

**MOBILE TIME AS A BLESSING OR A CURSE: PERCEPTIONS
OF SMARTPHONE USE AND PERSONAL TIME AMONG
GENERATION GROUPS IN ESTONIA**

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Abstract. Although the literature has paid a lot of attention to the importance of mobile digital media in shaping people’s perception of personal and social time, little empirical research has focused on these issues. We aim at bridging this gap by testing empirically a hypothesis that shared perceptions of social life in the smartphone era vary generationally. The analysis, based on representative survey data collected in Estonia in 2014 (n = 573), revealed three underlying dimensions of the perceptions of smartphone use: (1) Expanding flexibility and diverse opportunities, (2) Vanishing boundaries and foci, and (3) Changing social identity and communication conventions. Generational differences manifested in the case of the first and the second dimension, lending support to the initial hypothesis. In the case of the third dimension, other structural factors, time use and subjective perceptions of personal time, rather than generational differences, explained the variation in the perceptions of smartphone use.

Keywords: smartphone use, personal and social time, generational differences, social acceleration, technological change, Estonia

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1. Introduction

The question of time has intrigued philosophers as well as natural and social scientists. In the philosophical and psychological sense, time has often been addressed as subjective, constituted by rhythms, changes and courses of events in one’s individual life and in society (Sorokin and Merton 1937). In a similar vein, this paper treats perception of time as influenced by subjective experiences and social interactions. Time as a social phenomenon, or social time, thus, “may be subject to substantial variations”, depending on the relation to and participating in social “processes among different groups and individuals” (Gronmo 1989:340).

In social sciences, the ontological problems of social time (and space), and their interconnectedness with social imaginaries and the related concepts became important already in the classic works of social constructivism in the 1970s. A new turn in this area was proposed by theorists of the information society interested in fundamental changes in spatial and temporal organization of the world induced by the penetration of digital technologies in all spheres of the global network society (Castells 1996, Lash 2002). Recent theoretical elaborations have focused on problems related to acceleration of social time, time-space compression and (de)synchronization, offering models and critical insights concerning social, psychological and political implications of the speeding up of these processes, reaching beyond the capacity of human control and self-regulation (Adam 2003, Mückenberger 2011, Rosa 2005, Scheuerman 2009).

A rapid advancement and diffusion of mobile media technologies is considered as an evolution and intensification of the speeding-up processes that started to gather momentum in an earlier internet era of desktops. Smartphones, in particular, have become almost indispensable and emblematic communicational devices of contemporary modernity¹. Theoretical literature has paid attention to the importance of mobile digital media in shaping people's perception of personal and social time, and in moulding the patterns and rhythms of their everyday lives. Ben Agger (2011) has claimed that "smartphoning creates a kind of 'iTime' that challenges the pre-internet boundaries between public and private, communal and individual, day and night, work and leisure, space and time" (Agger 2011:120). Empirical studies in the field of neuroscience have shown that changes in time perception in the new technological era may happen due to changes in cognitive control. For instance, media multitasking tends to lead to a distinct cognitive approach to fundamental information processing (Ophir et al. 2009). Educational and clinical psychologists, too, have dedicated much attention to smartphone overuse: scales for measuring internet and smartphone addiction have been designed and adapted into many languages (see, e.g., Kwon et al. 2013, Rozgonjuk et al. 2016). Evidence demonstrates that smartphone overuse is related to psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and sleeping disorders (BinDhim et al. 2014).

Beyond neuroscience, psychology, and media multitasking studies (see Székely 2015) little empirical research has focused on subjectively perceived changes in human lives in the smartphone era. Agger (2011), furthermore, has called for analysing these changes dialectically – in terms of upsides and downsides, the potential for further change, and inter-generational differences. He envisions a huge generational divide in social imaginaries of 'iTime': while elders view it as a nightmare of 'limitless accessibility and manic connectivity', kids of today – the 'iPhone generation' in Agger's terminology – experience this time as normal.

