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THE BIG STORY

CALLING ALL INDIANS...

CONNECTED Phones are getting smarter, users are getting more savvy. Most use their devices for music, social networking and chatting; very few work on their phones, finds an HT-MaRS survey

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If there is one word that describes mobile phone use in India, it is ubiquity. With more than 860 million mobile phones in the country, they are literally the extension of our hands. The aggressive growth of mobile connectivity is beginning to recondition how people engage with shopping, entertainment, banking, work, health-care, and perhaps more than anything else, with one another.

While you run the risk of being laughed at for whipping out a clamshell phone in western countries, they are still popular in India. But this only indicates that the smartphone market here, comprising 10% of national phone sales, has room to expand furiously. And the signs are all around us.

According to a survey conducted by Hindustan Times, 42% of respondents use their smartphones at least once a day to access the internet. Interestingly, the highest satisfaction users get from their smartphones is in listening to music; accessing social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter ranked second in terms of satisfaction.

Smartphones are fast becoming essential components of modern life.

Animesh Mishra, a senior consultant at a software firm, uses his phone as a tool to enhance his living experience. "I used it to quit smoking. With the help of an app, the whole process turned into a game. And, of course, I wanted to win. It's good to have one device that serves many purposes," he says.

Users are also beginning to realise that a smartphone is only as good as the data transfer speed it offers. The survey found that more than 40% of users in Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata

subscribe to 3G speeds. And 80% of them look forward to getting 4G soon. "My smartphone is my newspaper, personal journal, health monitor and guide. Good connectivity is central to all that," says Mishra.

The desire for mobile internet is not limited to users in big cities. Satish Tiwari, an employee at Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi, is hooked to downloading songs on the go. "No wires, no going to shops — I can get any song I like in seconds," he says.

With numerous mobile phone service providers in the country, it is quality and economy that concerns many users. Mahinder Shrivastava, a 21-year-old engineering student, says he is reasonably happy with his coverage and download speeds.

"It is the price of 3G that is high for me, particularly when compared with other services," he says.

Nonetheless, it's a consumer's market, thanks to number portability.

"Portability lets you switch without changing your phone number, if the service provided isn't up to speed," says Vishal Ramchandani, associate vice-president of consumer research and brand planning at MaRS, the research agency that conducted the survey for Hindustan Times.

The survey, which polled 3,100 people across eight cities, found that 36% of users who switched providers said it was due to dissatisfaction with service-related interactions.

Network-related issues remain an important factor too, cited by 30% of respondents. After switching providers, however, only 4% were happier with their tariff plan. So it's service, not lower bills, that seems to matter to customers.

Not all of them, though. Tanya Sarah, 19, a student at Delhi University loves using her smartphone. "I use 3G for chatting and email and watching videos on YouTube," she says. "The speed is fine, but the prices are atrocious."

THE PORTABILITY CONUNDRUM

Vishal Ramchandani
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Number portability is here to stay, offering mobile phone users the alternative to switch if their current service operator falls short of their expectations.

Our survey explored the factors that prompt mobile phone owners to change service providers. The biggest reason, cited by 36% of users, was dissatisfaction with the provider on service-related interactions, either at service centres or call centres.

Network coverage issues — which emerged as the second-largest reason for portability — was followed by tariff-related issues. While customers contact service centres for problems, it was poor handling of issues that prompted them to switch, they said.

Having decided to shift, a third of respondents chose a new provider based purely on brand name. Tariff plans and schemes attracted 22% of respondents, while 16% were persuaded by the company's sales efforts.

Another 15% chose a new provider based on recommendations from friends and relatives. Interestingly, while half the respondents had compared different brands before making a decision (choosing a better tariff plan or value-added services), the other half had relied upon the brand's reputation.

Most respondents found the process of shifting convenient. Customers also reported a significantly higher (20% or more) satisfaction level with their new service operators.

