

# Youth's Mobile Literacy: The Case in Nakhon Phanom, Thailand การรู้เท่าทันการใช้โทรศัพท์มือถือของเยาวชน: กรณีศึกษาจังหวัด นครพนม

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาสถานการณ์การใช้โทรศัพท์มือถือของเยาวชนในจังหวัดนครพนม รวมทั้งความคิดเห็นของครูและผู้ปกครองต่อการใช้โทรศัพท์มือถือของเยาวชน ตลอดจนแนวทางแก้ไขปัญหามาจากการใช้โทรศัพท์ที่ขาดการรู้เท่าทัน วิธีการวิจัยใช้การอภิปรายกลุ่ม 5 กลุ่ม ประกอบด้วยนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 1 จำนวน 32 คน โดยแบ่งเป็น 3 กลุ่ม ครู 12 คนจำนวน 1 กลุ่ม และผู้ปกครอง 5 คน จำนวน 1 กลุ่ม ช่วงเวลาในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลคือเดือนมกราคม 2557 การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลใช้การพรรณนาวิเคราะห์ ผลการวิจัยพบว่ากลุ่มตัวอย่างเยาวชนมีโทรศัพท์มือถือของตนเอง เวลาในการใช้โทรศัพท์ 3-8 ชั่วโมงต่อวัน ส่วนน้อยที่ใช้โทรศัพท์มือถือเพื่อค้นหาข้อมูล เด็กหญิงใช้ในการพูดคุยกับเพื่อน เด็กชายใช้เล่นเกม ครูเห็นว่านักเรียนส่วนใหญ่ใช้มือถือในงานส่วนตัวมากกว่าเพื่อการเรียน ในทางตรงข้าม ผู้ปกครองเห็นว่าเยาวชนในครอบครัวใช้มือถือเพื่อทำการบ้าน

101

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ค้นหาข้อมูล เล่นเกม พุดคุย และเข้าเฟสบุ๊ก ผู้ปกครองให้ความสำคัญกับการให้ลูกู้เทคโนโลยีสมัยใหม่ แม้ว่าเด็กใช้เวลากับมือถือมากเกินไป ครูแนะนำให้ผู้ปกครองตระหนักในปัญหาจากการใช้มือถือของเด็ก ผู้ปกครองแนะนำให้ตั้งกฎระเบียบในการใช้มือถือ และหากิจกรรมใหม่ๆ เพื่อให้ผู้ปกครองและเด็กสามารถใช้เวลาอยู่ร่วมกันมากขึ้น

**คำสำคัญ:** เยาวชน /การใช้โทรศัพท์มือถือ/ การรู้เท่าทัน

## Abstract

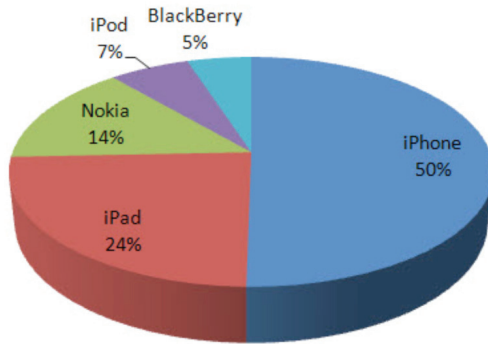
The objectives of this research were to study the youth's mobile usage situation in Nakhon Phanom, a northeastern province of Thailand, the teachers and parents' views on youths' mobile usage, and find solutions to prevent the misuse of mobile technology. The research was conducted with five focus groups. The first three focus groups consisted of three groups of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students in Nakhon Phanom. The total number of students was 32. The fourth focus group consisted of 12 teachers, while the fifth included five parents. Data was gathered during the focus group discussions that took place in January 2014 and was analyzed through descriptive analysis. The research has shown that: the youths in Nakhon Phanom all had their own mobile device, which they used for 3-8 hours per day. Very few students used their mobile device to search for information; girls mainly chatted with other girls while boys mainly played games. Teachers' view on mobile technology usage was that many students used their phones for personal matters, rather than for learning purposes. Their view clashed with parents' views, who, on the other hand, believed their kids used mobile phones to do their homework, search information, play games, chat and access Facebook. Parents stressed the importance for their kids to learn the functions of new media even though they spent too much time on the device. Teachers also warned parents to be aware of their kids' misuse of mobile technology. Parents suggested setting some rules for their kids when using mobile phones, creating new activities for them, and spending more time together.

