Mobile phones in everyday life of Mao Naga Youth: Mobile cultures and online social networking practices of Mao, Manipur

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Abstract

Mobile phones have facilitated connectivity in the north eastern region of India in terms of Information and Communication technology (ICT). The convergence of Mobile phones and social networking sites has become a forum for Mao Naga youth of Manipur to construct one's personal, social and political identity. The paper focuses on the 'mobile population' among the Mao youth who are constantly using the medium to stay connected with their friends and with their family who are far away. They are also regularly using Facebook to express their feelings and opinions with their peer groups, friends, acquaintances or with those who share similar interests. It is an attempt to understand how the Mao Naga youth have incorporated and appropriated the use of Mobile technologies in their lives and how they are using this technology as a medium to interact and communicate through social networking sites like Facebook.

Keywords: mobile population, digital users, mao naga Facebook, mobile phone, youth, social networks.

Introduction

With mobile technologies becoming an integral part of our life, if somebody we know does not own one, we start to wonder and are amazed at how they are able to survive. This was not so ten years or maybe even five years ago. But now if I have to go out without my mobile phone, I feel incomplete as though I have forgotten something important. Not only mobile technologies but even social networking sites especially Facebook has become a medium for me to be in touch with my friends, family. The convergence of these two medium, mobile technologies and social networks has made communication with friends so much easier. As these mediums have become a vital part of our lives, the paper observes and analyses this phenomenon in the context of the place I come from.

Mobile phones have facilitated connectivity in the northeastern region as well as in Mao in terms of Information and Communication technology (ICT). Wireless communication came to the region in the early 2000 and this technology integrated quickly among the people as a part of their daily activities. It is creating an identity for an individual that is personal, social and political.

The northeastern region consisting of the eight states, Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Sikkim, is a landlocked region. It's only physical connection to India is a narrow land corridor called the "Chicken's Neck" which is 20 kilometers wide at its narrowest near Siliguri (West Bengal) (Devi & Shimray, 2009). Northeast region has many indigenous communities and Mao Naga tribe is one of them. The region has for long time been cut off from 'mainland India'.

Due to the non interference policy which continued even after India's independence in the northeastern region, there was very little development in the region. According to the Government of India Act 1935, the Inner Line for Regulations prohibits all 'outsiders' except those who obtain special permission from the government from entering the region. This made it difficult for outsiders to come and invest in the region. The region has also been affected by insurgency and factional problems making it even more secluded and difficult for the rest of the country to access. This has also isolated people of the region from political and social developments taking place in other parts of the country. People from the region have moved out looking for better education and employment opportunities. The research is mainly focussed on those young people who have come out of their hometowns from the region for varied purposes.

When I was in high school, wireless communication had just begun to slowly enter the lives of people. The first time I saw one was when my neighbour bought a mobile phone in the late 90's and early 2000's. Slowly after that mobile phones started to make their entry. However, in those days, owning one was difficult as they were expensive. Incoming calls were charged and making a call was expensive. Landline connection, PCO's, writing and posting letters were the way I communicated with my friends and relatives. An avid letter writer, I always wrote letters to my cousins and friends almost on a daily basis. I was introduced to digital communication like internet via email, chat rooms like mirc[1], yahoo chats in the early 2000's. With the coming of digital communication, my letter writing pattern changed to emails, chats and as social networking sites became popular, the traditional way of communication faded away.

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[1] Internet Relay Chat (IRC) enables people all over the world to talk together over the Internet in real-time sessions in virtual rooms.

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I started using mobile phones in 2006 after I graduated from college. Using a mobile phone became a necessity for me so that I can stay connected at my work place and also with friends and family. Living away from home, it became easier to own a phone and be connected. For me, with the adoption of mobile phone, the trend of letter writing slowly took the exit door. In the present context, young and old seem to own a mobile phone and it has become an indispensable tool in their lives. The ring of a mobile phone has become a part of our lives, a message or call tone beeping from every corner in a public space has become a regular part of our lives and we have come to acknowledge that in our day to day activities.

