. (p. 283)

Multicommunication and Its Potentially Positive Impacts in Teams and Meetings

The research about the negative impacts of multicommunicating is compelling. Most professionals have experienced the negative impacts, and for this reason, multitasking generally and multicommunication specifically are often stigmatized, particularly in the monochronic North American cultures. Yet, multicommunication is not necessarily counterproductive for workplace performance and relationships. In perhaps the seminal work on multicommunication, Reinsch, Turner, and Tinsley (2008) cited research showing that one company estimated saving up to $200 million per year due to multicommunicating within and between teams (Amin et al., 2001).

Among the first researchers to empirically examine the positive impacts of multicommunicating during meetings were Rennecker, Dennis, and Hansen (2010). They examined the many ways in which professionals use instant messaging (IM) to hold multiple conversations during meetings. Grounding their work in Goffman's (1959) terminology about interaction order (the process of regulating interactions), they identified six types of overlapping communication activities of IM during meetings: directing meetings, providing task support, seeking clarification, providing social support, participating in a parallel subgroup meeting, and managing extra-meeting activities. They found that many of these practices led to efficient and effective meetings.

Stephens (2012) built and tested a scale based on the work of Rennecker, Dennis, and Hansen (2010). Her scale contains five factors related to multicommunicating in meetings: influence (influencing the actions of other during meetings); support (coaching and encouraging others during meetings); parallel activities (distractions from meeting goals and blowing off steam); understanding (verifying and clarifying meeting content); and being available (ensuring accessibility to others not present at the meeting). She identified most of these factors as leading to positive outcomes.

The research about multicommunicating, however, is relatively limited, and many of the propositions of the original theoretical work on multicommunicating remain untested empirically. Some of these propositions state that multicommunicating becomes more challenging under the following conditions: higher number of open conversations, faster pace of open conversations, lower integration among social roles occupied in the open conversations, and higher number of topics. Clearly, the degree of challenge associated with various forms of

multicommunicating impacts workplace performance and workplace relationships (Reinsch, Turner, & Tinsley, 2008; Turner & Reinsch, 2007).

Chinese Cultural Influences and Multicommunication via Mobile Phones

Little research exists about the role of culture in determining mobile phone etiquette and behaviors. Some Western scholars have suggested that mobile phones can serve to maintain social cohesion more so in collectivist countries (Mujtaba, 2013; Pearce, 2013). Also, some research indicates that Americans are less accepting of mobile phone use in work environments and are more likely to see it as distracting compared to other cultures (Peng & Chu, 2012).We would expect that Chinese and American cultures would adopt different attitudes and behaviors related to mobile phone use based on the way each cultures enacts relationships. Extensive research about Chinese culture suggests that it exhibits high collectivism, high power distance, and high-context communication compared to Western cultures (Hall, 1959, 1966; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Most scholars attribute these traits to China's Confucian heritage and its emphasis on guanxi relationships (关系). These guanxi relationships typically involve a cluster of emic Chinese relational concepts, including trust (信用), favor and emotional attachment (人情), face (面子), reciprocity (報), and respect for elders (孝) (Bond & Hwang, 1986; Cardon, 2009; Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Hwang, 1987; Park & Luo, 2001; Wang, Wang, and Zhang, 2013; Yum, 1988).

Research about mobile phone use among Chinese indicates these traditional Chinese values impact mobile phone behaviors and norms. For example, Liu (2013) argued that how Chinese use mobile communications must be interpreted through a cultural context of *guanxi*. He explained that one of the characteristics of guanxi-based mobile communications is the need for immediacy and emotional attachment to one's network, or what he refers to as "safety in numbers." Wang and colleagues (2013) found in survey research that the most important aspects of maintaining guanxi are maintaining frequent touch via meals, social activities, *and* mobile phone messages.

Similarly, Yuan (2012) conducted one of the first studies of Chinese communication practices via mobile devices through interviews with 20 Chinese. She found that mobile etiquette is largely defined by negotiating in-group membership, maintaining social harmony, and engaging in high-context communication. She explained that in the "receiver-oriented high-context culture" (p. 218) in China, mobile etiquette requires people to make judgments about how soon to respond to a call or text based on the expectations of the other person. Generally, hierarchy and social capital makes a significant impact on decisions

about whether to return or take calls immediately. As she found, "While the more powerful party usually can afford to be more obtrusive and enjoy higher degrees of privacy, the less powerful party is required to be more discreet and careful in observing etiquette in communication" (p. 218). Thus, texting is considered a high-context, face-saving act in that it allows the recipient to formulate a response.

Few studies have examined the role of gender plays in determining attitudes and behaviors related to mobile phone use in China. Fortunati and colleagues (2012) surveyed 487 mobile phone users in Beijing. They found that Chinese men tend to be more task-oriented in their mobile communications whereas Chinese women tend to be more relationship-oriented.

Overall, the few articles about mobile phone use in China seem to agree about several points. Mobile phones are an important element of maintaining guanxi relationships. Those professionals with seniority and social capital are generally given more latitude in mobile phone use. Texting is culturally appropriate for several reasons. Texting via mobile phones allows high-context communication in which Chinese may send indirect messages and have time to formulate a face-saving response. Also, whether and how soon to send and receive text messages is based on how much social capital a person holds in his/her network.

