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Non-Literate Mobile Phone Communication

Ahmedabad Bangalore China communication Hangzhou illiteracy
India Kathmandu literacy mobile phone Mumbai Nepal *all tags...*



To communicate with someone outside your immediate proximity requires at least 4 things: something to communicate; tools to create what you want to communicate; an infrastructure to carry the communication; and a means of identifying with whom to communicate. There are an estimated [799 million non-literate peoples](#) world wide. **If you can't read and write how do you manage your contacts?**

This simple observation was the starting point to conduct a series of (ongoing) exploratory research studies in India, China and Nepal - our aim to understand the communication needs of non-literate users. For mobile phone manufacturers who wish to address these needs: How does the inability to read and write affect the ability of mobile phone users to make effective use of mobile phones? Making and receiving calls? Creating and managing contact information? Text messaging? Using time management features? How can we design communication tools that draw on the knowledge and experiences that these users do have?

If your interest is piqued then you might enjoy the following essay entitled [Understanding Non-Literacy as a](#)

[Barrier to Mobile Phone Communication](#) which explores these issues and proposes a number of possible design solutions. As with a lot of our work the original projects included a fair amount of concept development that is only touched on in this essay.



In the studies we spent time with non-literate users exploring, mapping and understanding the things they used and the tasks they wanted to achieve - from using washing machines to weighing scales to running motorbikes to re-tuning TVs to paying for things. How did they interact with objects with textual and numeric interfaces? What problems did they encounter? What strategies did they adopt to overcome these problems? Were these strategies successful? If not, why not? And how can we bring the knowledge from this research and apply it to create communication devices that are more in tune with our non-literate users?

Researching non-literate communication practices has been rewarding: it touches on a very basic human desire - to communicate across time and space; the potential

payback for the research is obvious and non-trivial; and the study participants, collaboration partners and environments in which the research took place have been quite simply inspiring.



Photos taken from street research in Mumbai, Bangalore, 2004 & 2005.

Writing from Tokyo | November 20, 2005 | [Permalink](#)

Comments

This would be much more interesting if your command of the English language was better... =(

Posted by: [Seriously](#) at November 10, 2006 3:15 PM