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# Mobile communication and the culture of self-expression: The case of smsing to radio in Ghana

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**Over the last two decades, mobile telephony has wrought a tremendous impact on interpersonal communication over the world. In Ghana, however, the communicative significance of this new media as a means of promoting the culture of self-expression, particularly on the radio, is relatively unknown. In this paper, I examine the uses and gratifications of approximately 500 SMS texts, arguably the commonest new media, on the panel discussions of two major radio networks, drawing on Katz et al.'s (1974) uses and gratifications theory. Key findings showed that posting messages on radio panel discussions (RPDs) is motivated by six major gratifications, prominent among which are ideological formations and expressions of dissatisfaction about personal, social and national issues. These findings not only characterise RPDs as a unique discourse type, but quintessentially reveal the nature of participatory democracy on RPDs in Ghana. The findings bear theoretical implications as well as raise concerns for media practice.**

**Key words:** Mobile communication, SMS, self-expression, gratification, radio panel discussion

## INTRODUCTION

Exactly two decades after its emergence in the early 1990s to mainly promote person-to-person communication (Crystal, 2008), SMS texting has been extended to other language domains such as the electronic media, particularly the radio. There is little doubt that radio is a significant player in the media landscape because it is on radio, more than elsewhere, that both public and private opinions are normally expressed. Radio, to a large extent, promotes the development of modern society through individuals' self-expression (McLuhan, 1964; Karikari, 1994; Jones and Jones, 1999). The culture of self-expression, DeAndrea et al. (2010) among others believe, is guaranteed by the right of free speech and define it to mean one's ability to articulate one's internal attitudes, beliefs and values (p. 429). Self-expression is, therefore, upheld in many democratic, independent societies such as the United States and United Kingdom because it is the foundation upon which such virtues as freedom, creativity, courage and human dignity are towered (Kim and Sherman, 2007). In sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana stands tall in respect of the freedom to self-expression.

In recent years mobile communication has further promoted this culture of self-expression. Global research in the use of mobile telephony by young men and women to express their uniqueness and individuality abounds. The discussion on mobile telephony is not misplaced because the device is an essential desideratum for posting SMS. It has been suggested that many users of the mobile phone have adopted more personalised services such as ring-tones, ring-back tones and wallpapers in an attempt to enact an express identity for themselves (Petroff, 2002; Marek, 2004; Gai et al., 2006). Other studies have focused on the communicative role of the technology. A decade ago, Oksman and Rautiainen (2002) examined the everyday uses of the mobile phone among young Finnish. The study was conducted among teens, using an ethnographic approach. Instruments such as the interview and observation were used to sample the views of participants and some parents. A major finding of the study showed that the most important gratification of text messages among Finnish youth is the building and maintenance of social networks. Another use of text messages among Finns is the desire to define one's

space in relation to others. Texting provides Finns with a sense of virtual fraternity (Oksman and Rautiainen, 2002).

Fortunati and Magnanelli (2002) also investigated the uses of mobile messages among Italians. The authors collected data based on a sample of thirty unstructured interviews. The results as well revealed that young Italians are fond of texting because it is private and certain to arrive at the recipient's inbox. In France, Rivière (2002) identified five major categories associated with the uses of mobile messages. These include avoidance of telephone conversation, exteriorisation of emotions, fun and maintenance of social contact. Her findings are similar to those of the Russian scholars Höflich and Rössler (2002). The gratification of pleasure/entertainment and game playing, for instance, could be realised as fun, using Rivière's typology.

At the dawn of the new millennium, many young Americans were not interested in mobile communication. This was mainly caused by infrastructural related constraints and high pricing (Crystal, 2008). It is in this context that Yu et al. (2002) analysed the communicative patterns of mobile communication among American teenagers, using the interview method. Like Fortunati and Magnanelli (2002) and Yu et al. (2002) says that young Americans use the technology to maintain virtual fraternity, group identity and minimise loneliness. Similar findings were also identified among Japanese (Barry and Yu, 2002) and Nigerians, where SMS is used to express Christian values (Chiluwa, 2008). In Ghana SMS is used by many to express, inter alia, romantic and erotic love among partners (Coker, 2011) and make complaints on radio panel discussions (Coker, 2012).

In an earlier study, Aboagye-Aniagyei (2009) compared text messages posted by Ghanaian and Nigerian students in an English-medium university in Ghana. Based on a combined framework of Crystal's taxonomy and Brown's communicative orientations and themes, the results revealed sexual and romantic, informational and salutary themes. Other themes include chain messages and friendship maintenance. According to Aboagye-Aniagyei (2009), the interactional function of text messages expresses their love for others and builds friendship, a claim well illustrated by Coker (2011).

