



MOBILE PHONES AND THEIR LIVELIHOOD JOURNEY: THE MODERN COMMUNICATION VEHICLE

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ABSTRACT

Mobile phones are the perfect way to stay connected with others. These devices provide the users with a sense of security. This study aimed to determine how and why market vendors use the mobile phone and its effects on their livelihood. A combination of qualitative and

quantitative research approaches was used in the study. A case study design using the thematic analysis was used to identify the plight of the market vendor in using the mobile phone in their livelihood a case of the Calape, Bohol. Data were gathered through in-depth interview. All the participants identified owned a mobile phone. Their ages ranged from 18-66 with most of the respondents in the middle age bracket (22-45). Participants have been vendors for four months to a maximum of 40 years. More than half had been in the business for 1 to 10 years. With regard to the type of business, 15 vendors were from the vegetables and root crops section, five from ready-to-wear clothes and dry goods, and 8 from the meat section. Twelve respondents each belong to sections; rice and corn, dressed chicken, dried fish and fish, cafeteria and sari-sari store. For the whole motivation scale, results suggest that generally participants are really motivated to use the mobile phone for all but one of the respondents had high motivation. As for the four subscales, results revealed that respondents had high motivation on each: sociability, reassurance, instrumentality and communication facilitation. The uses of mobile phones reflected from respondents' responses could be grouped into four themes. These are using the mobile phone for business functions, for communication with family and friends, emergency purposes and lastly, for other functions such as games, calculator and alarm clock. In terms of empowerment, respondents underscored the fact that the mobile phone allowed them to have greater participation in their

organization's activities. Through the mobile phone, vendors describe being able to learn about family emergencies such as accident or death. Lastly, they value the mobile phone because it lets them ask for more information and call for help in case of emergencies.

KEYWORDS: Mobile phones, market vendors, livelihood.

INTRODUCTION

People have always needed to communicate with each other for many reasons: to spread news, to warn of dangers, to pass on information or to ask for help (The Communications Revolution, 1999). People communicate in order to share and receive information on many issues, to get support or assistance, to exchange information with family and friends and also to coordinate business activities.

The mobile phone has become a symbol of the use of new information and communication technologies (or ICTs) in the developing world. The report by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU, 2004) stated that in the Philippines, there were less than half a million mobile subscribers in 1996. This number sharply increased to six million in 2000, and then to nearly 33 million in 2004. This shows that the Philippines has indeed experienced an extremely rapid mobile phone adoption in the last decade.

The utility of a mobile phone in many developing countries extends past its functionality as a personal communication device, into a source of economic growth potential, social networking, and heightened political awareness (Sinha, 2005).

With the use of phones, farmers in Punjab, India already have a way to know the current and actual prices of commodities from the different markets of Punjab. They can pick and choose the best market to sell their products by simply dialing their mobile phones. A voice-based, value-added service called "*Mandi Bhav*", or "market rate" has been launched by a telecom solutions provider in Punjab which allow subscribers to get rates of products like vegetables, fruits, food grains, pulses, fiber crops and spices from wholesale markets across the state (Digital Opportunity Channel, 2009). Aside from being used to coordinate agricultural prices or transfer money, mobile phones also have a political impact. Innovative non-governmental organizations including the National Democratic Institute in the United States have pioneered the use of mobile phones in the process of election monitoring and the first recorded example

of the exclusive use of a mass-coordinated mobile phone network to monitor an election occurred in Montenegro in 2006 (The International Herald Tribune, 2008).

In the Philippines, the mobile phone had its remarkable impact during EDSA 2. Through massive dissemination of information via text messaging, tens of thousands of Filipinos staged demonstrations in the streets calling for then President Estrada's resignation, which eventually led to his deposition (Chun & Keenan, 2006).

Mobile phones also help people in developing countries to be more proactive and more aware in relation to danger, by providing information about future events that can cause damage if certain measures are not taken. In the case of the Tanzanian fishermen, mobile phones not only empowered them or provided them with increased knowledge about market opportunities but more importantly, also gave them the chance to take steps to decrease the risks that they are exposed to, such as emergencies out at sea (Myhr & Nordström, 2006).

