

Annals of Child

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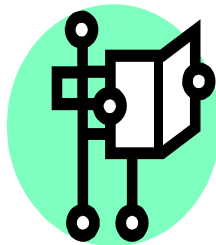
Youth Studies

September, 2021, Vol.11 (1)

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ISSN: 0795 - 1663



BRIEF HISTORY OF THE JOURNAL

At the 7th Annual General Meeting of the International Research and Development Network of Children and Youth in Agriculture Programme (CYIAP-Network: visit our website www.cyiap_network.org for more information) held at Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria on the 28th November, 2006, it was resolved that a journal named *Annals of Child and Youth Studies (ACYS)* of the Network be established. Dr. Dixon Olutade Torimiro, an Associate Professor in the Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria was unanimously appointed as the Editor-in-Chief and the Department was chosen as the Editorial Office of the Journal.

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University of Port Harcourt students' perceptions of use of mobile phones in Nigeria

by

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Abstract

Mobile phones are quickly becoming one of the most used advertising media in Nigeria. Many advertisers are reaping from the huge customer base of the telecommunication service providers to sell all sorts of things. This study examined the University of Port Harcourt students' perceptions of usage patterns and practices of mobile phones in Nigeria. Two focus group discussions with twelve participants each, selected through convenience sampling, were carried out to investigate their observations. Based on the findings and the current adoption level of mobile phones, the study predicted that soon mobile phone may become more ubiquitous than radio, even in the rural regions of the country; making it an ideal medium for direct communication to most Nigerians. With the medium threatening to become 'every man's radio', providing perpetual contact to even people in the rural areas, strategic communicators are, therefore, encouraged to harness such potentials for relaying their promotional messages.

Keywords: Mobile phones, mobile communication, mobile phone use, mobile marketing, Nigeria, perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

A household of five may need only one computer, radio or television but perhaps five mobile phones, resulting in more phones in the world than any other communication medium. The ubiquity of this medium extends even to rural environments. Scholars have endorsed its huge global diffusion rate by asserting that one out of every two persons in the world have a mobile phone. So, half the world's population owns a mobile phone. According to Statista (2015), in 2015 there were 4.8 billion mobile phone users in a world of 7 billion people. Nakamura

(2015) cited that 'in 2012, the ITU reported that the number of mobile cellular subscriptions in the world had reached 6.8 billion, which corresponds to a global penetration of 96%' (p.68). Kemp (2014) argued that since more than 50% of the world's total population owns a phone and an average user maintains roughly two active contracts per phone, then the total number of active mobile connections is almost equal to the number of people living on earth. Similarly, Wikipedia documented that with a population of about 177 million in 2014, Nigeria alone recorded about 167 million mobile phone users.

Such a huge figure of phone users in the world and in Nigeria certainly has a lot of socio-economic implications, which ignited this research interest. From this author's observation, Nigerians are relationship people; it often appears that they cherish nurturing relationships more than many other things in life. They relate intimately and talk a lot, even with strangers. One then understands why the mobile phone technology was quickly adopted by the people. It allowed them to do two things they love doing: maintaining relationships and talking. Schejter and Cohen (2005) held a similar view to support the high rate of adoption of mobile phones in Israel. 'In addition to the fact that Israelis are very fond of communications technology, there seem to be some particular characteristics that augment their obsession with and use of mobile phones: their need to be connected, their need to chatter and their basic audacious temperament' (p.38).

Another major reason for the quick and enthusiastic adoption of mobile phone technology in Nigeria was the paralytic state of the fixed telephony. For some Nigerians, mobile telephony launched in 2001 in the country was their first experience of any form of telephone communication. Its ease of use enhanced

its adoption by both the literate and the illiterate Nigerians. The availability of mobile phones in various price brackets also attracted even the poorest of the people. However, one reason why many people around the world were early adopters of the medium was its obvious usefulness. It is inconceivable that we coped in the past without mobile phones. Our dependency on this device has become really high. Confirming phone's indispensability to human existence, Mazaheri et al (2014) affirmed that in less than ten years 'mobility, accessibility and convenience of communication have made mobile phones an unavoidable part of life. People have adopted mobile phone technology with almost extraordinary interest'.

