

## **Manifestation of Mobile Phone Assisted Personal Agency among University Students: Evidence from Lahore**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The study was carried out to explore the manifestation of mobile phone assisted personal agency among university students. Personal Agency of Mobile Phone Users Scale was adapted to measure the practice of personal agency. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 401 university students in Lahore. Findings of the study indicated three constituents of personal agency among youth; contactability, organizability and de-restriction. Furthermore, duration of the possession of mobile phone was found significantly correlated with the practice of mobile phone assisted personal agency. Respondents reported that mobile phone has conferred upon them a sense of individual freedom and social connectedness. It has helped them to organize their daily activities. According to them, this electronic gadget has enabling effect and it enlivened their lives through its beeps and bells. The findings of the study are aligned with the results of D'Souza (2010) who did the pioneering study in exploring personal agency through mobile phone use. However, further research is required to explore the impact of mobile phone use on the lives of youth who have not been enrolled in the universities.

**KEY WORDS:** Mobile phone, University students, social object, contact ability, organize ability, de-restriction.

### **Introduction**

In recent years, the mobile phone has become a social artifact rather than a technological gadget. The adoption of this device among youth has become a global phenomenon. This electronic miracle has emerged out as a leading mode of communication and an ultimate attribute of contemporary society (O'Brien, 2010). To people, this device belongs to their daily lives and they feel its absence whenever they are not carrying it. The tunes and beeps of the mobile phone have

turned out to be part and parcel of the background noise of daily life (Katz & Aakhus, 2002). Especially, it has now become an integral part of young people's daily lives (Campbell, 2005). Touching the key pad of mobile phone gives both a sense of social connectedness and individual liberty. It has been transformed to a significant '*social object*' rather than '*technological object*' (Srivastava, 2005). It has revolutionized their life "*across diverse cultures with its own norms, values, and patterns of behavior*" (Nurullah, 2009), which is entirely different from the pre-mobile phone era. In this age, those who do not possess mobile phone are deemed as socially misfit and culturally awkward.

Mobile phone has transcended the traditional barriers of informal social control. The authoritative role of parents has declined as the use of mobile phone has provided the youth an opportunity to share their ideas and experience, and choices with their peers and friends unrestricted (Oksman & Turtiainen, 2004). This device promotes youth's interaction with the other people and provides a flexible lifestyle of instant information exchange and updates (Ito, 2004). Young people utilize this gadget in sharing their thoughts on different issues. This device allows them to share information instantly that they want to share with their peer group and friends (Habuchi, 2006). Ultimately this device has empowered young people by enabling them to communicate and interact with their peer group and friends (Ling & Yttri, 2005). Due to mobile phone, now the youth feels freer, more expressive and less restricted.

Mobile phone has loosened the clutches of social structure. Now, they can act independently practice as agents. This device has emerged out as social enabler and facilitator. Many researchers have investigated the concept of agency in relation to the mobile phone (D'Souza, 2010; Golden & Geisler, 2007; Lloyd, 2007). Agency is the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own choices (D'Souza, 2010). This concept has variegated interpretations ranging from '*moments of freedom*' and '*effort*' (Alexander, 1992, 1993), to the "*ability to initiate self-change*" (Thoits, 2003). It also refers to "*the ability to exert influence on one's life through actions one takes within the opportunities and constraints of social circumstances* (Elder & Johnson, 2002)". Agency practiced by individual with the help of mobile phone has been termed as mobile phone assisted personal agency. According to the Grotevant (1998), agency exposes the inimitability of the self especially in two dimensions namely: self-assertion, displaying one's own point of view and taking responsibility for communicating it clearly; and separateness, expressing the distinctiveness of one from others.

## **Analytical Framework**

With regard to relationship between mobile phone and personal agency, D'Souza (2010) conducted a study to examine the practice of personal agency through mobile phone among Indian youth. He found out three characteristics, contactability, organizability and de-restriction, contributing in the manifestation

personal agency by mobile phone use. These characteristics have been discussed in detail below.

