

Definition

*What does it mean?*

Morphology/Origins (breaking down the word)

**WORD OF**

**CIVILISATION**

**THE WEEK**

Synonyms

*Expand your vocabulary!*

In a sentence

*How may you use it?*

Click here for the link to the full article.

One scientist predicts that **civilisation** could end within 20 years. **What's your opinion?**

## 'Smartphones are taking control of our minds'



Anti-social media: One scientist predicts that civilisation could end within 20 years.

**Could Facebook start a civil war? In a new documentary, experts on social media explain how its algorithms are manipulating us – and warn that the consequences could be disastrous.**

A family is sitting down to supper. The mother announces that they are going to eat without the distraction of smartphones – so she collects everyone's phones and puts them in a glass jar with a timed lock. But shortly afterwards there is a crash: one of her daughters has got up and smashed the jar with a hammer.

This example of social media addiction was invented for the purposes of a **documentary** – but the rest of *The Social Dilemma* deals in serious facts. People who have held senior positions in companies such as Facebook outline why we cannot leave our phones alone, with the average person in the UK spending three hours a day staring at the small screen.

Among weaknesses these algorithms play on are "bad forecasting" – our inability to work out how much time we are going to spend on something; the fear of missing out; and the addictiveness of activities that require little or no effort, such as one-click ordering or automatically watching the next video suggested for us.

The effect of the algorithms is to reinforce our existing preferences – and prejudices. Two people googling "climate change" can get completely different results. If the computer thinks you are an environmentalist, it might supply the word "disaster"; if it identifies you as a sceptic, it might supply "hoax".



### **Q: What do we know?**

A: It is generally agreed that there has been a huge increase in depression and anxiety among young people since the majority acquired smartphones. Among 15-to-19-year-olds in the US, admissions to hospital for self-harming have risen by 62% in the last decade, and suicides by 70%. For 10-to-14-year-olds, the figures are 189% and 151%. According to psychologist Jonathan Haidt, young people are also less inclined to take risks: fewer are learning to drive, and fewer go out on dates.

### **Q: What do we not know?**

A: One main area of debate is around how to reduce the influence of smartphones. In the words of Anna Lembke, a doctor of addictive medicine, “Social media is a drug. We have a basic, biological imperative to connect with other people that directly affects the release of dopamine on our neural pathway.” Even the interviewees in the documentary, with all their inside knowledge, admit that they have had difficulty in giving it up.



## SOME PEOPLE SAY...

*“Nothing vast enters the life of mortals  
without a curse.”*

*Sophocles circa (497–406BC), Greek  
philosopher*

WHAT DO YOU THINK?