

The business model depends upon you living a life glued to your phone

A digital world propped up by digital addiction



Zack Morris the Elder
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One of the defining features of the modern economy—maybe the defining feature—is that so much of it depends upon you being on your smartphone a ton. Like, almost all the time. Up to 70% of web traffic is from “mobile devices,” meaning if smartphones disappeared tomorrow, countless businesses and outlets would be working at a catastrophic 30% of their normal Internet commerce levels. Armageddon.

The entire edifice is propped up by people scrolling on their phones endlessly—whipping them out in parks, in grocery store lines, on subways, on busses, at stoplights in the car, in libraries, in classrooms, in foyers and elevators and vestibules. That’s how you get to 70%: Rolling, endless usage, nonstop consumption, turning every single public and private space into a more streamlined and perfected medium of economic exchange, the comprehensive commodification of simply being.

In the end, of course, you are the principle of this economic exchange; the smartphone is just a device to deliver you to advertisers and salesmen, a conduit through which your money and your consciousness are channelled to make other people rich. Nobody could ever have imagined it would be that easy. If you had sold people on this device 15 years ago they would have laughed it off: “Imagine carrying around a little computer screen in your pocket that constantly distracts you from everything good in your life but rarely adds any real meaningful value to your life, and you’ll make a ton of other people rich and also spend a lot more money doing it.” What a pitch! It never could have succeeded in the abstract; only in the actualized was it a success.

For this reason you will never see any major media outlets argue too strongly against smartphone usage. It is their bread and butter and it would be antithetical to their business model to do so. Some conservative outlets might occasionally argue that you need to “put down the phone once in a while” and “remember there’s a wider world out there” or something, and infrequent reports at the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal will ponder whether or not it’s a bad idea to give smartphones to eighteen-month-old babies. (“Some experts are now saying it’s probably safer to wait until they’re 20 months.”) It will rarely go further than that. Essentially none of them are willing to point out the obvious: That these devices really haven’t made our lives all that

better, that the minimal benefits they offer are greatly overshadowed by their obvious and undeniable drawbacks, and that we would be overwhelmingly better off without them.

You can hardly blame them for not wanting to talk about it; they'd be shooting themselves in the foot. More generally, what this all means is that the people who are such incisive critics of the

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