Service operators seem to remain quite unfazed about losing a customer — less than half of the respondents said the previous provider enquired about the reasons for the change. But number portability is not a solution for everyone — many respondents, dissatisfied with their current operators, had not switched because they believed all service providers were the same.

Ramchandani is associate VP of Consumer Research and Brand Planning at MaRS



I use my smartphone to access social media and email, to Skype and to use chat services.

HUMA KHAN, 22, ENGINEERING STUDENT FROM DELHI



I use 3G mainly for chatting and other internet activities such as email and watching videos on YouTube. I am quite content with the speed, but the prices are atrocious.

TANYA SARAH, 19, STUDENT AT DELHI UNIVERSITY

METHODOLOGY: The survey was carried out in June among 3,172 smartphone users in eight cities in India — Delhi, Lucknow, Kolkata, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad. Three respondent categories were selected — those who have used the portability option in the past one year, current 3G users and all other smartphone users.

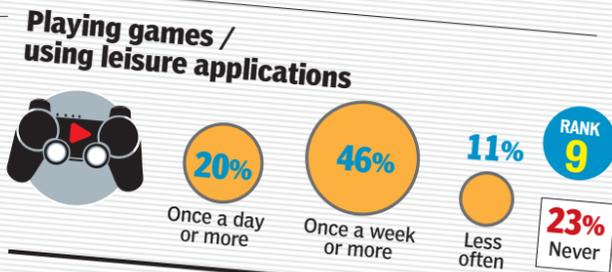
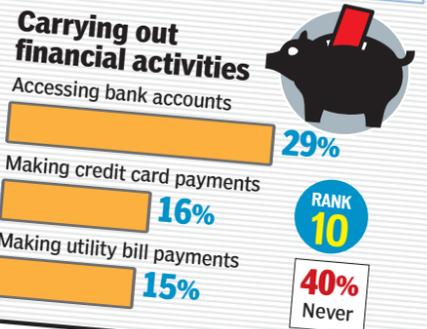
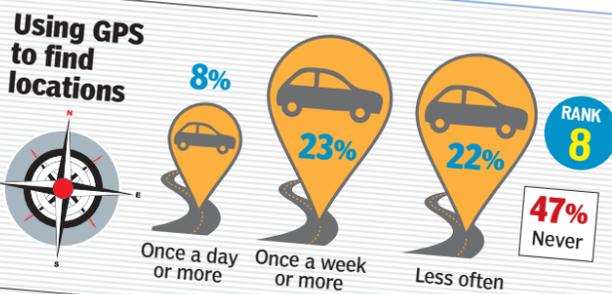
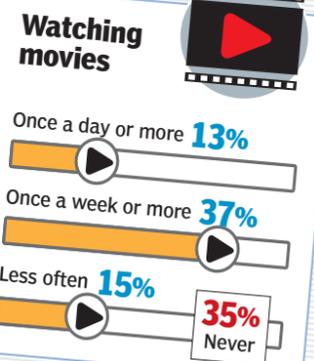
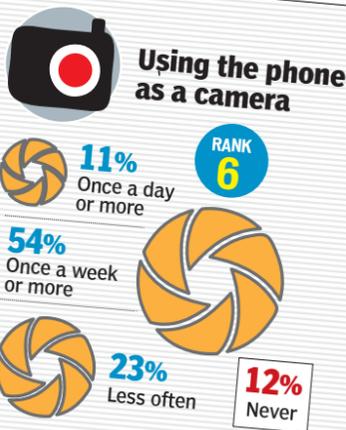
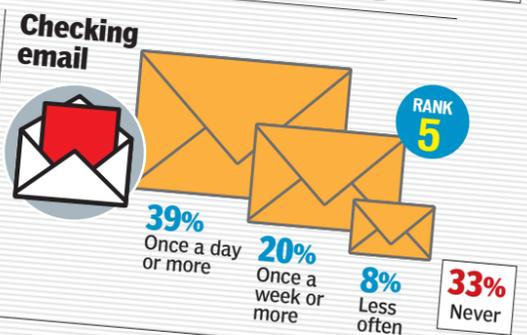
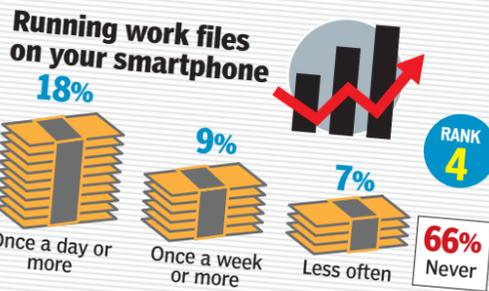
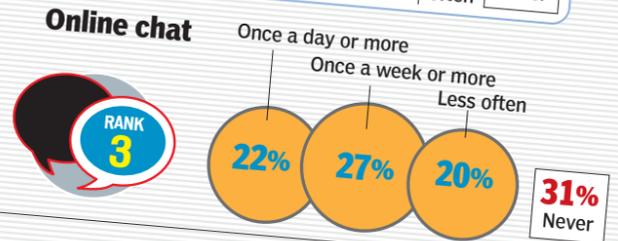
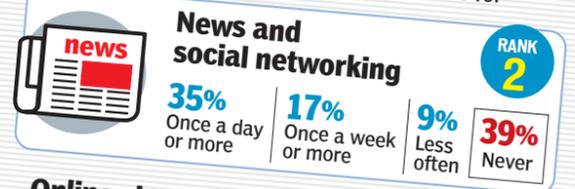
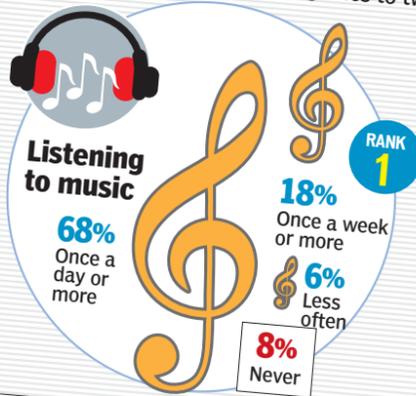
HINDUSTAN TIMES - MARS MOBILE USE SURVEY

