

Pensioner selfies on increase as smartphones gain ground

Have we gone beyond the point of being obsessed with technology or is there more to come, asks **DICK LUMSDEN**

Government statistics are like gold dust to journalists. As soon as a new batch comes out, they are pored over, dissected, and regurgitated in any number of guises to grab headlines ranging from the scaremongering to the reassuring.

Somehow, that combination of Government authenticity and the mythical power of percentages create a heady and irresistible mix.

Personally, I hate percentages... they can be made to sound good or bad, and almost invariably mask the real truth. I like real numbers, I can relate to numbers... I can visualise them, I can work out in my head what that statistic then looks like in real life.

For instance, last week the Government - through the communications watchdog Ofcom - published the most comprehensive report ever into our use of telephony, TV, radio and mail.

Buried deep in its 436 pages I discovered that 91% of over 65s who own a smartphone have never taken a selfie. Clearly an important and vital piece of information. But what does it really mean?

I looked further and discovered that there are 11.4 million people over 65 in the UK and 18% now own a smartphone - that is 2,058,000 give or take. If 91% of them have never taken a selfie, it means 184,000 have. Or one in every 62 if you really holl it down.

In my mind, I now see a packed bus from Manningtree to Colchester about 9.30am on a Thursday morning, full of buspass wielding pensioners heading into town... with one of them sitting on the upper deck at the front, holding their smartphone at arms length and snapping their morning selfie.

By way of contrast, the Ofcom report also told me that 13% of 16-24 year olds admit to taking selfies every single day... trust my maths when I tell you that is just shy of one million selfies a day, or 360 million a year. Mind boggling.

Another mind boggling statistic I uncovered shows just how much the over 65s have to go to catch up with the youngsters on smartphones.

The average older user spends just eight minutes a day on their smartphone, while the average



■ Conversation anyone? We simply can't resist our smartphones
Photo CONTRIBUTED

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16-24 year old spends 216 minutes. That is well over three hours a day of having their faces stuck in a four inch screen.

Mind you, that isn't all bad news as it would seem they have also developed supernatural powers of spatial awareness as they walk around town staring into their hand and never seem to bump into anyone or anything... or is it that the rest of us just give them a wide berth while tutting loudly?

Although I still have a handful of years to go till I reach the 65+ Club, I freely admit to being addicted to my Doro smartphone (other smartphones are available) although I'm not over keen on

selfies - I prefer not to remind myself of the ageing process.

I use my smartphone to check emails, make calls, send texts, take pictures, play solitaire when I'm stuck on a train, or track my route if I'm out on my bike.

Again, according to Ofcom, we love loading apps on our phones. The most popular among the over 50s are weather apps apparently, followed by maps, games and news.

Interestingly, while the average among all adults is 39%, only 19% of over 55s are trusting enough to do their online banking on a mobile - although it is equally as secure as your home computer using broadband.

There is no doubt that smartphones are becoming more popular among the older age groups as they become easier to use and make communicating with family and friends much easier and more fun.

In the last year, smartphone ownership among the 65+ has risen 26% - while for all adults it was just 7.5%.

But despite that, TV remains the number one source of information for the older age groups. The average time spent watching TV per day stayed almost exactly the same for the 65+, while it declined over 8% among 25-44

year olds, the equivalent of 16-17 minutes per day.

Is it too much of a leap to say these younger adults are spending less time watching the 40-inch screen in the corner of the room, and more time watching the four-inch screen in their hand? I don't think so.

Hand held technology is changing the way we live every day, and when the Ofcom report for 2020 comes out I wonder what it will say. Maybe everyone over 65 will have a smartphone, no longer watch TV or read a newspaper.

But by that time, everyone else will have grown bored of smartphones and communicate through chips in their heads. Blinking twice will take a picture of what they see and instantly upload it via thought transfer to a social media profile in cyberspace.

Closing their eyes they will have a rolling news feed playing on the inside of their eyelids with everyone else's pictures... and no-one will have time to do any work.

I bet you can't wait.

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