Technology and the Future of International Business Communication

With mobile devices increasingly occupying a place in international and cross-cultural business communication, research about how culture impacts norms and etiquette associated with technology-mediated communication is essential. Recently, a panel of international business communication scholars discussed the future of intercultural communication, often commenting on this need to understand emerging patterns of communication due to new technologies. For example, Professor Claire Babanoury, an expert in global business communications, stated, "Interconnection between people through technology shall continue to be at the center of the global business communication process" (Victor, 2012, p. 3). She further explained the shifting landscape for intercultural communication researchers and instructors:

> Due to the advances in technology and the increasing use of text messaging, email, and social networks, the message types used in business communication have changed and are probably considered "simpler to use" by the global user; at the same time the global socio-economic conditions and realities as well as the business interactions remain very complex worldwide. The language and culture specialists are therefore facing the

challenges of first tracking the changes that derive from the technological advances and of then deciding how to modify their language and intercultural teaching practice accordingly. (Victor, 2012, p. 8)

Dr. Priscilla Rogers, a leading voice on scholarship in intercultural business communication, further emphasized the need to understand the role mobile devices and the availability of constant information will play in intercultural business communication:

How the field of business communication develops in our global world is tough to predict. But the necessity of multi-tasking, compromise, and competitiveness, challenged by information overload and misrepresentation, attention deficit, and cross-cultural impatience, summons experts like us to develop frameworks and tools that help employees, managers, teams, and organizations process information, decipher falsehood, speak truthfully, seeking understanding, reach consensus, and discipline self-centeredness. (Victor, 2012, p. 3)

Dr. Joo-Seng Tan, an expert in cultural intelligence and cross-cultural communication, asserted that new technologies will in part lead to new forms of communication in a global context. He stated:

Our current thinking about what constitutes global business communication . . . will undergo a paradigm shift. It's really not the technology behind new media and social media; it's the transformations unleashed by these new media about how people connect and interact with others – new ways of communicating and interacting, and new connections forged between new media and "traditional" media. (Victor, 2012, p. 3)

Tan's comments suggest that new technologies will give rise to new communication patterns within and across cultures. This may even increase the complexity of researching and teaching cross-cultural communication. Ironically, many new technologies may provide the appearance of increased similarities in communication across cultures. Yet, as Dr. Iris Varner, another leading expert in intercultural business communication, explained, "The global use of technology and the speed of communication easily trap us in the belief that cultures converge. However, this is frequently a surface convergence only." (Victor, 2012, p. 11) Our study, in part, is a response to this call for research about the complex patterns of communication that are emerging in various cultures due to new technologies.

METHODOLOGY

Our primary goal was to conduct research about the nature of muticommunicating via mobile phones among Chinese in meetings. In this process we intended to establish a comparison between Chinese professionals in this study with American professionals in Washington and colleagues' (2014) study. We designed the study to address the following issues: (a) attitudes toward using mobile phones in meetings; (b) mobile phone behaviors in meetings; (c) attitudes about appropriate response time to digital messages; (d) targets of multicommunicating in meetings; and (e) functions of multicommunicating in meetings.

Our survey contains the same survey items as those in Washington and colleagues' (2014) survey. Based on open-ended interviews with professionals, they identified the most common mobile phone actions in meetings that were considered rude. Then, they surveyed a sample of 350 American professionals about how appropriate these behaviors were considered in formal and informal meetings. They used a scale of appropriateness adopted from Young (2008). They also asked a question about appropriate response time to the following forms of digital messages: texts, emails, and phone calls. Appendix items 1, 2, and 3 are taken directly from their study. Additionally, we added survey questions 4, 5, and 6 that build on Washington and colleagues' study to focus on self-reported behaviors (not just attitudes).

As we developed the survey, we also added several additional survey items to address Stephens' (2012) development of a multicommunication scale. While we considered Washington and colleagues' (2014) survey items useful to explain professionals' views of civility, we thought it lacked the ability to provide perspectives about positive and functional aspects of mobile phone use in meetings. So, we created survey items 8 and 9 to address each of the multicommunicating functions identified in Stephens' (2012) scale: influence (influencing the actions of other during meetings); support (coaching and encouraging others during meetings); parallel activities (distractions from meeting goals and blowing off steam); understanding (verifying and clarifying meeting content); and being available (ensuring accessibility to others not present at the meeting). Furthermore, we added item 7 to help provide context for multicommunicating by identifying the targets of multicommunicating, including options for clients, colleagues at the meeting, colleagues not at the meeting, friends and family, and others.

The survey was initially developed in English. It was then translated by a native-Chinese speaker (a member of the research team) into Chinese. The Chinese version is provided in Appendix 1, and the English version is provided in Appendix

2. To find participants for the study, we contacted professionals primarily in the Shanghai area but also from many other locations in China. These professionals were part of one of the research team member's professional network. As shown in the *Findings* section, these professionals were quite varied as far as age, gender, position, and type of organization. We think we achieved a strong sample that captures contemporary attitudes and behaviors related to mobile phone use in meetings among Chinese professionals.

We used regression analysis to examine several sets of dependent variables: (a) attitudes toward mobile phone use in meetings; (b) mobile phone use in meetings; (c) attitudes toward response time to digital messages; (d) actual response time to digital messages; and (e) purposes of multicommunicating. For each of these dependent variables, we used sums of related survey items. Each of the dependent variables showed high reliability for these summed items (with Cronbach's α reported for each dependent variable). We used survey items 1a through 1h for attitudes toward mobile phone use in formal meetings (α = .868); items 2a through 2h for attitudes toward mobile phone use in informal meetings (α = .865); items 3a through 3h for mobile phone actions in formal meetings (α = .869); items 4a through 4h for mobile phone actions in informal meetings (α = .854); items 8a through 8f for multicommunicating in formal meetings (α = .912); and items 9a through 9f for multicommunicating in informal meetings (α = .922).

A major goal of our study was to provide comparative data with American business culture. Because survey items 1 through 3 were the same as those in Washington and colleagues' study (2014) for attitudes toward mobile phone use in meetings and appropriate response time to digital messages, we were able to make direct comparisons with that study. We took their reported mean scores, standard deviations, and sample sizes to conduct independent samples *t*-tests of significance.

