

Mobile Phones and Libraries/ Information Centres

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INTRODUCTION

The value of *communication* cannot be overemphasized in this age where the world is rapidly turning to a global village. The increasing need and value of communication has always pushed people to invent better and more efficient ways to convey messages, propagate ideas, and share personal information with friends and family (Miluzzo et al., 2010). Communication today is made possible through various media, one of which is the Mobile Phone. This communication gadget has become a necessity for almost everyone to keep in touch with people and happenings around them. It is in line with this that Iwhiwhu, Ruteyan and Eghwubare (2010) noted that Mobile phones have revolutionized the daily lives of ordinary people.

The origin of mobile phones as a concept dates as far back as 1947. Bellis (2013) noted that researchers observed after taking a closer look at the crude mobile car phones, that by using small cells (range of service area) with frequency reuse, they could increase the traffic capacity of mobile phones substantially; though the needed technology was not readily available then.

On the 3rd of April 1973, *mobile phone* was first put to use. The first mobile *telephone call* was made by Martin Cooper who was an Engineer at Motorola (Violiner, 2013). The phone was only able to maintain its charge for about twenty minutes. The development of mobile phones was later

improved upon in 1982 through the introduction of car mobile phones by Nokia and later that same year with the introduction of the DX200. Donohoe (2010) also noted that in September, 1983, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the United States of America formally approved the DynaTAC 8000x phones which happened to be the world's first commercial handheld portable mobile phone. In 1987, there was a further advancement in mobile phone technologies with the introduction of the Mobira Cityman; which was the first mobile phone introduced for public use. He also noted that in the same year, the Global System for Mobile communications (GSM) network was adopted as the European standard signal and towards the late 90s Nokia introduced more mobile phones.

At the beginning of the 21st century, mobile phone providers became competitive and diversified in the production of these phones. In connection to this, Violiner (2013) noted that these companies went as far as advancing the services offered by these mobile phones to go beyond calls and texts messages. Within these few years, there has been obvious advancements in mobile phone technologies from simple mobile phones to indispensable 'smart' devices that provide tools which enables functions that surpasses phone calls and text messages. Such functions include web browsing, entertainment, etc. (Kim & Park, 2012). Even with all these improvements and advancements

in mobile phone technologies, more innovations are still being put in place and therefore we can expect higher level of technological improvements in mobile phones in the nearest future.

OVERVIEW

Use of Mobile Phones in Library and Information Services

The *library and information centre* is not just an institution, but a social service organization set up primarily to meet the varying information needs of its clientele through the provision of diverse information products and services. These services are simply intangible goods readily made available to information users in order to satisfy their information needs. Examples of these include: Indexing and Abstracting Services, Current Awareness Service, Selective Dissemination of Information, Referral Services, Photocopying, Internet Service, Bibliographic Compilation, Information Broking, Information Consulting, Web Page Design, Information Repackaging, Records Management, etc.

In a digital era like ours, the introduction of mobile phones has improved various services carried out by different sectors, one of which is the service carried out by library and information centres. Current advancements in the services provided by library and information centres can be partly attributed to the sophisticated internet and reference functions of mobile phones which go far beyond making and receiving calls, and sending text messages. One vital service carried out by libraries to its clientele is the reference service. This specialized service has been improved and made much more flexible with the use of mobile phones. Reference services are “information consultations in which library staff recommend, interpret, evaluate, and/or use information resources to help others to meet particular information needs” (Reference and User Service Association, 2013). The SLET Guide in Library

and Information Science (2013) quoting Ranganathan, refers to reference service as personal service to each reader in helping him to find the document answering his interest at the moment pin pointedly, exhaustively and expeditiously. This specialized library service is usually carried out on demand. With the advancement in mobile phone technologies, library clientele have the opportunities to get adequate and prompt reference services at their comforts. The reference librarian can simply communicate answers to the reference queries posed by the library clientele through opportunities provided by the mobile phone platform. Through these platforms, the reference librarian can send instant messages through face book, text messages, twitter electronic mails, etc. or even put a call through to the library user through the mobile phone technology. Library users do not need to physically come into the library to get answers to their reference queries. An important aspect of reference service in which mobile phone technologies are utilized in library and information services is in the provision of Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI). This is usually part of the job description of the reference librarian. O’Neil (2001) explained Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) as a system that attempts to aid and facilitate users’ information retrieval and information filtering needs. He noted that the main goal of selective dissemination of information system is to produce new information and information materials arriving to users who express their information needs or information interest through user profiles. Aina (2004) reiterated that Selective Dissemination of Information saves the user ample time. It also relieves the user of the cumbersome, burdensome and stressful activity of sieving through a large number of documents before getting the relevant and desired documents especially in this age of information explosion (that is, the continuous increase of information in leaps and bounds thereby leading to an obvious overload of available information).

With the introduction of mobile phone technologies into the services delivered by libraries

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