

## **MOBILE PHONE USAGE AMONG NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND ITS IMPACT ON TEACHING AND LEARNING**

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**ABSTRACT:** *In Nigeria, mobile phones have been instrumental to the rapid increase in telecommunications accessibility. Mobile phones have become integral part of daily life among the general population and college/university students. Several studies have found that the use of mobile phones among college/university students has brought about a profound and diverse pool of knowledge. However, mobile phone usage also has its adverse effects. This paper examined the evolution of mobile phones in Nigeria and the concomitant positive and adverse effects of its usage amongst students in tertiary institutions. It identified the positive effects to include easy access to information, instructional usage and personal convenience; while the adverse effects include distraction in the classroom, reduced cognitive ability, cheating during examinations, cyber bullying, poor writing skills and addiction. The paper then concluded that though mobile phones have positive effects on the educational and socio-economic development of Nigerian students, university authorities should take a more proactive role to reduce its adverse effects by either prohibiting the use of mobile phones during lecture hours or encouraging students to switch off their phones or put them on silence mode while receiving lectures. The significance of this paper for the Nigerian educational system is that if its recommendations are implemented, the positive effects of mobile phone usage will then overshadow its negative effects.*

**KEYWORDS:** Mobile Phone, Phone Usage, Nigerian Students, Positive Effects, Adverse Effects.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Mobile phone devices have become an essential part of daily life and a valuable means of information dissemination since its evolution in the late 1990s' in Nigeria and in most developing countries. Several studies have found the use of mobile phone among youth particularly students to be very important. In Nigeria, the emergence of mobile phones with internet services has brought about a profound and diverse pool of knowledge. However, it has also led, unintentionally though, to circumscribed students' commitment to serious

academic work, negatively impacted their thinking processes, communication and language skills.

Ownership of a mobile phone has social, economic, psychological and educational consequences on students as it usually influences their attitude and behaviour to academic activities. Some of the constraints posed by ownership of mobile phones to effective learning include inattentiveness, disruption and distraction. Closely associated to these is the use of mobile phones which causes noise and distraction during lecture hours. Studies have shown that there is a relationship between students' performance and commitment to academics in lecture rooms as those who use mobile phone during lecture hours are more likely to experience distraction, inattentiveness, and non-participation in academic class work (Ling, 2005). The problem is that the use of mobile phones among students has become habitual thus negatively impacting on conscious efforts required to achieve effective teaching and learning.

### **Evolution of mobile phones in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, as in most other developing countries, the mobile phone has been instrumental to the rapid increase in telecommunications accessibility. Before digital mobile telephony was introduced in Nigeria in 2001, the country had less than 500 thousand telephone lines. Today, the story is different with the number of telephone lines in Nigeria put at more than 30 million (Omeruo, 2009).

To appreciate the rapid growth we are talking about, in 1998, the African continent as a whole had about 14 million lines. In less than 10 years, Nigeria alone has more than doubled the number of lines the whole continent had thanks to what is now known as the mobile phone revolution. Before 2001, only analogue land-line phones were available in Nigeria which were deployed and managed by Nigerian Telecommunications Ltd (NITEL), the only national carrier and the only telecom company then. Satellite phone was also scantily available but satellite mobile phones were not generally available because they were expensive. Thus, they were seen as status symbols rather than as necessity.

However, in 2001 the Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM) was launched in Nigeria. GSM was then one of the second generation (2G) mobile technologies in the world. GSM in Nigeria proved to be an instant success immediately dominating the digital cellular market. Econet Wireless (which later had a lot of metamorphosis changing from Econet to Vmobile, Celtel and now Airtel) was the first GSM mobile phone network to go live in Nigeria. It was soon after joined by MTN, Mtel and Glo mobile. However the story of mobile telecommunication in Nigeria is not just about GSM, as the Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) has also contributed its own quarter. Companies like

Starcomms, Visafone and Bourdex are leaders in CDMA technology. In many ways, the mobile phone has contributed a lot to the development of Nigeria. The blessings of mobile communication in Nigeria have impacted directly or indirectly on the populace, the corporate world, the business world, and the society at large. Job creation and employment is one of the good things that GSM brought to Nigeria as it is the sector that has employed the highest number of both skilled and unskilled manpower in recent times. A great number of people especially young graduates have been given employment in the GSM companies where they make a living and are useful to their families. Apart from such direct employment, ancillary jobs have also been created, where many people are self-reliant doing their own GSM businesses, such as commercial calls and sale of recharge cards which are popularly known as business centers or call centers.

