

SMARTPHONES AND COMMUNICATION PATTERN AMONG STUDENTS IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Communication is at the heart of human existence and technology has always determined the nature of and nurture how man communicates. The introduction of mobile telephone and most importantly smartphones has altered the way youths communicate, yet there is little or no empirical research on the influence of this technology on the communication pattern of youth especially students in higher institutions. The survey research design was adopted with questionnaire as the instrument of gathering data from 500 respondents chosen from the Redeemer's University, Osun State and the University of Lagos, Lagos State. Study revealed that smartphone usage among students in higher institutions has positive influence on their communication pattern. The study further showed that majority of the respondents used their smartphone for social activities and related functions. On the strength of these findings, the researchers recommended that more researches should be conducted to know more about this growing technology. Also, it was recommended that marketing communication professionals should be interested in the opportunities provided by this technology to reach out to their target audience.

Keywords: Smartphone, communication, pattern, influence

INTRODUCTION

Technology has revolutionised the way and how we communicate. One technology that has contributed immensely to this revolution is the introduction of mobile and Smartphone. A mobile phone in simple terms is a device that helps with the transmission and sharing of information between people or groups of people that are connected in different locations or parts of the world.

Communication is vital to human existence and survival, hence, man cannot but communicate. Virtually every student in tertiary institutions clutches one form of smartphones or the other - a device which can be used to multitask. It provides access to the internet, social networking and a lot of other functions.

Today, mobile phone has become so popular that virtually everyone clutches one type or brand of mobile phone or the other. This explosion in the rise of mobile and smartphones explained the increase of mobile phone users in Nigeria from 100,000 in 2002 to over 81 million in 2011 (Ini, 2011:28). Again, there is a general believe that students use smartphones more than other members of the society. Students primarily use it for making phone calls, sending and receiving text messages, chatting via the BBM and social networking.

Despite predominant use of smartphones by students, there is little or no research done to know empirically, what use students put their smart phones to. In this respect, the study raised pertinent questions, which are: What do students in higher institutions use their Smartphone's for? Is there any difference in the use of Smartphone's among students in public and private higher institutions? What influence does Smartphone's use have on the communication patterns of students in higher institutions?

This study is guided by the uses and gratification theory (UGT) which place the power of choice in the hands of the audience. Unlike early theories which credited the media with considerable power to shape opinion and belief through the media message, uses and gratification theory suggests that media audience are not passive and that they select media messages to gratify their needs. The study situates Smartphone and communication pattern of students of higher learning within the general framework of the assumption of the uses and gratification theory which states that the focus of effect has shifted from media production and transmission functions to the media consumption function and that rather than ask "what kinds of effect occur under what conditions?" the question has become: "who uses which contents from which media under which conditions and for what reasons?"

This view is in tandem with the assertion of Biocca and as cited by Littlejohn (2006) that media audience is characterized by selectivity, utilitarianism, intentionality, involvement and imperious. By this Littlejohn (2006) meant that media audience deliberately choose the media message to attend to, use the media to meet particular needs and goals, purposeful use of media content, actively attend to, think about media message and cannot be easily persuaded by the media message. The underlining factor therefore, is that when youth of higher learning use their Smartphone in vary capacity or to find a specific piece of information that will gratify their needs, they are in fact exercising their power of selectivity as well as establishing that media audience are active.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the words of Ibitoye and Adebileje (2009:1), communication is the exchange of meanings between individuals through a common system of symbols: It is an impartation of living ideas evoking mental and emotional responses to a receiver; it also involves hearing, understanding, encountering, listening, responding, speaking, writing and delivering speech. They also noted that communication often focuses our minds on giving information to others, speaking to others, and explaining things using words. Whereas Anaeto, et al (2008:15) states that communication is what makes the world go round;

it is the engine that works human activities. To them, to communicate means to give life to symbols, words and relationships.

Baran (2001:47) posits that we are in an information society- a society wherein the creation and exchange of information is the dominant social and economic activity. He added that technological and social changes brought about industrialization, and in many cases, meetings amongst different people who may not necessarily be in the same place can hold meetings over the phone e.g. teleconferencing.