FINDINGS

Ultimately, 186 Chinese professionals (100 men, 53.8%; 86 women, 46.2%) completed the survey. Most of the professionals (*n* = 105, 56.5%) were from Shanghai. We gained a fairly wide range in terms of age: 21 to 30: *n* = 76, 40.9%; 31 to 40: *n* = 64, 34.4%; 41 to 50: *n* = 41, 22%; and over 50: *n* = 5, 2.7%. We also found a wide variety in positions: executives: *n* = 10, 5.4%; upper management: *n* = 24, 12.9%; middle management: *n* = 57, 30.6%; supervisors: *n* = 33, 17.7%; and regular employees: *n* = 62, 33.3%. We surveyed professionals in a variety of organization types: government: *n* = 13, 7.0%; joint ventures: *n* = 9, 4.8%; public institutions: *n* = 17, 9.1%; state-owned enterprises: *n* = 41, 22.0%; private enterprises: *n* = 60, 32.3%; publicly traded companies: *n* = 17, 9.1%; foreign-owned

enterprises: n = 27, 14.5%; and HK-Macau-Taiwan enterprises: n = 2, 1.1%. Additionally, these professionals reported a variety of average meeting sizes at their organizations: 2 to 5 people: n = 14, 7.5%; 6 to 10 people: n = 60, 32.3%; 11 to 15 people: n = 31, 16.7%; 16 to 20 people: n = 29, 15.6%; and 21 or more people: n = 52, 28.0%.

Table 1 shows attitudes toward various mobile phone behaviors in formal and informal meetings. Generally, the strong majority of Chinese professionals showed acceptance for each of the behaviors with the exceptions of answering a call and browsing the Internet. Chinese professionals expressed even more tolerance in informal meetings with only a majority expressing disapproval of answering a call. Table 2 shows the self-reported behaviors for each of these mobile phone actions in meetings. Self-reported attitudes and behaviors in formal and informal behaviors are nearly identical.

Table 1. Attitudes toward Mobile Phone Use in Formal and Informal Meetings.

	Formal Meetings			Informal Meetings		
	M	*SD*	%	*M*	*SD*	%
Bringing a Phone to the Meeting	1.72	1.11	11.3	1.47	.81	2.1
Checking Time with Phone	2.74	1.39	32.8	2.32	1.16	15.0
Checking Incoming Texts	2.76	1.29	32.3	2.28	1.08	12.4
Checking Incoming Emails	3.00	1.33	40.3	2.49	1.14	17.8
Answering a Call	4.26	.89	82.8	3.68	1.21	64.0
Leaving the Meeting to Take a Call	2.78	1.26	29.1	2.62	1.10	21.0
Sending Texts	3.22	1.20	41.4	2.72	1.14	24.7
Browsing the Internet	3.95	1.24	72.0	3.27	1.32	45.1

Note. The scale was as follows: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never. Percentage refers to how many people responded "never" or "rarely."

Table 3 shows attitudes toward and behaviors of appropriate response times to texts, emails, and phone calls. Chinese professionals clearly consider texts as the digital messages requiring the quickest responses. Closely behind, these professionals consider returning phone calls as quite urgent. Emails are far less urgent with a two-hour response on average considered appropriate.

Table 4 shows the most common targets of multicommunicating with mobile phones during meetings. On average Chinese professionals report contacting others with their mobile phones *sometimes* during meetings. The most targets of calls are clients, followed by friends and family, colleagues not at the meeting, and colleagues at the meeting.

Table 2. Mobile Phone Behaviors in Formal and Informal Meetings.

	Formal Meetings			Informal Meetings		
	M	*SD*	%	*M*	*SD*	%
Bringing a Phone to the Meeting	1.75	1.12	11.8	1.55	.95	7.5
Checking Time with Phone	2.84	1.30	34.4	2.47	1.16	16.7
Checking Incoming Texts	2.84	1.18	32.3	2.37	1.07	12.4
Checking Incoming Emails	3.13	1.18	39.8	2.71	1.16	20.4
Answering a Call	4.23	.99	80.1	3.68	1.23	60.3
Leaving the Meeting to Take a Call	3.10	1.29	41.4	2.78	1.08	23.6
Sending Texts	3.31	1.12	46.8	2.78	1.11	22.1
Browsing the Internet	3.97	1.22	70.9	3.42	1.29	48.4

Note. The scale was as follows: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never. Percentage refers to how many people responded "never" or "rarely."

Table 3. Attitudes and Behaviors for Response Time to Digital Messages.

	Attitude			Behavior		
	M	*SD*	%	*M*	*SD*	%
Text	1.69	.84	48.9	1.66	.67	44.6
Email	3.05	1.15	8.1	3.00	1.14	9.7
Phone	1.74	.81	43	1.81	.83	39.20

Note. The scale was as follows: 1, immediately; 2, within an hour; 3, within two hours; 4, within a day, 5, within a few days. Percentage refers to how many people responded "immediately."

Table 4. Targets of Multicommunicating in Meetings.

	M	*SD*	%
Clients	2.84	1.10	27.5
Colleagues at meeting	3.61	1.01	55.9
Colleagues not at meeting	3.26	0.98	39.2
Friends or family	3.00	1.17	33.8
Other people	3.65	1.09	60.3

Note. The scale was as follows: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never. Percentage refers to how many people responded "never" or "rarely."

Table 5 shows the reasons for multicommunicating in meetings. Each of these ideas emerges from Stephens' (2012) model. Overall, Chinese professionals report using these various multicommunicating functions *rarely* to *sometimes*, with the most common functions being asking others for information, checking with others before making comments, encouraging or coaching others, and giving ideas or suggestions to others.

Table 5. Multicommunicating Behaviors in Formal and Informal Meetings.

	Formal Meetings			Informal Meetings		
	M	*SD*	*%*	*M*	*SD*	*%*
Give ideas or suggestions to others	3.62	1.07	60.8	3.44	1.06	50.0
Encourage or coach others	3.61	1.08	58.0	3.38	1.07	49.5
Check with others before making comments	3.45	1.09	48.9	3.33	1.08	42.0
Ask others for information	3.27	1.06	38.8	3.19	1.09	38.7
Give immediate reactions to an idea	3.90	1.04	68.8	3.68	1.15	60.8
Discuss unrelated topics	4.07	1.11	74.2	3.79	1.18	66.1

Note. The scale was as follows: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never. Percentage refers to how many people responded "never" or "rarely."