Like in most other societies, the use of mobile phones in Nigeria has metamorphosed through different stages, being perceived and used differently at each stage of its evolution. Initially bulky, expensive phones with limited functions were owned only by well-to-do Nigerians who saw them as status conferral. Now when nearly everyone owns a phone, many of them resort to buying several smartphones to show off. These changes underscore what Katz and Aakhus (2002) said that 'mobile phones are in a transitional state, their status in public and

the norms governing its use is still transmogrifying' (p.10). Therefore, this study examined some of these mobile phone usage patterns and practices specific to the local context of the Nigerian people which have evolved over the years, as perceived by the students of University Port Harcourt (Uniport), in order to forecast the future of the medium in the country.

Statement of the problem

When mobile telephony was first introduced in Nigeria, to circumvent some of its undesirable features such as high tariffs charged by the telecommunication companies, the people quickly devised some coping strategies resulting in patterns of usage that are perhaps specific to them. Examples of such habits include making calls after midnight and using multiple phones or Sims. Similarly, perceptions of mobile phones have been transitional in the country, first being seen as a status symbol by merely having one, now it is a social necessity, as well as a symbol of affluence if an expensive one is owned. What are the implications of these social changes to the advertising value of the medium in Nigeria? The study, therefore, examined University of Port Harcourt students' perceptions of these mobile phone usage patterns, practices and

adoption models that are specific to the local context so as to predict the future of the medium in Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

This research investigated University of Port Harcourt students' perceptions of mobile phone use as a medium of communication among Nigerians over the years in order to make some logical projections of the future of the medium in Nigeria.

Research questions

1. What are the perceptions of University of Port Harcourt students on Nigerians' use of mobile phones over the years?
2. Based on the students' observations, what is the future of mobile phones as a medium of communication and advertising in Nigeria?

Significance of the study

International studies of mobile phone usage have been carried out by scholars such as Katz and Aakus 2002; Ito 2005, etc. on mobile phone use in Europe, America and Asia. This study made a similar contribution from an African perspective by highlighting the social and cultural diversity of mobile phone use in Nigeria.

Some researchers have demonstrated how specific uses made of mobile phones can be determined by age, gender, educational or socio-economic factors. Chakraborty's (2006) investigation on the usage patterns of mobile phones among university students in US and India showed that students in India use mobile phones differently from their American counterparts (Mazaheri et al, 2014). Confirming that mobile communication differs substantially from the Internet, Ito (2005) observed the diversity in implementation of mobile communications infrastructure which unlike the Internet has no uniform adoption/usage trends among all peoples. This researcher, therefore, deemed it imperative to study these emerging mobile phone cultures that could be peculiar to the Nigerian context.

Scope of the study

This research was delimited to the perceptions of Uniport students on mobile phone use in Nigeria to portray local practices, usage patterns or mobile phone culture over the years. It did not investigate all the specific uses that Nigerians make of the medium. The University of Port Harcourt is situated in southern Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

Uses and gratifications theory provided the theoretical base for this study. The theory which was popularized by Blumler and Katz (1974) emphasizes how people use media contents variously to achieve personal gratifications. The adherents of this theory believe that there are no uniform or universal approaches to media use since users generally use different media contents in ways that gratify their perceived needs. While the theory's approach is mainly to proffer an understanding on why and how media users seek out specific media contents to satisfy specific needs, in this context the emphasis is on how the study group adapts the medium (mobile phones) to satisfy mainly affective and social integration needs. These people customize the medium or technology to suit their personalized needs and not what it carries as a medium of communication (its apps and features). The study surveyed through focus group discussions how some Nigerians cultivated localized usage patterns of mobile phones to satisfy their own needs. Such contextual or customized usage patterns are embraced to gratify either personal needs or societal obligations.