Seeing the potential for transforming individuals' and communities' capacity for self-empowerment and economic growth through information communication technologies (ICTs), a number of development agencies like the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programmed have given emphasis on ICT's - including mobile phones - in their development strategies (Souter et al., 2005). More research regarding the impact of mobile phones on economic growth and their role in the communities and among individuals is needed because strong evidence is very important in the development of policies. Thus, with this study, results can contribute to understanding ICTs and development and would facilitate in strengthening existing programs on mobile phones to reach the vulnerable farmers, vendors and the poor. Results of this study reveal evidence that would give support in making policies and firm up existing ones. In addition, this study sheds light on whether expensive investments in telecommunications are effective as well as help identify the ways that mobile phones could contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The rapid increase of mobile phone usage has reached, and in some cases eventually helped farmers in improving the production and marketing of agricultural products. As revealed by this study, mobile phones also helped small business owners such as market vendors - as it did the farmers. Vendors use it for different purposes and its effects on the livelihood of market vendors were determined in terms of opportunity, empowerment and vulnerability to

risk. This study aims to determine how and why market vendors use the mobile phone and its effects on their livelihood with the following aspects socio-demographic profile, ascertain their motivations for using these mobile phones; determine respondents' use of mobile phones in their livelihood; and find out the effects of using mobile phones on respondents' livelihood in terms of opportunity, empowerment and protection from risk.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study is a qualitative research design particularly case study research design to determine the plight of market vendors in Calape, Bohol in using the mobile phones. In-depth interviews were made during the conduct of the study. The interview involved a comprehensive inquiry and detailed conversation of the motivations for and use of mobile phones and livelihood of each market vendor. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches was used in the study. The quantitative approach included the use of statistical tools to determine market vendors' socio-demographic profile as well as their motivations for using the mobile phone. The qualitative approach, on the other hand, involved the use of thematic analysis on the vendors' responses on the use and perceived effects of mobile phones on their livelihood in terms of opportunity, empowerment and protection from risk.

Stratified random sampling of sellers based on the section in the market where they belong was used. In the market, the sections were the following: vegetable and root crops, rice and corn, dressed chicken, dried fish, fish and meat sections, RTW and dry goods, cafeteria, sari-sari stores, agrivet supply, beauty and barber shop, cell shop, pharmacy, and tailoring and dress shop. The names of registered market vendors were grouped in terms of the category of goods sold. In this study, the sections chosen were: vegetable and root crops section, rice and corn, dressed chicken, dried fish, fish, meat section, RTW and dry goods, cafeteria, and sari-sari store section.

Using the online research randomizer form developed by the Social Psychology Network, 40 participants were selected and interviewed in-depth. Since there were relatively more vendors from the vegetable and root crops section, 8 vendors were interviewed. Five were taken from the RTW and dry goods section, four vendors from the meat section and three vendors each for the other categories.

Since the aim of this study is an analytical generalization rather than a statistical one, the relatively low number of respondents is reasonable. According to Normann (1970, as cited by Mhyr and Nordstrom, 2006), it is possible to generalize findings from a low number of observations because what matters is the comprehensiveness of the measures. Furthermore, participants from the different sections were chosen to get a comprehensive representation of the broad variety of respondents.

The Research Instrument

An interview schedule in English was constructed and translated into Cebuano for better understanding by the respondents. Interview questions leading in to larger areas of interest in relation to mobile phone use and livelihood and respondents' socio-demographic profile were prepared to serve as a guide in the interview.

Part I of the interview schedule inquired about the socio-demographic profile of participants. Part II assessed respondents' mobile phone usage. Part III questions were about the motivations or the benefits that the market vendors seek from using the mobile phones. The last part determined the effects of the use of mobile phone on the vendors' livelihoods especially in terms of empowerment, opportunity and protection from risk.

