

## Leisure activities during morning commute 'ease stress'

TODAY reports: Social media or leisure activities were not found to improve the emotional states of commuters during the evening commute though, according to a NUS study.

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SINGAPORE: Checking out the latest Facebook updates, texting a friend or staring out of the window while commuting — these activities do not just kill time, they could make a tangible difference to one's stress levels, especially when done at the right time of the day.

A survey of 174 employees found that online connecting — such as checking one's social networking apps and sites, personal emails, surfing the Web and texting — leads to less commuting strain and greater relaxation during the morning commute.

For instance, "vacuous" activities, such as people watching, looking at scenery and zoning out, during evening journeys allow people to better recover from their work day.

The study was done by researchers from the Department of Management and Organisation at National University of Singapore's (NUS) Business School.

"Engaging in pleasurable leisure activities during the morning commute to work helps one to start the day on a positive mood, thus easing the transition from non-work to work, rendering the individuals ready to go once they reach the office," said the researchers in their report on the survey, which was completed last month.

But social media or leisure activities were not found to improve the emotional states of commuters during the evening commute.

Instead, commuters are better off with relaxing activities such as people-watching, which generated more enjoyment, psychological detachment from work and reduction in fatigue.

Lead author Professor Vivien Lim, research assistant Audrey Kang and honours student Muhammad Fahmi obtained responses from employees working in four Singapore-based companies through an online survey. Sixty per cent of them were between the ages of 30 and 40.

Participants responded to questions about the positive and negative aspects of the commute and activities they engage in during the commute, among others. The correlation was then determined.

Apart from which activities were the most effective in relieving commuting stress, the study also found that work-related activities, such as reading work emails, working on assignments, and thinking about work-related things, are detrimental to commuters' well-being, regardless of the time of the commute.

Improvements commuters would like to see include less crowding, fewer breakdowns, better management and dissemination of information when breakdowns occur, greater predictability on bus and train arrivals and free Wi-Fi — without increasing fares.

### MORE INFORMATION, ENTERTAINMENT COULD HELP

Prof Lim said authorities could look into providing more boards indicating arrival times of buses. Televisions at MRT stations or in trains showing fun shows could also put people in a better state of mind. This could make people less hostile, and perceive annoying and stressful events at a less intense level.

"So you'll react to other passengers in a less hostile fashion and you would probably be more considerate to others," she said.

Commuter Daniel Neo, 26, was unconvinced that certain activities were more effective at certain times of the day. "It doesn't really matter what I do actually, does it? These activities just take your mind off things," said the civil servant. What he would prefer are less-crowded trains.

"You're cramping people all into these trains — whether you give them Wi-Fi or give them movies on the train, no one is going to be bothered because they are still going to be annoyed squeezing with everyone else," he said.

On the other hand, writer Serene Woo, 28, felt the findings made sense.

"In the morning, all we want to do is distract ourselves from the upcoming work tasks, so we catch up on news and look at social media sites. But in the evening, we're so tired from work that we just don't have the energy to scroll through feeds or talk to people. Looking out the window quietly seems more beneficial."