**Key words:** Youth /Mobile usage /Literacy

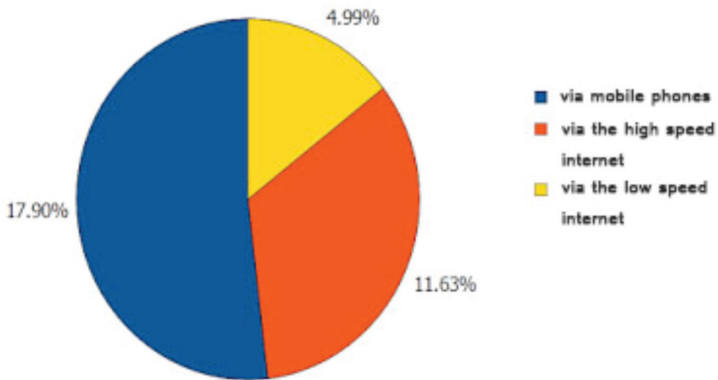
## Research Background

During the last decade, Thai youths have been greatly attracted to new kinds of media, in particular mobile technology. However, not many are aware of the individual and collective risks brought by the mobile society. In this article, literacy is defined as the set of skills and abilities to use the media consciously and responsibly. This means, literate and alert mobile users are those who are able to distinguish between good and bad media contents, interpret critically and consciously the information they receive through mobile technology and questioning who produced or who owns media content. Rather than passive consumers of media messages, literate mobile users are both consumers and producers of media messages; they oppose to unethical information, ask for consumer protection, negotiate media messages and unmask the hidden profit oriented agendas of media corporations.

According to a survey released by ACIS Professional Center (2014), currently, the highest portion of smart phone usage in Thailand is: iPhone (50%), iPad (24%), Nokia (14%), iPod (7%), and BlackBerry (5%). Another Internet usage survey conducted among Thai audience revealed that majority of Thais access Internet through their mobile phones (17.90%), High speed Internet via fix line phones (11.63%), and Low speed Internet via fix line phones (4.99%) (Graph). One more mobile survey conducted in 2011 by Digitalbuzz showed that people used their mobile phones mostly for Games (61%), Social networking (49%), Music (42%), Entertainment (33%), among others.



The proportion of Internet users via different channels 2009



The global mobile statistics released in 2012 revealed that the majority of mobile audience was of age 13+. Moreover, the results shown by the research “Consumer Mobile Behaviour in Europe, USA and Japan” (ComScore, 2010) revealed that in the United States and Europe, the highest percentage of mobile users used mobile devices to send text messages, take photos, use connected media (browser, app or download). Slightly different were the results of the research conducted in Japan, where the highest percentage of mobile users

used their mobile devices to connect with other media. Nielsen (2013) survey on US consumers' mobile behavior showed that preferred apps accessed via mobile devices were Games (61%), Music (55%) and Social networking (54%). The survey also showed that the average time spent per person by platform for monthly mobile time in the United States was 34 hours and 21 minutes. In the United Kingdom, people spent monthly 41 hours and 42 minutes on their mobile devices. In a recent study, Mobile Social Work (2013) revealed instead that 81% of youth less than 25 years, sleep with their phone next to them on the bed, while 74% of youths reach for their smartphones immediately after waking up. However, the study also showed that in general, 67% of people prefer face-to-face communication rather than voice calls, texting and social media.

Ansuya Harjani, writer at CNBC Asia [1] maintains that “teens are not just accustomed to mobile phones; they also expect their device to handle nearly every type of task and communication”. In Baig’s study on Mobile phone addiction among youths and its disadvantages [2], it was found that majority of youngsters are not able to prioritize between their responsibilities, commitments, and their mobile phone usage. The study also showed continually intense addictive behavior and restlessness.

### Stating the Problems

This research is aware of the accelerating number and threatening consequences of mobile usage, particularly among the youth at Nakhon Phanom, a province in the northeastern of Thailand,

according to a social service project of the School of Communication Arts, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. The questions addressed by this study were the following:

1. What is the situation of youth's mobile usage in Nakhon Phanom?
2. What are teachers' views on youth's mobile usage?
3. What are parents' views on youth's mobile usage?
4. What are some of the solutions to prevent youth's illiteracy and misuse of mobile technology?

