Understanding and Coping with Mobile Data Device Use in the Classroom

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Abstract

Mobile devices that allow people to seamlessly communicate and access information have become commonplace in much of the developed world. This is especially prevalent for the "Y" or "Millennial" Generation, where 18-27 year-olds use their mobile devices to browse the Web more often than a desktop or laptop. Walking across a university or college campus it is not uncommon to see the fingers of the majority of students being occupied on their mobile devices. Such devices have become a natural, and in many cases a primary, means of communication and information sourcing/sharing among students. However, when these devices enter the classroom, how is the learning experience impacted? This paper will report on a qualitative study where business students in a major Canadian university expressed their views on using their mobile data devices in the classroom for purposes not directly related to the class. Three distinct attitudes towards such behavior were detected from the students. Various motivations behind these attitudes were found from the qualitative analysis of student comments. This paper will present these findings and propose some strategies for instructors to help manage the potential distractions to learning from mobile device use in the classroom. Strategies will also be presented that may help instructors leverage the potential for utilizing mobile data devices to enhance the learning experience.