Akpabio (2005) notes that there is no better way to talk about GSM in Nigeria than to recall the pre-GSM era where telephones were the preserve of the rich and when Nigeria's tele-density ranked among the worst in the world. An overwhelming majority of Nigerians had to make do with phone booths and business centers where the long queues and waste of time were clearly inhibiting factors. To make an international call, one had to travel long distances to NITEL call centers which were mainly in capital and commercial cities.

Utulu (2012) asserts that looking around the cities, towns and even villages in present day Nigeria, one will hardly walk about two poles without seeing a business center mainly characterized by the use of umbrellas, kiosks and even shops painted with the colors of one or more of the mobile phone service providers. It is easy to start a mobile phone call center because it requires little start-up capital; in fact all that one needs to start is an umbrella as a shade, a stool, a table and a handset loaded with calling credit of any amount. This has provided a means of livelihood for many people who would have been unemployed. Many Nigerians who are technologically minded have also learnt the technical aspect of the business by repairing and fixing mobile phones in their repair shops.

### **Use of mobile phone by students**

Adenya & Oyeyinka-Oyelaran (2002), noted that educational institutions have witnessed an astronomical increase in the use of mobile phones by students in recent times. This scenario has been extended to primary and secondary institutions as well. However, in highlighting the constraints to effective learning, Park (2005) listed inattentiveness, disruption and distraction. Closely associated to these, is the use of mobile phones which causes noise and distraction during lecture hours. A study carried out at Ball State's Hanley Institute for mobile media research on students' use of mobile phones, revealed that students not only use a mobile phone for voice calls, but they also use it to e-mail, send text, download and listen to music and access social media sites. The study also found that

49% of students use mobile phones to access websites for entertainment or concert information, 52% use it for movie viewing, 61% for news, 87% for weather reports while 57% of students reported using it for searching and 51% reported making one or more calls per day (Park, 2005).

Cheung (2008) asserted that students use their mobile phones for tagging location, status update, and broadcasting where they are and what they are doing to all of their friends. Students also use it to grab pictures of what is going on other than waiting for photos to download or develop as soon as they snap their classic pictures of their friends' antics on the squad. They also share photos with a picture message or facebook post. Students also add filters to their pictures to give simple digital snapshots a more interesting look using their phones to keep afloat at school juggling between classes, work, friends and family. They also use it to stay in the loop and express themselves. Cheung (2008) revealed that boys tend to use mobile phones for recreational and communicative purposes such as playing games, listening to music, sending or receiving e-mails and accessing the internet whereas girls are more likely to use the device for maintaining social contacts by using features such as text-messaging or using the phone as a phonebook.

Young (1998) studied attitudes of students towards the use of mobile phones and the perceived social pressure and likely consequence. The study revealed a high usage of mobile phones and found that some students see mobile phone usage as pleasant, helpful and easy while others said they experience feelings of anxiety, distraction and that it sometimes takes too much of their attention that could have been allotted to other mainstream school programmes. Thus, there are challenges and implications that require to be addressed.

Ling (2004) asserts that much has been made of how rapid advances in technology have changed the way we learn and communicate. In terms of personal interaction, social networking tools such as MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, Texting, and YouTube have become common methods of communication for young consumers and they are gaining interest and acceptance among consumers of all ages. We are also seeing technology changing the way formal learning takes place with laptops in the classroom, iPhone applications, and online course offerings. It can no longer be argued that these technologies do not exist or that they are not widely used. However, questions that remain unanswered are, do these technologies actually enhance learning and do students believe that they are appropriate forms of communication for use in a university setting?

Miners (2009), notes that while it is quite clear that these social networks are commonly used for social contacts, it is not very clear whether they are seen as appropriate methods

of communication in a professional or university setting. Rather than being seen as acceptable sources of information, these networking sites may well be shunned by the exact audience that is being targeted. For example, it has been reported that numerous companies are now looking up potential new hires on social networking sites and are eliminating some of those applicants based upon what the applicants have posted in their profiles whereas such postings were based on the misguided assumption that the posted information is private and are only being shared with friends (Miners, 2009). It would seem logical therefore to assume that very few job applicants, or students, would want potential employers or professors viewing their private postings. University professors are now exploring the in-class use of text messaging. Again, the question that arises is, are these useful learning tools or simply distractions being implemented in the name of learning? As universities rush to keep up with these technological trends, it would seem prudent to slow down and ask if the targets of these sites (students) would wish to sign up with a university or departmental networking site and share their personal profiles in a much more public fashion or would they view this as an invasion of their privacy?

