

Mobile Phones and Society Transformation: The Developing World Perspectives

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Abstract

Mobile phone is an electronic gadget that is used in communicating information. It is portable, handy and easy to use. Individuals, groups, governments, companies, and organizations use the mobile phones. Its presence and impact has permeated all aspects of lives of the human beings globally. It has transformed people into information conscious societies. This success could be attributed to easy accessibility of the mobile phones by all and sundry. The paper highlighted on the role of mobile phone as a channel for communicating information and connecting people. The scenario of the developing world was taken in to consideration. The paper explained on the positive impact of the electronic device in the developing countries.e.g.it enhances lifelong learning [LLL], brings awareness among people and enhances business activities. On the negative impact, criminal activities are on the increase, examination malpractices among students increases and many more as a result of it's usage. The paper concluded by suggesting useful tips for curtailing these problems, so that enabling environment could be created for people in the developing world to actively partake in making effective usage of mobile phone in transforming information.

Keywords: Mobile phone; channels; communication; information; society; transformation

Introduction

The world has witnessed tremendous changes, transformation and development in the area of communication. With the advent of mobile phone people are now engaged in sending and receiving information across continents without tears.

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The generation of information is now on the increase, at an alarming rate. Presumably, this is because of the increase in population and people are beginning to realize the importance of information as a necessary component for their survival in this computer age. People have access to mobile phone, which provides a virile environment for them to get connected to their friends, relations, teachers, institutions, companies, customers, physicians and clubs, where ever they may be in this globe. Easy accessibility to mobile phone device, play a great role in attracting people (in both urban and rural Nigeria) to get involved in the use of the device for generating and communicating information. Mobile phone is a tool that is very effective in this digital age, in transforming information among various communities without barrier, boarders or boundaries.

Furthermore other benefits of the device nowadays include camera and connecting to internet. Noh et al (2012) opined that, "mobile phones provide various functions including not only calling, but also camera, MP3 player, and the connection to internet." In a similar statement, Chua, Goh and Lee (2012) expressed that, "the device is commonly equipped with wireless networking, cameras and GPS, mobile devices allow multimedia contact to be captured, shared and retrieved easily." Generally the mobile device simplifies people's access to information irrespective of their geographical location in this globe. Zhou, Mohammed and Zhang (2012) communicated similar view that, "Mobile handheld devices allow people to access information and services at any time and any-where."

Literature Review

Positive Impact of the Mobile Phone

In the developing world generally, people are beginning to realize that the acquisition of mobile phone is a necessity of life rather than for luxury or pleasure. It has been reported in an article on mobile phone and health (2008) that "cellular phone services being the easiest and fastest modes of communication have billions of subscribers round the world. Even in developing countries where a major part of population is striving hard to satisfy basic needs, i.e. Food and Clothing, use of mobile phone has become a necessity for them." It has been integrated into the personal life of many people and a source that is effective in connecting people for business or other forms of human endeavor.

Postnote (2006) reported that, "the Grameen Bank NGO in Bangladesh offers women low –cost loan to set up mobile phone exchanges in villages where there are few land lines. The women charge for the use of their village pay phones and earn close to three times their annual average income. Their earnings allow them to send their children to school and enhance their status in the community."

Also Graham (2002) says that," In Tanzania and Ghana for example- land-line telephony is the preserve of small economic elites-the US firm Adesemi has developed wireless systems to bring personal telecoms services to unserved poor urban and remote rural areas. Individuals can carry round low- cost pagers which notify them of incoming calls; these can be picked up at a network of wireless pay phones". Useful information communication, changes the life of human beings socially, politically, educationally and economically. More especially those in the developing world. They can now communicate easily within and beyond their continents .Kagbo (2002) says that, "In essence, information through the proper use of communication, has reduced the vast world to a global village where no one thinks of himself as an isolated entity any longer." Another dimension on the influence of communication on the society is the fact that, McNamara (2003) opined that "The combination of ICT-enabled global communications and the increase in global financial and trade flows, part of the broader process commonly called globalization, could provide new economic opportunities for developing countries" The success of the developing world lies on their effective utilization of information. One of the steps is that people should be exposed (through various means) to information, its relevancy, utilization and proper transformation from information poor citizens (IPC) to information literate citizens (ILC).

The success of mobile phone as a means of communicating information to people lies with the provision of effective ICTs infrastructure that monitors control and maintain the Operability of the mobile phone. In some European countries such as the UK and the Germany efforts are being made to engulf the rural communities into the manifold of ICTs users, communication inclusive.

The developing world needs to start by studying the information needs of their various communities (urban or rural) to be able to have effective, strong, relevant and affordable ICTs for their development in information generation and utilization.