Conceptual review

Considering its pervasiveness and universal diffusion, it is natural that mobile phone communication has gained considerable scholarly attention and research interest. This work reviewed some relevant literature on how the technology influences human existence. Although mobile phones were introduced only a few decades ago, telephony induced transformation started since the 19th century. 'With the invention of the telephone in 1876, it was possible for the first time in history to have real-time conversational interaction at a distance...Over the years, the telephone has dramatically changed how people live their lives and see their world' (Katz & Aakhus, 2002, p.1). This is understandable since all communication innovations in human history are always accompanied by significant changes in human life. Lin (2007) also observed that innovations in the realm of communication technology have 'catalyzed far-reaching social changes since the 19th century' (p.3).

Then with the invention of cell phones, the revolution became even more forceful in nearly all societies. Relating it to the experience in Finland, Puro (2002) admitted that 'mobile information society is a revolution in Finnish lifestyle. It

changes familiar communication codes... younger people, in particular, are right now adopting and so shaping the rules of the new culture' (p. 27). The author observed that 'personal free time or a holiday, for example, does not imply that you are not available. In that sense, the mobile phone means that you are at work, wherever you are...With mobile phones, work and leisure are mixed' (p.22). Night sleep is sometimes interrupted either by calls from relations, organizational leaders coordinating and directing the affairs of the next day, subordinates reporting their activities or promotional text messages of companies selling products and services. In summary, to have a mobile phone means that one can be reached at any time. McLuhan's assertion that media technology has altered modern lifestyles perfectly applies to this medium. And the situation is not different in Nigeria. Apparently, every aspect of how Nigerians live their lives: relationships, business, work, family, and private lives have changed with the emergence of the mobile phone.

Katz and Aakhus (2002, p.301) recognized that these changes on the nature and quality of social behaviour and organization occasioned by mobile communication are not restricted to the industrialized countries but are

'pandemic'. They also confirmed that there are:

prima facie evidence that times are changing owing to the mobile phone. Communication among teenagers is more intense, and novel forms of intimacy and distancing emerge. Relationships between teens and parents are altered by the existence of mobile phones. In social relationships among adults, mobile communication leads to different forms of coordination, cooperation and conflict. The organizational structure of businesses is changing as well ...corporate managers must deal with new forms of supervision, while employees must deal with new forms of monitoring.

So, mobile phone technology like any other communication technology has been revolutionary in all societies from its early years of adoption to the present time. What is more outstanding is that this medium's impact cut across all classes of people: the literate and illiterate; rich and poor; urban and rural dwellers. It affects personal lives, relationships, and corporate relations. Buttressing this multi-dimensional effect of the technology, Katz and Aakhus (2002, p. 2) highlighted that:

the spread of mobile communication, most obstructively as cell phones...is affecting people's lives and relationships. Cell phones speed the pace and efficiency of life, but also

allow more flexibility at business and professional levels as well as in family and personal life.

Unlike computers or the Internet which have almost a uniform application, mobile phones though universally adopted have diverse usage patterns in different contexts. Corroborating this uniqueness of the medium, Ito (2005) noted that in relation to PC Internet, 'differences in adoption were most often couched in terms of a digital divide, of haves and have-nots in relation to a universally desirable technological resource; by contrast, mobile media are frequently characterized as having different attractions depending on local contexts and cultures' (p. 6). Because mobile phones are used for maintaining various levels of relationships: business, personal, and social lives, the local structures that operate in these levels of relationships invariably affect the usage pattern, thus making the use of mobile phone to be context or culture specific.

So, the impact of mobile phones is universal but not uniform. Since their initiation in Nigeria, they were used to reinforce ties between family and friends. Long phone talks with family, friends and colleagues are common, even after only a few hours absence from each other. This endorses Katz and Aakhus' (2002) observation of phone being used to 'facilitate the planning and coordination of

everyday matters...a means to 'be in touch' to offer socio-emotional support.... a means for friends, family and other social networks to retain accessibility when they would otherwise be isolated from each other' (p. 8).

