

Bits

Business, Innovation, Technology, Society

Disruptions: More Connected, Yet More Alone

By **Nick Bilton** September 1, 2013 11:00 am

SAN FRANCISCO — Last weekend, I was watching television with a few friends, browsing the week’s most popular YouTube videos, when a piece in the comedy section called “I Forgot My Phone” caught my eye. As I was about to click play, however, a friend warned, “Oh, don’t watch that. I saw it yesterday, and it’s really sad.”

The two-minute video, which has been viewed more than 15 million times, begins with a couple in bed. The woman, played by the comedian and actress Charlene deGuzman, stares silently while her boyfriend pays no mind and checks his smartphone.

The subsequent scenes follow Ms. deGuzman through a day that is downright dystopian: people ignore her as they stare at their phones during lunch, at a concert, while bowling and at a birthday party. (Even the birthday boy is recording the party on his phone.) The clip ends with Ms. deGuzman back in bed with her boyfriend at the end of the day; he is still using his phone.

Ms. deGuzman’s video makes for some discomfiting viewing. It’s a direct hit on our smartphone-obsessed culture, needling us about our addiction to that little screen and suggesting that maybe life is just better led when it is lived rather than viewed. While the clip has funny scenes — a man proposing on a beach while trying to record the special moment on his phone — it is mostly ... sad.

“I came up with the idea for the video when I started to realize how ridiculous we are all being, myself included, when I was at a concert and people around me were

recording the show with their phones, not actually watching the concert,” Ms. deGuzman said in an interview.

“It makes me sad that there are moments in our lives where we’re not present because we’re looking at a phone,” said Ms. deGuzman, who also wrote the piece, which was directed by Miles Crawford. She mused that, like it or not, experiencing life through a four-inch screen could be the new norm.

Or not. Ms. deGuzman’s video may have landed at one of those cultural moments when people start questioning if something has gone too far and start doing something about it.

Last week, the Unsound music festival in Poland banned fans from recording the event, saying it did not want “instant documentation” and distractions that might take away from the performances. In April, during a show in New York City, Karen O, the lead singer of the rock band the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, told audience members to put away their phones (using an expletive to emphasize her point).

A number of New York restaurants, including Momofuku Ko and Chef’s Table at Brooklyn Fare, have prohibited people from photographing their food. (Note to foodies: Your quinoa does not need to be artfully posted with an old-timey look on Instagram.) And, of course, many mothers and fathers who fought to keep the television out of the kitchen may see smartphones as the next threat to dinnertime civility.

In the late 1950s, televisions started to move into the kitchen from the living room, often wheeled up to the dinner table to join the family for supper. And then, TV at the dinner table suddenly became bad manners. Back to the living room the TV went.

“It never really caught on in most U.S. homes,” said Lynn Spigel, a professor at the Northwestern University School of Communication and author of the book, “Make Room for TV.” “At one point, a company even tried to invent a contraption called the TV Stove, which was both a TV and a stove,” she said.

So are smartphones having their TV-in-the-kitchen moment?

“Every experience is being mediated and conceived around how it can be captured and augmented by our devices,” said Mathias Crawford, a researcher in human-computer interactions and communications at Stanford University. “No place is this more apparent than our meals, where every portion leading up to, during and after a dining experience is being carved out by particular apps.”

People make dinner reservations on OpenTable; check in on Foursquare when they arrive at the restaurant; take a picture of their food to share on Instagram; post on Twitter a joke they hear during the meal; review the restaurant on Yelp; then, finally, coordinate a ride home using Uber.

“If you’re wondering when people are going to reject the phone, that will mean they need to reject Silicon Valley’s entire concept of how you ought to be dining,” Mr. Crawford said. But, he added, it was possible. “Yes, society is changing, but the iPhone is only really six years old, and those changes aren’t set in place.” Given the overwhelming response to Ms. deGuzman’s video, people are at least thinking about those changes.

“It wasn’t until this year that I’ve had these revelations about living in the moment without my phone,” Ms. deGuzman said. “I still have my phone with me, but I try to leave it in my purse. Now I find myself just taking in a moment, and I don’t have to post a picture about it.”