Pretesting of the instrument. Prior to the conduct of the study, the interview schedule was pretested to five vendors from another town market since they had similar characteristics as the target respondents. The aim of the pretest was to find out whether the questions were clear enough and would elicit the needed responses as well as ensure that the sequence of question items were logical. Results of the pretest were then used for the improvement of the interview schedule before the actual interview. Results of the pretest revealed that some questions, particularly on the motivation statements, impeded a smooth and dynamic conversation. Because of this, the order of the questions were re-arranged. Inquiries regarding the socio-demographic profile of respondents, which were originally in the last part of the interview schedule, were also moved to the first part. Moreover, questions that seemed redundant to the respondents but were actually meant to measure different dimensions of the same concept were re-stated to establish rapport with the respondent and to facilitate a smooth and dynamic conversation.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through individual in-depth interviews by the interviewer together with two assistants. Student research assistant who took down important notes with a tape recorder aided in the conduct of the interviews. Before every interview, respondents were always asked if they would agree to record the interview and all did. Preliminary conversations before and after the official interview session were also noted as these helped in clarifying and validating any vague responses that emerged in the results.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, classified, tabulated and analyzed in accordance with the objectives of the study. Data on respondents' socio-demographic profile, usefulness and motivations were analyzed using descriptive statistics and then presented in tabular. After all the interviews were accomplished, the notes and the recorded interviews were transcribed. The transcribed conversations regarding the use of mobile phones and its effects on the livelihood of vendors were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings were ordered, categorized and labeled in conformity with the livelihood constructs framework namely, empowerment, opportunity and protection from risk. Data were grouped into the different thematic categories which were then described qualitatively. The statements used to illustrate the three categories of livelihood effects are mostly direct quotes from the respondents. These direct quotes, which were in the Cebuano dialect were translated for clarity. Both the Cebuano and English versions of the quotes are presented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents Profile

This study involved 40 market vendors all of whom owned a mobile phone. More than half (28) were female and twelve of them were male. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 66 with a mean of 38 ($SD=13$). Results showed that most (28) of the respondents belonged to the middle age bracket, seven of them fell under the old group. Others were young and only one was a senior citizen.

More than three-fourths (32) were already married, seven were single and one respondent was a widow. With regards to their educational attainment, all of them have attended formal schooling; twenty-eight reached the college level, four were in high school level, while eight only reached elementary level.

When asked about the distance of the vendors' home from the market, their main workplace, almost all (30) reported that they live within the población of Calape, Bohol, while seven in barangays within Calape and three outside Calape.

Seventeen of the participants reported that they were the main providers of their families; thirteen shared the expenses with their spouses, while ten said that they did not have any dependents at all. There were also respondents who were married couples and worked together in their business. The wives would do the selling while their husbands were the ones who would look for the commodities to sell, such as fish or pigs to be slaughtered for meat. A participant, whose primary source of income was selling fish, expressed that her family would not have anything to eat if she would not be able to sell fish because it is their main livelihood. Another said that eating three times a day and being able to buy the basic needs for her family was already enough for her. A number of respondents also asserted that although vending was their only source of income, they were still able to send their children to school and had them finish studies. In addition, a participant had said that it is much better these days for both couples to have work for she has experienced working alone, and though her job was stable, they still could not provide for their expenses sometimes. As vendors, most of them have stated that to communicate well with customers, they have to wear big smiles on their faces and treat their buyers very well even if they were already angry and tired.

Respondents have been vendors for four months to a maximum of 40 years ($M=8.12$ $SD=9.28$). Seven respondents had been selling in the market for less than a year. More than half (18) had been in the business for 1 to 10 years, seven had been selling for 11-20 years and fifteen had been vendors for 21-30 years. None of the respondent had been selling for more than 30 years.

A little more than a fifth (8) belonged to the vegetables and root crops section, ten of the respondents were selling ready-to-wear clothes and dry goods, and fifteen sold meats. Seven respondents each belong to the rice and corn section, dressed chicken, dried fish and fish, and cafeteria or *sari-sari* store section.