> *"Mobile phone has become part of the needs and hopes of the modern individual. It is an electronic communication device which has changed the way people live, through the introduction of mobile phone oriented companionship and tele-sociability. At the same time there are links to older forms of interaction. The incorporation of mobile phones into our way of life is therefore a two-way process: the device is not only adapted to the way people live but ways of living are also changed as a consequence of the device (Kopomaa, 2002 quoted Kopomaa, 2000, pp. 241)."*

Nowadays, a mobile phone is used not just as a phone; it is used as an accessory, as a music player, gaming machine, news updater, organiser, cameras, and for surfing internet (Kumar & Thomas, 2006). It is used as a device for interacting with people around the world, an equipment to access radio, television and newspapers. It has been used by many young people as a constant companion to keep up with the changing trends of the modern society through the Internet. This is quite true even in the remotest part of India. Every new technology that has come to the

market has acted as a catalyst to the development of the nation. Cheap and easy availability of mobile phones has also added a lot to the welfare of the urban and rural poor.

The introduction of mobile phones in our lives has completely changed our way of communication with each other. In public spaces, mobile phones have become a pleasant technology allowing one to overcome idle time and boredom. It connects people and we can see this in the smiles and faces of people around with mobile phones. The research looks at how the youth of Mao tribe have learnt to adopt this technology in their lives and how it is shaping them, their culture and enhancing their communication with other people outside their community. Though the use of internet through one's own personal computers, laptops cannot be ignored, young people are using their mobile phones as it is convenient. I focus on this population who uses internet and specifically, social networking sites like Facebook to stay connected and explore the notion of what staying connected is in this age of advanced communication for Mao youth, coming from a place like 'Mao', belonging to the Mao tribe and staying away from their home to pursue education or work. I will also look at the *'mobile population'* of the Mao Naga youth.

Mobile Population

'Mobile population' refers to those Mao youth who are from Mao or are Mao but at present are living away from their homes and are studying or working and using Internet- more specifically social networking sites like Facebook/Twitter or any other sites- through their mobile phones, whether regularly or not. '*Mobile'* here refers to those who are always on the move and more

importantly who use internet through their mobile phones when they are on the move. Mobile culture and the advent of Internet have brought a convergence in these two technologies. It was an appropriate term to refer to the Mao youth who are constantly using their mobile phones to stay connected with those in Mao, friends and at the same time accessing social networking sites as they live away from their home town in various cities. This group of youth who are a part of the study also follow these same practices as they come home for their holidays or for other varied reasons.

Mobile culture and the advent of Internet have brought a convergence in these technologies and the study looks at how this *'mobile population'* has incorporated these two forms of innovations in their lives. As Gerard Goggin points out, 'mobiles have become hybrid devices that articulate with other new technologies such as digital cameras, portable digital assistants, or location technologies. Third-generation (3G) and fourth generation (4G) cell phones promise finally to realise ubiquitous and personal video communication' (Goggin, 2006; 2).

I fall into the category of this 'mobile population'. Being a frequent user of mobile phone and internet especially Facebook through mobile phones, I wanted to explore my own interest and how those coming from the same place and sharing the same kind of interest are appropriating these technologies.

Mao youth have migrated to different cities in and out of the country for better opportunities in terms of education, job etc. Having moved out from their homes to cities, one of the only means of communication that they have with their own community back home and also in connecting with other Mao people is through their mobile phones and social networking sites. As the mobile phone is a communication technology which is *'personal, portable, pedestrian'* (Ito et al., 2005

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quoted in Castells, 2007), it has enabled young people to stay connected with their family, friends and community all the time. Accessing Internet through their mobile phones has also become a common thing for these young people. When I say young people, I am specifically looking at those who belong to the age group of 15-30, who may be studying, working or doing various other things and they also use their mobile phones and access internet. Through this I am trying to understand the *mobile population* among the Mao youth. The ability to access internet through their phones has made communication much easier for them.

I use Facebook through mobile phone because it's easier to access anywhere, anytime, anyplace and pocket friendly. (Student 1)

In more remote places where there is no broadband connection for computers and internet is accessible in phones through GPRS. (Student 2)

Brief Introduction to Mao Naga

In order to understand the context of 'mobile population' among the Mao Nagas, one needs to look at the history and understand the socio-political condition of the Mao tribe and the Naga community as a whole. Geographically, Mao is a small town inhabited mostly by the Mao community located in Manipur State- Senapati district on the border of Manipur and Nagaland. Road communication is the only means of transport to this district. National Highway 39 passes through the town. The Nagas comprise of over 60 tribes in the states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and across the border in Myanmar. In the formation of Nagaland

state as the 16th Sate of the Indian Union on 1st December, 1963, the Mao tribe politically became part of Manipur.

