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Cell Phones in Africa: Communication Lifeline

*Texting Most Common Activity, but
Mobile Money Popular in Several
Countries*

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

Jacob Poushter, Research Associate
Russ Oates, Senior Communications Manager

202.419.4372

www.pewresearch.org

About This Report

This report examines cell phone and smartphone use in seven sub-Saharan African nations and the United States. It is based on 7,052 face-to-face interviews in the seven sub-Saharan African nations with adults 18 and older conducted from April 11 to June 5, 2014. Comparison figures for the U.S. are from 2014 Pew Research Center surveys. For more details, see survey methods and topline results.

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

Jacob Poushter, *Research Associate*

James Bell, *Vice President, Global Strategy*

Danielle Cuddington, *Research Assistant*

Kat Devlin, *Research Analyst*

Michael Keegan, *Information Graphics Designer*

Bridget Parker, *Research Assistant*

Katie Simmons, *Senior Researcher*

Bruce Stokes, *Director, Global Economic Attitudes*

Hani Zainulbhai, *Research Analyst*

Jill Carle, *Research Associate*

Claudia Deane, *Vice President, Research*

Bruce Drake, *Senior Editor*

David Kent, *Copy Editor*

Steve Schwarzer, *Research Methodologist*

Bethany Smith, *Administrative Coordinator*

Richard Wike, *Director, Global Attitudes Research*

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Cell Phones in Africa: Communication Lifeline

Texting Most Common Activity, but Mobile Money Popular in Several Countries

In a few short years, the proliferation of mobile phone networks has transformed communications in sub-Saharan Africa. It has also allowed Africans to skip the landline stage of development and jump right to the digital age.

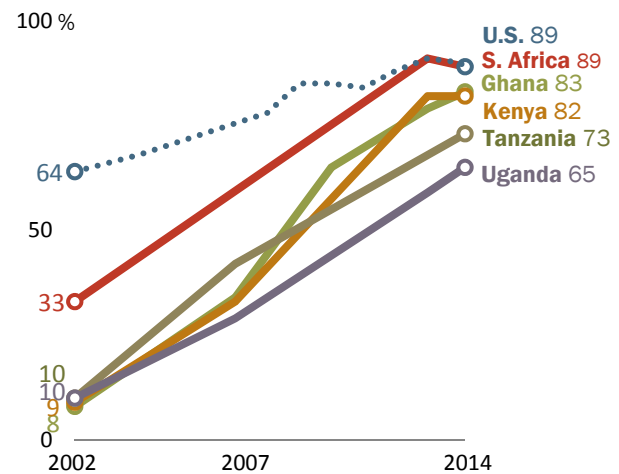
Cell phones are pervasive in the region. In 2002, roughly one-in-ten owned a mobile phone in Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Ghana. Since then, cell phone ownership has grown exponentially. Today, cell phones are as common in South Africa and Nigeria as they are in the United States. Smartphones (those that can access the internet and applications) are less widely used, though significant minorities own these devices in several nations, including 34% of South Africans.

Cell phones have different uses for different people, but sending text messages and taking pictures or video are the most popular activities among mobile owners. In a few nations, such as Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, mobile banking is also relatively common. Other activities, such as getting political news, accessing a social networking site, getting health and consumer information and looking for a job are done less frequently.

These are among the main findings of a Pew Research Center survey in seven sub-Saharan African nations. The survey was conducted April 11 to June 5, 2014, among 7,052

Cell Phone Ownership Surges in Africa

Adults who own a cell phone



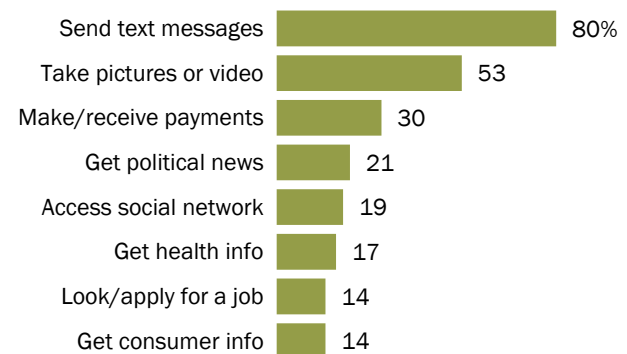
Note: U.S. data from Pew Research Center surveys.

