

Mobile Usage by Rural Women in Al- Taleea District, Babylon Province, Iraq

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Abstract

Rural women perform many jobs; mobile can facilitated the completion of these jobs. The study was undertaken to determine the usage of mobile phones among rural women in Al- Taleea district, Babylon province. Forty percent of rural women used mobile more than 2 hour per day. The most areas in which rural women use mobile phones are; contacting family and relatives, information about clothing and fashion, information about household goods, and information about food and nutrition. There is an urgent need to direct social, educational, cultural, health, economic and agricultural programmes specifically for rural women through mobile phone networks in Iraq.

Keywords: communication technologies; household wives; ICT; Iraq; utilization.

Introduction

Women make up 50% of the world's population (CRS, 2024), rural women constitute 49% of the world's rural population (IFPRI, 2024). Women perform many tasks and jobs in rural communities. Therefore, she needs to use many means and techniques to accomplish these tasks (Sheeja, 2021). Mobile is one of the most used technologies to facilitate the completion of many tasks (Haleem et al., 2023).

Mobile phones can expand rural women's knowledge base, thus making them more capable of managing human and natural resources and participating effectively in decision-making (Hossain and Samad, 2020). In different regions of the world many studies have been conducted and shown that rural women have started using mobile phones in various fields and activities; Nithyashree et al., 2019; Wyche et al., 2019; Rahim et al., 2020; Summers et al., 2020; Jabeen, 2021; Noor and Hoque, 2021; Scott et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2023; Ashley, 2024;

Leahy et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2024; Udishia, and Ambily, 2024.

In Iraq, mobile use began in 2003. The number of mobile phone lines in 2023 reached (40,054,869), Babylon Province ranks seventh in terms of number of lines (CSO, 2024a). But there are no official statistics on the number of mobile phone users, males and females, or in rural and urban areas. Women constitute (49.5%) of the population of Iraq in general and (49.3%) of the rural population in particular (CSO, 2024b). There is no doubt that rural women in Iraq have started using mobile phones and have expanded the areas of their use. However, we do not have sufficient studies on rural women's use of mobile phones, in the research area or throughout Iraq, which requires conducting such studies to identify the areas of mobile use and the factors influencing that. How many hours do they use their mobile phone daily? What are the areas of mobile usage? What are the factors affecting mobile use? The study was

undertaken to determine areas of mobile usage by rural women and to determine the

Material and Methods

The study was carried out in AL-Talyaa District in Babylon Province, located in south central Iraq, between 32.7° and 33.8° N and 43.42° and 45.50° E. Babylon Province is located in the Middle of Euphrates provinces. The population of AL-Talyaa district is 40567, about 78.73% of whom (31941) live in rural areas within 4000 family (CSO, 2021). 200 families (5 % of total families) were randomly selected; a woman from each family was chosen to respond to the questionnaire by personal interview from 1-15 December 2024. The instrument used was a two-part questionnaire comprising socio-economic characteristics and mobile usage. The socio-economic characteristics included age, education level, marital status, and occupation. The usage of mobile included eight areas; information about health and beauty, information about clothing and fashion, information about food and nutrition, information about household goods, information about agricultural production, contacting family and relatives, follow up children's education and watch programs and series. The respondents were asked to indicate the time (in minutes) that they spends daily using the mobile phone in general and how time is distributed across areas of use.

Content validity of the questionnaire was established by a panel of experts in fields

Table1.Distribution of rural women according to daily hours of mobile use

Daily use (hour)	%(n=200)	M	S.D.
>1	25%		
1- 2	35%		
<2	40%		
Total	100	1.6	0.36

differences in women usage based on their characteristics.

of agricultural extension. A pilot study was conducted to establish reliability of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha (a reliability coefficient of 0.91) was established, indicating the instrument used was reliable and valid.

Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean (M), standard deviation (SD) and Chi test, using SPSS ver. 22, (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL).