### **Contactability**

D'Souza (2010) refers contactability to "*the ability to be accessible and in contact "whenever" and "wherever" they were required by others even in emergency situations*". Aoki and Downes (2003) reported that personal safety and coordination with parents were the primary motivations for obtaining a mobile phone among youth. Mobile phone has empowered young people to remain accessible and in contact without the constraints of time and space (Ling, 2000; Ling & Helmersen, 2000; Ozcan & Kocak, 2003; DeBaillon & Rockwell, 2005; Chakraborty, 2006). Contactability in predicating personal agency has been conceived with reference of individual safety and coordination with parents (D'Souza, 2010).

### **Organizability**

D'Souza (2010) defines organizability as "*the ability of mobile phone users to organize themselves in the midst of regular or contingent situations*". Aoki and Downes (2003) stated that young people use mobile phone to manage their social life. They use this artifact to interact with their fellows and friends when they needed (Davie, Panting, & Charlton, 2004). This gadget has enhanced their abilities as their interaction with social environment increases (Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2007).

### **De-restriction**

D'Souza (2010) explains de-restriction as "*a sense of freedom and the ability of the mobile phone users to negotiate with their parents the time of returning home when they were out and about with their peers*". Mobile phone has provided the opportunities to the young people to express their ideas and thoughts. Moreover this gadget allows them to communicate and negotiate with parents when they are out with friends (Green, 2003).

Today no one can deny the importance of mobile phone as it has become a cultural commodity. Its practical use has significant effect in the daily lives of individuals. The research on mobile phones is constantly growing with mobile phone use being studied from various perspectives worldwide (D'Souza, 2010). In Pakistan, research (see Shaheen, 2008; Veijalainen & Rehmat, 2010; Rollier, 2010; Kamran, 2010; Naz et al, 2011; Ahmed & Qazi, 2011; Ahmed et al, 2011) have been conducted to understand the social consequences of mobile phone. The

following research particularly conducted to see its impact on young people within the agency perspective.

## Methodology

### The Data

Data were gathered through survey carried out in different public and private sector universities of Lahore. There are thirty different degree awarding institutions, recognized by Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. By using convenient sampling, a sample of 401 students was taken from nine different public and private sector universities in Lahore. The reason for using this sampling technique was unavailability of sampling frame of the students at the selected (for the study) universities. Table 1 presents the approximate number of students in each university and sample size taken from each category.

Table 1 Selection of the Respondents from each Stratum

Discipline	Degree Awarding Institute (DAI)	Approximate Number of Students in Selected DAI	Selected Students in Sample
General	University of the Punjab	35000	200
	Government College University	3000	18
	Lahore College for Women University	4000	23
	University of the Central Punjab	8000	46
Medical	King Edward Medical University	3000	18
Engineering	University of Engineering & Technology	9000	50
Management Studies	Global Institute	1000	6
	Imperial College of Business Studies	1000	6
Animal Sciences	University of Veterinary & Animal Sciences	4000	22
Others	National College of Art & Design	2000	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>401</b>		

### Measure of Mobile Phone Assisted Personal Agency

D'Souza's (2010) Personal Agency of Mobile Phone Users Scale (PAoMPUS) was adapted to measure the manifestation of personal agency among university students in Lahore. This instrument was developed to measure the practice of personal agency among Indian youth in Bombay. This tool was considered

appropriate in Pakistani context due to cultural similarity of both the countries. The researcher validated this tool on three characteristics explained above.