Also, Seiler and Beall (2005:22) state that technology has advanced so quickly. Digital cameras allow us to share pictures of ourselves, our families and special events with friends all over the world. Technology plays an important and powerful role in our lives. It has an impact on the ways we communicate, the ways we learn, and the ways we listen. Many people are concerned that the way we interact with each other on a one-to-one basis will be negatively affected because of technology. Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to search for ways to use it positively Seiler and Beall (2005:23). According to Scannel (2007:123), the question of modern technology is intimately linked to industrialization and mass production; it is relevant to communication especially since we are in the information age. In Bittner's words (2005:262), technology is changing the way we receive and consume communication. He continued by saying that communication is changing to encompass more specialized media.

However, Biagi (1996:4) posits that the rising importance of goods and services based on sophisticated knowledge and high technology has created a layer, a group of societies that increasingly do the world's economically relevant "knowledge work". Similarly, Akpan-Obong (2012:12) states that technology can facilitate inclusive development, the kind that ensures that no matter who you are, where you live, or how much you earn, you have access to basic services. For example, Finance Minister, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was quite vigorous in using social networking sites to "correct misinformation" about the fuel subsidy.

The way people use technology is what gives it significance. Technology's influence according to Baran (2001:22) is ultimately determined by how much power it is given by the people that use it, the best we can do is to make our way reasonably well in a world outside our own control. But if technology is indeed neutral and their power resides in how we choose to use them, we can utilize them responsibly and thoughtfully to construct whatever we want. An insight that technology does have an impact on communication was given; what technology does not do is relieve us of our obligation to use mass communication responsibly and wisely (Baran, 2001:22).

In order to maintain effective communication, as inferred by Halliday (2011), especially since we are in the computer age where almost everything –from registration to banking, from selling to buying- is done technologically, it is essential that organisations and individuals adapt to the latest technology to keep people interested. This most certainly is the case for youth- especially students- whose media behavior today is an indicator of what must be learned to accommodate now and in the future. Mobile technology continues to shape how individuals communicate, whether in a business or individual setting. Smartphones allow people to communicate and do things that have traditionally been done by computers or laptops, hence gradually reducing the need for computers or laptops; and as observed by Halliday (2011), smartphones, especially blackberries are gaining ground over older feature phones, and a visit to most campus will confirm that the majority use Blackberry Smartphone.

Smartphone usage has been on the rise to the extent that it is gradually replacing traditional cell phones and personal digital assistants. Many activities, for example "occupy Nigeria" were fuelled by social media which was mainly accessed through Smartphone and other mobile phones. However, the

most powerful up-to-date information appears to take over a more covert social network: BBM i.e. Blackberry messenger. In London, for example, the Blackberry smartphone is referred to as the “riot phone”. According to an online report in Mail and Guardian (2012:2) and Dimitris (2012) the phone has become known as the ‘crackberry’, the Guardian report further stated that the “RIM has proved itself capable of reinvention but on a limited scale. Its Blackberry messenger service has been widely adopted by British teenagers and its role in helping to organize last summer’s looting earned the cell phone a new nickname- the riot phone”.

Also, the influence of social networking may also be the major reason why students are interested in Smartphone; this is based on the fact that youth are believed to be more involved with social networking than many other things. Students nowadays have lost interest in receiving news information via newspapers, television and radio, instead, they use their mobile phones: therefore, it is essential that broadcasters adapt to the latest technologies to keep them interested in news. This most certainly is the case for younger people, whose media behavior today is an indicator of what the news industry must learn to accommodate now and into the future.

To buttress that the use of Social networking sites and applications is widespread, Ipsos (2010:44) posits that most part of the world is interconnected thanks to email and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter among others. Perhaps that is why Ihebozor (2012:16) says that “Facebook and Twitter have become invaluable tools for keeping in touch with family and friends- the smartphone offers this”. In the process, it is unleashing hidden journalistic talents as we witness a mushroom of bloggers, social commentators and critics share ideas, criticize and vent frustrations on their pages. The fact that more than six in ten people worldwide use social networks and forums is a transformation in how people communicate with each other. Ihebozor (2012:16) confirm the growing use of Smartphone in Nigeria when he said:

...there is evidence of a growing use of the social media by Nigerians. Social media has become a veritable tool with vast potential for use for awareness creation, sensitization and mobile mobilization. Social media for now are increasing, only the voice of an educated urban based population in their clamour for greater political and space is heard. The voice of the rural poor still remains dim and under-represented in this situation. A desirable development would be for the privileged and increase the poor’s share of the “dividends” of this new information democracy and freedom!” social media can be harnessed as a force for good. They can also be abused. Everything in the end depends on the attitudes and intentions of the human being as agent and user.

