

## SMARTPHONE PERCEIVED-USERS' PERCEPTION (A FOCUS GROUP)

SANDEEP SHARMA \*

### ABSTRACT

Whenever a new communication medium arrives at the scene, it creates some flutters in the social and personal life of a person. Personal and professional life experiences changes which have both positive and negative aspects. With these basic assumptions in mind, a focus group study was conducted on smartphone users and an attempt was made to understand how this new medium and the changes brought out by it, are being perceived by its users. In perceivers' views, after owning a smartphone, their lives have become better. Daily routine, social engagement, reading habits and leisure time are some of the other activities over which respondent participants' opinion was sought.

**KEYWORDS:** Smartphone, New Communication Technology, Real World Social Engagement, Reading Habits, Communication.

### INTRODUCTION

What changes has your life gone through after you owned a smartphone? Has it 'improved' or become 'worse', you as a smartphone user can have a directional opinion like this, but you cannot stay neutral. Your daily routine, reading habits, leisure time and social engagements are not the same activities as they used to be, when you were just a java phone user. With these basic assumptions and curiosity in mind, researcher conducted a focus group study on smartphone users and tried to understand how this new medium is being perceived by its users.

Smartphones have made their presence felt in India, particularly in urban India. A report produced by market research firm Mediacells indicated that India would have surpassed US in smartphone usage by the end of 2014. In terms of new smartphone users, India will see a rise of

207 million. According to Nielsen Informatel Mobile Insights' "Indian Smartphone User Study" released in February 2013, the country currently has 900 million mobile phones in use out of which 40 millions are smartphones. The study further reveals that 50 per cent of those 40 million smartphones are with people under the age of 25 years.

The above data is sufficient premise to make a reasonable assumption that a smartphone as a medium of communication is going to affect our lives in many ways. Over a conventional mobile phone, smartphone gives us many options. We can communicate with people in every way imaginable. We can get instant news & information updates related to sport, politics, and stock market etc.

---

\* Ph.D. Scholar, Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Kangra.

E-mail Id: sandeepvizanta@gmail.com

Ever growing treasure of smartphone apps can help us to keep up with our day to day routine and provide us with such platforms where we can flex our mental muscles by playing real-time games; where we can kill our loneliness and boredom by becoming a member of a virtual society; where we can exhibit our artistic skills and make impression. However, all of these conveniences do have a grey side too, which we need to be cautious of.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand how life changes after purchasing a smartphone
- To know how these changes are perceived by the smartphone users
- To give some recommendation for the best utilization of this medium

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the book 'The New Digital Age', Jared Cohen and Eric Schmit have talked about the 'Smartphone Revolution'. In their opinion, this revolution will occur when maximum people of developing world will start using smartphones to access and use information. According to them '*the smartphone revolution will profoundly benefit these populations*'. They have beautifully described in detail how smartphones will help those voiceless people to speak for themselves and make their life better. Further, they have bestowed full confidence on new communication technologies and seem hopeful that communication technologies will revolutionize every field of human life like health, education, governance and commerce etc. And the benefits of this revolution will trickle-down to the grass-roots of society.

While talking about the pros and cons of the smartphone like communication technologies, many sociologists, psychiatrists and health scientists, however have taken contrary position to Cohen and Schmit. Dr. Sangeeta Ravat, Head of

the Department of Neurology at Seth GS Medical College and KEM Hospital states that too much use of smartphones may have ill effects on our declarative memory. As per Dr. Ravat,

*"While earlier, we'd easily remember at least ten important numbers by rote, today we cannot recall any other than our own. Our mind is not challenged. Everything is fed in the phonebook, and under categories-family, work, miscellaneous. Sometimes, there are so many, we cannot recall the face to the name and number."*

Elaborating on the smartphone's impact on children Shraddha Shah, Clinical Psychologist with the Department of Neurology at KEM states,

*"This mental process of awareness, perception, reasoning and judgment can only be built if the child experiences something physical,... it's not possible if s/he is starting into a screen and conquering angry birds."*

In his argument on smartphone's multiple tasking feature, Clifford Nass, Professor of Communication at Stanford University recons,

*"It is not physiologically healthy for you because humans are not built to do a multitude of tasks at one time. Your phone makes you feel like you have to respond, which then increase you stress and harm you cognitive thinking."*

According to Dr. Byun Gi-won, a South Korean expert in cognitive problems related to computer and smartphone usage at the Balance Brain Center in Seoul, the high incidence of digital dementia in Korea is a side effect of the fact that the country has one of the world's best developed and fastest networks with a very high rate of usage of digital devices by its citizens. Cases of "digital dementia" associated with smartphone addiction are characterized by memory deficits, attention disorders and emotional flattening among young people who spend too much time using a gaming device, web searching, texting, and multimedia on

smartphones. Apart from all these, security and privacy are some other major concerns researches have pointed out.