This paper aims to contribute to filling the gap in literature by presenting a multidimensional analysis of people's imaginaries of digital media technologies, particularly smartphones, and the relationships between those imaginaries and

¹ The number of global mobile devices and connections has grown in 2016 to 8.0 billion, and by 2021 there will be 1.5 mobile-connected devices per capita (Cisco VNI 2017).

personal perception and use of time. Specifically, the paper represents an original endeavour to test empirically Agger's (2011) thesis that social imaginaries of normal social life in the smartphone era vary generationally. To build a sufficiently broad conceptual framework for this task, we apply interdisciplinary insights from sociology, media and communication studies, and psychology. The theoretical framework of the paper first introduces conceptualizations of changing time regimes of the late modernity (including the 'acceleration' syndrome, Rosa 2013), and outlines changes in the paradigm of mobility, and the emergence of 'mobile time' or 'iTime' (Agger 2011). Subsequently we give an overview of the main theoretical perspectives and previous studies on the functions of mobile technology in social life, and state the rationale for inter-generational analysis by presenting the concepts of 'generational time' (Corsten 1999) and 'media generations' (Bolin 2014).

1.1. Changing time regimes of the late modernity

A thorough change in the perception of time (and space) has been brought about in today's late modern conditions (Giddens 1991) by the developments related to the 'information society' or 'network society' (Castells 1996, Lash 2002) and the use of increasingly advanced communication technologies. The rapid development and wide availability of mobile devices has made technology use a much more individual phenomenon than it used to be (Ling and Campbell 2008), and has broadened and redefined the dimensions of time and space in a new way.

Behind these changes is not merely high-tech advancement, as the purpose of technologies is not only to transmit information and messages. Various value- and experience-related factors of technologies shape the lifeworld of individuals (Askegaard 2010), and modify time and space relations and structures (see, for example, Hassan 2009; Rosa 2013, Tomlinson 2007). According to Hartmut Rosa (2013), postmodern Western societies are largely characterised by the 'acceleration' syndrome, which is expressed in various symptoms. The process of mechanical acceleration, today associated particularly with the digital developments, began in the 19th century in conjunction with industrialization. It was closely related to another process defined as time-space convergence or compression (Harvey 1990, Janelle 1969), by which, among other things, distant places across the world become much more effectively accessible, due to the development of transportation (Warf 2008).

Such macro-processes of acceleration lead to a rising pace of life. According to Rosa (2013), although technological development should favour a quicker completion of tasks, and therefore give users more free time, this is increasingly questionable. One of the reasons of this paradox is that the culture of acceleration urges people to take maximum advantage of the opportunities offered by contemporary life, and use their entire time in this pursuit. They are driven and often pressurised by the goal of living life to the fullest each day. This aim turns lives

into a competition in doing faster and more, and often doing several things simultaneously, that is, multitasking. This, in turn, may lead to a serious time shortage, or ‘temporal mismatch’ or ‘asynchronicity’ with surroundings. Therefore, the continuously accelerating society does not only move toward incessant progress due to the technological advancements, but results also in more complexity.

1.2. Mobile time

The mobile media and smartphone technology are tightly related to the mode of mobility and its relation to communication. Changes in the paradigm of mobility, referring to socio-geographic dynamics in urban spaces, have aptly been discussed in Mimi Scheller’s and John Urry’s work (2006) on ‘new mobilities’. They emphasise the “constitutive role of movement” within social practices and various relationships that “involve diverse connections, sometimes at a distance, sometimes face-to-face” (Scheller and Urry 2016:11).

Indisputably, the newest technological media have revolutionized the entire understanding of connectivity, boundaries and mobility (Dholakia et al. 2015). Mobile and smart devices not merely opened new possibilities for greater mobility and flexibility in space and time; they have become ‘ingrained into social life’ (Westlund 2014:135) in a way no previous medium has been able to do before.

In distinguishing features of ‘smart’ mobile devices compared to their predecessors, Agger (2011) has proposed that the smartphone has an ability to change ‘normal time’ to ‘iTime’. In this sphere of ‘boundaryless mobile time’ or ‘iTime’ (differently from ‘immobile time’ in the pre-cable TV, pre-internet or pre-digital era), one is increasingly expected to be always networked. There is, thus, no downtime on the one hand, while paradoxically, time is frozen in the present on the other as the ‘eternal present’ rules (Agger 2011:133). As described by Agger, the simultaneous (interlinked and combined) performance of several different activities and work processes is favoured in a constructed ‘iLife’. Living and interacting in such mobile time regime needs to be addressed in its own terms.

