

The Culture and Communication of The Mobile Phone **Janey Gordon, The University of Luton,**

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Screen 1

Title Page (This is a Power point presentation)

Let me begin by giving the back ground to this paper. I am at present editing a special edition of Convergence for the Summer 2005 concerning mobile communications technologies. I obviously already have an interest in this area and have written and published a short piece. But to brief myself more fully I attend two very diverse conferences one academic conference at Surrey and one industry conference in London's Excel. What I am hoping to provide here is a snapshot of where we stand now. I have called the paper the culture and communication of the mobile phone as this really sums up the two areas of our interest at this conference, but I want to start by providing a few background statistics¹.

Screen 2

Statistical overview of mobile phone usage, January 2005

Global - 25%

UK - 79%

USA - 50%

Philippines - 20%

Africa - 6%

China - 25%

One of the fascinating things for me about mobile phones is that the industry hype and talk up has frequently been exceeded by the reality. For example when I started researching mobile phones it was estimated by the industry that by 2006 there would be a global usage of 25% (1.52 billion)² but as you see this is already the case. The developed countries such as the UK clearly skew this figure but the markets in simple handset ownership in the developed countries have slowed and look mature in some areas. In the UK 79% of adults have phones although there is about one handset per person in the UK because many users have more than one phone³. The greatest areas of growth in the market is in the developing countries of Africa where usage has more than doubled in the past 12 months (although this is still only 6% of the population)⁴ and also of China (25% of population)⁵.

I also mention the Philippines here as it exemplifies a country where mobile phone usage amongst a relatively poor population is commonplace and they have adapted the systems to suit their own social situation. I'll come back to that in a moment.

So what is special about mobile phones?

We like them!

We have taken to them in a way that the industry did not fully anticipate either in our alacrity of take up or the way we use them.

In a previous paper I have argued that they rapidly became part of our popular culture.

Screen 3

Popular cultural artefacts, fascias, pockets, chargers, ringtones

We have adopted its technology and made it our own

Screen 4

Text messages

The text message was just given away as an addition service to begin with but we now send more than 1 a day per head of population in the UK, 69 million⁶.

Screen 5

Short Message Service, texts per day

UK - 69,000,000

Philippines – 500,000,000

However in the Philippines they send more than 6 a day per head of their population. At present they send around 500 million per day.⁷

Recent add-ons have included visual images, which we are being encouraged to send to each other, but at present are not particularly inclined to do although we use the facilities

Screen 6

Mobile phone video clip

But what has become user friendly and commonplace is the using the phone for data. Either to be kept informed by a provider or by finding it for yourself on the Internet. Web site providers are rendering their pages for mobile access.

Screen 7

BBC web site, rendered for mobile phone use

So what is the industry concerned about, firstly in terms of communications?

Screen 8

Industry Interests and Concerns - communications

Well the nice thing about telecommunications is that the user by and large provides their own content. We speak to each other or text each other and all the provider has to do is give a network, which we can do this with.

However what they are concerned about is that we are doing this very much on our own.

The industry is very keen to lead our development of usage in mobile technologies. They are trying hard for example to encourage us to use MMS or media message services, to send frivolous picture messages to each other. This has not taken off so far but is growing. In October Ofcom reported that MMS usage had doubled although remained a very small proportion of messages⁸. We still text each other and call each other and say things like, "Where are you?" "I'm just walking up the path". We are very savvy as to how to use the services economically. Young people in particular will have one hand set and several sim cards that each provide free or inexpensive time and they swap them around.

One area that has taken off is 'Location Services'. If you are carrying a mobile phone that is switched on, your mobile provider knows pretty much where you are. And this has been converted into a really useful way of companies keeping track of their staff and if the staff is delivering goods or services then this service can be extended to include tracking of these products. I am sure we have all experienced this with deliveries and meter readers.

In the US, phones are obliged to include a device that has come to be called e911, which can give emergency services the abilities to find the handset if an emergency call is made from it. Of course this does not necessarily mean they find the person.....

Other services, that may not be regarded so positively is that you receive a text as you pass a shop that has your number or more positively, that on arriving at a railway station your phone tells your taxi company to meet you. There is a great deal of debate about these services and not surprisingly some unease⁹.