The 'Inner line' regulation imposed in the northeastern region has deferred development in the region. The reach of communication and information technology came much later than in the region. Cellular mobile services were introduced in the northeast region only in 2003 after a delay of eight years than the rest of the country on security considerations as the region has international boundaries. Even now there are still restrictions in border areas and no signals are allowed within 500 metres of the international border. The cellular service started with the Government launching BSNL postpaid services. Slowly, after its launch, other private cellular service started to make its entry into the region.

Mobile Technology & Mao Naga

Initially when cellular phone was launched, it was extremely expensive to get a connection. An individual had to shell out about 1000 rupees (Indian) to purchase a sim card. In Mao, the carrier services available at present are Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (BSNL)[2], Aircel, and Airtel. Now with private carriers available, one can easily get a new sim card by paying 60 Rs after submitting documents and proof according to the norms of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)[3]. So far there are no branch offices of mobile telephone carriers in Mao. There is a

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[2] Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (BSNL) is the only telecom service provider owned by Government of India.

[3] Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) is to ensure that the interests of consumers are protected and at the same time to nurture conditions for growth of telecommunications, broadcasting and cable services in a manner and

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'Rural Distributor' (RD) who takes care of the distribution in the Mao Maram and Paomata sub-divisions. The nearest branch offices are in Senapati, the district headquarter for all the different carries, BSNL, Aircel and Airtel. BSNL has one mobile tower, Airtel has one tower which has two branches, and Aircel also has one tower with three branches in and around the Mao-Maram subdivision under Senapati district.

Connectivity in terms of technologies and other facilities is still very limited and it is considered a luxury if one owns a personal computer or better still a laptop and, having a broadband connection is still a farfetched dream for many. Though computers are still out of reach for many, mobile phones have become very much a part of their lives. Many use it for messaging, or to flaunt, and just be among their friends group. One of the emerging trends now is the use of internet through mobile phones especially in a place where I come from.

People also resort to accessing internet through their mobile phones because of the geographical isolation of the place and lack of proper connectivity like electricity. The concern of load shedding and power supply is also a major reason why people end up using their phones. With the problem of load shedding, people are not able to use their computers whenever they want to and mobile phones have become an easier tool to go ahead with. With this issue, I can also bring in the social conditions of the people living in the state. Before landline connection could reach the interior parts of Mao, mobile phones had arrived and people adopted this technology faster as it was accessible for them. One can afford them and did not have to spend too much on it.

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at a pace which will enable India to play a leading role in the emerging global information society (TRAI website, http://www.trai.gov.in/ As Accessed on 22nd February, 2012).

Mobile Phone and Youth

Mobile phones serve as an important element of identity construction and expression for many individuals. As a medium for social interaction, it has been used to gather information and entertain themselves in various ways. Mobile phone is like a 'Swiss knife' with multi functional tools (Sooryamoorthy, 2009). Using mobile phone gives an opportunity for group interactions through various means of images, chats, group calls, and instant messages etc. Sooryamurhty further adds that the cell phone as a medium that relates to one's everyday experiences has become similar to mass media in allowing access to the experiences of others. It is a medium capable of producing and enhancing self perception (ibid). For young people mobile phones have become a tool used not only for means of communication but for varied other purposes as well. It has converged with many other digital technologies. It has become all in one for them, useful, convenient, accessible. Cameras, music players, calculators, organisers, radios have all converged together in a small technological device called the mobile phone.

Mobile phones have entered the lives of people so much that it has become a daily necessity. It is like a watch attached to the body (Castells, et al. 2007 quoted Fortunati and Mananelli 2002). The mobile phone is seen as an embodied object. The notion of embodiment refers to the process of integrating the object with the user's own body, making it work as a part of one's physical self (Caronia & Caron, 2004). Mobile phone has been constructed as one's clothing, a watch that is always attached to the body, an object displayed and socially performing at all times. It has become a part of an individual's everyday life constantly performing as the user of the mobile phone engages it with activities. Using their phone as an extension of their body, young people are constantly changing their mobile phone settings like wallpaper, ringtone, themes. It is a way

of personalising their clothes and identifying themselves to a mood or situation that fits them best.

> Mobile Phone has become like a friend even without other company/ friend. I can indulge in it myself. I can spend hours playing games, listening to music, surf internet. Not only that I can always keep in touch with my friends through sms chat, phone calls even without having to be with them. (Student 3)

> Depending on my mood & needs I change the setting of my phones like wallpaper, ringtone and theme. (Employed Youth 1)

Though the penetration of Mobile phones in the northeast came only in the mid 2000's, this communication technology has become a hit among the young people of the region.[4] Young people have learnt to adapt new devices and technologies quicker than those of the older generation. Older people can be expected to have a different approach to technology from younger people. Because of sensory, motor, and cognitive changes due to ageing, older people might need more time to learn, be more error-prone, and need more steps to operate the system (Consi, Pianesi & Zancanaro).

