

THE USE OF MOBILE PHONES IN THE PUBLIC AREAS OF A NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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Abstract

Mobile phones are important means of communication but its use is becoming incessant and considered distractive by some library users. A questionnaire was designed for a survey to elicit the reactions of library users on how best to handle its usage in Kenneth Dike Library (KDL), University of Ibadan, Nigeria. 1,500 copies were placed at the reference and circulation sections of the library for users to complete. Of the total number of questionnaires made available, 1,290 copies, representing 86%, were returned. These were analyzed using frequency, percentages and inferences. 1,010 (78.29%) of the respondents affirm that they are distracted each time a cell phone rings near them in the library. It is therefore suggested, among other things, that the university authority (employing its official organs and enlisting the support of the students' union) should come up with appropriate rules and regulations on the use of mobile phones in the library while the library should provide designated areas where calls could be made and/or received within its premises with appropriate notices and instructions posted in conspicuous areas. In addition, users should be encouraged to put their global system of mobile communication (GSM) handsets in the vibration/silent modes whenever they are in the library.

Key Words: Mobile phones, Public areas, University library

Note that 'global system of mobile communication' (GSM), 'mobile phones' and 'cell phones' are used interchangeably in this paper.

Introduction

Libraries are public institutions concerned with rendering services to meet users' satisfaction. Efforts are made to guide against the violation of peoples' rights while dispensing services to them. Also, care is taken to ensure that individual user's rights are protected while ensuring that other users' rights are not violated in order to avoid conflict of interests. Thus, there are rules guiding library operations. These rules are regulated and changed depending on prevailing circumstances like the introduction of news services or technologies that may affect their operational policies.

Libraries are expected to create conducive environment for studying. It is a common rule that noise is forbidden, not only in the library, but within the library premises. Discussions, informal meetings and unauthorized conferences by users are prohibited in some parts of the library. These rules are made to create an atmosphere of serenity to enable users to concentrate on their work. Noise-making constitutes a major distraction and libraries generally do not tolerate it.

New trends in information and communications technology (ICT) have impacted on the way librarians and information scientists do their jobs (Ola and Ojo, 2006). ICT is fast-paced so, libraries and librarians are expected to equally keep pace with the new developments. New rules are required to cope with new trends. Libraries usually respond to

ICT in two ways. First, by applying the technology to enhance service delivery and; second, by setting rules to manage the technology.

At various times in history, libraries have had to use technology to enhance service delivery. Conversely, the libraries have also had to review their rules to accommodate the services and to establish their user-friendliness for the satisfaction of all library clients. In this respect, Onu (2004) observes: “Over the mid-19th century, technology has progressed dramatically and the world has experienced – in rapid succession – the emergence of the telegram, radio, automobile, aero plane, television, computer and now, the mobile phone (the global system of mobile communication).”

The use of GSM handsets is the latest form of ICT that libraries have to cope with. The use of this technology is now gaining so much ground in Nigeria just as it has in developed economies. GSM handsets are very popular because of its economic benefits and general usefulness. How are libraries responding to its usage as it continues to gain prominence? Whereas it is considered a veritable gadget that could be adopted for the promotion of library services, it is also seen as noisy gadgets that should be prohibited in libraries.

The Problem

Kenneth Dike Library (KDL), University of Ibadan was established in 1948 and it has grown since then to be one of the most accomplished university libraries in the West Coast of the African continent. According to Adeyemi (2002) as at 2002, it had a collection that was well over 600,000 volumes of books and journal titles that were above 6000 and; it served a population of about 26,000 people in the academic community. It was reported later that the library now has an aggregate holdings of over one million in all: books, journals monographs, theses, maps, manuscripts, etc. (Kenneth Dike Library, 2007).

As the Reference Librarian in charge of the Postgraduate section of the library, the author noticed that in spite of several instructions prohibiting the use of cell phones in the library and, in spite of periodic checks made by library officers and supervisors, users (mostly graduate students and senior staff) continue to use mobile phones in the library. Some of the users complain about the distractions caused by the incessant use. On the other hand, those who use it refuse to switch-off their cell phones while in the library.

Purpose of the Study

This study is not about how libraries can utilize the inherent capabilities of mobile phones for the promotion of library services. It is to elicit reactions and suggestions from library users on how effectively the library authority can regulate its use in the library. The suggestions proffered by the respondents will be collated and made available to the appropriate library and university authorities to assist them setting the regulations that will guide the use of mobile phones in the public areas of the KDL.