Table 6 shows two regression models with attitudes about using mobile phones during formal and informal meetings as the depending variables. Older professionals are significantly more likely to think using mobile phones in formal meetings more often in meetings is appropriate. They are also more likely to actually use mobile phones more often during meetings. Also, professionals who tend to report having larger average meetings sizes are significantly more likely to think using mobile phones in meetings more often in meetings is appropriate; however, in practice, they do not report using mobile phones any differently than those professionals who report smaller average meeting sizes. For informal meetings, none of the variables are significant in predicting attitudes. Men report being more accepting of mobile phone use in informal meetings with near significance ($p = .08$).

Table 6. Regression of Attitudes towards Mobile Phone Use in Meetings.

	Model 1: Formal Meetings			Model 2: Informal Meetings		
	B	*SE*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*p*
(Constant)	32.793	3.574	.000	22.544	3.443	.000**
Gender	1.559	1.029	.132	1.735	.991	.082
Age	-.212	.058	.000**	-.058	.056	.299
Position	.111	.428	.796	.135	.413	.745
Annual Salary	-.138	.209	.508	-.234	.201	.246
Average Meeting Size	-.907	.371	.015*	-.295	.357	.409
Size of City	-.234	1.246	.851	-.685	1.201	.569

Note. $R^2 = .14$ for Model 1; $R^2 = .05$ for Model 2. The scale was as follows: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never. *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$.

Table 7 is a regression of self-reported behaviors in formal and informal meetings. Model 3 shows that older professionals report using their mobile phones significantly more in formal meetings. Model 4 shows that women report using their mobile phones significantly less than men in informal meetings. Similarly, women report using their mobile phones less than men in formal meetings with near significance ($p = .08$). Models 3 and 4 also show that as average meeting size increases do does the frequency of mobile phone use in formal and informal meetings.

Table 7. Regression of Mobile Phone Use in Meetings.

	Model 3: Formal Meetings			Model 4: Informal Meetings		
	B	*SE*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*p*
(Constant)	32.276	3.5	.000**	3.85	2.90	.000**
Gender	1.768	1.008	.081	29.924	3.247	.030*
Age	-.142	.057	.013*	2.044	.935	.129
Position	.127	.419	.762	-.08	.053	.531
Annual Salary	-.203	.204	.322	-.244	.389	.092
Average Meeting Size	-.996	.363	.007**	-.321	.189	.003**
Size of City	-1.31	1.221	.285	-1.026	.337	.006**

Note. $R^2 = .12$ for Model 3; $R^2 = .07$ for Model 4. The scale was as follows: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never. *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$.

Table 8 is a regression of response time to digital messages (texts, emails, and phone calls). Older professionals report that response time should be significantly quicker. They report actually responding sooner as well (with near significance at $p =.061$). No other variables contain significant differences.

Table 8. Regression of Response Time to Digital Messages.

	Model 5: Attitudes			Model 6: Behaviors		
	B	*SE*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*p*
(Constant)	8.529	1.086	.000**	7.385	1.061	.000**
Gender	-.354	.313	.258	.194	.305	.526
Age	-.043	.018	.015*	-.032	.017	.061
Position	.148	.130	.257	.13	.127	.309
Annual Salary	-.013	.063	.844	-.005	.062	.932
Average Meeting Size	-.005	.113	.968	-.101	.11	.358
Size of City	-.685	.379	.072	-.281	.37	.449

Note. $R^2 = .04$ for Model 5; $R^2 = .11$ for Model 6. The scale was as follows: 1, immediately; 2, within an hour; 3, within two hours; 4, within a day, 5, within a few days. *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$.

Table 9 shows that men report multicommunicating significantly more often in formal meetings. Men also report multicommunicating more frequently in informal meetings (with near significance at $p = .075$). Also, multicommunicating occurs significantly more often in formal and informal meetings when the average meeting size is larger and when located in non-Tier 1 Chinese cities.

Table 9. Regression of Multicommunicating Purposes in Formal and Informal Meetings.

	Model 7: Formal Meetings			Model 8: Informal Meetings		
	B	*SE*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*p*
(Constant)	21.131	2.776	.000	21.769	2.954	.000**
Gender	2.51	.799	.002**	1.525	.85	.075
Age	.014	.045	.757	.028	.048	.561
Position	.132	.333	.691	.15	.354	.671
Annual Salary	.105	.162	.517	.009	.172	.959
Average Meeting Size	-.877	.288	.003**	-.838	.306	.007**
Size of City	-1.988	.968	.041*	-2.588	1.03	.013*

$R^2 = .11$ for Model 7; $R^2 = .08$ for Model 8. The scale was as follows: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never. *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$.

In Tables 10, 11, and 12, we provide comparative data with that reported in Washington and colleagues' (2014) study of mobile phone behaviors among American professionals. We developed our study with identical survey items related to attitudes toward mobile phone use in formal and informal meetings as well as appropriate response time to digital messages so that we could make these comparisons. Table 10 shows that Chinese professionals expect far quicker response times to texts and phone calls, whereas American professionals expect faster response to emails.

Table 10. Comparison between Chinese and American Professionals of Response Times to Digital Messages.

	Chinese			Americans				
	M	*SD*	%	*M*	*SD*	%	*t*	*p*
Text	1.69	.84	48.9	2.25	1.00	26.6	-6.82	.000**
Email	3.05	1.15	8.1	2.68	1.11	9.4	3.56	.000**
Phone	1.74	.81	43.0	2.53	1.19	15.4	-9.03	.000**

Note. The scale was as follows: 1, immediately; 2, within an hour; 3, within two hours; 4, within a day, 5, within a few days. Percentage refers to how many people responded to "immediately." *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$.

