

MIT study asks: Does BlackBerry equal 'CrackBerry' or career essential?

March 22 2007



Melissa Mazmanian is researching how BlackBerry users balance the efficiency and lifestyle effects of their gadgets. Photo courtesy / MIT Sloan

One might expect a doctoral student conducting research on BlackBerry usage to own one or more of the handheld devices. But Melissa Mazmanian, a fourth-year MIT Sloan doctoral student, doesn't own one, and she prefers it this way.

Mazmanian's study of how people use the BlackBerry in their everyday lives has already drawn attention in the Wall Street Journal and The Independent and on National Public Radio. Her research won an Academy of Management award in its division last summer.

When Mazmanian first began her research, which has been funded by

the National Science Foundation, she decided it was best not to have preconceived notions, and thus she never purchased a BlackBerry.

"My goal is to try to figure out the personal and social challenges that go into negotiating norms. I've found that people struggle with when and where is it okay to use their BlackBerry," Mazmanian said.

"I'm lucky because people want to talk about their BlackBerry use. It's an easy project to describe and it hits enough of a nerve with people that they're eager to share. They light up when talking about how it affects their lives," she said, adding, "I've heard of people who wake up in the middle of the night to check their e-mail, others who set their alarms on the BlackBerry and check their messages first thing in the morning."

Mazmanian is working with several companies to conduct the research, including law firms, investment banks and an apparel manufacturer.

(The companies participating in the study prefer to remain anonymous.)

"Being from MIT is a great entrée, as far as people taking you seriously," she said. Mazmanian spent the month of January in southern California, studying the sales team of the apparel manufacturer, as the mobile nature of sales gave her additional opportunities to explore BlackBerrys in use.

What she has found to date is that BlackBerry use has a large impact on the workplace landscape, affecting expectations of work turnaround, employee availability, personal interactions and the increasingly rare notion of free time. Of course, like society in general, many of the people in the research study claim they have become "addicted" to using their BlackBerrys--thus the moniker "CrackBerry."

One group of professionals who had taken time during their annual partners' retreat to discuss their ever-increasing use of BlackBerrys found that even after the partners established shared guidelines they could not stop using their BlackBerrys during firm meetings, she said.

"It was fascinating; they just couldn't even keep to their own rules. What we tend to see is a gradual blurring of the lines between 'work time' and 'personal time' by device owners. Some people feel more productive when they use a BlackBerry. Others feel compelled to stay in the loop. Many also feel trapped by the social expectation to be constantly available," Mazmanian said.

Many of the people she has spoken with have become emotionally attached to the devices, she noted. One man she interviewed accidentally dropped his BlackBerry onto a train track and jumped down to get it without really thinking of the consequences. (He was fine.) Afterwards, she said, he was surprised by his own actions. But to many people, the device is that valuable.

Mazmanian acknowledged the negative stereotypes of electronic-device dependency. "There are a lot of good, helpful, rational reasons that people use BlackBerrys," she noted.

Working with MIT Sloan professors JoAnne Yates and Wanda Orlikowski, Mazmanian hopes to complete her research in time for her first baby, due in early June. She plans for two more years in the doctoral program.

Does Mazmanian regret not owning a BlackBerry? She said no. But she did miss an opportunity to be a guest speaker on "Talk of the Nation," a radio show on NPR, because she did not receive the e-mail invitation in time. She hopes, she said, to participate next time.

Source: MIT

22) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2007-03-mit-blackberry-equal-crackberry-career.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.