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q68.

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Texting Most Common Use of Cell Phones in Africa

Median adult cell phone owners who used a cell phone in the past 12 months to ...



Note: Median percentages across seven African countries.

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q74a-h.

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respondents in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. All interviews were face-to-face. Comparison figures for the U.S. are from 2014 Pew Research Center surveys. (For more on technology use in Africa and other emerging and developing nations worldwide, see [*Internet Seen as Positive Influence on Education but Negative on Morality in Emerging and Developing Nations*](#), released March 19, 2015.)

Cell Phones Common in Africa

Across the seven countries surveyed, roughly two-thirds or more say they own a cell phone. Ownership is especially high in South Africa and Nigeria, where about nine-in-ten have a cell phone.

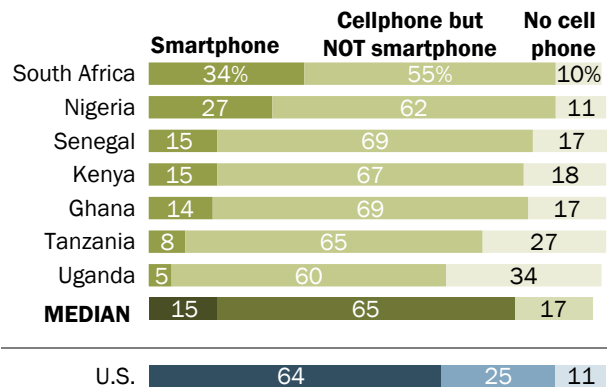
Since 2002, cell phone ownership has exploded in the countries where trends are available. In 2002, only 8% of Ghanaians said they owned a mobile phone, while that figure stands at 83% today, a more than tenfold increase. Similar growth in mobile penetration is seen in all African countries where survey data are available. By comparison, as of December 2014, [**89% of American adults owned a cell phone**](#), up from 64% ownership in 2002.

Roughly a third of South Africans (34%) and about a quarter of Nigerians (27%) say that their device is a smartphone, i.e. one that can access the internet and apps, such as an iPhone, Blackberry or Android device. Smartphone ownership is less common in the other nations surveyed, and in Tanzania and Uganda it is still in the single digits. By comparison, 64% in the United States [**owned a smartphone**](#) as of December 2014.

The highly educated are particularly likely to own cell phones and smartphones. For instance, 93% of Ugandans with a secondary education or greater own a cell phone, compared with 61% of those with less education. And in South Africa, 57% with a secondary education or more own a smartphone versus 13% with less education.

Few Own Smartphones in Africa, But Cell Phones Common

Do you own a cell phone? Is it a smartphone?



Note: Percentages based on total sample. U.S. data from December 2014 Pew Research Center surveys. Median percentage excludes the U.S.

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q68 & Q69.

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Cell phone and smartphone ownership is also more common among Africans with at least some English facility. Three-quarters of Ugandans who speak or read at least some English own a mobile phone, while only about half (48%) of those with no English language skills own one. And one-third of English-speaking Nigerians own a smartphone, compared with 2% of Nigerians who do not have the ability to read or speak at least some English. (*For more on the influence of English language ability on technology usage, see [Internet Seen as Positive Influence on Education but Negative on Morality in Emerging and Developing Nations](#), released March 19, 2015.*)

In terms of age, mobile phones are common among young and old alike. About the same number of 18- to 34-year-olds and those 35 and older own cell phones in all but one of the African countries surveyed (Tanzania). But there are age gaps in every country on smartphone ownership. For instance, in South Africa, 41% of 18- to 34-year-olds own a smartphone, while only 27% of those 35 and older do.