1.3. Studying the functions of mobile technology in social life

The transformation of time and challenges of structuring personal and social life within the context of the all-present use of mobile technology and smart devices can largely be seen through the perspective of Manuel Castells and his co-authors who discuss the new meaning of time that emerges from the “desequencing of social interaction, either by compression of time or by random ordering of the moments of the sequence” (Castells et al. 2007:172). Similarly, space organizes itself around ‘flows’ of “simultaneous social interaction at a distance by networking communication” (ibid.), not being related to any particular place but to the relationships constructed in and around communication. Therefore, time and space are “utilized for their ability to support networked flows” (Campbell and Ling 2010:251), for instance, using mobile technologies that have increasingly become a “structural element in society” (Ling 2014:37). Ling

elaborates on how “the strict time-space coordination paradigm of the pre-mobile era has been replaced with the more iterative microcoordination whereby it structures interaction” (ibid.) as part of people’s social interplay with others and with the surroundings.

Mobile media research has also used the theories of domestication of technologies (see, for example, Haddon 2004, Hartmann 2013, Hjorth 2009 Silverstone and Haddon 1996). According to the domestication approach, developed already in the 1980s, emerging technologies are integrated into the home and everyday life, and therefore promote the meaning-making around technologies or elaborate the rituals or social relations taking place in relation to the media technologies (Hartmann 2013). In the context of this article, two aspects as highlighted by Hartmann (2013:45) are relevant: firstly, the problem of combining “public and private routines in the time-related appropriation aspects”, and secondly, users as agents of various changes (e.g. processes of social arrangements, see also Boczkowski and Lievrouw 2008). Furthermore, Vincent and Fortunati (2014:316) suggest that “The mobile phone becomes an expression of the user’s emotional identity and the mobile phone itself becomes the repository of the content and functionality that is the trigger for electronic emotions”.

Therefore, differently from previous technologies, mobile media such as smart phones have their special features, demonstrating a shift towards individual use of mobile technology for one’s own purposes and not merely for interpersonal interaction. Ling and Campbell (2010) emphasise that the change in the organization of the individual lives occurs due to the growing ability to keep a wearable device always near and ready for use when moving between the locations. Furthermore, as Mizuko Ito and others (2010) show, many smart phone users tend to wrap themselves in a ‘cocoon-like micro-environment’ where they can be alone and connected at the same time, no matter where they happen to be – in private, semi-private or public areas. In such way, they colonise shared public and personal spaces, while creating their ‘own time and space’ among co-present others.

Besides changing the ways of interactions and individual practices, the smart-phone use has a potential to change the organization of the individuals’ time management and perception (Thulin and Vilhelmson 2010). While the flexibility and multifunctionality are often seen as an advantage, using mobile technology has also its drawbacks. Some studies (Thulin and Vilhelmson 2010) have shown that the raising unpunctuality may be one of the negative outcomes of the growing flexibility and availability in communication. Other studies have indicated that daily activities become increasingly fragmented in both time and space (Sullivan and Gershuny 2001) and under growing time pressure, especially due to the communication pressure and lack of non-communicative time during the day (Green 2002, Ling 2004).

Studies in the field of psychology have also demonstrated both negative and positive aspects related to the use of communication technologies. For instance, Ophir with colleagues (2009) demonstrated that heavy media multitaskers have difficulties in filtering out irrelevant stimuli in their environment and, thus, may

have lower ability to concentrate. Some more recent studies, however, have shown that the use of smartphone apps for social media predicts increase in social capital (Cho 2015). This applies most pertinently to young users.

