

Connecting Indigenous Peoples: Mobile Phone Experiences of Three Indigenous Peoples Groups in the Philippines

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The indigenous peoples (IPs) of the Philippines, numbering between 4.5 million to 10 million, live in mostly remote rural areas, and are generally regarded as marginalized owing to their geographic, economic, social, and political location. Their situation notwithstanding, this study shows that selected groups of IPs – the Sama-Tausugs, Aytas, and Dumagats – are no strangers to information and communication technologies, particularly the mobile phone. Their perceptions of the mobile phones are shaped by their present life world. But despite limited financial resources, low literacy level, and poor signal in their respective areas, the IPs have devised ways of acquiring and using the mobile phone to keep them connected to each other and to the “lowlanders.” For the IPs of this study, mobile phone ownership and use have provided them access to and acceptance in the mainstream society.

Introduction

The Philippine Constitution uses the term indigenous peoples (IPs) or indigenous cultural communities (Rodil, 2004; Castro, 2000) in referring to more than 40 ethnolinguistic groups that have remained largely un-Hispanized and un-Westernized despite the country’s centuries of being colonized. According to Barrameda (1993: 4), they “trace their ancestral origin to the land in which they live.”

For this research, indigenous peoples or IPs refer to the indigenous groups Dumagat, Ayta, and Sama-Tausug. They

identify themselves as members of indigenous cultural communities because they adhere to some pre-colonial cultural beliefs and practices.

Estimates on the number of IPs in the country vary. Dulay (Manaligod, 1990: xii) approximates it to be “anywhere between 6.5 to 10.0 million.” Based on the 1980 National Census’ projected annual growth rate of 2.38 percent, the number in the 1990s was estimated at 4.5 million. They are also estimated to account for 6.9% (Castro, 2000) to 10% (Commission on National Integration in Rodil, 2004) of the national population. Thus, if we were to assume that IPs comprise 10% of the country’s estimated national population, the IPs would reach about 8.5 million.

Classifications or groupings of IPs likewise vary. Castro (2000) and Manaligod (2004) have identified six major groupings of IPs, namely:¹

- Lumad: non-Muslim hill tribes of Mindanao;
- Cordillera Peoples: ethnic groups inhabiting the Cordillera mountain ranges over five provinces in Northern Luzon, namely, Ifugao, Benguet, Kalinga-Apayao, Mt. Province, and Abra;
- Caraballo Tribes: ethnic groups inhabiting the Eastern Central Luzon’s Caraballo mountain ranges connecting the provinces of Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, Nueva Ecija, and parts of Rizal and Quezon;
- Agta and Ayta: most widely distributed among tribal Filipinos, particularly in the Sierra Madre and Zambales mountains;
- Mangyan: ethnic groups inhabiting the mountains and foothills of Mindoro Occidental and Mindoro Oriental; and
- Palawan hill tribes: indigenous peoples of the province of Palawan.

Meanwhile, Rodil (2004) included Muslim Filipinos in the list of IPs with Islam as their dominant religion. The Muslim Filipinos belong to the following major ethnic groups: Tausug, Maguindanao, Maranao, Samal, and Yakan which comprise 5% of the population.

More often than not, IPs live in remote rural areas and the hinterlands. A confluence of geographical, economic, social, and political factors excludes the country's indigenous peoples from accessing and receiving benefits from the government and other social service institutions. A literacy rate from 45% to 57% characterizes most indigenous peoples. Rodil describes their condition:

Once the masters of their own lives, now, the majority of them are poor and landless. In the old days, many of them lived in the plains. But as a result of population pressures and resettlement programs from among the majority, they have moved to the forest areas. Now, their forests are devastated and their culture is threatened. (Rodil, 2004: 11)

In the field of communication, IPs lag behind by several years. Landline telephone use is scarce in their areas because telecommunication services are concentrated in urban centers. Access to the landline and mobile phone technologies is consequently very minimal.

For instance, a study by Cureg (2004) of the indigenous peoples in the town of Cabagan, Isabela in Northern Luzon showed that only a few people actually own mobile phones. They are mostly professionals belonging to the middle and high-income brackets and with relatives working abroad. After all, mobile phone ownership entails continuing expense.

Another study cited changes in material culture and acceptance or rejection of technologies, but it only mentioned the Internet, not the mobile phone, as a communication tool used by

IPs. It acknowledged that IPs “are still beyond the reach of information technology” (Castro, 2000: 216).