### **Social networking sites used by students**

Some social networking sites commonly used by students include:

1. **Facebook:** With Facebook you can browse and join networks, pull contacts from a web-based e-mail account, find friends in several ways, upload pictures and video clips etc. Facebook has recently crossed 500 million users and is the most popular social networking site of the world (Cecconi, 2007).
2. **MySpace:** When you join MySpace, the first step is to create a profile. You then, invite friends to join there and search for your friends already profiled on MySpace (Cecconi, 2007).
3. **Twitter:** Twitter is a very simple service that is rapidly becoming one of the most talked-about social networking service providers. When you have a Twitter account, you can use the service to post and receive messages to a network of contacts, as opposed to send bulk email messages (Cecconi, 2007).
4. **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn is an online social network for business professionals, which is designed specifically for professional networking, to help them find a job, discover sales leads, connect with potential business partners.

Other social networks include; Bebo, Friendster, Ning, Classmates, Tagged, My Year Book etc (Cecconi, 2007).

### **Positive effects of mobile phone usage among students**

According to Morgan (2012) cell phones are a positive tool for keeping new college students connected to their family and friends back home. Cornell University reports that a cell phone is "a must" for keeping students linked to family. Students communicate with

their parents an average of 13 times per week, and the use of a cell phone to talk to family members, unlike social networking, instills a strong feeling of support and security. (Morgan, 2012)

Some of the positive effects of mobile phone usage amongst students include:

**a. Easy Information Access**

Research is a key component of many college classes. One advantage of mobile phones is that they allow students to find information on the go. They can use the phone to complete group activities in class by doing a quick search on a topic. Students can also access university library resources and databases virtually anywhere, getting a start on the research process without having to wait for access to a computer (Morgan, 2012).

**b. Teaching Tools**

In spite of the distractions they pose, a Bellarmine University study concluded that many teachers use mobile phones as teaching tools. Some actually text with students, sending reminders and letting them ask questions. The study found that students appreciate the convenience and speed of this method. Online polls, where students text their responses and the results are projected at the front of the room, are another useful tool. Many English teachers also use text messages to teach literature, letting students write imaginary text message conversations between literary characters (Morgan, 2012).

**c. More Convenience**

Mobile phones are undeniably convenient. Because of mobile phones, students never have to look for a pay phone or wonder about the location of a friend. These ubiquitous communication tools allow students to reach their peers and their parents instantly (Morgan, 2012).

**Adverse effects of mobile phone usage among students**

Mobile phone offers a lot of advantages but it also has negative aspects. In response to a question about mobile phone addiction, one out of three students said that they felt addicted to their phones. This sense of addiction may be related to dependency and heavy usage (Ling, 2005). In addition, excessive mobile phone usage gives rise to serious social, health and educational hazards as well while a strong correlation has been observed between excessive mobile phone usage and criminal activities such as fighting, theft, use of alcohol and narcotics (Ling, 2005).

Tindell & Bohlander (2011) enumerate some of the adverse effects of mobile phone usage amongst students as follows:

**a. Classroom Distraction**

In college classrooms, mobile phones can become a serious distraction that interferes with learning. According to a University of New Hampshire study, college students check their phones between one and five times during class. In addition, reports show that mobile

phone usage during class affects students' grades and distracts classmates from learning. Even the attentive student misses out when his classmates fiddle with their mobile phones. (Tindell & Bohlander, 2011)

**b. Reduced Cognitive Ability**

A mobile phone offers numerous conveniences, including easy access to calculators, dictionaries and other tools. However, mobile phones do take a toll on students' cognitive thinking abilities. Attention spans have shortened so dramatically that many college students struggle to read anything longer than a social network posting. In addition, becoming dependent on the phone as a quick fix for information can keep them from developing the ability to "think on their feet" in work situations (Tindell & Bohlander, 2011).