1.4. Research problem: mobile generations and beyond

This study takes the point of departure in the generation theory by Karl Mannheim (1952 [1927/1928]) and the concept of ‘generational time’ as introduced by Michael Corsten (1999), based on Mannheim’s legacy. According to the concept of generational time, understood mainly through a structure of mental opportunities, a social generation comes into actuality only when the people united by ‘their time’ share certain ‘basic intentions’ and/or ‘principles of construction’, which “serve as a framework of orientation towards their collective opportunity structure of experienced events” (Corsten 1999:255).

We assume that usage of smartphones and the related communication conventions, common to a generation group, may form a certain generational perception of social time. Previous studies on ‘media generations’ (Bolin 2014, Bolin and Westlund 2009, Kalmus et al. 2013) have shown that the use of media and communication technologies varies between generations, and the related communication conventions, ways of interaction and other lifeworld practices follow the same pattern.

This article focuses on the usage of smartphones as a wide-spread practice in technologically advanced countries. Nevertheless, we consider that many people still opt for non-usage or very limited use of smartphones or mobile services due to various psychological and/or socio-economic reasons. Studies (e.g. Annafari et al. 2013) have concluded that two major socio-economic factors have remained significant in explaining non-usage of mobile phone services in developed countries – age and household income.

Based on the results of previous studies, we presume that different groups adapt differently to changed temporal structures: while time accelerates for some, it may decelerate, or remain about the same, for others. Our study aims to explore how shared perceptions of smartphone use vary between age groups. Further, we analyse the role of other socio-demographic factors and perceptions of personal time and time use in forming the social imaginaries of smartphone use.

2. Data and methods

The paper employs data from the 5th round of the representative population survey “Me. The World. The Media”, carried out by the Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu, and Saar Poll market research company at the end of 2014. The survey covered the Estonian population aged between 15 and 79 with a total sample size of 1503 (1028 respondents completed the questionnaire in Estonian and 475 in Russian). A proportional model of the general population and multi-step probability random sampling was used. To alleviate the differences between

the representative population model (based on the demographic statistics) and the sampling outcome, the data were weighted by the main socio-demographic attributes (gender, age, ethnicity, and place of residence). The survey covered, among other items, attitudes towards changes in Estonia during the past ten years, values, political and civic participation, usage of time, media use, life-styles, and life conditions. A self-administered questionnaire, combined with an interview, was used.

This article focuses only on smartphone users ($n = 573$). For analysing inter-generational differences in the perceptions of smartphone use, the sample was split into six groups, representing age cohorts rather than delineating social generations in Mannheim's (1952 [1927/1928]) sense. The cut-off points in the continuum of birth years were, to a great degree, chosen for statistical reasons to construct the age groups of comparable size, appropriate for multidimensional statistical analysis. Nevertheless, we considered that the notion of a generation as a socially constructed category depends, according to Mannheim and many other theorists, on the existence of shared generational identity and self-consciousness. The survey "Me. The World. The Media" included questions about the length of one's perceived generation (in years). While the largest group of respondents perceived ten years as the most appropriate amplitude for their generation, the length of one's perceived generation grew with an increasing age, ranging from six years (predominant among 15–20 year olds) to 20 years (among 71–79 year olds). Based on these considerations, we constructed the age groups as follows:

- 15–21 year olds ($n = 111$; 19% of smartphone users; born between 1993 and 1999, and grown up in the period after Estonia regained independence; mainly secondary school or university students);
- 22–28 year olds ($n = 142$; 25% of smartphone users; born between 1986 and 1992, with their formative years falling in the period after Estonia regained independence; mainly those having recently entered the labour market);
- 29–34 year olds ($n = 80$; 14% of smartphone users; born between 1980 and 1985, and having experienced diverse social circumstances during their formative years; mainly engaged in work and raising children);
- 35–44 year olds ($n = 92$; 16% of smartphone users; born between 1970 and 1979, with their formative years falling mostly in the Soviet period; mainly engaged in work and raising children);
- 45–54 year olds ($n = 87$; 15% of smartphone users; born between 1960 and 1969, with their formative years in the Soviet period; mainly engaged in work);
- 55–79 year olds ($n = 60$; 11% of smartphone users, born between 1935 and 1959, with their formative years in the Soviet period; many of them pensioners).

