Professor Email Signature on Student Perception of Credibility, Approachability, Immediacy, and Respect for Professor

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Study Purpose
This study examined the effect that a professor’s email signature has on students’ perception of the professor regarding credibility, approachability, immediacy, and level of respect for professor.

Hypotheses
H1: Students’ perceptions of professor credibility will significantly differ depending on the type of email signature the professor uses.
H2: Students’ perceptions of professor approachability will significantly differ depending on the type of email signature the professor uses.
H3: Students’ perceptions of professor immediacy will significantly differ depending on the type of email signature the professor uses.
H4: Students’ level of respect of professor will significantly differ depending on the type of email signature the professor uses.

Methods
A convenience sample of 110 undergraduate students enrolled in basic communication courses at Washburn University completed the survey on the SurveyMonkey website. After reading an IRB approved consent form, participants were presented with the experiment stimulus (a posttest-only experimental design). Participants then completed four scales for dependent variables and demographic questions. Results were analyzed using SPSS.

Results
A factorial 3 x 2 (email signature x sex of professor) ANOVA revealed no interaction effect between the email signature and the sex of the professor on any of the dependent variables. None of the hypotheses were supported.

The factorial ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for the sex of the professor with credibility: F(1, 110) = 6.28, p = .014 and approachability: F(1, 110) = 5.68, p = .019.

The factorial ANOVA for male participants indicated an interaction effect for approachability: F(2, 41) = 3.73, p = .033.

The factorial ANOVA for female participants indicated a significant main effect for the sex of the professor with credibility: F(1, 69) = 4.48, p = .038 and approachability: F(1, 69) = 4.59, p = .036

Discussion
• Professor email signature does not have a significant impact on student perceptions of professor for any of the dependent variables.
• Students may not care or pay attention to how professors sign their email.
• Female participants rated the female professor as less credible and approachable than the male professor.
• Women may evaluate female professors less favorably than male professors on credibility and approachability because they may have internalized gendered stereotypes more than men, resulting in different evaluations of the professors.

Limitations
Limitations for this study include:
- Small sample size
- No interaction effect between the email signature and the sex of the professor
- Unequal distribution of stimuli ranging from 12.4%-23%

Future Research
Ideas for future research include: a similar qualitative study, a similar study analyzing additional email signatures, and a similar study in a corporate environment.