

The Use of Mobile Phone and Social Relationships in Lagos Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: The use of mobile has been argued to improve social relationship by encouraging communication but, it may have only succeeded in fostering “networked individualism” which does not encourage individuals to visit or engage in physical face-to-face contact with each other or participate in social gatherings physically. This may have caused individuals to have weak social ties and pushed them into loneliness and depression. Therefore, this study investigated the impact of mobile phone use on social relationships in Lagos metropolis. The study anchored on the penetration theory of R. Higbie. This is because; it explains the role of communication on social relationships.

Methodology: The study adopted a descriptive research design and divided the state into four clusters. Mushin, Ojo, Shomolu and Badagry were selected to represent the clusters and two streets were selected from each of the local government areas to represent the entire LGA using a balloting sampling technique. Respondents were however, selected using a simple random sampling technique so as to give every individual equal chances of being represented. Using a sample calculator of 95% confidence level with a margin of error of 5 and a population proportion of 50, the study derived a sample size of 385. 48 copies of questionnaire were distributed to each of the sample location to ensure even distribution of the research questionnaire. Thus, 384 copies of questionnaire were distributed. In addition to the primary data, the study further made use of secondary data.

Findings: Findings revealed that the use of mobile phone aids communication and fosters social relationships but has affected the rate at which individuals visit or have physical interaction with each other adversely.

Conclusion: It was also revealed that though it has not affected social support, emotional support has been affected adversely. It was there recommended that individuals involve themselves in clubs and associations and also, imbibe the culture of visiting their family and friend irrespective of their busy and tight schedule.

Keywords: Mobile Phone, Physical Interaction, Social Relationship, Social Ties.

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Introduction

Mobile phone was invented in 1973 by the former general manager of Motorola; Martin Cooper (Magner 2004). According to Obilor (2022) it is a portable device that is used to connect to a telecommunication network for communication. It allows individuals to make and receive calls as well as send and receive messages and access social media platforms. In addition to this communicative use of mobile phone, mobile phones have been found to perform non-communicative functions like; watching television (TV) and browsing the internet. Brenner (2013) sums this function by stating that nowadays, users of mobile phone use it to download apps, send short messages to family and friends, browse the Internet, check social networks sites, take photos and perform a variety of other activities.

In contemporary times mobile phone use has been argued to improve social relationships in addition to its positive implications on communication. Ling (2008) has argued that, the use of mobile phone helps in establishing strong ties among friends, family and acquaintances due to sustain regular contact. Campbell and Kwak (2010b) further argued that voice calling and text messaging with mobile phones was positively related to social leisure activities, such as eating meals with others, meeting friends and playing team sports as people could easily contact each other irrespective of the distance between them.

This especially with the introduction of social media platforms like whatsapp, instagram, facebook etc. seem to have further strengthened relationship and as well reduced the financial cost of sustaining social relationship. Ellison et al., (2007) opined that mobile phone helps to reduce the time used in maintaining relationships with a relatively large number of acquaintances especially, with people who are not in the same geographical area (Boase, Horrigan, Wellman, 2006). This allows individuals with different ethnic, religious and cultural background to share ideas and information that enables them to participate effectively in decision making.

In affirmation, Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll (2005) opined that the use of mobile phone avail individuals of different backgrounds and interests the opportunity to participate in community activities. Park and Lee (2012) have argued that among young users of mobile phone in Korea the number of social relationship established and maintained by the mobile phone was related to greater self-esteem and lower levels of loneliness and depression. According to them, this was also related to higher self-esteem and lower depression. Warner (2003) further opined that, the use of mobile phone is related to an increased sense of belonging especially as people seek to get in touch with their family and friends regularly (Ito, 2006).

However, this may have affected face-to-face communication adversely especially as people rarely visit each other since the use of mobile phone became rampant. Communication seems to have become less emotional with little or no commitment or attachment. Thus, while mobile phone may be argued to have improved social relationship by encouraging communication, it may have succeeded in ushering in a new phase of social interaction into the social structure known as “networked individualism” where individuals stay connected through their mobile phone but are individualistic and do not share ties or affinity. In this form of social interaction, individuals may interact via their mobile phone but do not visit or engage in physical face-to-face contact with each other or participate in social gatherings physically. In view of this, individuals are unable to adequately establish strong social ties and attend to their social needs of improving their social esteem and sense of belonging thereby; pushing them into loneliness and depression.

Research Questions

In view of this, this study investigated the impact of mobile phone usage on social relationship Lagos metropolis. This study answered the following questions. They are:

1. What is the impact of mobile phone usage on social relationships Lagos metropolis?
2. How has the use of mobile phone affected face-to-face communication Lagos metropolis?
3. How can social relationships be improved even as the rate of mobile phone users continues to increase in Lagos metropolis?

