

# Why are some people more attached to their phones than others?

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Some people frequently check and re-check their mobile phones. Once this impulse is triggered, it may be more a question of not being able to leave the device alone than actually hoping to gain some reward from it. These insights are drawn from a study by psychologists Henry Wilmer and Jason Chein of Temple University in the US and are published in Springer's journal *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*. Their findings shed light on the reasons why some people are so attached to their smartphones and mobile technology, while others are less so.

A better understanding of the impact of smartphone and mobile technology usage is needed to assess the potential problems associated with heavy use. Although these electronic devices are playing an increasingly pervasive role in our daily activities, little research has been done about a possible link between usage behaviour and specific mental processes and traits. Therefore, Wilmer and Chein set out to determine if people who report heavier [mobile technology](#) use might also have different tendencies towards delaying gratification than others, or might exhibit individual differences in impulse control and in responding to rewards.

Ninety-one undergraduate students completed a battery of questionnaires and cognitive tests. They indicated how much time they spent using their phones for social media purposes, to post public status updates, and to simply check their devices. Each student's tendency to delay gratification in favour of larger, later rewards (their so-called intertemporal preference) was also assessed. They were given hypothetical choices

between a smaller sum of money offered immediately or a larger sum to be received at a later time. Participants also completed tasks that assessed their ability to control their impulses. Finally, participants' tendencies to pursue rewarding stimuli were also assessed.

The results provide evidence that people who constantly check and use their mobile devices throughout the day are less apt to delay gratification.

"Mobile technology habits, such as frequent checking, seem to be driven most strongly by uncontrolled impulses and not by the desire to pursue rewards," says Wilmer, who adds that the findings provide correlational evidence that increased use of portable electronic devices is associated with poor impulse control and a tendency to devalue delayed rewards.

"The findings provide important insights regarding the individual difference factors that relate to technology engagement," adds Chein.

"These findings are consistent with the common perception that frequent smartphone use goes hand in hand with impatience and impulsivity."

**More information:** Wilmer, H.H. & Chein, J.M. (2016). Mobile technology habits—patterns of association among device usage, intertemporal preference, impulse control, and reward sensitivity, *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, [DOI: 10.3758/s13423-016-1011-z](https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-016-1011-z)

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