## Methods

This is a qualitative study. The research was conducted with five focus groups. The first three focus groups consisted of three groups of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students in Nakhon Phanom, a northeastern province of Thailand. The total number of students was 32. The fourth focus group consisted of 12 teachers, while the fifth included five parents. Data was gathered during the focus group discussions that took place in January 2014 and was then analyzed through descriptive analysis.

## Results

### Youth's Mobile Usage

Among the 32 samples of students, there were more females than males. Almost all of them had their own mobile phones and a few also had iPads and iPods. Most students were given mobile devices by their parents, while just few bought their own device. Some students were given phones by their parents as a reward for getting good grades

in school. The average time that students spent using their mobile devices was 3-9 hours a day. Girls used mobiles phones mostly to chat, while boys played games. Girls and boys used Facebook, Line, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tango, Wiki and Google to relax, for entertainment, for listening to music and watching movies. Others also used mobile phones to watch indecent photos and flirt with boys. All students realized chatting was a waste of their time and energy and preferred voting “like” competitions on Facebook fan pages. Boys used Special Face (SF), Point Bank and Mine Craft. Older boys played with strategy games, trying to advance in levels and get the best scores. They had to pay for “codes” or had to ask the “codes” to their friends in order to play the next stages of the game. Only few students used mobile phones to study, search for information and submit their homework. Others used translation apps, online dictionaries, GPS, calculators, set the alarm clock on their mobile device, checked the time and used phones to contact their parents. Teens reported cases where mobile phones were stolen because of the owner’s lack of attention or while the phone was charging in the room.

### Teachers’ Views on Youth’s Mobile Usage

Teachers’ view on mobile technology usage was that many students used their phones for personal matters, rather than for learning purposes; most girls for chatting and most boys for playing games. Some did not allow students to bring their mobile phones to school as a punishment for those who did not pay attention during class hours, or for those who sat at the back of the classroom to play with their phones.



While some teachers simply turned students' phones off, others took the phones and requested that their parents should come to school to pick them up. Teachers blamed parents for not being aware of the issues related to mobile technology. They maintained that while parents believe in the benefits of giving mobile devices to their kids, for instance, easier communication with them, they are not aware of the dangers of the misuse of mobile technology. They also argued that students were overall incapable of using phones wisely and that just a few were responsible users.

### Parents' Views on Youth's Mobile Usage

Teachers' views clashed with parents' views. Parents believed their kids used mobile phones to do their homework, search information, play games, chat and access Facebook. They stressed the importance for their kids to learn the functions of new media even though they spent too much time on the device. Few parents acknowledged the risks and disadvantages of using mobile technology, but recognized how using mobile phones distracted their kids from performing other activities.

### Solutions to Prevent Youth's Illiteracy and Misuse of Mobile Technology

Teachers suggested that they should collaborate with parents to monitor kids usage of mobile technology in school and at home and teach them about ethical usage of mobile technology and self-regulation. Some proposed that academics and technocrats should join together to design attractive solutions on how to teach kids to

use the media in smart, responsible and entertaining ways. Students must understand how to use the media without falling into addiction and taking into account the other “non-virtual” experiences of life, for instance, interpersonal communication with their peers, family members and the community. Some teachers suggested organizing and delivering workshops on mobile literacy and recommended parents not to buy their kids expensive mobile phones without having them mastered the necessary mobile literacy skills. Kids must be able to understand the roles of senders and receivers, the implications of using certain types of languages, and how to manage their time using mobile technology. Some parents suggested putting in practice rules to regulate their kids’ mobile usage at home; for instance, allowing them to use their mobile phones only after finishing their homework and assignments and following a time schedule. They also acknowledged the need for engaging in more activities with their kids.

## Discussion

Let’s confront the results of this research with the trends outlined in the surveys cited earlier in this paper.

### 1. Youth’s Mobile Usage

Youths affirmed to all have their own mobile device, which they used for at least 3-8 hours a day. Some used conventional mobile phones while others had smart phones, iPads and iPods. This contradicts the report of ‘Statistics of Thai people’s Smart Phone Usage’ that stated the highest portion of smart phone usage in Thailand is the

iPhone. The reason may be that iPhones are too expensive for parents to afford, in particular in Thai provinces, and that iPhones may be too complex to use compared to traditional phones.