Graham (2002) quoted Shanmugarelan (2000) who says that "Above all, though, such efforts to build up ICT, social and institutional capacity in parallel in local communities need to be building on knowledge and understanding of how people and communities communicate, obtain information and transact at present. Too often all people and groups within a settlement or community are forced into imposed and standardized top-down model which neglect the huge diversity of communicational cultures among them."

The spread of mobile phone and its utilization improves the level of awareness of the citizens and enhances their social interactions with the entire community. This could be seen as a tremendous achievement for the developing countries. This could also be considered a step forward towards realization of the importance of information in human and nation development. In the near future the developing nations will see the light in the effective utilization of information as a major source for development. The developing countries are not in the proper level to compete with the developed worlds in information generation and communication, but copy some useful relevant techniques from them. Graham (2002) also quoted Smith, (1999) where he says "In 1999, both New York and Tokyo had more telephones than the whole of Africa (14Million)".

However, critiques condemned the regulators and operators of mobile phones, that they are spreading the use of the communication device for economic reasons only and not for the improvement or upliftment of the developing world in information generation and its utilization. Chan (2007) says that "Analysts say the positive economic of higher mobile

phone penetration is a strong reason for regulators and operators to get the mobile phone into the hands of broader population in developing markets, including lower-income groups and rural communities". Whatever the motives of the regulators and operators, the developing world is learning a lot and progressing in information generation, communication and usage.

Use of the mobile phone in the developing countries assists greatly in widening the horizon of the people and changing their perception to life in so many ways. Psychologically people now tolerate one another, and can even accommodate other tribal people in spite of their differences in religion, way of life and language.

It is through communication that, people learn fast and understand other communities easily in this digital age. Various diverse communities are now coming together as an entity and this could be attributed as one of the dividends of mobile phone usage. Inter-cultural activities are now better organized and executed among different tribes and cultures; and doing this invariably softens and reduces the rates of inter-tribal killings, clashes, political upheavals and disharmony. This ICT device could be used to bring peace, harmony and tranquility in aggrieved societies if properly utilized.

On the issue of employment, the mobile phone has performed wonders. Millions are now employed and engaged in various capacities of jobs mostly that relates to the usage of the mobile phones. Individuals, groups, corporates, governments and NGOs. are among the major beneficiaries of these programs. Curtain (2002) says that ".....no country can afford to ignore information and communication technology (ICT) as an employment generator, whatever their stage of development". There are various examples from all nooks and corners of the developing world on how people secured employment in many wireless communication business outfits and other ICT related jobs. The rate and nature of the jobs differ due to the financial status of a country and the extent to which it utilizes ICT infrastructure.

Mobile phone usage enhances lifelong learning (LLL) activities and help reduces Illiteracy rate among various communities in the developing countries, more especially Nigeria. Due to the importance, the Nigerian communities attached to communicating information using wireless mode, people can make sacrifice of whatever is at their own disposal to acquire the cell phone. Many people that can neither read nor write or communicate in English, are now literate and can read and write (SMS) messages using their cell phones. This has made many people to appreciate the beauty of knowledge seeking and eventually enrolled into various institutions for adult literacy classes, for further studies and general training. In Nigerian societies, e.g.The Hausa community of the north, commonly use a slogan that ridicules those that do not have mobile phone as "**Deaf and Dumb**". They cannot communicate with people, and nobody communicates with them.

This negative declaration or classification of human beings forced both males and females to at least learn the skills of reading and writing for the purpose of communicating information using the wireless phone. This scenario could be considered as a very good achievement for the developing world generally. It is a clear indication that, the rate of illiteracy will continue to reduce drastically as people voluntarily are engaging themselves into self-motivated learning (SML) which is an aspect of lifelong learning (LLL), all in the name of mobile phone communication.

Whalley (2010) expressed a similar view that, "Learning with online and mobile technologies is an example of an ever-increasing range of self-help books for students on a variety of topics relating to skills, tips and education." Another important aspect of the mobile phone as an agent for enhancing communications among people is that, it exposes people in to the business of buying and selling of the hand phones, telephone line and other accessories. Some are even acting as promotion agents for various communication companies. They go round the towns, and villages; strategically on the market days. This is the case of Nigeria, Niger, Cameroun, Ghana, Benin and Tanzania. Many public pay phones kiosks are now opened for people's patronage. With, this development, the financial status of many families improves tremendously .Kirby,(2010) opined that, " Cell phone service, retail outlets, manufacturers, distributors and users all stimulate the economy in monetarily."

Negative impact of the Mobile Phone

In spite of the fact that mobile phone assist in so many ways in making the global society appreciate, utilize, generate, receive and disseminate information; it has also some recorded negative impacts on the society (**both urban and rural**).In the developing countries some people use the cell phone to generate information that leads to criminal activities in the society.