**c. Cheating**

Many mobile phone users have turned the devices to a cheat machines. Students no long bother exploring creatively, the Internet facilities they have but use it to devalue themselves by cheating. Many students nowadays see visiting the library, reading a text book, asking relevant and meaningful questions about a concept as a gross waste of time and energy. They never consider that even the very facility (GSM) they are exploring is a product of hardwork and research. Contrary to this, many students use their phones to download documents from the Internet, paste it into a word-processing programme without making any input apart from replacing their names with that of the original author and submit same to their lecturers. (Tindell & Bohlander, 2011).

**d. Cyber Bullying**

Mobile phones, particularly models that allow access to social-networking, email and other applications, are sometimes used for cyber bullying. Mobile phones allow bullies to send unpleasant messages all day long, disrupting their educational progress as well as that of the recipients of such messages (Tindell & Bohlander, 2011).

**e. Health Hazards**

As known to many, it has been proven that talking on a mobile phone for as little as 500 to 1000 minutes per month can increase the probability of brain cancer. Not only that, it can also lead to difficulty in sleep, difficulty in concentration, fatigue, headache and infertility. There are also chances of Alzheimer's disease, leukemia, ear effects and blurring of vision among regular mobile phone users. Intense use of mobile phones may cause harm to the users' health including his/her other psychological wellbeing (Tindell & Bohlander, 2011).

**f. Psychological Disorder**

Studies from different countries such as Thailand, Norway, have found that students who are pre-occupied with mobile phone tend to experience psychological disorders. They are usually prone to having a higher risk of developing cornucopia or other psychological disorders including mania, paranoia, aggressive tendencies and anti-social behaviors (Lenhart, 2009).

**g. Poor Writing Skills:**

According to Lami (2011), slang terms and text-speak such as IDK (I don't know), LOL (Laughing out loud), SMH (Shaking my head), BTW (By the way), TTYL (Talk to you later) have become a common sight on students assignments, befuddling educators who are unsure of how to fix the growing problem. There has also been a dramatic decline in the writing abilities of students due to tweeting, facebooking and texting. They do not capitalize words or use punctuation marks anymore; any word longer than one syllable is now abbreviated to one word.

**h. Eating Disorders**

Social media networking tends to make individuals feel bad about themselves. A survey conducted on 600 Facebook users at Sheppard Pratt Centre revealed that more than half of students stated that seeing pictures of themselves and others on the social networks sites makes them more conscious of their own body and weight (John, 2010). The study specifically found that 32% of respondents feel sad when comparing photos of themselves to pictures of their friends, while 44% stated that they wished they had the same body or weight as their friends when looking at photos on Facebook. This disorder is common to both the male and female respectively (John, 2010).

**i. Addiction**

According to John (2010), a study conducted at Cyber Psychology Behavior and Social Networking Journal revealed that individuals that spend less time socializing on Facebook and spent more time with real friends were less likely to be unhappy. Another study conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics found that individuals especially teenagers can develop Facebook depression when being overwhelmed with positive status, updates and photos of happy friends (John, 2010). In addition, the youngsters tend to ignore safety precautions and use mobile phones while driving or crossing the road, activities that put them at serious risks. In conclusion, mobile phone has become a gadget of the moment on which most of our students commit their valuable learning time.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Global System of Mobile Communication introduced in Nigeria in 2001 is used by students to communicate with their course mates, friends, lecturers and family relatives. Family matters, finance and academic matters constitute the topic/subject of mobile communication for a majority of the students. However, during examinations students who are not separated from their mobile phones use them to answer examination questions just by keying in the problem into the browser and carelessly copying the result on answer booklets.

The evolution of GSM in Nigeria has no doubt had a positive effect on the political and socio-economic growth of the Nigerian society. Students have also tapped on the benefits



of the GSM evolution. However, it is here recommended that university authorities in Nigeria should take a more active role in the effort to reduce the adverse effects of mobile phone usage amongst students from the angle of examination malpractices. The use of mobile phones by students during lecture hours should be prohibited by university managements to enable students to be more focused on their academic learning. Students should switch off their phones or put them on silent mode while receiving lectures. It is also recommended that students should dedicate much of their mobile phone usage time to research and academic activities. In other words they should visit websites that pertain to areas of their academics, as against engaging in social networking and ping.

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