Besides age as the main independent variable, we used several socio-demographic control variables in the analysis: *gender* (1 = male; 2 = female); *ethno-*

linguistic group (1 = Estonian-speakers, 2 = Russian-speakers), *education* (1 = primary education ... 14 = higher education with doctoral degree); *income* (1 = less than 60 euros ... 12 = more than 1000 euros in month per household member); *occupational position* (1 = unemployed ... 14 = owner of a company); *self-estimated social status* (1 = low stratum ... 5 = high stratum), *number of children under 18* (numeric variable). All control variables were standardised prior to the analysis.

The analysis employs a set of novel and original indicators, developed by the research team of the project “Acceleration of Social and Personal Time in the Information Society: Practices and Effects of Mediated Communication” at the Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu. Two groups of indicators are used in this study:

- A module of 14 positive and negative statements regarding the use of smartphones, inspired by previous theoretical studies (Agger 2011), and measured on a 5-point scale (5 = totally agree ... 1 = totally disagree). The statements begin with the phrase ‘Due to smartphones...’ (see Table 1).
- Five index variables about perception of personal time and time use: *perceived lack of time* (consisting of five indicators: time one can use as one pleases; the frequency of having perceived the lack of time; work load hindering practising pleasing activities; feeling always busy and unable to do everything; having no time when one does not have to be available); *multitasking* (frequency of doing different activities simultaneously; feeling that one is mostly doing several things simultaneously); *attempts to reorganise one’s time use* (25 indicators of activities one has tried to allocate more time to at the expense of other activities); *time spent on work and education* (time spent on work or subsidiary earnings; time spent on learning, self-education or reading special literature); *time spent on media use* (watching TV; searching for information on the internet and following online news; reading newspapers and magazines).

First, we used principal-component factor analysis with Varimax rotation technique² to reveal underlying relationship patterns among the statements on smartphone use. To compare six age groups in terms of their perceptions of smartphones, we calculated individual factor scores and analysed the mean scores across age groups. The relationships between the imaginaries of smartphones, generation groups, and perceptions of personal time and time use were explored by using generalised linear regression analysis.

² We used principal component analysis (PCA) instead of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on the grounds of aiming to test empirically the hypothesis based on theoretical assumptions. In the case of non-orthogonal Oblimin rotation, the correlations between the factors remained below .32, meaning that there was less than 10% of overlap in the variance among factors. Due to the relatively low correlations between the factors (see the suggestions by Tabachnick and Fidell 2007) and our aim to obtain simple and well-interpretable factors (through maximising the loadings of variables on a particular factor while preserving the relative independence of factors), we opted to use an orthogonal rotation technique.

3. Results

3.1. Imaginaries of smartphone use

In presuming that underlying relationship patterns among the statements about smartphone use refer to imaginaries of smartphones, we used principal-component factor analysis with Varimax rotation. The criterion of eigenvalues above one suggested a 3-component model (explaining 62% of the total variance). The results (see Table 1) reveal a clear and well interpretable factor structure (with

Table 1. Factor loadings of the statements regarding the use of smartphones*

Due to smartphones...	F1: Expanding flexibility and diverse opportunities	F2: Vanishing boundaries and foci	F3: Changing social identity and communication conventions
1. It is possible to use time much more flexibly as I always have access to the internet.	.807		
2. I have better opportunities to know more of the events around me and in the world.	.750		
3. Spatial boundaries disappear as I have access to the internet everywhere.	.737		
4. My life is significantly better organised, the phone helps me a lot in planning everyday life.	.719		
5. My life is substantially more versatile as I can engage simultaneously in different activities and communicate with different people.	.713		.317
6. I have better opportunities for being connected with intimates and friends.	.679		
7. Boundaries between public and private information disappear.		.854	
8. Boundaries between work and leisure time disappear, it is impossible to disengage oneself from work.		.845	
9. It is impossible to really focus on anything		.807	
10. I feel that I have no more time for activities important to me as I spend too much time on surfing the internet.		.585	.430
11. I live more in the present moment, I have less need to think about things that happened in the past.			.763
12. I feel that I belong to a certain group, I never feel myself alone.			.751
13. I feel that I have no more sufficient need for face-to-face communication with people important to me.			.744
14. Former face-to-face communication customs and manners are no more valid.		.336	.664

* Principal component analysis with Varimax rotation.

