BlackBerry Use and Sociability Amongst Female Emirati University Students

Ebtisam Mahmoud Thoban
College Of Education
Zayed University
Abu Dhabi, UAE

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Justin Thomas

Abstract

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) enjoys widespread telecommunications network coverage, it is presently ranked 30th in the world on the Networked Readiness Index, a measure of telecommunications coverage (TRA. 2012). Additionally, UAE citizens enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world, enabling them to have access to the latest telecommunications devices. These devices are particularly popular with university students. There are several reports, and growing concerns about possible negative effects from the heavy use of such technologies. One such concern is the detrimental effect on face-to-face sociability. This study explores the relationship between the use of BlackBerry (highly popular mobile Internet device) and sociability amongst female university students. Additionally, this study uses a cross-sectional correlational study design. Participants were 102 female university students at Zayed University in the UAE. All participants completed the sociability questionnaire (SQ) and also completed the BlackBerry use questionnaire (BUQ), which was adapted from Abu Dhabi Social Support Centre Internet addiction questionnaire. Participants completed the questionnaires in classrooms, all participants worked alone. Both the BUQ and the SQ demonstrated acceptable internal reliability, alpha coefficients .78 and .71 respectively. Sociability scores amongst female Emiratis were generally higher than those reported by Hanewicz and Bellamy1998. There was no relationship between BlackBerry use and face-to-face Sociability. The use of BlackBerry doesn't appear to be associated with lower levels of sociability in the present Emirati female student population. Future research should also consider duration use; furthermore longitudinal studies are required to better understand any possible causal relationships.

Keywords: BlackBerry, Smartphone, Sociability

1. Introduction

People's use of technology has changed, so have their life styles, with many people now spending more time on communications technology (smart phones, Internet etc.). This increase has been dramatic, estimates suggest in just one decade daily Internet use went from 9 million to 240 million Americans (Katherine M., Hertlein & Webster, M. 2008). Digital communications technology use is becoming increasingly common world-wide. This technology undoubtedly brings many benefits, for example, improved business management and access to essential information in educational and healthcare contexts (Kanarek, L. 2011).

Although technology has many benefits, there are also some disadvantages. It can distract students from study, and foster a dependency on technology that leads to laziness, such as not checking spelling or looking for primary sources. Additionally over-reliance on technology may lead to shallow emotional communication, and there are reports of it being at the center of marital problems (Katherine M., Hertlein & Webster, M. 2008). A common compliant of many 21st century spouses is that their partners technology use leaves them feeling neglected (Katherine M., Hertlein & Webster, M. 2008).

One area of particular concern is the fact that smart-phones use has become ubiquitous. This may have led to a reduced ability to be sociable face to face. Previous research has demonstrated a negative correlation between

frequent smart phones use and face to face sociability. One study looked at a group of male employees to explore the effects of smart phones on their social life. The employees received BlackBerries and they used them for a long period of time. Then after a few months their family members and their wives complained that their husbands are spending less time with them due to their heavy use of BlackBerry (Doc Zone. 2012). These findings are in line with Carmel Melouney's thoughts about what she terms, BlackBerry addiction. Melouney suggests BlackBerry addiction is "*controlling lives, increasing stress loads and even threatening relationships with loved ones*." (Melouney, C. 2008). Similarly, Nada Kakabadse, a Professor at the Northampton Business School, stated that technology addiction can affect sociability negatively because "*people spend more time using their technology than spending it in socializing or in family time*" (Anonymous, 2007). Moussly (2009), Supervisor of Student Affairs in Dubai Women's College (DWC), said that: "*the heavy use of BlackBerry can ultimately cause self-imposed isolation which means that the BlackBerry addict does not tend to socialize with others effectively*" (Moussly, R. 2009). In addition, Dr. Julie Cogin, from the Australian School of Business at the University of NSW said that: "Not spending enough time together is a relationship killer and being on-call constantly through the BlackBerry is further robbing family time." This quote indicates that the extensive use of BlackBerry can affect the relationships among family members negatively as it decreases the number of hours spent with family (Melouney, C. 2008).

The present study aims to explore the relationship between BlackBerry use and face-to-face sociability. The BlackBerry was chosen because at the present time it is the most popular communications device with female university students in the UAE. We hypothesize that extensive BlackBerry use will be negatively correlated with a measure of face-to-face sociability.

2. Methodology

2.1 Design

This study used a cross-sectional correlational design.