E-mail: bilton@nytimes.com

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Does Technology Cut Us Off from Other People?



Three new studies paint a surprisingly complicated picture of the role of mobile devices in our social lives—and suggest steps we can take to make the most of technology.

BY LAUREN KLEIN | MARCH 12, 2014

I keep technology at a little distance, which makes me unusual among millennials. Four out of five of my peers—those born after 1980—own mobile devices, which are always on, always on us, and always connected to social media like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

But while all my friends seem wired into their smartphones 24-7, I've turned off notifications on my iPhone and I participate in the occasional technology Shabbat.



It's hard to shake the feeling that, although smartphones open the door to new kinds of social connection, they burn through precious social capital—the web of social networks that research says can help us to be happier, healthier, and better employed.

I'm not alone. In fact, *Greater Good* contributor Barbara Fredrickson published a study last year that suggests smartphone use may be taking a toll “on our biological capacity to connect with other people.”

But do digital devices and social media really disconnect us from the flesh-and-blood people in our lives? Or can mobile devices actually add to our social capital? Researchers are starting to explore these questions—and the answers suggest that our social media presence need not detract from our real-world social connections. In fact, technology can actually increase our social capital, if we know how to use it.

When it's smart to use smartphones

First up, do smartphones actually reduce our social capital?

To find out, a team of researchers at the University of Florida surveyed 339 students about the intensity of their smartphone use and online social networking. They found that, on average, participants reported spending about 100-200 minutes per day using the Internet and about 30-90 minutes using social networks. Then the students answered questions about four dimensions of social capital:

- **Trust**, measured with questions like, “Generally speaking, there is someone I can turn to for advice about making very important decisions.”
- **Organizational participation**, measured simply by their number of group memberships.
- **Political participation**, measured by how often they watched political debates or participated in demonstrations.
- **Network resources**, measured by the people of people they know who could provide different resources, such as a holiday homes abroad or access to professional journals.

The results? Across the board, heavy smartphone use was positively associated with all four measures of social capital. So it seems that all those people who are glued to their phones are not necessarily more socially isolated.

But this relationship only exists to the extent that the smartphones were being used for their social networking capabilities, as opposed to random Internet surfing. In other words, only those who used their smartphones for social media

like Google+ or Twitter knew more people, were more involved with organizations, participated more actively in politics, and perceived more trust among their peers.

This study was of young people. Do people on the other end of the age spectrum also benefit from online social networking?

Social media help older people stay connected

Studies have shown that older adults—those 65 years and up—who use social networking sites benefit from better health, reduce their chances of cognitive decline, and prevent premature death. But only four percent of Facebook users in the United States are over 65, which suggests that older adults may be missing valuable opportunities to strengthen their social ties through social media.

A team of Mexican researchers designed their own type of social media platform, called Tlatoque, which borrows many of its features from popular networking sites (e.g., it has a news feed, status updates, and photo sharing capabilities). After a few weeks, the researchers looked at how interactions through Tlatoque influenced social capital and interactions in the real world.

They found that the system significantly enriched these adults' relationships with close friends and family. The authors suggest that's because the system helped them become more aware of what their relatives were up to, enabling the sharing of information with friends and family who prefer social media to the "more traditional" ways of staying in touch. This catalyzed and enriched real-world conversations, according to the results.

While Tlatoque might not be coming to an app store near you anytime soon, this study is the first to suggest that we can use our online social capital to enrich our in-person encounters. It's a good first step toward understanding the relationship between online and offline social capital—and how both of these networks might influence one another.

It takes a village on Twitter



The results of these two studies seem conclusive: Together, smartphones and social media can increase your social capital.

But are all forms of social capital created equal? Another study, recently published in the *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, looked at how the micro-blogging platform Twitter builds different types of social capital.

On Twitter, all messages posted are publicly available in the global feed of “tweets.” But to filter this feed, users can choose to follow other users. That’s a great way to learn about a new job, read about different experiences and opinions, or feel like part of a group that’s bigger than yourself.

