Promising Future of Mobile Technology

FORTY years ago, 45-year-old Martin Cooper made the first handheld mobile call in public. On 3rd April 1973, Cooper made the world’s first mobile call from a Manhattan street corner to Joel Engel, his rival in AT&T. Widely regarded as the “father of the cell phone”, Cooper told Engel, “I’m calling you on a real cell phone; a personal portable hand-held cell phone.”

The clunky, heavy phone was Motorola’s DynaTac 8000x far removed from the modern, ultra-thin, super-light smartphones of today. It was 9 inches tall, an inch and a half wide and weighed 2.5 pounds – no wonder it was called “the brick”. It had a battery life of only 20 minutes and a single-line text-only LED screen. It would be a decade before the phone would finally reach the hands of consumers at a whopping cost of $ 3,995.

That was the time when cell phones were proud possessions of the elite and the wealthy. Today, cell phones have broken all class barriers. A new United Nations study has found that more people around the world have access to a cellphone than to a working toilet! The study claims that of the world’s estimated 7 billion people, 6 billion have access to mobile phones. However, only 4.5 billion have access to a toilet.

Mobile phone technology has come a long way ever since 1947 when AT&T first commercialised its Mobile Telephone Service. The service was introduced in a hundred towns – calls were set up manually by operators; to talk the user had to depress a button on the handset and release the button to listen. And it was expensive. This “0G” service was followed by the first generation (1G) analog cellular network introduced in the early 1980s, which was based on car phones and used in business. Then came the second generation (2G) digital cellular networks between 1993 and 2000. Beyond 2000, with the arrival of the third generation (3G) broadband data services and the Internet, smartphones soon became a reality. The state-of-the-art, fourth generation (4G) native-IP networks were standardised in 2012.

Today’s mobile phones do much more than merely making calls. You can take photos, play music and games, watch video clips, send emails, chat with friends, surf the net, download maps, and use it as a navigator. They are also driving healthcare, education, government services delivery, election campaigns, banking and much more. In fact, more often now we see phones being used for everything but making calls.

But, as with other technologies, cell phones have also been used for nefarious means such as blowing up bombs remotely and clicking and circulating unwanted pictures. In some cases the obsession with mobile phones has even been fatal for young children who have been mowed down by trains or knocked down by vehicles, glued as they were to their mobiles.

However, the journey of the cell phone from “the brick” to the sleek and ultra-lightweight cell phones has been an exciting one so far. And experts believe there is still a lot of innovation yet to come.

Apart from memory and the capability to create better pictures, display brighter images, and access the Internet at higher speeds, mobiles hold the potential to usher in a cashless society sometime in the future. There are other innovations already happening such as wireless charging, mobile-enabled interactive billboards where you could control and interact with billboards and store-front displays through your mobile, wearable smartphones with flexible screens, and even a smartphone that could predict where your friend could be headed or the direction a criminal could be moving in. And there’s still a long road ahead for innovations.

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