Rationale of the Study

Although there exists a body of knowledge on IPs in the Philippines, there is nonetheless a dearth of studies on how they acquire and utilize information and communication technology (ICT), particularly the mobile phone.

A study by Isis International–Manila stated that the country’s level of economic development and political economy as well as its rough terrain and geographical features had an impact on the acquisition of the new technology and its diffusion. The large number of islands in the Philippines makes communication difficult. The study cited certain factors that hinder access and use of ICT in women’s organizations, such as urban bias, limited access, collaboration and networking, under-utilization of ICT, social exclusion due to non-usage of English, inadequate skills, gender and psychological barriers, and a serious lack and disparity of resources.

According to a 2002 unpublished report of Isis International–Manila:

The persistent structural, systemic, and ideological barriers constitute obstacles to increasing women’s participation in the ICT arena. It has been pointed out that the IT (information technology) is managed globally and locally by an elite system of managers, which is unlikely to include a critical mass of women. As access to resources is generally easier for the privileged, Gilkim emphasizes that factors such as race, gender, and class will limit ICT access to marginalized groups. In Asian countries where factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, caste, and geographical location play a major part in access to and content of resources in general, ICT access and use will also be necessarily shaped and

influenced by similar factors. (Isis International-Manila, 2002: 5)

Similarly, geographical obstacles, language barrier, and mealy economic resources underpin the indigenous peoples' long history of marginalization and exclusion.

Schiller (1996) proposed transforming the informational system into an open network system – open enough to include everyone regardless of economic conditions, whether belonging to an indigenous group or not. Inclusion here means a connection not only involving individuals but also societies and cultures.

The relevant conduits for this connectivity are the various forms of communication, including mass media and ICTs. The Internet and the mobile phone provide the means for individuals and countries to be included in, connected to, and become part of a globalized world. As McQuail said, ICTs have a “greatly increased capacity to transmit sounds and (moving) images at low cost across frontiers and around the world, overcoming limits of time and space” (2000: 111).

The extensive use of technologies has spurred interest among scholars and researchers to study the new media, particularly the Internet, cellular phones, and other ICT devices, focusing on how these are affecting the lives of Filipinos. This researcher chose to study the mobile phone because it is cheaper and more popular than other media, including the computer or the Internet.

McQuail further noted that technologies such as the mobile phone can be harnessed for social growth and development. He added that technologies could function as a catalyst (1994: 103):

changes in modes and forms of communication effect corresponding changes in the society's power structure, culture and ideology. Any media technology gives rise to societal and world complexities, which may in part cause changes in relationships between and among individual groups.

An editorial of *Mass Media Asia* (2003) established a connection between marginalized groups and the ICTs by arguing that the traditional media and the ICTs can be used to collectively fight against poverty. Reddi (1987) also agreed that ICTs are an important factor in development.

Cognizant of the potential role that ICT plays in the development and connection of the marginalized and poverty groups in the social, cultural, and economic affairs of society, this study probes the extent to which the IP sector has connected with the rest of Philippine society using the mobile phone. It analyzes the IPs' relationship with the mobile phone. It aims to contribute to the discourse related to indigenous peoples, culture and technology, citing the social, economic, geographical, and cultural barriers that may possibly hinder the diffusion of and access to the mobile phone.

Furthermore, it describes how these obstacles shape the content and mode of mobile phone consumption; how the technologies invade their cultural space; and are assimilated in their way of life.

Finally, the study explores the negotiations and adjustments to mainstream society that IPs experience in using the mobile phone. It depicts the IPs' various cultural expressions in acquiring and using the mobile phone, and creating meaning in the process.

Research Problems and Objectives

To what extent and in what manner have the three groups of IPs connected themselves to mainstream Filipino society with the use of the mobile phone? What change in cultural experience has the mobile phone provided these indigenous groups?

Specifically, the study aims:

1. To explore the factors and context of mobile phone awareness, acquisition, use, and skills among selected indigenous peoples, considering their geographical location and socio-economic status;
2. To identify and describe the experiences of the informants in using the mobile phone and the meaning they have attached to this; and
3. To identify and assess the changes caused by the mobile phone in the daily lives of the informants.