Mao Youth are also using mobile technology as a medium to communicate and educate. 'Around the globe, mobile telephone adoption has grown more quickly than any other technology. Wireless Intelligence data estimates that there were five billion mobile phones in use by July

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[4] Cellular mobile services were introduced in the northeast region only in 2003 after a delay of eight years than the rest of the country on security considerations as the region has international boundaries.

2010, with most of the growth in the coming decade—the next billion subscribers—expected to come from rural areas of developing countries (Andjelkovic, 2010).'

Andjelkovic also pointed out that mobile phones have become one of the primary communication tools in rich and poor countries alike, and they have been increasingly used to access the Internet, whether they be "smartphones" with purpose built applications and browsers or simpler "feature phones" relying on SMS systems connected to web servers. In today's context, the necessity of mobile phone in a place like Mao cannot be neglected.

> Be it in cities or villages mobile phones are needed. In a remote place like Mao, mobile phones can bridge the gap that is prevalent with the outside world. (Student 3)

> As the major or minor news journalist is not available or effective in Mao, mobile phone is the only alternative for sharing information. (Student 2)

The basic use of mobile phones is for communication, however the device has become much more than just a 'communication device'. The choice young people make in purchasing a certain brand of mobile phone in a way effects how they want their identity to be constructed in their social life. Young people choose brands according to the design of the phone. Young Mao youth are also looking for phones like Blackberry, I-phone, Samsung-galaxy, Nokia, Sony Ericson and brands which has 'cool' applications which has got style and techno-advancement. Mao youth use mobile phones as a fashion statement. When an individual wears a certain kind of clothing, it is a way of making a statement which can be interpreted by the viewer. The interpretation may be true to the intention of the wearer, or perhaps it is clouded in the bias of the viewer (Ling 1998*).* Likewise, when young people use mobile phone, they are also creating a kind of identity.

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The kind of mobile phone handsets they purchase projects their identity, as Ling pointed out, an individual may not mean to carry the phone as a creation of their individual identity, however, the viewer may see it differently.

Iphone / Galaxy Note, they have great apps. (Employed Youth 1)

Nokia, Samsung, Sony Ericson because they come with cool models (Student 4)

I use mobile phone as a fashion statement because we are totally influenced by the motives of fashion in our modern world. (Student 5)

Young people want to use handsets that are 'cool'. They want to stay trendy, modern and techno-savvy. Brands like Iphone, Nokia, Samsung-galaxy, and Sony Ericson are preferred by young people. Many Mao youth have also appropriated the use of mobile phones in their lives and desire for phones with many facilities so that they can communicate and cope with the rest of the world. They are creating a new set of 'digital users'[5] among the Mao community.

As Mao is geographically located at the border of Manipur and Nagaland, one has easy access to reach the capital cities of both the state, Imphal and Kohima. Imphal is about 107 kms, a 3 hours drive from Mao whereas Kohima is about 32 kms which takes about 45 minutes by road. Thus, it is easy for people in the interior areas of Mao to also get access to mobile phones. Mobile phone easily being accessible, many of the youth uses internet through their phones. Broadband

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[5] When I say, 'digital users', I look at those youth who have adopted technologies like mobile phones, computers and other information communication technologies in their day to day lives and are avid users of it. They may not necessarily be only those in Mao but also those who have moved out from Mao and are now living in different cities.

facilities are still owned only by a few section of the society. However, internet pack and voucher for mobile phones is available and can be accessed at any time and even in interior parts.

In the course of my study and in trying to understand how the youth have adopted phones in their lives, I would like to categorise the Mao youth in six different sections according to their usage pattern: 'Mobile communicators', 'Mobile fillers/entertainers', 'Mobile performers', 'Mobile Socialiser', 'Mobile Educators' and 'Mobile Netters'[6]. I came up with this categorisation in order to understand the way young people use their mobile phones. My research is an attempt to look at how the Mao youth have incorporated mobile phones in their lives. It is also to establish the popularity of Social networking sites like Facebook and other applications on the Mobile phone among the youth in their daily lives have created a unique set of digital users in Mao, who also use the same for their political expression. Through the analysis of mobile phone users among young people, this categorization gives a space to the different aspects of how these technologies have been adopted and appropriated in one's everyday live. The categories that I have formulated are interrelated to each other and cannot be taken out separately; I have tried to distinguish them differently in the order of the usage patterns that emerged from my study.