Motivation for Using Mobile Phones

Motivations are defined as the expressed desires for gratification in a given class of situations and seen as originating in the person's basic needs, in his/her structural background and in the

current social situation (McLeod and Becker, 1981). Twenty motivation statements adopted from Wei (2006) were used to measure vendors' motivations for using the mobile phone. These statements were categorized into Wei's four categories: sociability, reassurance, instrumentality and communication facilitation.

The 20 motivation statements were tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. Results showed that the motivation scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83. Further analysis showed the subscales on sociability, reassurance, instrumentality and communication facilitation. Reassurance and instrumentality got a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74 and 0.79, which, according to Nunnally (1978), are passable. Sociability and communication facilitation had Cronbach's alpha of 0.68 and 0.67, respectively.

Reassurance. The third set of motivation statements were clustered according to its reassurance ability. This category included statements reflecting respondent's feeling of safety in times of emergencies. This includes statements of how the mobile phone protects them from risk, giving them a sense of security and allowing parents to carry out family responsibilities while at work.

Instrumentality. Seven motivational statements made up the instrumentality scale. The motivation statements included items relating to the use of mobile phone for business transactions, in obtaining information about products, in making appointments and in managing time effectively.

The highest possible score for this category was 40 and the lowest 1. Scores were classified into low (1-13), moderate (14-26) and high (27-40). Participants scores ranged from 27 to 39 with a mean of 33.12 ($SD=4.42$). Results showed that 37 participants had high motivation and 3 participants had a moderate motivation of using the mobile for instrumentality.

Results also showed that the motivational statements under instrumentality elicited positive responses from the respondents. This affirms how the mobile phone helped users seek product information and organize their lives.

For this set, majority (21) of the respondents strongly agreed that mobile phone is used to conduct business transactions. Most (18) of the respondents agreed that mobile phone helps them seek information about products and services while 9 respondents strongly agreed with the statement. A total of 31 participants agreed (24) and strongly agreed (7) that mobile

phone is used to schedule or cancel appointments. On the other hand, a total of 32 participants agreed (19) and strongly agreed (13) that the use of mobile phone to order things motivates them to use the device. A little over half of the participants strongly agreed that mobile phone allows them to talk about business. Twenty-four agreed that the mobile phone helps them manage time effectively. Lastly, all the respondents agreed (20) and strongly agreed (15) that the mobile phone enables them to tell others that they will be late for meetings and other appointments.

Communication Facilitation. This category shows the responses of the participants to the statements regarding mobile phone use for communication facilitation. Included in this section are six motivational items that made up the last motivation category.

In this set of motivation statements, the highest possible score was 30 and the lowest 1. Scores were categorized into low (1-10), moderate (11-20) and high (21-30). Respondents' scores ranged from 13 to 30 with a mean of 24.86 ($SD= 3.12$). All but one of the participants had high motivation for using the mobile phone to fulfill their need for communication facilitation.

Based on the results, participants underscore the helpfulness of mobile phone in getting news and information, anywhere, anytime and in being able to do more than one thing at the same time.

Respondents' Use of the Mobile Phone

All of the participants paid for their mobile phone use through prepaid arrangements. Participants had been using a mobile phone from a couple months to 15 years ($M=6.06$, $SD=4.27$), with the main part of the participants ownership ranging between 1 to 5 years. No more than two mobile phones were owned by five participants while the rest (30) possessed only one phone.

Participants use the mobile phone to communicate with their family (26), dealers and suppliers (23), customers (20), friends (14), relatives (10), fellow vendors (5), boss or stall owner (4), text mates (2) and boyfriends (2). When asked about the frequency of their mobile phone communication with the aforementioned people, more than half (22) reported communicating only when necessary. Nine respondents said they communicated with them always and the remaining nine said they seldom did.

To ascertain the extent to which participants use the mobile phone, they were asked the number of messages sent and received, number of calls they made and received, the average duration of the calls, and the amount they spent on load per week.

Using mobile phones for business purposes. The first theme, using the mobile phone for business purposes, incorporates different components under it. These include keeping in contact with suppliers, customers, boss and co-workers. Furthermore, vendors get updates and inquire about market information and prices as well as keep tabs on accounts, either from money borrowers and lenders.

