

Bernd Rohrmann

LITTLE MEMO ABOUT THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF SMARTPHONES

10-04-2016

For about a year now I observe the use of smartphones ... My initial esteem of this stunning tool gets increasingly overrun by social worries ... So I'll scribble down what's in my mind.

<> HOW MANY PEOPLE USE SMARTPHONES?

As it seems to me: About 90% of women, and about 50% of men. This is just a guess, it's based on what I observe every day in cafes, bistros, waiting rooms, banks, trams and so on. Women usually have it in their hand all the time, not in a bag.

<> DO I OWN SMARTPHONES?

Yes, I own two. One is a compact simple-to-use mobile phone for emergency situations, that's certainly a useful one. (even though it's not 'smart') The other one is a highly developed Nokia+Windows smartphone, it can do a lot yet is hard to handle and very fast empty.

My first smartphone I bought (pushed by my doctors) in 2004 when I was for several months in hospital. This tool, the "Xda Pocket PC" made by company O2, was the first true smartphone, combining a mobile phone and a mini-Windows, and had a very large screen; the price was about 1000 dollars, urghhhh.

Unfortunately O2 collapsed some years later, and their ingenious instruments are not made anymore

<> WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SMARTPHONES?

These are many. The original function, to be a mobile telephone, means that people can phone and be reached almost everywhere. This is essential for staff of companies who work outside, e.g., medical services, ambulances, police officers, repair people, gardeners, painters, plumbers and so on. It is also important for families, especially for linking parents and kids.

Beyond this, smartphones offer a very large range of facilities, including internet access, e-mail facilities, navigation tools, address lists, a powerful camera, and a wide range of music.

<> DO I OBSERVE WORRYING SMARTPHONE USES?

Yes I do, here are some examples: Quite a few car drivers speak in their smartphone or type a message while driving (which is an accident risk and forbidden anyway). Some

bicycle people (men) read their smartphone while cycling on the road. Many women moving along a tram have a smartphone in their hand and read it often.

Postscriptum:

A further issue is that many people read frequently their smartphone re private matters while at work ...

I just heard that a railway officer responsible for train line management had played a game on his smartphone before being due with decisions. These decisions went wrong, two trains crashed, 12 passengers died and 80 were injured ... a disaster.

⟷ WHAT ARE PEOPLE DOING WITH THEIR SMARTPHONE?

According to my own explorations: Most people read websites such as Facebook or Instagram or Twitter. Some deal with e-mails. About a quarter listen to music. Only few people use their smartphone for phoning.

⟷ HOW OFTEN ARE SMARTPHONES USED BY THEIR OWNERS?

The reports about this differ - but must conclude that people inspect their smartphone permanently, and many never put it of. Some articles claim that this applies to any kind of social meetings as well, e.g., when having lunch or dinner together.

And there are stories that some people even let the smartphone on during erotic endeavours or sex ...

⟷ THE LINK TO THE "SOCIAL MEDIA" - IS IT ENDEMIC?

Especially many younger people steer their life via Facebook. They may not have own plans or concepts, they use the (pseudo-)interaction with Facebook instead. Good ideas and even more so bad ideas are easily installed there, or taken over for the own moral if someone hasn't ever developed personal attitudes and agendas - or just wants to be like others.

⟷ PHYSICAL IMPACTS OF SMARTPHONES?

Physiotherapists report that quite a few smartphone users have neck pain. The reason seems to be that people bend forward and look down when reading it, and this is overdemanding the neck muscles, given the weight of the head.

⟷ PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF SMARTPHONES?

People feel under psychological pressure to get everything. Meanwhile there are even acronyms: Fomo = Fear Of Missing Out, Fobo = Fear Of Being Offline, Nomo = No Mobile. Many people, of all age groups, whatever their job, may develop anxiety.

Meanwhile a discussion has started whether strong "social media addiction" (which is handled via smartphones) should get recognised in the DSM (diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders).

<> SOCIAL IMPACTS OF SMARTPHONES?

It seems to me that intense smartphone use impedes strongly on the social life of people. Face-to-face communication has become somewhat rare. I often see couples sitting together for brekkie or lunch, yet they hardly speak with each other - both read their own smartphone the whole time.

Recent reports claim that especially young people almost fear personal verbal contact, and that it is less stressing for them to communicate using their smartphone, and even that indirectly, using Facebook.

<> HOW ABOUT THE ROLE OF SMARTPHONES FOR KIDS?

There are heterogeneous viewpoints: Some authors praise that young boys and girls get so early access to an important social tool.

Others warn that using smartphones in early age can have unfortunate influence on important social learning processes.

<> SHOULD NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SMARTPHONES BE ACCEPTED?

In my view: No!

Yet currently it seems almost impossible to stop the manifold risks linked to the over-use of smartphones, because smartphones are simply a principal feature of most societies - certainly the Australian or the German one ... The social impacts worry me most.

<<>> *Well, all my memos are 'ad-hocish' - I grew up and became "adult" long time ago and in a very different world ... May be I am still bound to philosophies and perspectives which are simply not relevant anymore in current times??*