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The medium is the mobile phone

In an online survey entitled 'Anytime Anyplace', Lodestar Universal has come up with some very interesting findings on mobile usage across 10,000 'connected world' respondents in the age group of 16-to-54 years. The survey targeted markets including the US, Brazil, Russia, Pakistan, India, China and Japan. It throws light on trends in mobile usage across developed and developing markets.

The rapidly expanding popularity of portable devices such as digital cameras, iPods and MP3 players is confirmed through the findings of the report. Of the total universe of 690 million, 75 per cent owns a digital camera. The trend towards multiple device ownership is also evident, with 25 per cent of the total respondents owning five or more portable devices. This has far-reaching implications; it throws light on multiple platforms of advertising available for the marketer.

As far as 3G – the most awaited emerging technology – is concerned, the optimism is for real. Forty-three per cent of the respondents are keen to obtain a 3G phone in the future. Regarding mobile search and m-commerce, 49 per cent of the respondents in Japan have used the mobile search while Greece, China and UK emerge as the markets with above average usage. In India, Airtel has tied up with Google for the service.

Similarly, for m-commerce, in electronic payment via mobile phone, Japan shows the maximum adoption with 81 per cent of the respondents claiming to use the service. The next best promising market for m-commerce is South Korea, with a far lesser adoption of 19 per cent.

Findings on digital music point to some disturbing trends. Thirty-six per cent of the respondents have downloaded music via P2P (peer to peer) versus only 18 per cent who have actually paid for digital music. Only in the US and South Korea, the use of P2P sites to obtain music is lower than the percentage of people who actually pay for digital music.

This means that pirated music is still satisfying a majority of consumers in all other markets.

Tushar Shah, head, product management & marketing communications, mobile2win, a mobile VAS player in India, agrees that the music scenario is grim. "Ironically, while the networks have contributed to a significant increase in the consumption of music, they have also contributed to an increase in piracy, which has reduced music industry revenues. And yet we have seen the big success of digital music stores such as iTunes, which generate significant revenues already. We are also seeing a lot of action to protect copyright. Music companies are also adapting by trying out new ways of selling music – new price points, subscriptions and the like."

In many markets, mobile phone operators are evolving from voice to data services. In Japan, the report reveals, just 24 per cent of mobile usage is phone calls, compared to 65 per cent in the US. Manoj Dawane, CEO, People Infocom, the wireless division of People Group, which owns Mauj Telecom, a mobile value added service player, says, "Going by the current trends, voice will soon be a commodity service and we can see this reflecting in the 10 paise per minute for calls within the same network. Reliance has already started an unlimited Rs 400 pack per month. Data services are picking up fast with GPRS-based applications being launched frequently. Travel portals, real-estate applications, stock broking applications are coming in fast and the acceptance is high."

Shah of mobile2win shares the optimism: "About 10 per cent of telecom revenues are from data usage and the rest from voice. Most of the 10 per cent is from SMS and not from internet use. This will increasingly change over the coming few years."

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