2.2 Measures

Two questionnaires were administered to determine the correlation between Sociability and BlackBerry use. The first questionnaire was developed by the Social Support Centre for measuring Internet addiction. In the present study, this instrument was adapted to measure the BlackBerry use rather than Internet use. This involved minor changes to the wording of the items. For example the original item "Do you neglect your daily duties because you spend a long time on the Internet?" changed slightly to "Do you neglect your daily duties because you spend long time on your BlackBerry?". Furthermore, this questionnaire was translated into English as there are variable levels of Arabic amongst the student population. The alpha reliability of the adapted instrument was 0.78. The second questionnaire was sociability items developed by Hanewicz and Bellamy (1998), this was translated to Arabic, and the alpha reliability of this dual language version was 0.72.

3.Participants

Female students, an opportunity sample, at Zayed University (*N*=102) were recruited from across the institution's range of disciplines. Their mean age was 21.00 and the standard deviation was 1.81. Most of the participants were single (*N*=65 =63.72%), seven of them were married (6.86%) and only one participant reported being divorced (0.98%) and 29 = 28.43% omitted their marital status.

3.1 Procedure

Participants completed the questionnaires in class; the largest class size was 40. Participants were instructed to work alone. The questionnaires were presented in dual-language format, with the English and Arabic alongside each other. This was necessary because there is extreme variability in English and Arabic language ability within the institution despite the language of instruction being English. Participants completed the Blackberry use questionnaire followed by the sociability questionnaire.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive

The mean score on the BlackBerry use questionnaire was $M= 37.84$ ($SD= 12.50$). The mean score for sociability was $M= 24.73$ ($SD=4.64$).

4.2 Correlational Analysis

Sociability was negatively correlated with the age $r = -.219$, this relationship was significant $p <.05$. Marital status was positively correlated with sociability $r =.294$ ($p < .05$), as well as it was positively correlated with age $r =.445$ ($p < .001$).

There was no relationship between sociability and BlackBerry use ($r = .006$ $p > .05$).

5. Discussion

This research was conducted to look at the relationship between BlackBerry use and sociability. A non-significant zero correlation was reported between a self-reported measure of BlackBerry use and a measure of sociability. This suggests, at least in the present study, that BlackBerry use has no detrimental effects on sociability. Leading to the rejection of the study's hypothesis.

However, several previous studies exploring this topic, have reported negative correlations between BlackBerry use and sociability e.g. Lickerman, A, 2010, Erdmann, A., & Robinson, P. 2007, Moussly, R. 2009, and Melouney, C. 2008. In other words, most previous research has found, that as BlackBerry use increases, measures of face-to-face sociability decline.

There are several possible explanations for the discrepant findings in the present study. First, it is possible that in Emirati culture there are strong barriers against unsocial behavior. For example, communal eating with family and extended family is a routine occurrence, and opting out is highly frowned upon. Second, the UAE has only been on the BlackBerry network for 4 years, which is far shorter than North American and European Nations. It could be that the relatively short duration of the technology's existence in the UAE explains the lack of relationship; this relationship may develop over time. Third, it is possible that the questionnaires were administered in a less than ideal situation. The two questionnaires were given out to the participants in a group setting at the end of a class, this may have had a negative effect on the accuracy of responses given, however the alpha coefficient does suggest .872. Fourth, the small number of participants ($N=102$) might be a factor that led to the contradiction of findings with previous studies.

Future research should consider using a more representative sample, including males, and implementing longitudinal study designs. These findings represent a preliminary investigation into the relationship between BlackBerry use and sociability amongst female Emirati university students. This study suggests there are no negative effects of BlackBerry use on sociability. Further research is required.

6. Acknowledgements

Table 1. BlackBerry use questionnaire which was adapted to measure BlackBerry use

Age:…….   Major:………...   Year of study:…… Marital status:……….. Do you use BlackBerry?...........

	Always دائماً	Often times غالباً	Sometimes أحياناً	Rarely نادراً	Never أبداً
Do you spend time on BlackBerry longer than what you want? هل تستخدم البلاك بيري وقتاً أطول مما تريد؟					
Do you neglect your daily duties because you spend long time on your BlackBerry? هل تهمل (تهملين) أعمالك اليومية بسبب استخدامك للبلاك بيري؟					
Do you form relationships with others via your BlackBerry? هل تكوّن علاقات اجتماعية مع اخرين من خلال البلاك بيري؟					
Are people around you getting bothered because of your heavy use of BlackBerry? هل يشكو الاخرين (من أهلك أو أصحابك) من أنك تستخدم البلاك بيري أكثر مما ينبغي؟					
Is your academic performance dropping because of your extensive use of BlackBerry? هل يتأثر أداؤك في العمل أو درجاتك الدراسية بسبب طول الوقت الذي تقضيه في استخدامك للبلاك بيري؟					
When you face personal problems do you spend time on your BlackBerry to forget about your problems? هل تصرف نفسك عن التفكير في مشاكلك الحياتية باستخدامك للبلاك بيري؟					
When you cannot use your BlackBerry (because you are in the class or taking shower) do you feel eager to use BlackBerry? عندما لا تستطيع استخدام البلاك بيري (لأنك في الفصل أو لأنك تستحم) هل تجد نفسك متشوقاً للوقت الذي تستخدم فيه البلاك بيري؟					

