

I can't live without my mobile phone, and a digital manners manual

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I can't live without my mobile phone and a digital manners manual - 24 August 2006

HONG KONG – Sixty percent of Asian consumers are unable to live without their mobile phone and two thirds of Asians believe digital devices should come with user etiquette manuals, according to a Synovate survey.

Exploring Asian consumer attitudes towards wireless manners, Synovate surveyed 3,363 respondents in the markets of China, Hong Kong, Korea, Malaysia and Thailand about their most essential digital device, their most annoying digital behaviours, and whether they had ever been 'dumped' by SMS.

The findings reveal that as the public continues to unplug and tune in, consumers across Asia believe that technology manners leave a lot to be desired.

Mobile manners

When asked which digital device they are unable to live without, 60% of Asians voted for their mobile phone, with consumers in Hong Kong (76%), Malaysia (71%), and Thailand (69%) particularly mobile reliant.

Desktop computers (16%) and laptops (6%) were the next most essential devices, while handheld PDAs were the lifeline of a surprisingly small one percent of the population.

Synovate Managing Director Hong Kong, Jill Telford, said that the mobile phone had developed into a multimedia tool that was now considered a necessity among all Asian consumers.

"Mobile phones have become an essential item rather than a luxury, even among low income groups who require a basic model to participate in today's lifestyle," she said.

"Although the extent to which people use mobile functionality is open to debate, Synovate research across the region shows that Asian consumers view their mobiles not just as a convenient communication tool but also as an indispensable fashion accessory that reflects their individual style and values."

While mobile phones may be commonplace, the survey shows that mobile manners are not, with 40% of Asians nominating mobile phones as the number one digital device most likely to be used impolitely. Misuse of handheld electronic games was a distant second, chosen by 13% of the population.

When it comes to what constitutes poor mobile manners, carrying out a loud conversation in public places is the worst mobile phone habit for 42% of Asians, closely followed by speaking on a mobile during a movie (22%) and answering the phone during a business meeting (16%).

Koreans (51%) and Chinese (50%) are more likely to be subjected to someone else's conversation in a public place, with residents in Hong Kong (36%) and Thailand (32%) affected more by the number of people who interrupt movies to speak on their mobile phone.

Inconsiderate use of mobile phones is a problem in many countries and has got so out of hand that telecoms providers are now running educational public service ads in some countries, including Korea and Hong Kong," said Ms Telford.

"With 45% of Asians in the countries surveyed believing that people are now less courteous when using a mobile phone than they were five years ago, it is clear that the lack of mobile manners is only getting worse," she added.

Dating disasters

Behaviour now considered appropriate for mobile phones is affecting Asian consumers' love lives, with a remarkable ten percent of respondents having had a relationship or friendship ended by SMS message. SMS dumping is most prevalent in Malaysia, where close to a third of the population (30%) have had their hearts broken by SMS, followed by Korea (13%), China and Thailand (both 12%).

Asians should also beware of how they use their mobile phone when courting, with a further 30% indicating they would not see a person again if they had a mobile phone conversation while on a first date.

Email etiquette

As mobile manners deteriorate, netiquette, or polite online communication, also seems to be falling by the wayside.

Top of the cyberspace rudeness list for Asian consumers is sending chain emails, with 40% of the population nominating this as the worst email habit of all, closely followed by copying irrelevant people on messages (39%).

Other email etiquette gripes include poor grammar (6%), using a handheld PDA while eating out (6%) and bad spelling (5%).

Chain emails are more problematic in China, where 64% believe it is the worst email habit of all, while 58% of Koreans and 55% of Hong Kongers are more irritated by users who include a stream of irrelevant people on a message.

Malaysians seem in most need of a linguistics refresher, with poor grammar chosen by 18% of Malay consumers as the worst email habit nationally.

Ms Telford believes that part of the netiquette problem may be that people are often bolder and pay less attention to detail when it comes to working in cyberspace.

"Chain mails are a recognised burden to everyone with an email account, but it also appears that CC is fast becoming the most annoying letter combination in the business world," she said.

"With email an indispensable form of communication for business and personal purposes, people need to compose their emails carefully, think before unnecessarily copying in colleagues and also make sure they turn their spelling and grammar checks on."

Resigned to rudeness

Despite the many annoyances inconsiderate use of technology creates, Asian consumers now seem resigned to digital rudeness, with 51% saying that they are affected by inconsiderate use of technology only occasionally and 18% never affected at all.

"People have become desensitised to inconsiderate use of technology and are often not even aware when their own wireless behaviour starts affecting others around them," Ms Telford said.

"However, with just over one quarter of the population (26%) adversely affected by impolite technology use at least once a week and two thirds of Asian consumers believing that digital devices should come with user etiquette manuals to inform users about polite usage in public, there is a clear gap in the market for consumer education.

"Not only could such education be a platform for savvy marketers to differentiate themselves from the competition in a positive and constructive manner, it may also bring some welcome relief from the day-to-day disturbances that modern devices can create," she added.

About Synovate

Synovate, the market research arm of Aegis Group plc, generates consumer insights that drive competitive marketing solutions. The network provides clients with cohesive global support and a comprehensive suite of research solutions. Synovate employs over 5,500 staff in 108 cities across 50 countries.

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