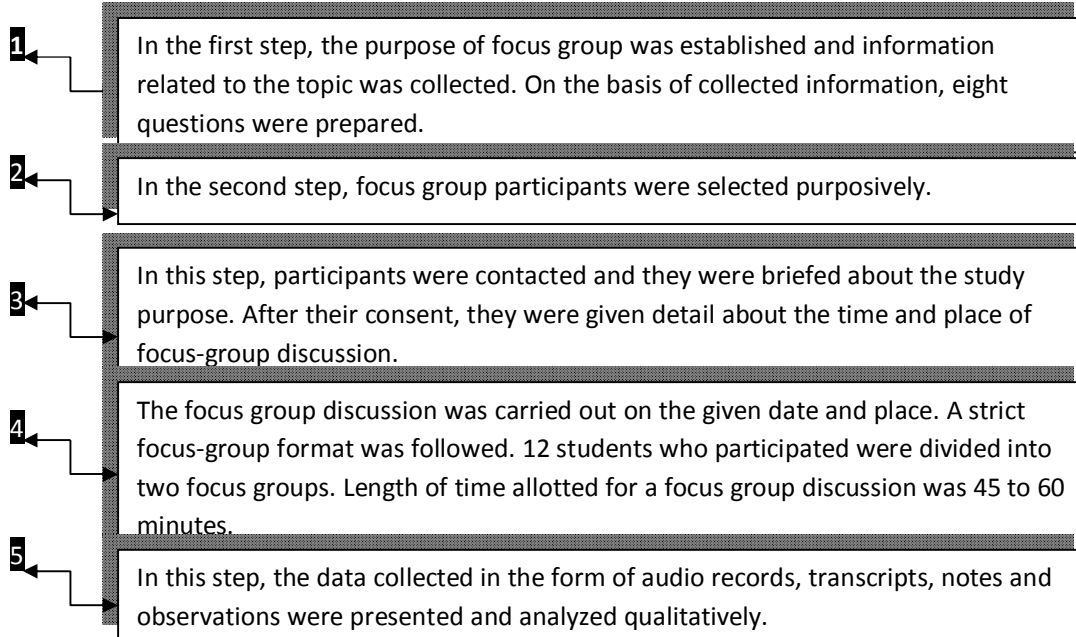
A smartphone connected to the internet is vulnerable to hacking, fishing, breach of privacy etc.

**METHODOLOGY**

**STUDY DESIGN**

As the study is exploratory in nature, hence focus-group method was used to get the best results.

**STEPS FOLLOWED**



**PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT**

The study population of this research was the M.Phil. Students of MCU, Bhopal. Out of total 18 students, only smartphone users were chosen. 12 of 14 smartphone users agreed to participate in focus group activity. The participants were

divided into two groups, consisting of six participants each.

**FOCUS GROUP**

Two focus groups were conducted at the same location on the same date.

Table 1.The Focus Groups

Date	Location	Participants	Number
12/04/2014	MCU Campus, Bhopal	M.Phil. Students	6
12/04/2014	MCU Campus, Bhopal	M.Phil. Students	6

Both focus groups lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Each focus group discussion was audio

recorded and later transcribed.

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

Table 2.Demographics of the Participants

Age Range (years)	Gender		Education
24-30	M	07	Post-graduation or above
	F	05	

In Group A, there were three males and equal number of females, and in group B, there were four males and two females.

### ILLUSTRATING THE STRUCTURE OF FOCUS GROUP

Table 3. Structure of Focus Groups

Stage	Task	Organization
1	Initial briefing	Moderator-led
2	Initial questionnaire	Completed as individual
3	General discussion	Interaction-moderator as facilitator
4	Final comment	Individual participation
5	Final debriefing	Moderator-led

### SMARTPHONE USERS' STATUS

Table 4. Status of Smartphone Users

Time Period of Usage of Smartphones	Number of Participants
Six months or less	2
Between six months and a year	6
More than a year	4

### DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data was collected and analyzed qualitatively. Demographic questionnaires, audio recorders, observations and notes-making were used as data collection tools. The collected data were analyzed on the basis of major themes. Special consideration was given to the following five factors while analyzing data:

#### WORDS

The words used by participants during discussion.