** Higher loadings in a factor are marked with bold. Factor loadings lower than .3 are excluded from the table.

only three variables being multidimensional, i.e. having factor loadings higher than .3 in more than one component). We also tested the factor structure by the KMO and Bartlett tests, both indicating the high reliability of the 3-factor model (KMO = .818; Bartlett test $p < .001$).

Factor 1 (having the highest explanatory power, 33%) involves six positive statements focusing mainly on smartphones as devices enhancing and diversifying one's life and opportunities: enabling more flexible use of time and overcoming spatial boundaries, and offering multitasking options and better opportunities for organising one's life and for being informed and connected with intimates and friends. Accordingly, we labelled this factor as *Expanding flexibility and diverse opportunities*.

Factor 2 comprises four critical statements regarding the use of smartphones such as disappearing boundaries between private and public, and between work and leisure, concentration difficulties and lack of time for significant activities. One more statement has a high loading in this factor, referring to the invalidity of former face-to-face communication customs that can also be interpreted as a negative consequence of smartphone use. Based on the content of the main constituting variables we labelled this factor as *Vanishing boundaries and foci*.

Factor 3 involves four more or less neutral statements related to perceived changes in one's time horizon, identity and social interactions: a firmer anchoring in the present, stronger feelings of social belonging, a lesser need for face-to-face communication, and invalidity of former communication customs. One more variable, referring to opportunities for communicating with various people, is related to this factor. In search for a common denominator, we named the third factor as *Changing social identity and communication conventions*.

Subsequently, we saved the individual factor scores for each component, and used the analysis of variance (ANOVA) for comparing the average levels of internalization of smartphone imaginaries among different age groups (see Figure 1).

Factor 1, *Expanding flexibility and diverse opportunities*, was almost linearly related to age, being most characteristic of the youngest group (15–21 year olds), followed closely by the group of 22–28 year olds, and then decreasing gradually with growing age (the statistical significance of the difference in mean values is, however, not very high: $F = 2.818$, $p < .05$). This factor is also characterised by the highest within-group deviation in two oldest age cohorts: for instance, a very small group of 71–79 year olds smartphone users ($n = 8$) expressed almost the same level of the positive perception of the device as the youngest respondents did.

A bit surprisingly, three youngest age groups (particularly 15–21 year olds) were also most cognizant of the negative aspect, *Vanishing boundaries and foci* in the smartphone era, while three older cohorts, especially 45–54 year olds, expressed significantly lower levels of criticism ($F = 6.9$, $p < .001$) towards the bound-collapsing and de-focussing potential of smartphones.

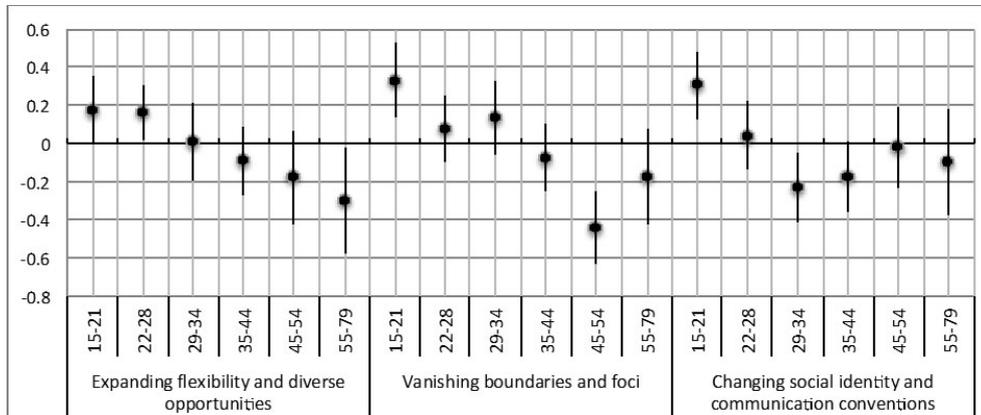


Figure 1. Imaginaries of smartphone use in age groups (mean factor scores with 95% confidence intervals).