Younger, Educated and English-Speaking Africans More Likely to Own Smartphone

Adults who own a smartphone

	Total %	By education:			By English language ability:			By age:		
		Secondary or more %	Less than secondary %	Diff	Speak or read English %	Cannot speak or read English %	Diff	18-34 %	35+ %	Diff
South Africa	34	57	13	+44	--	--	--	41	27	+14
Nigeria	27	35	5	+30	33	2	+31	34	17	+17
Senegal	15	46	8	+38	38	5	+33	20	9	+11
Kenya	15	28	5	+23	19	1	+18	18	11	+7
Ghana	14	21	4	+17	20	2	+18	21	6	+15
Tanzania	8	--	--	--	17	1	+16	10	5	+5
Uganda	5	20	3	+17	7	1	+6	7	2	+5

Note: Based on total sample. Only countries with sufficient sample sizes shown. All demographic differences shown are statistically significant. For English language ability, South Africa excluded due to insufficient sample size for non-English speakers. Respondents who replied that they can read or speak some English, or took the survey in English, were considered to have English language ability.

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q68 & Q69.

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Men are more likely than women to own a cell phone in six of the seven countries surveyed. For example, 77% of Ugandan men own a mobile phone, while only 54% of Ugandan women do. While not as dramatic, significant gender gaps on mobile phone ownership appear in all the other African countries surveyed except South Africa, where equal numbers of men and women own cell phones. Men are also more likely to own a smartphone than women in four countries – Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal and Uganda.

A median of 17% across the sub-Saharan African countries surveyed do not own a mobile phone. However, this does not necessarily mean they do not have any access to cell phones; they may share one with someone else. In fact, in spring 2013, when Pew Research asked Kenyans who did not own a cell phone whether they shared one with someone else, 58% of those non-cell phone owners said yes. And 21% of Kenyan mobile phone owners said that they shared their phones with others. Nevertheless, women, the less-educated and those who cannot read or speak English are less likely to have their own mobile phone.

Texting and Taking Pictures or Video Most Popular Cell Phone Activities

Among cell phone owners in Africa, the most popular activity is sending text messages. Overall, a median of 80% of mobile phone owners across the seven sub-Saharan countries surveyed say they do this with their phones. This includes 95% in South Africa and 92% in Tanzania. In all the countries, at least half of cell phone owners say they send text messages with their devices.

The second most popular activity is taking pictures or videos. A median of 53% among cell phone owners say they have done this in the past year. Using mobile devices for pictures and videos is most popular in South Africa (60% among cell owners) and Nigeria (57%).

Texting, Taking Pictures and Videos Most Common Use of Cell Phones in Africa

Adult cell phone owners who used a cell phone in the past 12 months to ...

	Send text messages	Take pictures or video	Make or receive payments	Get political news	Access social network	Get health info	Look/apply for a job	Get consumer info
South Africa	95%	60	15	18	31	15	19	14
Tanzania	92%	53	39	21	19	11	14	12
Kenya	88%	54	61	28	28	19	26	14
Nigeria	80%	57	15	28	35	23	15	14
Senegal	70%	50	30	19	19	17	12	14
Uganda	60%	37	42	23	14	20	14	16
Ghana	51%	48	15	18	15	11	9	8
MEDIAN	80%	53	30	21	19	17	14	14

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q74a-h.

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Making or receiving payments on cell phones, also referred to as mobile money, is not as common as texting and taking pictures. But in Kenya, 61% of mobile owners use their device to transfer money. And many people in neighboring Uganda (42%) and Tanzania (39%) also participate in this activity on their cell phones. One of the reasons usage is so much higher in these countries is

the prominence of mobile money services, such as [M-PESA in Kenya and Tanzania](#) and MTN Mobile Money in Uganda. Elsewhere in Africa, mobile banking is less common.