Methodology

The survey method of research was adopted. A questionnaire with twelve separate questions was designed. One thousand, five hundred (1,500) copies of the questionnaire were placed at the Reference and Circulation Sections (both are public areas of the KDL) for users

to pick and fill. One thousand, two hundred and ninety (1,290) copies were completed and returned. This figure represents 86% of the number distributed. These were analyzed using percentages and inferences. A few tables are used to make the analysis more explicit.

Mobile Phones and Libraries

Mobile phones have come to be very important means of communication and its use is very pervasive in recent times. Alao, Ajala and Ajayi, (2006) noted that mobile phones were introduced to the Nigerian communications enterprise by the combined efforts of Econet Wireless Nigeria Ltd, MTN, Globacom and Mtel networks in 2001. Since then, Garuba and Ujuanbi, (2005) reported that the subscribers increased from about 1.7 millions to 16 millions.

The menace of improper use of mobile phones in libraries and other public places have been very prevalent. The communication gadgets have become agents of distraction and disturbance in libraries especially, since they are suppose to be public places where quietness and serenity are meant to be observed in order to create conducive atmosphere for research and learning. Alao, Ajala and Ajayi, (2006) asserted in the findings of their investigation on the use and control of GSM handsets in some academic libraries in Nigeria that the incidence of menace of GSM use in libraries was high. This is no less the case in some developed countries too (Aoki and Downes, 2003).

In a survey by Wei and Leung (1999), classes and libraries were discovered to be one of the highest areas where the usage of cell phones irritated people. In fact, they found out that the respondents also complained intrusive GSM ringing tones. According to Monk, et al, "Like many new technologies, the mobile phone (cell phone) has engendered public concern in a number of areas. In particular, there is a common perception that mobile phones are annoying when used in a public space."

While acknowledging the positive engagement of mobile phones for service delivery in libraries, Buczynski, (2008) opined that proper attention has not been given to the menace caused by its usage in the library. According to him, "Few libraries are experimenting with using mobile phones to engage their patrons to improve their service experience rather than focusing exclusively on managing phone use behavior: library code of conduct policies, policy enforcement, signage, quiet library space zoning and strategies for staff and patrons buy-in."

Obviously, the library is one of such public spaces where mobile phones should be used with extreme caution. The tradition of prohibiting noise in libraries stemmed from the fact that quietness is regarded as sacrosanct as distractions could be obstructive to the concentration and thought-flows of library patrons. It is in the light of this that this study investigates how to curb the prevalence of the menace of the usage of mobile phones in libraries using a Nigerian university library as a case study.

Discussion and Analysis

One thousand, five hundred (1,500) copies of the questionnaire were printed and placed at the public areas of KDL (the Circulation and Reference Control Desks of the main library) for users to pick and complete. Of this number, 86%, representing one thousand, two hundred and ninety (1290) copies were well completed and returned. The remaining 210

(14%) were either not properly completed or not returned. Table I below shows the distribution of the respondents according to Faculties.

TABLE I: Faculty distribution of respondents.

Faculty	No. of Respond.	Percentage
Agriculture	40	3.10
Arts	80	6.20
Education	290	22.48
Law	220	17.05
Medicine	10	.76
Pharmacy	20	1.55
Science	110	8.53
Soc. Sciences	310	24.03
Technology	20	1.55
Vet. Med.	20	1.55
Others	170	13.18
Total	1,290	100

From this table, one can see that most of the respondents, 310 (24.04%), are from the Faculty of The Social Sciences. Only 10 (.76%) are from the College of Medicine. The seemingly low response from the College can be explained in the sense that it has its own library, Latunde Odeku Medical Library at the College. Only pre-clinical students make use of KDL, others rely heavily on the Medical Library. The respondents are also classified according to status. Thus, one thousand (1000) are students while two hundred and eighty (280) and ten (10) are staff and ‘other users’ respectively. Interestingly, of the student respondents, postgraduates and undergraduates are five hundred (500) apiece. Whereas, 710 (55.04%) are male, 580 (44.96%) are female.

TABLE II: Age classification.

Age	No. of Respondents.	Percentage
18-25	340	26.36
26-35	530	41.09
36-45	300	23.26
46-55	120	9.30
56-65	-	-
65+	-	-
Total	1290	100

It is instructive to note that the age distribution indicate a decline in the number of users who own mobile phones as the age groupings advance. From as high as 530 respondents who are between the ages of 26 and 35, to as low as 120 for those who are between the ages of 46 and 55. Beyond this age grouping, no respondent indicated that s/he owns a mobile phone. This shows a great generational divide between the older generations who probably are not as enthusiastic as the younger ones about the new communication technology.