It is increasingly clear from the review above that there is little scholarly interest in the discourse of mobile messages on the radio in Ghana. Despite the large body of research SMS as a new media (Thurlow, 2003; Herring, 2004; Bieswenger, 2006; Al-Khawalda, 2008), studies into texting on radio are rare though "as people become more aware of the communicative potential of texting, the range of specialised uses grows" (Crystal, 2008: 117). Such an investigation is needful so as to understand the nature of public discourse of texters to radio panel discussions in Ghana in so far as Ghana currently records over 100 private commercial radio

services (Ghana Broadcasting Study, 2005). Besides, it is often assumed, though wrongly, that the motives for posting SMS texts are universally applicable to all domains of language use. As Gai et al. (2006: 3) attest, "Mobile telephony is also regarded as rooted in specific cultural and social contexts rather than a cross-culturally universal solution". Given this gap, the present study examines the discourse of text messages posted to panel discussions of Joy FM and Peace FM, two popular private radio stations in Ghana. Specifically, the work examines how SMSing affords texters new voices to express their views and sentiments on radio panel discussions. From this standpoint, I draw on the uses and gratifications theory for the study's framework.

## THEORETICAL LENS

The uses and gratification theory (henceforth UGT) was first introduced by Elihu Katz in the 1970s when he suggested that people use the media to their benefit. According to Katz et al. (1974), audiences are active people who seek specific media and content to achieve certain results and gratifications that satisfy their personal needs. To this end, UGT attempts to match one's wits against others, and to obtain information and advice for daily living. It also attempts to provide a framework for one's day, to prepare oneself culturally for the demands of upward mobility, or to be assured of the dignity and usefulness of one's role (Katz et al., 1974).

The basic assumption of UGT is that the audience is conceived as active users of a medium. This assumption holds that users are goal-oriented and seek to achieve their goals through the media source. Significantly, in the mass communication process much initiative in linking need or gratification and media choice lies with the audience member. Here it is assumed that it is the individuals themselves that determine what they are going to do with the medium.

The theory also assumes that the media compete with other resources of need satisfaction (Katz et al. 1974). In essence, individuals have several needs. For this reason, many of the observations media researchers make can be derived from data supplied by the individual members themselves. According to Katz et al. (1974), people are very aware of their motives and choices and are able to explain them verbally if necessary. They further explain that audience members use the media to shape their own identities.

A third assumption of UGT is that value judgements about cultural significance of mass communication should be suspended while the audience operations are explored in their own terms. This means it is the individuals themselves that place values on the decisions they make. Thus, for communication scholars such as Fiske (1982), McQuail (1987), Ruggiero (2000) and

Littlejohn (2002), UGT springs from the functionalist approach associated with the social sciences.

Following the popularisation of the Internet, telecommunication and computer-mediated communication (CMC), the importance of UGT has been critically assessed. As Ruggiero (2000: 37) posits, "The timely intervention of CMC has bolstered the theoretical potency of UGT by allowing it to stimulate research into a proliferating telecommunications medium." The author holds that the primary strength of UGT theory is its ability to permit researchers to investigate mediated communication via communication content and psychological gratifications within a particular cultural context. It was earlier stated that empirical studies on the uses of SMS for self-expression and other communicative values are functionalist in character (Haddon, 2002; Oksman and Rautiainen, 2002; Rivière, 2002). One criticism against the theory of uses and gratifications, however, is its inability to provide a clear taxonomy for its analysis (Fiske, 1982).

Given the weakness UGT inheres, the researcher made some modifications to the theory. This modification is important in the sense that, although an attempt to modify UGT was first proposed by Palmgreen et al. (1980), its application in empirical research is rare. The adaptation of was, thus, informed by two main reasons. First, the present modification accounts for spatio-temporal constraints I faced in collecting data. The study was limited in making physical contacts with texters so they may explain their motives and intents for posting their messages to radio panel discussions. Therefore, the researcher had to rely solely on their messages as the basis for arriving at the gratifications. Second, the modification also attempts to strengthen the UGT theory in view of the emergence of new media such as the internet and text messages. As pointed out earlier, "the timely intervention of CMC has bolstered the theoretical potency of UGT by allowing it to stimulate research into a proliferating telecommunications medium" (Ruggiero, 2000: 37). The alterations in the theory will, therefore, enable us to provide evidence of the validity of UGT in its analysis of new media such as SMS.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research settings

The study was conducted at Joy FM and Peace FM, two private radio stations situated in Accra, the capital of Ghana. These networks were selected for three major reasons. The foremost is that both Joy FM and Peace FM broadcast arguably the best morning panel discussions, namely 'Joy Super morning Show' (henceforth JSMS) and 'Kokrokoo Morning Show' (henceforth KMS) respectively. These morning shows include the newspaper review that urge the listening public to air their views on interpersonal, social and national issues either through an interactive phone-in-segment or texting. Clearly, they act as "a bridge between the private, family sphere and the more impersonal, public domain of

work" (Jones and Jones, 1999: 28). It is for this reason that both JSMS and KMS have won several Chartered Institute of Marketing-Ghana (CIMG) awards. For example, Yankah (2004: 10) testifies of Peace FM thus:

... Peace FM took advantage of the large indigenous language vacuum created by the earlier stations, and targeted illiterates, low class Ghanaians, the voiceless majority... To many, this was the hour of linguistic liberation, when they would listen to all Ghanaian programmes and participate in debates on major national and local issues.

