

INFLUENCE OF MOBILE PHONES ON AN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IN BAMBAN, TARLAC, PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

One of the main media of communication in the society today is the mobile phone. It has conquered all fields including news, radio and television. It has also conquered the Aetas, an indigenous group in the Philippines. This study determined the perceived influence of mobile phones on the culture of Aetas in Bamban, Tarlac. It used the quantitative method of research. The researchers administered the survey questionnaire among 80 randomly selected Aetas in Bamban, Tarlac. Data gathered were analyzed using frequency, percentage and weighted mean. Analysis of Variance and T-test were used to determine the significant difference in the influence when grouped by demographic profile of the respondents. Based on the results, most of the respondents use mobile phones and most of them were male. Majority of the respondents use their mobile phones every day and the primary function of mobile phones to them is for texting and calling. Results also revealed that mobile phones influence the respondents' habits, relation to work, family coordination and family safety. The study concludes that there is significant difference between the perception of the respondents and their demographic profile.

Key words: *Aetas, mobile phones, influence, habits, family*

INTRODUCTION

Mobile phones have been one of the main media of communication in the society today. It conquered all the fields like news, radio and television. People tend to be exposed to these media in their everyday lives. Almost everybody is now dependent on the convenient sources of information and entertainment.

The article titled “History of Mobile Phones” states that most phones today rely on 3G or third-generation mobile technology. Mobile telephony developed in leaps and bounds over the next decade, particularly with the arrival of handover technology. This allowed users to keep their connections as they traveled between base stations – so as a user walked from one mobile phone mast to another, the connection and conversation would not drop or be interrupted. The birth of the Second Generation (2G) mobile phones was in Finland in 1993. It was also the year that the first SMS text messages were sent and that data services began to appear on mobile phones. Mobiles that are being used today are 3G mobiles, or Third Generation mobiles. Third-generation mobile technology or 3G was launched in 2001 and allowed operators to offer a huge range of advanced services such as video calling and HSPA data transmission.

According to Mona (2008), cell phones did not become as common or popular until the 1990s, but they have been a work in progress for decades. Now, in addition to making calls and sending text messages, one can take pictures, listen to music, go online, send files, browse the Internet and use different kinds of applications. One can find out who owns a phone number, look numbers up, and communicate more freely with others. The cell phone has been one of the most important innovations of the past century and will undoubtedly continue to change the way that people communicate with each other in numerous ways.

According to Jones (2012) stated that when one see people with their cell phones walking down the street or sitting at a restaurant, they are typically not making a phone call or just sending messages. Mobile phones have become a mulitfunctional device. Extra features included a clock, calculator, calendar, alarm features, basic games, camera, and Internet

browsing and almost unlimited variety of applications if one is using apple or android devices.

On the other hand, the article titled “History of Mobile Phones” stated that with the widespread adoption of mobile phone across the world, mobile phone has become a necessity instead of a want, to a point where everybody in the family must own one. According to a research from the International Telecommunication Union (May 2014), there are nearly 7 billion mobile subscriptions worldwide, this is equivalent to 95.5 percent of the world population. Mobile phones are universally diffused that use is unaffected by income levels and occupation.

Moreover, the Telecommunications Overview (2011) stated that nearly every Filipino adult has access to a mobile phone and the mobile network covered almost the entire country. There were 87.3 million mobile phone subscribers in the Philippines at the end of 2011, which gave the country a mobile penetration rate of 92%. Compared to most countries, the Philippines has high access and usage statistics: an average of 101 cellphone subscriptions (both postpaid and prepaid) per 100 people; 96% of total subscriptions were prepaid; and 99% of the country was covered by a mobile-cellular network.

Also, Wirth (2008) stated that with the arrival of third-generation mobile and devices and services, the evolution of mobile communication have reached a new stage: the main issue is no longer the binary question “who uses a mobile telephone?” but the more qualitative and differentiated concern of “how do people use their mobile telephones?”.

In a study, Rodil (2004) described the living condition of the indigenous people: once the masters of their own lives, now, majority of them are poor and landless. In the old days, many of them lived in the plains. But

as a result of population pressures and resettlement programs from among the majority, they have moved to the forest areas. Now, their forests are being devastated thru logging and housing development and their culture is threatened.