These types of bonds, which are largely informational, are described by researchers as *bridging social capital*, which the authors loosely define as, “the formation of rather weak ties between people from different networks.” *Bonding social capital*, on the other hand, has a more emotional tone. Bonding happens in homogenous groups of like-minded individuals, like friends or family. So if bonding capital is about connecting more deeply, then bridging capital is about connecting more widely.

If you were to guess, which one would you say Twitter helps to build?

The researchers had a hypothesis that it was both. So they asked 264 Twitter users to report their number of followers and followees, estimate the number of minutes they spend on Twitter on an average day, and answer a few questions that would approximate a measure of both bridging and bonding social capital. A typical question for bridging social capital asks if “interacting with people on

Twitter makes me feel like part of a greater community”; a question for bonding social capital asks if, on Twitter, “there are several people I trust to help solve my problems.”

Twitter did indeed seem associated with both bonding and bridging social capital—but only if the number people you interact with on Twitter fell within a goldilocks zone of not too few and not too many.

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Explore the health benefits of social connection **here and here**.

For example, people who spent the most time on Twitter and followed more users reported more bridging capital. This is because the more you follow, the more opportunity you have to gain exposure to new ideas—or, as the authors say, to “expand your horizons” beyond your “narrow daily existence.” So is it best to follow as many people as possible? The answer is no, according to this study—when we follow *too* many people, we risk information overload. As the authors caution us, “There can be too much of a good thing.” More is better, but only up to a point.

When it comes to bonding social capital, a similar principle applies. They found that a user with an engaged and dedicated audience of

followers is likely to feel a great sense of emotional support. But if that user’s follower network becomes too large, it becomes an abstract faceless mass, “which increases the user’s psychological distance from his or her followers.”

So to build the most bridging and bonding capital on Twitter, you want a village

of followers, not a teeming metropolis.

What might this have to do with our offline social capital? While it wasn't the main focus of this study, researchers found that those who feel more connected in their everyday lives also seemed to feel more connected to their online peers, not unlike the elderly participants of Tlatoque. So in some way, there is a relationship between your offline self and your online profile. The Tlatoque study even suggests that online connections can support the offline ones.

Taken together, these three studies hint at a compelling story—that social networking services can be a significant way of developing, maintaining, and strengthening our social connections, both online and in person. Using social networking services builds social capital in a number of ways: greater emotional support, lower levels of loneliness, and more feelings of connectedness. But these studies also contain a note of caution: Too many followers and too much participation can lead to information overload, depression, and feelings of disconnectedness.

The bottom line? I'm going to keep my iPhone and my Facebook account—but I think I'll also keep setting limits.

About the Author

Lauren Klein

Lauren Klein is a *Greater Good* editorial assistant.

Are smartphones making us less social?

Everyone knows smartphones are causing us to tune out the world and interact less with others. But is that really the case?

By Scott Matteson | December 8, 2014, 7:16 AM PST

We've all seen it first hand: you get into an elevator with a bunch of strangers and everyone pulls out their phone and fixates on the screen. It's the same scene whether you're waiting for a subway, standing in line at the grocery store or sitting in the doctor's office. Worse, you can go into a restaurant and see friends and couples doing the same thing; spending more time with an electronic device than a fellow human being. There's even a term for this called *phubbing* (<http://stopphubbing.com/>); "the act of snubbing someone in a social setting by looking at your phone instead of paying attention." I saw it first-hand one evening in Ireland this past summer: a teenaged couple sat at a table in a pub barely acknowledging one another in favor of the devices in their hands.

"Everyone just tunes each other out," conventional wisdom says with a mixture of sadness and contempt. "Nobody wants to engage with others any more. Our smartphones are killing society."

Smartphones are ubiquitous. IDC reports (<http://www.idc.com/prodserv/smartphone-os-market-share.jsp>) that over 330 million smartphones were shipped in the second quarter of 2014, and "At this pace, 2014 promises to close at nearly 1.3 billion [smartphone] shipments." The report is worth looking at to see how each mobile platform (Android, iOS, etc.) is doing, but my point here is that the smartphone habit is here to stay. So how are we dealing with it?