Similarly to other factors, *Changing social identity and communication conventions* were most strongly perceived by the youngest smartphone users ($F = 3.552, p < .01$). Below the average factor scores among older cohorts, particularly 29–44 year olds people, may indicate their relatively stable identity and communication habits that remain unchallenged by yet another new media device.

3.2. Predictors of the imaginaries of smartphone use

In being intrigued by the fact that two youngest generation groups have, to the highest degree, internalised positive as well as critical imaginaries of smartphones, we aimed at analysing the influence of other explanatory variables. We carried out a series of generalised linear regression analysis (GLM) with the factors of smartphone perception as the dependent variables. In addition to age as the main hypothesised predictor, we included other socio-demographic variables and the index variables measuring time perception and time use in the analysis.

As results in Table 2 indicate, the regression models 1 and 2 are quite similar: two main imaginaries of smartphone use are strongly related to age, also when other socio-demographic variables are controlled for. Negative regression coefficients indicate that younger people are more likely to perceive both positive and negative changes related to smartphone use. Furthermore, age is the only socio-demographic variable explaining the variation in *Expanding flexibility and diverse opportunities* and *Vanishing boundaries and foci*.

In the case of Factor 3, age is not a significant predictor. Instead, occupational position, subjectively estimated social status, and number of under-age children in the family are statistically significant in this model. Negative regression coefficients reveal an interesting structural relationship pattern: the lower or less secure one's position in the occupational hierarchy, and the lower one's self-estimated social status, the more one perceives changes in social identities and

communication conventions related to smartphone use. Furthermore, the smaller the numbers of under-age children in the family, the more sensitive people are to changing identities and conventions in the smartphone era. Similarly to age, the predictive power of other socio-demographic variables (such as gender, ethno-linguistic group, education, and income) regarding the third imaginary dimension of smartphone use is statistically not significant.

Table 2. Regression analysis of the imaginaries of smartphone use (GLM)

		Model 1: Expanding flexibility and diverse opportunities		Model 2: Vanishing boundaries and foci		Model 3: Changing social identity and communication conventions	
		B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Socio-demographic variables	Intercept	-.205***	.060	-.190**	.061	.086	.059
	Age	-.154**	.060	-.202***	.060	-.087	.058
	Gender	-.044	.043	.015	.044	-.003	.042
	Language	.024	.046	.024	.046	.078	.044
	Education	.020	.045	.005	.045	.023	.044
	Income	.079	.045	-.019	.045	-.031	.043
	Occupational position	.011	.054	-.020	.054	-.209***	.052
	Perceived social status	.064	.052	.032	.052	-.171***	.050
	Number of children under 18	-.005	.039	-.014	.039	-.102**	.038
Variables measuring time perception and time use	Multitasking	.147*	.049	.075	.050	-.036	.048
	Perceived lack of time	-.012	.047	.058	.048	.103*	.046
	Attempts to reorganise one's time use	.032	.038	.070	.038	-.078*	.037
	Time spent on work and education	-.036	.043	-.005	.044	.087*	.042
	Time spent on media use	-.011	.041	.019	.041	.102**	.040
	<i>AIC</i>	1656.687		1660.023		1626.389	
<i>Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square</i>	33.487**		33.036**		66.863***		

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

The group of predictors measuring time perception and time use reveals further patterns. The first factor, *Expanding flexibility and diverse opportunities*, is predicted by the index of *multitasking*, indicating logically that the enthusiastic perception of smartphoning is related to a higher level of habitual ability of practising different activities simultaneously. The critical imaginary of smartphones as boundary-collapsing and de-focussing devices is not significantly predicted by any indicators of time use or time perception.

The pattern of regression coefficients in the third model suggests that changes in social identity and communication conventions related to smartphone use tend to be perceived more discernibly by people who spend more time on work and/or

education and on media use (particularly on following online news and searching for information on the internet, according to a more detailed analysis), and suffer more from the lack of time. Furthermore, the smartphone users who are more perceptive to changing identity and communication conventions are less agentive in controlling their personal time, that is, in trying to reorganise their time use.

