Relationship of Mobile Phone Usage and GPA among the Undergraduate Students at the University of the West Indies - Mona Campus

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Abstract

This paper is a work in progress which reviews the relationship between Undergraduate University Students' mobile phone usage and their Grade Point Average (GPA). To facilitate data collection, a questionnaire was administered where 196 Undergraduate University Students, voluntarily, shared their academic standing by stating their GPA, mobile phone usage habits along with their demographic details. The final results of this study, which will be publicized in a Journal article, will elaborate on the relationship between mobile phone text messaging and call frequency with students' academic performance.

Keywords

mobile phone, grade point average, undergraduate students

Introduction

Globalization has changed our lives and one of the ways in which it is changing our lives, every day, is how we communicate; thanks to advancements in ICT's (Information and Communication Technologies). One of the ICT's which is seeing rapid advancement is Mobile Phone. Mobile phone is popular since the late 1990s (Ishii, 2006) and today, with 7 billion mobile connections worldwide and unique mobile subscriptions of over 3.5 billion (GSMA, 2014), they are very popular with young people and are commonplace in the Universities. These phones are no more just voice communication tools. Functions like short message service (SMS) or texting have become global phenomenon. Not many of us keep wallet photos of loved ones. Now we save photos in our mobile phones, and view them on a touch of the screen.

University students extensively use mobile phones to remain in touch with parents and friends (Chen & Katz, 2009). Many Undergraduates (66.84 % of the 196 participants in this research) never turn off their mobile phones during the day/week and carry them everywhere, even in places like classrooms.

Mobile phones can be used to access information and record useful information (Schachter, 2009) but mobile phone usage is not wholeheartedly accepted in lecture rooms (Wei and Leung, 1999). This was verified in the discussions following this paper presentation at GASI conference. But do students care? Limited attention span coupled with less engaging lecturers and students would day dream or take out their phones, even in class rooms, and start playing candy crush.

Maybe that is why, Universities like Abilene Christian are encouraging their students to use mobile technologies in class to enhance their learning experience (Abilene Christian University, 2008); this University recently won Apple's award for distinguished school in recognition of incorporating student learning with mobile technologies (Abilene Christian University, 2014). On the other hand, distinguished Professor of Syracuse University, Thomas Lawrence would not take a second to walk out of the lecture room of hundreds if he catches a single student texting (Jaschik, 2008). Google "how to text in class" and you will have numerous resources to guide students in successful accomplishment of this adventure. The use may increase as mobile phones become more affordable. Just in the United States of America, around 93% of college students own a mobile phone (Beaver, Knox, & Zusman, 2010).

It is important to note that with increasing competition and many applicants applying for one job, it is important for undergraduates to perform well at Universities. Research on the possible impact of cell phone usage on undergraduate academic performance is sparse but walk across a University campus and you will see far more students busy on their mobile phones than reading a book or engaging in scholarly conversations with academics. The final paper which will be published later in a Journal will be an attempt to explore, if mobile phone usage can affect undergraduate student's GPA.

Research Design and Method

The data was collected through surveys in December 2013. A survey was pilot tested on 8 undergraduate students and then finalized after peer review from relevant university members. Incomplete surveys were not included.

Participants

196 Undergraduates (93 males, 103 females) completed surveys, voluntarily; they were selected at the convenience of the researcher. 83% of students were between the ages

of 19 and 23 with an average age of 21.27 years and age range of the entire sample was 17-31 years.

Procedure

Participants were given a brief on the research before they spent 5 minutes, approximately, in filling a survey. Later, they were thanked for their participation.

Findings and Discussion

At this time, I am only publicizing partial findings.

Students with a GPA of 3.5 and more tend to speak with, on average, 3.95 different people on their phone per day, whereas students with GPA 3.0 - 3.49 are speaking with more different people (average 6.04) per day. This shows that students with 3.0 - 3.49 GPA are engaged with more different people on the phone and maybe that is why their GPA is lower.

3.5 and higher GPA students seem to be more selective in terms of how many different people they speak with on their phone. Maybe they are selective because they have less time to talk on phone as they want to spend more time studying.

Talking on phone demands considerable amount of attention, engagement and energy so 3.5 and higher GPA holders are more selective in terms of how many different people they would want to engage with, every day.

We all have limited time and energy and maybe higher GPA students want to spend most of their time and energy on studies. Feel free to write to me if you want to know more about the research results. At this moment, complete research findings are with a Journal for possible publication.

Future research may investigate, why higher GPA students are more selective in terms of how many different people they speak with on their phone daily. Is it because higher GPA Students are more likely to spend more time on academics, thus having less time to engage with different people on phone or there are some other reasons.

Limitations, Conclusion and Future Research

One of the limitations of this research is that survey participants are only from one University. Future research should involve participants from different Universities and Countries to have more robust findings. Survey instrument can be improved by asking students e.g. how much time they spend talking on phone. The GPA was self-reported so there is a possibility that students overstated their GPA standing. Convenience sampling was used therefore participants are not representative of Undergraduate population.

Despite of these limitations, this study made some noteworthy findings, most importantly, higher GPA students are more selective in how many different people they speak with on their phones. In depth study will shed more light on this issue. This paper opens many avenues for future research. A mixed method approach should be utilized to understand how higher GPA students are using their phones differently. Incorporating a qualitative arm in the research with some open ended questions will help in understanding this issue more clearly. Furthermore, mobile communication researchers would want to probe any difference between genders in their mobile phone usage and secured GPA. It would be beneficial to review if the lower GPA students have lower GPA because they are talking more on their phones or because of some other reason.

Further research is required to make conclusive remarks but one thing is clear. Young undergraduates are not interested in staying off their mobile phones in near future, at least until they get some new and exciting ICT in their hands. It is more relevant to understand, how undergraduates should use their mobile phones that their GPA is not affected (e.g. by being selective in how many people they engage with on their mobile phones) than not to use them at all.

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Author Biography

Tashfeen Ahmad expanded his understanding of Psychology at Harvard University and currently is a researcher and adjunct lecturer of International Business Management at The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, Jamaica. His primary research interest is ICT's specifically mobile communications.