I recently wrote about "10 ways mobile devices are changing society" (<https://www.techrepublic.com/article/10-ways-mobile-devices-are-changing-society/>), but I intentionally left out the 11th and most significant way since I wanted to devote a full article to the question to explore it further: are mobile devices changing how people

interact with another... or causing them to neglect to do so? Is conventional wisdom correct? Are we all devolving into Neanderthals who will one day do little more than grunt incoherently at one another while staring at our screens (some might say we're already there!), the fine art of face-to-face conversation utterly destroyed? Is this proof that humanity is on a downward spiral where we'll all eventually be pure loners incapable of empathy or emotion for one another?

Well, not exactly.

Some things are just that way

In the first place, there have always been escape hatches for antisocial or just plain bored people to use in order to avoid contact with others. If it involves something to preoccupy your time, you can use it to ignore people, whether it's a book, a crossword puzzle, a music player or a smartphone. If you're playing Candy Crush or some other solitary pursuit on a smartphone it might be argued you're missing out on the society around you, but many people who seek to be left alone for some quiet time just aren't going to walk up to strangers and ask about their day in the absence of all other forms of entertainment. It's a foolish argument to state that antisocial people will become social butterflies with no escape hatches to avoid it: people are going to gravitate to their comfort zones (but it's a valid question to ask: are those comfort zones getting TOO comfortable and luring more people away from other zones they should be treading in?)

The unique advantage

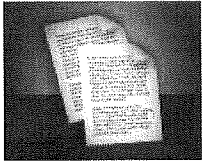
Secondly, there's an element smartphones bring to the table which is missing from the other potential distractions I mentioned above: they can actually expand your social world. When people are on their phones they're generally communicating with someone, whether it's a coworker, friend, significant other, or even strangers on the internet with whom they're exchanging comments or playing games. As a result, the rules of engagement are changing - certainly those annoying text abbreviations are common vernacular now - and so are the borders of socialization. Thanks to social media it's now almost possible to virtually experience what your friends and family

are doing in real-time format, thanks to pictures, status updates and other play-by-play exposures. Granted, many people make the mistake of devaluing their immediate experience by focusing more on spreading it (read: bragging) to others, and it's clear that much of what is shared need not be, such as pictures of food in a restaurant or the obvious laments that "Friday is too far away/I really need coffee!". However, this is still a far cry from blocking out the world through reclusive behavior like huddling in the basement playing Atari games. Note: I for one like Atari games but there has to be a balance.

Giving and taking as part of the big picture

Thirdly, mobility brings us instant access to information both as consumers and producers building a give and take environment. Perhaps some may take more than give, but as the saying goes, "no man is an island," and the elements of mobility and what it's used for define connections to others and a reliance on ideas, developments, strategies and engagement. People post concepts. Developers build apps. Events produce feedback. This engages users, though understandably at the expense of equally engaging material in the world around them on which they might miss out.

Making the world a smaller place



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(https://adclick.g.doubleclick.net/pcs/click%253F%253DAKAOjstDbpX61x1XhUotSIYsgg_ucAfIlg6KSkI)
Mobile devices have quickly become a ground zero for a wide spectrum of risk that includes White Papers (<https://www.techrepublic.com/resource-library/content-type/whitepapers/>) provided by Lookout (<https://www.techrepublic.com/resource-library/company/lookout/>)

Finally, the communication benefits offered by our smartphones allow us to meet and keep in touch with people we might never have ordinarily known. I have many work colleagues I've never met in person but with whom I've carried out enlightening conversations through email and messaging. I have family members and neighbors in my social media list that live throughout the country, and I have been able to keep up on what they're doing to get to know them, and vice versa. It's absurd to state a smartphone makes you less social if you're using it to interact with others, but it's also

worth questioning the quality of those social connections you're focused on. Social media speaker Jay Baer puts it eloquently (<http://www.convinceandconvert.com/social-media-tools/social-media-pretend-friends-and-the-lie-of-false-intimacy/>): "Maybe we should be focused less on making a lot of connections, and focused more on making a few real friends."

What's the verdict?