As stated in the study of Lisen et al. in 2012 entitled “The Non-formal Education and Migration of the Aeta, An Indigenous Tribe in the Philippines”, the Aetaa are indigenous people of the Philippines and one of the oldest groups of inhabitants. There were approximately 31,000 Aetas living on various Philippine islands. The Aetas are included among the so-called *negritos*. The name came from a spanish term negrito, meaning “little black person”.

Also, an article entitled “Who are the Aeta” states that, as people, the Aetas have been known to constantly resist assimilation into mainstream Philippine society. Inspite of this, they have shown remarkable resilience in the face of mounting external pressures and have lived largely unmolested even in times of great socio-political upheaval.

Since the respondents have just acquired mobile phone technology four years ago, there has been no study conducted of how mobile phones are being used and how it has been influencing the Aetas of Bamban, Tarlac.

Ultimately, the goal of the present study was to identify the factors that have most influenced on the indigenous community. In this study, the researchers focused on the intersection of mobile phone technology with the culture of the indigenous community. The researchers believed that the results are interesting and worth reporting and that this area has received very little attention. The study can lead to a better understanding of the influence of mobile phones in the culture of the indigenous communities and

improve ICT investment decisions, implementations and training programs them, and of course a better understanding on the said topic.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, the researchers used Uses and Gratification Theory. In the case of the Aetas, an indigenous group in the Philippines and the respondents of the study, they are not aware about mobile phones before but as the world changes overtime, they are also developing. They will not be forever native. As stated by Portus in her study “Connecting Indigenous Peoples: Mobile Phone Culture among Selected Indigenous People in the Philippines”, Aetas are no stranger in the field of communication, people can see that Aetas can adapt and are adapting in the change brought by the world. They are now using mobile phones though they are indigenous people because it was stated in the theory that media consumers have a free will to decide on how they will use the media and how it will influence them.

When it comes to the field of communication, the Aetas are no strangers but also novices in the subject, the theory explains that there are many reasons for using the media because there are also many media users and consumers simply use the media to satisfy a given need does not seem to fully recognize the power of the media in today’s society.

Conceptual Framework

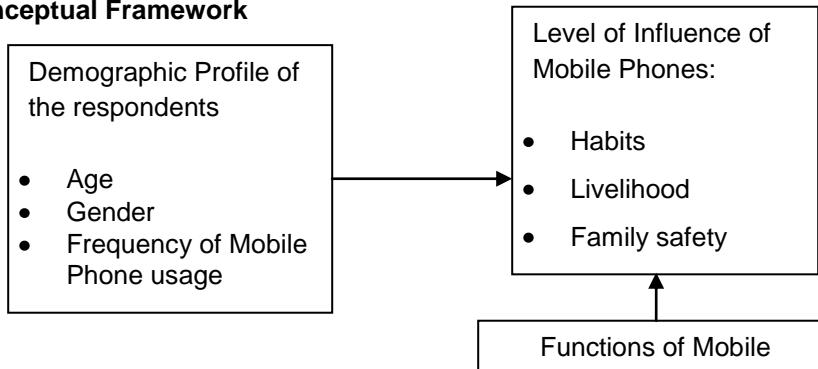


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

From the diagram above, the flow of the variables in the study is observed. The respondents were grouped according to their demographic profile in terms of age and gender in order to determine the significant differences of the influence of mobile phones. The influence and the functions of mobile phones may vary depending on their socio demographic profile in terms of age, gender and frequency of cell phone usage.

Given that the respondents were frequently exposed to mobile phones, their habits or their everyday lives, livelihood or the work they have, family coordination or the relationship in the family and family safety may be influenced accordingly.

The study was conducted and analyzed in accordance to these groupings and who use the mobile phones.

The framework shows that the demographic profile of the respondents is the independent variable while the influence of mobile phones in terms of habit, livelihood, family safety and family coordination and the functions of mobile phones are the dependent variables.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine the perceived influence of mobile phones on the culture of Aetas in Bamban, Tarlac. Specifically, it aimed to:

1. find out the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1 age;
 - 1.2 gender; and,
 - 1.3 frequency of mobile phone usage.
2. find out the functions of mobile phones to them.
3. find out the perceived influence of the mobile phones to the respondents in terms of:
 - 3.1 habits;
 - 3.2 livelihood;
 - 3.3 family coordination; and,
 - 3.4 family safety.
4. determine if the demographic characteristics of the respondents affects how the mobile phone will influence their family safety, habits, livelihood, and family coordination.

