

# Peer Behavior, Not Communication Overload, Determines Mobile Device Use in Meetings, Study Shows

July 1 2009

---

(PhysOrg.com) -- Organizational norms and social cues, not communication overload, are the strongest predictors of whether individuals use their laptops or smart phones to electronically multitask during a meeting, according to researchers at The University of Texas at Austin.

The report "The Social Influences on Electronic Multitasking in Organizational Meetings," by Keri Stephens, assistant professor of communication studies in the College of Communication, and doctoral candidate Jennifer D. Davis, appears in the August issue of *Management Communication Quarterly*.

The expectation that the more people experience communication overload the more they will engage in electronic multitasking during meetings was debunked in the study, which surveyed individuals from a diverse range of organizations, including engineering, finance, software, energy, marketing and health care.

What does influence the use of mobile devices during meetings is the perceived opinions of peers and supervisors and observation of others using their mobile devices in a meeting. The study also extends the current research correlating the level of experience with technology to the likelihood of using it during a meeting.

"There's no doubt the ubiquity of mobile devices is changing the nature of workplace meetings," said Stephens, who studies how people use information and communication technologies at work. "What we've found is that simply feeling overloaded with messages coming from channels such as e-mail, texts and instant messages is not the primary driver for multitasking in meetings."

The study is particularly informative in that organizational norms overshadowed individual-level predictors, which might be due to the unique nature of portable technology. People have been using non-technology communication—pens and paper—to multitask in meetings for decades.

The research suggests that if organizations ban mobile technologies and set new norms for how they can be used during meetings, employee behavior will likely change. The research is timely in light of recent news coverage of organizations banning mobile devices or going lap "topless" in meetings to get participants' undivided attention.

While banning mobile devices will likely eliminate unproductive behavior, such as updating a Facebook profile or trading jokes about the meeting presenter, researchers warn it can stifle legitimately productive behavior that can enhance the meeting process. For example, a manager might need access to information from a colleague traveling on business. A brief e-mail can result in an updated spreadsheet that changes the nature of the decisions made in the meeting.

For organizations, one of the key findings of Stephens and Davis' research in mobile device use in meetings is that prior to a meeting facilitators need to communicate clearly about whether using [mobile devices](#) is acceptable or not. [Meetings](#) also need to include the right content for the right people, as well as engaging material.

More information: The research study can be found [online](#). It is published in Volume 23, Issue 1 of Management [Communication Quarterly](#).

Provided by University of Texas at Austin ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: Peer Behavior, Not Communication Overload, Determines Mobile Device Use in Meetings, Study Shows (2009, July 1) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-07-peer-behavior-overload-mobile-device.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.