



AMBIENT AWARENESS

CAN BROWSING PROVIDE AWARENESS OF ONLINE NETWORKS




Social media and networking sites allow people to communicate at virtually no cost and effort and establish numerous connections, which in turn offer a powerful potential for social and emotional support (Donath, 2007). Ambient awareness refers to the idea that by browsing social media and encountering snippets of personal information, people can develop awareness of what the people whose updates they encounter (Thompson, 2013). As with other forms of ambient contact, ambient awareness is envisioned as a cognitively efficient process contributing to relational communication (Ito, 2005; Romero et al., 2007). The process can be that of spontaneous inferences, occurring without cost/effort beyond that already invested in browsing. However, ambient awareness and its underlying processes have been studied in the context of social media.

Can awareness of online contacts develop on the basis of browsing social media?

Do people make spontaneous inferences when browsing social media?

AMBIENT AWARENES ON THE MICROBLOGGING SITE TWITTER

To Investigate the prevalence of ambient awareness among social media users, we conducted a survey among active users of a microblogging site.

 - brief updates to wide audience; asymmetric relationships;
- networks not based on offline acquaintanceship (cf. Facebook)

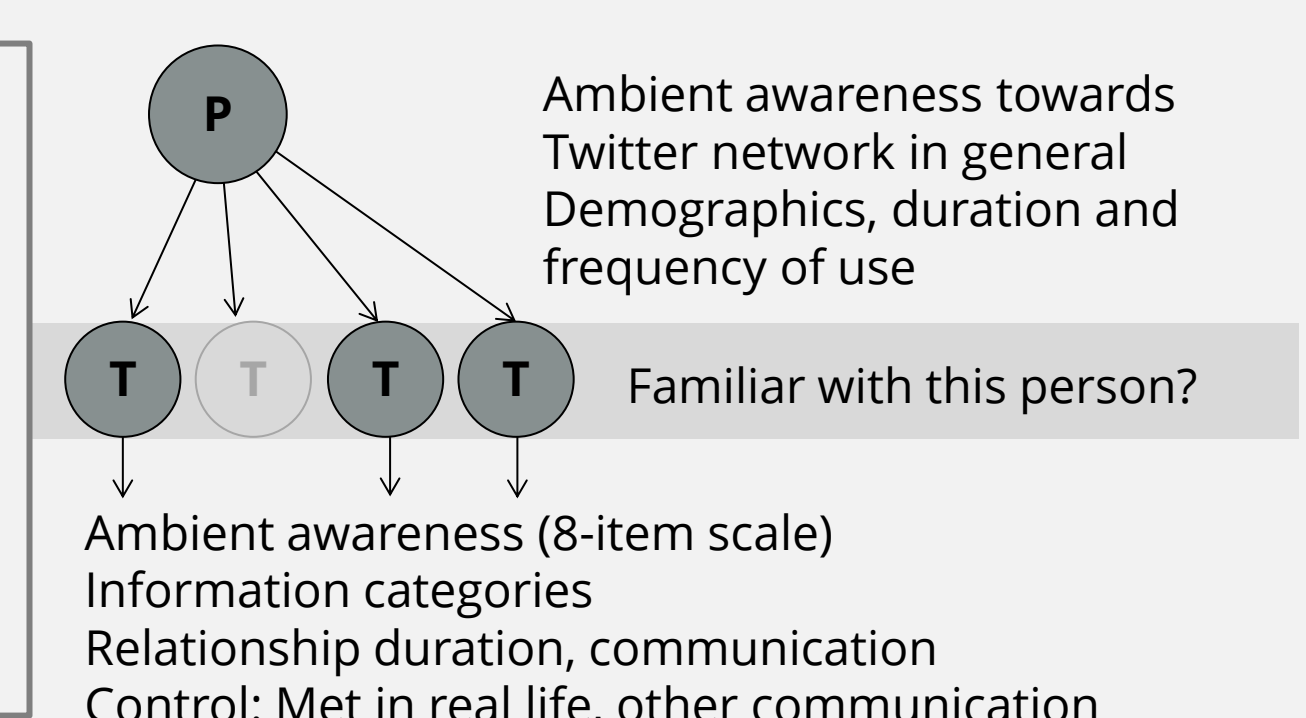
→ Awareness of people known only on Twitter likely to be ambient

RQ1: Are Twitter users familiar with people they only know online?

RQ2: Is it just a vague sense of familiarity or actual information?

METHOD

SOCIAL NETWORK SURVEY among active Twitter users, assessing familiarity with and knowledge of a selection of people p-nts knew only through Twitter



RESULTS

Ambient awareness towards network in general

STUDY 1: 213 people followed, ~40 years old, 153 network size

STUDY 2: 148 people followed, ~41 years old, 217 network size

Regression results for ambient awareness:

- PASSIVE COMM (reading posts): $\beta = .36, SE = .06^{**}$
- ACTIVE COMM (P with T): $\beta = .21, SE = .09^{*}$
- ACTIVE COMM (T with P): $\beta = .03, SE = .08$
- RELATIONSHIP DURATION: $\beta = .07, SE = .02$

Information

Personality, Profession, Humor, Hobbies, Values, Life events, Moods/experiences, Other, Not sure

Regression results for information:

- Personality: $\beta = .43, SE = .07^{**}$
- Profession: $\beta = .38, SE = .09^{**}$
- Humor: $\beta = .10, SE = .07$
- Hobbies: $\beta = .01, SE = .07$
- Values: $\beta = .03, SE = .07$
- Life events: $\beta = .03, SE = .07$
- Moods/experiences: $\beta = .17, SE = .08^{*}$
- Other: $\beta = .01, SE = .08$
- Not sure: $\beta = .01, SE = .08$

SUMMARY

Results indicate that active Twitter users experienced ambient awareness for a substantive proportion of their network. Awareness of individuals was influenced mainly by passive communication (reading). Respondents reported specific knowledge about the individual contacts, indicating that ambient awareness is more than a vague sense of familiarity.