Mobile Communicators

'Mobile communicators' refers to those who use their mobile phones for communication purpose which is the reason for owning one. This category are those who feel that mobile phones are a

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[6] These are the six mobile users' categories that I have come up with to analyze my research and describe the Mao youths who have access to mobile phones. The description of each category has been mentioned and when I use this term in the course of my writing would describe them accordingly.

necessity for keeping in touch with people around them and use their phone avidly for calling, receiving and sending SMS. Some of the young people can talk over the phone for hours. Though they also use phones for other purposes, the main reason they use it is for communication purposes.

I use my mobile phones to make calls. I usually talk over the phone for hours. Minimum 30mins, maximum is 2-3 hours depending on the situation. (Employed Youth 2)

Mostly phone calls and texting (Student 2)

The young Mao youth I met pointed out that they use their mobile phones for communication purposes. With the advent of mobile technology in their lives, their communication pattern has changed. They are constantly in touch with one other. Always on the move and wherever they are, they also make sure that they communicate and distance is no longer an issue for them. Though landline telephones were available before the advent of mobile telephone in Mao, only a very few section of the community had access to it. However, mobile phone has changed this. Almost every individual now owns a mobile phone. Landlines have almost been washed out in the area. 'The ways in which mobiles are used, valued and owned in the developing world are very different from the developed countries *(*Castells, et.al. 2007 quoted Geou and Grezo).' For many of the young people, mobile phone is their first communication device. When we try to understand this notion, mobile phones have been a great benefit in terms of getting connectivity to the world in a place like Mao.

Mobile Stylers/fillers

'Mobile Stylers/fillers' refers to those who use their mobile phones as a form of entertainment. Mobile phones as a multi functional entertainment tool as music players, gaming device, camera, video recorder, and also as a computer where you have all your information stored as well as use the phone as a device to access the internet. When I say mobile phone as entertainment device, I would be referring to these forms of entertainment.

This category of young people has adopted their mobile phones as a part of their daily lives in order to keep them entertained. Mobile phones have become some sort of 'leisure-time appliance' (Fortunati, Katz & Riccini, 2004), it is used to fill the emptiness of time spent between *time and space* (Castells, et al. 2007: 171). When one is alone, mobile phone keeps one company and the notion of being alone at a place and time is not created. Young people communicate all the time and even when they are not communicating, they use it for other purposes like listening to music, playing games or surfing the internet through their mobile phones.

As Lobet-Maris puts it, 'the present moment is always being split, always shadowed by an 'elsewhere' that takes up every moment of time not filled by some immediate activity. There is no more empty time. The 'mobile' fills all the previous gaps between activities.' (Lobet-Maris, Claire, 2003; 91) Young people when they feel that they are not productive at a certain point of time automatically resort to their mobile phones for comfort and to get entertained. Even when they are travelling and at places they are unfamiliar with, mobile phones have become a friend, a constant companion for them. Listening to music when they are bored, alone or travelling is a common phenomenon among this group of users.

To keep updated with loved ones who are away from me and of course to chat with friends when am bored, interested in. (Student 1)

I spend about 3-4 hours listening to music usually when I am alone, travelling or when I get bored. (Employed Youth 1)

Mobile performers

'Mobile performers' refers to those youth who use their mobile phones as a fashion statement and as an extension of one's body. 'Wireless technologies are portable and wearable, like a watch, it is only natural for mobile devices to become fashion items with all kinds of decorative, expressive, and symbolic functions (Castells, et al 2007 quoted Ling 2001).' Young people are trying to make a fashion statement of their own through the kind of brands they purchase, the personalisation they make with their phones in terms of their ringtone, wallpapers or other minute details.

Mobile phone is a fashion statement for me because we are totally influenced by the motives of fashion in our modern world. (Student 5)

Mobile phones have become so much a part of their lives that they use communication technology as *social performance (*Caronia & Caron, 2004*).* Young people's usage pattern shows

how it is important for them to interact and get to know people. In this mobile phones play an important role in helping them identify with their own peer group. They are integrating the object, (here the mobile phone) as one's own body bringing out the notion of embodiment. Mobile culture has been imbibed and integrated into the lives of these youth.