Baran (2001:47) attests to this by saying that “the concern is with how best to use the strengths of the emerging medium and how to minimize its disruptive potential”. In the same vein, McIntire (2006) stated that addiction to technology can be damaging to mental health because of its excessive use.

According to Nelson (2011), Technology is constantly altering the way we live our lives. From how we eat to how we travel and work to how we entertain ourselves, technology has become an integral part of our day. However, the aspect of our lives that has been most impacted is likely the way we communicate with one another. These changes have been for both better and worse, but have unequivocally impacted the way we interact with the people in our lives.

Nelson listed the ways and areas in which technology has changed the way people communicate to include:

- **Speed-** Technology has amplified the rate at which we communicate with the world around us. Developments like email, instant messaging, texting, cell phones; social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and MySpace, and video conferencing have allowed us to connect with each other

at breakneck speeds. This has helped us in some ways by allowing us to get in touch with each other quickly for both business and emergency needs

- **Accessibility-** Technology has changed how when, when, where and contact each other. With cell phone service being more consistent than it was in its early introduction in Nigeria, and a growing market of smartphones with mobile internet and email access, messages can literally be transmitted anywhere at any time. This is uniquely helpful in a professional sense, because it allows people to stay in touch with colleagues when on a business trip or out of the country.
- **Efficiency-** Technology has greatly impacted the efficiency of our communicative acts. Instead of having to have a long conversation with a client about his kids and home life before asking a quick question about an order, a brief and to-the-point email can be sent to accomplish the same task.
- **Family Connections-** Technology has made it easier for families to stay in contact with each other. Instead of having to rely on physical photographs being sent every couple of months, new parents can now send photo text messages (MMS) to proud grandparents every day. Video telephone calls made with platforms like Skype can let parents on overseas business trips talk to and see their kids.
- **News:** Technology has exploded access to news for the public. We are able to communicate about events as they happen with platforms like Twitter or news tickers that can be downloaded to your desktop. Moreover, the internet has changed the way we communicate news by giving literally anyone a voice with blogs and websites.

Finally, Bitnner (2005:262) points out that though we assume that simply because a new technology appears, it will greatly alter our lives, offer us new alternatives for choosing both the context and the means of communication, but that is not always the case. According to him, users must understand that we control technology as much as it controls us. As observed by Bill Gates, “any tool that enhances communication has profound effects in terms of how people can learn from each other, and how they can achieve the kind of freedoms that they are interested in” (www.blurtit.com/q299548.html).

Mobile phones are also used for business on many occasions; different packages from network providers and applications from RIM have been introduced. One of such packages as stated by Oketola (2012:29) is MTN MyOffice. According to him, the service it involves fixed internet, fixed voice, mobile voice, mobile internet and cloud computing services. MTN is not alone in the provision of this service; other GSM service providers such as Globacom, Etisalat and Airtel have one form of package or the other to target business people.

METHODOLOGY

The survey research method was adopted for this study. The method is unique in that it deals with subjects concerning all works of life and is suitable for collecting data on attitude of people on certain subject area. Students in higher institutions were the population for this study while purposive sampling method was used to select two higher institutions in Lagos state (Redeemer’s University and University of Lagos) among several higher institutions in Nigeria.

A total number of 500 respondents were selected using a multi stage approach to select two faculties in each university. From the faculties, two departments each were selected to represent the faculties, while students were selected from each department through mall intercept system to respond to data gathering instrument (questionnaire). 125 copies of questionnaire were distributed in each department out of which 480 were returned and properly filled for analysis. This gives a return rate of 96%.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION**Table 1: respondents' institution and their gender**

Institutions	Responses		Total
	Male	Female	
RUN	21.8% (n=105)	28.1% (n=135)	49.9% (n=240)
UNILAG	25.6% (n=123)	24.3% (n=117)	49.9% (n=240)
Total	47.4% (n=228)	52.4% (n=252)	100% (n=480)

Of the 480 respondents, 228 were male respondents making 49.9% of the total number, while a total number of 252 female representing 52.4% responded to the questionnaire. Further analysis showed that majority (28.1%) of respondents from Redeemer's university was male while majority (25.6%) of respondents from University of Lagos was male.

R.Q 1: What do students in higher institutions use their Smartphone's for?