One thousand and seventy (1070) of the respondents own mobile phones and one thousand and ten (1010) of them take the phones with them whenever they are visiting the library. So, only a small fraction (60) does not take their cell phones to the library. Also,

although one thousand, one hundred and eighty (1180) of all the respondents claim to be aware of the notices prohibiting the use of mobile phones in the library, the notices were ignored in spite of the fact that one thousand and ten (1010) of them confess to being distracted each time the phone rings near them. Two hundred and sixty (260) say they are usually not distracted whenever a mobile phone rings near them while twenty (20) of them do not indicate either way.

It is of interest that of 260 who claim not to be distracted by the use of mobile phones, 210 spend more than 3 hours, on the average, in the library daily. One would have expected that since they spend more time in the library, they will be the ones who would be missing more important calls if they switched-off their phones during the period, hence, they should be the ones to clamor for the liberty to leave their phones on while in the library. The implication therefore is that most of those who clamor that mobile phones should not be switched-off actually spend less than an average of 3 hours daily in the library. Only 50 of the 260 respondents spend less than 3 hours in the library. So, 80.8% of those who are not perturbed by the use of mobile phones spend 3 hours and above while others spend less. One would have expected those who spend more time to be more worried about incessant use of mobile phones. Table III below shows the number of respondents who are usually distracted whenever a phone rings near them while Table IV shows the average time spent by the respondents in the library daily.

TABLE III: No of respondents distracted by mobile phones.

Distraction	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Distracted	1,010	78.29
Not Distracted	260	20.16
Indifferent	20	1.55
Total	1,290	100

TABLE IV: Average no. of hours spent per day in the Library.

Time Spent in Library daily	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 1 hr	20	1.55
1 – 2 hrs	30	2.33
2 – 3 hrs	270	20.93
3 – 4 hrs	380	29.46
4 – 5 hrs	220	17.05
5 and above	370	28.68
Total	1,290	100

It was discovered that 950 of 1,070 respondents who own mobile phones indicate that their cell phones have the vibration/silent mode facility. Even 30 of the 120 others claim that their phones have all the ringtones facility, including the vibration/silent option. This means that 980 (91.59%) of the respondents who own mobile phones have the vibration facility. One wonders why the controversy about the use of mobile phones is not just resolved by instructing the users to put their phones in the silent mode when entering the library. This, indeed, seems to be the position taken by most of the respondents when asked to suggest ways that the library authority should adopt in handling the use of mobile phones in the library.

Suggestions. The respondents' suggestions on how the library can deal with the use of mobile

phones are summarized as follows:

- The use of mobile phones should be prohibited in the library.
- Library users should be advised to set their mobile phones in the vibration or silent mode.
- Guidelines concerning this should be well disseminated on campus through the distribution of leaflets and the university official communication organs like newsletters, library bulletins, notice boards, etc.
- Library porters and security men should be trained to constantly remind users to set their phones in the vibration or silent mode as they enter the library.
- Library supervisors and monitors should be made to go round to ensure that users conform to the instructions. Periodic noise patrols should be conducted by porters.
- Library authority should make provisions for designated areas within the premises where calls could be made and received by mobile phone users.
- The respondents further suggest that those who refuse to comply with these regulations should be:
 - Handed over to the university security and made to face the advisory committee of the Students' Disciplinary Committee.
 - Made to pay a compulsory amount as fine.
 - Sent out and suspended temporarily from using the library and its facilities.
 - Have their library cards seized and denied the use of the library until they have shown enough penitence and are prepared to be of good conduct.
 - Have their phones seized and released only when they are ready to leave the library.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Most of the respondents are obviously against the use of mobile phones in the library and they call for its outright prohibition. They see the library as a place that should be quiet, serene and noiseless. Distractions of whatever sorts should be disallowed. On the whole, it is apparent from the foregoing that the use of mobile phones in KDL constitutes a great menace to the library users. Majority of the respondents affirm this. Even though a few are of the opinion that the library should be able to accommodate this new means of communication they are unequivocal about their distaste for the opprobrious use of the gadgets in the library. The University is therefore advised to come up with a clear-cut policy on the use of mobile phones in the library.

Punitive measures should be outlined for erring users. The relevant organs of the university should be involved in the process of putting the rules and regulations in place. The Students' Union should be informed and/or involved as a means of sensitizing and mobilizing the students about the new rules. And lastly, the library should make provisions for designated areas where calls could be made and received.

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