This research shows that girls used mobile phones to chat with other girls, while boys used their devices to play games. Some also used mobile technology for entertainment, listening to music, and watching movies. These results are similar to the ones cited earlier in the survey on mobile usage in the United States and Europe (ComScore, 2010), where the highest per cent of mobile behavior was to send text messages, or as in the case of Japan, to use connected media (browser, app or download). For this study and the one conducted in USA and Europe, the data coincides even when it concerns consumers' favorite mobile activities and preferences, and accessing the activities via app or browser for games, music and social networking. Similarly to American and European Youths, Thai youths from the province used their mobile devices to send text messages, access apps, social networking or to browse games and music. In addition, as in the case of Japan, Thai youths were also concerned with media connection on their mobile devices.

## 2. Teachers' Views on Youth's Mobile Usage

The present research shows that teachers' view on mobile technology usage was that many students used their phones for personal matters, rather than for learning purposes. One of the reasons may be that teachers and parents do not teach their students and kids

mobile literacy; another reason may be that adults, as the youth in Thailand, are more attracted to entertainment rather than educational and serious matters. The study also showed that teachers used punishment strategies to teach their students not to use mobile devices during class hours. More appropriate and smart solutions must be designed for teachers and students to collaborate together and learn mobile literacy.

### 3. Parents' Views on Youth's Mobile Usage

The present research shows that parents believed their kids used mobile phones to do their homework, search information, play games, chat and access Facebook. They stressed the importance for their kids to learn the functions of new media even though they spent too much time on the device. Mobile illiteracy is not just a concern of the youth in Thailand; even adults spend much time on their mobile devices, therefore, trainings should be organized for both the youth and adults on how to engage responsibly, ethically and critically with mobile technology.

### 4. Solutions to Prevent Youth's Illiteracy and Misuse of Mobile Technology

Teachers suggested that they should collaborate with parents to monitor kids usage of mobile technology in school and at home and teach them about ethical usage of mobile technology and self-regulation. Parents, should not reward their kids with mobile technology without having first mastered the required mobile literacy skills and

competencies. Parents also suggested to set-up some rules for their kids on when to use mobile technology in the house. In reality, parents, kids and teachers must all become more mobile literate and understand the implications of using mobile technology. Teachers must also understand that mobile technology is part of youths' culture and lives; rather than using punishment, they must identify with their students and come up with more sustainable and effective solutions.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

This research shows that girls used mobile phones to chat with other girls, while boys used their devices to play games. Parents believed their kids used mobile phones to do their homework, search information, play games, chat and access Facebook. They stressed the importance for their kids to learn the functions of new media even though they spent too much time on the device. Trainings should be organized for both the youth and adults on how to engage responsibly, ethically and critically with mobile technology. Solutions to Prevent Youth's Illiteracy and Misuse of Mobile Technology are that teachers should collaborate with parents to monitor kids usage of mobile technology in school and at home and teach them about ethical usage of mobile technology and self-regulation. Parents should not reward their kids with mobile technology without having first mastered the required mobile literacy skills and competencies. Parents also suggested to set-up some rules for their kids on when to use mobile technology in the house. In addition, parents, kids and teachers must all become more mobile literate and understand the implications of using mobile

technology. Teachers must also understand that mobile technology is part of youths' culture and lives. They must identify with their students and come up with more sustainable and effective solutions.

As citizens of the digital age, we cannot deny the risks and challenges brought by the mobile society. Mobile addiction is rising dramatically and users increasingly expect mobile devices to handle nearly everything, especially their work and communication. For youngsters, the pervasive use of mobile technology might also mean exceeding bills and family expenses, psychological and health problems, lack of concentration and sleep (which might lead to poor performance in school), and lack of interpersonal, communication and social skills. Youngsters should value more “non-virtual” experiences. When it concerns educational institutions, teachers should be the first ones to be trained in mobile literacy so that they can train their students on the key skills and competencies needed for responsible, ethical and critical use of mobile technology. Students and teachers should be proactive rather than passive consumers of media messages and they must negotiate the information and content that is being shown to them. They must also unmask the hidden profit oriented agendas of media corporations, understand which points of view and interests are being perpetuated in media presentations and why. New strategies must be put in place in schools and at home to ensure that mobile technology is being used responsibly to empower rather than to threaten people.

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