A smartphone is a tool which can be used a lot or a little, for valid and enriching purposes or to waste time and miss out on opportunities. It really boils down to the same argument that has been applied to cars, guns, alcohol, and other such "vehicles": some can use them correctly and others cannot. Ways to use them constructively are what we need, not Luddite sniffs of superiority that "smartphones turn you into a tech zombie which is why I refuse to own one." People chose to ride horses when the automobile was developed too, but that quickly became antiquated. I'm not saying mobile devices don't exacerbate existing problems - low attention span, technological dependency, shyness, inability to approach strangers, etc. It can certainly be argued smartphones are making us dumb

(<http://www.thebeat1037.com/onair/david-caudillo-40418/are-our-smart-phones-making-us-12689412/>).

As to whether smartphones are making people less social, the answer is "it depends on the individual." A person's interests, values, priorities and even attention span will be the best answer to that question. Some will use the device for increased socialization with their extended network while participating in the world around them. Some will fall prey to situations where a smartphone disrupts one form of socialization such as hanging out with friends in favor of another form which overwhelms the user's attention; engaging in an electronic chat with someone else, oblivious of what's going on in the immediate vicinity. And there will be those who use them to tune everything out entirely, which is more a sign of their own disinterest - or at least their inability to resist compulsion. The moral here is that it's not always easy to apply a single answer to a complex question involving differing personalities and pursuits; we have to look more closely at the people and situations involved to determine how the answer individually applies. It's a see-saw upon which individuals will be perched at varying positions, and that concept is perfectly illustrated by an iOS

app called Cloak (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/cloak-incognito-mode-for-real/id830708468?mt=8&affid=1503186>) which can alert you that friends are nearby so you can associate with them... or avoid them entirely.

I think it's worth examining further how we can use smartphones to evolve while retaining human connections and maintaining the day-to-day slices of life that build our environment. Studies upon the sociological aspect of this technology would definitely be welcome.

An unexpected twist

By the way, that couple in the pub I mentioned? I had a conversation with the boy in question and lightly joked: "Boy, dating sure has changed since I was your age. Back then we spent more time sweating over what we were going to say next and less time working on our abacuses."

"Oh, we're not dating," he responded. "We work together in the kitchen, 4-5 days a week, 8-10 hours per day. We talk all the time. By the end of shift, though, you're tired and just want a break to recharge and get caught up with what's going on in the world. Emails from my mom and dad and so forth. After several hours of chit-chat I think maybe she and I'd just run out of stuff to say for one day!"

What do you think? Are smartphones making society better, or worse?

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About Scott Matteson

Scott Matteson is a senior systems administrator and freelance technical writer who also performs consulting work for small organizations. He resides in the Greater Boston area with his wife and three children.

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10 ways mobile devices are changing society

Humanity is evolving in many ways thanks to mobile devices. But are all the changes for the better?

By Scott Matteson | November 19, 2014, 8:49 AM PST

I was raking leaves in my yard the other weekend when I observed a black SUV slowly idling down the street. I didn't recognize the vehicle and it looked out of place as though the driver were confused about where to go... or possibly casing houses to rob (hey, I'm a crime writer by nature).

The car pulled up to me and the passenger window went down. An older gentleman politely inquired if I knew where a certain nearby street was located. I told him how to get there and he thanked me profusely then drove off.

That got me thinking that I hadn't been asked for directions in years, since most people now rely on their mobile devices for maps and directions. I reflected that I wouldn't have had the pleasant encounter with that grateful driver if he had been using a device to guide him, and that started a train of thought about how mobile devices are changing society. What has improved us, and what are we missing out on?

1. We always know how to get there

It's great to throw out the paper maps and not have to call people to find out how to get anywhere, nor to be called when they're coming to my house. All we need is the address and presto! We're there.

But... we're also missing out on the unique dialogue we only get from people who know their own neighborhoods. Google Maps won't tell us that our turn is right after the red mailbox and that it's a tricky one so slow down. It can also be vague when it directs us through confusing areas like rotaries or 5-way intersections. And as

someone who used to get "Triptiks" from AAA, it was pretty cool not only having the entire route for a trip laid out for us by an expert (in a visual form), but to get some one-on-one advice from them such as the best time to travel through D.C. to avoid traffic (trick question, there is no "best time.") Sure, you can look this up online... where ten different opinions will be available, requiring you to pick and choose the most plausible.

