

Trevor Pinch links app usage to personality types

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(PhysOrg.com) -- What "appitype" are you? The Apptusiast? The Live Wire? The Appcentric?

The apps you add to your [smartphone](#), from games to stock tickers, can tag you as one of these "appitypes," says Trevor Pinch, professor of science and technology studies.

Working as a consultant for the Finnish telecomm giant Nokia, Pinch concluded that survey data on app usage from 5,000 smartphone users in 10 countries could be used to create appitypes to help define user profiles.

For example, Pinch said an "appcentric" is an extreme user who uses the mobile phone as their main computing device for anything from data management to playing games. The "apptusiast" is someone who feels the need to search out and download the latest apps. The "live wire" downloads a mix of fitness, social and travel apps.

The survey found that "Germans were downloading flashlight and alarm clock apps," Pinch said, while "Brazilians download lots of music and social networking apps. The Chinese download news apps. South Africans prefer [social networking](#) apps. India goes in for business apps."

"The British are the most apathetic," said Pinch (who is British), with a quarter of those surveyed admitting to hardly ever using the apps on their device. This [skepticism](#) toward apps perhaps comes from Britain's

already strong person-to-person social networks, "such as meeting up in pubs and so on."

While previous data had been collected on the number of apps users have, there was no global survey of smartphone users, until now.

"I interpreted the data and thought about different profiles of users of smartphones," Pinch said. "The idea of these appitypes is to think about how people actually use these devices. Some people use phones for social connection, some as a substitute computer -- it's become their main device."

Smartphone users with lot of apps "become more than just a person. They have new possibilities to do things," said Pinch, whose band, The Electric Golem, uses an [app](#) to replace using a large synthesizer. "When you see someone's car, you think you can learn something about their identity. The human-machine combination tells you something more about them and their aspirations. The person in combination with his or her phone makes up a new unit, as it were."

Of course, that new unit is disabled if a network goes down, and some users worry they may be surveilled by GPS-enabled phones. But "at the moment, users perceive the benefits to far outweigh the disadvantages," Pinch said. "As the cost is coming within reach of many people, farmers in Africa could get weather information and crop prices. One can see all sorts of unexpected benefits in this technology, and users will start to use it in all sorts of unexpected ways."

Appitypes play into people's desire to project an identity, Pinch said, and could be of use to developers and users alike.

"Think about connections between humans and technology," Pinch said. "You can have smartphones with you all the time. You can sleep with the

thing if you want. Giant amounts of computing power and connectivity. These apps capture people's imagination and add mobility. There is nothing inevitable about the path technology takes. We need more research on how people and technology together can produce meaningful change in our lives."

Provided by Cornell University

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