

---

# WATCH OUT! SMOMBIES AHEAD

---

Salmiah Abdul Hamid, Qistina Donna Lee Abdullah,  
Teo Miaw Lee, and Aliffazraie Jali

**Abstract**

This article unpacked the reality of 'Smombies', a term coined from "Smartphones/Social media users" and 'zombies' who use their mobile phones while walking on the streets. This article intends to show that people who ignored their surroundings while using their mobile phones are prone to injuries when walking or crossing the streets. Street signs and signals were redesigned to accommodate the "Smombies effects" which took place in Sweden, South Korea, United States, Belgium and China. Researchers and city councils also developed digital technology for pedestrian awareness. This article also shows the common practice of urban streets signs that can be found in different countries. The smombies effect is an arising issue that should be taken seriously by the policymakers. Thus, this article hopes to unfold the reality of alertness among smartphone users who are considered 'glued' to their device then to their surroundings.

**Keywords:** Smombies; smartphones; road signs and signals

**Introduction**

Are you a smartphone addict? Do you walk while texting your friends on your smartphones and ignored your surroundings? Alternatively, do you quickly get distracted when talking on the phone while walking on the busy streets? Have you watched a famous Korean film *Train to Busan* or the American TV series *The Walking Dead*? Numerous accident cases in the world are related to people who use their phones when walking or driving. If you are the person who uses your mobile phone while crossing the streets, you are known as the 'SMOMBIES' 'Smombies' is a term coined from "smartphones/social media users" and 'zombies' who use their devices obliviously when walking without bothering other people or their surroundings. As mentioned by Chatfield (2016):

*"More sinister is the portmanteau 'smombie', short for "smartphone zombie" and used to describe a mindlessly strolling pedestrian whose attention is consumed by their device. Crowned Youth Word of the Year in Germany in 2015 – despite its general use by older speakers as a despairing description of young people. Germany also boasts the distinction of installing some of the world's first traffic lights in the pavement, designed to stop smombies walking out in front of a bus."*

A study by Nasar and Troyer (2013) showed that pedestrian injuries among males under 31 years old were higher prone to using mobile phones while walking. In another research by Basch, Ethan, Zybert, and Basch (2015), 42% of the pedestrians in Midtown Manhattan were found to be talking on their

mobile phones, wearing headphones or looking down at their electronic device while entering the "Don't Walk" signals at the intersections. We are bound by the rules and regulations not only when we drive, but also when crossing the streets.

Regarding the safety of pedestrians and drivers, most city councils installed road signs and signals by highlighting warning signs for pedestrians to reduce speed when approaching the intersections. The most common signs and signals in the world can be seen in Figure 10.1 and Figure 10.2 below.



**Figure 10.1:** Signals for pedestrians (Image source: pixabay.com).



**Figure 10.2:** Traffic signs for pedestrians (Image source: pixabay.com).

**Smartphone Users**

Are we not aware of our surroundings when we walk? Most of us are so into our mobile phones and are distracted when using it. Walking around the cities with our headphones, texting or taking photos on our mobile phones have become mundane in our daily lives. There was even an incident in Stockholm, Sweden when a young girl stood in the middle of the road texting and being alarmed by the horn of bus driving through the street. In a study conducted by a Stuttgart-based DEKRA accident research group in 2016, Stockholm city was found to be the most used smartphone by pedestrians (The Local, 2016).