Research Methods

This researcher conducted fieldwork and focus interviews in Zamboanga del Sur among the *Lumah Ma Dilaut* organization's officers who describe themselves as Sama-Tausug; and in Barangay Cadmang, Cabagan, Zambales among the Aytas. She also had key informant interviews and one focus group discussion (FGD) with members of the Dumagat and Remontado tribes in Tanay, Rizal.

Results of the Study

The Factors and Context for Mobile Phone Use

Profile of informants

The study had a total of 23 informants, eight of whom are Dumagats-Remontados, 13 Aytas, and two Sama-Tausugs. Majority of them are aged 18 to 30. Only five are male while the rest are female. Majority are married, with six of them married to non-natives or lowlanders and with an average of four children.

Table 1. Ownership Profile

Informants	Years Acquired	No. of Mobile Phones Acquired So Far	Manner of Acquisition
Dumagats 4 FGD participants 4 FI informants	3-5 years ago	3-5 units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - hand-me-down - bought in Manila as second-hand units - pawned/unredeemed
Aytas 8 FGD participants (Canduli Family) 5 FI informants	less than a year to a year ago	1 unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - hand-me-down - bought from a friend as second-hand - bought second-hand in Olongapo City
Muslim-Tausug Sinama Tribe 2 FI informants	1-2 years ago	none (renting) 1 unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - bought second-hand in the city - gifts from relatives/bought second-hand

Two of the informants reached college. Another two reached high school; 11, elementary level, five of whom finished only Grade 1. Another eight did not have any schooling at all.

The informants' educational profile appears well within the general literacy rate of 45 to 50% of the country's indigenous peoples (Rodil, 2004).

As far as occupation is concerned, the married women-informants were laundry women, plain housewives, *kaingineros* (those engaged in slash-and-burn agriculture), and wood gatherers. The single or unmarried women, on the other hand, worked as housemaids of rich families in the town or city. They usually went home to their families in the villages on weekends.

Meanwhile, the men worked as farm helpers, wood gatherers or irregular construction workers.

The study's informants were subdivided into two categories: those who reside in far-flung communities; and those who moved to the town proper or urban centers because of marriage, educational attainment, and economic opportunities and thereby acquired some of the ways and lifestyle of urban residents.

Awareness and modes of mobile phone acquisition

ICTs are now used by most, if not all, sectors of Filipino society, including the IPs of Mindanao, Rizal, and Central Luzon. Among these technologies, the most widely used is the mobile phone.

Table 1 shows that because of exposure to the lowlanders' lifestyle, the Dumagat and Remontado informants are familiar with the mobile phone. In fact, they have been users of the mobile phone for five years. Three of them have had three to five mobile phones each already.

Meanwhile, the Ayta informants may not have actually owned a mobile phone, but they are aware of the gadget. They have experienced using a rented mobile phone that belonged to a neighbor.

No one among the informants bought a brand new mobile phone, a reflection of their lack of capacity to do so because of their economic status.

Below is an account of how an Ayta informant was initiated into the mobile phone culture in the mountain:

Estella Santos, 35, is an Ayta residing in Baranggay Cadmang who married a lowlander. She does not have a mobile phone, but she is aware of mobile phones and their brands such as Motorola and the old models of Nokia like the 5110 and 3233.

Estella first saw a mobile phone that belonged to a lowlander visiting her baranggay. In fact, she was able to hold one when a neighbor pawned his unit to her. For her, it was like holding a delicate thing.

In the beginning, Estella did not know how to use it and was not familiar with the symbols on the keypad. She learned how to do so after a friend taught her how to press the keys and explained to her the meanings of the symbols or icons.

Estella felt envy whenever neighbors displayed their mobile phones. The gadgets seemed mysterious, but when someone pawned a mobile phone to Estella, she said: "*Ganito lang pala!*" (So, this is how it works!)

The next time someone pawned her a mobile phone, Estella refrained from using it because she might get hooked to it. She did not want to feel bad if and when the owner retrieved it.

Meanwhile, the Sama-Tausug informants were in a situation similar to that of the Aytas. Although poor, living in remote areas, and illiterate, the Sama-Tausugs have some awareness about the mobile phone. In using it, the tribal elders would usually request the younger and more literate members of the Sama-Tausug to do the texting for them.

The informants who own mobile phones acquired these as gifts or hand-me-downs from well-off relatives, as second-hand purchases, or bargain sales in urban centers.

