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# The Distinct Psychology of Smartphone Usage

*ABSTRACT*: One of the most important trends in today’s marketplace is consumers’ increased reliance on smartphones not only as a communication device but also as a central platform for

accessing information, entertainment and other consumption activities—the so-called “mobile revolution.” It is therefore surprising that the psychology of mobile consumption has received so little attention in the consumer behavior literature. The purpose of my dissertation is to address this void by examining what is fundamentally different about the psychology of smartphone use. The dissertation consists of two complementary essays. In the first essay I focus on clarifying the particular type of relationship consumers form with their smartphones. Specifically, I advance the hypothesis that smartphones often fulfill the role of “attachment objects” for consumers. That is, smartphones are now used by consumers in much the same way as pacifiers or security blankets are used by children—which I refer to as the Adult Pacifier Hypothesis. Consistent with this hypothesis, results from two controlled lab experiments show that relative to a comparable device such as one’s personal computer, engaging with one’s

smartphone provides a greater sense of comfort as well as faster recovery from a stressful situation, both of which are defining characteristics of attachment objects. Also consistent

with this hypothesis, a third study shows that the drive to use one’s smartphone becomes

especially pronounced among consumers who have recently quit smoking—that is, consumers who are particularly susceptible to anxiety and stress. Additional studies for this first essay are in the planning stages. In the second essay I document an important consequence of consumers’ increased reliance on their smartphones: its impact on user-generated content. Across six studies I show that using one’s smartphone results in the generation of online content that is significantly more emotional compared to content generated on PCs. I demonstrate this phenomenon through both analyses of field data (from UrbanSpoon as well as Twitter) and controlled experiments. Overall, I hope that that the initial insights from my dissertation will help pave the way for a comprehensive body of research on the psychology of the mobile consumer and its marketing implications.