Screen 9

Industry Interests and Concerns - culture

What are the industry concerns in terms of what we may call culture or cultural products?

The big one here is DRM, Digital Rights Management.

There is a great fear that the industry was not proactive in the development of the Internet until the population had got used to working out how they were going to use it themselves. Ted Cohen from EMI Music, said, "In the Internet we waited to get it right and missed it."¹⁰ The music industry suffered as they had not anticipated or been proactive in the growth of music downloading as a method of distribution and of purchase. 'Napster' the software that allowed Internet users to share music collections without reference to the music companies was a severe wake up call.

The mobile industries are keen to use the technology to provide cultural artefacts and that we should be paying for this service. For example...

- Ringtones (*sound*, Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy)

The copyrights and sales of ringtones are now globally equal to 10% of the total music market¹¹. This has happen in just a couple of years. In particular the development of polyphonic ringtones has influenced this growth.

- Wallpaper (*image*, Homer Simpson)

Homer Simpson is a copyrighted image if you want his picture on your phone and many people do, you will pay for that right.

- Video clips, movies and full music tracks.

A fascinating area, not only can we down load clips of, say, a football goal, but short films are being written for the mobile. I attended the “Worlds Smallest film Festival” at Excel. Whole music tracks may also be down loaded as MP3 files on to a handset and shortly this will include whole feature films. Why you would want to watch a feature film on a screen of approximately 2 inches by 2 inches is beyond me but you can. More realistically you can down load music and films from a phone handset on to a PC and burn a CD so that you can take it away, listen to it any time in your car or on your MP3 player or keep it on your phone to listen again. Why would you want to do this on your phone and not your computer?

Well if you are 15 you may not have your own computer, but you almost certainly have your own phone. Twice as many people in the world have access to a mobile phone as have access to the Internet¹².

For us as academics the whole area of distribution and distribution rights and management is suddenly up in the air. Very small companies can distribute films around the world easily. Think about some of your students’ films....

Furthermore if you own a phone you have a convenient...

- ‘E-wallet’.

A music track downloaded on to your mobile phone is charged to your phone bill. You pay for it at the end of the month. However in the UK, more than half of mobile phone users use Pre-Pay. In many other countries this is less common, for example in Japan, where there was an attempt to ban pre pay mobiles as they could be used by criminals. On a pre-pay phone, you are effectively using your phone as bank. You put money in and spend it, as you need to. In fact regulatory bodies have to address this, as a whole bunch of new regulations apply.

- ‘E-shopping mall’

A mobile phone may also be a shopping mall and this is where the various providers are attempting to take control and be organised. It is suggested that the mobile mall needs “anchor stores” that people use regularly, as well as specialist stores for individuals and also what is called “daily life providers”¹³. For example buying a bus ticket. This service is being tested in several areas, for example in Frankfurt in Germany, in order to buy a bus ticket, you text a number and receive a ‘ticket’ back to show the driver.

- Shared protocols

Biggest headache for the industry in terms of cultural products is agreeing to share the protocols and software to let the customer access them.

Companies such as SDC, a Swiss company, who are providing a music download service, they are a music store on your mobile phone, are having to find ways of making this provision to a host of different phones. It is like buying a CD and having to say that you have Samsung CD player, which is different to Sony, Phillips etc etc. Michael Bornhauser the CEO, felt that a lack of shared software between the companies was the biggest problem in development at present¹⁴.

My money is on Nokia, who have 35% of the global market share of handsets. (But in computing that's what IBM thought and in fact it was the processing company they used called 'Microsoft' that came through in the end.)

Screen 10

Academic Interests and Concerns - communication

So what are academic concerns? Well some are pretty straight forwards.

- Who is using mobile phones?

This is relatively easy to chart. Mostly the mobile phone companies know who they provide services to. They know their names, addresses and phone numbers. They can count them. There is a great deal of data available.

There are exceptions, mobile phones are very mobile, and they are sold on, stolen and used by a range of people who the provider may be unaware of. Crimes involving phones are worth investigation. These include simple theft, of handsets, of copyrighted material and of spectrum time in terms of phones being used for free. In fact the illicit use of mobile phones seems under investigated.