#### CONTEXT

Examined the context of words by finding the triggering stimulus and then interpreted the comment in light of that context.

#### INTERNAL CONSISTENCY

The flow of conversation and position taken by participants was carefully examined.

#### SPECIFICITY OF RESPONSES

Whether the responses were based on personal experience or were vague or impersonal.

### BIG IDEA

The idea that cut across the entire discussion.

### ANALYSIS

#### HOW DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO BE A SMARTPHONE USER?

Almost all the participants used cheerful expressions and words like 'awesome' and 'great' while expressing their feelings in response to this question. *'It really feels great! It's like transmission from a less advance stage to an advance stage. The Java man has become Android man'* as one participant responded. It was quite evident that acquiring a smartphone was considered a status symbol by maximum participants. *'People around you do take note of the gadget you keep and behave accordingly'* as one of the respondents stated. Some other indicated that buying a smartphone is like keeping up with the modern fashion and trend. But some of the participants took inverse position that 'status symbol' and 'fashion' like terms were never in their mind before buying a smartphone.

It was the utilities of the phone which occupied their thought.

Form the above discussion, it can be concluded that acquiring a smartphone like gadget is in everyone's wish-list, but the reasons for this inclusion could vary from person to person.

### **HOW HAS A SMARTPHONE AFFECTED YOUR DAILY ROUTINE?**

To find the answer to this question, students were asked to give their thoughts regarding the changes they had sensed in their daily routine after purchasing a smartphone. A major point which came up during general discussion was that due to prolonged engagement with a smartphone, daily routine had in one way or other, got affected. For example, all the students agreed on the point that their bed-time had got extended by 30 to 60 minutes because of this engagement. One participant shared his experience, *'before going to sleep, even after switching off all the electronic gadgets, it's smartphone which still remains on. Sometime it takes one or two more hours to get rid of this gadget.'*

Sum of this discussion is that smartphone has influenced users' daily routine in some way but has not changed it drastically. Timing of the daily activities like waking-up, going to bed, having meal and going to schools have not changed significantly but they have got extended by a difference of some minutes.

### **SMARTPHONE AND READING HABITS**

Students were asked the following question: "Does a smartphone have an impact on your reading habits? If yes, then how? Several students indicated their text-intake has increased a lot after purchasing a smartphone. They stated that they had never had such convenience of reading news items and academic materials ever before, as after getting a smartphone. They

claimed that now they were reading lots of news and blogs related to health, technology and tour and travel etc. One participant said that he had been utilizing this medium as a tool for preparing for the competitive examination. *"I can take mock tests, cross check the facts and ask my friend to clear any confusion"* as he stated.

But on the other hand, some students thought quite inversely. In their opinion, smartphone had negatively impacted their reading habits. They feared that extensive use of smartphone might result in non-serious-reading. Their views on this perspective can be summarized as follows:

- Instead of consulting the original sources, reliance on secondary sources has increased.
- Instead of reading the whole book or document, now we prefer to read only some selected pages.
- During exam time, a smartphone becomes the biggest disturbance.
- Quality of the text matters, not quantity.

### **SMARTPHONE AND REAL WORLD SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT**

Members of focus group threw diverse views when asked to shed their opinion on the question: "How this medium has influenced your real world social engagement?" Some of the participants stated that smartphone had cut short their real world social engagement. Physical interaction with family and friends had decreased. One of the students shared his experiences as, *'many a times my family members and friends have strongly objected my engagement with a smartphone in their presence. I have been often asked to choose either their company or the company of smartphone.'*

But on the other hand, some other respondents felt that smartphone had widened the scope of real world social engagement. In their opinion, there are some such smartphone apps which

always keep you in touch with your family members and friends. Interaction with family members, relatives and friends with the help of smartphone apps cannot be sighted as virtual.

Synthesizing both points of view, one respondent said, *'how a smartphone is going to impact one's real world social engagement varies from case to case. It's a matter of wise use and misuse.'*

### SMARTPHONE AND DECISION MAKING

Maximum focus group members did not have a clear idea of how smartphones were helpful in their day to day decision making process. But two of the participants explained it beautifully. In their opinion, smartphone has made information access easy and instant. And information is key to decision making. Day to day decision making involves-choosing a route by using navigation app, finding the best restaurant in a city, instant expert advice etc.

