

Introduction by Eva de Valk

My phone, my phone, my irresistible phone – April 20, 2017

Thank you Tracy & John Adams Institute for letting me host this evening. I'm very happy to be here to discuss the rapid rise of the smartphone, and how it became to play such a dominant role in our lives. In fact, **the rise of the smartphone is one of the most extraordinary developments I've seen both my private life and my professional career.** It's hard to imagine, but it's only 10 years ago when Steve Jobs presented the iPhone. Now, most of us – including me – cannot imagine living without one.



A brief survey:

- Who owns a smartphone? Who doesn't own one?
- Who sleeps with their smartphone next to them?

You don't have to be embarrassed – I read in Adam Alter's book that 60 per cent of all adults sleep with their smartphone next to them. For a lot of people, it's the first thing they check in the morning and the last thing before they're going to sleep.

We have a very intimate connection to our phones. Before the smartphone, we had the era of the personal computer. This sounds 'personal', but still most people didn't really relate with their pc. With the desktop computers, you worked on it, you shut it down and it was over. The smartphone however, we always carry with us, all the time. A smartphone is so much more than a phone:

- it's a tool for fact checking – if you have a question or disagree with someone, you can always check the answer through your browser of your smartphone
- it's a communication tool – messaging apps and social networks brought into being totally new forms of communication with emoji, photo's, abbreviations and memes
- it's a time killer – the smartphone gave rise to a new type of mobile games that you can play anywhere, anytime
- it's a platform to consume video's and news articles
- it's our navigation – we can always check where we are and what's the fastest way to get somewhere, in various forms of transportation
- it's an activity tracker and fitness coach,
- it's a platform for online shopping and ordering food,
- and of course, camera – we now tend to record everything in our lives.
- It touches on every aspect of our lives

In short, the smartphone can be used for a wide variety of purposes – both in useful and pointless, even harmful ways. That has made the smartphone such a powerful device. It often functions as a symbol of the rapid way technology is transforming our lives.

In the last years, people increasingly start to feel uncomfortable about their relationship with their smartphone. I can see that in the articles that are published in the technology section of NRC

Handelsblad: personal articles, with headlines like '[Why am I constantly looking on my smartphone](#)', or '[A week without a smartphone](#)', are extremely popular. I think this shows **we are desperate for reflection on this topic, and we're desperate for guidance in our (maybe unhealthy) relationship with our smartphone.**

Luckily for us, we have two highly regarded authors in our midst, who just excellent published books on this subject.



The first one is Adam Alter. He obtained his Ph.D. in Psychology from Princeton University and is an Associate Professor of both Marketing and Psychology at New York University (which is an interesting combination, we might get back to that later on). Adam Alter is the author of the book ***Irresistible (translated by Maven Publishing as Superverslavend)***, about the techniques tech companies use to make their products more and more attractive – and addictive.

The second one is Wouter van Noort. He will read a personal column about his quest into his obsession with technology. Wouter van Noort is a technology journalist of NRC Handelsblad. He just published *Is daar iemand? Hoe de smartphone ons leven beheerst*, published by Thomas rap.

Afterwards, Adam and Wouter will be joined by Jan Willem Huisman, creative director of gaming company IJfontein, and by Marleen Stikker, founder and director of the creative lab Waag Society. They will discuss what is at stake on the long term. There also will be time for questions from the audience, so please feel free to join the discussion.

But first, a warm welcome for Adam Alter.