Table 2: respondents' use of Smartphones

Institutions	Responses					Total
	Chat	Browse	Receive and make calls	end Message	others	
RUN	15% (n=72)	16.8% (n=81)	6.6% (n=32)	7.2% (n=35)	4.1% (n=20)	50% (n=240)
UNILAG	15.6% (n=77)	17.7% (n=85)	6% (n=32)	8.3% (n=40)	1.6% (n=8)	50% (n=240)
Total	30.6% (n=147)	17.5% (n=166)	13.2% (n=64)	15.5% (n=75)	5.7% (n=28)	100% (n=480)

Table 2 above shows what respondents' use their smartphone for. Majority (16.8%) of respondents' from Redeemer's university say they use it for browsing the internet, 15% use for chatting on social media platform, 7.2% of them use it to send short messages (SMS), while the least (4.1%) use it for other purposes. Majority (17.7%) of respondents from UNILAG also uses it to browse, 15.6% use it to chat, and 8.3% use it for SMS, while the least (1.6%) use it for other purposes.

Further analysis shows that majority (34.5%) of respondents from both Redeemer's university and UNILAG use it for browsing, 30.6% for chatting while the least (5.7%) use it for other purposes.

R.Q 2: what is the communication pattern in the use of smartphone among students in higher institutions?

Table 3: respondents' communication pattern on the use of smartphones

Institutions	Responses					Total
	Chat	Social network	Voice call	SMS/MMS	others	
RUN	13% (n=62)	9% (n=91)	6% (n=27)	7.9% (n=38)	5% (n=24)	100% (n=240)
UNILAG	13.9% (n=67)	9.8% (n=100)	8% (n=28)	7.7% (n=37)	1.6% (n=8)	100% (n=240)
Total	26.9% (n=129)	9.8% (n=191)	11.4% (n=55)	15.6% (n=75)	1% (n=3)	100% (n=480)

Table 3 above shows respondents' communication pattern with the use of smartphone. Majority (19%) of respondents from Redeemer's university use it for social networking, 13% use it for chatting with friends, 7.9% use it to exchange SMS/MMS with friends, 5.6% of them use it for voice calls while only 4.5% use it for other purposes. Similarly, majority (20.8%) of respondents from UNILAG use it for social networking, 13.9% use it for chatting with friends, 7.7% use it for SMS/MMS, 5.8% use it for voice calls, while only 1.6% use it for other purposes.

Further more, majority (39.8%) of the total respondents use it for social networking, followed by 26.9% who use it for chatting, 15.6% for SMS/MMS, 11.4% for voice calls, and only 6.1% use it for other purposes.

R.Q 3: What influence does Smartphone's use have on the communication patterns of students in higher institutions?

Table 4: respondents' view on the influence smartphone on their communication pattern

Institutions	Response		Total
	Positive	Negative	
RUN	40.2% (n=193)	9.7% (n=47)	50% (n=240)
UNILAG	39.3% (n=189)	10.6% (n=51)	50% (n=240)
Total	79.5% (n=382)	10.3% (n=98)	90% (n=480)

Table 4 show respondents' view on the influence smartphone has on their communication pattern. Majority (40.2%) of respondents' from RUN say it has positive influence on their communication pattern, while 9.7% say it has negative influence on them. Also, majority (39.3%) of respondents' from UNILAG say smartphone has positive influence on their communication pattern, while 10.6% say it has negative influence on their communication pattern.

From this finding, majority (79.5%) of the total respondents' say smartphone has positive influence on their communication pattern. This finding is contrary to some scholars' assertion that use of mobile phone is having negative influence on peoples' communication pattern.

CONCLUSION

Like any other communication technology, smartphone usage among students in higher institutions has influence on their communication pattern. The influence from the result of this work is positive which means smartphone is contributing to communication exchange among students in higher institutions.

This finding therefore, opens opportunities to many communication scholars and professional to explore the avenue provided by smartphone technologies to advance the frontier of research and communication services for the enrichment of human communication.

In view of this, it is therefore recommended that:

- Since smartphone technology is evolving, communication scholars should devote time to study and understand its impact on human communication.
- Marketing communication professionals should see the opportunities provided by smartphone as a means to enrich their profession.
- Advertisers should explore the communication potentials of smartphone technology to reach their target prospects.
- A larger sample size and spread should be adopted for further studies.

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