- How are they being used?

This is also interesting and is the subject of several of the papers that will be in Convergence this summer.

In particular how have we as a society responded to being in 'perpetual contact'? How are we responding to this? Do we regard it as generally positive or generally negative? Increasingly it is the norm to be contactable, those without phones are regarded as eccentric. In 2004 mobile usage overtook fixed line usage, 1.5 billion mobiles to 1.2 billion fixed lines.¹⁵ (It was interesting in the two conferences, who chose not to have a phone at all, who switched off and who had technically low level phone not able to use current technologies, just remained with basic services.)

Screen 11

Academic Interests and Concerns - culture

In Surrey there was considerable concern about privacy. The conference was called "The Life of Mobile Data"¹⁶ and it was particularly interested in what happened to all the data that the mobile companies collect and know about you. And they know a lot.

- Privacy

There was much discussion over privacy and what constitutes privacy and what aspects of ourselves we consider to be 'private'. David Lyon from Queen's University, Canada, began by thinking about applying some of the language of harm

(physical and monetary) and hurt (emotional) to privacy. He spoke about the notion of 'personality rights', which are enshrined in Canadian law by the Napoleonic code as a way of examining what we lose when another party, such as a mobile phone provider, knows a great deal about us and can use and sell that information. What have we as an individual lost by that transaction? Did we give this away or was it stolen? He was concerned that the mobile providers are not subject to ethical scrutiny or democratic involvement.¹⁷

The second keynote address was from Professor Charles Raab from the University of Edinburgh, who also looked at issues of privacy but this time from the standpoint of the law. He began by saying, "If someone says, 'I have nothing to hide', ask them when they last had sex? Who with? How?"

He has worked on the current UK Data Protection Act and told an interesting story informally about buying a ticket for the theatre and refusing to give his name and address. He believes that we are prepared to give away too much personal data and should be much more cautious. He asked if we should view the collection of IT data 'safe', until proven dangerous or vice versa. He suggested that we apply a Privacy Impact Assessment on data collection.¹⁸

He was followed by David Birch, who was not an academic but an IT consultant, he suggested that property rights are considered more important than privacy, because they are more easily priced and that once privacy is viewed as being 'owned' it becomes more valuable. He felt that we need to be much more aware of what we are giving away that somebody else is going to regard as a saleable product.¹⁹

- Civil liberties.

Let me quote from a recent article in 'Jane's', the information and publishing group, concerning the use of mobile phones to gain criminal evidence.

"It has been estimated that 70 per cent of Britain's population have at some time given their details, including phone numbers, to credit companies and, in this respect, criminals are no different to the rest of the population. They may think that a mobile number cannot be traced to them, but if they have used that number in any other application, or it is on any other database, it can be matched up using the same software deployed by credit agencies and market research consultants to gain access to specific customer groups.

*The new link between mobile phones and other databases will mean that detectives will also be able to use techniques normally reserved for complex fraud investigations. For example, forensic data mining is a process that combines large computer databases, neural networks and an analysis of the links between apparently random bits of information."*²⁰

Recently there have been a number of cases where mobile phones have been used to provide criminal evidence, for example in the Soham trial. The time and place of one of the victims was traced using her mobile phone.

Now we may feel that using mobile data in this way, to trace a victim or convict a murderer, is generally beneficial to society. However as David Lyon said, "While this is not in principle ubiquitous, inevitable or oppressive, some aspects of mobile

surveillance require careful consideration from analytical, ethical and political perspectives....The key opportunity for engaging in these questions is while the technologies are being stabilised.”²¹

- Public Sphere

On a positive note, I would argue that a new and enhanced public sphere might be developed by the use of mobile technology. There have been instances of the phone being used to circumvent oppressive or intimidating situations. A well-documented example is the overthrow of President Estrada in the Philippines, when the text message was used to provide a quick way of passing on information and rallying support amongst the population²².

