Chapter 32
Mobile Phone Use During Class at a Japanese Women's College

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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire survey was conducted with university students from a women's university in Japan on the use of mobile phones during a lecture. Topics specifically investigated included (1) whether students put their mobile phone on their desk during the lecture, (2) the reasons why students put their phone on their desk during the lecture, (3) responses to incoming calls during the lecture, and (4) the psychological impact on students of setting rules regarding the use of mobile phones during the lecture. Students were divided into two groups according to their responses to item (1): those who said they put their phone on their desk and those who said they did not do so. These groups were compared in terms of items (3) and (4). As a result, it was found that over 60% of students put their mobile phone on their desk during the lecture and that these students were more likely to use their mobile phone during the lecture. The survey suggested that students today are aware of mobile phone etiquette with respect to lectures, and are especially aware that communication etiquette conflicts with lecture etiquette.

INTRODUCTION

Numerous previous reports have examined personal (Hembrooke & Gay, 2003; Fang, 2009; Fried, 2008) versus educational use (Barak, Lipson, & Lerman, 2006; Demb, Erickson, & Hawkins-Wilding, 2004; Gay, Stefanone, Grace-Martin, & Hembrooke, 2001) of laptop computers during class. In the case of Japanese universities, there is some use of laptop computers by graduate students during seminars, but almost no undergraduate students in general studies programs use laptops during class, particularly in lecture-style classes. It is common, however, to see students in university classrooms place a mobile phone or smartphone on their desk (Amali, Bello, & Hassan, 2012; Hammer, Ronen, Sharon, Lankry, Huberman, & Zamtsov, 2010; McCoy, 2013). Also common is to see students in Japanese universities using a mobile phone during class.

We have performed various investigations of modern-day Japanese university students—the so-called digital natives (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Prensky, 2001a; Prensky, 2001b; Teo, 2013) born in the 1990s and raised in an environment where the Internet and mobile phones play an integral part—including their use of mobile phones during class. In an investigation of 21 college students by Author et al. (2012), 52.4% of students responded that they used mobile phones during class, and 42.9% of students do not feel guilty about using phones during class. Author et al. (2013a) distributed questionnaires to 20 college students participating in a computer laboratory class who had a phone on their desk, requesting a free response to the question "Why do you keep a mobile phone on your desk during class?" and a yes or no answer to the question "Do you feel guilty about keeping the phone on your desk?" The most commonly reported reason for keeping a phone on their desk was to communicate with others (7 responses), and 9 of the students reported not feeling guilty about keeping a phone on their desk (Author et al., 2013a). Moreover, in previous studies by Author et al. (2013b) and Author et al. (2014) investigating a total of 237 students, 67.9% replied that they usually keep a phone on their desk during classes and 30.8% reported doing so even in classes where mobile phone use was prohibited.

Thus, previous research suggests that at least half of current Japanese university students use mobile phones during class, and that many students do not feel guilt about doing so. Studies such as Author et al. (2012) and Author et al. (2013a) were performed using relatively small sample sizes, making it difficult to perform detailed analysis such as investigating differences between students who place a phone on their desk and those who do not. Furthermore, these studies were performed in a computer laboratory class, which may give rise to differences from other instructional formats such as lecture-based classes in large lecture halls. Sample sizes were increased in Author et al. (2013b) and Author et al. (2014) but those investigations involved student recollections of their general behaviors across all university classes, making consideration of specific classes difficult. The present paper is an attempt to overcome such limitations of the previous research in consideration of what was learned when conducting them.

GOAL

We conducted a questionnaire survey regarding university student use of mobile phones during classes, targeting students in a course taught by one of the authors. Specifically, we investigated (1) whether students kept a mobile phone on their desk during class, (2) why they kept a phone on their desk, (3) how they responded to incoming communications during class, and (4) the psychological impact of rules concerning phone use. Based on the results, we investigated modern-day university student attitudes regarding the use of mobile phones during class.

METHODS

Participants and Class

Participants were 76 Japanese women aged 18 to 21 years [mean, 19.00; standard deviation (SD) 0.65] enrolled in a media theory course taught by the author during the fall 2013 semester at a Tokyo liberal arts college for women.

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