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Why texting harms your IQ

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Txts n emails mk ppl stupid coz they R worse than smking pot & lead 2 a st8 of 'infomania'

THE regular use of text messages and e-mails can lower the IQ more than twice as much as smoking marijuana.

That is the claim of psychologists who have found that tapping away on a mobile phone or computer keypad or checking them for electronic messages temporarily knocks up to 10 points off the user's IQ.

This rate of decline in intelligence compares unfavourably with the four-point drop in IQ associated with smoking marijuana, according to British researchers, who have labelled the fleeting phenomenon of enhanced stupidity as "infomania".



Research on sleep deprivation suggests that the IQ drop caused by electronic obsession is also equivalent to a wakeful night.

Infomania is mainly a problem for adult workers, especially men, the study commissioned by Hewlett Packard, the technology company, has concluded.

The noticeable drop in IQ is attributed to the constant distraction of "always on" technology when employees should be concentrating on what they are paid to do. Infomania means that they lose concentration as their minds remain fixed in an almost permanent state of readiness to react to technology instead of focusing on the task in hand.

Workers lose productivity by interrupting a business meeting and disrupt social gatherings because of their infirmity, the report said.

The brain also finds it hard to cope with juggling lots of tasks at once, reducing its overall effectiveness, it added. And while modern technology can have huge benefits, excessive use can be damaging not only to a person's mind, but to their social life.

Eighty volunteers took part in clinical trials on IQ deterioration and 1,100 adults were interviewed.

More than six in ten (62 per cent) of people polled admit that they were addicted to checking their e-mail and text messages so assiduously that they scrutinised work-related ones even when at home or on holiday. Half said that they always responded

immediately to an email and one in five (21 per cent) will interrupt a meeting to do so.

Furthermore, infomania is having a negative effect on work colleagues, increasing stress and dissenting feelings. Nine out of ten polled thought that colleagues who answered e-mails or messages during a face-to-face meeting were extremely rude. Yet one in three Britons believes that it is not only acceptable, but actually diligent and efficient to do so.

The effects on IQ were studied by Dr Glenn Wilson, a University of London psychologist, as part of the research project.

"This is a very real and widespread phenomenon," he said. "We have found that infomania, if unchecked, will damage a worker's performance by reducing their mental sharpness.

"Companies should encourage a more balanced and appropriate way of working."

The report suggests that firms who give employees gadgets and devices to help them keep in touch from wherever they might be should also produce guidelines on use.

These "best practice tips" including using "dead time", such as travelling time, to read messages and check e-mails and turning devices off in meetings. David Smith, commercial manager of Hewlett Packard, said: "The research suggests that we are in danger of being caught up in a 24-hour 'always on' society.

"This is more worrying when you consider the potential impairment on performance and concentration for workers, and the consequent impact on businesses."

He said that although the company produced such technology, it was similar to a motor manufacturer making a 150mph sports car and telling drivers to stick within speed limits.

He added: "Similarly, 'always on' technology has proven productivity benefits but people need to use it responsibly. We know that technology makes us more effective, but we also know that misuse of technology can be counter-productive."

GETTING THE MESSAGE

- More than 50 billion e-mails are despatched every day worldwide; in 2001 the traffic was less than 12 billion
- Of these 88 per cent are junk e-mails including around 1 per cent which are virus-infected
- The average number of e-mail messages received per person per day is 32. This is rising by 84 per cent each year
- There are 440 million electronic mailboxes including 170 million corporate ones in use, growing by 32 per cent per year
- A total of 1,035 million mobile phone text messages are despatched each month in Britain.
- The average amount of texts per month is 37 per user compared to

21 in 2001

- A million children aged under 10 in the UK — one in three — now have their own phones
- The average age at which a child gets his or her first mobile phone in this country is eight

- Eighty two per cent of children and young people from 5 to 24 — a total of 12.6 million — own a mobile phone; this is predicted to rise to 87 per cent by 2007

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