Owing to its multi-media nature, the phone has also become for many Nigerians, as in most other societies, an all-encompassing device serving different purposes such as calling, texting, recording, photographing, browsing, calculating, time-keeping, playing games, listening to music. It can also be a dictionary, bible, textbook, sports gadget, etc. For a lot of people, it is a two-way channel to access the world and be accessible to the world either through the Internet or telecommunication services. Worldwide the telephony evolution means that cell phones have become less expensive, ubiquitous, more powerful and suitable for data-driven applications. Wood (2015) noted that there are now applications for everything. Yet in the early years of mobile phones, functionality was limited to calling and texting.

Nonetheless, like other communication technologies, this medium brings with it the good and the ugly, though its usefulness far outweighs its downsides. A mother who wants to reach or monitor

a child with a phone takes the risk of perhaps making the child also reachable to others and may not have full control of what the child does on the phone. For a student, a phone can yield a lot of academic benefits and at the same time be a huge distraction. Mobile phone distractions have also been responsible for a number of communication-related family problems. Parsons (2013) noted that mobile phone may 'connect you to the digital world but they disconnect you from everything that truly matters, such as the real world, your loved ones and your manners'. On its dual capability, Katz and Aakhus (2002, p. 8, 15) blamed mobile phones as the 'cause or catalyst of the loss of control over life' and brings the 'future user face-to-face with a blessing and a curse'. Many accidents are caused by distracted drivers or pedestrians calling or texting on the road. Some health hazards are attributed to excessive use of mobile phones. The American Cancer Society believes that electromagnetic radiation called Radio Frequency (RF) which cell phones emit can cause brain cancer, also known as glioma or meningioma. Interestingly, mobile phones also share nearly all the positive and negative values of the Internet because phones can access the Internet.

These multi-dimensional implications of this medium, whether positive or negative, are so enormous that it would be unrealistic to wave them aside as inconsequential. This research, therefore, provided an empirical undertone to mobile phone use, especially from an African perspective. Similarly, Katz and Aakhus (2002, p. 10) argued that mobile phone-engineered changes to the human society have such a huge impact to justify a more theoretical picture of technology, yet communication theories ignore technology, except as a mass medium where the preoccupation is traditionally on media effects. 'Given the omnipresence, the expansive multitasked functions, and the far-reaching social implications of the mobile and personal communications technology, it would seem worthwhile to make it a focus of theoretical investigation'. Likewise, Farman (2012) argued that the worldwide adoption of mobile technologies calls for a re-examination of how we live our everyday lives, knowing that there is always a cultural change that accompanies new innovations and their various forms of existence.

UN former secretary general, Ki-moon (2011) exhorts that: 'there is no part of modern life that is not affected by ICTs.

With well over five billion mobile cellular subscriptions and more than two billion people online, our challenge is to leverage the enormous power of technology to make the world a better place'. On the above premise it is imperative to examine how strategic communicators can benefit from the peculiar usage patterns of mobile phones in Nigeria.

Methodology

Data for this study were obtained from ethnographic observations and two focus group discussions carried out in 2015 with students from Uniport in Nigeria. From a population of 40,000 students, a sample of 24 was drawn and interviewed. The discussants comprising 13 female and 11 male students were selected using convenience sampling technique. The discussions of the study group and the researchers' observations formed the basis for the descriptive analysis and data interpretation made.

Result and discussion

The discussants observed that initial fascinations following the takeoff of mobile telephony in Nigeria resulted in its mass adoption even though the bulky phones sold then were extremely expensive, had limited applications, yet were exclusively owned by the rich. Although they were mostly used for calls

and texting, having a mobile phone then was a status symbol and luxury. Over time, following their high penetration rate and availability of several telecommunication networks even in rural areas, its ownership ceased to be an elitist symbol since nearly everyone has one. But now what has become classy is having several expensive smartphones. One of the participants asked: 'if not, why do people go extra miles to buy Samsung S6 and S5 even when they don't need the apps? Many people do not buy such phones because of their applications but just to show off'. The study group perceived the new digital divide and status conferral of this medium as currently anchored on the quality of phone one owns.

