Smartphones and 'technostress'

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If you feel stressed out by your smartphone, it might be down to your personality as well as your phone, a new study suggests.

Writing in the journal *Behaviour & Information Technology*, Yu-Kang Lee and colleagues explored the relationship between four key personality traits, the types of phones people used and the levels of 'technostress' they experienced.

The first trait they studied was 'locus of control', which the authors defined as 'the extent to which people believe that their actions determine their rewards in life'. As smartphones blur the line between home and work, encourage multi-tasking and constant checking, the authors found them unsurprisingly to be a greater source of technostress than traditional phones. 'This has been called the "helpful-stressful cycle", in which one purchases a smartphone to help manage the workload only to have it induce stress and become the bane of one's existence,' they observe.

The second trait the authors explored was 'social interaction anxiety' (SIA). As people with high SIA are more likely to depend on the internet for social networking, they are also more likely to suffer the negative side effects of excessive use including stress caused by repeated smartphone checking and internet addiction.

The third trait was the 'need for touch', which can be satisfied in many people by constantly fiddling with their smartphone touch screens – a problem users of traditional phones don't have. However, the fact that

touching a smartphone becomes almost compelling is yet another source of technostress for their users.

The final trait, materialism, was the only one that seemed to cause more technostress in users of traditional phones than smartphones. The reason why isn't clear, but the authors suggest that perhaps users of snazzy smartphones have already reached a 'ceiling' in terms of their own material desires and therefore how much stress it can cause them.

So we now know that certain personality traits can make people more prone to suffer technostress, and health professionals may be able to identify and treat people who fall victim to technostress. And finally, this new work can also help individual users: the authors recommend that people with high levels of technostress – and the 'attendant psychological characteristics' – reduce their mobile usage, which is probably good advice for us all.

More information: "Helpful-stressful cycle? Psychological links between type of mobile phone user and stress." *Behaviour & Information Technology* DOI: 10.1080/0144929X.2015.1055800

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