References

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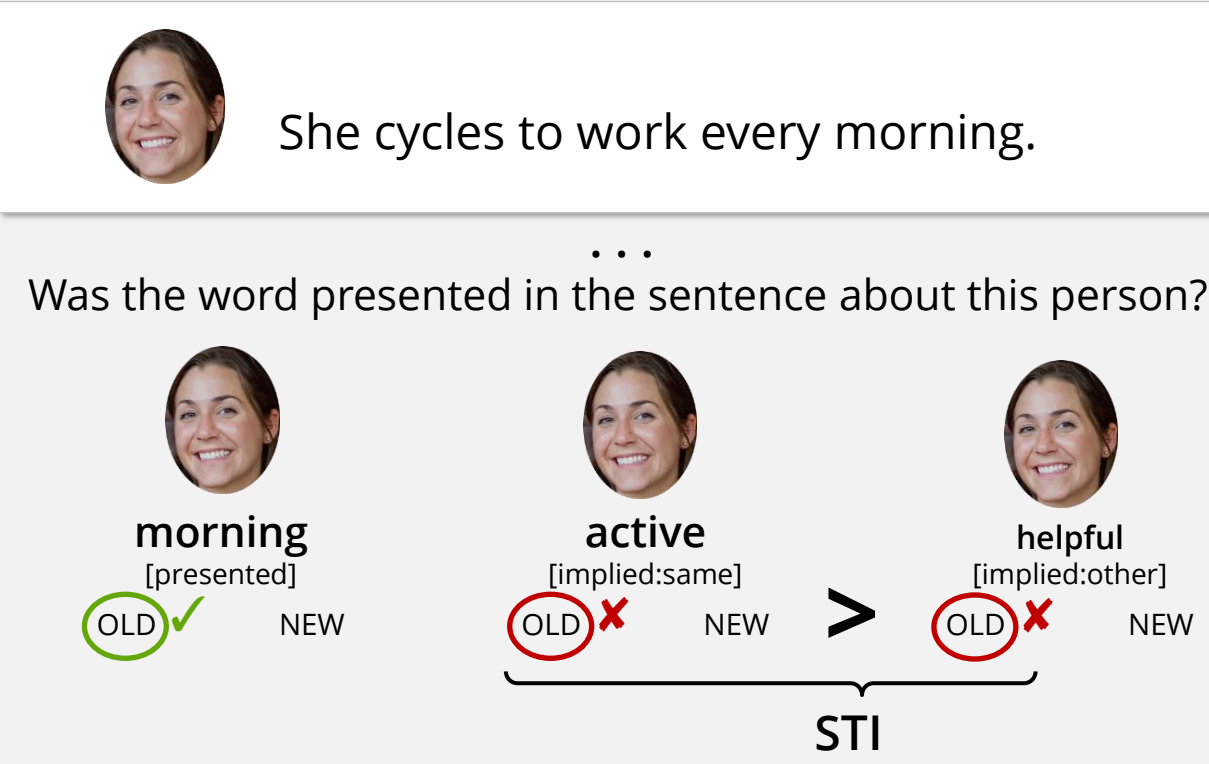
SPONTANEOUS INFERENCE PROCESSES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In offline contexts, people spontaneously infer traits, goals, and values from minimal exposure to relevant information. Such snap judgments can be seen as a mechanism underlying ambient awareness. However, the extent to which they are made on social media is not clear because (a) content can be self-generated; (b) multiple updates are viewed simultaneously; and (c) not processed attentively but in "browse mode."

RQ3: Do spontaneous trait inferences occur on social media?

METHOD

An adapted version of the FALSE RECOGNITION PARADIGM (Todorov & Uleman, 2002) to investigate STIs in conditions characteristic of social media



RESULTS

EXPERIMENT 1

1 X 18s

EXPERIMENT 2

1 X 5s

EXPERIMENT 3

9 X 60s

EXPERIMENT 4

36 X self-paced

False recognition results for STI:

| Condition | Same | Control | Other |
|--------------|------|---------|-------|
| Experiment 1 | ~50% | ~25% | ~25% |
| Experiment 2 | ~50% | ~25% | ~25% |
| Experiment 3 | ~50% | ~25% | ~25% |
| Experiment 4 | ~50% | ~25% | ~25% |

SUMMARY

Results suggest that while the format of microblogging updates does not prevent people from making trait inferences, there seems to be a limit to the extent they spontaneously do so while browsing.

CONCLUSIONS

Two exploratory surveys show that social media users experience ambient awareness, as well as can recognize and report concrete information about individuals they only know through the microblogging site Twitter, suggesting that the microblogging format allows for awareness to develop. We further investigated spontaneous inferences as a process underlying ambient awareness, demonstrating both its potential and limitations.