Further, both Joy FM and Peace FM, like other radio networks, serve the communicative needs of listeners of panel discussions. With its official policy of using Akan, the most widely spoken local language with over 60% of both natives and non-native speakers (Obeng, 1997; Yankah, 2004; Nyarko, 2008), Peace FM allows language users from diverse social, cultural, ethnolinguistic and educational backgrounds to express their opinions about on-going discussions. This goal is expressed in the station's motto: "Bringing radio to the ordinary Ghanaian." In much the same way, Joy FM is patronised by "the middle-working class, educated and upwardly mobile adults" (Yankah, 2004: 8). In this light, both radio stations cater for the language needs of Ghanaians.

As well, listeners of the two stations cut across the length and breadth of Ghana, and so represent a microcosm of the larger Ghanaian society. Through their affiliate stations across the country, Joy FM and Peace FM reach millions of listeners not only in Accra but in almost all regions of Ghana.

### Data collection procedure, sampling method and ethics

Data were collected at Joy FM and Peace FM from December, 2009 to February, 2010 during the five working days of the week when JSMS and KMS are aired. Although random probability sampling is by far the most reliable sampling method because it ensures the validity and reliability of the findings of any given research (Sarantakos, 1993; Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000), this sampling method was, however, not employed. This is because it could result in the selection of data that would not have been of interest to the purpose of the study.

For this reason, I purposively sampled data that were most useful in the analysis. The aim of purposive sampling, Cresswell (1994: 148) writes, "is to purposefully select documents that will best answer the research question". Incomplete and illogical text messages, which could hardly be analysed as single communicative units, were therefore deleted from the corpus. Thus out of a total of five hundred and two (502) text messages, the data sample was made up of four hundred and sixty (460) text messages, comprising 317 and 143 SMS messages collected from Joy FM and Peace FM, respectively.

In resolving the ethical snag associated with the study, I used generic or first names of texters as they do not refer to specific persons. This attempt aimed at avoiding using the names of texters without seeking their consent because I could hardly get in touch with them in view of the practical difficulty. It was important to do so because "whatever the specific nature of their work, researchers must take into account the effects of the research on participants, and act in such a way as to preserve their dignity as human beings" (Cohen et al., 2000: 56).

### Method of data analysis

The work is essentially a qualitative content analysis. An analytical description, the study is not supported by rigorous statistical material but by details and illustrations drawn from the data.

Content analysis is a key methodological apparatus that enables researchers to understand the process and character of social life and to arrive at a meaning, and facilitates the understanding of the types, characteristics and organisational aspects of documents as social products in their own right as well as what they claim. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2000), a person's or group's conscious or unconscious beliefs, attitudes, values and ideas often are revealed in their communications through a rigorous content analysis. In Herring's words (2004: 22), "this approach is well suited to analysing new and as yet relatively undescribed forms of CMC, in that it allows the researcher to remain open to the possibility of discovering novel phenomena, rather than making the assumption in advance that certain categories of phenomena will be found".

At the heart of this approach is coding. Such codes as tags, lines and labels were assigned against the pieces of data. The point of assigning such codes was to attach meaning to these pieces of data. Specifically, I employed open coding to summarise the data by pulling together identifiable patterns in order to find conceptual categories in the data. The main function of open coding, according to Punch (1998: 210), is "to expose theoretical possibilities in the data." This was followed by axial coding so I may find the relationships between the categories. However, this method of analysis was not rigidly pursued step by step since the analysis of data usually tends to be cyclical. This process was particularly useful as it encouraged me to rigorously examine the data in order to arrive at valid conclusions rather than skew findings or think of them a priori.

Content analysis is, however, criticised for doing little in ensuring the validity of its findings (Krippendorff, 2004). This limitation was surmounted by engaging a colleague lecturer in independent coding using the available coding system in the spirit of achieving internal reliability of the findings such that conflictual observations were collaboratively resolved. It was useful to establish the inter-coder reliability of this work, given that qualitative research is often "a very personal process because two researchers analysing a transcript will probably come up with different results" (Dawson, 2002: 128).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides an analysis of the uses and gratifications texters sought to derive from posting SMS messages on radio panel discussions (RPDs) in Ghana (Table 1). At the outset, it is important to stress that the messages were presented as originally as posted by texters themselves as obtains in functional discourse analysis (Brown and Yule, 1983; Chilwa, 2008).

The analysis yielded six basic uses and gratifications texters sought to obtain by posting messages during RPDs in Ghana. These gratifications were identified keeping in mind Thurlow's (2003) concept of primary orientation. For example, although a text could be considered fairly ambiguous in interpretation, it still may have a basic communicative function. However, where the communicative ambiguity could not be easily resolved the text was labelled 'indeterminate'.

