

Cellphone use linked to selfish behavior in new study

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Talking on the cell phone may reduce the desire to connect with others. Credit: John Consoli/UMD

Though cellphones are usually considered devices that connect people, they may make users less socially minded, finds a recent study from the University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith School of Business.

Marketing professors Anastasiya Pocheptsova and Rosellina Ferraro, with graduate student, Ajay T. Abraham, conducted a series of experiments on test groups of [cellphone users](#). The findings appear in their working paper, "The Effect of [Mobile Phone Use](#) on Prosocial Behavior."

Prosocial behavior, as defined in the study, is action intended to benefit another person or society as a whole.

The researchers found that after a short period of cellphone use the subjects were less inclined to volunteer for a community service activity when asked, compared to the control-group counterparts. The [cell phone users](#) were also less persistent in solving word problems - even though they knew their answers would translate to a [monetary donation](#) to charity.

The decreased focus on others held true even when participants were merely asked to draw a picture of their cellphones and think about how they used them.

The study involved separate sets of college student subjects - both men and women and generally in their early 20s. "We would expect a similar pattern of effects with people from other [age groups](#)," said Ferraro. "Given the increasing pervasiveness of cellphones, it does have the potential to have broad [social implications](#)."

The authors cited previous research in explaining a root cause of their findings: "The cellphone directly evokes feelings of connectivity to others, thereby fulfilling the basic human need to belong." This results in reducing one's desire to connect with others or to engage in empathic and prosocial behavior.

The study also distinguished its subjects from users of other social media -- Facebook users -- in one of the tests. The authors found that participants felt more connected to others because of their cellphones than because of their Facebook accounts, suggesting that this difference in connectedness was the underlying driver of the observed phenomenon.

Provided by University of Maryland

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