Tables 11 and 12 show that Chinese are far more flexible or accepting of mobile phone use in formal and informal meetings. In particular, Chinese professionals are far more accepting in both formal and informal meetings of bringing a phone to the meeting, checking for incoming texts, answering a call, leaving the meeting to take a call, and even browsing the Internet.

Table 11. Comparison between Chinese and American Professionals for Attitudes toward Mobile Phone Use in Formal Meetings.

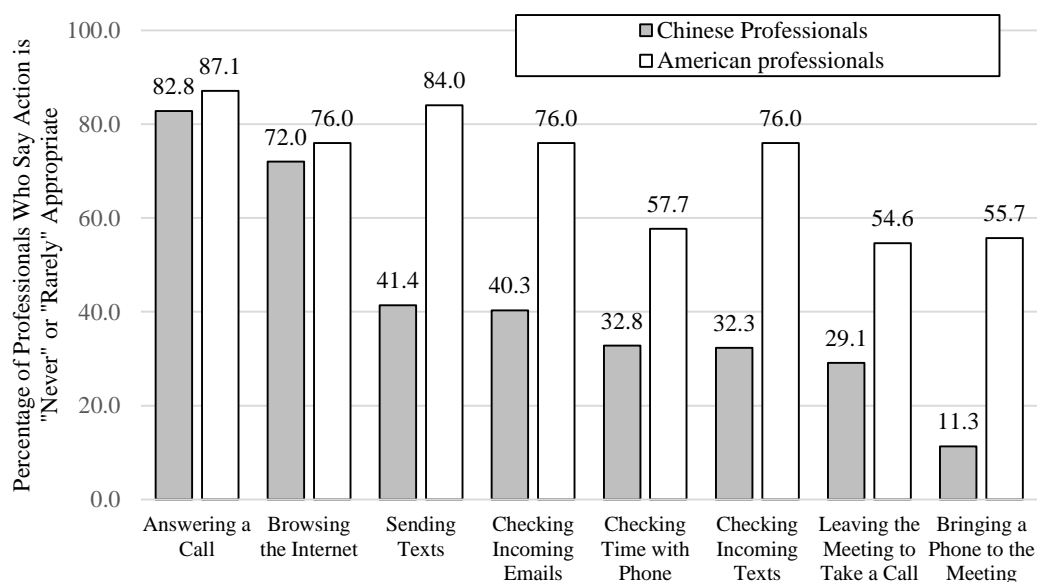|	Chinese			Americans				
	M	*SD*	%	*M*	*SD*	%	*t*	*p*
Bring Your Phone to the Meeting	1.72	1.11	11.3	2.63	.97	55.7	-9.36	.000**
Checking Time with Phone	2.74	1.39	32.8	2.75	1.03	57.7	-.09	.93
Checking Incoming Texts	2.76	1.29	32.3	3.15	.95	76.0	-3.60	.000**
Checking Incoming Emails	3.00	1.33	40.3	3.15	.95	76.0	-1.35	.17
Answering a Call	4.26	.89	82.8	3.39	.82	87.1	10.98	.000**
Leaving the Meeting to Take a Call	2.78	1.26	29.1	2.69	.88	54.6	7.42	.000**
Sending Texts	3.22	1.20	41.4	3.38	.87	84.0	-1.59	.11
Browsing the Internet	3.95	1.24	72.0	3.17	.95	76.0	7.43	.000**

Note. The scale was as follows: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never. Percentage refers to how many people responded "never" or "rarely." *p<.05, **p<.01.

Table 12. Comparison between Chinese and American Professionals for Attitudes toward Mobile Phone Use in Informal Meetings.

	Chinese			Americans				
	M	*SD*	%	*M*	*SD*	%	*t*	*p*
Bring Your Phone to the Meeting	1.47	.81	2.1	1.92	.88	22.0	-5.90	.000**
Checking Time with Phone	2.32	1.16	15.0	2.19	.96	32.9	1.30	.195
Checking Incoming Texts	2.28	1.08	12.4	2.59	.97	53.1	-3.25	.001**
Checking Incoming Emails	2.49	1.14	17.8	2.59	.97	53.1	-1.09	.314
Answering a Call	3.68	1.21	64.0	2.69	.92	61.4	9.68	.000**
Leaving the Meeting to Take a Call	2.62	1.10	21.0	2.23	.90	34.0	4.12	.000**
Sending Texts	2.72	1.14	24.7	2.89	.97	66.3	-1.71	.087
Browsing the Internet	3.27	1.32	45.1	2.83	1.01	61.4	3.94	.000**

Note. The scale was as follows: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never. Percentage refers to how many people responded to "never" or "rarely." *p<.05, **p<.01.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

In this section we provide some of our major conclusions. We focus most of these conclusions as far as comparisons between Chinese and American professional cultures. This is largely due to our original motivation to our study – to build on and extend Washington and colleagues' (2014) study in American business culture. We believed that a study in Chinese culture would produce different results, yet we were surprised how dramatic these differences were in some cases.

Chinese professionals are far more accepting of mobile phone use in meetings than are American professionals. Figure 1 displays the dramatic differences between Chinese and American samples based on our work and that of Washington and colleagues (2014). For most of these mobile phone actions, American professionals are roughly 2 to 2-1/2 times more likely to say the actions are "never" or "rarely" appropriate in meetings. Perhaps the most dramatic difference is even bringing a phone to a meeting in which American professionals are five times as likely to say professionals should "never" or "rarely" do this. These major differences in what is considered appropriate mobile phone etiquette seem to indicate that Chinese and American professionals have significant differences in judging what constitutes "respect" during meetings. We consider this idea further in the next several conclusions.

Figure 1. Comparison of Attitudes toward Mobile Phone Actions in Formal Meetings among Chinese and American Professionals.

