

The mobile revolution

The days when the speed of transport was also the speed of communication are long gone. No matter how fast we travel today, communication technology remains several steps ahead. Mobile telephony epitomises mankind's fantastic hype in the domain. The mobile telephone has endowed us with the gift of ubiquity. Indeed, who can afford to stay away from that small tingling, singing, writhing, vibrating thing that keeps us in permanent contact with the external world, causing its boundaries to shrink to the size of a village.

With the mobile phone, businessmen have found their contact potential maximize as they remain always available. Professionals from all quarters can provide a more efficient service especially in moments of crisis when a timely instruction can avert catastrophe. Managers can keep a tag on the whereabouts of their personnel and reorganize human resources to satisfy the ever-changing needs of modern commerce. The media industry has enlisted a powerful ally to beat time and space so that its audiences do not miss out on any happening.

The sociological implications are far-reaching. The mobile phone has accelerated the experience of freedom as we can indulge in social interaction in real time without being physically tied to a place of geographical boundary. Indeed, the mobile phone can be seen as a 'third place' adjacent yet different from the home and the workplace where one may withdraw whenever one feels like. In a fragmented and isolating world characterized by an individualistic ideology, mobile therapeutic gossip restores our sense of community, providing an antidote to the pressures and alienation of modern life. Thus, many people, who bought their mobiles just for emergencies, are using the mobile for chatting and gossiping with friends and family. The mobile telephone provides quite a particular kind of social lifeline.

The mobile phone has a special significance for teens. At a period when friends come fully to the centre stage, transcending all other relationships and when the relations with one's family are fraught with the conflicts of struggle for independence, the mobile telephone and the jargon surrounding the short messaging system (SMS) have become a tool for marking the boundary between teens and their parents. Besides, texting, because it allows extra time to formulate one's

thoughts and express them more clearly, or diplomatically, is an invaluable tool in helping teenagers overcome their awkwardness and develop their social and communication skills.

But there exists no technological advance without strings attached. The mobile phone has accelerated the experience of freedom, but at the same time it ties one up. Continuous accessibility implies that one can be under constant control, as if in a digital prison. Some people see the mobile phone as an electronic tag, enslaving us to the capitalist machinery. It encourages wheeling and dealing anywhere, be it a place of worship or a cemetery, thus forcing upon us a culture of interruption.

The mobile telephone today has become a status symbol and its size, shape; looks as well as the way it is carried and held constitute messages in themselves.