Do you get angry or agitated if someone annoyed you when you are texting on your BlackBerry? هل تتضايق أو تغضب إذا أزعجك أحد ما وأنت تستخدم البلاك بيري؟				
Do you worry about how your life would be (boring and joyless) without your BlackBerry? هل تخاف من أن حياتك بدون البلاك بيري ستكون مملة و فارغة؟				
Do you go to bed late because of your BlackBerry? هل تتأخر في الذهاب للنوم بسبب استخدامك للبلاك بيري؟				
Do you find yourself thinking of using BlackBerry when you cannot use it? هل تجد نفسك تُفكر في استخدام البلاك بيري عندما لا تستطيع استخدامه؟				
Did you fail reducing the number of hours spent on your BlackBerry? هل تفشل محاولاتك لتقليل ساعات استخدام البلاك بيري؟				
Do you prefer using your BlackBerry to spending time with family or friends? هل تفضل استخدام البلاك بيري على قضاء بعض من الوقت مع الأهل أو الأصدقاء؟				
Do you feel bothered when you cannot use your BlackBerry and then this feeling gets diminished when you use BlackBerry? هل تشعر بالضيق أو الاكتئاب عندما لا تستطيع استخدام البلاك بيري و لكن هذا الشعور يزول سريعاً بمجرد معاودة استخدام البلاك بيري؟				

439

Table 2: Sociability items developed by Hanewicz and Bellamy (1998)

	Strongly agree أوافق بشدة	Slightly agree أوافق إلى حدٍ ما	Neither agree/nor disagree لا أوافق و لا أعارض	Slightly Disagree لا أوافق إلى حدٍ ما	Strongly disagree لا أوافق بشدة
In my free time I like to interact with other people. أفضل الاختلاط بالناس في وقت فراغي					
I prefer classes where the students get to work in groups. أفضل العمل في مجموعات في الفصل					
I enjoy going to parties, weddings, and family gatherings. أستمتع بالذهاب للحفلات والأعراس و الزيارات العائلية					
I enjoy being by myself most of the time. أستمتع بالبقاء بمفردي في معظم الأحيان					
I enjoy belonging to organizations (i.e., fraternity/sorority, clubs, political group, etc.). أستمتع بالانضمام إلى النوادي و المنضمات الاجتماعية					
I enjoy meeting new people. أستمتع بلقاء أشخاصٍ جُدد					
I am comfortable in new social situations أشعرُ بالارتياح و عدم التوتر في المواقف الاجتماعية الجديدة					

Table 3. SPSS Data Output

Correlational Analysis

Variables	Correlations (r)	Significance of correlations (p)
Sociability & Age	Negative Correlation $r = -.219$	Significant $p <.05$
Sociability & Marital Status	Positive Correlation $r =.294$	Significant $p <.05$
Marital Status & Age	Positive Correlation $r =.445$	Significant $p <.001$
Sociability & BlackBerry	No Correlation $r =.006$	Not Significant $p > .05$

7. Bibliography

1. Doc Zone (Producer). (2012). *Are We Digital Dummies? | Doc Zone*[Videotape]. Canada: WatchCBCLearning

2. Kanarek, L. (2011). 8 Ways Technology Helps You Save Time. *Startup nation*. Retrieved June4, 2012, from http://www.startupnation.com/business-blogs/index.php/2011/10/03/8-ways-technology-helps-you-save-time/

3. Katherine M., Hertlein & Webster, M. (2008). Technology, relationships, and problems: a research synthesis [PDF document]. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 34*(4)445-460. Retrieved June 5, 2012, from Wiley Online library http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2008.00087.x/pdf .

4. Melouney, C. (2008). BlackBerry addiction takes hold. *The telegraph.com.au*. Retrieved December 1, 2011, from http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/sydney-nsw/blackberry-addiction-takes-hold/story-e6freuzi-1111116304455

5. Moussly, R. (2009). Campus BlackBerry addiction. *Gulfnew.com*. Retrieved December 1, 2011, from http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/education/campus-blackberry-addiction-1.547265

6. Anonymous. (2007). The rise of technology addiction. *BBC News*. Retrieved June 27, 2011, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/click_online/6411495.stm

7. TRA. (2012). UAE Rankings in Various International Studies. *Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA)*. Retrieved October 7, 2012, from http://www.tra.gov.ae/UAE_rankings.php

8. Hanewicz,C.I. , & Bellamy,A.(1998). *Electronic Journal of Sociology 2001*,(1198 3655).   Retrieved October 7, 2012, from http://www.sociology.org/content/vol005.003/ia.html