Some variations were noted in the Dumagat informants' mode of acquisition of the mobile phone. They said that they bought their mobile phones in cash from stores in Manila. Unlike the Ayta and Sama-Tausug informants who live in rural areas, the Dumagat-Remontado informants reside near urban centers. The districts of Quiapo in Manila and Greenhills in San Juan are

accessible to them since buses and jeepneys ply the Tanay-Greenhills-Manila route regularly. Having left the Tanay mountains as a result of marriage, business or work opportunities, they now live in the town proper, readily exposed to the persuasions of commercial establishments. As Barrameda (1993) put it, they have become “easy prey to modern materialistic philosophies . . . (and have swallowed) the fatal bait of the almighty market and entrepreneurship” (4).

Some Dumagat informants got their mobile phones as hand-me-downs from their affluent relatives. Also, some interviewees got mobile phones after the owners pawned their units to them and failed to redeem these. Still others had to scrimp and tighten their belts in order to buy their mobile phones.

A study of mobile phone ownership of their urban poor counterparts (Portus, 2005) reveals that, common among the possessions of the poor, whether indigenous or not, are low quality and outmoded gadgets like the hand-me downs and the pawned or unredeemed mobile phones. Understandably, the mobile phone models of the study’s informants were not top-of-the-line, but merely the old and almost obsolete ones. These models were bulky and worn-out, featuring the visible antennae.

There were varied reactions or types of behavior noted among the owners of old mobile phone models. Those who do not have television sets and seldom visit the town or city do not seem to mind having the outmoded mobile phones. They are not even aware that there are new models, i.e., mobile phones without the visible antennae, or with a camera, or slim cases, or the phones that one could flip, fold, or slide. One of the informants said, “*Hindi kasi kami nakakakita ng mga bago.*” (That’s because we haven’t seen the new models.)

Significantly, those who have seen the latest models of mobile phones by watching television, feel embarrassed in showing their outmoded mobile phones whenever they go to town. They would simply hide their obsolete mobile phones in their bags.

Mobile Phone Experiences and Meanings

Mobile-phone-for-rent: A community tool

According to the informants, only two individuals in the Sama-Tausug and Ayta communities have mobile phones. These owners allow community members to use their mobile phones for P2 to P4 per text message, or P10 to P12 per one-minute call.

This innovative use of the mobile phone allowed the Sama-Tausugs and Aytas to be better connected to their loved ones and friends. The mobile phone, as a community communication tool, has contributed to the growing awareness and aptitude of the informants in mobile phone use and has greatly enhanced their access to communication.

The capacity of the mobile phone to become a community tool shows the IP informants' desire to promote community welfare. The original telephone landline may have been intended mainly for individual households to communicate. However, responding to the access and communication needs in the IP informants' communities, owners devised an alternative use of the gadget. The mobile phone has evolved from personal to that of a community communication tool.

The above finding underscores the ability of tribal communities concerned to adapt to the technological environment. More significantly, it reinforces the traditional custom of sharing one's bounty with the rest of the community.

However, as material instruments, mobile phones carry with them not only social but economic advantages as well, allowing enterprising owners to generate income through them.

Paradoxically, generosity seems to have emerged in combination with the subtle assimilation of capitalist behavior. The concept of mobile phone rental implies the entry of consumerist values and commercial orientation among cultural communities. While sharing involves the use of the unit by all,

the paid text messages and calls mean profits for the mobile phone owners.

Considering that the field work and interviews were done two years ago, there is a possibility that more residents may have acquired mobile phones by this time, thus changing the mobile phone technology landscape from communal to private ownership.

The convergence of these two cultural practices – shared access and collective consumption of goods on one hand and selling text messages and calls on the other hand – can be both gleaned in the context and manner by which cultural communities consume the mobile phone as exhibited in the case of Baranggay (Village) Cadmang in Cabagan, Zambales:

The residents of Baranggay Cadmang live in huts together with their extended families. They share a single mobile phone. Before the introduction of the mobile phone in Baranggay Cadmang, residents would go to the Radio Communications Philippines, Inc. (RCPI) office in town to make a call. But now, with the mobile phone, making calls became much easier.

Despite the slow pace of development in Baranggay Cadmang, a number of residents have mobile phones. Almost all of these mobile phones are old, so unlike the top-of-the-line models being used by affluent residents in the urban centers.