### Ideological formations

The analysis showed that the most common desire texters sought by posting messages on RPDs was the

**Table 1.** Uses and gratifications of RPD-SMS.

Use and gratification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ideological formations	132	28.7
Dissatisfaction and solidarity	125	27.2
Phatic communications	94	20.4
Deprecations	56	12.2
Commendations	33	7.2
Attention-Getters	13	2.8
Indeterminate cases	7	1.5
Total	460	100.0

need to construct some ideologies. This gratification was usually conveyed through texters' expressions of thoughts, ideas, values and opinions concerning on-going debates and issues raised during panel discussions. Fairclough (1995) and Gee (1999) have noted that ideology is seen in the discourse of people since discourse is itself constructed in the society from which they are a part. In other words, society influences the way people use language. Here are some examples:

**Text 1:** Ghanaians proverbial hospitality accommodates foreigners but unfortunately does not extend to our own. We must ALL work to change this. Mac, Acc (JSMS 008)

In Text 1, Mac bemoans what he perceives as the hypocritical hospitality of Ghanaians as they show more affection to foreigners rather than Ghanaians themselves. Mac expects that the value of love and sense of belonging would permeate the Ghanaian society because Ghanaians are believed to be hospitable. Mac's gratification of this ideology comes to light in his concluding remark when he encourages everybody to join hands in discontinuing this unfortunate trend in Ghana. His concern is echoed by such choice of words as 'we', 'must', 'work' and 'change'. More importantly, Mac brings into sharp focus the indefinite pronoun 'all'; he foregrounds it at the forecourt of the host of JSMS so that it may serve as an added emphasis when the host reads the message on air in the hearing of the listening public. Thus, by the rendition of the indefinite pronoun in block letters, Mac cautions all Ghanaians not to exempt themselves in this crusade.

The ideological formations of texters to media panel discussions are very important in that they help us to understand the nature of public discourse in Ghana. Crystal (1987) refers to this language function as propositional. In his own words, the author asserts that "whenever we tell people about ourselves or our circumstances ... we are using language in order to exchange facts and opinions" (Crystal, 1987: 10). Two types of ideological formations came to light in the data: (a) social ideologies and (b) political ideologies.

The data indicate that texters posted messages during RPDs in order to express social ideologies and belief systems. This gratification was more dominant. A range of issues including education, health and sanitation, law and order were addressed in the messages. Below are some examples:

**Text 2:** If the police are reluctant to issue out a simple apology then lets get it clear if daily graphic has their own police men must b chargd. tino, TEMA (KMS 004)

Tino writes in the context where the Ghana Police Service has come under serious public scrutiny concerning their wrong labelling of a substance they perceived to be cocaine at the premises of Kinapharma Company Limited, a leading pharmaceutical company in Accra. According to Tino, the police needed to apologise to Kinapharma and not to have blamed the 'Daily Graphic' that broadcast the news. This social concern for justice is captured by the use of block letters almost throughout the message. Like Mac, Tino is ensuring that his message achieves the desired gratification and that his thought is fully conveyed. Another example is given:

**Text 3:** Kwame, do you know that it is not right to play excerpts of an interview to promote your program or as a jingle without prior approval of the interviewer. Think about it. Dan Dansoman. (KMS 012)

As can be seen, in Text 3, Dan thinks that it is not proper to get hold of an interview's excerpt without a prior notification of the interviewer. That the text writer urges Kwame Sefa Kayi, the host of KMS, to "think about it" means he is expressing his/her thought. Although the writer is expressing a concern, he is in the process educating not only the host of KMS, but also the listening public to desist from such a practice. The idea is expressed that it is not socially acceptable to make use of a person's property without the consent of the said person. This appears to be Dan's primary motivation for posting his text on the show.

Political ideologies were another important motivation texters sought by sending their messages to RPDs in Ghana. According to Fairclough (1995), the media are an effective political public sphere for national debates and discussions of political issues (p. 44). The data indicate that texters posted messages to express their views about developments in the two major political parties in Ghana that is, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP). The following are some messages that reflect how texters express their opinions on political issues during RPDs.

**Text 4:** Kojo, the Exec. is not dictating to the Legislative. As per the NDC constitution, Prez.

Mills is the leader of the NDC. He is allowed to suggest or even appoint anybody to any non-elective position within the NDC or any group which promotes NDC interests. In any case the legislature is made up of the majority and the minority. Prez Mills's dealings with his party men should not be misconstrued as interfering with the Legislature. I would advise that Avoka and Pepuo should learn to keep things told them in confidence. It is such slippery tongues which are creating problems in the NDC Paul Haatso. (JSMS 295)

In Text 4, Paul expresses his opinion with clarity that President Mills is not a dictator as there are checks and balances to ensure that such a thing does not happen. From the text, such expressions as "in any case", "should not be misconstrued" and "I would advise that" bear implications of an aura of knowingness exuding from his message. As Katz et al. (1974) have pointed out, people use the media to their advantage in constructing their own identity. One such identity created by the texter is that he has deep knowledge in political issues.

Perhaps, another identity he shapes for himself is that he is an avid NDC faithful. This is conveyed in the warning he gives to the leaders within the party to be mindful of what they say to the outside world by zeroing in on Honourable Cletus Avoka and Rashid Pelpuo, former ministers of Interior and Youth and Sports respectively. Thus, by expressing his views about whether or not President Atta Mills is a dictator, the texter also gratifies his need to be identified as a political expert and a strong member of the National Democratic Congress, the party of the incumbent government. Sometimes also, texters aimed at expressing their displeasure on issues around them.