Screen 12

Estrada final text message

AFTER PEOPLE POWER 2:
CONGRATULATIONS!
THANK U 4 UR SUPPORT N
DS HISTORICL EVENT. ERAP
WIL GO DOWN N PHIL.
HISTORY S BEIN D 1ST
PRESIDNT OUSTD BY TXT

Screen 13

Title

In conclusion I would like to stress the importance of this small piece of technology. I feel that as academics interested in culture and communications, the mobile phone is of a significance that we are only just realising. It is quietly and without fuss causing us to carry it about and so be locatable and be able to communicate in places hitherto unimaginable. It has forced societies to rethink laws and social mores and it has influenced our cultural forms and their distribution.

¹ Population statistics have been obtained from <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm> [accessed 2/1/05]

² <http://www.cellular.co.za/stats/stats-main.htm> [accessed 27th December 2004]

³ http://www.ofcom.org.uk/research/industry_market_research/m_i_index/cm/qu_10_2004/cm_qu_10_2004.pdf [accessed 27th December 2004]

⁴ <http://www.cellular.co.za/stats/stats-africa.htm> [accessed 27th December 2004]

⁵ http://www.cellular.co.za/news_2004/sep/090504-mobile_subscriber_growth_drops_i.htm [accessed 27th December 2004]

⁶ http://www.cellular.co.za/news_2004/may/0500404-uk_sms_traffic_continues_to_rise.htm [accessed 27th December 2004]

⁷ <http://www.cellular.co.za/stats-main.htm> (accessed 26th February 2004)

⁸ http://www.ofcom.org.uk/research/industry_market_research/m_i_index/cm/qu_10_2004/?a=87101 [accessed 29th December 2004]

⁹ McCullagh, Declan, (13th August 2003) “Cellphones betray your every move” CNET News

<http://comment.zdnet.co.uk/declanmccullagh/0,39020670,39115796,00.htm> [accessed 29th December 2004]

¹⁰ Cohen, Ted (September 2004) “Applying DRM to mobile content” Mobile Content World, London Excel, 22/9/04

¹¹ http://cellular.co.za/news_2004/may/050104-mobile_content_shows_revenue_pro.htm [accessed 29th December 2004]

¹² <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm> [accessed 24th February 2005]

¹³ De Jong, Mark (September 2004) “Keynote Address: how the convergence of media and entertainment are shaping the mobile economy”. Mobile Content World, London Excel, 22/9/04

¹⁴ Bornhauser, Michael (in an interview conducted on 22nd September 2004, London.)

¹⁵ http://www.cellular.co.za/news_2004/dec/121404-mobile_phone_sales_to_beat_fixed.htm [accessed 24th February 2005]

¹⁶ “The Life of Mobile Data: Technology, Mobility and Data Subjectivity”, April 15 – 16, 2004, University of Surrey, England

¹⁷ Lyon, David (April 2004) “Why where you are matters: mundane mobilities, transparent technologies and the recording of time-space paths.” Keynote address delivered to conference on “The Life of Mobile Data: Technology, Mobility and Data Subjectivity”, April 15 – 16, 2004, University of Surrey, England

¹⁸ Raab, Charles (April 2004) Keynote address delivered to conference on “The Life of Mobile Data: Technology, Mobility and Data Subjectivity”, April 15 – 16, 2004, University of Surrey, England

¹⁹ Birch, David (April 2004) “Managing the Data Trail”, paper delivered to conference on “The Life of Mobile Data: Technology, Mobility and Data Subjectivity”, April 15 – 16, 2004, University of Surrey, England

²⁰ Jane’s, (1st October 2004) “Forensic telecoms’ revolution is turning mobile phones against their criminal owners.” http://www.janes.com/press/pc041001_1.shtml [accessed 29th December 2004]

²¹ Lyon, David (April 2004) “Why where you are matters: mundane mobilities, transparent technologies and the recording of time-space paths.” Keynote address delivered to conference on “The Life of Mobile Data: Technology, Mobility and Data Subjectivity”, April 15 – 16, 2004, University of Surrey, England

²² Gordon, Janey (2002) “The Mobile Phone, an artefact of popular culture and a tool of the public sphere.” *Convergence*, Volume 8, Number 3, Autumn 2002, pp 15-26, ULP