## The Results

### Mobile Phone Assisted Contactability

The belief of contacting their loved ones in case of emergency was the first indicator in measuring mobile phone assisted contactability. Table 2 depicts the responses of the respondents on this indicator. 85 % respondents expressed their belief that mobile phone is helpful to contact their parents and friends in case of emergency situations. 72% of the respondents consider that with the help of mobile phone, other people are able to contact them in case of emergency. 89 % of the respondents said that they could easily contact their parents and friends if they would in emergency percent of the total population of the study. 84% respondents of the sample study replied that they used mobile phone to *get in touch with others wherever I am and whenever I need them*. To contact people personally to gather facts in making some urgent decision while on the move was fifth and final item in assessing mobile phone assisted contactability. On this item, 37 % of the respondents responded as exactly true while 34 percent of the respondents replied as moderately true. While 30 % of the respondents reported on this item as not true.

**Table 2 Mobile Phone Assisted Contactability**

No	Item	Response								Total	
		Not at All		Hardly True		Moderately True		Exactly True		F	%
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	I am certain that I will be able to contact my parents or friends in case of any emergency.	7	1.7	5	12.4	85	21.1	260	64.7	402	100
2	Others can easily contact me in case of any emergency.	6	1.5	51	12.7	96	23.9	249	61.9	402	100
3	I can easily contact my parents and friends in case of any emergency.	4	1.0	44	10.9	63	15.7	291	72.4	402	100
4	I can easily get in touch with others wherever I am and whenever I need them.	17	4.2	50	12.4	96	23.9	239	59.5	402	100
5	I can easily contact people personally to gather facts to make some urgent decision while on the move	30	7.5	86	21.4	140	34.8	146	36.3	402	100

### Mobile phone assisted organizability

The second variable in practicing personal agency is the mobile phone assisted organizability. In assessing the mobile phone assisted organizability, first indicator was about the belief to use this gadget for the information access. 72 % of the respondents replied that mobile phone is an important source of information. The second indicator in measuring mobile phone assisted organizability was the use of this gadget for entertaining with music or radio, anytime and anywhere. 69% of the respondents replied that mobile phone is an important source of entertainment. Paying attention to words or text while speaking was the third indicator in assessing mobile phone assisted organizability. On this item, 66% respondents replied that they are attuned to words while speaking. 19 % respondents reported this item as hardly true and 12 % respondents did not agree with this statement. It is evident that that majority of the respondents pay attention to use mobile while they are calling or SMSing.

Planning of face to face meeting for group study or any other social activity through mobile phone was the last indicator in judging mobile phone assisted organizability. The majority of the respondents used mobile phone in organizing face to face meeting as 60% of the respondents agreed to this statement. Besides this 22 % of respondents reported this item as hardly true and remaining 15 % did not agree to this statement.

**Table 3 Mobile Phone Assisted Organizability**

No	Item	Response								Total	
		Not at All		Hardly True		Moderately True		Exactly True		F	%
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	I am certain that I will be able to have quick access to information services	36	9.0	74	18.4	154	38.3	138	34.3	402	100
2	I can easily pass time by entertaining myself with music or radio, anytime and anywhere.	40	10.0	82	20.4	165	41.0	115	28.6	402	100
3	I tend to pay attention to my words or text and while speaking or SMSing	52	12.9	80	19.9	132	32.8	138	34.3	402	100
4	I can plan an instant face-to-face meeting e.g. group study or a meeting on Internet chat	63	15.7	91	22.6	124	30.8	124	30.8	402	100

### Mobile phone assisted de-restriction

The third variable contributes in measuring mobile phone assisted personal agency is mobile phone assisted de-restriction. Table 4 given below depicts the on three items finalized after factor analysis in measuring mobile phone assisted de-restriction.

Mobile phone allows people to talk their beloved ones and it gives the feeling of happiness. In appraising the mobile phone assisted de-restriction, an indicator ‘I feel happy that I can talk to my parents and friends whenever and from wherever I feel like’ was included. Mostly respondents which are 61 percent of the total sample responded on this item as exactly true. While 24 percent of the respondents replied on this item as moderately true and 12 percent of the respondents as hardly true. Only 4 percent respondents of this study said about this item as not true. On second indicator of the mobile phone assisted de-restriction which is ‘I feel safe that my parents and friends are in touch with me when I am out’. The majority of the respondents said that they felt safe that my parent and friend would be in touch with me when I am out, as 75% respondents agreed this statement.

