KIWANJA.NET
MINDFUL SOCIAL CHANGE

MOBILE DATABASE · ARTICLE

MOBILE CULTURE

Author / organisation	TMCNet
Year recorded	2007
Region	Africa · Ghana
Category	Other
Original source	tmcnet.com
Archive page	kiwanja.net/mobile-database/mobile-culture/

This document is part of the kiwanja.net Mobile Database, an archive of more than 700 articles, reports and projects on mobile technology for development, collected between 2003 and 2010. It is reproduced here for reference; the original author's rights are retained.

Explore more. Browse the full archive at kiwanja.net/mobile-database.
Looking for support with your own social change work? See kiwanja.net/work-with-me.
Ken Banks offers coaching, mentoring and strategy support.

[June 08, 2007]

Have Mobile Phones Become Part of Culture?

(Ghanaian Chronicle Via Thomson Dialog NewsEdge) THE REIGN of the mobile phone continues to grow considerably stronger in Sub Saharan Africa. According to the GSM Association, only 10% of the population had network coverage in 1999 whereas now 65% are covered and this is set to increase to 85% by 2010.

An example of one of the initiatives that will promote the use of phones and enhance the economy is a software company TradeNet which is based in Accra.

The scheme will enable buyers and sellers of agricultural products across West Africa to receive business information via text message so that sales can take place over the phone. Mobiles are set to ensure a huge rise in business ventures throughout West Africa and improve communication within society.

However, whilst I appreciate and encourage the economic and social benefits of this piece of technology I ask one question: Have mobile phones become part of Ghanaian culture?

The reason I ask is because I find that wherever I go in Accra, I hear a chorus of ring tones and one-sided conversations echoing around me.

The enormous Areeba building in Osu dominates the immediate surroundings, making it something of a landmark and credit vendors line the streets making it impossible to ever be without the opportunity to top up your phone.

People constantly check their screens to see if they have any text messages and are always furiously tapping at the key pad to respond to some irrelevancy. The human body is evolving with one arm raised to the ear and the head tilted slightly to one side.

These days it seems the person is not complete without this one essential item in their hand. The phone has incorporated itself into society making people reliant on it. I only wonder whether this form of communication will have any alienating effects on Ghanaian communities.

Africa has proven to be the fastest growing market for mobile phones in the world and Ghana is in the middle of a technological movement that will revolutionize communications in the country and across the world.

Whilst the benefits of improving communication systems are without a doubt worth it, there are social implications that I have seen occur in my own

society back in England that should be avoided.

For instance, the mobile has a curious power to draw someone away from a conversation they are having in person with a close friend by simply sounding its alarm.

As soon as that ring tone goes off, people will disrupt the social environment by rummaging around in their bag or pocket trying to frantically find their mobile as if it's a bomb that can only be diffused by answering it. Thus the person they were talking to face to face is interrupted and ignored.

Sometimes the phone can cause issues of miscommunication and jeopardize the transmission of the correct message.

For example, I do not use my phone very frequently nor do I check it regularly. The other day I glanced at my screen and noticed that I had an excess of twenty missed calls from a man who I had given my number to.

When I bumped into him a week later and tried to explain to him that I did not like to use my phone as my sole method of contact he informed me that we were now enemies because I had neglected his calls.

He judged me because I personally choose not to be permanently attached to my mobile twenty-four hours a day and would rather speak to someone in person. I do not find this an example of good communication.

One question I always ask myself having lived through the frenzy of mobile phone technology in Britain is what did we do before to communicate? I received my first phone in England in 2000.

Suddenly my methods of staying in contact and arranging my life became dependent on my new Nokia. Instead of setting a meeting place prior to my departure I now would just say "ring you when I get there".

It was only until I lost my phone that I realised how reliant I had become on this new piece of technology. I had forgotten how to survive without it.

Looking back at past generations you wonder whether all this constant contact via the phone is really necessary. In pre-mobile days people did not tell everyone of their every move and they had the beauty of being able to relax without interruption from garish ring tones.

These days, as I experienced from my encounter with my serial caller, people panic or take it personally if you don't want to be contacted or located.

Particularly in England we have become lazy in making arrangements and the phone has altered the way we stay in contact with our friends and family.

Before we might have gone round to see a friend and pass on a message whereas now we just make a quick call or even more impersonally, send a text.

Other methods of communication seem to have been neglected and people are using their phones to do everything. Good phone use to me seems to be

having the ability to gauge what method of communication to apply to a variety of situations.

As the use of mobile phones increase in Ghana it is important that people do not become preoccupied by the handset itself as opposed to the purpose of good communication.

Distributed by AllAfrica Global Media. (allafrica.com)

Copyright 2007 Ghanaian Chronicle, Distributed by AllAfrica Global Media , Source: The Financial Times Limited

[Back To TMCnet.com's Homepage]

Copyright 2007 Technology Marketing Corporation (TMC) - All rights reserved