

Attention: ■

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## Oz-first survey measures national mobile addiction

DRAFT: Australians are becoming addicted to their mobile phones, according to a researcher from the Queensland University of Technology who tomorrow will begin a national survey to measure the nation's obsession with mobiles.

Consumer behaviour researcher Diana James from QUT said the online questionnaire was the first Australian survey dedicated to the emotional, psychological, financial and social impact of our skyrocketing use of mobile phones.

The survey will run from April 1 to May 31 at [www.mobilesurvey.com.au](http://www.mobilesurvey.com.au) and is open to anyone aged 16 and older who lives in Australia and has a mobile phone.

Ms James said Australia had one of the highest mobile phone penetration rates in the world and it was important to find ways to measure mobile phone addiction.

"Mobile phone addiction is going to surpass internet addiction because at least you can walk away from your computer ... our dependency on mobiles means most people are never without them," she said.

"Like substance abuse, excessive use of mobile phones can lead to personal problems.

"I think it's critical that we can help people realise their level of dependency and ultimately help them do something about it. I want to develop a scale that can measure addiction so that people can self-assess themselves.

"I want to find out how many people are consuming this technology in a healthy manner, and for how many others it's become 'all-consuming'."

Ms James said danger signs included running up huge bills and having irrational reactions to being without a phone if you forgot or lost your mobile.

"Because they can provide immediate pleasure, if you're not careful mobile phones can become as much of an addiction as snacking on junk food or smoking," she said.

"And as ownership rates have increased, they've become a huge part of people's social lives ... without their phone, people feel like they are out of the loop."

Ms James said her preliminary research among Queensland university students had found many were obsessive in their use of mobiles, and could panic and become agitated if they were parted from them.

She said some students suffered withdrawal symptoms if they didn't receive calls or text messages, which could lead to anxiety and self-esteem problems.

"In some cases, students said they suffered sleep deprivation and even RSI as they lay awake at night texting on their mobile phones," she said.

She said students who took part in a recent focus group with her as part of her study "panicked" when she asked them to turn off their phones during the discussion.

"They were afraid - they were quite agitated," she said.

"Students were quite relieved when the session was over and they could turn their phone back on and check for messages."

But Ms James said not everyone who used their phone heavily had a problem.

"Not everyone who drinks heavily is considered an alcoholic," she said.

"Similarly, people who use their mobile phone very heavily may or may not be addicted.

"It depends on the impact it has on their day-to-day life. Is their phone costing them more than money in terms of emotional, social and physical stress?"

Ms James's survey results will be analysed for her PhD study with QUT's School of Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations.

"Essentially, this survey is about constructing a scale that will measure 'addiction' to mobile phones," she said.

"It draws on literature from consumer behaviour (such as impulsive and compulsive buying) and clinical addiction.

"What is different about this scale is that it will measure in degrees ... it will go from recreational users through to impulsive, compulsive and addictive users.

"It also seeks to extend beyond the idea of 'dependency' in defining addiction. Just because someone is dependent on something, doesn't determine whether the impact on their lives is not overall a positive, rather than negative thing. So the survey also investigates consequences for individuals."

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\*\* High-resolution photos of Ms James with a mobile phone are available for media use. Please contact Mechelle.