Older Chinese professionals are more accepting of mobile phone use in meetings than are younger Chinese professionals – exactly opposite the pattern among American professionals. One of the most striking differences between our study and that of Washington and colleagues (2014) is how age impacts attitudes toward mobile phone use in in meetings. Whereas older American professionals are far less accepting than younger American professionals of mobile phone use in meetings, older Chinese professionals are far more accepting than younger Chinese professionals of mobile phone use in meetings. Figures 2 through 4 depict some of these differences. These figures focus on texting, but we could have chosen nearly any of the other items to display to show these major differences in age.

We believe these differences are evidence of the impact of Confucianism, with its tradition of respect for seniority and maintenance of guanxi, on contemporary Chinese business culture. More senior professionals, in age and length of service in an organization, are more highly valued. Consistent with the Confucian *Ethical Code of Five Relationships*, a fairly rigid hierarchical structure exists. Also, older professionals recognize that they must respond immediately to important contacts. As holders of more social capital, these more senior Chinese business professionals are more aware of the art of cultivating guanxi and understand the need for immediate replies to valued guanxi partners (Bond & Hwang, 1986; Knutson, Hwang, & Deng, 2000). The preference for texting seems to indicate reliance on a more high-context communication channel. It's also possible that younger professionals tend to have adopted more task-based approaches to working with less emphasis on guanxi. This may have occurred for a variety of reasons, including working or studying abroad, gaining exposure to the West in other forms, and being protected by parents and seniors (due to the one-child policy).

Figure 2. The Role of Age in Influencing *Texting Reply Time* during Meetings.
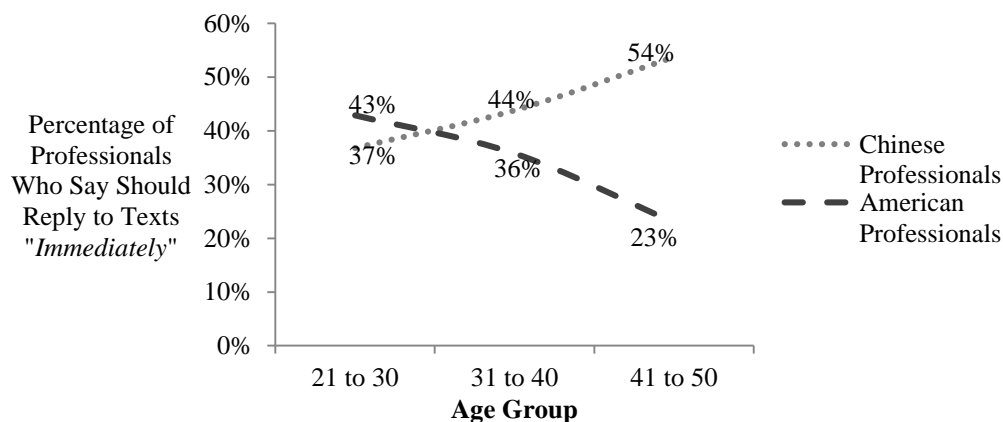
Figure 3. The Role of Age in Influencing *Appropriateness of Reading Texts* during Meetings.
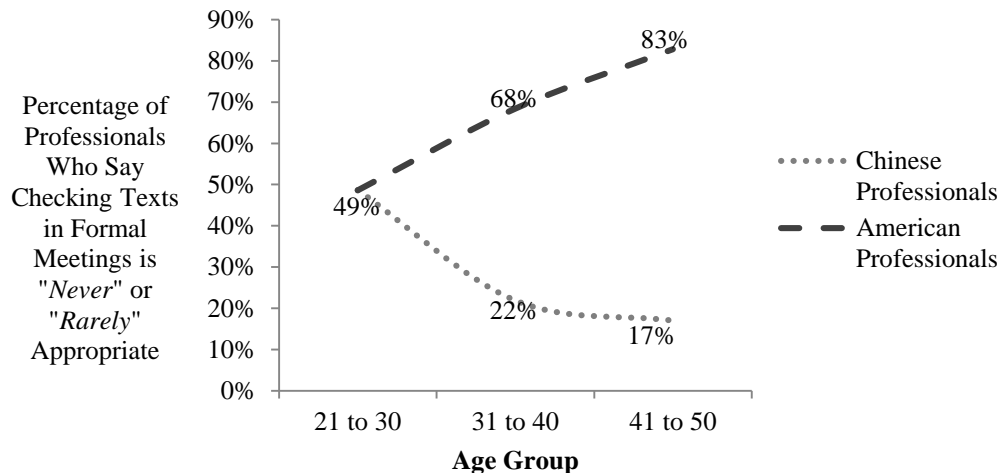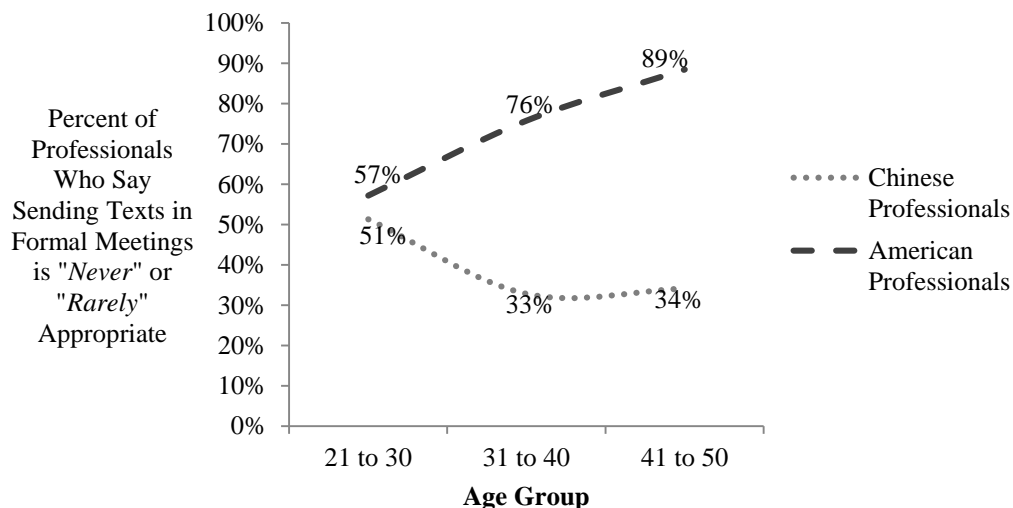

Figure 4. The Role of Age in Influencing *Appropriateness of Sending Texts* during Meetings.

