

# Mobile Phone Misuse in the Workplace

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## **Abstract**

Today's workplaces are increasingly utilizing electronic devices to boost the efficiency of daily processes and performance of employees. Firms sustain less a mobile free policy. Still, managers have a hard time dealing with employees who have a problematic use of mobile phones within the framework of work duties and work schedule. These concerns have raised the need to better understand which employees are more prone to mobile phone abuse. This study assess whether certain character traits are associated with a problematic use of mobile phones. Data was collected conveniently from 244 employees and 199 (81.5%) were considered for the study. Each participant filled the Problematic Use of Mobile Phones (PUMP) and the Big Five Model questionnaires. Results revealed that 86.93% of the employees have a problematic use of mobile phones. However, a regression analysis showed that personality traits of the Big Five Model could explain only to a low extent the problematic use of mobile phones. The study compares its results with those of other studies conducted within other cultures and raises the question of possible cultural differences among personality traits and mobile phone use.

**Keywords:** Mobile phone, misuse, PUMP, personality traits, workplace.

## Introduction

In today's business world, mobile technology offers flexibility, accessibility, and entertainment for their users. For many people, cellphones have become their endless companion. Technology and smart phones have played an important role in people's personal lives as well as in corporations. In fact, it's predicted that by the end of 2017, the average number of cellphone users will rise to 4.77 billion worldwide.

Although mobile phones are useful and are an attractive mean of communication, there exists the risk of addictive and problematic use of this device. Through the decades, researchers have developed theoretical frameworks on personality traits to better understand human behavior. As it was shown, personality is a unique constellation of attitudes and dispositions that governs individuals' consistent cognitive, affective and behavioral patterns (Costa and McCrae, 1995). These attitudes and traits of character enforce certain behaviors that might be aligned with the person being affected or influenced by his social group. It is yet unclear whether mobile users' traits influence their mobile phone use.

## Literature Review

The developments and evolutions of cellphones lead to a smarter device called "smartphone" which provides more features and advanced utilities than a basic feature phone (Litchfield, 2010). Today's workforce can be more mobile than ever. Due to internet's global reach, business people have the capacity to obtain old and current information from any source within seconds. Mobile technology provides employees the advantage of working on the go and it increases worker's availability and flexibility without being bound to a physical location. Hence, work is freed from geographical obstacles and individual performance is enabled during periods formerly spent at

home or at remote sites. Thus, companies may benefit from individual connectivity to boost productivity even when workers are away (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006).

### *The Importance of Mobile Phones*

Mobile phones are so vital due to the internet connectivity for calls, text messaging and social networking sites. Moreover, business emails can be sent and received at any time of the day. Smartphones are so efficient due to the speed at which tasks can be done. From a business point of view, employees can be connected to their colleagues, partners, suppliers, customers at all time. Smartphones are so functional; people can store important data, files, pictures, and notes on the phone, and they can save time by achieving tasks such as online banking, transfer funds and make international calls. Job related applications are now part of company processes for the running of work. In this respect, mobile phones have revolutionized work and the way tasks are achieved. People considered that cell phones have brought positive change in their lives, since it had made it very easy to contact anyone, anywhere and anytime which gave them a feeling of assurance and safety (Andrew, *et al* 2014).

### *Mobile phone usage and productivity at work*

Mobile technologies devices impact performance, culture and the structure of the company itself (Meeker et al, 2010). Some people believe that mobile phones improve communication, thus, will have positive impact on their work. Others think that episodic cell phones use at work will distract them from their jobs, which negatively influence their productivity. These types of interruptions at work make employees lose their focus and consequently, they would not meet their project deadline (Donya and Kumah, 2011). When employees receive a call or their cellphone rings, it will have a

negative effect on their productivity, whether they answered it or not. During the few seconds spent on the decision to take or ignore that call, the flow of concentration is interrupted and it takes time to reestablish efficiency (Yihong, *et al* 2010). An external interruption refers to an event such as email, phone call, instant message or notification that alters work evolution. By contrast, an internal interruption identifies changes in work tasks that are self-initiated (Ellwood, 2005). One study found that employees working in the manufacturing sector had a problematic mobile phone use which negatively influenced their productivity (Wahla and Awan, 2014).

In addition to distraction, side effects of mobile use could negatively influence efficiency at work. A study on Saudi Arabian participants, mentioned that 44.4% complained of headache, concentration deficiencies, memory loss, hearing loss, and exhaustion were related to their mobile phone use (Khan, 2008). Moreover, another study showed that 3-4% of mobile phone users suffered problems such as fatigue and dizziness, and more than 20% developed headaches (Al-Khlaiwi and Meo, 2004). These medical health hazards might later relate to absenteeism and requests for sick leaves. In addition, other negative outcomes could result from the overuse of mobile phones such as financial problems, sleep disturbance and behavioral addiction.