With minor exceptions, most of the other cell phone activities tested in Africa are not as widespread. Medians of about two-in-ten or less of mobile owners say they get political news (21%), access social networking sites (19%), get information about health and medicine (17%), look or apply for a job (14%), or get consumer information such as prices and product availability (14%) on their phones.

Accessing social networks on a phone is more popular in Nigeria (35%) and South Africa (31%) compared with the other African nations surveyed. Given that browsing social networks is more likely to be done on smartphones, the fact that smartphone penetration is higher in these two countries may drive this difference. Mobile owners in Nigeria also enjoy getting political news and information (28%). Kenyan cell owners also use their phones to access information about politics (28%), access social networks (28%) and look or apply for jobs (26%).

Generally, young people, those with a higher education and Africans with the ability to read or speak English are more likely to participate in most of these mobile activities. For example, 65% of mobile owners ages 18 to 34 in Ghana say they use their device to send text messages, while only 34% of those 35 and older do this. Similarly, 62% of young, cell-owning Ghanaians say they take pictures or video with their phones, but only 33% among the older generations do.

These demographic differences do not appear for all activities. Similar numbers of young (18-34 years old) and older people (35+) say they use their cell phones for making or receiving payments.

Young More Likely to Use Cell Phones for Texting, Taking Pictures or Video

Adult cell phone owners who used a cell phone in the past 12 months to ...

	Send text messages			Take pictures or video		
	18-34	35+	Diff	18-34	35+	Diff
	%	%		%	%	
Ghana	65	34	+31	62	33	+29
Senegal	84	56	+28	61	39	+22
Nigeria	89	67	+22	68	42	+26
Uganda	66	52	+14	51	20	+31
Tanzania	97	84	+13	62	41	+21
Kenya	93	83	+10	62	44	+18
South Africa	98	92	+6	69	51	+18

Note: All age differences are statistically significant.

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q74a-b.

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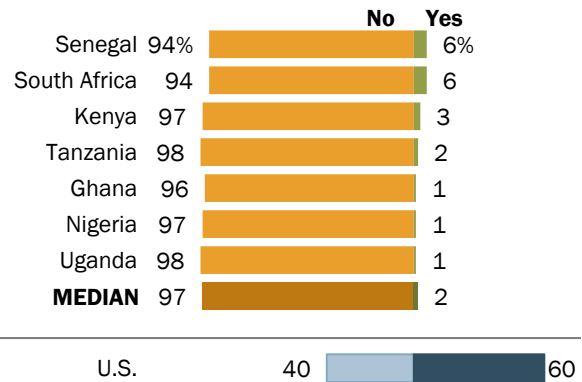
Landline Penetration Near Zero

While mobile networks in sub-Saharan Africa have spread rapidly, landline penetration in the seven countries surveyed is close to zero. A median of only 2% across these nations say they have a working landline telephone in their house, with a median of 97% saying they do not have one. There is little variation across the countries on landline ownership.

Landlines are simply rare on the continent. By contrast, 60% of Americans have a landline telephone in their household. (However, the share of wireless-only households in the U.S. [has been growing rapidly over the past decade](#) as landline ownership falls.)

Very Few Africans Have Landlines

Do you have a working landline in your household?



Note: Percentages based on total sample. Median percentage excludes the U.S.

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q160 & LL.

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Methods in Detail

About the 2014 Spring Pew Global Attitudes Survey

Results for the survey are based on telephone and face-to-face interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. Survey results are based on national samples. For further details on sample designs, see below.

