

Chapter 32

Mobile Phone Etiquette in Nigeria: The Case of Calabar Municipality, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

There has been tremendous growth in the mobile telephony industry in Nigeria in recent years. This evolving technology has given rise to concerns over the etiquette governing mobile phone usage. This study was undertaken to better understand levels of knowledge of Nigerians about etiquettes of mobile phone usage. Data were collected through interviews, direct observations and questionnaire from 861 randomly selected mobile phone users residing in diverse streets of Calabar municipality. The study revealed that the levels of knowledge of Nigerians about etiquette of mobile phone usage is high but users refuse to conform; that the etiquette that should be up held include volume of the ringing tone should be low, pleasant and not annoy others; mobile phones are not used while driving. The implication of is that non compliance with mobile phone etiquettes poses a serious threat and distraction to others. Based on the findings, recommendations which would increase levels of knowledge of and compliance with the etiquette of mobile phone usage in Nigeria were set forth.

INTRODUCTION

ICT is any technology that enables electronic capture, process, and transmit information. In recent years a 'new' ICT, the mobile phones have become available to a growing number of people worldwide. Today, mobile phones are the primary form of telecommunication in most emerging

economies (Bell 2005). Mobile phones are fast becoming indispensable in the modern society and has become the most widely used and diverse piece of technological equipment, surpassing fixed line telephone, radio or television. *Mobile phones represent the biggest breakthrough in the new digital infrastructures of developing nations.*

The International Telecommunication Union (2009) release reveals an explosion in mobile phone use globally, much of which has been

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driven by growth in the developing world. According to the report, subscriptions now stand at 4.1bn worldwide around 61% penetration (at the end 2008) up from 1bn in 2002. Developing countries account for about two-thirds of mobile phones in use compared to less than half in 2002, making mobile phones the first telecommunications technology in history to have more users in developing countries than in the developed world. Nowhere is the effect more dramatic than in Africa, where mobile technology often represents the first modern infrastructure of any kind. The growth of mobile phone use in developing countries is indeed explosive. In Africa 28 per cent of the population now has a mobile phone, compared to just two per cent in 2000. There has been a clear shift to mobile telephony.

According to a report in "This Day" Newspaper (June 18, 2008), an estimated 68.4 million Nigerians currently own mobile phones and a significant majority of non owners aspire to buy one in the near future because of widely available content and attractive services offered by mobile phone operators. The results posted on the website of the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) also showed that Global system for mobile communications (GSM) subscriber base has increased to 47,205,063 million and the teledensity ratio to 33.72% as at March, 2008. There is an alarming increase of over two million between January and March 2008. A breakdown of the data showed that, GSM recorded 43,786,542 active lines, mobile *Code division multiple access* (CDMA), 567,185 and fixed wired/wireless 1,545,984. The total installed capacity has also increased to 88,471,789 with mobile GSM having the highest of 79,625,308, mobile CDMA 3,170,000, and fixed wired/wireless 5,676,481. Nigeria's teledensity has risen dramatically from 0.73% in 2001 to 33.72% in 2008, exceeding the International Telecommunication Union's minimum recommendation of 1%. (See Table 1 showing the subscriber information from Year 2001 – March 2008 and Figure 1 showing Nigeria's teledensity

from 2001 to April 2008). Mobile phone users extend beyond what the number of subscriptions suggests as there is a culture of sharing communication tools. That means that whilst a mobile phone may belong to a single person, it is often shared among members of a local community (Goodman, 2007).

In Nigeria today, mobile phones are a part of our lives and as a means of communication, more used now than fixed line phones. They provide telecommunications to people without the constraints of needing a fixed line telephone, providing more freedom for people to communicate with one another from virtually anywhere. As with all technology solutions, some ethical issues emerge to the end users of product and service offerings, particularly those that provide us with the ability to connect with the global community. It must be stressed that these etiquettes are not new; they are simply applicable to a new operating environment. While most Nigerians have a strong desire to enrich their lives by participating in this bigger environment, it is important that we are aware of the etiquette of mobile phone usage. Mobile phone etiquette entails following simple guidelines when using a mobile phone for safety and security reasons and to create a good environment for working and being in. Mobile phone etiquette is just a matter of being considerate of others, which benefits everyone.

However, cursory observations show that there is a growing culture of poor mobile phone etiquettes among Nigerians. Chances are that just about everyone has been annoyed at one point or another by someone not practicing proper mobile phone etiquette. A person talking loudly into a mobile phone offends those forced to listen. Private conversations, arguments, and details about how a business meeting went, or intimate spouse relationships are conversations that should not necessarily be aired out in public. Aside from arrogant conversations, obnoxious ring tones piercing the atmosphere in buses and other public transport facilities, the ambiance of restaurants and

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