2. We can buy almost anything immediately

Mobile devices are commonly used for purchasing, and according to Adweek.com (<http://www.adweek.com/news/technology/15-holiday-retail-stats-every-marketer-needs-see-161257>)

"smartphones and tablets will account for \$1.6 billion in sales on Thanksgiving, Black Friday and Cyber Monday combined." It's great that we can buy stuff we're interested in as we please.



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https://www.techrepublic.com/resource-library/company/lookout/)

But... this can pose a problem for compulsive shoppers or people who may be less than responsible for their actions (I'm thinking inebriated college students after 2 am). Obviously this is an issue that can impact anyone with low impulse control and mobile devices are simply the conduit for their problem, not the problem itself. But I've also found real-life clerks can be extremely helpful in providing advice - the paint guy at my local hardware store, for instance, knows more about paint than anyone I've met. Sure, online advice and reviews are available to help you figure out what to

buy but the human touch from knowledgeable experts you can talk to in person can't be replaced.

3. We're always available

Whether through a phone call, text, email, social media or some other form of communication, we're always at the beck and call of those we know so long as we have a mobile device with us. Sure, the devices have "mute" functions and off buttons, but the constant flow of input can make many people reluctant to use these options (or to rely on them for long), especially if our mobile devices are used for work or emergency contact from loved ones. In fact, if we contact someone on their cell and they don't pick up it can be disappointing or irritating. That's what they're there for, right?

But... people who want to concentrate and remain focused on a single task at a time have to exert rigid discipline on themselves (and likely those in their inner circle) lest they wander from one interruption to the next, checking that Facebook message a friend just sent or seeing if their spouses replied to that text. It's like trying to work in an office with the door open while a big party is going on outside in the hallway. I've found it's best to either close the door and focus or knock off for the day (if possible) and officially attend the party; working halfway in between is a recipe for low productivity.

4. No more waiting for the 11 p.m. news

Nowadays if something significant happens (no, but the Kardashians aren't remotely significant) we whip out our devices and see what's afoot, whether it's a weather emergency, a crisis, or some historic moment. Even if the website we're visiting is overloaded or sluggish there are plenty of others available. It's all part of our "need to know now" mindset, right?

But... needing to know now can detract from the present moment if the news isn't exactly earth-shattering. If it's just another interruption it's one more thing that takes away from what we're doing (or trying to get done). I can't help but feel like many

news stories are played up or overemphasized as part of a "Hey! Look over here!" distraction, whether to promote ads, news sources or some other ulterior motive. This only contributes to the short attention span which is becoming a real problem for many people.

5. We're never bored

Our mobile devices can hold or connect to an endless amount of entertainment. Thanks to streaming audio, video, copious storage capacities and zippy processors, it's possible to listen to music, watch movies, read e-books, browse the web, engage with others and play games in just a few taps. With this much variety nobody need ever be bored again, right?

But... I think it's important for people to learn how to handle boredom. So many of us feel like the phrase "I have nothing to do" is something to be feared rather than embraced. I've been guilty of it as well, such as during car trips where I was driving while my family slept and I shut the radio off since I didn't want to disturb them. Being bored is an opportunity to reflect, consider and plan: to revisit the past or map out the future. It can be healthy, not frightening. At the time I was immersed in the TV show "LOST" and used several hours going over all the clues, details and plot elements that had yet to be unraveled (as it turned out, I never got close to the actual story behind the island).

6. We never have to take chances

My wife and I went out the other week and during the course of our evening decided on the spur of the moment to get tickets for the WWII film "Fury." I lined up tickets on my smartphone at a theater in the next town over - the only one that still had seats for the show - and we picked them up then entered the movie. Great that we didn't have to just drive over and hope we could get lucky by scoring a pair of seats, right?