The very poor do not have mobile phones despite the relatively low cost of second-hand ones. These individuals, however, would really like to own mobile phones. They stated that as soon as they were able to save enough money, they would definitely buy mobile phones.

Due to some enterprising individuals, residents without mobile phones no longer have to go to town for more than an hour or spend precious money for a

call at the RCPI office. These residents allow others to use their mobile phones for a fee. For every text message that is sent, the phone owners would get P2).

One of these entrepreneurs said that his earnings for selling “text messages” are substantial, having financed some of his family’s needs, such as food and house repair. The rate is cheaper compared to a PLDT call charge of P5 to P10 per call, not to mention the additional transportation cost in going to the RCPI office.

Meanwhile, even the illiterate users manage to send messages because others do it for them.

Those who do not speak Filipino or English and speak only Zambal still succeed in communicating with others through a borrowed mobile phone with the owner translating.

No one among the Ayta informants can afford to buy a P300-load for their mobile phones. According to the informants, a majority of them usually avail of the electronic load costing P10 to P30 pesos, courtesy of relatively well-off residents in Barangay Cadmang.

Others would avail of the “*pasa-load*” despite the additional charge of P5 for a P15 load. So, if one were given a P15-*pasa-load*, he or she would actually have to pay P20. At times, those who do not own mobile phones would offer to pay for the load of the mobile phone owned by another in order to make calls or send text messages.

An imaginative member of the Ayta community advertised the availability of his mobile phone-for-rent by posting a handwritten notice by his door.

Likewise, residents who are into buy-and-sell business – mostly women who sell beauty products – regard the mobile phone as a partner due to its usefulness in getting purchase orders.

The above case is similar to the Sama-Tausugs whose majority do not have mobile phones. Being illiterate, they would pay P2 to phone owners to send text messages for them. To a certain extent, these mobile phone owners regard this as a way to generate income since a text message only costs P1.

A Sama-Tausug informant confirmed:

Oo, ay! Hindi naman labat... meron. Like this Tampalan, ang meron lang d'yan ay dalawa lang sa pagkalaki-laki ng community na 'yan. Itong sa Sanggli, isa lang sa 70 households n'yan.

Labat nagte-text doon. Itong sa Tampalan nga, si Jul 'yung teacher – 'yun siya na parang bakla. Siya ang taga-text sa mga taga-Maynila.

(Oh, yes! Not all have these. For instance, here in Tampalan, only two persons in this rather large community have mobile phones. Here in Sanggli, only one out of 70 households.

All who live there send text messages. Here in Tampalan, it's Jul, the teacher – the one who acts like a gay – who does the texting for residents in Manila.)

The community mobile phone, however, was a necessity to the Dumagats since majority of them had their own mobile phones.

A sign of prestige

Mobile phones bring prestige and “high” status to owners or users. IPs (whether Dumagat, Sama-Tausug or Ayta) who purchased their mobile phones from distant places like Manila, Olongapo City, Zambales, and Zamboanga City, do so due to the prestige of traveling to centers of commerce, far from their mountainous habitat.

Those who married lowlanders acquire some of the latter’s ways, including making frequent trips to the city to shop for food, furniture, appliances, and goods, like mobile phones. Notably, the low price of old models and second-hand units enhance the indigenous people’s ability to buy mobile phones in cash.

In the case of the Dumagats, the stature that the mobile phone gives depends on the place where the mobile phone is used. When in their barrio, amidst fellow Dumagats, they do not have any qualms about showing off their mobile phones. This is because there are only a handful of mobile phone owners there. However, when in town, surrounded by strangers who have better models, they would feel embarrassed in using their mobile phones in public.

Prestige is also linked to political position. Many believe that community leaders should be the very first to own mobile phones. Thus, two baranggay chairpersons were actually the first ones in their respective communities to buy mobile phones.

One of the baranggay officials thought that, being a baranggay chair, she should not only be the first to own a mobile phone, but that she should also have a better model. She believed that this would surely enhance her status as a baranggay chair. In her own words, it should not be an ordinary one like those owned by her constituents, “*Para ‘di ako mapahiya.*” (So that I won’t get embarrassed).

