

Social Implications of GSM on Nigeria: A Study of Ifako/Ijaye Local Government Area Lagos Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examines the social implications of mobiles phones (GSM) among the consumers in Ifako/Ijaye Local Government Area, Lagos. Seven hundred and four respondents were purposively selected. Questions relating to socio economic background and the social effects of GSM on the respondents were asked. Findings revealed that the consumers welcome this new (GSM) development and it has contributed both positively and negatively to their social lives. Appropriate suggestions were made to ensure that consumers enjoy this intervention maximally.

Key words: Purposively, suggestions, intervention, GSM

INTRODUCTION

The importance of information dissemination internally and locally cannot be overlooked. Africans, over time, usually disregarded the physical stress and other risks involved at ensuring that they passed their information across to the recipients. However, as technology became improved due to industrialization, these risks became reduced, but the problem was still not solved. One of the technological advancement in the country was the establishment of telecommunication industry since 1881 which eventually metamorphosised into Nigeria Telecommunications (NITEL)^[1]. In spite of this development, the problems associated with information dissemination still persisted. Then it was still a difficult scenario for an average Nigerian to have access to telephone facilities. This was as a result of the financial and administration problems associated with obtaining telephone lines at that time. All the above were the issues in Nigerian telecommunication until 1999 when another policy came into effect.

In 1999, the new administration then made policy statements that culminated into the establishment of GSM industry in Nigeria. This was a welcome development among the Nigerian citizenry. Journeys that required extensive traveling in the time past became reduced. Reports also reveal that road accidents, a recurrent phenomenon became drastically reduced and the difficulties the people faced in the hands of the single national carrier-Nigerian Telecommunications Communication (NITEL) became a thing of the past^[1,2].

Thus in year 2000, several people became owners of handsets as a result of this development, Ernest Ndukwe, Vice Chairman Nigerian Telecommunications comments:

“Given the suffering that an average Nigerian had to undergo, prior to the August 2000 in the hands of the only phone company, the Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL), you would not blame any one who was carried away by the expectations of the emergence of a solution to the problem found in the sector^[3]. In year 2000, the first GSM operator in Nigeria ECONET (now V-Mobile) was established, while others MTEL, MTN and GLO followed suit. This is presented in the Table 1.

Considering these major achievements in telecommunication industry in Nigeria and the antecedent support it has received from the citizens, it would be interesting to know the socio-economic status of users and social factors responsible for the acceptance of GSM in the country apart from the general need for communication. It is documented that by the year 2000, mobile subscribers' numbers had overtaken those of fixed lines. In the last four years of the existence of mobile phones in Nigeria, it is estimated that over five million subscribers have joined the race^[4]. Critical Friends of Technology^[4] and Nigeria Communications Commission^[1]. Therefore, it will be important to identify other needs of the people that have prompted them in accepting whole-heartedly this new development.

It will be an understatement to argue that any intervention programmes on the populace usually bring about both positive and negative consequences. Since the introduction of mobile phones in Nigeria, there have been conflicting reports on its operations. Several people have expressed doubts about it, claiming that GSM will do more harm than good. Therefore they tend to discourage the industry^[5]. Some have based their arguments on religion and cultural reasons claiming that it is another instrument of enslaving Africans.

Table 1: situational reports on gsm development in nigeria

	December 2000	December 2002	Projection to December 2003
No of connected fixed Lines	450.000	702.000	
1.200.000			
No of connected digital mobile lines	None	1.594.179	2.900.000
No of national carriers	1	2	2
No of operating ISPs	18	30	35
No of active licensed fixed line operator	9	16	30
No of licensed mobile operator	1	4	4
No of km of microwave links	16.000 km (est.)	31.200 km (est.)	37.000 km
Private Investments	\$50 m USD	\$2.100 m USD	\$3.8000 USD

Source: Nigerian communications commission. 2004

Consequently, it becomes imperative to understand the social impacts of this intervention on the people. This becomes crucial considering several reports and actions of the people in relation to GSM introduction and its relevance in Nigeria^[4-6]. Nigerian Business Information Bureau^[7]. Attention has always focused on the relevance of GSM as a tool for communication, but general assessment of GSM in Africa reveals that the reason for acquiring telecommunication facilities may go beyond communication. For instance, several people are in the habit of changing their handsets at certain intervals. One may want to know what is responsible for this. Therefore other social impacts of GSM on the users become important for this research. A facial understanding of the impact of gains and losses of GSM on Nigeria citizens without an empirical basis might not do the required justice to the issues of GSM, especially as new service providers are likely to be given new licenses after 2006, marking another phase in telecommunication industry in Nigeria.