YOUR WORLD IN A PHONE

The number of mobile internet users in India is expected to touch 130.6 million in 2014, from just 4.1 million in 2009. A look at how we use our phones, and how happy we are with the services rendered by network providers

HOW INDIA USES SMARTPHONES

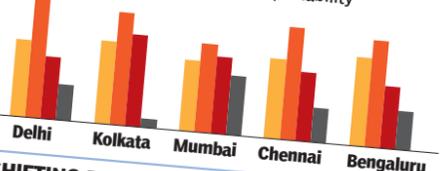
From playing games to tweeting, the top 10 things people use their phones for



MOBILE NUMBER PORTABILITY

REASON FOR CHANGING SERVICE PROVIDER

- Dissatisfied with the previous operator on network/coverage
- Dissatisfied with the service provided by the previous operator
- Tariff-related issues
- Just wanted to avail of portability



SHIFTING PROCESS WAS QUITE INCONVENIENT

Mumbai	54%
Delhi	48%
Chennai	32%
Kolkata	30%
Bengaluru	27%

INCREASE IN SATISFACTION AFTER SWITCH

Call centre	23%
Service centre	20%
Signal strength	8%
Tariff plan	4%

3G SERVICES

Overall satisfaction level of using 3G (out of 1,000)

Town	Score
Ahmedabad	820
Bengaluru	820
Lucknow	815
Mumbai	793
Chennai	785
Hyderabad	770
Delhi	743
Kolkata	710

79.6% people surveyed said they are looking forward to 4G being introduced

60% of those surveyed said the price of 3G services in India is excessive



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I changed providers because having the same provider as my friends meant that calls became cheaper.

VISHNU SINHA, 18 STUDENT