Baranggay Chair Eliza explained:

Noong ako'y magkaroon ng mobile phone aynaano ko naman sa aking sarili dahil medyo mura-mura ang aking mobile phone, tinatago ko sa bag dahil nakakita ako ng mamahaling mobile phone, nahihiya na ako sa mobile phone ko. Hindi na pang-kapitan ang mobile phone ko, pangkaraniwan na lang.

(When I acquired a mobile phone, I kept it to myself because I had a cheap one. I'd hide it in my bag because I felt embarrassed with it after having seen the more expensive ones. My mobile phone is no longer appropriate for a baranggay chair, only for ordinary people.)

Neighbors and community members also said that leaders must acquire mobile phones since these would help in facilitating community activities. Leaders of tribal communities said that the mobile phone is a necessary and helpful tool for the effective performance of their functions, like calling for meetings. Instead of traveling far from one place to another in their mountainous territory, all that they would have to do is send a text message.

Among the Aytas, the mobile phone also brings honor and prestige to the owner, whether one is a leader or not. In fact, it serves to thwart the usual discrimination and ridicule being experienced by the natives from lowlanders. Aytas, usually the objects of humiliation with their dark skin, kinky hair, and short height, are now respected, instead of humiliated and discriminated, when they start brandishing their mobile phones.

This social bias against persons based on what they possess and not on who they are, seems to have crept into the indigenous peoples' belief system, given their constant exposure to lowlanders. Material possession is thus used in valuing people and in assessing a person's character.

Breaking physical and social barriers

In citing the reasons for acquiring a mobile phone, the informants revealed the need to connect because of geographical location: “*Para magkaroon kami ng communication sa kabayanan... kinakailangang magkaroon kami ng kontak sa munisipyo.*” (So that we could have some means of communication in our town... we need to establish contact with the municipality.)

The barangay chair-informants in particular need to be connected to the town’s seat of government to be able to avail of services that are almost non-existent in the mountains or rural areas. The mobile phone has afforded the indigenous peoples a connection to the town, making them aware about the situation in the town and around the nation.

The mobile phone has solved the problem of paying for transportation, particularly for people living outside the center of commercial and social activities (e.g., Barangay Cadmang and the town of Tanay). “*Kabit walang pamasabe*” (Even without transportation fare), they claim, since the mobile phone owners are able to deliver or send messages to relatives or friends staying in the town proper.

The mobile phone has thus broken down physical and social barriers.

One respondent said that despite being “*taga-bundok*” (mountain dwellers), most of them own mobile phones. For the indigenous peoples, they said:

... napakahalaga ng ating mobile phone sa kasalukuyan dahil kabit kami ay narito sa bundok, ora mismo nagkakaroon kami ng connection sa mga pulis. Narayan ang Office of the Mayor. So, hindi kami makauwi, maulan, nagkakaroon kami kaagad ng komunikasyon. Pag nagkakaroon ng kaunting problema dito, nakakaabot sa kanila.

(...the mobile phone is very important at this time for us who live in the mountains, since we are immediately connected to the police when there are crimes in the area. Within reach is the Office of the Mayor. So, if we can't go home due to heavy rains, we can immediately communicate home. If there's any problem at all over here, they'll know about it.)

The remote locations of the indigenous peoples render communication very difficult, especially where there are no telephone lines. But a call for help is now only a text away through the mobile phone.

Cell sites have been constructed even in mountainous areas. The mobile phone users have become more innovative or creative. Whenever they find the mobile phone's signal rather low, they would climb tall trees or water tanks from where they could send a message. They would also move around holding the mobile phone over their heads to locate the signal, at the same time vigorously shaking their mobile phone until it successfully registered: "Message sent."

Ownership of a mobile phone brings feelings of comfort and confidence to the indigenous peoples. This also translates to the ability to obtain help when it is needed.

Mobile phone as burden and distraction

Mobile phones are not always regarded as beneficial. The adverse effects of the mobile phone are evident among the female informants who felt that mobile phone distracted them from their household chores. Among the Dumagats, housewives cited delays in their household activities because they have to stop, read the text messages, and respond to them.

The women in particular take longer time to finish their laundry now that they own and use mobile phones. They would finish texting their friends first before cooking or doing their laundry.

A Dumagat informant shared that:

Para sa akin, ang pangkaraniwang nabago sa akin ay 'yong bang ako'y bago matulog, mobile phone muna. Mga 12, titingnan ko, baka may nag-text sa akin. Imbes na ako'y tulog na, ako'y bumabangon. Yon pala, nagpapadala lang sa akin ng ringtone.