Research questions: Following these issues, the questions one is apt to ask in this research are:

- What are the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of these users?
- What are the factors responsible for the wide acceptance of GSM in Nigeria?
- What are the socio economic gains and losses inherent in the introduction of GSM on the citizens?

Objectives of the study: Aside the general objective of the study, which is to understand the social implication of GSM on Nigerians, the specific objectives are:

To understand the socio- economic and demographic characteristics of GSM users in Nigeria;

Identifying the factors responsible for the acceptance of GSM on Nigerians.

Highlighting the effects of the introduction of GSM on the consumers.

Recommend ways by which GSM industry can be more effective based on the research findings.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A well-designed questionnaire (structured) was carefully packaged to capture the focus of the research. These questionnaires were distributed to eight hundred respondents from the Ifako/Ijaye local government area of Lagos State. The distribution was based on snowball selection process across the local government area. Lagos was chosen because it was the first place where GSM was formerly launched. Aside this, the city is regarded as the commercial nerve center of the country. People possessing GSM were contacted from different streets in the area. A larger population of the area could read and write, so it was easy to distribute the questionnaire. The questions asked bothered on the respondents' socio economic and demographic background, assessment of the introduction of GSM in Nigeria so far and social implication of the use of GSM in Nigeria. The questionnaires collected numbering seven hundred and four were analyzed using simple percentage distribution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data on the age of the respondents revealed that majority of the respondents using GSM in Nigeria are over twenty years. Less than one third (18.2%) of the respondents constitute the age group 15-19 years while 3.8% of respondents between age brackets 20-24 also possess GSM handset in the study. The percentage distribution of GSM users might not be surprising. Mobile sets are not meant for under age. Not that alone, they may not be financially capable of purchasing handset as their parents might not want to indulge them in order not to distract their attention from the mainstream of academic activities. Those adolescents using handsets (8.2%) are tertiary school students.

Findings on the sex of the respondents revealed that close to two-third of the respondents (70.5%) are male while 34.5% were female. This might be as a result of the fact that some families who could not afford to purchase multiple (more than one) handsets will allow only their spouse (husbands) to use the handset. Also, it appears that men seem to attach more importance to GSM because of the status that accompanied it especially when it was first introduced. Women do not attach importance

(status-wise) to handsets as men do; only a few of them consider purchasing it due to the nature of their business or jobs. The status symbol attached to it however do precipitate its purchase and usage by most people.

On occupation, about half of the respondents (56.8%) are students, followed by civil servants (20.5%). It is surprising that a large proportion of GSM users interviewed in this study are students. Little wonders why GSM service providers focus more on the students' population by organizing shows, advertisement and erecting their masts on campuses. Majority of other people would prefer to go to business centers to make calls since it is relatively cheap. Aside from the above reason, some of them have fixed lines in their offices and may consider it a waste of money purchasing call cards. But this may not be so for students that are away from homes.

On educational attainment, findings revealed that 90.9% are secondary school certificate holders and above. This may not be surprising, as GSM usually attracts the literate population. Those who cannot read nor write would rather prefer to go to business centers to make calls when such need arises. Equally, this is supporting the findings on the occupation of GSM users, which are predominantly students.

The data on the respondents' income revealed that a little over (20.5%) of the respondents fall among low-income earners below N2, 500 per month. This finding supports the one-fifth-percentage distribution of the respondents using GSM handsets. These set of respondents, it is believed are students who rely on their monthly allowances to survive. This further supports the finding regarding students as the major users of GSM in Nigeria. The highest respondents using GSM are income earners above N20, 100 with percentage distribution of 29.5% (a little above one fifth of the total respondents). Others total a little above 50%, an indicator that income level is not a determinant of GSM use any longer. Virtually everybody interested in acquiring handset can do so with determination. More especially with the importation of fairly used handsets into the country

Further questions were asked on the social effects of GSM introduction in Nigeria. An overwhelming majority of the respondents' (97.7%), quite support the introduction of GSM in the country. This is a pointer to the fact that they are deriving some benefits from it. To buttress this, questions were asked on the relevance of GSM to them. About 96% (95.5%) of the respondents argue that it has enabled them re-unite themselves with their friends and relatives as they now have the opportunity to call them on their handset or in a public phoning center. Another group of respondents (79.5%)

also argue that it has been a source of employment for people, especially young school leavers. This explains why majority of the people in GSM phoning business are young adults.