The impact of mobile phones may be influenced by the user characteristics such as age, gender, and employment position. It may also vary due to the factors specific to certain countries. Rakow and Navarro (1993) noted that the mobile phone usage is an extension of the public world when used by men and in contrary an extension of the private world when used by women. Women spend more time on their smartphones and are more addicted to the device than men. While 52 percent of female used their mobile phones for at least 4 hours a day, only 29.4 percent of male respondents did the same. Male participants uses their mobile devices

typically during breaks while women participants often sneak a peek to their phone to check instant messages and social networking such as Facebook and Instagram. Initially men were more likely to utilize information and communication technologies (Ono and Zavodny, 2005). More recently, women started building interpersonal relationship through the internet usage which might have led to greater mobile phone dependency. Age also has its impact over mobile phone usage. Younger individuals eighteen to thirty years old, care about their self-image and are willing to spend more for a mobile phone than their older counterparts (Venkatesan, 2015).

### ***Big Five Model Personality Traits***

A body of literature has investigated employees' traits of character and addictive behaviors to many of their work choices. The Big Five personality traits model is well validated and proposes that people might belong to five personality domains: extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Thus, personality traits might trigger employees' misuse of mobile phones, and some employees might be more prone than others to show signs of problematic use of mobile phones.

### **Research Questions**

Very few studies investigated the problematic use of mobile phone among employees. Again, no studies correlated individuals' personality traits with the problematic use of mobile phones.

This study aims at answering the following research questions: (1) Do Lebanese workers have a problematic use of mobile phones? (2) Is there any correlation between employees' personality traits and the problematic use of mobile phones?

## Research Design and Methodology

### Sample

Participants in this study were randomly selected from different companies belonging to the banking, engineering and telecommunication fields. Out of the 244 distributed packages, we received 199 completed, achieving a response rate of 81.5%.

Each participant received two questionnaires and was allowed two weeks to respond. The two questionnaires included the Problematic Use of Mobile Phones (PUMP) and the Big Five Model (Big Five). Demographic variables included age, gender, seniority and work sector, and was collected using an additional section in the consent letter.

### Tools

This is a non-experimental quantitative study that uses two reliable and validated tools for the assessment of its variables. The PUMP is developed by Billieux and his colleagues (2008) and validated by Merlo, et al. (2013) for English speaking participants. The PUMP included thirty statements relevant to phone use habits, self-evaluated on a four-point scale. The Big Five assesses five significant dimensions that underlie most significant variation in human personality. The five factors are: (1) extraversion (2) agreeableness (3) conscientiousness (4) emotional stability and (5) openness to experience. The Big Five is a 50 item questionnaire reporting a self-description of respondents. Research has found a relationship between the above stated personality dimensions and job performance: Although conscientiousness is the trait most consistently tied to job performance, the others also influence some aspects of performance depending on the situation.

## Results

Concerning the first question on the problematic use of mobile phones assessed using the PUMP questionnaire: The results revealed that 86.93% of respondents have a problematic use of mobile phones.

Regarding personality traits: the descriptive analysis primarily shows that the majority of respondents (61.31%) are extroverted. As expected by the cultural traits of Lebanese people, this trait characterizes people who are sociable, talkative, assertive, and enthusiastic. They are usually more emotionally expressive and have better interpersonal skills. The second variable, agreeableness relates to people who are cooperative, warm and trusting. These people are usually more compliant and conforming. The study revealed that about 59.8% of participants were agreeable. Conscientiousness characterizes people who are responsible, organized, dependable and persistent. These workers show effort and discipline in the workplace. It was shown that 58.79% of subjects have that trait of personality. Neuroticism, better expressed as emotional stability is a state of mind which relates to people who are calm, self-confident, and secure. People with high negative scores are usually nervous, anxious, depressed and insecure. Almost 53% of Lebanese workers show signs of emotional instability. This of course might be in relation to the downturn in the economy, long work hours and stressful conditions that an emerging post-war country like Lebanon still suffers from. Finally, openness to new experience is a trait of personality that distinguishes creative, curious, and artistically sensitive individuals. These are employees with higher adaptation to change and enhanced leadership. About 57.8% self-reported traits of openness.

A multiple regression analysis revealed that traits of personality of the Big Five Model could not explain much of the problematic use of mobile phones with the following  $R^2$  values for extraversion (0.02), agreeableness

(0.02), conscientiousness (0.09), emotional stability (0.15), and openness to experience (0.26).

### Discussion

Study findings highlighted problematic use of mobile phones among a high percentage of Lebanese workers. The latter have major implications on organizational behavior research and the way management should deal with the abuse and misuse of mobile phones by their employees. Again, managers should know how to set the limits for their workers if they witness conditions where the mobile addiction exceeds its benefits. Moreover, this research attempted to explain whether certain individuals with specific personality traits exhibit higher problematic use of mobile phone. However, the assumption was rejected, and there was no significant relationship between Big Five personality traits and the problematic use of mobile phones. Thus, other socio environmental conditions might be defining the use of mobile phones in workplace.

### Study Limitations

This study covered mainly businesses from the banking and construction sectors, and should have covered a larger span of businesses. Again, the sample population could have been larger and other psychological tools assessing addictive behaviors could have been interesting to correlate with mobile misuse.

### Conclusion

In today's world and the speed of technological advancement, we assume few firms will be able to sustain a mobile free policy to ensure high productivity. There will be the need to enhance the proper use of mobile phones, company software, and appropriate applications. Moreover, the latter might have to be included in performance evaluation and possibly company reward structure.

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