(For me, the change in my lifestyle is that before I go to sleep, I would use my mobile phone. At around midnight, I would check my mobile phone for possible messages. Instead of being sound asleep, I would get up only to discover that someone had sent me a ringtone.)

Another informant, Seling, added:

Parang nagkaroon ako ng self... kabit may gagawin kang ano, pag may magti-text sa yo, parang hindi mo na napapansin 'yong mga ibang ginagawa mo. Parang naka-focus ka lang sa mobile phone.

(It's like I'm having a new self. . . even if I wanted to do something, once a text message came, I would not be able to focus on the things that I'm doing. It seems like my full attention is on the mobile phone.)

Mobile phone messages come anytime of the day. One would get up even when about to sleep, or only half-awake in the morning, just to read text messages.

The message ring tone induces the mobile phone owner to immediately check the message. The thought of some good news or even an untoward event excites mobile phone users who cannot postpone viewing the message, no matter what they may be doing.

Majority of the informants claim that mobile phones are an added burden to their already tight budget. A mobile phone load costing P30 would be given priority instead of rice or viand or soup.

Displaying a critical attitude towards the mobile phone, an informant gave a different perspective on the adverse effects of the mobile phone. She argued that the exposure to the outside world causes a potential conflict because the generation gap between the young and the old widens.

The informant was referring to how quickly the young learn how to operate the mobile phone. Apparently, the youth know more about the features and functions of the mobile phone and are exposed to more updates and new models.

Some informants added that the difference was apparent not only between the young and the old, but much more so between the rich and the poor. Surprisingly, the informants revealed that there were many more women (than men) who used the mobile phone.

This revelation can be attributed to the fact that the women usually remained at home and were frequently exposed to numerous TV ads featuring popular actors and celebrities promoting new mobile phone models. Such images stimulate the viewers' curiosity and generate a desire to acquire and use the mobile phone, too.

Class difference

Understandably, indigenous peoples, given their socio-economic status, utilize the mobile phone differently from the more affluent sectors of society. The difference lay mainly in the mode of acquisition and frequency of use of the mobile phone. A discussant revealed that:

Eh, sa amin di tulad ng iba, halimbawa, katulad sa amin yong paggamit ng mobile phone, may mga time na sa paggamit namin non ay inilalagay namin sa, una sa lahat, wala kaming

pambili ng... inaano namin yong aming, yong bulsa namin baka wala kaming pambili kaya limit kami sa pagti-text kumbaga. Gusto lang namin receive kami nang receive, ganon.

(We differ from others in using the mobile phone. First of all, we don't have money to buy mobile phones in cash; we have to save. And then we cannot regularly buy mobile phone loads, so as much as possible, we avoid sending text messages. We just want to receive and receive messages).

Their generally low level of education did not deter the indigenous peoples from learning how to send text messages. Their children, who have reached at least the high school level, have been teaching them how to press the keypad and understand the functions of notations, symbols and the Filipino translation of English terms or instructions.

Jenelyn confessed:

At saka, tinitingnan namin ang menu. Doon kasi tinuturuan din kami ng anak namin, eh, komo sila mga sanay sa mobile phone. Kaya ako, dala-wang linggong nagsasanay, tinagalog ko na't lahat-lahat...Hindi ko pa rin naiintindihan. Pag naka-English na sa manual, di ko na maintindihan.

(And, we look at the menu. Our children use it also in teaching us, since they are familiar with the mobile phone. And so, I've been training for two weeks. I've been translating everything in *Tagalog*. But I still do not understand. When it's in English in the manual, I no longer understand.)

Changes Brought by the Mobile Phone

System of communication

The informants attested to certain changes in their lives due to the mobile phone. Foremost among these changes was the facility in communication. They realized the advantages of contacting relatives and friends at a much shorter time and at a minimal cost.

However, the trade-off for this convenience involved partially giving up face-to-face interaction with relatives and friends as well as coveted visits to the town or city. The informants felt that saving on cost or time was not sufficient for them to ignore the value of personal and direct communication and to disregard the lure of the town or city. Some admitted that they went to the city, not only to make calls, but also, due to their desire to relax in the cinemas, parks, malls and the like.