Empirical Literature

Ishfaq, Tehmina & Khadija (2011) investigated the pattern of mobile phone usage among youngsters in Pakistan in a study titled “Mobile phone to youngsters: Necessity or addiction”. The study focuses on exploring the pattern of mobile phone usage among youngsters in Pakistan to delineate the extent of addictive behavior towards its usage. Questionnaires were used to elicit the responses for this study. University students were selected as the sampling population using simple random sampling technique. Findings of this study revealed that majority of the respondents are able to have definite priorities between their responsibilities and commitments and their cell phone usage. Very few are those who always exhibit extreme addictive behaviors and the rest is the majority who are not frequently involved in addictive usage patterns. Thus, youngsters use their cell phones under reasonable limits and do not tend towards extreme behaviors leading towards addictive cell phone usage.

Dania & Iwe-Ewenode (2016) carried out a study titled “Undergraduate Usage of Mobile Phones and Its Implication of School Application”. The study is a survey research that intended to find out undergraduate usage of mobile phones and its implication of school application. The colloquium population is 27,650 at which two hundred and thirty eight undergraduate students were randomly selected from two universities in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. A questionnaire on “current trends in mobile phone usage among adolescents” was used for the study. It was discovered that nearly all the undergraduate students own mobile phones and majority consider it very useful. Several reasons were advanced for owning a mobile phone by students. These include; for mobility, emergency, e-mails and short message service, self-assurance, improved social status, for fashion, loading information, social network and malpractice. The feature commonly used by students apart from sending and receiving calls is the short message service. The implications of mobile phone usage by students on school administration are: it is an object of distraction, encourage laziness as students now browse instead of going to the library, an object for examination malpractice and several other vices. Recommendations were made to check the use of mobile phones by undergraduate students in Nigerian universities.

In a study titled “Connected Teens: Measuring the Impact of Mobile Phones on Social Relationships through Social Capital”, Charo (2017) find out how computer-mediated communication helps or obstructs the creation of social capital between teenagers, and what are the consequences of its use for this age group. To achieve this, an index of social capital was developed in the study, designed to determine the positive or negative impact of certain components of mobile mediated communication in the creation of this intangible resource. Questionnaires were distributed among Spanish adolescents of secondary and high school age, from different public and private schools of Navarre. Furthermore, the study considered the adolescents’ own perceptions about the incidence of the use of mobile phones in their social relationships. Findings revealed that, to identify the components of mediated communication that significantly affect social capital it is necessary to conduct an objective measurement of this resource.

Mohammed & Samy (2017) carried out a study titled, “Effects of Mobile Technology on Human Relationships”. The study aimed at finding out the relation between mobile technology and its effects on face- to- face communications at Al-Azhar University in Gaza. The major objectives of this research are to examine the relationship between mobile technology use and the ability of people to communicate face- to- face and to find out whether mobile usage is weakening the quantity and quality of face- to- face interactions. This study found out that the use of mobile technology have negative impact on both the quality and the quantity of face- to- face communications. The study concludes that mobile use by individuals has reduced the time they spend engaging in face- to- face communications with each other because of the time spent on the mobile.

The empirical literature that were reviewed investigated the pattern of mobile phone use among youngsters in Pakistan, mobile phones and its implication of school application among undergraduates, Impact of Mobile Phones on Social Relationships among teenagers and the impact of mobile phone on face- to- face communications at Al-Azhar University in Gaza. This is a total departure from this present

study which investigated the impact of mobile phone usage on social relationship in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study anchored on the penetration theory of R. Higbie that was propounded in 1935. This theory asserts that as relationships develop, communication moves from relatively shallow, non-intimate levels to deeper, more personal ones.

This theory opined that communication is in two phases; intimate or personal and shallow or non-intimate; all of which revolves around the type of relationship individuals share. Thus, as relationship develops, individuals may rely on the use of mobile phone to sustain the relationship however, when a relationship becomes more intimate, the use of mobile phone becomes less effective in sustaining the relationship. This is because the relationship tends to be more demanding with time and people's needs tends to move from mere communication to companionship and intimacy as relationship matures.

This theory effectively explains the relationship between communication and social relationships but it failed to take into cognizance the instrument of communication.

Research Methodology

Lagos state is the largest city in Nigeria and the most populous in Africa with a population of 23.5 million as at 2018. It is a major African financial centre and economic hub in Nigeria, with a lot of mobile phone users. Therefore, this study investigated the impact of mobile phone usage in Lagos state. The city has 20 local government area (LGAs) which includes; Alimosho, Ajeromi-Ifelodun, Kosofe, Mushin, Oshodi-Isolo, Ojo, Ikorodu, Surulere, Agege, Ifako-Ijaiye, Somolu, Amuwo-Odofin, Lagos Mainland, Ikeja, Eti-Osa, Badagry, Apapa, Lagos Island, Epe Ibeju-Lekki. The study adopted a descriptive research design and a cluster sampling method in dividing these LGAs into four clusters based on the proximity between these areas. Cluster A comprised of Alimosho, Ajeromi-Ifelodun, Kosofe, Mushin and Oshodi-Isolo cluster B comprised of; Ojo, Ikorodu, Surulere, Agege and Ifako-Ijaiye cluster C comprised of Shomolu, Amuwo-Odofin, Lagos Mainland, Ikeja, Eti-Osa while cluster D comprised of Badagry, Apapa, Lagos Island, Epe, Ibeju-Lekki. One local government was selected to represent the local government areas in the cluster. The selected LGA includes Mushin, Ojo, Shomolu and Badagry. The study also used a balloting sampling method to select the streets used in this study. Access Street (str.) and Access road were selected from Mushin, St. Mary Cl and St. Mary St. were selected from Ojo, Balogun Street and Bankole street were selected from Shomolu while Ilagbo and Morogbo were selected from Badagry.