4. Discussion

Although communication *via* smartphones has become a “structural element in society” (Ling 2014:37), we know quite little about the social implications of smartphone use. This article aimed to contribute to filling this gap.

Our analysis indicated that opinions about the role and functions of smartphones in moulding everyday life form coherent and meaningful social imaginaries. The perception of smartphones, according to our analysis, is three-dimensional – including *Expanding flexibility and diverse opportunities*, *Vanishing boundaries and foci*, and *Changing social identity and communication conventions*. The first two dimensions express the two poles of the same phenomenon – positive *versus* critical attitudes towards smartphone use.

All dimensions are internalised to a different degree by generation groups. Interestingly, the youngest age groups see the function of smartphones most positively, while being also most cognizant of the negative aspects. Furthermore, age is the strongest predictor of positive as well as negative perceptions of smartphoning. In this sense, Agger’s (2011) thesis stating that the social imaginaries of the normal social life in a smartphone era vary generationally was confirmed. The picture, however, is more complex. The youngest smartphone users (15–28 year olds) tend to perceive most strongly the device’s contribution to increased flexibility and diversified opportunities, while this perception weakens sharply in older age groups. This trend supports the conceptualization of ‘media generations’: the youngest age groups (born in 1986–1999) have, indeed, welcomed their ‘fresh contacts’ (Mannheim 1952 [1927/1928]) with this new media device more enthusiastically, displaying many features attributed to the ‘digital generation’ or ‘digital natives’ (cf. Papert 1996, Prensky 2001), including making an extensive use of online media for incessant communication and networking.

The age-related trendline of the second dimension with critical connotations (*Vanishing boundaries and foci*) manifests quite a novel nuance of the hitherto predominantly celebratory discourse of the ‘digital natives’: younger smartphone users (aged 15–34) in 2014 are the ones who tend to recognise the problems arising from smartphoning such as de-focussing, the fragmentation of activities, and communication pressure, found also in some other studies (Green 2002, Ling 2004, Sullivan and Gersuny 2001). One of the reasons may consist in the very high frequency of smartphoning in younger generations (Madden et al. 2013), even young smartphoners’ tendency to score higher on the smartphone overuse scale compared to older users (Rozgonjuk et al. 2016).

Although the third dimension – *Changing social identity and communication conventions* – is significantly and negatively related to age, it is most strongly predicted by lower values of both objective and subjective social status. Moreover, the temporal dimension of the lifeworld – how one uses and perceives personal time – forms a set of significant predictors on the identity and communication factor of smartphoning: the more ‘time capital’ (Preda 2013) and ‘time use capability’ (Vihalemm and Lauristin 2017) one has, the less one perceives the effect of smartphoning on their identity and communication conventions, being more immune to such influence on the integrity of their selfhood. Indirectly, the negative correlation between this imaginary of smartphones and the occupational position supports the same conclusion: entrepreneurs, managers and creative workers tend to have more time use agency, making them less dependent on the demands of a new technological device. The number of under-age children as a significant negative predictor of the third factor probably manifests an effect of parenting ‘native smartphoners’ (as we may call this generation) – being more deeply engaged in and familiar with their lifeworld and the related communication conventions.

As a general conclusion we state that perceptions of smartphones are related to generational belonging as well as personal time and time use capability. In answering the question in the title of the paper we suggest that mobile time can be a blessing and a curse at the same time. Even the youngest generations acknowledge both positive and negative aspects of smartphoning, and benefiting emotionally and cognitively more from this device depends on individuals’ capability of multitasking and using their time capital efficiently.

A limitation of this study lies in the fact that only those respondents who reported the ownership of a smartphone were asked the questions about the use of these devices. While this decision was justified in methodological terms (the questions about perception of changes related to smartphone use from those having had no personal experiences with these devices would have resulted in many missing variables), it led to a reduced sample size and did not enable comparisons with those not using smartphones. Future studies could aim at comparing the imaginaries of smartphones among users and non-users. Furthermore, conducting a study with a larger sample size would enable finer inter-group comparisons, particularly in older age groups where smartphone use is less prevalent.

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