Chinese women are less accepting then Chinese men of mobile phone use in meetings – similar to patterns seen among American professionals. One interesting similarity between Chinese and American professionals is the role gender plays in attitudes and actions related to mobile phone use. This confirms findings from Fortunati and colleagues (2012) in Chinese culture. It seems that women in Chinese and American business cultures tend to associate more mobile phone use in meetings with less respect for others. Chinese believe social rules should be maintained by moral education and self-improvement. As they grow up, Chinese women are taught to follow the norms set for women, including learning

to be more self-disciplined. What they see and what they experience then reinforces the norms. Chinese women gradually get used to the submissive image of themselves as they grow up. The willingness of putting themselves in a one-down position makes them more easily follow the Chinese moral standards and apply civility principles to their activities to show respect to others.

Multicommunicating via mobile phones in meetings is mostly client-based and relationship-based, and to a lesser extent team-based. Chinese professionals most often use their mobile phones to communicate with clients, followed closely by friends or family members (see Table 4). They far lesson often use their mobile phones to communicate with colleagues at the meeting or not at the meeting. This tends to demonstrate that client relationships occupy the primary rationale for multicommunicating. It's also striking that friends and family members are targets of multicommunicating more so than team members. This seems at odds with American culture's stronger separation between work and home life.

Perhaps most striking about the targets of multicommunicating is the far less frequent attention to teammates. American business culture has certainly adopted a strong team-based orientation in the past few decades. The multicommunication literature emerging from the West, particularly the work of Stephens and her colleagues, is grounded in the assumption that multicommunication is a team-based activity. This may in part explain why Chinese professionals tend to report more relaxed views of mobile phone use in meetings yet relatively infrequent multicommunicating purposes as expressed in Stephen's (2012) model of multicommunication (see Table 5).

Meeting size matters a lot. One issue that has gone largely unnoticed in Western studies of multicommunication is the number of participants in a meeting. We assumed going into this study that as the number of meeting participants increases, there will be more multicommunicating occurring. As expected, this was the case in every instance among Chinese professionals. We expect this relationship would hold in all cultures.

We note the following recommendations for future research. Each recommendation is related to a limitation of this study:

We suggest additional research about the high-context nature of Chinese texting in the workplace. Several studies we cited identified texting as well suited to traditional Confucian relational values of respect for elders and nuanced understanding of relational networks. Texting allows professionals to infer meaning not only from the text itself but also the contextual cues related to relationships,

social capital, and timing. To some extent, our study likewise suggests that texting may fit this high-context communication pattern. This is a significant conclusion given some recent studies suggesting the distinctions between low-context and high-context business communication are becoming less important (Cardon, 2008). Yet, we think our survey research can't completely capture the high-context rationale and interpretation of texts. We recommend ethnographic and rhetorical research that more closely examines the content of text messages and the thought processes of Chinese professionals in this process.

We suggest research about the nature of cultural convergence and divergence of mobile phone attitudes and actions across generations. Cross-cultural experts often discuss the nature of globalization in driving convergence or divergence of values. Our study showed exactly the opposite patterns of mobile phone attitudes and actions as far as generation. These patterns on the whole seem to indicate convergence is not happening. In other words, the patterns seem to match traditional Chinese values of collectivism and power distance and American values of individualism. Yet, the attitudes and actions of Chinese and American professionals in the 21 to 30 year old group are nearly identical, which raises the question of whether convergence is occurring among this generation. Our study is a snapshot in time of Chinese business culture. We drew comparisons to another study that contains a snapshot in time of American business professionals. We encourage additional research, particularly longitudinal, that helps provide answers about the degree to which mobile phones are driving convergence or divergence of communication patterns. Our study shows that this research must pay close attention to generational groups.

We suggest research about the nature of mobile phone use in intercultural meetings. Our study drew comparisons between mobile phone attitudes and actions within cultures. We encourage research about how mobile phones in meetings influence intercultural communication. For example, we suggest research that examines the mobile phone behaviors of Chinese and American professionals when they are in meetings together.

We suggest research that broadens the scope of multicommunication purposes and behaviors. We think Stephens' (2012) research about multicommunication is seminal research and theory about the use of mobile devices to facilitate overlapping conversations in meetings and team-based environments. We built part of this study on this research. This research, based in North American culture, is far more team-based. This study seemed to indicate that Chinese professionals are more likely to multicommunicate with different parties (i.e., clients, family/friends) more frequently. We suggest additional

multicommunication research in various cultures that remains open to different priorities for targets and purposes of communication.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of mobile phone use in meetings among Chinese professionals. We replicated and extended surveys conducted in North America in order to draw cross-cultural comparisons. Based on survey results, we concluded the following: (a) Chinese professionals are far more accepting of mobile phone use in meetings than are American professionals; (b) older Chinese professionals are more accepting of mobile phone use in meetings than are younger Chinese professionals – exactly opposite the pattern among American professionals; (c) Chinese women are less accepting then Chinese men of mobile phone use in meetings – similar to the pattern seen among American professionals; (d) multicommunicating via mobile phones in meetings is mostly client-based and relationship-based, and to a lesser extent team-based; and (e) meeting size strongly impacts attitudes toward mobile phone use in meetings. Many of our conclusions point toward a seniority-based, high-context approach to mobile phone use in meetings among Chinese professionals. We suggest additional research about the high-context nature of Chinese texting in the workplace. We also suggest research about the nature of cultural convergence and divergence of mobile phone attitudes and actions across generations. Finally, we suggest research that broadens the scope of multicommunication purposes and behaviors.

