



# Perceptions of public mobile phone conversations and conversationalists

Nate Sutter\*, Thomas Holtgraves

*Department of Psychological Science, Ball State University, United States*

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 2 July 2012

Accepted 3 September 2012

Available online 26 September 2012

### Keywords:

Mobile phone

Communication

Annoyance

Person perception

## ABSTRACT

This research examined perceptions of public mobile phone conversations and conversationalists. Participants viewed a staged video of a public conversation and later rated their perceptions of the conversation and target speaker. Two variables were manipulated: whether the conversation took place over a mobile phone or was face-to-face, and whether participants could hear both sides or only one side of the conversation. In general, participants rated the one side mobile phone conversation as more noticeable, intrusive, and annoying than the other conditions. Additionally, the target speaker in this condition was less well-liked than the speaker in the other conditions. Perceptions of the target's extraversion varied as a function of whether the conversation occurred on a mobile phone or not. Overall, the results suggest the existence of negative views toward mobile phones and exposure to one side of a conversation.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

According to the [International Telecommunication Union \(2011\)](#), approximately 5.3 billion mobile phone subscriptions were issued in 2010, with 3.8 billion of these subscriptions in developing countries. In the United States, over 90% of the adult population subscribed to some sort of mobile phone contract in 2009 ([Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association, 2009](#)). In addition, in 2002 the number of mobile phones outnumbered the number of fixed line phones on a global scale ([Srivastava, 2005](#)). Based on these findings, it seems evident that mobile phones have truly revolutionized communication. Moreover, mobile phone users can use their phones anytime, anywhere. This ubiquity may have a cost, however, as public mobile phone conversations may be viewed, at times, as annoying and noticeable ([Monk et al., 2004a](#)). The overall purpose of this research was to investigate perceptions of public mobile phone users and their conversations; a more specific goal was to identify the processes that drive these perceptions.

There have been several informal studies of how mobile phone users might be perceived. Through the use of focus groups and the analysis of comments posted on Usenet.com in response to open ended questions regarding mobile phone use, [Ling \(1997\)](#) found that those using their mobile phone inappropriately (i.e., talking just to talk) in public areas were often viewed as status seeking yuppies or being ostentatious. Moreover, those who used their mobile phone for inappropriate calls were typically labeled as gossipers. [Plant \(2001\)](#) speculated that there appears to be two types of mobile phone users based on their mannerisms when they make or receive mobile calls—the spacemaker and the speakeasy pose. The spacemaker is described as an introverted individual who generally slants his or her body towards his or her mobile phone during conversation, focusing all his or her attention to the person on the other end of the line. Mobile phone users who exhibit this posture respect the privacy of others and will seek out areas of comfort and relaxation where they can make or receive their calls. Conversely, those who demonstrate the speakeasy pose often radiate a sense of confidence in how they utilize their

\* Corresponding author. Address: Department of Psychological Science, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, United States. Tel.: +1 4197991412.  
E-mail address: [n.sutter@bsu.edu](mailto:n.sutter@bsu.edu) (N. Sutter).

mobile phone in public and are often unapologetic in the process. Plant describes speakeasyers as much more extroverted than spacemakers, with the former refusing to be distracted by the outside world while utilizing their devices. Plant also interviewed professional occupational women in Chicago; these respondents reported that their male counterparts were inclined to display their mobile phones as a symbol of their status or even virility.

One aspect of mobile phone use that has been investigated is its perceived intrusiveness. In general, researchers have found that mobile phone use is perceived to be the most intrusive in areas of high concentration (i.e., social settings where people are to focus their attention); participants are generally more comfortable using their phones in relatively open public settings. For example, Höfllich (2006) surveyed participants from European countries and found mobile phones to be rated as more of a nuisance at cinemas or museums, official events (e.g. a lecture), or in waiting rooms, but less of a nuisance in streets or public parks. Furthermore, nearly half of those questioned felt quite uncomfortable if others were present during their mobile phone conversation, almost a third reported that they tried to avoid such situations, and 40% reported feeling embarrassed when their mobile phone rang in situations where others were present.