### Dissatisfaction and solidarity

Dissatisfaction and solidarity in the data was conveyed through complaints. People make complaints in order to express their dissatisfaction about someone or something that may not be necessarily present at the scene (D'Amico-Reisner, 1985; Olshtain and Weinbach, 1987; Boxer, 1993). A complaint may, therefore, be direct or indirect. The messages were posted to RPDs often in the form of indirect complaints. They appeared as direct confrontations with the objects of complaint. The use of text messages to make complaints merits two main classifications: social dissatisfaction and political dissatisfaction.

Social complaints were more common than political complaints. As users of radio, texters expressed their dissatisfaction on social concerns on panel discussions as part of their contributions to a programme. Social dissatisfaction concerned education, health and sanita-

tion, business and finance. Others include science and agriculture. Here is an example:

**Text 5:** Pls Kwame, what is ECG doing about this constant power interruptions it's so frustrating, is Ghana now becoming like Nigeria hmmm! Tk ofankor. (KSMS 010)

Here, the anonymous complainer was expressing his dissatisfaction about the constant power interruptions by the Electricity Company of Ghana. The complaint is conveyed by the rhetorical question "what is ECG doing about this constant power interruption?" the clause "it's so frustrating" and the humming expression "hmmm". Together, these linguistic resources enable the texter to bring to the fore his or her utmost disappointment about ECG's poor management of electricity in Ghana. In this case, the texter solidarises with all Ghanaians who suffer from the inactions of the staff and poor services of ECG.

Political discontents in the data were also conveyed in some complaints sent by texters to express their dissatisfaction about the performance of government or most especially political leaders and their parties. The analysis showed that this type of motivation is usually face-threatening in nature because it reflects the disdain of their writers towards the object of complaint (Coker, 2012). An important thing to note here is that texters are very much aware of the anonymity the technology of radio affords. They, therefore, found it convenient to express their views even in the most offensive way. This development is in line with earlier claims by Boxer (1993) and Baym (2006) that distance and anonymity can result in the use of abusive and face-threatening language. Below are some illustrations:

**Text 6:** If our Politicians can deceive us by turning their campaign pledges into nightmare, whom then do we trust for our economic development? The nation deserves a better deal from the NDC. Kabiesi sek, di" (KMS 038)

In this text, the writer thinks that the NDC government has deceived all Ghanaians by not fulfilling its campaign promises. Although this conviction is produced from the texter's personal assessment of government, the texter assumes that all Ghanaians agree with him or her. Thus, by making this complaint the texter expects government to be meticulous in the management of the nation's economy.

Texters also solidarised with others through such acts as requests and inquiries. As per the data, requests and inquiries appeared as discourse functions that sought to let the addressees perform a task on behalf of the senders. The texts were posted in order to make requests or inquiries about disturbing issues confronting themselves and others. Texters sent messages in order to seek information or obtain some clarification about an

issue from the hosts of the radio panel discussions and/or their resource persons in order to show their concerns. Some examples are as follows:

**Text 7:** I want to know why we have not consulted Antoa Nyama on the fire outbreaks. Paa Nii, Adenta"(KMS 131).

In this text, Paa Nii would like to know why Ghanaians did not make consultations with Antoa Nyama; a deity located in the Ashanti region of Ghana, and is believed to be very powerful. The writer implies that only a divine force can intervene in the matters of Ghanaians given that they themselves are not capable of managing their own affairs. The message demonstrates how Paa Nii solidarises with the victims of fire outbreaks in Ghana. Here is another example:

**Text 8:** Please Kwame, let me use your media to appeal to the government to come to the aid of the people of Enchi by equipping our fire men with facilities. We are at risk. Bismark (KMS 096).

The gratification of solidarity and support is evident in the texter's attempt to identify himself with people who are going through difficult times: "We are at risk", he says. This motivation to show his support for the suffering masses is most urgent in that it emanates from the hazards fires are causing to the people of Enchi, a town in the Western region of Ghana. It can also be noted that Bismark's request expresses his deep concern for the welfare of Enchi. This request thrives on the third assumption of uses and gratifications theory that intimates that the media compete with other resources of need satisfaction (Katz et al., 1974). What this means is that Bismark, the texter, chooses the medium of texting to RPD over and above other media in order to express his dissatisfaction of the government's performance in the development of Enchi.

In brief, dissatisfactions on radio panel discussions are normally indirect since the objects of the complaints are not present at the time such dissatisfactions are made, although the messages pose a threat to the faces and dignity of their objects of interests.

### Phatic communications

The desire to keep in touch with loved ones was also found in the data. The analysis showed that SMS texts were sent during RPDs in order to wish dear ones a happy birthday, success in an examination or to generally wish them well in their endeavours. This observation supports Chiluya (2008) and Coker's (2011) claims that well-wishes are in the form of admonition, encouragement and general welfare. Here are some examples of birthday messages.