Market vendors use mobile phones to contact their suppliers when they run out of stock, want to order more goods or products and also if they have problems with their inventory or when they think that the delivery was wrong. In obtaining updates about prices and other market information, mobile phones are also being used by the vendors. They would ask either their co-workers or their suppliers about the recent changes in the prices of stocks. Another use of mobile phone in market vendors' business is in communicating with customers. Through their phone, respondents would inform their customers about their newly arrived stocks. By texting and calling, they can also ask what their customers' orders are and what products they want. In turn, because their consumers already have their numbers, the phone makes it easier for the customer to reserve orders. For respondents who were not owners but salespersons at the stall, the mobile phone serves as a device that enables them to communicate with their boss for errands and reminders like in the case of a salesman in the rice and corn section who usually takes orders from his boss. Communication with other market vendors is also necessary for them to get updates and be informed about events when they are not in the market. Furthermore, the mobile phone was considered useful when requesting for favors from co-workers in the delivery of goods. This is expressed in the following statements of the vendors: Respondents also reported that they use their phones to get updates and market information and prices as well as to keep track of their accounts, either from money lenders or their debtors. A number of participants have unsettled accounts and the mobile phone proved to be helpful in checking these finances. With just a text, they are able to ask for money whenever they have financial problems or when asking for payment from those who borrowed money from them.

Using the mobile to communicate with family, relatives and friends. All participants used their mobile phones mainly to have easy access and constant contact with their family. This is illustrated in the statement by a vendor who mainly used her mobile phone as a link to her family.

Using the mobile phone for emergency purposes. As what most of the respondents stated, mobile phones are highly valued when it comes to requesting assistance during emergencies. There were participants who stated how they used the mobile phone in checking their deliveries during bad weather conditions especially those stocks transported by boat. Several of the participants also pointed out the use of their mobile phones when faced with risks and danger. It has given them the possibility to connect and ask for help during hard situations. This is evident for example in the case of some vendors who could send message or call help upon encountering accidents as well as to those who were seeking for support in the form of monetary funds during emergency situations.

Using the mobile phone for other functions. A vendor was seen playing games on his mobile phone before he was interviewed. This shows that the mobile phone is also used as a tool to relax and pass the time. Another reason that a respondent articulated was that the mobile phone allows her to stay awake because of its engaging games. Aside from games, participants also identified using other functions such as the alarm clock and calculator.

Perceived Effects of Mobile Phone Use on Vendors' Livelihood

Data on the perceived effects of mobile phones on the livelihood of market vendors was taken from respondents' interview records that were subjected to thematic analysis to determine the various effects of mobile phone use in terms of opportunity, empowerment and protection from risk. Other effects that were expressed by the respondents but could not be categorized under the three identified themes were included in the other effects category.

In terms of mobile phone use and opportunity, responses revealed four themes that could be classified under opportunity. These themes are that mobile phones: (1) provide access to customers; (2) provide access to suppliers and other resources; (3) allow fast transactions; and (4) save money.

When it comes to mobile phone use and empowerment, four themes were also revealed by the responses. These are that mobile phones allow them to: (1) have greater participation in

organization activities; (2) have an influence on others' decisions and actions; (3) have greater control over the business; and (4) gain confidence.

The last livelihood indicator, protection from risk, has drawn out the following themes from the vendors' responses. The mobile phone has: (1) given them the ability to share and receive warnings about personal safety, (2) enabled them to send and receive warnings related to business, (3) kept them updated about warnings, accidents and news related to family and social networks and lastly (4) enabled them to ask for information and call for help in case of emergencies.

Mobile phone use and opportunity. The first livelihood indicator, opportunity, has been defined as respondents' access to business transactions, market sources and other resources. Mobile phones improved opportunities for business by giving market vendors more access to their customers, suppliers of stocks and other resources like their co-vendors. Mobile phones also aided fast business transactions and helped them save money.

CONCLUSION

Mobile phones have affected the way vendors manage their business. With the used of mobile phones, vendors are provided with fast business transactions and immediate access to resources thereby giving them access to more opportunities.

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