There are many instances in Nigeria when armed robbers are seen communicating among themselves using the wireless phone. They monitor the movement of customers entering banks and the commuters in the motor parks. With this negative information they exchanged among their members, it becomes very easy for them to mount road blocks on the high ways and engage in robbery.

Due to sporadic and sometimes selective shootings, by these armed robbers many lives and properties are lost. Therefore the cell phone usage aggravates and refines their activities in the developing countries. e.g. Nigeria.

Students in Nigeria are using cell phone to generate information that paved way for examination malpractices. In many instances students are caught copying answers from (SMS) messages they received from their friends. Students are now very lazy because, many scientific calculators contain already solved mathematical and statistical equations they need during examination. These are being inputted into the cell phone, one need to only click on the relevant one and copy the answers in examination situation.

Good cultural norms and values are now affected seriously and negatively through passing negative information in form of images and photos that are obscene in nature. This contributes towards destroying the good values the society is proud with. The cultural heritage is no longer appreciated by the teeming majority of the youth who are always carried away, fascinated by the wonders performed by the cell phone. Exchange and sending of phonographic pictures is the popular thing they do instead of communicating useful information for their development and future carrier. The influx of these communicating gadgets into our communities without government control and filtering is making adverse effects on our established progressive norms and cultures. Levy, (2010) reiterated further that, "There are 2.2billion mobile phones...305 million computers, but only 11million hospital beds." This is the current situation in the developing countries globally.

Another major problem of the mobile phone is maintenance and sustainability. Users of the device find it too demanding for their effective maintenance capabilities. This situation led to the influx of " used handsets" and " low quality mobile phones" into our markets, shops and kiosks. Attached to this, these days' people are not getting connection easily because of sheer negligence on the part of the communication companies. They are not taking good care of the bandwidth and are not keen to expand it to cater for the large population of their users and to meet the information needs of their respective customers.

The cellular phones are hazardous to human health, because of the radio waves they emit. This leads to cancer and other forms of brain diseases. It has been reported (2008) that "cell phone communication does include the emission of radio waves, which are absorbed by the bodies in one way or the other, but it is a hazard only for people with high exposure to the radio waves, i.e. .extensive use" This issue is not only peculiar to the developing countries but is a global affair, many researches and investigations are carried out in order to ascertain the claim that it has health hazards. However many of the researches conducted on health hazards of the mobile phones, the findings or results are on the affirmative.

Important Tips

- The governments should have effective techniques for monitoring business transactions of the mobile phone. (***Who buys what? Who sells what? For the purpose of what?***) With this theory the government will be in clear picture of what is happening in the sector. Monitoring and effective surveillance must be enforced to these companies. This is one way of having proper control of their operations and activities.
- Tracking techniques (TT) must be applied to all the (SMS) messages before passing to their intended destinations. This will assist in checking phonographic photos and obscene images. This will serve as a barrier to the unserious students who are in the habit of using the communication device to perpetuate various examination "malpractices".
- Both the governments and the mobile phone companies should move towards saving the lives of the cell phone users from falling into health hazardous conditions. The cell phone could be re-designed and modified in such a way that the waves emitted may not be dangerous to people's health. Alternatively, a device could be attached to each cell phone that could serve as "waves absorbers" to any form of waves emitted by the communication device. It becomes imperative for the developing countries to emulate the advanced nations where they work tirelessly to see that lives of the users are spared and not unduly sacrificed. A report (2008) highlights that, Viviane Reading, European Union Commissioner responsible for Telecommunication and media says "I congratulate the mobile phone industry for moving towards protecting minors. It shows that responsible self-regulation can work at European level. "The developing countries should not fall into the victims of blind imitations. But copy, emulate, imitate, improve and initiate with sense of direction, vision, dedication and objectivity.
- Use of the mobile phones must be regulated to guard against the abuse of the communication device. Any body found breaking the laws should be treated according to the dictates of the law. Selective judgments must be avoided.

- The governments should make it (*mobile phone*) an official channel for communicating and sending instructions to the community. This method will surely assist in monitoring the activities of people using the cell phone; and enhances, Life Long Learning (LLL) activities.
- For easy accessibility and control purposes, centers should be provided where people can communicate using the mobile phones in subsidized rate.
- Public, Special, Academic and National libraries should incorporate the use of the mobile phones in their information literacy programs and outreach awareness campaign. This will assist in checking the excesses of usage of the device. Iwhiwhu , Ruteyan and Eghwurube (2010) observed that, " Short messages (SMS) or text facilities available on all mobile phones, could be used to create awareness amongst the academic library clientele about upcoming events and new arrivals. This could be flashed through a facility called "broadcast" where one text message is sent to all the library contacts listed in the address book on the mobile phone at once."

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