METHOD

Locale of the Study

The research locale is at Bamban, Tarlac. Bamban is one of the places where Aetas moved after the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo. Bamban is located at the southernmost part of Tarlac Province. On the north, it is bounded by the municipality of Capas, Tarlac, and on the south, by the

municipality of Mabalacat, Pampanga. The Parua River, popularly known as Bamban River, separates Bamban from Mabalacat. Toward the east lies the municipality of Concepcion, Tarlac. On the western side, the terrain is rugged due to rolling hills and mountains bordering the municipality of Botolan, Zambales (Sicat, 2011).

Participants of the Study

The respondents of this study are the Aetas, one of the indigenous groups in the Philippines. The researchers did a random sampling on choosing the participants of their study. The respondents were asked if they are using mobile phones or not as part of the pre-interview method. This served as the basis of the researchers on who are the users of mobile phones among Aetas.

Data Analysis

The researchers used interview and survey method in gathering data among the Aetas in Bamban, Tarlac.

The researchers also used a survey questionnaire to determine the influence of mobile phones among Aetas. The survey questionnaire includes the socio demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age and gender, the extent of exposure to mobile phones, the functions of mobile phones to them and the influence of mobile phones to them in terms of habits, livelihood, family safety and family coordination.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Below are the results of the gathered data:

Demographic profile of the respondents

The results of the study revealed that forty percent of the mobile phone users belong to the fifteen to twenty five age brackets while the usage of mobile phone was least among the fifty nine to sixty nine age brackets, the results is almost similar to the study of Bittman et al. (2007) on “The Impact of Mobile Phone on Work/Life Balance” where they found out that the lowest mobile phone usage is found among those aged 60 years or more, and majority of users are subscribers and prepaid use is concentrated among those under 25 years.

More than 50% of the mobile phone users are males. According to the report published by the Vodafone Institute for Society and Communications, men workers say that it would be difficult to do their job properly without their mobile while mobile phones enable women to maintain three roles within the house hold; simultaneously being wives, mothers and wage earners.

Functions of mobile phones

On the other hand, in terms of the functions of mobile phones among Aetas, the results show that all of the respondents use their mobile phones for texting and calling since according to the article titled “Definition of Mobile Phone”, mobile phone allows users to make calls and send text messages among other features and it is really the first function of mobile phone. Majority of the Aetas use mobile phone for playing games, listening to radio and music, possibly to ease their boredom. The least used feature of mobile

phones among Aetas is the Internet surfing and sending e-mails since there is no Internet in the area.

Influence of mobile phones

When it comes to influence of mobile phones, results show that majority of the respondents are moderately influenced on the statements that they forget their boredom whenever they use their mobile phone, using their mobile phone becomes their past time and most of them even fall asleep at night with their phones on their hands. Most of them do not use mobile phones while eating and using comfort room.

Also, the Aetas are influenced by mobile phones in terms of relation to work due to the reason that majority of the respondents are highly influenced on the statement “Using my cell phone helps me to become open with my co-workers”, the Aetas also *agreed* that using their cellphone for their work helps them increase their connections.

On the other hand, the Aetas are influenced by mobile phones in terms of family relation because they are moderately influenced on the statements: “Using cell phone makes communication in the family more open, family conflicts are quickly solved with the use of cell phone, my time for my family and other affiliations are influenced by using cell phone, our family conflicts can be avoided or lessened by using cell phones and “There’s a greater sense of unity in the family with the use of cell phones”, mobile phones have altered relationships with family, spouses and close friends. Mobile phones significantly help to maintain physical and psychological health when family members move away from home seeing that the Aetas feel comfortable communicating and maintaining family communication with the use of mobile phones.

In addition to that, mobile phones do influence the way the Aetas view their family safety since they are all moderately influenced on the statements: "My worries for my family are lessened with the use of cell phone, I can immediately know if something bad happened to my family with the use of cell phone, The possibility that my family can be in danger is lessened with the use of cell phone, I'm confident enough that my family is safe with the use of cell phone and I feel at ease when I know that is in good situation through of the use of cell phone."