**Text 9:** Kojo wish Olivia of the University of Ghana success in her exams and let her know I will always be there! John, roman ridge (JSMS 180)

It is clear from the on-going discussion that text messages are more interactional than transactional (Chiluwa, 2008; Crystal, 2008) as they are used by texters to express their emotions. In Text 9, John expresses a well-wish to his dear one, Olivia. According to Ruggiero (2000), people send messages to others in order to obtain some psychological gratification through the message content. In this light, John will, to some extent, feel content that he had been able to wish his loved one success in her university examination. Evidently, a close analysis of the data brings to light two basic types of phatic communication, namely, direct phatic communication and indirect phatic communication.

Direct phatic communication refers to first person narrative accounts in text messages on RPDs. The messages usually are marked by either the first person singular I or plural we. Text messages that express direct phatic messages were very emotional in content. Here is an example:

**Text 10:** Hi kojo, we wish our daughter Romeine of holy trinity lutheran school Kumasi a hapi b'day. May she be blessed and highly favored? Fm Mr and Mrs Kwakye (JSMS 110)

Here the parents of Romeine, the addressee, pray for the favour of God upon their daughter's life on the occasion of her birthday. We gather from Text 10 that the texters employed the first person plural 'we' to enact a direct involvement in the act. In this manner, they satisfy their personal needs of expressing their love to their dear one.

Indirect phatic communication, on the other hand, refers to well wishes read by the hosts of RPDs on behalf of the sender. Here, the sender of the message makes a request to the host to wish a loved one well. One significant difference between a direct and an indirect phatic exchange is that while the latter is a form of a request, the former is not. As per the data, indirect phatic communication was usually prefixed with the politeness marker "please", thus indicating a request. This observation is consistent with the position of Edu-Buandoh (1999) that in media panel discussions, Ghanaians often use the linguistic resource "please" to show politeness as found in Text 11.

**Text 11:** Br. Kwame, pls send a b'day wish to wife, ivy aka nana yaa of zain in ksi. May she live happily to be a good and a wonderful wife... from Emma" (KMS 087).

The study also revealed that mobile messages were posted for greeting purposes. Greetings also function as

phatic communication, and thus ensure rapport among interlocutors. From the data, texters sent their messages on panel discussions to express such virtues as love, affection and solidarity to loved ones. Two basic types of greetings were found: season's greetings and solidarity greetings. Season's greetings are a universal phenomenon that captures the essence of social relationships among interlocutors. The data are replete with text messages in this regard. A major reason for this development is attributable to the growth of technology. As Chiluwa (2008: 18) has clearly averred:

Interestingly, electronic cards and text messages are increasingly becoming an alternative to paper cards. Evidently, during festive periods season's greetings by SMS text messages precede the paper cards and reach more and wider receivers than the ordinary cards. People who may never get the paper cards are easily and satisfactorily reached.

The use of text messages during such important moments as Easter, Christmas and New Year in the Christian context and Ramadan and Eid Adha among Muslims cannot be underestimated in today's technological world. An example is given:

**Text 12:** Good morning Kojo, I would like to send this message to the Board, Directors, Management and staffs of National Lottery Authority. May we look past our differences and reconcile with new challenges up ahead. 2009 was very eventful and amazing. May 2010 bring us more closely to the road of success and greater achievements? All hail the duties and possibilities of the coming twelve months! Happy Xmas and Happy New Year. Anaafi-NLA (JSMS 256).

After giving his support to the National Lottery Authority in its quest to achieve success, the sender of the message, Anaafi, ends by sending a season's greeting to all the staff of NLA, wishing them a merry Christmas and happy new year. This motivation stems from the fact that the year under review is coming to an end and that the anonymous texter thinks that it is prudent that both the management and staff of National Lottery Authority (NLA) together forge ahead. The texter, therefore, uses the medium to send a piece of advice to all those who matter in the affairs of NLA. As Wimmer and Dominick (1997) have said, audiences use the media not only to obtain advice but to also throw caution and advise the public.

### Deprecations

Not only did texters post their messages to express displeasures, they also did so as to deprecate individuals

and/or organisations. Deprecations represent a very important motivation texters sought on RPDs. Deprecations were usually expressed through such acts as attacks, insults and name-calling. Others appeared as flyting and maledictions. The analysis revealed that such behaviours usually arise because texters enjoy a degree of distance, anonymity or pseudonymity. The point elucidates an earlier observation by Yankah (1998) that Ghanaians use abrasive language in the media, especially in the electronic media due to the technological growth of mobile telecommunication. Yankah's (1998: 40) concluding remarks on the subject is worth quoting:

As communication becomes more faceless, the indigenous norms of restrained discourse are bound to slacken, taken over by greater openness and candour where affront is inevitable. But this also deepens the communication crisis; for faceless communication on radio-phone in programmes, has yielded its fair share of emotionally charged contributions, which have sometimes been interpreted as discourtesy to authority.

From the citation above, it is possible to say that texters often threaten the faces of their addressees and are discourteous to them because of the distance and anonymity the medium provides. Baym (2006) describes the negative use of language in the new media as uninhibited behaviours. These include flyting, sarcasm and humour (Crystal, 1987; Baym, 2006). The following example attests to this.

