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Are smartphones irrelevant? A constructivist analysis of technoscepticism and the impact of technology on social change

This dissertation examines the phenomenon of technoscepticism in the context of the widespread adoption of smartphones in society. The main thesis of this dissertation concerns the relative insignificance of smartphones in the context of social change caused by technological development. The author shows that the process of social change, which is evaluated negatively within the framework of technoscepticism, was not initiated by smartphones, but by other technologies that were developed many years earlier. The author further argues that the main reason why smartphones may cause some negative repercussions is not because of the smartphones themselves, but to the consumerist value system that has developed over decades with other technologies and has been internalized by societies in the globalized world. The dissertation is divided into three parts.

In Part One (in Chapter 1), the author introduces the author's theoretical concept of first- and second-order technologies. Its primary function is to help distinguish between technological innovations whose impact on the processes of social change is fundamental and those whose range of impact is negligible. The author discusses the introduced categories using the example of the invention and spread of plastics in the early 20th century (as an example of a first-order technology) and slot machines and the Sony Walkman (as second-order technologies). The interpretive framework for the introduced category is provided by such theoretical schools as social constructivism, media ecology and circuit of culture theory, which the author discusses in Chapter 2.

Part Two was devoted to the empirical part of the dissertation. Chapter 3 outlines the assumptions and methodology of the study, setting out its three key stages:

examining scientific and media discourse on the negative impact of smartphones using systematic literature reviews, and examining people's social action against smartphones using in-depth interviews. The study of scientific discourse was based on the assumption that scientific findings are one of the main points of reference for the mass media, and that science itself is a social archetype of objectivity and truth, which has the ability to shape public perceptions on various topics. The rationale for examining media discourse was that the classical media (i.e., television, radio and newspapers) are still one of the main sources of information for people, and social discourse on a given topic is often shaped through them. The study of social action directed against smartphones, on the other hand, was dictated by the fact that various dimensions of social life intersect at this level (micro social): from an individual's professed values, to the influence of reference groups, to public discourses (including scientific and media discourses). The result of each research stage is further discussed in Chapters 4 (scientific discourse), 5 (media discourse) and 6 (in-depth interviews).

In the Third Section, an interpretation and synthesis of the collected research material was carried out. In Chapter 7, the author juxtaposed the theses of technoskepticism identified in the second part with the questions Neil Postman suggested to ask in the context of technology-induced social change. The questions Postman raises concern the holistic dimensions of society's relationship to technology and direct the research optics toward both primary and secondary technologies. The author presented his own interpretation of the answers to Postman's questions, which could be given in the spirit of the technosceptical discourses discussed in Part Two. Based on these, he points out areas where technoskepticism misidentifies smartphones as a major threat to the established social order. In Chapter 8, the author analyzes smartphones as second-order technologies and argues that they are only an intermediate link in the evolution of computer technology, the direction of which is oriented toward the development of virtual reality.