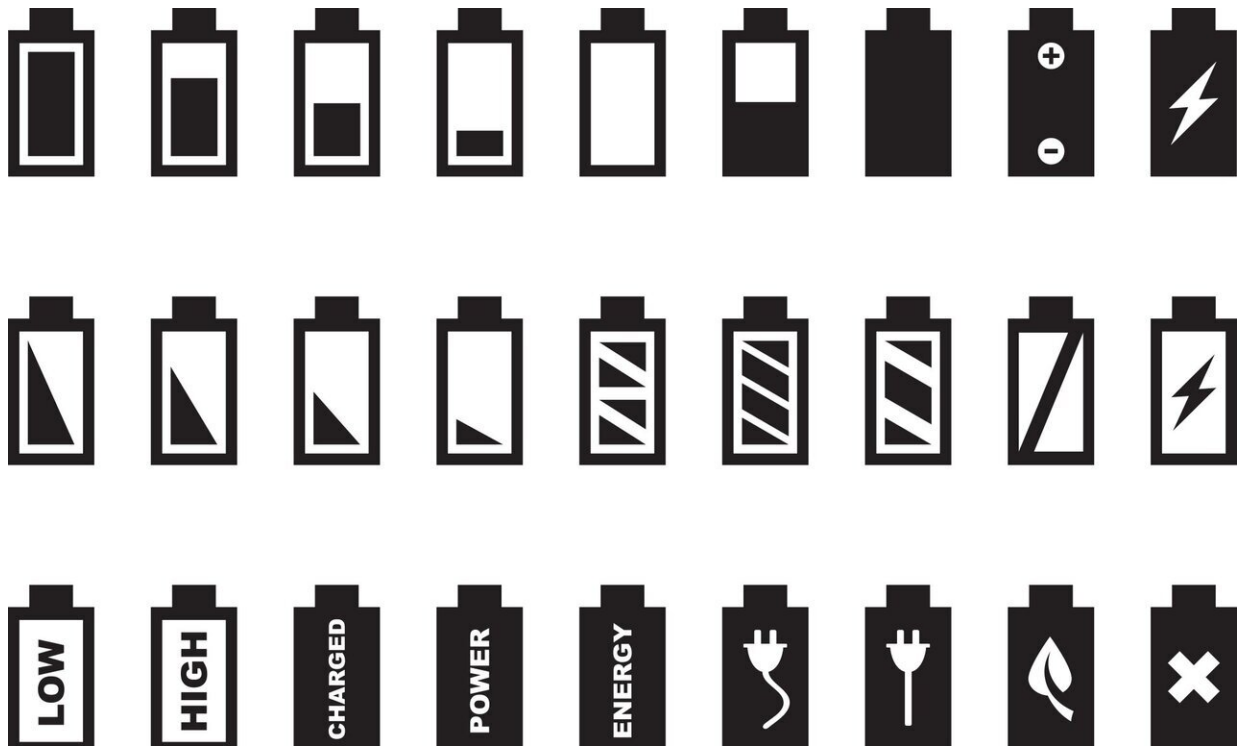


Battery icons shape perceptions of time and space and define user identities

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New research from Cass Business School has found that battery icons on mobile phones shape how people view time and space, and how battery conservation practices define user identities.

The study of London commuters found that respondents viewed their

daily trip in terms of the time and distance between charging points for [mobile technology](#).

"People no longer think about their destination being 10 km away or 10 stops on the tube. They think about it being 50 per cent of their [battery](#) away," said the study's lead author, Dr. Thomas Robinson.

"During interviews respondents discussed how a full battery gauge made them feel positive and as though they could go anywhere or do anything. Anything less than half full, however, induced feelings of profound anxiety and discomfort," he said.

One of the study's respondents described the experience of watching their battery icon throughout the day: "Full would be 'Yeah, ok great', good to go for the day'; 50 per cent I'd be a bit 'Oh God, I had better stop it from updating itself all the time in the background' ... then it would be at 30 per cent and I would be like: 'Now I'm not having fun anymore'," the respondent said.

As mobile phones are now far more than just means of communication—they are maps, digital wallets, entertainment systems, diaries, banking, step and pulse counters etcetera—battery icons are at the heart of social and consumer tasks.

Devices defining identity

Management of battery levels structures people's [daily activities](#)—from arguing over who can charge their device next to the bed, to making decisions about where to go shopping in order to access complementary charge stations.

The study found that this reliance means people now identify themselves and others in relation to how they maintain their battery levels.

Respondents who monitor their battery gauges and take measures to keep a high level of charge identify themselves as "control freaks", "quite anal", "planners" and "a bit OCD".

People who regularly allow their [phone](#) batteries to run out of charge were identified as "frightfully frustrating", "disorganised" and "inconsiderate".

"We found that people who let their phones batteries run out are viewed by others as out of touch with the social norm of being connected and therefore unable to be competent members of society," Dr. Robinson said.

"Phones have become such a nexus for everything that we are that an inability to effectively manage battery life becomes symbolic of an inability to manage life."

The paper Portable Technology and Multi-Domain Energy Consumption is scheduled for publication in the journal *Marketing Theory*.

More information: Thomas Derek Robinson et al, Portable technology and multi-domain energy practices, *Marketing Theory* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/1470593119870226](https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593119870226)

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