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APPENDIX 1: Survey Items about Mobile Phone Use (Chinese)

二、您对在商务会议中使用手机所持的态度

1. 您认为在正式会议中下列情况的发生频率应该是：(总是, 经常, 有时, 极少, 从不)
   a) 将手机带入会场
   b) 用手机查看时间
   c) 查看来电信息
   d) 查看短信／电子邮件
   e) 在会场内接听来电
   f) 离开会场接听来电
   g) 发送短信
   h) 上网浏览信息

2. 您认为在非正式会议中下列情况的发生频率应该是：(总是, 经常, 有时, 极少, 从不)
   a) 将手机带入会场
   b) 用手机查看时间
   c) 查看来电信息
   d) 查看短信／电子邮件
   e) 在会场内接听来电
   f) 离开会场接听来电
   g) 发送短信
   h) 上网浏览信息

3. 您认为回复下列信息的最适宜时间应该是： (立刻, 一小时内, 两小时内, 一天内, 几天内)
   a) 短信
   b) 电子邮件
   c) 电话

三、您本人在商务会议中使用手机的情况

4. 正式会议中，下列情况在您身上的实际发生频率为：(总是, 经常, 有时, 极少, 从不)
   a) 将手机带入会场

b) 用手机查看时间
c) 查看来电信息
d) 查看短信／电子邮件
e) 在会场内接听来电
f) 离开会场接听来电
g) 发送短信
h) 上网浏览信息

5. 非正式会议中，下列情况在您身上的实际发生频率为：(总是, 经常, 有时, 极少, 从不)
a) 将手机带入会场
b) 用手机查看时间
c) 查看来电信息
d) 查看短信／电子邮件
e) 在会场内接听来电
f) 离开会场接听来电
g) 发送短信
h) 上网浏览信息

6. 您实际回复下列信息的时间为：(立刻, 一小时内, 两小时内, 一天内, 几天内)
a) 短信
b) 电子邮件
c) 电话

四、您在商务会议中使用手机发送信息的对象及其原因

7. 您使用手机给下列联系人发送信息的频率为：(总是, 经常, 有时, 极少, 从不)
a) 客户
b) 到会的其他同事
c) 不在会场的同事
d) 朋友或家庭成员
e) 其它

8. 正式会议中，您出于下列原因使用手机发送信息的频率为：(总是, 经常, 有时, 极少, 从不)
   a) 给他人出主意
   b) 给予他人鼓励或指导
   c) 发言前与同事核对信息
   d) 询问相关信息
   e) 发表即时评论
   f) 谈论与会议无关的话题

9. 非正式会议中，您出于下列原因使用手机发送信息的频率为：(总是, 经常, 有时, 极少, 从不)
   a) 给他人出主意
   b) 给予他人鼓励或指导
   c) 发言前与同事核对信息
   d) 询问相关信息
   e) 发表即时评论
   f) 谈论与会议无关的话题

APPENDIX 2: Survey Items about Mobile Phone Use (English)

Section 2: Attitudes toward Various Mobile Phone Actions in Meetings

1. How often do you consider the following actions with mobile phones appropriate in formal meetings? (scale: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never)
    a. Bringing a Phone to the Meeting
    b. Checking Time with Phone
    c. Checking Incoming Texts
    d. Checking Incoming Emails
    e. Answering a Call
    f. Leaving the Meeting to Take a Call
    g. Sending Texts
    h. Browsing the Internet

2. How often do you consider the following actions with mobile phones appropriate in informal meetings? (scale: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never)
    a. Bringing a Phone to the Meeting
    b. Checking Time with Phone
    c. Checking Incoming Texts
    d. Checking Incoming Emails
    e. Answering a Call
    f. Leaving the Meeting to Take a Call
    g. Sending Texts
    h. Browsing the Internet

3. How quickly should you respond to the following types of incoming messages? (Scale: 1, immediately; 2, within an hour; 3, within two hours; 4, within a day, 5, within a few days).
    a. Text
    b. Email
    c. Phone

Section 3: Self-Reported Frequency of Various Mobile Phone Actions in Meetings

4. How often do you engage in the following actions with mobile phones in formal meetings? (scale: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never)
    a. Bringing a Phone to the Meeting
    b. Checking Time with Phone
    c. Checking Incoming Texts
    d. Checking Incoming Emails

  e. Answering a Call
  f. Leaving the Meeting to Take a Call
  g. Sending Texts
  h. Browsing the Internet

5. How often do you engage in the following actions with mobile phones in informal meetings? (scale: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never)
  a. Bringing a Phone to the Meeting
  b. Checking Time with Phone
  c. Checking Incoming Texts
  d. Checking Incoming Emails
  e. Answering a Call
  f. Leaving the Meeting to Take a Call
  g. Sending Texts
  h. Browsing the Internet

6. How quickly do you actually respond to the following types of incoming messages? (Scale: 1, immediately; 2, within an hour; 3, within two hours; 4, within a day, 5, within a few days).
  a. Text
  b. Email
  c. Phone

Section 4: Reasons for Multicommunicating in Meetings

7. When you are in meetings, how often to you contact the following via mobile phone? (scale: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never)
  a. Clients
  b. Colleagues at the meeting
  c. Colleagues not at the meeting
  d. Friends or family
  e. Other people

8. When you are in formal meetings, how often do you use your mobile phone to do the following? (scale: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never)
  a. Give ideas or suggestions to others
  b. Encourage or coach others
  c. Check with others before making comments
  d. Ask others for information
  e. Give immediate reactions to an idea
  f. Discuss unrelated topics

9. When you are in informal meetings, how often do you use your mobile phone to do the following? (scale: 1, always; 2, often; 3, sometimes; 4, rarely, 5, never)
   a. Give ideas or suggestions to others
   b. Encourage or coach others
   c. Check with others before making comments
   d. Ask others for information
   e. Give immediate reactions to an idea
   f. Discuss unrelated topics