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Happy Homes, Happy Society?

The Contribution of Domestic Life in a Time of Social Changes

Creating meaningful connected homes: the relationships and dynamics of household-digital technology interactions in fostering wellbeing.

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Changes in household composition and household life (ONS 2019) and the pervasive use of data-driven services is impacting on the characteristics and quality of home life. Remote working, online learning, platform-based consumption, telehealth, streamed entertainment and digitally mediated relationships are increasingly part of home life. These services are accessed via the web, mobile apps, smart devices and sensors, which are all part of, what is termed here, the 'connected home'. Connected homes are the backbone of a connected UK (BEIS 2019), central to its economy, society and culture. However, connected homes are ad hoc in their configuration and in what they 'socially shape': they exert an influence on households and are experienced very differently depending on household culture and practice, housing design and quality, geodemographic factors, life stages, wellbeing and -more recently – public health crises. Understanding how the connected home meets the needs and desires of households, in all their diversity, without reinforcing or increasing inequalities is a major challenge and knowing how people within households want to live with technology is vitally important. This paper addresses the ways in which the increasing use and reliance on digital connectivity and data-driven services is underpinning developments of 'connected homes'.

'Feeling at home' summarises the multidimensionality of wellbeing. It conveys how material living standards, services, information, security, communication, relationships and companionship create homes (Mallett, 2004, Søraker et al. eds.

2015). The quality of home life and how it supports household members' wellbeing is relational, within the household but also within the neighbourhood, at work, in commerce, and with services (Blunt and Dowling 2006, May and Nordqvist eds. 2019). The home is an economic, social and cultural entity. Its role within work, socialisation, care and wellbeing changes, as does its use of domestic spaces. As such, the home's deepening dependency on data-driven services requires us to understand the domestication of technology, and the complex social shaping role which it has within the home (Hartmann 2020; Williams 2019). This is seen in terms of the home's: (a) materiality (economic, technological and housing); (b) practices (relationships within households, including interacting with technology and data); (c) and knowledge (social imaginaries of home and technology). To understand how the ways in which household practices are shaping connected homes, the paper discusses formal and informal work in the home, consumption practices in homelife, household and kin relationships and art, hobbies and cultural activities in the home within the temporal and spatial dynamics of the home. The paper argues that understanding households is important order to support the development of connected homes that support wellbeing.

*Full papers are being prepared for publication. Further details to be announced.