Many young people use mobile phones due to peer pressure to stay trendy and also it is an excellent way to pass time. (Employed Youth 3)

Mobile phones have not only become a status symbol but it is also a necessity in a fast paced world of today. (Student 5)

Young people also face peer pressure to stay trendy and cope up with their friends and peers. Mobile phone is used as an extension of their body and a device for identity building to construct and organise their social state. It is used as a form for their reflection and construction of the forms of everyday social life.

Mobile Socialiser

'Mobile Socialiser' would be referred to those who use their mobile phones in order to socialize and as a social status. Taking forward the users of *'Mobile performers',* with the advent of mobile technology, young people have started forming an identity of their own through mobile phones. They make it a point to always be in touch with their friends and peers. They use the communication technology to interact with people as a form of socialising. This form of socialisation creates a mobile community as interaction happens through phone calls, exchange

of smses. They interact and learn or unlearn from one another. There are also arguments that mobile phones have had a negative impact on the Mao community. Communication technology is enhancing relationship with friends and enabling Mao youth to form their own social life and identity among those they interact with.

Mobile phones have become a part of everyone's lives. Almost everyone has a cell phone nowadays and almost 90% of the youths spent their time chatting. Well, this is the major defect of cell phones. People are only chatting and they forget about their own work. If people had their own limits, then mobile phones could rather prove very helpful like chatting with good friends we get to learn lots, building friendship etc. if there is a limit then cell phones would have been a strong bridge in one's life. All this depend only on human. (Student 4)

Mobile Educators

'Mobile Educators' refers to those who use their mobile phones for education purposes. Young people have adopted mobile technology and are using the tool as means of gathering information and keeping themselves updated with the daily happenings around them. The dissemination of information has been facilitated because of the use of this technology. Those in rural areas have also become a part of receiving information and disseminating it in their own way. For the Mao youth, the adoption of this technology has helped them in understanding and widening their global knowledge. It is one of the factors in giving a certain kind of confidence when they interact and relate to the people around them, especially with those who are not in Mao.

Mobile phone brought a different and a new kind of confidence to face the unknown world of blasted information and knowledge. (Student 6)

Life has become easier, safer and informative. Mobility of news, information has widen our knowledge and outlook and to educate. (Teacher 1)

'Mobile Netters'

'Mobile Netters' would be referred to those who use their mobile phones for internet through mobile phones. I specifically would be looking at those who access social networking sites and particularly Facebook through their mobile phones. Young people find it convenient and easy to access Internet through their mobile phones. 'Mobile Netters' are a group of people who are frequently updating about themselves when on the move. I would be looking at the 'mobile population' among the Mao in greater detail.

Mobile phones has made accessing internet in a place like Mao very convenient and useful for the young people. Accessing internet through phone is so much easier because, mobile phones can be purchased at a much lower rate than purchasing a computer. For a community like Mao where access of information and communication technology is limited, mobile phone is one of the only sources of communication which can reach and inform people around the globe.

'I'd have to carry a telephone diary everywhere I go[7], save up money to buy one if I don't own any' (Student 4)

'Well, I can't imagine life without Mobile. (Student 2)

In order to understand the daily activities of a 'mobile netter', I looked at the kind of uploads- photo, video, status updates, the comments young respondents of my research shared and they way they interact with their friends, the kind of groups that they joined were observed during this period of study. They have joined groups or liked pages relating to their own community, the Naga community or northeast as a whole. Groups like 'Ememei', 'Mao Community', 'We want PTI to APOLOGIZE for distorting news of Mao killing on 6 May 2010', and 'Stop Discriminating People from the North-East India' were common to all the respondents. Joining groups such as this is a way of taking a political stand and creating an identity of their own among the network society and it is a form of digital activism. Young people are taking a stand on a social forum. Joining this helps them to connect to another person who feels the same way, and to create a form of identity within it.

Some Mao youth though are not literally discussing politics; they are constantly updating their status and uploading famous Japanese sub-culture Anime, which is also a kind of political expression and stand that they are taking.

A young woman I interacted with is an avid follower/fan of 'Manga Anime's'. *"Anime" in Japanese technically means any animated film, and "Manga" is any printed cartoon. "Manga are Japanese comics, and Anime is the Japanese version of animation. Anime is usually, but not*

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[7] Here the respondent is trying to say that when mobile phone is not with him, he would need to carry a dairy around.

always, the animated version of popular Manga (Eri Izawa, 1995). She updates and uploads her profile with everything relating to the Anime. This indicates the trend of how South East Asian sub culture has also penetrated into the lives of the Mao youth. All this is facilitated because of digital technologies. Though living in India, this group of young people are able to relate to such kind of sub culture as they create an identity of their own. Coming from a region, geographical and political isolated from the rest of the country, young people from this region are not able to relate to Bollywood music, songs. They associate themselves more with something that they can understand, appreciate or relate to.

