

# Smart phone not a smart choice when facing depression

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Credit: George Hodan/Public Domain

Depressed people who turn to their smart phones for relief may only be making things worse.

A team of researchers, that included the dean of Michigan State University's College of Communication Arts and Sciences, found that people who substitute electronic interaction for the real-life human kind

find little if any satisfaction.

In a paper published in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior*, the researchers argue that relying on a mobile phone to ease one's woes just doesn't work.

Using a mobile phone for temporary relief from [negative emotions](#) could worsen psychological conditions and spiral into unregulated and problematic use of mobile phones, or PUMP, said MSU's Prabu David.

"The research bears out that despite all the advances we've made, there is still a place for meaningful, face-to-face interaction," he said. "The mobile phone can do a range of things that simulate [human interaction](#). It seduces us into believing it's real, but the fact remains it's still synthetic."

Lead author Jung-Hyun Kim, with Sogang University, Seoul, South Korea, said the study shows that face-to-face interaction can buffer the negative effects of heavy mobile phone use.

"Engaging in more face-to-face interaction can work as an antidote to the development of problematic mobile phone use," Kim said.

The researchers examined two pathways for habitual use of a smart phone: To either pass the time or entertain, or to alleviate feelings of sadness or depression by seeking out others.

It's the second reason, David said, that can cause trouble.

"This suggests that problematic use of mobile phone is fueled in part by the purposeful or deliberate use of the mobile phone to relieve or alleviate negative feelings," he said, "whereas habitual or ritualistic use to pass time is not strongly associated with it."

David and the researchers agree that using a [mobile phone](#) in moderation - to stay in touch with family or friends, for example - is not a bad thing. But don't let it replace real human interaction.

"If you have a chance to see someone face-to-face, take it," David said. "Life is short."

Mihye Seo, with Sungkyunkwan University, Seoul, South Korea, also contributed to this study.

Provided by Michigan State University

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