



How Smart Phones Can Worsen Blue Feelings

People who swap electronic interaction for the real-life human kind find little if any satisfaction, a new study finds.

The findings suggest that depressed people who turn to their smartphones for relief may only be making things worse.

Using a mobile phone for temporary relief from negative emotions could worsen psychological conditions and spiral into unregulated and problematic use of mobile phones, or PUMP, says Prabu David, dean of Michigan State University's College of Communication Arts and Sciences.

Selfie videos offer clues to mental health

"The research bears out that despite all the advances we've made, there is still a place for meaningful, face-to-face interaction," he says. "The mobile phone can do a range of things that simulate human interaction. It seduces us into believing it's real, but the fact remains it's still synthetic."

Lead author Jung-Hyun Kim of Sogang University, Seoul, South Korea, says the study shows that face-to-face interaction can buffer the negative effects of heavy mobile phone use.

"Engaging in more face-to-face interaction can work as an antidote to the development of problematic mobile phone use," Kim says.

The researchers examined two pathways for habitual use of a smart phone: To either pass the time or entertain, or to alleviate feelings of sadness or depression by seeking out others.

It's the second reason, David says, that can cause trouble.



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Does screentime cause trouble for couples?

“This suggests that problematic use of mobile phones is fueled in part by the purposeful or deliberate use of the mobile phone to relieve or alleviate negative feelings,” he says, “whereas habitual or ritualistic use to pass time is not strongly associated with it.”

David and the researchers agree that using a mobile phone in moderation—to stay in touch with family or friends, for example—is not a bad thing. But don't let it replace real human interaction.

“If you have a chance to see someone face-to-face, take it,” David says. “Life is short.”

Mihye Seo of Sungkyunkwan University, Seoul, South Korea, also contributed to this study, which appears in the journal **Computers in Human Behavior**.

Source: **Michigan State University**

Original Study DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2015.05.030

Posted by **Tom Oswald-Michigan State** August 26th, 2015