The descriptions below show the margin of sampling error based on all interviews conducted in that country. For results based on the full sample in a given country, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus the margin of error. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Country: **Ghana**
 Sample design: Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by region and settlement size
 Mode: Face-to-face adults 18 plus
 Languages: Akan (Twi), English, Dagbani, Ewe
 Fieldwork dates: May 5 – May 31, 2014
 Sample size: 1,000
 Margin of Error: ± 3.8 percentage points
 Representative: Adult population

Country: **Kenya**
 Sample design: Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by province and settlement size
 Mode: Face-to-face adults 18 plus
 Languages: Kiswahili, English
 Fieldwork dates: April 18 – April 28, 2014
 Sample size: 1,015
 Margin of Error: ± 4.0 percentage points
 Representative: Adult population

Country: **Nigeria**
Sample design: Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by region and urbanity
Mode: Face-to-face adults 18 plus
Languages: English, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo
Fieldwork dates: April 11 – May 25, 2014
Sample size: 1,014
Margin of Error: ±4.3 percentage points
Representative: Adult population (excluding Adamawa, Borno, Cross River, Jigawa, Yobe and some areas in Taraba, or roughly 12% of the population)

Country: **Senegal**
Sample design: Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by region and urbanity
Mode: Face-to-face adults 18 plus
Languages: Wolof, French
Fieldwork dates: April 17 – May 2, 2014
Sample size: 1,000
Margin of Error: ±3.7 percentage points
Representative: Adult population

Country: **South Africa**
Sample design: Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by metropolitan area, province and urbanity
Mode: Face-to-face adults 18 plus
Languages: English, Zulu, Xhosa, South Sotho, Afrikaans, North Sotho
Fieldwork dates: May 18 – June 5, 2014
Sample size: 1,000
Margin of Error: ±3.5 percentage points
Representative: Adult population

Country: **Tanzania**
Sample design: Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by region and urbanity
Mode: Face-to-face adults 18 plus
Languages: Kiswahili
Fieldwork dates: April 18 – May 7, 2014
Sample size: 1,016
Margin of Error: ±4.0 percentage points
Representative: Adult population (excluding Zanzibar, or about 3% of the population)

Country:	Uganda
Sample design:	Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by region and urbanity
Mode:	Face-to-face adults 18 plus
Languages:	Luganda, English, Runyankole/Rukiga, Luo, Runyoro/Rutoro, Ateso, Lugbara
Fieldwork dates:	April 25 – May 9, 2014
Sample size:	1,007
Margin of Error:	±3.9 percentage points
Representative:	Adult population
Country:	United States
Sample design:	Random Digit Dial (RDD) probability sample of landline and cell phone households
Mode:	Telephone adults 18 plus
Languages:	English, Spanish
Fieldwork dates:	April 22 – May 11, 2014
Sample size:	1,002
Margin of Error:	±3.5 percentage points
Representative:	Telephone households with English or Spanish speakers (roughly 96% of U.S. households)

Topline Results

**Pew Research Center
Spring 2014 survey
April 15, 2015 Release**

Methodological notes:

- Survey results are based on national samples. For further details on sample designs, see Survey Methods section.
- Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%. The topline “total” columns show 100%, because they are based on unrounded numbers.
- Since 2007, the Global Attitudes Project has used an automated process to generate toplines. As a result, numbers may differ slightly from those published prior to 2007.
- For some countries, trends for certain years are omitted due to differences in sample design or population coverage. Omitted trends often reflect less representative samples than more recent surveys in the same countries. Trends that are omitted include:
 - Senegal prior to 2013
 - Nigeria prior to 2010
 - South Africa in 2007
- Not all questions included in the Spring 2014 survey are presented in this topline. Omitted questions have either been previously released or will be released in future reports.