Then subscription rates charged by telecommunication service providers were high even for texting. To cope with high tariffs many users developed strange phone habits such as making calls between 12.30a.m and 4.30a.m popularly known as '*midnight calls*'. Service providers offered discounted or free rates during those hours; so, many people would wait to make long and free calls after midnight. Waking up or being woken up for lengthy discussions on mobile phones at those weird hours became an acceptable practice for many

people, especially if this was pre-scheduled. Others indulged in the practice since it cost nothing to make calls after midnight. A discussant observed that 'some naughty people would even dial numbers randomly after midnight to speak with whoever was at the end of the phone'. With time this practice dropped though service providers still offer free calls, probably because subscription rates are also much cheaper now. Having rushed or over-summarized phone talks (speaking 120 words per second!) and texting in highly contracted words were also used to outwit exorbitant subscription rates.

Another common practice adopted in the past to evade high tariffs was acquiring multiple phones or Sims. An average Nigerian had at least two phones or a phone that takes multiple Sims. Since calls to the same network were cheaper, having active contracts with the four major service providers (MTN, Glo, Airtel and Etisalat) guaranteed that calls were made from the receiver's service provider. This tradition is still prevalent. A similar mobile culture is found among 'women in Italy (who) possess several private mobile phones, each devoted to pre-identified correspondents: husband and children, lover, friends' (Gournay, 2002, p. 201). Besides financial considerations, subscribing to several networks helped users beat providers' erratic services since

the quality of services provided were poor, one could never tell which network would be better each day and in different locations.

The study group believed that these habits of making midnight calls and carrying multiple phones/Sims reflected the people's desire to live out their very nature of being talkative on the phone as they are in face-to-face communication, which the high call rates were obstructing. Even the habit of rushing phone talks is not noticed when they receive calls. As long as they are not paying, most Nigerians generally want to talk long on phones. This is similar to Schejter and Cohen (2005)'s observation that 'Israelis have no qualms about speaking at length especially if somebody else is paying the bill' (p. 39). This study also bears support to Storm (2002, p. 283)'s conclusion that 'access to telephones and their use to make calls are shaped by the economy'. An individual's economic status and the cost of communication through a given medium determine the access and usefulness of that technology to the person. Those early days of mobile telephony introduction in Nigeria, many people struggled to buy phones, Sims, phone accessories and even airtime. A participant narrated how he bought a phone at #26,000 in 2002 and had to wait

three months later to afford a Sim also for #26,000. On why a postgraduate student in 2015 would spend #52,000 to buy a phone and Sim back in 2002, he replied: 'then having a phone was like buying a car and that was what motivated me to buy one'. And now telecommunication companies offer people free Sims loaded with airtime, merely to woo them to their networks. Some service providers sometimes offer bonus airtime to keep their customers hooked to their network. What a transition! Another participant recounted how his family collectively bought a 'Family Sim' in 2003 because someone who approached them for a loan of #16,000 presented his Sim as collateral. Sim was then sold for #32,000. Consequently, the family was motivated to save money towards buying a phone, so as to make use of the Sim before the debtor returned the money and retrieved the collateral.

We prayed that he would never come back for the Sim, after saving for many months we could buy a phone. We used to make irrelevant calls, sometimes with no one at the receiving end, to show the neighbours that our family owned a phone. We adopted a lot of abnormal behaviours to show off our new status to neighbours like calling dad out from a village meeting to come and receive calls at home when no one actually called.

Brandishing their phone was for his family their way of being ahead of the

competition and a proof of belonging to the rich class. Some other discussants also shared experiences of communal owning of phones or Sims by friends, colleagues or family members.

One discussant explained that her mother gave her a phone as a birthday present which she claimed enhanced her status then because it just showed that: 'I belonged to the club of big girls in school. Then it was very stylish to brandish my phone before my classmates at the least opportunity. Of course, only a few of us were that privileged to own one'. Such attitudes often led users to make calls merely to attract attention. This study, therefore, confirmed that mobile phone during its launch years in Nigeria was unquestionably a status symbol and many struggled by all means to acquire that proof of affluence since owning a phone was synonymous with being well-to-do.