Some respondents interviewed has these comments to make on their perceived effects GSM:

GSM is a blessing to us in this country. The president of this country has done a great thing. Now I can communicate my friends all over the country with just N30 at pay-phone centers. -A male adult, 46years old

I think it's a welcome development, I know somebody that applied for a job through GSM and he was eventually employed, all through GSM. If it were through the postal service or other means, may be he wouldn't have got the job...-A female school leaver, 22 years old

Further still on the effects of GSM operators on Nigerians. Respondents also believe that apart from the positive contributions of GSM, there are negative implications of the introduction GSM on Nigerians as well. Over 95% of the respondents are of the view that GSM has its negative consequences. About 27.3% of the respondents agree that its introduction in Nigeria has increased the rate of road accidents on the high ways. They argued that several motorists make and receive phone calls while driving on the highways. About 50% of the respondents also agree that GSM has negative effect on the health of the citizenry 22.7% of the respondents also attribute the introduction of GSM in Nigeria to increase in violent and non-violent crimes in Nigeria. According to them, a large number of the citizens have been defrauded through illicit phone calls from fraudsters. They also argue that students in tertiary institutions use handsets for examination malpractices, while armed robbers also use it to facilitate their operations. The respondents also highlighted the faults of the service providers. Respondents are of the opinion that they are exploitative by charging high tariffs (45.5%) while about 38.6% of the respondents argue that the service providers do not invest their gains in Nigeria. Others attribute their reasons to poor coverage (9.0%) and lack of connectivity among service providers.

Some of the comments of the respondents interviewed are as follows:

There are so many fraudsters in the country now. They will call you and ask for certain amount of money claiming that you have just won a lottery or something. They have ruined homes businesses through GSM phones. -A female Banker, 35years old.

This development is a laudable one, but one has to be careful, as it can be a source of problem especially in the hands of fraudsters. They have caused a lot of havoc in the country. I don't know what the government can do about that.- Another male, civil servant, 28 years old.

Their call charges are too high. They should be called to order. They should be made to understand that it is not easy to get money, or do they think we are going to spend our income on making telephone calls?- An artisan and father of four.

Some motorists especially private ones are so careless that they risk their lives by making and receiving phone calls while driving! A lot of people have lost their lives as a result of their carelessness. - A married woman, 30 years old

Based on the opinions of the respondents on whether the use of GSM in Nigeria be continued or not, we need to submit that the respondents do not want GSM operations to be stopped. This is surprising considering several reports given by the respondents on the negative effects of its introduction in Nigeria. Precisely, 95.4% of the respondents want GSM services to continue if only for breaking the monopoly of the Nigerian Telecommunication (NITEL). The assessment of the service providers reveals that 68.2% of the respondents rated them a little below average shown in appendix A.

Appendix: A background information

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age		
15-19	1.24	18.2
20-24	224	31.8
Above 25	352	50.0
Mean = 233		
Sex		
Male	296	70.5
Female	208	24.5
Mean = 252		

Appendix continued

Occupation		
Student	400	56.8
Business	64	9.1
Professional	48	6.8
Artisan	48	6.8
Civil Servants	144	20.5
Mean = 140		
Highest educational level		
No formal education	48	6.8
Secondary education	256	36.4
OND/Professional	112	15.9
Tertiary	28	40.9
Mean = 111		
Income		
Below N2, 500	144	20.5
N2, 501-N5, 000	112	15.9
N5, 001-N10, 000	96	13.6
N10, 001-N20, 000	144	20.5
N20, 001 and above	208	29.5
Mean = 140		

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Whether consumer support introduction of GSM in Nigeria		
Yes	688	97.7
No	16	2.3
Mean = 352		
Assessment of the Contributions of GSM in Nigeria	80	4
Mean = 90		
Impact of GSM on the consumers has increased level of relationships and intimacy and friends and relations		
No tangible impact	672	95.5
	32	4.5
Mean = 352		
Other development and contributions		
Sources of Income and		
No response	560	79.5
	44	20.5
Mean = 352		
Whether GSM has negative impact on the people		
Strongly agree	192	27.3
Agree	400	56.8
Undecided	1.96	13.6
Strongly disagree	-	-
Disagree	16	2.3
Mean = 176		
Whether it has done more harm than good		
Strongly agree		
Agree	256	22.7
Undecided	352	50
Strongly disagree	48	6.8
Disagree	80	11.4
	64	9.1
Mean = 160		

