

Understanding a new mode of mobile usage to increase ARPU

Mobile phone networks are under pressure to gain payback from their investment in 3G as well as their generous subsidies of 2.5G camera phones, today's must-have items.

We've worked on various projects to gain deep customer understanding of mobile usage and we've come to the conclusion that one of the keys to encouraging successful adoption is supporting an emerging mode of mobile behaviour that we call *supporting social experiences*.

Trial is not enough

A lot of efforts currently focus on gaining trial of new mobile services. Some networks offer free usage during the first month. While gaining trial is a necessary precursor to adoption, we have found it is rarely sufficient.

Customers need to actively learn how to integrate these services into their daily lives, finding out how they can enhance everyday social experiences. When customers get their handset free with a 12-month contract, they are not overly motivated to find this out. Technical glitches and a lack of understanding about charging only serve to raise the adoption bar.

How a new mode of mobile usage is emerging

We've identified three mobile usage modes. The first and most basic is *communicating*, whether by voice or text. The second is less obvious but probably familiar to most of us, using the handset for *diversion*. While some people occupy themselves by gaming we've also observed people 'playing' with their phone, for example spinning it around in meetings like an executive toy. Others spend considerable amounts of time on the bus or tube sorting and editing pictures, re-reading old texts and engaging in what they describe as 'flicking through'.

The third and most interesting mode is where we've observed people using the phone to support everyday social experiences, sometimes in weird and wonderful ways: teenagers passing their mobile around the table to show off pictures and texts; remotely-located friends watching *Buffy* while discussing the story by text; people 'Shazaming' whether the track is by *Groove Armada* or *Mint Royale*; and parents using their 'free' minutes as a form of currency.

In each case the phone is supporting behaviours and rituals that are long established but now enhanced. Perhaps the most compelling example we witnessed is a group of 20-something friends who swap phones and text 'anything to anyone' in the address book – after they have consumed copious amounts of alcohol. The game is largely about the fun and hilarity the technology supports but it's also an unspoken statement of group trust and belonging where everyone implicitly agrees not to overstep the mark.

What this all means for encouraging service adoption

Mobile networks that recognise this emerging mode and help their customers find ways of engaging in it stand to gain most. They can do this by gaining deep insights into the significances of their target segments' everyday social behaviours and by studying those who are already adopters. Only then can networks design content and services that enhance everyday experiences and identify the emotional triggers for advertising and communications.

The way to do this: ethnographic, in-context research methods that capture otherwise unseen and unarticulated behaviours, and analysis techniques that map and make sense of these experiences providing tools for innovation.