Result and Discussion

Mobile usage

Based on the time spent daily by rural women using mobile phones, the respondents were divided into three categories (Table1). Result showed that 25% of rural women in AL-Talyaa District used mobile less than an hour per day, 35% used mobile between 1- 2 hour per day, while 40% of them used mobile rather than 2 hour per day. Overall time of mobile used for rural women was 1.6 hour, which indicates a decrease in the average number of hours of mobile use per day by the respondents. This may be due to the many burdens, tasks and duties that rural women undertake and the lack of sufficient time to use their mobile phones.

Rural women often characterized by their low use of mobile phones (Rahman et al., 2024), Belur et al., 2024, found that rural women used mobile phone less than 2 hour per day.

Areas of mobile usage

Mobile has multiple functions and benefits, so, it can serve a variety of areas in our life. The areas of mobile phone use depend on the user's personal, social, economic, health, educational and professional characteristics.

Rural women perform many domestic, social and professional tasks and duties, and they can use mobile phones to accomplish some of these tasks. Results in table2 indicate that contacting family and relatives was the first area in which rural women use mobile phones. The first and basic function of the mobile is to make and receive calls. The respondents were distributed according to the duration of using the mobile phone for contacting as follows: 40% more than 2 hours, 35% between 1- 2 hours and 25% less than 1 hour. The most common use of mobile phones by rural women is to make and receive calls (Rahman et al., 2024; Garg, 2021; Wyche et al., 2019).

There are special interests of women related to physiological, psychological aspects, their family and domestic duties; one of these interests is clothing and fashion. So, rural women use mobile to seek information about clothing and fashion, this is the second among mobile usage areas by rural women in the district, where 95% of respondents indicate that. 37.5% of respondents used mobile more than 2 hours, 32.5% between 1- 2 hours and 25% less than 1 hour, to get information about clothing and fashion.

The responsibility for choosing and purchasing household goods often falls on rural women (Fran et al., 2022; UNOPS, 2020). As such, they use all available means to obtain useful information, the most important of which is the mobile phone, as many companies and shops display goods through websites and Facebook pages. Searching for information related to household

goods ranked third among rural women's areas of mobile phone use in the study area. Where 90% of respondents indicate that. 37.5% of respondents used mobile more than 2 hours, 32.5% between 1- 2 hours and 20% less than 1 hour, to get information about household goods.

Proper intake of food and nutrition is very important for any people to have a healthy mind and body (Zavitsanou and Drigas, 2021). Information about food and nutrition are very important for rural women (Feskens et al., 2022). All most, rural women have a medium knowledge level of Information about food and nutrition (Kumari et al., 2023; Bhimani et al., 2020; Choudhary et al., 2019). Getting Information about food and nutrition ranked fourth among rural women's areas of mobile phone use. Result in table2 indicates that 87.5% of respondents get this information through mobile, 35% of respondents used mobile more than 2 hours, 30% between 1- 2 hours and 22.5% less than 1 hour, to get information about food and nutrition.

Mobile phones have become a successful alternative to television and cinemas (Nakshine et al., 2022). People can now watch programs, series and movies through mobile phones (Xie et al., 2020). Now days people spend more time on mobile devices than TV (Priya and Maheswari, 2024). 79% of rural women in the district use mobile to watch programs and series, 32% of them used mobile more than 2 hours, 27% between 1- 2 hours and 20% less than 1 hour.

People put health at the top of their concerns. Women put beauty at the top of their concerns (Aharoni and Ayalon ,2024; Kim and Lee, 2018). Beauty is often associated with health (Grossi, 2024). Result of the study indicates that 70% of rural women used mobile to get

information about health and beauty, 27.5% of them used mobile more than 2 hour per day, the same 1-2 hour, and 15% used less than an hour. Rural women do not care much about health and beauty (Wheeler and Nye, 2024; Verma et al., 2019).