Okabe and Ito (2005) observed that while travelling on public transports, Japanese passengers do not engage in mobile phone talks, they rather send text or e-mail. Despite being an object of envy originally, after their wide adoption phone talks were restricted in public places, voice calls became unacceptable violations of the norm of silence. 'If the offender speaks particularly loudly, s/he may get a glare or an expression of

disapproval, even if there are people chatting more loudly in the next seat' (p.205). In contrast, initially in Nigeria, passengers on long distance journeys (and customers in banks) were required to switch off their phones. This was done to prevent any form of crime-related communication. Currently, such restrictions no longer exist. Now people can make calls everywhere except inside banks, even there, they still violate the law and receive calls in low tones. This practice that demonstrates their present over-reliance on phones is similar to what obtains in Israel as Schejter and Cohen (2002) attested that:

There is virtually no place where Israelis do not use their mobile phone... Judging by its omnipresence, it seems that there are few limits and restrictions that people abide by. In fact, it is not uncommon for people to use their mobile phone in places where it is prohibited by law, such as in certain parts of hospitals and gas stations (p. 40).

With the lifting of the ban, many Nigerian passengers, especially young girls have the habit of making excessive calls to impress other passengers with their private conversations. This is in line with Puro's (2002) assertion that the mobile phone 'is a new kind of stage where the mobile information society is acted out.... a place where one can go and chat about anything....(it) may be creating an

obligation for talk without a reason for the talk' (p. 27). In many public places, many Nigerians seem to be under this obligation to talk without a reason; merely utilizing the mobile phone stage to act out their private lifestyles for the people around. 'You know I went to Los Angeles for my vacation, my hubby bought me a car for my birthday, I am now the manager in my father's company', are some examples of big phone talks that is not uncommon to hear in public places.

Unlike in some societies where mobile phone use was distanced either from work or relationships, most Nigerians did not make such distinctions. This explains why they usually do not have separate lines for 'office hours' or private times. This is also because fixed lines in many places are non-functional. So, the same personal mobile lines are used at home and at work. The downside to this 24hours availability is that one can be reached at any time, even when asleep. This observation corresponds with Puro (2002)'s Finland experience:

Availability via the mobile phone is a real problem in Finnish business life...owing to the fact that most Finns own their own phones and do not receive one through their workplace... Personal and professional messages become intertwined; Sundays are no different from Mondays (p. 22).

Whether at work, on holidays or wherever, the person in a sense is at work, or at least reachable to answer some questions. Strom (2002) observed that 'in the Philippines, in general unless you want to contact a member of your family, you do not call an office but go in person' (p. 280). In Nigeria, there are no such reservations. Anyone who has your number can call you, including a stranger.

This research also indicates that the Nigerian experience is inconsistent with Yamanashi study which claims that 'Webphones are most often used to exchange short, quick messages with those who are physically nearby. They are less often used to access the Internet, and they are rarely used to gather information about social issues or to participate in online communities' (Miyata et al, 2005, p. 160). For many Nigerians, accessing the Internet on the mobile phone is perhaps the primary option, if not the only option. Internet Society (2015) affirmed that 'as with mobile telephony, mobile Internet does not just liberate us from the constraints of a wired connection, but it offers hundreds of millions around the world their only or primary means of accessing the Internet'. Similarly, Smith (2015) admitted that 19% of Americans rely only on smartphones for their browsing experience 'either because they lack broadband at home, or because they

have few options for online access other than their cell phone’.

On the benefits derivable from using mobile phones, a participant illustrated how her phone has substituted many other devices.

I use my phone for virtually everything from Bible reading to Internet searches, academic reading, following the news, as a dictionary, etc. As long as it is downloadable and free, I will rather use my phone. Why buy a radio when a mobile phone has almost all the qualities of radio: portability, low cost, and many more functions?

Other discussants corroborated that reading and monitoring of news seem more appealing on phones. This confirms Nakamura’s (2015) findings on the extreme dependence on mobile phone for numerous activities: ‘Prior to 2000, a majority of users employed only the talking function of their mobile phones. Currently, however, mobile phones are used for a variety of functions including reading mail, accessing the web and location-based services, and playing music’.

