

A nation addicted to smartphones

Description

This is the cunning strap line accompanying the release of [Ofcom](#)'s recent information-rich report on the communications market. The adoption of fully-featured mobile phones (Blackberry, iPhone, Android) has rocketed in the past 12 months. Furthermore, according to the report

When asked how addicted they are to their mobiles phones, 37% of adult smartphone users admitted high levels of "addiction" to their phone, with this rising to 60% of teen



It seems people use their phones in the street, the

bathroom, in bed first thing in the morning, and in the midst of social gatherings.

Addiction is a powerfully loaded concept with shameful connotations. Note the scare quotes. "Addiction" is an example of the kind of streetwise colloquial overstatement to which any of us could subscribe happily. You can also be addicted to learning, charitable causes, healthy eating and exercise. If this is addiction then let's embrace it.

Instead of "addictions" the adoption of smartphones into everyday use could be discussed as the acquisition of new communicative **habits** or new media **practices**. Walking quickly in the rain, cleaning your teeth, rubbing your eyes in the morning and eating with a knife and fork are habits.

So people now habitually use their smartphones in many contexts. These are practices they fall into without thinking. It's a habit from which they are extricated only by a conscious exercise of will.

Academic researchers have long scrutinized the social changes brought about by ubiquitous mobile media. The book on mobile phone usage in Japan by Mizuko Ito *et al* captures the trend towards ubiquity well, even in its title: *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian*. The pedestrian is the ordinary, which is to say the habitual, the taken-for-granted, as well as the mobile.

Mobile phone researcher Michael Bull describes "habitual everyday notions of what it might mean to inhabit" certain spaces such as the automobile, the street, the shopping arcade or indeed the

living roomâ• (p.171), thereby linking habit to habitat, ie space.

In so far as they occupy the world of everyday things, pervasive media become part of the regular way of doing things, part of the human beingâ•s habitual and everyday lifeworld.

â•A nation habituated to smartphonesâ• is less catchy, but provides a more subtle rubric under which to discuss smartphones. *Smartphone habits* carry less stigma and social embarrassment than *smartphone addictions*.

I discuss habits and smartphones in a chapter in *The Tuning of Place* â• which I could have subtitled something like *Philosophy for Smartphone Addicts* or *Habituated to Smartphones*.

With a smartphone you can download third party apps that do almost anything: mapping, locating, recording, listening, talking, browsing, shopping. The rapid adoption of fully featured smartphones is impressive, leading no doubt to subtly new ways of thinking about sociability, how we occupy space, what we see and hear, and the ways we tune our interactions with each other and the environment.

References

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See also earlier post on [Otaku architecture](#).

Category

1. Body

Tags

1. addiction
2. habit
3. habitat
4. mobile
5. smartphone

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