### A SMARTPHONE: PROBLEM OR SOLUTION

**Table 5. Opinion of Participants regarding Smartphones**

	Problem	Solution
More than a problem, it's a solution	3	9
	Luxury	Necessity
More than a luxury, it's a necessity	2	10
	Worse	Better
Have your life become better or worse?	0	12

Table 5 suggests that maximum participants keep a positive attitude towards smartphones. Those who indicated it as a problem also neutralized their opinion by saying that smartphone cannot be a problem for wise and smart users. Those who indicated it as a luxury argued that smartphone is a market manufactured necessity. In their opinion, incessant advertising has blurred the line of difference between 'luxury' and 'necessity'.

Against all these diverse opinions, every participant seems to agree on the point that life has sensed a positive change after purchasing a smartphone.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- The study will be helpful to understand the interplay between new communication technology and different aspects of human life.
- It will also be useful for smartphone users. On the basis of findings of this study, they can enhance their understanding about the pros and cons of smartphone's use and decide the best way for themselves.
- The study is also beneficial for the smartphone selling companies to enhance their understanding of smartphone customers' attitude toward smartphones.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- This study is subject to the weaknesses inherent in the focus group design.
- Time and money constraints forced the researcher to carry out this study with a limited number of participants in a very short period.
- The data could not be analyzed on the basis of gender as equal number of male and female participants could not be found.
- Group comparison was not performed because firstly, only two groups were included in the study; and secondly, both groups represented the same study population.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that smartphone users should exercise optimal control over their smartphone habits. Uncontrolled usage will not only negatively impact users' physical or mental health, but also familial or social relationship.

- Smartphones may make or spoil your reading habits. They may make you non-serious readers as indicated by some of the respondents.
- People should have a positive attitude toward the new communication technologies. They are inevitable. Instead of opposing them, we should find ways to deal with them.
- The study has also indicated the blurring line between 'luxury' and 'necessity'. The users are recommended to give a considerable thought to these terms and decide what is best for them.

## **CONCLUSION**

The major goal of the study was to explore how smartphone usage was perceived by the smartphone users. What attitude did they adopt toward this technology and how they assessed the changes brought by this technology? Data was collected and analyzed by using focus group method.

During focus group discussion, students showed positive attitude toward new communication technology (smartphone). For some students, smartphone is a status symbol, for others, it's a fashion and trend, and for the remaining, more than a status symbol and fashion, it's a utility.

All the participants agreed on the point that their life has experienced some changes after purchasing a smartphone. For example, almost all the students felt that smartphone had influenced their daily routine. The timing of their daily activities like going to bed, waking up in the morning, going to college, having meal etc. have got extended by some minutes invariably.

Further, this study shows that there is a correlation between reading habits and smartphone usage. Some participants pointed

out that after acquiring smartphones, their textual-intake had increased.

A smartphone can influence familial and social aspects of one's life. As the study indicates, a smartphone may increase or decrease a person's real world social engagement.

Finally it can be stated that smartphones like new communication technologies are inevitable. Instead of opposing them, we should adopt a progressive and positive attitude toward them for their best utilization in the service of mankind.

## **REFERENCES**

- [1]. Babin S. Developing Software for Symbian OS: Creating Smartphone Application in C++ 01. England: *Wiley*; 2005.
- [2]. Cohen J, Schmidt E. The new digital age: Reshaping the future of people, nations and business. London: *Hodder and Stoughton Limited*; 2013.
- [3]. Meyer TG. Path dependence in two-sided markets. Dissertation. Freie University of Berlin; Aug 2012.
- [4]. Rittinghouse JW, Ransome JF. Cloud Computing implementation, management, security. NY: *CRC Press*; 2009.
- [5]. Nielson. Available from: <http://www.nielsen.com>.
- [6]. The Economic Times. Available from: <http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com>.
- [7]. Livemint. Available from: <http://www.livemint.com>.
- [8]. Webopedia. Available from: <http://www.webopedia.com>.
- [9]. BusinessDictionary. Available from: <http://www.businessdictionary.com>.
- [10]. Digital Journal. Available from: <http://digitaljournal.com>.
- [11]. The Times of India. Available from: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>.