

Mobile Phone Culture: The Impacts of Mobile Phone Use

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INTRODUCTION

The development and convergence of mobile technologies have led to the wide and rapid diffusion and use of mobile phones. From a simple communication technology to a key social tool, mobile phones have become a crucial part of people's everyday lives. The mobile phone has altered the way people live, communicate, interact, and connect with others. It is also transforming how people access and use information and media. Mobile phones have become the most rapidly adopted technology throughout history. Given the rapid pervasiveness of mobile phones in society across the world, it is crucial to explore important aspects of mobile phone use and their impacts on users, cultures, communications, interactions, and society. This chapter aims to explore the social and cultural implications of mobile phone propagation, given the ubiquity, unprecedented connectivity, and advancement of mobile phones. The chapter also focuses on a discussion about people's dependence upon, attachment and addiction to mobile phones, social issues generated by mobile phones, and how people value mobile phone use. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the historical and technological development of mobile phones before exploring the implications of the mobile revolution, followed by mobile phone use and mobile culture. The key concepts include mobile phone culture, which means the culture created by mobile phone use, and mobile phone addiction, which refers to heavy dependence on mobile phone use and constant check on mobile phones.

OVERVIEW

The Mobile Revolution

The pioneering scholars who have examined mobile phone culture and the impact of mobile phones on people's lives and on society include Dr. Ling (2004) at the IT University of Copenhagen, Denmark, and Dr. Ito (2005) at the University of California. This section of the chapter focuses on the mobile technological revolution and the development and current status of mobile phone use.

More than 40 years ago, the first historical mobile phone call was made in New York City. The world's first mobile phone weighed about 1.5 kilograms (2.5 pounds) was introduced by Motorola in 1973. It took a decade, however, for the first commercial mobile phone (Motorola's Dyna TAC) to finally reach consumers in 1984 ("The first mobile," 2013). Nearly another decade after the introduction of the first public mobile phone, the world's first original smartphone was introduced in 1993, offering features such as e-mail, a pager, a calendar, a complete keypad, and a stylus for writing on the screen ("5 major," 2013). Another astonishing technological development in the history of mobile phones was the first mobile phone with built-in camera made available to the public in 2002. One year after the arrival of the first camera phone, BlackBerry was unveiled in 2003, offering e-mail, texting, a web browser, and a messenger service ("5 major," 2013). With the revolutionary technological development, mobile phones have been quickly evolving into the high-tech multitasking gadgets ("5 major," 2013;

Humphreys, von Pape, & Karnowski, 2013; Lee, 2010). Multitasking and efficiency are the main focus in mobile phone development.

Mobile phones have come a long way in the last 40 years. The first revolutionary iPhone that Apple launched in 2007 was an integrated handheld device, consisting of a wireless communication device, an iPod, and a mobile phone, with such features as a touch screen, a touchpad keyboard, a photo library, and a visual voicemail box (“5 major,” 2013). Compared to the first mobile phone, often so-called the “brick phone,” nowadays, palm-sized smartphones such as the iPhone 5 weigh less than four ounces. Since the late 2000s, the data transmission speed of mobile phones has made great progress, from 3G (3rd generation) to 4G (4th generation) LTE (long-term evolution).

In the early days, the mobile phone was called “an aristocratic phone” and was considered a symbol of wealth. As of 2013, the global mobile phone users have surpassed 4.3 billion, and the number of smartphone users worldwide has reached more than 1 billion (see Table 1; eMarketer, 2014a). More than 91% of American adults owned a mobile phone, while smartphone users in the United States accounted for 74% of all mobile phone users in 2013 (eMarketer, 2013; Rainie, 2013). In Korea, the penetration rate of smartphones surpassed about 73% as of 2013 (Suk, 2014). Smartphones are becoming people’s primary platform for accessing the Internet. Mobile phone subscriptions in some countries such as Luxembourg, Hong Kong, and South Korea surpassed the number of people. The penetration rate of mobile phones in Luxembourg, for instance, has reached 158% (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2014).

Table 1. Mobile phone and smartphone users in 2013

Users	Worldwide	US
Mobile phone users	4.3 billions (61%)	91%
Smartphone users	1.4 billions (20%)	74%

*Source: eMarketer (2014a); ITU (2014)

The penetration and use of mobile phones have quickly overwhelmed traditional landline telephones, which are being replaced with mobile phones as subscribers have begun to choose mobile phones as their sole phone service (Calamur, 2013). This phenomenon reflects the rapid decline of the conventional fixed telephone service. People can hardly find a public telephone on the street. The mobile revolution is taking place across the world, including in developing countries, and becoming a global phenomenon. Adoption rates of mobile phones in developing countries are surging, including more than 580 million mobile phone users in Africa and 3 billion across Asia (also see Table 2; ITU, 2014). The mobile phone brings users access to modern digital communications at an unprecedented rate, especially in developing countries.

The revolutionary mobile phone, with its unprecedented connectivity potential, has become deeply integrated into people’s daily lives and industries. Particularly the smartphone, with its wide variety of mobile features based on fast data speeds, has changed people’s lifestyles. A smartphone user, for instance, wakes up in the morning to an alarm clock or radio alarm application (app) on her phone. She checks the arrival time of the bus approaching the nearest bus stop to her home and watches the morning news on her smartphone, and then leaves for the bus stop in time to reach the bus. During her commute, she uses her smartphone to check her email and

Table 2. Mobile phone and internet access for developed and developing countries and the world (penetration rates)

	Mobile Phone Subscription	Active Mobile Internet Subscription	Households with Internet Access at Home
Developed countries	119%	75%	75%
Developing countries	88%	17%	28%
World	93%	27%	40%

*Source: ITU (2014)

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