But... there is something to be said for just gambling and taking a shot at something without using what is the real-life equivalent of a "cheat code." Sure, it's better than getting to the theater to find all the seats sold out, but that would have opened up

some other options: see another film? Go somewhere else nearby? View a later show? Don't get me wrong - if my smartphone can help up my odds of doing something I really want, I'll play that card, but it does detract from the unpredictability of life with its themes of give and take or wins and losses.

7. We don't need to know all this useless trivia

Numerous others have discussed this as well: thanks to mobile devices there's no need to know silly little things like which planet is the sixth one from the sun, who won the War of 1812, or how many digits are in Pi (hint: a lot). We can just look it up right away, so as to save our brains for something more important like what Kim Kardashian is up to (not to beat a dead horse).

But... this access to information also has the capacity to erode our own personal knowledge stores as well as critical thinking ability. If we offload all that data elsewhere and access it only as (or if) needed, we'll miss out on a lot of interesting and useful things that will hamstring us if we don't have our mobile devices. In essence, we're delegating our brain's skills to an artificial brain, which can't reason or meaningfully apply its talents to improve our lives or activities - other than just spitting out the facts we ask for. Information is more valuable when applied to the appropriate contexts by a brain actually engaged with what's happening.

8. We never have to disconnect from friends or family

Social media can truly be amazing. I use it to connect with family across the country whom I'm not able to see regularly. I have built and strengthened friendships with people in my town because of it. And I've kept in touch with people who have literally known me all my life; in the era before social media we would simply have fallen out of touch, eventually forgetting each other's names and all past interactions.

But... stories are rampant about social media wrecking marriages, working relationships and familial ties. Used correctly by well-adjusted folks, it's a way to bring people together. Used inappropriately by those with underlying issues, it's a way for them to alienate others (political battles, anyone?) or lose focus on their face-to-face

loved ones in favor of their online community. I'm not blaming mobile devices or social media; as with online shopping I'm pointing out that this concept can wind up causing harm to people who misuse it, or misuse others with it.

9. We don't have to drop off film for processing

Anyone remember Fotomats? If so, you were probably a child of the 80's. These were drive-thru film processing kiosks where you could drop off your photo film and pick up the processed photos a day later. I haven't seen one of these in years, and while it's certainly true that photo film still exists and can be processed at other stores, this is usually done by professional photographers or photography enthusiasts. I've been using digital cameras and my smartphone for years now to take pictures; they're easy to store on my hard drive, they are backed up automatically on my phone, and I can see how the shots turned out instantly.

But... there was something nice about dropping film off knowing it would be ready the next day (unlike in today's instant gratification society, where we get impatient if something's not immediately available). There was a sense of anticipation along with the hope all the shots came out OK. We had more patience. And we didn't waste pictures goofing around, and the ones we kept were generally worth keeping.

Back in the 80's I probably took one-tenth the pictures I do now, and, while hard drive space is cheap and plentiful, organizing photos by year or occasion (and in some case which one of my kids is involved in the shot) is tedious. I rarely delete digital photos unless they're blurry or extremely poor quality, so there's more of a "quantity over quality" element now, whereas it was the reverse back then, at least for me.

10. We don't ever see payphones or telephone booths around any more

When I was a kid my elementary school had a fantastic old (even for the time) payphone which had three slots at the top for feeding in coins: a nickel slot, a dime slot and a quarter slot. Putting in money and hearing the electronic tones as the coins registered (actually I think it only cost a dime to make a call) was like seeing a magic trick. Now payphones and telephone booths - a famous landmark for Superman fans -

have gone the way of the passenger pigeon; I think the last one I saw was in Europe this summer. We just make calls on our smartphones; no hunting for coins, dealing with missing phone books or finding public phones out of order. My kids will likely grow up never having used one of these artifacts.

But... actually, there is no 'but'. This one was a tongue-in-cheek one; everyone is better off with payphones and phone booths relegated to the dust heaps of history (even the phone carriers are likely making more money off smartphone sales/data plans than they ever raked in with coin-operated telephones). Some progress is truly inarguable.

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About Scott Matteson

Scott Matteson is a senior systems administrator and freelance technical writer who also performs consulting work for small organizations. He resides in the Greater Boston area with his wife and three children.

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