The results of the study are comparable to the study titled "Impact of Mobile Phone in Daily Life" where it is stated that mobile phones are also known as lifesavers as they can help people in case of emergencies. Mobile phones are comfortable way of communication over a long distance. Along with the obvious convenience and quick access to help in emergencies, mobile phones can be both economical and essential for travellers trying to stay connected.

Aetas' perception when grouped according to demographic profile

The result of the study shows that the perception of the Aetas when they are grouped according to demographic profile ranges from 0.52 – 2.23. It only shows that the influence of the respondents does not vary on their demographic profile. The respondent's influence is made regardless of their gender and age.

On the other hand, since the frequency of use is included in the demographic profile of the respondents, according to the results of the study, Aetas use their mobile phones daily for their habits, family coordination and family safety. Their daily usage of mobile phones does not influence their relation to work. Aetas use their mobile phones when there are calls and messages only for their habits. It is not influential in relation to work, family

coordination and family safety. In terms of their usage of mobile phone when there are calls and messages, it only influences their habits and lastly when the respondents only use their mobile phone when they need to leave their home; it is only influential in their habits and relation to work.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusions

The Aeta's demographic profile was gathered by the researchers. In terms of gender, there are more male respondents compared to female respondents and the dominant age of the respondents ranges from 15 – 25. In terms of the extent of exposure of the Aetas to mobile phones, the researchers found out that 76.25% of the Aetas are using their mobile phones every day and the rest still uses mobile phone but not daily.

The researchers also found out that the primary function of mobile phones to them are calling and texting and the secondary functions of mobile phone to them are for taking pictures, playing mobile games and listening to radio and music. Also, the least used function of mobile phones to them are surfing the Internet and sending e-mails because there is no Internet connection in the area.

Further, the researchers found out that mobile phones influence the habits of the Aetas. Based from the statements written in the questionnaire that was distributed, most of them agreed that their boredom is lessened when they are using mobile phones.

The researchers also discovered that mobile phones influence the Aetas in terms of relation to work because majority of the respondents agreed that they do not get tired much when they use cell phone at work, and using their cell phones at work helps them become open with their co-worker,

they can also save money when they use their cell phone at work and using their cell phones helps them increase their connections and that mobile phones helps them save money, the mobile phone has solved the problem of fare money, particularly for people residing outside the center of commercial and social activities.

Moreover, mobile phones influence the Aetas in terms of family coordination because the Aetas agreed on the statements that using cell phones makes communication in their family more open, there is also a greater sense of unity in their family with the use of cell phones. Most of the Aetas feel comfortable communicating and maintaining family communication with the use of mobile phones. Family conflicts are quickly resolved with the use of their cell phones, their time for their family and other affiliations are balanced with the use of cell phones, their family conflicts can be avoided or lessened by using cell phones, and there is a greater sense of unity in their family with the use of cell phones mobile phone owners are able to deliver or send messages on their behalf to relatives or friends staying in the town proper.

The Aetas are also influenced by the use of mobile phones in terms of family safety because the statements: worries for their family are lessened with the use of cell phones, immediate knowledge if something bad happened to their family with the use of cell phones, the possibility that their family can be in danger is lessened with the use of cell phones, confident enough that their family is safe with the use of cell phones and feeling at ease when they know that their family is in good situation through the use of cell phones were agreed upon by the respondents.

Recommendations

For the Aetas, the researchers recommend the continuous use of mobile phones because it can help expand and strengthen their social networks; help them deal with emergencies and to work together thereby reducing costs and increasing productivity. It is also recommend that they should not limit the use of mobile phones to only calling and texting but they could also use for work, and socialization.

For the future researchers, the researchers recommend that they should widen their research by not only using quantitative research but also qualitative research where they can fully immerse themselves with the Aetas and their culture so that they will have an in depth results on this topic.

For the academe, the researchers also recommend that they should aid the students to understand that some people, particularly Aetas in the country are not that familiar in using mobile phones, and they use it for productivity and out of needs, and students should not take for granted mobile phones.

For the AB Communication students, the researchers recommend that they should try to help educate fellow Filipinos and also some indigenous group like the Aetas in order for them to use the new media as a form of a gate to innovation and advancements.

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