Negotiating with parents regarding the time to return home if out with friends, the third indicator is used in assessing mobile phone assisted de-restriction. On this item, 45 percent respondents replied as exactly true and 29 percent respondents as moderately true. This shows that majority of the university students use mobile phone in negotiating with parents regarding the time to return home if they are out with friends. Overall, the respondents on each item replied positively and felt that mobile phone allowed them to de-restrict themselves within the circumstances in which they are living.

**Table 4 Mobile Phone Assisted De-Restriction**

No	Item	Response								Total	
		Not at All		Hardly True		Moderately True		Exactly True		F	%
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	I feel happy that I can talk to my parents and friends whenever and from wherever I feel like.	15	3.7	47	11.7	97	24.1	243	60.4	402	100
2	I feel safe that my parents and friends are in touch with me when I am out.	22	5.5	75	18.7	123	30.6	182	45.3	402	100
3	I negotiate with my parents regarding the time to return home if I am out with friends.	27	6.7	75	18.7	117	29.1	183	45.5	402	100

## Relationship between the duration of possession of mobile phone and the practice of personal agency through mobile phone use

To see the impact of the length of possession of mobile phones on the exercise of personal agency, researcher has hypothesized the following hypotheses.

### Alternative Hypothesis

The length of possession of mobile phones made a significant difference on the exercise of Personal Agency of mobile phone users.

### Null Hypothesis

The length of possession of mobile phones made a no significant difference on the exercise of Personal Agency of mobile phone users.

To see the difference in the practice or exercise of personal agency through mobile phone on the basis of duration of having a mobile phone, researcher conducted the one way ANOVA test.

**Table 5 Level of Agency with the length of possession of mobile phone**

Agency			
Duration of Mobile Phone	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
More than 1 year	36.65	47	6.871
More than 2 year	37.40	66	4.504
More than 3 year	38.70	289	5.346
Total	38.21	402	5.582

**Table 6 ANOVA- Mobile phone assisted Personal Agency and duration of mobile phone possession**

ONE WAY ANOVA					
Agency					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	260.890	2	130.445	4.254	.015
Within Groups	12234.712	399	30.663		
Total	12495.602	401			



Table 6 revealed the results of ANOVA test conducted to see the difference in the practice of personal agency by comparing the duration of having a mobile phone. The calculated value of p was .015 which was lesser than the value of alpha (.05). Hence ANOVA test confirmed the significant difference between the means of personal agency among groups which differed on the basis of possession of a mobile phone. Thus researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted alternative hypothesis, the length of possession of mobile phones made a significant difference on the exercise of personal agency of mobile phone users. In addition to this, table 4.27 demonstrated that the higher the duration of having a mobile phone, the greater the exercise of personal agency through mobile phone use among youth. Therefore, researcher concluded that the length of possession of mobile phone support in practicing personal agency through mobile phone among youth in Pakistani context.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The enabling effect of technology cannot be denied. Mobile phone has revolutionized the ways of communication. The findings of the study are aligned with the results of D'Souza (2010) who did the pioneering study in exploring personal agency through mobile phone use. The mobile phone has given access to outer world and provided freedom to engage in communication without the constraints of physical proximity and spatial immobility. In mobile phone research, independence and freedom provided by mobile phone use is an often researched theme (Oksman and Turtiainen, 2004). The study has revealed an important conclusion that technology acts as social facilitator and enabler. This small gadget has altered the people's way of communication and interaction. Social connectivity has been increased with the help of this and social capital has been increased. Managing the emergency situations has become easy with the help of mobile phone. It has provided new source of recreation and enjoyment. Now entertainment is at the finger tip of every mobile phone user and they can enjoy it everywhere every time. This device has conferred upon a sense of freedom, autonomy and hopefulness.

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