		Q68 Do you own a cell phone?			
		Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total
Ghana	Spring, 2014	83	17	0	100
	Spring, 2013	79	21	1	100
	Spring, 2007	34	66	0	100
	Summer, 2002	8	91	1	100
Kenya	Spring, 2014	82	18	0	100
	Spring, 2013	82	18	0	100
	Spring, 2011	74	25	0	100
	Spring, 2010	65	35	0	100
	Spring, 2007	33	66	1	100
	Summer, 2002	9	91	0	100
Nigeria	Spring, 2014	89	11	0	100
	Spring, 2013	78	21	0	100
	Spring, 2010	74	26	0	100
Senegal	Spring, 2014	83	17	0	100
	Spring, 2013	81	19	0	100
South Africa	Spring, 2014	89	10	0	100
	Spring, 2013	91	9	0	100
	Summer, 2002	33	67	0	100
Tanzania	Spring, 2014	73	27	0	100
	Spring, 2007	42	58	0	100
	Summer, 2002	10	90	0	100
Uganda	Spring, 2014	65	34	1	100
	Spring, 2013	59	41	0	100
	Spring, 2007	29	71	0	100
	Summer, 2002	10	89	1	100

		Q69 ASK ALL CELL PHONE OWNERS: Some cell phones are called "smartphones" because they can access the internet and apps. Is your cell phone a smartphone, such as an iPhone, a Blackberry (INSERT COUNTRY SPECIFIC EXAMPLES)?				
		Yes, smartphone	No, not a smartphone	DK/Refused	Total	N=
Ghana	Spring, 2014	17	81	2	100	844
	Spring, 2013	19	79	2	100	663
Kenya	Spring, 2014	19	81	0	100	869
	Spring, 2013	23	76	1	100	675
Nigeria	Spring, 2014	30	69	1	100	912
	Spring, 2013	24	75	1	100	829
Senegal	Spring, 2014	18	81	1	100	833
	Spring, 2013	16	82	3	100	649
South Africa	Spring, 2014	38	60	2	100	909
	Spring, 2013	36	63	1	100	741
Tanzania	Spring, 2014	10	89	1	100	762
Uganda	Spring, 2014	8	91	1	100	670
	Spring, 2013	7	93	1	100	471

		Q74a ASK ALL CELL PHONE OWNERS: In the past 12 months, have you used your cell phone to do any of the following things? a. send text messages				
		Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total	N=
Ghana	Spring, 2014	51	49	0	100	844
Kenya	Spring, 2014	88	12	0	100	869
Nigeria	Spring, 2014	80	20	0	100	912
Senegal	Spring, 2014	70	30	0	100	833
South Africa	Spring, 2014	95	5	0	100	909
Tanzania	Spring, 2014	92	8	0	100	762
Uganda	Spring, 2014	60	40	0	100	670

		Q74b ASK ALL CELL PHONE OWNERS: In the past 12 months, have you used your cell phone to do any of the following things? b. take pictures or video				
		Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total	N=
Ghana	Spring, 2014	48	51	1	100	844
Kenya	Spring, 2014	54	46	0	100	869
Nigeria	Spring, 2014	57	43	0	100	912
Senegal	Spring, 2014	50	50	0	100	833
South Africa	Spring, 2014	60	40	0	100	909
Tanzania	Spring, 2014	53	47	0	100	762
Uganda	Spring, 2014	37	63	0	100	670

		Q74c ASK ALL CELL PHONE OWNERS: In the past 12 months, have you used your cell phone to do any of the following things? c. get news and information about politics				
		Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total	N=
Ghana	Spring, 2014	18	81	1	100	844
Kenya	Spring, 2014	28	72	0	100	869
Nigeria	Spring, 2014	28	71	1	100	912
Senegal	Spring, 2014	19	81	0	100	833
South Africa	Spring, 2014	18	81	1	100	909
Tanzania	Spring, 2014	21	78	0	100	762
Uganda	Spring, 2014	23	77	0	100	670

		Q74d ASK ALL CELL PHONE OWNERS: In the past 12 months, have you used your cell phone to do any of the following things? d. access a social networking site				
		Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total	N=
Ghana	Spring, 2014	15	84	1	100	844
Kenya	Spring, 2014	28	72	0	100	869
Nigeria	Spring, 2014	35	65	1	100	912
Senegal	Spring, 2014	19	80	1	100	833
South Africa	Spring, 2014	31	68	1	100	909
Tanzania	Spring, 2014	19	81	0	100	762
Uganda	Spring, 2014	14	86	0	100	670