In some societies, such as Iraq, and due to the nature of the educational system in schools, the family must follow up on the education of the children continuously, especially in primary and middle schools. Follow-up is done by visiting the school or communicating with its teachers via mobile phone, in addition, some teachers create groups for students on social media such as Telegram or WhatsApp. 65% of rural women in AL-Talyaa District-Babylon Province, use mobile to follow up children's education, 7.5% of them used mobile more than 2 hour per day, 32.5% used

mobile 1-2 hour, and 25% used less than an hour. Mobile can use effectively to educate and follow up children's education (Dorris et al., 2024; Gath et al., 2024; Pozos et al., 2023; Stamatios and Michail, 2017).

Rural areas characterized by being the place of agricultural production, but half of rural women did not show any interest in agricultural production issues. The reason for this, is that many of them do not participate in agricultural work (see table 3), in addition to, the dependence of those who participate in agricultural production on their family members to obtain agricultural information. Result indicates that 50% of rural women use mobile to get information about agricultural production, 5% of them used mobile more than 2 hour per day, 25% used mobile 1-2 hour, and 20% used less than an hour.

Table2. Mobile usage areas and daily hours use by rural women

Mobile usage areas	Daily hours use			Total	
	< 1	1- 2	> 2	F	%
Contacting family and relatives	50	70	80	200	100
Information about clothing and fashion	50	65	75	190	95
Information about household goods	40	65	75	180	90
Information about food and nutrition	45	60	70	175	87.5
Watch programs and series	40	54	64	158	79
Information about health and beauty	30	55	55	140	70
Follow up children's education	50	65	15	130	65
Information about agricultural production	40	50	10	100	50

Mobile usage and rural women characteristics

Mobile phone use is influenced by the personal, social, economic and professional characteristics of the user (Haiqing et al., 2024; Rahman and Sultana, 2022; Neştian et al., 2020). Result (table 3) indicates that mobile used affected by rural women characteristics, and there are significant differences between rural women mobile usage according to their age, education level, marital status, and occupation. Daily hour of

mobile use decrease with increased in age, while it increase with increased in education level of rural women. Unmarried, secondary educated, young and housewife rural women are the higher used of mobile among their categories. Young rural women are often more likely to use mobile phones, due to their many interests and desire to gain more knowledge (Garg, 2021). The rural housewife often spends most of her time at home and therefore

has more time to use her mobile phone (Summers et al., 2020)

Table3. Characteristics of rural women and daily use of mobile

Characteristic	Categories	N	%	Daily hours use				Chi test
				< 1	1- 2	> 2	M	
Age	< 20	40	20	3	14	23	1.88	9.763*
	20 – 35	70	35	17	25	28	1.57	
	> 35	90	45	30	31	29	1.49	
Education	<Secondary	66	33	35	24	7	1.07	37.7*
	Secondary	86	43	10	26	50	1.96	
	University	48	24	5	20	23	1.87	
Marital status	Married	124	62	46	52	26	1.34	63.54*
	Unmarried	68	34	3	13	52	2.22	
	Widow	8	4	1	5	2	1.62	
Occupation	housewife	64	32	17	13	34	1.77	74.43*
	Employee	26	13	6	10	10	1.65	
	Farmer	110	55	27	47	36	1.58	

*significant at 0.05 level of chi square

Conclusion and recommendations

Due to the multiplicity of tasks and duties undertaken by rural women and the diversity of their interests, and their awareness of the importance of mobile phones in helping to accomplish tasks and meet interests, they have turned to using mobile phones extensively. Forty percent of rural women in Iraq used mobile more than two hour per day, these hours of use were distributed among several

areas, the most important of which are; contacting family and relatives, information about clothing and fashion, information about household goods, and information about food and nutrition. There is an urgent need to direct social, educational, cultural, health, economic and agricultural programmes specifically for rural women through mobile phone networks in Iraq.

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