**Text 13:** Sammy-madina) we're sick and tired of Rawlings's Maafia and tctice afrall what? If he wants to move into his bedroom ... (KMS 073)

In Text 13, Sammy deprecates the perceived monopoly and control of state affairs by former president Jerry John Rawlings. This, he seeks by expressing his dissatisfaction in no uncertain terms. For the texter, it would have been better if JJ, as he is affectionately known, remained silent. Certainly, the cliché "sick and tired" will not be appropriate in this context given that it is impolitic for a reference to an ex-president. The text is, therefore, abuses a leading political figure in Ghana. This motivation is likely to stem from the knowledge that social accountability on the airwaves, as stated earlier, is low so that texters can seldom be held answerable for their use of irreverent language.

As can be observed, the use of language to condemn other selves is usually influenced by a politically motivated ideology. Perhaps, it is for this reason that texters sent messages to directly or verbally abuse political figures and/or the party a said figure is believed to be associated with. For instance, Goshgarian (2004)

labels name-calling as the foremost tool used in propagandist politics. Discourses of propaganda are frequently accompanied by distortions of facts and by appeals to the passions and prejudices of the public. A major objective of propaganda is to persuade the audience to believe the propositions of the speaker or writer. For instance, in deprecating other people of influence in the Ghanaian society texters draw on name-calling in order "to make us form a judgement without examining the evidence on which it should be based" (Goshgarian, 2004: 157). From the data, deprecations were normally directed at the two leading political parties in Ghana, namely, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Consider the text:

**Text 14:** Kojo some NPP MPS are behaving like footballers on the bench. Their only prayer is that a player is injured so they could be substituted to show their skills. Martins, KSI (JSMS 124)

This text demonstrates the invective the sender uses to malign his opponents on the other political divide. It is possible that the texter is a member of the NDC, and so aims at expressing his or her disdain for the leading opposition party, the NPP. Note that the message is rendered entirely in block letters and thus expresses the intent of the anonymous texter to emphasise his or her convictions about the NPP.

### Commendations

The study also showed that text messages were sent to RPDs to commend dear ones. The messages were in the form of thanksgiving for divine providence and gratitude to someone for an act of benevolence. Some messages also expressed commendation for the good work done by the hosts of the two panel discussions. The commendation was usually personal as the texts were cast in a first person narrative. The following examples further explain the point being made:

**Text 15:** I had my breakthrough in 2009, I got myself a job and enrolment in the University. I'm hoping to meet my dream lady and possibly marry IN JESUS' NAME. Dzifa, Ho (JSMS 272).

**Text 16:** President Mills's u are definitely doing the right things. Am proud of you! Given the pace at which you are moving, i have no doubt that you will leave Ghana a better place (KMS 137).

In Text 15, the texter is satisfied and thankful to his Lord for making it possible for him to get a job and also have admission in one of the universities in Ghana. The only

way to express his gratitude is to share this breakthrough with the entire world and let them know what God has done in his life. This is why he chooses the medium of texting on radio over and above other media in order to reach out to a much larger public. The foregoing also holds for the anonymous texter in Text 16. The unknown texter expresses contentment and trust in President John Evans Atta Mills' government because, according to him, the president is placing Ghana on the right footing. This commendation stems from the texter's surety that President Mills, in the texter's own words, will "in no doubt leave Ghana at a better place".

### Attention-getters

Messages were also posted by texters to get the attention of the public, target groups and public institutions on happenings around them. Attention-getters were one of the least sought gratifications. There are two basic reasons attention-getters recorded a low usage on radio panel discussion text messaging. In the first place, it is the primary function of the radio as a type of media to inform and also educate the listening public. This means that texters usually seek information on radio rather than being the source of information themselves. Katz et al. (1974) have clearly stated that audiences are people that seek specific media and content to achieve certain results and gratifications that satisfy their personal needs. Texters seek specific content from RPDs in order to remain updated on issues of social and national interest as well obtain information on happenings around the world.

Further, whereas texting is primarily a person-to-person practice, thereby ensuring the dissemination of information to one another for rapport, RPD-SMS, on the other hand, does not easily allow that. This is because when texters posted their messages on RPDs they did so to meet other gratifications such as those already discussed. All the same, two types of attention-getters were identified in the data: personal attention-getters and social attention-getters.

In the corpus, texters sent in messages to RPDs in order to obtain information about them. The example below was sent by a nine-year old girl during a JSMS on February 18, 2010. It reads:

**Text 17:** Hi Kojo, i'm Naa 9 year old pupil of Queens Int Sch, East Legon, wish to tell you that my father has bought me the book you choose for the book club. So I wish to join your book club. Thank u. (JSMS 306).

As can be seen, the text writer, Naa, sends a message to Kojo Oppong Nkrumah, host of JSMS, to inform him about the fact that she had laid hold of the book he Kojo has recommended for members of his book club, hence

her desire to join the club. The message has a personal import because it discusses the texter's desire to join the host's book club. This open declaration on air, Naa believes, will express her burning passion to join the book club of the host.