Using a sample calculator of 95% confidence level with a margin of error of 5 and a population proportion of 50, the study derived a sample size of 385. 48 copies of questionnaire were distributed to each of the sample location to ensure even distribution of the research questionnaire. Thus, 384 copies of questionnaire were distributed. Respondents were selected using simple random sampling technique. The copies of questionnaire were filled and retrieved at the spot to avoid losses. Responses in the questionnaire were close-ended so adequately guide respondents towards the study.

The study relied on the use of questionnaire and secondary sources of data collection technique like; textbooks, journal, internet materials for this study. Respondents were male and female adults (21 & above) from different religious and educational background who were randomly selected for the study. Responses were however presented in tables and analysed using frequency distribution table.

Research Findings

S/ N	Questions	Yes	No	Respondents
1.	The use of mobile phone enhances communication	301 78.4%	83 21.6%	384 100%
2.	The use of mobile phone aids social relationship	285 74.2%	99 25.8%	384 100%
3.	The use of mobile phone has reduced the rate of visitation among individuals	204 53.1%	180 46.9%	384 100%
4.	The use of mobile phone has reduced the level of commitment in relationships	112 29.2%	272 70.8%	384 100%
5.	The use of mobile phone has affected intimacy adversely	93 24.2%	291 75.8%	384 100%
6.	The use of mobile phone has made individuals prone to depression	194 50.5%	190 49.5%	384 100%
7.	The use of mobile phone has affected companionship negatively	274 71.4%	110 28.6%	384 100%
8.	The use of mobile phone has reduced the rate of face-to-face interaction	265 69%	119 31%	384 100%
9.	The use of mobile phone makes it difficult for individuals to get social comfort/support	191 49.7%	193 50.3%	384 100%
10.	The use of mobile phone tends to build weak social ties	111 28.9%	273 71.1%	384 100%
11.	The use of mobile phone makes it deprives members of the society of emotional support.	193 50.3%	191 49.7%	384 100%

Discussion of Findings

Findings revealed that the use of mobile phone has a positive impact on communication and social relationship. This is due to the fact that communication is key in sustaining relationships and the use of mobile phone makes it easier and faster to communicate. However, the rate at which individuals visit each other has reduced drastically. But this seems not to have affected the level of commitment in relationships as findings revealed that the level of commitment and intimacy has not reduced even with the reduction in visitation.

It was also revealed that, the level of face-to-face communication and companionship has reduced due to the fact that the use of mobile phone does not necessarily support social gatherings and visitation. This was revealed to have made individuals prone to depression. Contrary to this, it was further revealed that the use of mobile phone does not affect social ties or social support adversely as people could easily call for help using their mobile phone if need be.

The findings further revealed that the use of mobile phone does not provide for emotional support even though it provides for social support. This may be partly because of the fact that one may not observe that an individual is going through emotional challenges through mobile phone communication except there is a physical interaction between both persons.

Conclusion

The use of mobile phone no doubt has made communication easier and faster irrespective of the distance between the sender and receiver. It can as well be asserted that by facilitating communication, it has as

well improved social relationships among individuals as individuals could keep in touch with their loved ones regularly. It is believed that when people communicate regularly, they tend to build some level of intimacy and commitment with each other. But, even as this assertion can be justified, some aspect of social relationship may have been affected adversely.

This part of relationship has to do with physical interaction and visitation. Since the polarisation of mobile phone, individual hardly engage in social gathering, visitation or any form of physical interaction as they could easily put a call across instead of taking the risk of travelling and incurring the expenses attached to visitation.

While this may be effective to cater for the social needs of individual as it continues to build strong social ties, intimacy and commitment in relationship, the emotional needs of individuals are left unattended to thereby plugging individuals into loneliness and depression. There is no gainsaying that the Nigeria traditional structure allows for a lot of physical interactions that supports the social and emotional well-being of individuals and do give room for emotional problems like loneliness and depression. Thus, while cognizance is placed on mobile phone as a facilitator of social relationship, there is need to take a critical look towards its lapses it has on social relationships.

Recommendation

Based on the finding above, the following recommendations were made. They are:

1. There is need for individuals to involve themselves in clubs and associations like; village meeting, age grade association, old students association, Leo club, Rotract etc.
2. Individuals should imbibe the culture of visiting their family and friend irrespective of their busy and tight schedule. They should also try not to use their phone to chat or browse during their visit.
3. There is need for an increased awareness on the need for individuals to visit and have physical interaction with each other. This awareness should be basically through the mass media.
4. There is need for the government and NGOs to create a meeting place for people where they can have physical contact and interaction. The people should be divided into strata while the commentator oversees to it that there is an interesting topic to discuss and everyone contributes to it reasonably.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflict of interest.

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