In order to understand as to why south Asian cultures have penetrated among the Mao youth can be taken back to the times when Manipur militant groups banned Hindi films and Hindi satellite channels in the four districts that make up the Manipur valley in 2000. The ban was in order to stop the 'Indianisation' of the state (Sunita: 2010). Sunita further mentions that following the ban, Korean entertainment slowly gained a stronghold in Manipur and started to influence its mainstream culture. Korean sub culture seeped into the lives of the young people in Manipur and among the Mao youth as well. Young people have adapted Korean dressing style, hairstyle, its sitcoms and films in their lives. The entertainment vacuum created by the absence of Bollywood and other kinds of Hindi music gave a free pass to rock shows and Western music in the last two decades (Malem Ningthouja: 2011). Digital technologies like mobile phones, Internet have facilitated other western and other sub-cultures like Korean, Japanese and South Asian cultures to influence young people of the state.

Social Networking: Facebook through Mobile Phones

Young people interacting and communicating extensively on social networking sites, has formed a kind of 'network community' even among the Mao society. Network community *'is an infrastructure that connects computers to each other and to a range of external devices, and thereby enables users to communicate and exchange information.' (Beer & Gane 2008, pp. 16)* Taking his notion forward, with the explosion of new media like the information and communication technology, flow of information and interaction among the Mao youth has also changed to a great extent. Young people are communicating with each other through Facebook. Network communities have been created in Facebook in order to bring the Mao community to one platform through communication technologies. There are various communities like 'Mao Community', 'Ememei'[8], MSUD Ememei, Mao in Mumbai etc., created in Facebook where Mao youth come and interact and engage in various kinds of conversation relating to the place, news etc. Other than groups solely for the Mao community, there are also other groups like 'Nagalim Times', 'Nagas on Facebook', 'Nagaland.Open.Online.Barter or Sell(N.O.O.B.S.)', 'Photography Naga' and other such groups that Mao youth also participate and get involves in the discussion and interaction that takes place.

Being away from home, it is not easy to keep myself updated all the time about things happening at home. Through the groups and pages, I get to know the important issues worth knowing and get to know the ideas and thoughts of others too. (Teacher 2)

The 'Mao community' group on Facebook had about 1032 members in the month of January 2012 during the period of study. Members uploaded videos relating to the May 6, 2010 incident

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[8] Ememei is the local term for Mao.

where two Mao students were killed during a non violent protest at Mao Gate. The video showed how the atrocities were carried out by Manipur Police to civilians. Uploading the video again on Facebook and sharing the YouTube link almost 2 years after the incident took place is also a way of expressing their political stand. They are constantly reminding themselves of the kind of political identity they stand for. Geographically, belonging to a state where one is not allowed to move and live freely, members are using the group as a forum to express their political views and share their own personal opinion.

As there are no mass media, vernacular newspapers or other forms of media run by Mao community or solely for the community, members of the group are using this forum as a means of communication to pass on news, information and other related things to its members[9]. They are producing and sharing news among the people. In a way, they have formed a sort of journalistic forum in themselves. They are creating news or updating the happenings of the community to the members. Information related to competitive exams, notification for admissions in institutes, job opportunities and such related things are also updated in the forum. The 'Mao Community' group is an opportunity given to all members to use the forum to contribute and build up the community positively as mentioned in the description of the group.

With the pervasion of social networks into the lives of the Mao youth, communication among the community has moved up to a different level. As a community where other means of traditional information system is still lacking behind, the coming of information technologies like social

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[9] There are slots for new/programmes in Mao language in All India Radio Imphal and North East TV (NE TV). However, they do not give local Mao news but translate the national news to Mao language. There are a few times when AIR Imphal gives news/information related only to Mao community. It may also be noted that the time slot given is or 30minutes.

networks, mobile phones and digital technologies has enabled young people to share information and news about one's own community and the world at a much faster rate and easily. Information is constantly updated on the group page and people instantly start to share their views and opinions. Though there are Mao youth who uses social networks on a daily basis, I look at the *'mobile population'* among the Mao youth. It is an attempt to understand how young people of the Mao community have appropriated mobile phones into their lives and how this medium of communication is used to explore social networks.