Similar results were reported by Turner et al. (2008). They presented young adult participants with an image of an actor using his or her mobile phone in five different locations (e.g., bar/restaurant, street) and asked participants how uncomfortable they would feel in making and answering a phone call in the same location. Most participants felt uncomfortable using their mobile phones at work and generally more willing to receive than make calls in public places. American contributors interviewed in Plant's (2001) study mentioned they would not hesitate to ask strangers to stop using their mobile phone in their vicinity if the conversation was perceived as intrusive, just as they might ask people to please stop smoking. Regarding third party observers of mobile phone conversations, researchers have found that males, and those high in individualism, tend to express greater annoyance when these devices are used in public settings (Campbell, 2008; Turner et al., 2008).

One possible explanation for why mobile phone conversations are perceived as intrusive was offered by Höfllich (2006). He interviewed individuals from European countries and found that people who overhear public mobile phone conversations generally rate this experience as a nuisance due to the unwanted information they absorb from the process. Monk et al. (2004b) suggested that in addition to only hearing one side of the conversation, people may have had bad experiences with mobile phones (e.g., dropped calls, hidden fees) and this also could be a reason public mobile phone conversations are perceived negatively.

Monk et al., (2004b) tested these two explanations in a field study. In this study participants overheard either a face-to-face conversation between two females, a female speaking on her mobile phone, or two females conversing where one was speaking at an inaudible level. The mobile phone conversation was rated by participants as more noticeable and intrusive than the face-to-face conversation condition, a finding that parallels an earlier study (e.g., see Monk et al., 2004a). Interestingly, however, the face-to-face condition in which only one participant was audible yielded similar ratings to the mobile phone condition. Monk et al. (2004b) argued that this finding provides empirical support for what they termed the need-to-listen hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, people perceive mobile phone conversations negatively because they hear only one side of the conversation, not because of anything about mobile phones per se.

One possible explanation for the need-to-listen effect is the lack of predictability that occurs when hearing only one side of a conversation. Emberson et al. (2010) hypothesized that the relative predictability of a conversation affects how distracting it is, and depending on what is overheard, can consequently result in decreased cognitive performance. Relating this to mobile phone communication, they conducted two experiments in which participants performed both a verbal and nonverbal task while overhearing different types of speech: a dialog between two individuals, a halfalog (i.e., similar to a mobile phone dialog where only one side of the communication is heard), or a monolog where one person would recap a particular conversation. Experiment 1 supported Emberson et al.'s hypothesis in that overhearing a halfalog was more distracting for participants while performing each task, relative to overhearing a full conversation. In Experiment 2, Emberson et al. rendered the speech that participants overheard incomprehensible in order to test whether this effect was due to mere acoustic unpredictability. The results of this experiment did not demonstrate the same effect as before, and thus suggest that it is the unpredictability of the speech content (not just acoustic unpredictability) that produces the distraction. Based on these findings, Emberson et al. offer a cognitive explanation for why public mobile phone conversations might be irritating; it is due to the limited predictability of speech content overheard in mobile phone conversations.

### 1.1. Current study

The current study was designed to test whether public mobile phone conversations are perceived negatively, and if so why. Regarding the latter, one possible explanation for potential negative perceptions is that many people have negative associations with mobile phones due to negative experiences with them. Another possibility is that they are viewed negatively because they are distracting due to hearing only one side of a conversation (the need-to-listen effect; Emberson et al., 2010; Monk et al., 2004b). Although the Monk et al. (2004b) study supported the need-to-listen effect, additional data would be helpful. More importantly, the design in the Monk et al. (2004b) study was incomplete because it did not include a two-sided mobile phone conversation condition. This condition, which was included in the current study, is necessary in order to provide a fair test of these two explanations.

In the current study, participants were exposed to different versions of a video depicting two students communicating about their recent summer vacation. In each condition, participants observed this conversation occurring over a mobile phone or face-to-face, and either overheard both sides of the conversation or heard only one side. Hence, we used a  $2 \times 2$

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/466037>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/466037>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)