Text messages were also sent to RPDs to serve as social attention-getters. According to the data, this type of attention-getters out-numbered personal attention-getters. Mobile messages with a social touch express the concern and social responsibility of texters about the state of affairs in a particular social setting or the country in general. Here are some examples:

**Text 18:** Chaos at Agona Swedru. 2 people dead so far. Gradually things are getting worse. (JSMS 232)

In this telegraphic message, the texter passes on a piece of social information about the clash between the inhabitants of Swedru and the Zongo community. The chaos was caused by the death of one Zongo man at a drinking spot at Swedru, a town in the Central Region. By this message the texter seeks to inform Joy FM about this development in recognition of the fact that the message will reach the station in the shortest possible time. There were, however, instances of difficulty in identifying specific gratifications in some text messages. Such messages were, therefore, labelled 'indeterminate cases'.

### Indeterminate cases

Indeterminate cases were the least recorded in the data. The label expresses a special motivation of text messages posted to RPDs where a particular message could achieve more than one gratification. This observation is in sync with Thurlow's (2003) claim that it is sometimes difficult to account for the gratification of text messages. Indeed, some messages posted by texters performed more than one single gratification. For example, some texters combined two motivations such as dissatisfaction and phatic communication, and ideological formation and deprecation. Others include commendation and attention-getters, deprecation and dissatisfaction. Here is an illustration:

**Text 19:** BEN from Adenta: My funniest politician of the year is Arthur K. The guy is a joker. He got one vote in an election. His party is out of power and, he is pissing about thinking he can transform the party by criticizing everybody. CONCERT! (JSMS 248)

The sender of this message combined the need of commendation and deprecation. Although this text message is supposed to be a response about which

Politician was the favourite among the Ghanaian public in 2009, it is nonetheless derisive towards its target that the texter named "Arthur K", obviously Arthur Kennedy, the 2007 NPP Campaign Communication Director. The texter called this politician a "joker" and one who is "pissing about". Actually, this verb phrase is understood as disgracing the political party one belongs to by way of washing its dirty linen in public. Moreover, the use of the word "CONCERT" written in block letters is indicative of his disgust for Arthur K, a clear example of face-attack (Tracy, 2008). Another example can be seen as follows:

**Text 20:** The rape victim must be a very strong teenager to be able to endure 2 rounds of rape each from a military man and a police man. The question I want to ask is how many matured women can stand 4 rounds of heavy love making? (JSMS 159)

In this final illustration, the texter expresses his or her view about the defilement of a teenage girl allegedly perpetrated by the military and police. That is, the texter presents his or her ideology of women who, according to him, can roll out in bed with men for quite a long time. The texter, however, does not consider whether or not the rape victim consented to the act and the possible pains that were afflicted on her due to the forceful act against her will. Yet towards the end of the texter's bias and prejudice, he or she ridicules women through an inquiry in the form of a rhetorical question: "... how many matured women can stand 4 rounds of heavy love making?"

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper sought to examine the interface between mobile communication and self-expression among Ghanaians on two major radio panel discussions. The study showed that posting messages to RPDs is motivated by six major gratifications, prominent among which are ideological formations and expressions of dissatisfaction about personal, social and national issues. First, these findings characterise SMSing on RPDs as a unique discourse type. Second, the findings reveal the nature of public discourse on RPDs in Ghana. Thus, these findings bear theoretical implications as well as raise concerns for media practice.

Theoretically, this work serves as a useful lens for understanding human behaviour. Through the study of text messages, discourse analysts and other researchers will be able to identify the gratifications and motivations texters in Ghana attach to text messaging on radio networks. The research, therefore, sets the stage for understanding such theoretical concepts as identity and community. As Herring (2007) notes, discourse involves speaker (in our case texter) choices which are condi-

tioned not only by purely linguistic considerations but also by cognitive and social factors. Therefore, an analysis of text messages posted to RPDs will help researchers to understand public discourse in so far as "the media are consequential in social life" (Altheide, 1996:69).

From the above standpoint, the present study provides researchers in media and mass communication with the opportunity to extend the uses and gratifications approach. As media research proper, media and communication researchers usually draw on such conventional tools as questionnaires, interviews and focus groups in obtaining data for determining the needs and gratifications of media consumers (Dominick, 1996; Wimmer and Dominick, 1997; McQuail, 1987). In addition to these instruments, media experts can extend the uses and gratifications theory, also termed functional analysis, to the analysis of the message content as obtains in the communication chain. Such an attempt will rigorously help researchers to directly obtain information about media users from the viewpoint of language. It will, for example, motivate media experts to identify the many social and psychological factors that go into the realisations of the distinct but related discursual functions of text messages.

Finally, it is important that both radio and television networks formulate unequivocal editorial policies about the content of text messages that are read on their airwaves in order to maintain sanity of expression. Though the media in Ghana, as in most countries, guarantee freedom of expression (Yankah, 1998; Ghana Broadcasting Study, 2005), it remains a challenge to media practitioners to sift uncomplementary SMS texts that are posted to their shows. Text messages in the form of invectives and imprecations need not be entertained on the airwaves in Ghana as part of the social responsibility and accountability of the media to the public. The reason is that derisive messages have the potential of undermining the social, cultural and national cohesion of the nation. Besides, the youth could pick up wrong behaviours from these anti-nationalist and often propagandist discourses.

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