		Q74e ASK ALL CELL PHONE OWNERS: In the past 12 months, have you used your cell phone to do any of the following things? e. get consumer information such as prices or availability of products				
		Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total	N=
Ghana	Spring, 2014	8	91	1	100	844
Kenya	Spring, 2014	14	86	0	100	869
Nigeria	Spring, 2014	14	85	1	100	912
Senegal	Spring, 2014	14	84	1	100	833
South Africa	Spring, 2014	14	85	1	100	909
Tanzania	Spring, 2014	12	88	1	100	762
Uganda	Spring, 2014	16	83	1	100	670

		Q74f ASK ALL CELL PHONE OWNERS: In the past 12 months, have you used your cell phone to do any of the following things? f. get information about health and medicine for you or your family				
		Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total	N=
Ghana	Spring, 2014	11	88	1	100	844
Kenya	Spring, 2014	19	81	0	100	869
Nigeria	Spring, 2014	23	76	0	100	912
Senegal	Spring, 2014	17	82	2	100	833
South Africa	Spring, 2014	15	84	1	100	909
Tanzania	Spring, 2014	11	88	0	100	762
Uganda	Spring, 2014	20	79	1	100	670

		Q74g ASK ALL CELL PHONE OWNERS: In the past 12 months, have you used your cell phone to do any of the following things? g. make or receive payments				
		Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total	N=
Ghana	Spring, 2014	15	84	1	100	844
Kenya	Spring, 2014	61	39	0	100	869
Nigeria	Spring, 2014	15	85	0	100	912
Senegal	Spring, 2014	30	69	1	100	833
South Africa	Spring, 2014	15	84	0	100	909
Tanzania	Spring, 2014	39	61	0	100	762
Uganda	Spring, 2014	42	57	0	100	670

		Q74h ASK ALL CELL PHONE OWNERS: In the past 12 months, have you used your cell phone to do any of the following things? h. look for or apply for a job				
		Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total	N=
Ghana	Spring, 2014	9	89	1	100	844
Kenya	Spring, 2014	26	74	0	100	869
Nigeria	Spring, 2014	15	85	0	100	912
Senegal	Spring, 2014	12	87	1	100	833
South Africa	Spring, 2014	19	80	1	100	909
Tanzania	Spring, 2014	14	86	0	100	762
Uganda	Spring, 2014	14	85	0	100	670

		Q160 Do you have a working landline telephone in your house or not?			
		Yes, have landline phone	No, do not	DK/Refused	Total
Ghana	Spring, 2014	1	96	3	100
	Spring, 2013	1	98	1	100
Kenya	Spring, 2014	3	97	0	100
	Spring, 2013	1	99	0	100
	Spring, 2011	1	99	0	100
Nigeria	Spring, 2014	1	97	2	100
	Spring, 2013	5	95	0	100
Senegal	Spring, 2014	6	94	0	100
	Spring, 2013	6	94	0	100
South Africa	Spring, 2014	6	94	1	100
	Spring, 2013	6	94	0	100
Tanzania	Spring, 2014	2	98	0	100
Uganda	Spring, 2014	1	98	0	100
	Spring, 2013	2	98	1	100

		LL Respondent has a working landline telephone		
		Yes, have landline phone	No, do not	Total
United States	Spring, 2014	60	40	100

Spring 2013 Survey

		Q69 ASK IF CELL PHONE OWNER: Do you share your cell phone with someone else or is it just for your own use?				
		Yes, I share my cell phone with someone else	No, I do not share my cell phone	DK/Refused	Total	N=
Kenya	Spring, 2013	21	78	1	100	675

		Q70 ASK IF NON-CELL PHONE OWNER: Do you share a cell phone with someone else?				
		Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total	N=
Kenya	Spring, 2013	58	40	2	100	122