

Relationships among mobile phones, social networks, and academic achievement:

A comparison of US and Taiwanese college students

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Abstract

Mobile phone use on college campuses has increased dramatically in recent years. While research on media (e.g., television and Internet) and social capital among users has been abundant, research on mobile phone use, social networks and academic achievement has not been widespread. Research examining these phenomena from a cross-cultural perspective is virtually non-existent.

Taiwan has the world's highest density of mobile phone users, a status which the country achieved in 2004. For most youth in Taiwan, using a mobile phone to network with friends has become a daily routine. Thus, the mobile phone has become one of the most important communication tools in their social life.

This study examines relationships among mobile phones, social networks and academic performance in the U.S.A. and Taiwan. Various researchers have sought to examine the relationship between new technologies and human communication behavior. Among these scholars, Katz and Aspden (1997) found that the Internet did not increase social isolation but instead was a source of civic organizational involvement, as well as a venue for the creation of new personal friendships. Thus, research suggests that mobile phone use increases social connections and its accompanying spectrum of relational benefits (Ling, 2004). Other scholars looking at other forms of personal mediated communication (specifically, the Internet) suggest that heavy technology use for recreational purposes was highly correlated with reduced academic performance (Kubey, Lavin, & Barrows, 2001).

In this study, a total of 686 undergraduate college students were non-randomly selected. Paper-and-pencil instruments were distributed to 518 undergraduate students in the U.S.A., whereas due to geographic limitations, an online survey was deployed to Taiwanese college students, which yielded 167 responses. Participation was on an anonymous, voluntary basis.

Analysis of the data found that significantly positive relationships of self-reported mobile phone usage and relationships with friends and parents were present

in both the US and Taiwanese samples. In fact, heavy mobile phone users reported that they had a better relationship with their friends and parents (alpha sig. of 0.01). Additionally, frequent mobile phone users also reported that highly consistent use of their mobile phones affected their academic performance and learning (alpha sig. of 0.01). The study provides further evidence of the positive consequences of mobile phone use. The results are surprising in the sense that many observers and especially academic critics have claimed that there are numerous harmful consequences to heavy media use. While the present study does not by any means demonstrate that all consequences of the mobile phone are positive, they certainly add to the mounting, and surprising, evidence of the positive association between mobile phone use and social network benefits.

References

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Authors' Bio

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Chen and Lever are doctoral students in School of Communication, Information, and Library Studies at Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey, U.S.A. Currently they are studying how personal communication technologies, particularly in mobile phones, affect social relationships and how cultural values influence usage patterns of these technologies. Chen and Lever have research interests that encompass several aspects of mediated communication including personal communication technology.