

How does calling, texting and emailing affect teens socially?

19 September 2014, by Dana Yates

Near-constant smartphone use is a hallmark of today's teenagers. And while the phenomenon has given rise to new injuries – "text neck" is now a growing problem – how is all that calling, texting and emailing affecting teens socially?

"Since adolescents tend to use [communication technologies](#) to interact with a clique, the overarching concern is they are losing opportunities to gain new information or perspectives by interacting with, for example, friends in other [peer groups](#) or adults," says Ryerson researcher Jeffrey Boase, a professor in the Faculty of Communication & Design.

But are phone-obsessed adolescents really missing out on valuable relationships? Or is the true complexity of teens' social connections being overlooked?

To better understand the different levels of bonding and relationships that Canadian adolescents form through their smartphones, Boase is leading a research study fuelled by \$240,000 in funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The four-year project also involves co-investigator Rhonda McEwan of the University of Toronto, and researchers from Japan, Scandinavia and the United States.

The team is developing an innovative mobile application in order to capture data based on smartphone communication.

Next, a few hundred [adolescent](#) and adult Android smartphone users from across Canada will be recruited to install the application on their mobile devices. Following installation, the application will prompt a user to answer a brief set of onscreen survey questions.

The application will record the number of contacts

that a user has, as well as the frequency of his or her calls, texts and emails without collecting the content or any personally identifying or sensitive information.

Finally, in-depth interviews will be conducted among a representative sample of 50 adolescent high school students in the Greater Toronto Area who have installed the application.

The goal is to gain further insight into what motivates adolescents to adopt certain interaction patterns. Through previous research, Boase found that teens use smartphones to communicate frequently with a small number of friends; however, there is high turnover among those peers over time. In contrast, adult smartphone users communicate less often with their contacts, but their circle remains fairly constant and includes a large number of friends and colleagues.

"In this study, we want to get a full picture of what's really happening in the population," says Boase.

"By comparing adults with adolescents, we'll see exactly how teens' communication styles are unique."

Provided by Ryerson University

APA citation: How does calling, texting and emailing affect teens socially? (2014, September 19)
retrieved 30 October 2020 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-09-texting-emailing-affect-teens-socially.html>

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