The diffusion of mobile communication technology greatly contributed to the spread of *space of flows* and *timeless time* as the structures of our everyday life (Fortunati 2002 ibid). For the 'mobile population' among the Mao youth, this ability of communication technologies to give them *space of flows and timeless time* has allowed them to be able to reach out to those in the interior parts of the region and also allowed them to be able to access and connect to the *network society* when they come to Mao and go to parts where communication access is still difficult. However, mobile phones have broken down these barriers and young people are able to stay connected with their friends, their network society even when they are in the interior parts.

Mobile phones have enabled easy access of communication and rural and interior remote places. (Student 5)

It is a time saver, helps us to stay in touch with people, easy accessibility to internet, spreading awareness, news provider, event reminders, etc. (Student 7)

If we were to wait for land-line connection majority of our region will still be in the "incommunicado." Mobile connection did transcend this gigantic hurdle – it's almost a

miracle. Cell connection has indeed reinforced familial/community growth. Its good far out-weighted the negatives. (Employed Youth 4)

Joining the network society has broken communication barriers with the rest of the world. From a state of being '*incommunicado*' as pointed out, Mao community has moved forward into a realm of society who is always interlinked by technologies around them. An individual does not feel lonely or alone anymore. Mobile phone has become their constant companion and with the facility to access internet through their mobile phone has enabled them to always stay connected.

For young people mobile phones have become an identity that they are constantly building on. In the course of research and discussion trying to understand the changes mobile phones have brought into their lives, they have appropriated this technology as an indispensible tool. Mobile phones have changed the way they communicate with each other on a daily basis. As mentioned earlier carrying a mobile phone is more like wearing your clothes every day. Since mobile phone is always with them, they are able to communicate with their friends instantly about what they are feeling by updating their status of Facebook instantly. There is no longer any constraint of time and space. One is able to constantly express one's feeling and emotions to those on one's networked group.

Summary

The research looked at how young people's discourses on uses of their mobile phones are producing an identity of their own. The convergence of Mobile phones and social networking sites has become a forum for Mao youth to construct one's personal, social and political identity.

The 'mobile population' that I analysed are constantly using the medium to stay connected with their friends, family who are not with them at a certain time and they are also regularly using Facebook to express their feelings and opinions with their peer groups, friends, acquaintances or with those that they share the same interest.

The way Mao youth have adopted and appropriated this technology is also similar to other young people across the globe. However, I focused on them as I am able to bring in my own experience and see it through my practices of mobile phones and social networking sites. Mao youth are using Facebook community groups that they have created as a medium to discuss political issues and disseminate information/news. Young people are taking stands on online communities and forums. They are using such groups to express their feelings and thoughts. This is also because there are no other social public forums available for them. Mainstream media are not carrying issues relating to them and even if they do, it is just superficially. Coming from such a situation, social media like Facebook has become an important platform to be able to express it. However, when they share such news or information on a platform like this the question that arises is how much it is helping them and what is the use of such a forum. The information is passed on to the same group of people. They are becoming producers and consumers of this news themselves. It is a question as to whether this kind of platform is really helping them.

I mostly discussed about how technology has facilitated communication among the Mao youth. Though technology has played a great role in bridging communication gaps and keeping people connected, they are also aware of the flip side of technology. The argument is on how technologies are affecting human touch. Communication is happening in a virtual space; however, people are becoming distant from each other in the physical world. In one way

technologies are bridging communication gap among those who are located in different geographical spaces; however the same is creating distance with those you are living with. An individual is up staying online, updating status, chatting and connecting with those that are away from you but one is also constantly disregarding those that you stay with. Mao youth come from a community where, community living and doing things together are very much a part of day to day living. Technology has somewhat started to replace this. While one is trying to be connected with this network society online, this is a disconnection happening in the physical community. We may argue that, the same group of people are online and therefore forming another community in itself, but those that have access to this kind of forum is also limited. Only a few can afford to be online and participate and that is why the focus on the 'mobile population'.

Young people from Mao living in different cities of the country and abroad are using virtual space as a substitute to the physical interaction that they would otherwise have with their peers and families within their community. They have to use these spaces as a way of keeping connected to their culture and be informed about the community as they have to move out from Mao for education or work. Interacting on virtual space has become an important medium for them; it is a way of 'hanging-out' with their peers and family.

Bio-note

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