

ABSTRACT

The habits of social relationships and communication and adoption of technology have always been different in rural and urban areas. But 'mobile phones are the exceptions. Social networking by mobile telephone has opened the channel to enhance the living of standard of the rural dwellers by providing many communication features and services thereby facilitating an environment for more remunerative life. Many background elements and of course, some technological-barriers hinder adoption and to mobile phone acceptance as social system.

How rural families are benefited by the use of mobile phone, what factors influence mobile phone uses in family communication, awareness of mobile phone technology's benefits among rural masses are some of the questions which inspired investigator to take up this research study. Study has been planned with the objectives to study users, use pattern and factors influencing the use of the mobile phones in rural families, to examine age and gender difference in use pattern, and to find out positive as well as negative impact of mobile phone and also perceived potential of the mobile phone use in sustainable rural development.

To cover wide geographic area 20 villages have been randomly selected (10 from each district) from Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur districts of Uttar Pradesh state in India. From Twelve hundred households (60 from each village) using at least one mobile phone, one member from each selected household has been selected for seeking responses. Thus, the final sample comprised of 1200 respondents including families with variations in their SES and other demographic variables (education and occupation) and members of different age and sex. A semi structured

questionnaire has been developed including open ended as well as closed ended statements on various aspects such as use pattern, purchase decisions; services used, difference in the use of services and service providers, amount and time of use, change in achievement, positive/negative impact, family and social relations. The data were tabulated categorized, presented in frequency and percentages. Qualitative explanations was provided with context based illustrations and generalizations. The findings were also represented with the help of suitable diagrammatic and graphical presentation.

Study results showed that more males than females had mobile phones. Mobile phone use is more among educated people. Nokia was the most preferred brand followed by Samsung and Airtel was the most preferred network followed by idea.

The first priority of providing mobile phones is given to male members and mostly to head of the family rather than females in all the age groups. The study observes that rural consumers gave first preference to the price as factors influencing purchase decision in all age groups and gender. Second most important factor was durability/functionality followed by design/style and brand.

There is not much more difference between mobile usage patterns of people of different age groups, but Age as a primary factor reveals the true nature of respondents towards expenditure on phones, type of mobile phone, number of SIM cards used, availability of Internet and services opted in mobile phone; young group being the quick adopter but can expend less due to lack of financial resources and work . The further research found that primary motive to use mobile phone was to get connected with people, to get socialized or using social media. The problems

faced by the rural mobile user are battery charging, network issue, recharge, high cost, slow internet etcetra.

Positive impacts of mobile phones reported by majority of the respondents are opportunity to maintain healthy relations with old friends and family members, change in their social life and socialization and keep away feeling of loneliness. Another important achievement of mobile phones is in the field of education and career development. Negative impacts of mobile phones reported are increased expenditure, compromise to others expenditure, loss of social activity and many times conflicts with friends and family members.

Some of the perceived potential of the mobile phone use reported by rural phone users are to get knowledge about agriculture and new technologies of farming, for credit or money transfer by family members, participation in different types of activities by using SMS.