Mobile users make same mistakes as disabled PC users

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Mobile phone owners make similar mistakes to physically impaired computer users when using the technology, according to new research from The University of Manchester.

The first set of results from research funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) indicates that many able-bodied people make the same errors – and with similar frequencies – when typing and 'mousing' on mobile phones, as physically impaired users of desktop computers.

According to researchers in the School of Computer Science working on the RIAM (Reciprocal Interoperability between Accessible and Mobile Webs) project, mobile owners press the wrong key and press the same key repeatedly by mistake.

They also found mobile users tend to click the wrong area of the screen, click the screen multiple times in error, and make mistakes when trying to drag and drop information.

"These types of errors have been a big problem for physically impaired users for a long time," said Dr Yeliz Yesilada, a senior researcher on the project. "But solutions have been developed for all of these problems in the form of small assistive computer programmes, which supplement Windows and Mac operating systems."

For the study, researchers at Manchester re-analysed earlier work by

scientists at the University of Edinburgh who had looked into the problems of physically disabled users. They then re-ran the experiments with mobile users and found that a significant correlation existed between the two user groups.

"In recent years solutions have been built to help disabled users and it is hoped these solutions which can now be applied for the benefit of mobile phone users," said fellow researcher Tianyi Chen.

"By using solutions developed for disabled users we can help handset manufacturers, such as Nokia and Sony, to reduce the time we all spend correcting errors on our mobiles.

"Software already developed for PC users with disabilities could automatically correct erroneous commands and help reduce those annoying times when you accidentally cancel a text message or call someone by sitting on your phone."

Source: University of Manchester