

Professor researches cell phone usage among college students

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Cell phones are commonplace fixture in United States culture these days, but a recent Virginia Tech survey reveals not only whom college students are talking to, but also for how long, and from where they converse.

The study was conducted by a research team of Kappa Omicron Nu Honor Society undergraduate and graduate students under the direction of Peggy S. Meszaros, the William E. Lavery Professor of human development and director of the Center for Information Technology Impacts in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. The data, collected in February and March of 2005, consists of 568 responses to a

53-item survey, representing a 50.2 percent response rate.

“We were interested in whom the students were primarily talking to on their cell phones,” said Meszaros, “as well as their motivation for adopting technology and learning about the features they desire to see in future cell phone designs.”

The results from the large, heterogeneous study of college cell phone users also suggest that parents, who represent 80 percent of the cell phone bill payers, want their students to have and use their phones. Similarly, the students place a strong value on the safety and security of having a cell phone.

The report indicates that students are in regular communication through their cell phones, participating in an average of 11 calls per day. Eighty percent of the participants used their phones most often between the hours of 6 p.m. until midnight, seemingly taking advantage of the lower evening rates.

The preferred place for both females and males to use their cell phone was at their home, followed by a car for females and school for males.

Overall, student responses regarding to whom they talked were fairly evenly distributed across three categories: immediate family members, boyfriends or girlfriends, and friends/relatives. Students varied widely in their attitudes toward social dependence on the cell phone. Female students differed from male students by using their cell phones for communication with immediate family members, including parents, speaking more often, and talking for longer times. Future research is needed to explore the impact of this frequent pattern of communication between college students and their parents on their transition to adulthood.

Over 345 students responded with desired features-for-future cell phones. Suggestions ranged from having access to Braille on their phones to having phones equipped with live video cameras so they can see their callers. There was clearly a trend toward having phones that combine multiple functions and are an accessory as well as a functional appliance.

Source: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

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