The data suggest that the informants combine, rather than supplant, their face-to-face communication with their new-found system of communication. The Aytas, Sama-Tausugs and Dumagats have adopted the mobile phone technology to complement their current mode of communication.

Attitudes, values and spending patterns

The most obvious change that the informants experienced with their introduction to the mobile phone was the added financial burden from having to buy a cell card and/or a load, or to rent a mobile phone. Despite their lack of money, they would still rent mobile phones or buy P5 to P30 loads.

Even before the advent of the mobile phone in their lives, the different groups of informants were already complaining about inadequate financial resources. However, they seem to have adjusted to the added financial burden and managed to prioritize this new gadget over their basic needs.

The seemingly amazing gadget combined with tantalizing commercial ads has produced a certain obsession that, in turn, has effectively changed the informants' spending pattern. Attractive mobile phone posters and TV ads have penetrated the remote and inaccessible abode of the indigenous group-informants.

Attitudinal change was evident among some informants. Before owning a mobile phone, they regarded those with mobile phones as braggarts without realizing that, when it was their turn to have one, they also felt like showing off their new gadget.

Sa akin, yong nagbago sa akin, no'ng ako'y walang mobile phone, ako'y ang tingin ko don sa may mga mobile phone, napakayayabang. Pinagaganyan-ganyan ba, kayayabang. Pero nung nagkaroon ako, ganoon pala. Pero naramdaman ko ang tuwa at parang proud ako.

(For me, what changed in me, when I had no mobile phone yet, I regarded those owners or users of mobile phones as show-offs. When I had one, I realized how it felt to be proud and happy.)

Possession and status symbol

The most significant change felt by the informants was the prestige and recognition that they received, not only from their peers among the indigenous peoples, but more importantly, from the lowlanders. The mobile phone became a status symbol and bridged the gap between the lowlanders and the indigenous groups. Text messages were being exchanged not only among relatives, but among friends who hailed from other sectors of society (e.g., government officials, police and other lowlanders).

The data showed how people are valued based on their material possession. The mobile phone paved the way for the indigenous groups' recognition. Seeing somebody with a mobile phone connoted a connection or membership in a group.

Assimilating the ways of the lowlanders became an effective way to minimize discrimination.

Social growth and development

As McQuail (1994) had predicted, technologies become catalysts due to changes in modes and forms of communication. In this study, all the groups of informants have experienced faster communication, access to government services, better relationships between and among individual groups due to frequent contacts.

In terms of harnessing the informants' development, they have become more sociable and have shed off their feeling of inferiority. They have become more confident in dealing with others.

Enterprising Aytas and the Tausugs have even grabbed the opportunity to earn by renting out their mobile phones.

Conclusions

This study reveals how the mobile phone connects the IP-informants, not only to relatives and friends, but also, to government institutions and/or services as well as to the outside world. The data suggest that the extent and manner of communication or socio-cultural connection were dependent on two major constraints:

- a) Poor ability of indigenous peoples to access the mobile phone due to geographical location: The study's sites are far from urban centers where communication cell sites usually operate. Thus, the resulting weak signal to and from the mobile phones in the remote and rugged terrain of the IPs poses the biggest problem to the informants in using their mobile phones or sending text messages.

- b) Limited access to the mobile phone due to poor purchasing power: Majority of the IP-informants do not have mobile phones, owning mostly to their lack of purchasing power. Nonetheless, as explained earlier, this particular obstacle does not deter them from using the mobile phone. They negotiate their way to be able to use the mobile phone.

The mobile-phone-for-rent as a communication facility in the community reflects the native intelligence and ingenuity of the indigenous peoples. Truly, this may have emerged out of sheer necessity, but it also echoes a historical and cultural tradition of the IPs to share with the rest of their peers whatever they may have (acquired) in the course of daily living. Undeniably, the mobile phone technology presents itself as a case in point of the IPs' cultural practice of sharing.

The study illustrates how cultural communities achieve elevated status because of the mobile phone. Discrimination and ridicule seemingly disappear once IPs acquire mobile phones.

Mobile phones progressively connect the cultural communities to the outside world and enable them to access government programs and services.

Meanwhile, the adverse effects of the mobile phone on indigenous peoples, such as, a distraction, financial burden and consumerist values, usually surface and accompany the IPs' technological socio-cultural experiences.

Note

- ¹ For the list of specific ethnic groups in each category, refer to Manaligod (2004).

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