The participants agreed that mobile phone makes communication easier. One of them asserted: ‘Why spend hours to visit when I can call. Formerly, you would travel for hours only to realize that the person is not in... today people fix all

appointments on the phone. The mobile phone has bridged the location gap’. They now come with more applications and are still sold much cheaper. Wood (2015) confirmed that ‘phones are becoming cheaper and smarter; the technology is becoming more and more powerful’.

The discussants espoused other benefits of phone use in Nigeria such as reduction in transportation related costs and dangers, fewer traffic jams because of decongested roads since people do not always have to travel to coordinate all their activities. Business is boosted since every business person hands in a business card to be called back after every transaction. Business executives also use BBM and Whatsapp to describe their businesses and give details of their operations. It has also bridged the illiteracy cum elitist barrier. One participant observed that ‘mobile phones have a lot of applications and functions that can reduce a person’s ignorance and help users improve grammar and English Language. This is in line with Wood (2015) assertion that mobile phones can be used to access books and all forms of reading materials that could make the illiterate, literate. ‘The Internet-connected mobile phone - has the power to make illiteracy a thing of the past ...there is an app for everything, thus

mobile phone can be a life changer for many people in developing countries’.

A discussant argued that phones are enhancing McLuhan’s global village ‘since it appears you are holding the whole world in your hands with potentials for good and bad’. Job seekers get job postings sent directly to them, and one can subscribe to any form of information. The mobile phone revolution is also believed to have created a lot of jobs ranging from those who print and sell airtime to those who worked in the call centers, which was once a booming business in Nigeria. Spiritual lives too are affected since the medium can be a distraction or a boost to one’s prayer life, depending on how it is used. The same phone can be used to download either a Bible or pornography. This confirms the dual nature of the device which Katz and Aakhus (2002) recognized as both a curse and a blessing.

Negatively, some discussants believed it has encouraged a culture of lies among many Nigerians because unlike the fixed telephone that immediately communicates one’s location, mobile phones mean that users can be wherever they say they are. Phones can be a huge distraction. ‘Some people cannot just concentrate on anything at home, in

class, in church, etc. because they are fondling with their phones. It has affected time usage for more productive activities as users jump from Facebook to Whatsapp’, noted a participant. Others claimed that pornography had increased since mobile phones provide maximum privacy for users to watch pornographic images unnoticed even in public places.

On the future of mobile phones, as unsolicited ad messages are bombarded at users’ devices, the participants saw it as the next advertising medium for all categories of Nigerians. There are also prospects of mobile marketing and mobile banking. Some wondered if laptops and tablets might become outdated. One of them asked ‘will phone replace camera since people prefer taking pictures with phones because they are easy to upload and share online?’ Communication history has no record of any technology replacing another. Television did not replace radio though it seemed more appealing. The Internet only added value to the other media. Therefore, it is safer to think that mobile phone will only enhance the usefulness of the other media and not eliminate them.

Conclusion

This study concluded that mobile phone communication in Nigeria has evolved through various phases; starting from an early stage when due to economic factors

only a few could afford it, to its current status when nearly everyone has it. Its early adopters quickly perceived themselves in exalted positions making themselves the envy of most other Nigerians who struggled to acquire mobile phones at all cost. It is also noted that at each of these stages of its evolution, that Nigerians cultivated different usage patterns and practices to suit the local context which resulted in a unique mobile phone culture in the country. Finally, that owing to the pervasive nature of the medium, threatening to become more ubiquitous than many other media of communication, mobile phones may be the most appropriate medium to reach all classes of Nigerians.

Recommendations

1. Corporate communicators are reminded of this pervasive and cheap channel which can get their messages directly into the palms of most Nigerians, irrespective of their geographical location, literacy level, or economic status with the potential for a 24-hours visibility.
2. This research also recommended that the National Communication Council should ensure that the

potentials of this medium are not rubbished by greedy telecommunication service providers who still make mobile communication unaffordable to some Nigerians.

3. Other scholars could do similar studies in other regions to identify their local usage patterns.

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