Appendix continued

GSM and types of negative effects road accident		
Negative health	288	27.3
Implications	160	40.9
Violence fraudulent activities	48	6.8
No response	16	2.3
Mean = 40		
Assessment of Service		
Providers	42	6.8
Excellent	144	40.9
Good	80	22.7
Poor	96	27.3
Mean = 70		
Reasons attributed to the above responses charge high tariffs		
Do not invest in Nigeria	320	45.5
Poor Coverage	272	38.6
Lack of connectivity among operators	64	9.1
No response	32	4.5
	16	2.3
Mean = 40		
Whether GSM use should still be encouraged		
Strongly agree	400	34.1
Agree	432	61.3
Undecided	16	2.3
Strongly disagree	-	-
Disagree	16	2.3

CONCLUSION

The introduction of Mobile handsets (GSM) in Nigeria no doubt has contributed immensely to the social upliftment and the development of Nigerians. Equally, the negative influences are enormous and cannot be overlooked. One can agree with Chief Ernest Ndukwe, the Vice Chairman of Nigeria Communications Commission in his assertion that telecommunication is seen as one of the dividends of democracy. From all indications, mobile communication (GSM) is a welcome development in the country and it appears almost everybody would like to own a mobile set. Relating to the negative effects of mobile communication in Nigeria, it appears that this has not affected the demand for the services of GSM among the populace; rather the demands for it are on the increase daily. Based on this, effort should therefore be made to reduce; the negative effects to the barest level so as to enable the populace enjoy this new development in the country. This could be achieved through the ban of the use of GSM on certain occasion. We need to acknowledge the efforts of the government and other organizations in reducing the risks associated with GSM use. One of such is the ban and the heavy penalty on erring motorists caught making and receiving telephone calls while driving. Beside this, GSM use has

been banned in banks especially while transacting business in the banking halls. Very many filling stations now have inscriptions cautioning its use at their premises to avoid some of these negative consequences. Where necessary such as during examinations and for other security purposes, users could be demobilized for the period of the examinations. We need to assert that most of these laws and notices are made by individuals and private organizations and not by government or its agencies. Therefore, some people still flout these laws since they know that those laws do not have government backing.

Based on the findings and discussion above, it becomes imperative to ensure that the goals of the introduction of GSM are achieved and all the risks associated with it are reduced to pave way for the realization of its goals and objectives. In line with this, the following recommendations are made.

- It is suggested that government should be more active in ensuring that GSM operators adhere strictly to the rules and regulation binding communication in Nigeria. Government should find out means adopted else where in ensuring efficiency on the part of GSM operators.
- Tariffs charged by the service providers are still high compared to other countries. Profits realized by these service providers are enormous, an indication of high tariffs charged. It is therefore suggested that tariffs on these services should be reduced to allow everybody enjoy the new development in communication.
- Crime and violence can also be reduced if proper measures are taken. We therefore suggest that proper monitoring of the use of mobile handsets be taken. Banks and other public places have banned the use of handsets in such places, but the consumers are not complying with these laws since they are aware that they do not have legal backing. Gadgets that could monitor if handsets are put on should be placed in these places. Erring consumers should be dealt with accordingly. This will serve as a deterrent to others.
- Furthermore, if there is consumer parliament monitoring the activities of the service providers, there should also be consumer court to punish offenders as well.
- There should be proper sensitization of the public on the ills inherent in the use of GSM. Presently, activities of Nigeria Communication Commission

are not being felt. They should be up and doing in order to pursue their aims vigorously. Sub-committees should be set up to sensitize the consumers. This will awake the consumers to the proper use of the gadget. Equally, these committees could monitor the activities of the GSM Service Providers and it would also compel them to take necessary steps that will guarantee the safety and well being of the entire citizenry.

- Government should work with private organizations to identify areas where laws can be promulgated or otherwise to reduce criminal behaviours.

With the above issue properly taken into consideration, it is believed that the negative effects of GSM use in Nigeria will be reduced thereby paving way for genuine and unadulterated benefits of modern communication systems in Nigeria.

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